DECONSTRUCTING VULNERABILITY: EXPLORING THE LIVES OF YOUNG BLACK MEN IN URBAN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS
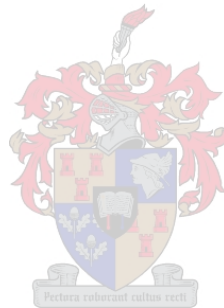
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DECLARATION

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Table 1 Chapters 2, 3 and 5: The nature and scope of my contribution

Chapter	Nature of contribution	Extent of contribution (%)
Chapter 2	This chapter was published as a journal article: Zweig P 2016. Lost in space? Considering young men as drivers of urban informal settlement risk. *Urban Forum* 27: 383-398.	100%
Chapter 3	This chapter was published as a journal article: Zweig P 2021. Exploring men's vulnerability in the global South: Methodological reflections. *Area* 53: 718-726.	100%
Chapter 4	This chapter was published as a journal article: Zweig P 2022. Views From the Margins: Exploring how vulnerability contributes to shaping men's identities in informal urban South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies.* p.00219096221079313.	100%

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ABSTRACT

Globally, over a billion urban dwellers live in slum conditions today, increasing by around ten million inhabitants annually. Much of this growth is occurring in Africa, where some estimates suggest that more than half the urban population already lives informally. Generally unplanned and inadequately serviced, these densely settled urban areas are becoming hot spots of urban risk, strongly rooted in social and economic vulnerabilities associated with unstable sources of livelihood and deplorable living conditions. Daily life in these contexts is thus a precarious and constant confrontation with the lived realities of poverty that shapes the way people respond to the world around them.

In these environments, women and children are generally considered to be most vulnerable to the hazards associated with daily life. But there is growing concern about the lives of men and their perceived marginalisation, feelings of self-worth, and collective and individual vulnerability in an urban environment in which their roles have fundamentally changed. If we are to influence behaviour change among young men to reduce the acknowledged risks they pose to others, we must understand how *they* are being made vulnerable in a changing society that no longer defends their rights.

This study sought to understand the challenges faced by young Xhosa men and the nature of their vulnerabilities in informal settlements in contemporary South Africa, by determining the building blocks of their vulnerability and how these are shaped and change over time and space. In contemporary South Africa, poor young Black men are being confronted with new circumstances that are profoundly shaping their identities.

Adopting an interpretivist theoretical approach, a grounded methodology involving suite of methods was employed to interrogate the nature of the young men's perceived vulnerabilities, how they coped with them and how in response they constructed their identities. These ranged from adapted participatory methods involving drawing, to diary-keeping and one-on-one discussions.

In describing their lives in informal settlement environments the young men in the study revealed how they were made vulnerable and what they were vulnerable to, which included physical threats but also less tangible forms of susceptibility that included navigating relationships in a changing world, unemployment, living up to the social and cultural expectations placed on Xhosa men - both by themselves as well as others around them - and

trying to accommodate new gender and other fundamental rights discourses brought by democracy that have brought traditional masculine forms of identity into question.

In navigating complex urban informal landscapes, the identities of young men were found to be constantly mediated in response to new circumstances in which they find themselves. As a consequence, they shift interchangeably between different masculine identities to reduce their perceived vulnerability, often accommodating conflicting value systems, with each man positioning himself in relation to the power dynamics he encounters, shifting from hegemonic to subordinate forms of masculinity.

This study has revealed that young men are currently conflicted in not knowing how to accommodate change without forfeiting the very essence of what it is that they believe makes them men. It suggests that we should adopt a far more culturally attuned and Afro-centric approach to understanding poor young African men that considers the ways in which they are made to feel vulnerable. This means challenging our preconceived notions about the masculine identities we think they are invested in.

OPSOMMING

Oor die wêreld heen bly meer as 'n biljoen stadsbewoners vandag in krottoestande, en hierdie syfer neem jaarliks met ongeveer tien miljoen inwoners toe. Die meeste van hierdie groei kom in Afrika voor, waar meer as die helfte van die stadsbevolking na raming reeds informeel woon. Hierdie digbevolkte stadsgebiede is in die algemeen onbeplan met onvoldoende dienste, en raak tans gevaarpunte vir stadsrisiko's wat sterk gewortel is in maatskaplike en ekonomiese kwesbaarhede wat met onstabiele lewensbestaanbronne en betreurenswaardige lewenstoestande gepaardgaan. Die daaglikse lewe in hierdie kontekste behels dus 'n gevaarvolle en konstante konfrontasie met die geleefde realiteite van armoede, wat die manier beïnvloed waarop mense op die wêreld om hulle reageer.

In hierdie omgewings word vroue en kinders in die algemeen as die kwesbaarste vir die gevare wat hul daaglikse lewe inhou, beskou. Daar is egter toenemende kommer oor die lewens van mans en hul waargenome marginalisering, gevoelens oor eiewaarde en gesamentlike en individuele kwesbaarheid in 'n stedelike omgewing waarin hul rolle wesenlik verander het. Ten einde gedragsverandering onder jong mans te beïnvloed om die erkende risiko's wat hulle vir ander inhou, te verminder, moet ons verstaan hoe *hulle* kwesbaar gemaak word in 'n veranderende samelewing wat nie meer hul regte verdedig nie.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om begrip te verkry van die uitdagings vir jong Xhosa-mans en die aard van hul kwesbaarhede in informele nedersettings in hedendaagse Suid-Afrika deur die boustene van hul kwesbaarheid te bepaal, asook hoe dit met verloop van tyd en oor ruimte heen gevorm word en verander. In hedendaagse Suid-Afrika kom arm, jong swart mans voor nuwe omstandighede te staan wat 'n grondige invloed op hul identiteitsvorming het.

'n Grondige metodologie bestaande uit 'n reeks metodes volgens 'n interpretivistiese teoretiese benadering is gebruik om die aard van die jong mans se waargenome kwesbaarhede te ondersoek, asook hoe hulle dit hanteer het en hoe hulle in reaksie daarop hul identiteite saamgestel het. Dit het gewissel van aangepaste deelnemende metodes soos tekeninge maak tot dagboekhouding en persoonlike gesprekke.

In die beskrywing van hul lewens in die omgewing van informele nedersettings het die jong mans in die studie aangetoon hoe hulle kwesbaar gemaak is en waarvoor hulle kwesbaar was, insluitende hul kwesbaarheid vir fisiese bedreigings, maar ook minder tasbare vorme van kwesbaarheid soos die hantering van verhoudings in 'n veranderende wêreld, werkloosheid,

voldoening aan die sosiale en kulturele verwagtinge van Xhosa-mans – sowel hul eie verwagtinge as dié van ander om hulle – asook pogings om nuwe diskoerse oor gender en ander grondliggende regte te hanteer wat deur demokrasie aangevuur is en hierdie tradisionele manlike identiteitsvorme bevraagteken.

Daar is gevind dat die identiteite van die jong mans deurlopend bemiddel word in reaksie op nuwe omstandighede waarin hulle hulself bevind met die hantering van ingewikkelde informele stadslandskappe. As gevolg hiervan verwissel hulle tussen verskillende manlike identiteite om hul waargenome kwesbaarheid te verlaag, en aanvaar hulle dikwels sodoende teenstrydige waardestelsels, met die mans wat hulself posisioneer in verhouding tot die magdinamiek wat hulle teëkom in 'n verskuiwing vanaf hegemoniese tot ondergeskikte vorme van manlikheid.

Die studie toon dat hierdie jong mans in 'n tweestryd verwikkel is omdat hulle nie weet hoe om verandering te hanteer sonder om die wesenlikheid van dít wat hulle glo hulle mans maak, prys te gee nie. Dit doen aan die hand dat ons 'n veel meer kultureel ingestelde en Afrosentriese benadering tot begrip van arm jong Afrika-mans moet inneem wat die maniere waarop hulle kwesbaar gemaak word in ag neem. Dit verg 'n ondersoek na ons vooropgesette menings oor die manlike identiteite waarin hulle na ons mening verwikkel is.

SLEUTELWOORDE

Manlikheid Kwesbaarheid, Informele Nedersettings, sSadsrisiko

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my friend Thandi Mpambo-Sibhukwana.
Her deep passion for the Xhosa culture made her the inspiring teacher she was.
Without the insight and understanding she imparted to me,
this study would never have been possible.
Sadly, she never got to read it.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS   Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

CBO   Community-Based Organisation

CSMM   Critical Studies of Men/Masculinity

DiMP   Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme

EPWP   Expanded Public Works Programme

FBE   Free Basic Electricity

GAD   Gender and Development

HIV   Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IEP   Institute for Economics and Peace

IFRC   International Federation of the Red Cross

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

SASSA   South African Social Security Agency

SAPS   South African Police Service

UNISDR   United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Secretariat

UNDRR   United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

UNODC   United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Prologue: The story of a life in the city….

Anathi is twenty-four years old, unemployed, and lives with his family in a rudimentary shack in a densely populated informal settlement located on the flood-prone Cape Flats in Cape Town, South Africa. Shortly after his birth in the city, like many other young Xhosa children, he was sent to the rural Eastern Cape, the traditional and spiritual home of the Xhosa ethnic group, to be reared by his maternal grandparents. Here he was inculcated with Xhosa beliefs and customs that also invested him with unassailable traditional rights and privileges as a male. On starting school, he re-joined his parents in a crowded informal settlement in the city, slowly adjusting to a precarious and at first unfamiliar urban lifestyle. As a young schoolboy, he committed petty crimes to help put food on the table, but as a teenager became more daring, robbing passengers travelling on local trains. In his final year at senior school, becoming serious about his future, he studied hard to achieve a Matric certificate. Today, despite his education, he survives doing piece-meal jobs and helping out at a local youth non-governmental organisation (NGO).

Anathi shares his small home, a cramped shack made of wood, tin, and other recycled materials, with a large family, including a five-year-old disabled and mentally challenged niece. Recently, his girlfriend and their young child have also moved in. Their settlement is provided with communal water and sanitation facilities, solid waste collection, and a free, though limited supply of electricity by the local authorities. Shacks fires are commonly occurring hazards, while flooding occurs after heavy rainfall in the winter.

Despite his hardships, Anathi remains hopeful of making a better life for himself, continuously seeking opportunities to do so. He admits that when he drinks, he occasionally beats his girlfriend, but insists that he will marry her when he can afford his own home. In addition to his traditional upbringing and belief in the ancestors, Anathi is devoutly religious, spending Sundays in Church.

Anathi's identity is continuously being reshaped by the range of contrasting yet intersecting influences he encounters, a melange of traditional norms and mores, strong Zionist Christian religious beliefs, and modern city images and ideals. While his masculinity can at times be described as hegemonic, as in his domination of his girlfriend and the patriarchal privileges he references in their relationship, it is simultaneously shaped by his own marginality in this urban space. Anathi is typical of many poor young Black men, who is made vulnerable by the physical, economic, social, and cultural environments in which he lives.

CHAPTER 1: MEN LIVING LIFE ON THE MARGINS

"…in some ways boys, men and their particular vulnerabilities have been ignored or obfuscated in the dominant view of men as perpetrators"

(Shefer et al. 2007: 3)

INTRODUCTION

Globally, more than a billion urban dwellers live in slum conditions, increasing, it is estimated, by ten million inhabitants annually (IFRC 2010). Much of this growth is occurring in Africa, where some estimates suggest that more than half the urban population already lives informally. Generally unplanned and inadequately serviced, these densely settled urban areas have become hot spots of urban risk (Pelling & Wisner 2012), strongly rooted in social and economic vulnerabilities associated with unstable sources of livelihood, deplorable living conditions, and poor governance (Birkmann et al. 2010*; Moser 1996*; Pelling 2003: Pieterse 2011). Hewitt (1997) believes that increasing urban density correlates with rising levels of risk. Poor marginalised households living in urban informal settlements[1] and low-cost housing developments, located as they generally are in risk-prone and ecologically fragile areas, are more vulnerable to both anthropogenic and natural hazards, such as fires and severe weather events (Holloway et al. 2008), and are also associated with high levels of crime and violence.

Daily life in informal urban contexts is thus a precarious and constant confrontation with the lived realities of poverty that shapes the way people respond to the world around them. In these environments, women and children are generally considered to be most vulnerable to the hazards associated with daily life (Budlender 2004; Chant 2007; Goldblatt 2009; Mitchell 1999; Pelling 2003). However, while the literature is replete with studies focused on the so-called 'feminisation of poverty' (Chant 2007; 2008; Merino & Lara 2016; Olufemi 2000), the

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[1] Although Statistics South Africa (2016) define an informal settlement as "An unplanned settlement on land which has not been surveyed or proclaimed as. residential, consisting mainly of informal dwellings (shacks)", Smit et al. (2016) suggest that there are varying and often contradictory definitions. Generally, however, such settlements are established on marginal pieces of land and are constituted of informally constructed houses made of available materials, usually wood, zinc sheets, cardboard and other recycled materials. They are usually, though not always, provided with rudimentary basic services, such as communal ablution facilities and waste collection services.

vulnerabilities of young men in these environments has generally been disregarded and is poorly understood (Diouf 2005; Hunter 2010; Seidler 2006). Rather, young men are considered the generators of many of the risks encountered in these areas (Diouf 2005; Hearn 2007; McDowell & Harris 2018; Shefer et al., 2007; Ward et al. 2017; Xaba 2001*)*, making those around them vulnerable.

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, however, young Black men in particular are suffering the effects of structural racism that still disproportionately disadvantages Black people even today. The legacies of apartheid continue to be manifested in limiting their access to opportunities, making it difficult to secure a decent livelihood and equality. Their vulnerability thus compounds other vulnerability.

This chapter introduces the rationale for the study, explaining the research problem and presenting the aims and objectives. The research methodology is then briefly described, whereafter the research design is presented diagrammatically. The structure of the dissertation and the nature of each chapter is then explained. Finally, the geographical context of the study within the City of Cape Town and the geographical location of the various informal settlements are introduced.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The rapid pace of urbanisation and the changes it has engendered on human life, have driven a research agenda that seeks to understand how people's lives are changing in response to these dynamic processes. This has driven an increasing focus on the lives of men (Berg & Longhurst 2003; Cleaver 2002; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Xaba 2001), their perceived marginalisation (Connell 1993; 2005, Morrell 2001; Morrell et al. 2013; Morrell & Swart 2005), feelings of self-worth, and collective and individual vulnerability in an urban environment in which their roles have fundamentally changed (Meth 2009; Meth & McClymont 2009; Walker 2005). Navigating their way in these complex urban landscapes, the identities of *young* (own emphasis) men in particular are constantly mediated and negotiated in response to new circumstances in which they find themselves (Meth 2009). In the context of Africa, which has the youngest population in the world, it is imperative to document the lives of young men, "piecing together" narrative accounts of their lives (Diouf 2005).

In contemporary South Africa, young men are confronted with new circumstances that are shaping their identities in profound ways (Morrell 2001; Walker 2005). Against a background of rapid social transition and a progressive constitution that enshrines women's rights (Moolman 2013; Morrell 2007; Reid & Walker 2005; Sideris 2005; Walker 2005), Reid and Walker (2005: 2) suggest that South African masculinities are "in a state of flux, reconfiguration and change", a so-called 'crisis of masculinity' (Chant 2000; Cleaver 2002; Morrel 2001; Reid 2005; Ward et al. 2017). Morrell (2007: 83) suggests that young African men in South Africa are trying to reconcile new democratic rights-based discourses with traditions that "stress ethnic identity, clan loyalty and the spiritual, social and economic importance of family".

Thus, in today's 'risk society' (Beck 1992), the certainties once provided by tradition are being increasingly challenged. For the young men caught in this transition, life has become complex and difficult to interpret; their behavioural responses no longer as prescribed by culture as they once were.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

If we are to influence a change in the 'risky' behaviour of the poor young Black men who inhabit these proliferating informal urban spaces, it is critical to understand current constructions of masculinity, how they are challenged in these contexts (Lindegger & Maxwell 2007), and how impoverished young men strive to manage vulnerabilities associated with life in these settings (Furlong et al. 2003; Sommers 2010; Walker 2005).

The concept of vulnerability has been applied in studying powerlessness, marginality, and defencelessness. In contrast to physical hazards, which are external threats, vulnerability is the "internal risk variable" in the risk equation (Manyena 2006: 436). As a measure of human welfare shaped by physical, economic, political, and social factors (Adger 2006; Blaikie et al. 1994; Bohle et al. 1994; Manyena 2006), vulnerability is dynamic and needs to be understood within the geographical and social contexts in which it develops; noting how it changes over time (Liveman 1990).

Fineman (2008) speaks of 'existential' vulnerability, a very useful framing for considering how each person develops particular vulnerabilities and what they develop these in relation to. Clowes (2013) in describing the vulnerability of South African men, hints at the inherent complexities of understanding how it is shaped in space and time. She believes that "dominant masculinities structured around race, sexuality and class have been unsettled by the sweeping

constitutional changes that have enshrined gender equality as a fundamental feature of post-apartheid South Africa" (2013:15). In other words, she finds men to be challenged to adapt to these changes and the ways in which they usually construct their masculine identities.

Focusing on young Xhosa[2] men from informal settlements in the City of Cape Town, South Africa, this study explores how their perceived vulnerabilities in these environments contribute to shaping new and variable masculine identities (Luyt & Foster 2001; Ratele 2016). In describing the challenges these young men encounter in navigating the complex post-apartheid city, the study seeks to demonstrate the many ways in which their identities are conflicted, influencing their behaviours and attitudes in response to the precariousness of life.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to understand how young Black African men are made vulnerable to risks associated with life in informal settlements, and how the challenges and threats they encounter in navigating life in these risky urban spaces[3] contribute to shaping their identities as men and in determining how they respond.

In achieving this aim, the research had the following key objectives:

- To investigate the nature of young men's vulnerability in informal urban spaces.
- To determine the key factors that contribute to shaping both their real and perceived vulnerabilities, and how and why these may develop over time.
- To understand how young men's sense of vulnerability influences the identities they invest in and the coping strategies they develop in response to the hazardous environments in which they find themselves.

By addressing these objectives, this research addresses a gap in current understandings of informal settlement risk through a shift in approach: from focusing on those considered most at risk (women and children) to those considered the primary creators of risk (young men). I

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[2] In the Western Cape in South Africa the majority of black Africans are members of the Xhosa ethnic group. Culturally, Xhosa people have norms and rituals, such as male initiation, that differ from other ethnic groups. Ethnic identity contributes significantly to shaping masculine identities.

[3] In informal settlement areas in the City of Cape Town crime and violence are endemic, there are poor levels of environmental health, frequent 'shack' fires (occurring throughout the year), and flooding during the winter months. Basic services, such as ablution and toilet facilities are constantly broken and frequently vandalised.

argue that understanding how and why young men are made to feel vulnerable in these environments may provide deeper understandings about their behaviours and attitudes, ultimately providing insights into their reactive responses, thus providing an additional entry point for addressing how and why they may pose risks to others.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Exploring the perceptions of poor young men living in the impoverished informal urban margins about the nature of their vulnerabilities engendered an exciting methodological journey over six years, from 2015 to 2021, where I sought methods and tools that were more appropriate for a study of such a sensitive nature. After several false starts during which I tested a variety of methods and approaches, some of which I found lacking, I gradually developed and evolved a suite of techniques that not only captured details about the life histories of the young men and their daily lives, but also revealed their feelings and deeper emotions about their fears and the challenges they face, as well as their coping mechanisms and defence strategies.

This approach is considered to be grounded methodology, which is used for developing theory through an emergent process of data collection. This approach is typically used to understand relatively unknown social phenomena, 'building brick-by-brick' (Babbie et al. 2007), the antithesis of hypothesis testing. As Strauss and Corbin (1990: 23) suggest, grounded theory is an inductive process, "discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon". Thus, for this research, I started by studying a phenomenon to uncover what is not known about it, thereby beginning to develop theory from the data and evidence I collected.

For this study, I employed a range of qualitative methods and tools, involving focus groups, interviews, and diary-keeping. What made it unique was how I adapted participatory research methods that I used during the interview sessions with individuals. These served to enrich my insight and understanding, while making the process more enjoyable for the participants themselves, involving them more intimately in the research process. In this regard, the participants became involved in the process of developing tools, critiquing, and improving them. A more detailed account of this methodology is provided in Chapter 3.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research began with a review of various bodies of literature pertaining to the study. This informed some of the initial themes explored in the first round of interview sessions with the young men. A review of the interview transcripts then revealed other key themes; as these new areas of focus began to present themselves, the interview process was paused while I returned to the literature before framing my next research questions. I then had to consider the methods to use for deriving the information as well as the emotional nuances I was seeking.

I continuously shifted from fieldwork interviews to review new bodies of literature around emerging themes, returning each time to consider the development of tools for deriving the depth of insight I sought. Although this was a slow process, it gradually deepened my understanding. Shifting at a later stage to the use of diaries with a smaller group of young men required an application for amendments to my ethical clearance from the university before I could continue. Eventually, I conducted two rounds of diary-keeping over two months in 2018. The diaries were reviewed each time to identify themes for the post-diary interviews, which comprised one-on-one sessions in which the issues raised in the diaries were discussed with each young man, and often gently probed further.

The research therefore occurred in several distinct phases, partly due to my fulltime employment and heavy workload that did not permit regular periods of research, but also because of the grounded methodological approach I took that resulted in many stops and starts. Analysis also therefore took place at various stages of the research process, rather than all at one time.

The research design is shown in Figure 1 and illustrates the key steps in the process followed.
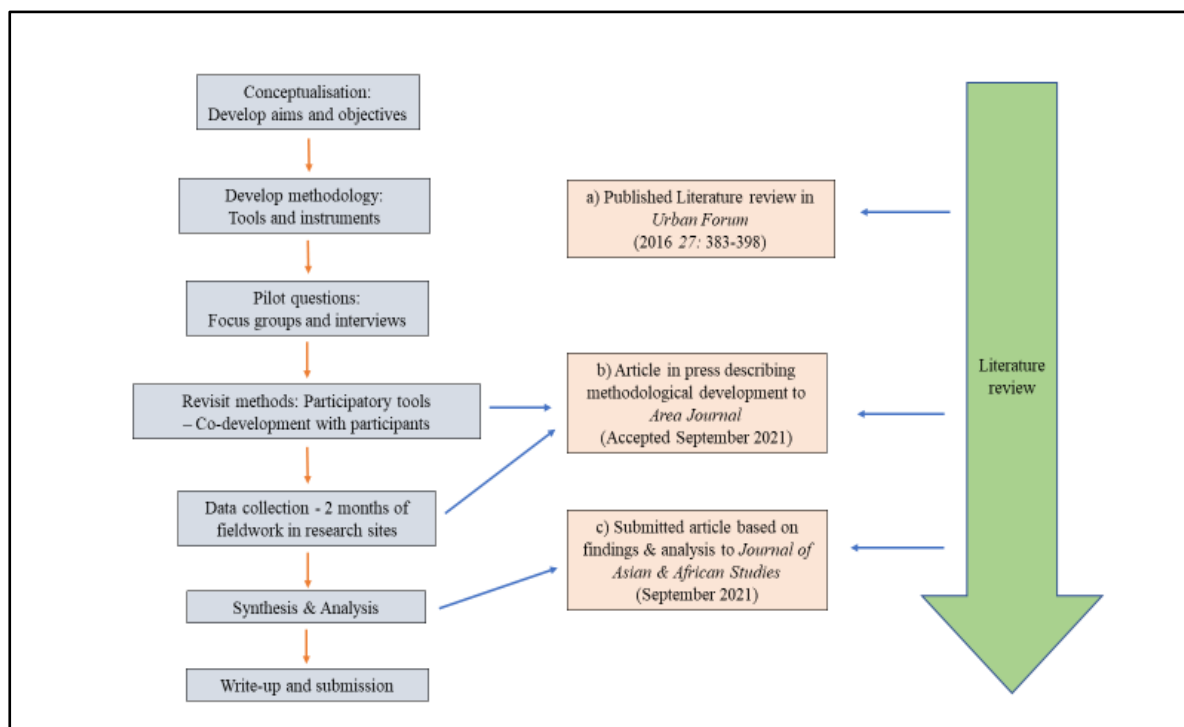
Figure 1 Research design

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

In the opening opening chapter I relate my concern that the lives of young men living in informal settlements are poorly understood and relatively under-researched. Most attention, I argue, is paid to those considered to be most vulnerable in these contexts, namely women and children. However, in trying to read the contemporary African city I suggest that we need to correct this imbalance by focusing more on the lives of young men, who though undeniably contributing to the riskiness of these environments through their actions and responses, nevertheless are made vulnerable themselves in ways that need to be determined. I argue that the lens of vulnerability can be usefully employed to unpack their lives, revealing both inherent fragilities common to many such young men, but also how these are constructed over time and also have unique qualities. Young men, I argue, need to be understood in terms of their own situated identities which, I contend, are fashioned in response to both real and perceived vulnerabilities. The chapter presents a rationale for the study, articulates the aims and objectives and briefly mentions the methodology that was employed.

Chapter 2 reveals how I have engaged with and critiqued the literature in building the rationale for the study, thereby substantiating the arguments I make in the chapters that follow. I have organised the chapter into several key thematic areas that were critical to the context of the study. These include: informal settlements, the situational context in which the study was

conducted; the concept of vulnerability, the overarching lens through which the study was analysed; and the issue of identity, which became a key area of study encompassing several subthemes. Specifically I reference global youth identities, masculinity, African cultural identities, touching on what it means to be 'Black' in the context of South Africa where race undeniably contributes to shaping identities. Bracketed under the general theme of 'emotional geographies', the sense of place literature is described as an introduction to writings on risk perception. Although labelled deliberately as an element of geographical study, this theme delves quite heavily into psychology and other behavioural literature. These literatures are inter-related and serve to reinforce each other throughout the study.

In this study I have adopted an interpretivist approach in exploring how young Xhosa men are made to feel vulnerable to the environments in which they live and how they construct their identities in response. In Chapter 3 I describe the grounded methodology I developed for such a theoretical approach, explaining how and why it was developed gradually over time. This involved several key turning points; the rationale is explained for each of these, and the methods and tools employed are described. This chapter was published as a stand-alone article in *Area* (See Appendix C). I believe that it was this methodological journey that in many ways sets this study apart and adds to its unique value; thus it is a critical element of the dissertation. The methodology also indirectly formed part of the analysis, demonstrating how the young men assisted in developing some of the tools and how they felt about using them.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings of the study under two broad themes - namely vulnerability and coping capacities. I demonstrate how vulnerability is actually not a static human condition, but a dynamic process that builds over time and is constructed of various building blocks that, although unique in many ways to each individual, yet in other ways are also often universally experienced by men. The complex intertwining of these vulnerability variables are usefully explained in terms of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1994) several decades ago, and which is experiencing a resurgence of interest. I draw on the concept of relational geography to explain how peoples' vulnerabilities change according to time and space, as do the methods they use for coping with them. Drawing on interview transcripts and diaries, these chapters incorporate many illustrative quotes from the participants themselves, demonstrating how the findings either converge or disagree with the work of other scholars in relation to the key themes presented.

In Chapter 6 I bring the empirical work of the preceding chapters into conversation with each other, demonstrating how the ways in which young men are made to feel vulnerable in

impoverished environments in the city, influences the ways in which they construct their identities. As Crowes (2013: 15) argues "[T]hese stresses and strains find expression as gendered practices", which have an effect on others from these same environments.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I present the theoretical contribution of this study to existing scholarship, showing how in adopting an interpretivist approach I have been able to reveal how masculinity is manifested in the impoverished areas in the study, demonstrating why vulnerability is such a useful lens for understanding identity formation. I also explain why the methods I employed were critical for deriving the depth of insights I achieved.

The structure of the dissertation and content of each chapter are summarised in Table 1.

Table 2 Dissertation structure and chapter con

Chapter	Chapter title	Main points
1	Men living life on the margins	Introduction and background rationale to the study.
2	Reviewing the literature - expeditions into multiple disciplines and some unfamiliar spaces	A review of the literature. Includes a published article, supplemented by an expanded review of key literature.
3	Exploring men's vulnerability in the global south: Methodological reflections	A description of the development of the methodology and specific tools used in the study, illustrating how these evolved over time. Builds on a published article supplemented with addition detail.
4	Building a picture of vulnerability	A summary of fieldwork findings, revealing key elements. Builds on another published article, supplemented with additional detail.
5	Coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies	A summary of fieldwork findings, revealing key elements.
6	Situated male identities	Analysis of the findings of the research, summarising the elements of vulnerability.
7	Vulnerabilities revealed	Concluding remarks explaining the theoretical assumptions made in the study and how these are related to existing theory - convergence and difference.

1.7 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The City of Cape Town, South Africa's second largest metropolitan area, has since the early 1990s attracted the settlement of thousands of Black people, previously denied rights to the city under the apartheid regime (Lemon 2021; Smith 1992; Visser & Horn 2021). Today, the number of those living informally continues to rise because of a chronic shortage of housing, which is partly a legacy of the pre-democratic era, but also linked to growing demand due to rapid population growth. A ubiquitous feature of South Africa's contemporary urban landscape, there are currently over 400 informal settlements in Cape Town, in the Western Cape Province (Ismaps n.d.). As an economic hub, the city continues to attract in-migration, particularly from the Eastern Cape, the neighbouring province, which is the traditional home of the Xhosa people.

Informal settlements are generally established on marginal pieces of land unsuited to formal development, with dwellings typically constructed from tin, wood, plastic sheeting, cardboard, and other recycled materials, which offer little protection from the elements. Living environments are harsh, with shack fires a frequent scourge (Zweig et al. 2018), flooding common in winter (Drivdal 2015), crime and violence endemic, and high levels of food insecurity, alcohol, and drug abuse (Jewkes et al. 2015; Smit 2006). While women, children, and the elderly are considered most at risk to these and other hazards, statistically young men are more often victims (Hearn 2007; Seedat et al. 2009). Recent democratic changes in South Africa, while enshrining the rights of women and children, have inadvertently overlooked men, driving new forms of male vulnerability.

South Africa has experienced rapid social transition since the advent of democracy which, some would argue, has engendered a "reconfiguration of masculinity" (Reid & Walker 2005: 1-2) in a new gendered ordering of society. Young Black men make increasingly less reference to the traditional systems and cultures that once guided their gendered responses to situations and informed their decision-making (Morrell 1999; Ratele 2001; Walker 2005; Xaba 2001). Living in often unfamiliar and marginalised urban environments, young men have survived by developing strategies, combining traditional beliefs with new experiential urban knowledge (Reid & Walker 2005). However, it has been argued that tradition is rarely considered in studies of masculinity in the global South (Gouws & Stasiulis 2015; Ratele 2013; 2016). In his seminal work, Giddens (1991) argues, in what he calls the 'post-traditional' order, that identity formation has become a dynamic and complex personal project; a process of continual revision and adjustment to the world around us. He suggests that

increasing interconnections between the local and global causes people to grapple with conflicting moral registers and value sets (Giddens, 1991). This is no less so for the young Black man living in an informal settlement in South Africa, whose masculine identity is being shaped not only by his race and his gender, but by his marginality in this environment, which conflicts with his traditional status as a man. As Ratele (2016: 140) suggests, masculinity is "as much about where we are located in our society, by laws, traditions, institutions, rules, and discourses", as it is about the psyche. Thus, in trying to understand men, we need to deconstruct the influences and lived experiences that continue to shape their identity and spiritual being.

Recent popular literature has begun to capture the real lived experiences of young men in poor low-cost and informal settlement areas (Forde 2012; Harber 2011; Langa 2020; Otter 2007), illustrating the increasingly fragile nature of these environments, generally characterised by high levels of unemployment, constrained access to resources, fractured households, and the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Bondi 2005; Joseph et al. 2008; Morrell 1998; 2001; Reid & Walker 2005).

Growing levels of informal urbanism call for more grounded understandings of the everyday lives of informal settlement residents (Pieterse 2011; Sandercock 1998; Simone 2001). In these complex and rapidly changing urban environments, women and children are generally considered to be most vulnerable to growing levels of urban risk from both natural and manmade or even social hazards (Blaikie et al. 2004; Cannon 2008; Enarson & Morrow 1998; Moser et al. 1994). However, the vulnerabilities of young men in these environments are generally disregarded, or at best poorly understood, presenting a critical gap in our understanding of a large constituent group living in our urban informal areas.

A consideration of the marginalisation and particular vulnerabilities of contemporary men has been the focus of various disciplinary studies in recent years (Connell 2005; 2014; Hunter 2010; Kimmel et al. 2005), with a significant focus on men and masculinity within social and cultural geography (Berg & Longhurst 2003; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Meth 2009). Although identified in the literature as a critical area for global research (Gough 2001), there remains a paucity of geographic research into the everyday, lived experiences of ordinary men. It is perhaps within the realm of geography that we can best explain how masculinity is enacted in different environments, articulating very differently in changing geographical contexts and social spaces (Hopkins & Noble 2009). Although this study contributes to social and cultural

geographical knowledge, what really sets it apart from other studies is the specific context of risk and vulnerability within which the lives of ordinary men are also considered.

1.8 THE STUDY SITES

Participants were selected from settlements located in three densely settled areas of the City of Cape Town metropole, namely Khayelitsha, Philippi, and Masiphumelele. While Masiphumelele is a single large settlement, Khayelitsha and Philippi are made up of numerous areas. The areas where young men were living at the time of their participation in the study are indicated as sub-areas within these two larger areas on the map (Figure 2). Masiphumelele can be seen to be located at quite a distance from the others. All settlements, however, are located at some distance from the city and other industrial and commercial hubs.
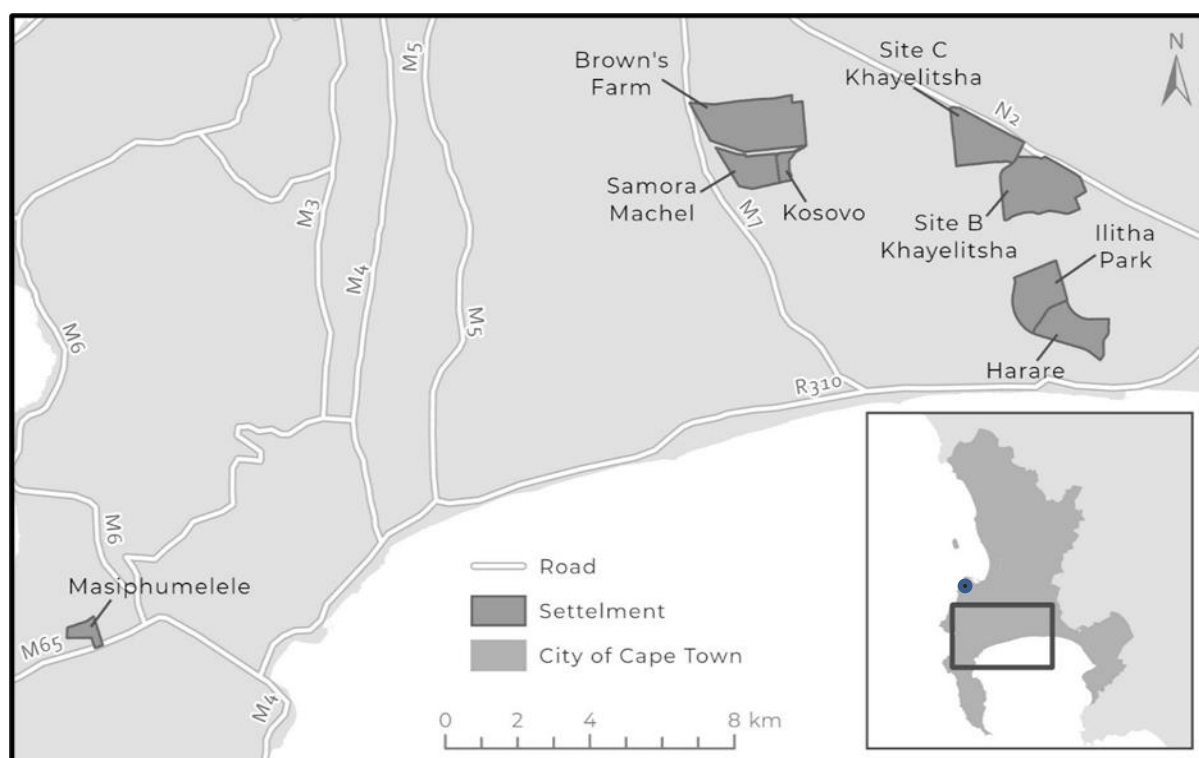
Figure 2 Location of the study sites within the City of Cape Town

Khayelitsha and Philippi are located in the Southeast corridor of the city, where much of the state-funded housing development has been concentrated. Today they are constituted of a combination of formal housing developments interspersed with numerous informal settlement areas of various sizes, from a few dozen dwellings to several thousand. Many settlements in these areas have resulted from orchestrated land occupations by people of colour desperately seeking places to settle. Originally, this settlement occurred in defiance of the apartheid state, beginning in the 1970s with the establishment of Crossroads in Philippi (Cole 1990). The

settlement continued apace, however, following the transition to democracy that began in the mid-1980s, with the rescinding of apartheid laws that had prohibited the settlement of Black people in urban areas, and which was strictly controlled by the infamous 'pass system'. This rapid growth and movement of people into the city challenged the democratic state to provide sufficient housing for a rapidly growing urban population. In addition to the pressures of natural internal population growth, ongoing in-migration from impoverished rural areas continues to swell the numbers of those seeking places to live, particularly from the Eastern Cape. This has driven increasing density in already settled areas and the proliferation of new settlements, often on unsuitable land far from the city centre (Lemon et al. 2021).

The suburbs of Khayelitsha and Philippi are home to many informal settlements that have developed on marginal pieces of land on the periphery of the city, far from most employment opportunities, in an area known as the Cape Flats. The Cape Flats is predominantly sandy, wind-swept land that was previously considered unsuitable for human settlement by other than a few intrepid farmers and missionaries, due to its predominantly wetland character. The area has a high water table, making it prone to flooding during the winter rainfall months (Pharoah 2014; Ziervogel et al. 2017), while its flat topography exposes those who live there to the impacts of the gusting winds that are so prevalent at this southern tip of Africa: the Southeast wind blowing in the dry summer months, often for several weeks on end, and the North westerlies associated with heavy winter rainfall. Wind drives up the risk of rapid-spread informal settlement fires, which occur so frequently that the city has been dubbed the 'fire capital' of South Africa (Gqirana 2015; Zweig et al. 2018).

Masiphumelele, though similarly afflicted by flooding and the scourge of fires, is somewhat atypical of most informally settled areas of the city because of its location on the picturesque Southern Peninsula, where it is surrounded by middle- to higher-income suburbs. There are many employment opportunities here, both for formal jobs and piece-meal work, while many organisations and concerned local people concentrate development projects and upliftment programmes in this growing community. Despite, or perhaps because of this, people continue to settle in their numbers in Masiphumelele. This area of roughly 40 hectares is currently estimated to be settled by over 30 000 people, bounded on all sides by formal middle- to high-income suburbs and an ecologically fragile wetland, leaving no room for expansion.

One of the characteristics of life in the margins is fluidity (Amin & Thrift 2002; Beck 1992; Kesselring 2006), with people constantly on the move so that residency is often short-term. Since 2018, when most of the fieldwork was undertaken, many of the young men have

subsequently moved on to other places. Figure 2 above illustrates the location of the informal settlements in which the participants lived when the study was undertaken.

Although marginalised young men from many ethnic groups reside in the city, the majority of Black African young men are Xhosa; an ethnic group with a long history of settlement there. Traditionally, the Xhosa people, who speak an Nguni language characterised by clicks inherited from historical contact with Khoisan people, were settled in the Eastern Cape region. Under apartheid, Xhosa people were often forcefully removed from urban areas and relocated to this customary tribal land in the Eastern Cape. In the 1970s, two so-called 'homelands', the Transkei and Ciskei, were established by the apartheid regime; they were given a token measure of self-government, though still fully controlled by the apartheid state. Over time, due to the growing numbers of people forced to live in the homeland areas, the land became over-grazed; as trees were cut for firewood and building materials, high levels of erosion gradually made subsistence farming unviable. Once the apartheid regime was replaced by a democratic government and apartheid laws restricting movement to urban areas were rescinded, migration from the impoverished rural 'homelands' began in earnest, continuing today still. However, many Xhosa children today, even those born in urban areas, still spend their formative years in these traditional rural areas, being reared by their grandparents in rural villages and later relocating to the city to join their parents when they attend school. Children are thus still inculcated with traditional Xhosa customs and cultural values that are based on a patriarchal system of male entitlement. On later moving into settlements in urban areas, these children are confronted with very different modern values that are often at odds with the traditions they have been raised on.

As boys become young men, they eke out a living, made even more precarious by the endemic levels of crime and limited opportunities to uplift themselves in these densely settled and marginalised living environments. This is what drives the disconnect between young men's beliefs, their expectations, the lived realities, and their vulnerability.

This chapter provided an outline of the rationale for and background to the study, describing the aim and objectives, research methodology, and overall design. The structure of the dissertation was explained, and the study sites introduced. The next chapter provides further context to the study, summarising the key bodies of literature that I reviewed.

CHAPTER 2. EXPEDITIONS INTO MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES AND SOME UNFAMILIAR SPACES[4]

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter engages with a range of relevant bodies of literature, providing background and context to the study. Drawing from quite a variety of disciplinary domains, including geography, anthropology, development studies, disaster risk studies, gender studies, psychology, public health, theology, urban planning, and research methods, I show how this scholarly writing usefully informs the theories I develop in the study. In adopting a grounded methodological style, the study developed in an organic and purposefully loose fashion, necessitating constant returns to the literature as I explored new themes that constantly emerged.

Beginning with a review of literature pertaining to informality and informal settlements, which helps to paint a textured picture of 'slum life', I demonstrate the deprived physical and socio-economic environments in which the young men studied are continuously developing their identities. These, I postulate later in the dissertation, are better described as 'marginalised' (Meth, 2009) or transformative rather than hegemonic.

The chapter goes on to explore the key elements contributing to shaping male identity in these 'marginalised' spaces. This includes the critical role of cultural tradition in shaping contemporary African masculine identities, while for comparison, shifts in global youth identities are considered, both the commonalities to be found across cultures and how, in the specific context of Africa, they are perhaps more significantly prescribed by cultural norms and expectations than in other places. This brings me to a brief encounter with Black identities and how they are different. In exploring young men's feelings of attachment and '*sense of place*' in the urban landscape, I delve into the sense of place literature, showing how it usefully informs men's emotional responses to the different living environments they encounter in life, shaping the identities in which they are invested in response to them. Finally, I explore writings on urban risk and vulnerability linking to the core focus of the study, the susceptibility

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[4] This chapter was published in a shorter form as Zweig, P. 2016. Lost in space? Considering young men as drivers of urban informal settlement risk. *Urban Forum* 27(4): 383-398. (See Appendix B).

of young men to the vagaries of their living environments and the range of identities they adopt in response.

Southern scholars have contested dominant northern framings of urbanism, seeking theoretical approaches more suited to the realities of urban evolution in more southern contexts (Mabin 2014; Oldfield 2014; Roy 2014). In Roy's (2014:14) discussion of the concept of 'worlding', for example, which she describes as "a perennial process of a lived and imminent contingency" that counterbalances the theory of 'globalisation', she suggests that the global south is becoming the heart of a new world order that is being "recreated through the urban revolution". Given these concerns, it is imperative to develop new theoretical frames of understanding of a different African form of urbanism (Comaroff & Comaroff 2011) from the perspective of the people who inhabit these spaces (Pieterse 2011).

These generally unplanned and poorly serviced areas are gradually becoming hot spots of urban risk (Pelling 2003; Pelling & Wisner 2009). This is directly attributable to the social and economic vulnerabilities of the people who inhabit them, living in deplorable conditions and generally with unstable sources of livelihood (Birkmann et al. 2010; Moser 1996; Pelling 2003). Hewitt (1997) suggests that there is a positive correlation between increasing urban density and rising levels of risk. Indeed, it is generally poor marginalised households living in crowded informal settlements and low-cost housing areas that are most vulnerable to hazards such as fires, severe weather events, and seasonal flooding, located as they are in risk-prone and ecologically fragile areas (Holloway et al. 2008).

Research has found young men to be the drivers of many of the risks prominent in informal settlements, from behaviours that often result in settlement fires (Pharoah 2009), to escalating levels of crime (Diouf 2003; Urdal & Hoelscher 2009; Wood & Jewkes 2001), with consequences for the communities in which they live. It is thus critical to understand how young men themselves navigate life in these complex impoverished urban landscapes and how the identities in which they are invested are constantly being mediated and reshaped in response to the changing circumstances in which they find themselves (McDowell & Harris 2018; Morrell 2001); what Ratele (2016: 132) calls their 'situatedness'. Understanding the perceived vulnerabilities of young men and their behavioural responses to the risks and challenges they face may provide a stepping-stone in finding solutions to rising levels of urban risk (Lindegger & Maxwell 2007).

This focus on young men is a departure from the emphasis of previous urban risk and development studies, which generally consider women and children to be most vulnerable to growing levels of urban risk (Anderson 1994; Blaikie et al. 2004; Budlender 2004; Enarson & Morrow 1998; Fordham 2004; Niaz 2009; Van Hoven & Horschelmann 2005). Contrastingly, as Wisner (2016) has argued, this focus on typically vulnerable groups - women, children, the elderly, and those with HIV - is a very broad and un-useful generalisation because patterns of vulnerability are much more complex and dynamic, constituted of many layers. Failing to consider the vulnerability of young men and their role in shaping and driving risk in the communities in which they live, presents a critical gap in our contextual understanding of life in urban informal areas today.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Over a billion urban dwellers live in informal environments today; a number that is increasing every year, it is estimated, by around ten million inhabitants (IFRC 2010). In sub-Saharan Africa, more than 60% of the population is already living in slum conditions (UN Habitat 2010). Sandercock (1998:7) believes that in response to this proliferation of informality, it is critical to develop a better understanding of people's livelihoods: in other words, "a new kind of cultural as well as political and economic literacy" to inform a new urban planning paradigm. Acknowledging these new urban realities, Pieterse (2011:6) anticipates that 'slum urbanism' will in future continue to characterise African urban landscapes, suggesting that "the shanty city is by and large the real African city".

Informal settlements have become a global challenge, no longer found only among developing countries, with even first world cities seeing the proliferation of such forms of accommodation (Devlin 2018). Growing levels of informality call for more grounded understandings of the everyday lives of those who inhabit these complex and dynamic urban spaces (Gough 2001; Pieterse, 2011; Sandercock 1998) and the ways in which they function (Fernandez-Maldonado 2006). The study of informality and informal settlements has become the concern not only of academics (Cirolia et al. 2017; Huchzermeyer & Karam 2006; Pelling & Wisner 2009; Simone & Abouhani 2005; Smit 2006) but also of activists, politicians, and development practitioners; attracting the attention of international aid agencies as well more localised non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) (Cirolia et al. 2017).

In South Africa, informal settlements have become a ubiquitous feature of every urban area, from the big cities to the small towns and even rural villages. They are typically densely settled

areas of shacks built on marginal pieces of leftover land; generally, but not always located on the periphery of urban areas (Huchzermeyer & Karam 2006; Smit 2006). Dwellings are commonly made of sheets of zinc or wood and other recycled materials, with flat roofs often covered with plastic sheeting that affords occupants some protection from the rain, and earth floors often covered with cheap roll-on linoleum. Interior walls are insulated with cardboard and other easily available materials. Generally, however, dwellings remain poorly protected from the elements, becoming hot and stuffy during the summer months and extremely cold in winter.

While many dwellings are constituted of single rooms, others make clever use of furniture to divide and differentiate living spaces, while some are constructed with several interleading rooms, generally with only one exit door. In these cramped and shared living conditions there is little privacy, even to perform personal ablutions (see for example Meth, 2009). In addition, as settlements densify over time, spaces between dwellings are often limited, situated so close together that neighbours can often hear what is happening in adjacent dwellings.

In Cape Town, where the provision of basic infrastructure is better than in many other parts of the country[5], most settlements are provided with communal toilets and standpipes, with many areas now supplied with household *porta-potties*, the kind of toilet with removable tanks that is usually fitted into caravans. Although collected and emptied every few days by municipal teams, settlement dwellers find them unhygienic and culturally unacceptable. With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, concerns over adequate access to water and sanitation facilities to stem the spread of the disease resulted in the provision of small stand-alone portable toilet cubicles shared between a few households, the type usually used at festivals and fairs. Despite regular maintenance, none of these options are very hygienic, being used by many more people than is desirable, while the use of any communal facility comes with a high risk of crime. Criminals typically prey on those using such facilities, particularly after dark.

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[5] This comment is not based on statistical evidence, but instead draws on many conversations I have had with local government staff from across South Africa who have attended a training course in community-based risk assessment that I have run for over a decade. Following fieldwork in informal communities, which forms part of the course, participants have often commented on the inferior level of services found in other parts of the country compared to Cape Town, leading me to draw this conclusion.

In South Africa, in terms of an electrification program implemented according to the Policy Guidelines for the Electrification of Unproclaimed Areas introduced in 2011 (Lemair & Kerr 2016), the state has aimed to provide all informal settlement dwellers with access to electrical power, providing them with free basic electricity units (FBEs) each month. Although dwellers can purchase additional units at their own cost, given high levels of unemployment, many households cannot afford to top-up their electricity in this way. Frequently they resort to using candles for light and paraffin stoves for cooking and heating once their FBEs are used up (Francioli 2020). So too do the many households in areas that for various reasons simply cannot be supplied with electricity, and new settlements not yet provided with electricity. Typically, an old jerry-can (*mbawula)* punctured with holes into which hot embers are placed is still commonly used for warmth inside the home in winter. The use of flammable energy sources drives up the risk of fire and is also a health hazard (Gordon et al. 2014).

Although many settlements today are provided with high-mast lighting - strong beam lights located on high poles that cast light across a broad area at night - there is usually insufficient light after dark, presenting opportunities for criminal activities. Given the high levels of poverty typical of informal settlements, crime is endemic. In response, informal dwellers often fortify their homes with security gates and burglar bars, using thick padlocks on the doors. Those with enough space may erect barbed wire fences around their living space, with some people keeping dogs for protection.

Informal settlements not only accommodate the poorest of the poor, those who are unemployed or unable to pay rent, but given the dire shortage of affordable low-income housing throughout the country, increasingly provide housing options even to those with steady incomes. Growing levels of unemployment, estimated to be close to 30% prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (StatsSA 2018), and even higher youth joblessness has meant that informal areas today are home to growing numbers of households who lack any form of employment. Many of these households are reliant on state welfare grants supplemented with piece-meal work. Informal settlements are also usually the first stop for migrants arriving from other countries (Crush 2013), as well as those returning from stints in prison, and increasingly also the elderly left with no other options (Scholtz 2015). It has also been noted that the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in South Africa are found among informal settlement dwellers (Joseph & Van Donk 2008), while food insecurity is notably higher in these areas too (Battersby 2013; Battersby & Haysom 2018).

Currently, no forms of secure tenure are available for informal settlement dwellers (Cirolia et al. 2017; Durante-Lasserve & Royston 2002), though there have been studies seeking to develop alternative tenure solutions for settlement dwellers (Kihato & Royston 2013; Whittal 2014). As a result, households have little incentive to invest their limited resources in more robust and comfortable structures that offer protection from many of the risks prevalent in such areas. Life is therefore precarious, with informal settlement fires a particular scourge due to the use of open flames for cooking, which are exacerbated by the combustible materials with which most dwellings are made. In addition, the proximity of dwellings promotes the rapid spread of fire from the point of ignition (Pharoah 2009; Zweig et al. 2018).

In Cape Town, the area in which this research was undertaken, large tracks of land have historically been left undeveloped due to their unsuitability for formal development, such as areas where the water table is naturally high and prone to flooding after heavy rains in the winter. Typically, such areas are situated on the urban periphery at some distance from opportunities for employment. Informal settlements established on these undeveloped areas are therefore sprawling sites of poverty and degradation, where people are made vulnerable to the vagaries of everyday life (Holloway et al. 2008).

2.3 VULNERABILITY

Employing 'vulnerability' as a conceptual lens, this study explores how young men are made susceptible to risk in the city, and how this in turn shapes their behaviour and masculine identity. Vulnerability as a concept evolved from the social sciences (Schneiderbauer & Ehrlich 2004). In his analysis of rural poverty, Chambers (1983) was among the first to apply this concept, insisting that it was not synonymous with poverty, but rather as "*defencelessness, insecurity, and exposure to risk, shocks and stress*" (2006: 33). This framing was later taken up in many other disciplinary contexts and was also the one adopted in this study.

In their seminal work on risk, Blaikie et al. (2004: 441) suggest that vulnerability "involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone's life and livelihood are put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event in nature or in society". Bohle et al. (1994) similarly believe that vulnerability is a measure of human welfare, a complex multi-layered concept that incorporates consideration of different forms of exposure to various harmful situations. Cardona (2004) views vulnerability as a predisposition to be affected by harmful elements or situations, while Liverman (1990) stresses, however, that vulnerability must be seen as geographically contingent, shaped and developed in particular physical and social

spaces. More recently, Romero et al. (2018: 93) have suggested that urban forms of vulnerability are being shaped by the process of urbanisation, *"acting on urban centers as places with unique social and environmental histories, opportunities, and constraints"*.

Birkmann (2006) developed a model demonstrating how the concept of vulnerability has gradually expanded in its conceptualisation, reinterpreted by various scholars with increasing degrees of scale and complexity (Figure 3).
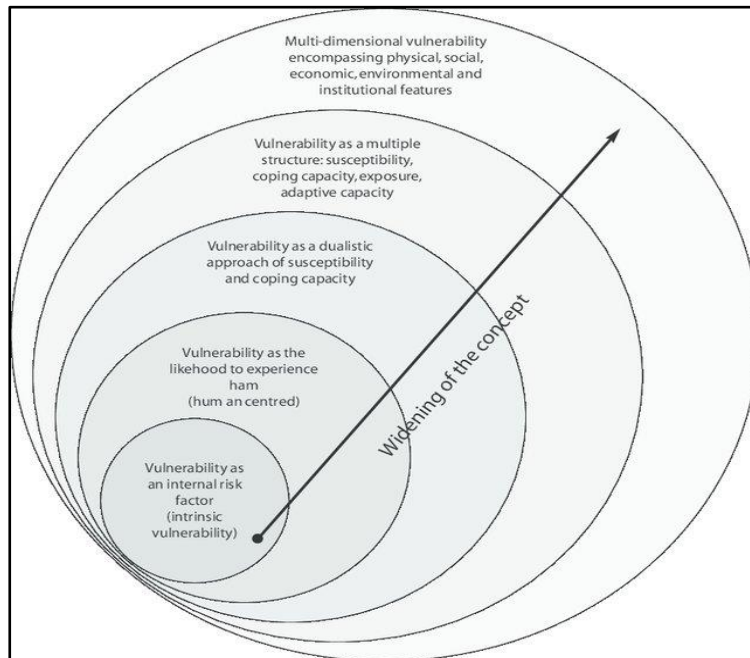
Figure 3 Birkmann's key spheres of vulnerability (2006: 17)

Birkmann (2006) identifies five spheres in the development of the concept: from an initial framing that considers vulnerability to be intrinsic to human life driven by exposure to harm; moving on to include the chance of experiencing harm to oneself and one's livelihood; and further to a more double-sided approach to vulnerability that considers not only the chance of harm, but also the ability to cope. Bohle (2001), for example, identifies an 'internal' and 'external' side of vulnerability; the latter relating to one's exposure, while internal factors are associated with one's coping capacity in the face of risk. This is taken further in the fourth sphere in the diagram, which considers vulnerability to be more complex and multi-faceted rather than dual-sided. Finally, it is suggested that vulnerability should encompass considerations of less immediate and often broader scale influences, such as the effects of globalisation and the onset of climatic change. In this respect, Kelman (2018) has argued that vulnerability is a very complex and dynamic process.

Today, due to the range of disciplines that have adopted the term in their lexicons, vulnerability continues to be defined variously (Hufschmidt 2011; Wisner 2015). Definitions of vulnerability continue to change over time, influenced particularly by its incorporation into climate change terminology.

In the disaster risk domain, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)[6] defined vulnerability as "the conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards" (UNISDR 2009: 24). Many scholars in the disaster risk domain still prefer this definition (Kelman 2018; Wisner 2015). More recently, a new definition (UNDRR 2017) has dropped the 2009 emphasis on human agency or coping capacity (Wisner 2015: s.p.), defining vulnerability as "conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual… to the impacts of hazards". However, in studying vulnerability holistically, one should not only consider how people are exposed to threats, but also how they cope with them (Wisner, 2016).

The concept of vulnerability has often been adopted in the analysis of marginalisation, powerlessness, and defencelessness (Adger 2006; Anderson & Woodrow 1989; Hilhorst et al. 2004; Lewis 1999). Access to power and the ability to exercise power contributes to shaping vulnerability, or as Joronen and Rose (2020) have recently argued, "*power is, by definition, a problem of vulnerability*" (2020: 1404). Those who have more power receive more favourable outcomes, which suggests that those who are marginalised are inherently more vulnerable due to their powerlessness and lack of agency. However, in a recent article Barnett (2022) contests this notion, suggesting that most vulnerability analyses tend to focus on people's lack of agency, rather than acknowledging that everyone has some level of agency.

Lewis (1999) has shown that the socio-ecological and political perspective of everyday life is critical to understanding people's vulnerability. Vulnerabilities are partially created through the decisions we make and our subsequent actions, which have historical antecedents (Garcia-Acosta 2002). However, while vulnerability can be considered socially constructed (Cannon

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[6] UNDRR, formerly known as UNISDR, provides definitions of risk-related terminology in an effort to standardise the meanings of terms in common use. UNDRR has amended its definition of vulnerability several times, from the one first developed after the International Decade of Risk Reduction (UNISDR 2004), to an amended version several years later (UNISDR 2009), and then again in 2017.

et al. 2003; Cannon 2008; Lindegger & Maxwell 2007; Pelling 2003), it is also derived from one's physical environment (Hopkins & Noble 2009; Massey 1991; Relph 1976; Taylor 2009; Tuan 1977). Others have extended this to argue that it is also critical to explore the more intangible aspects of vulnerability such as individual emotions (Brownlow 2005; Gorman-Murray 2011; Ignatieff 1994; Kelman 2011; Meth 2009).

In developing his environmental risk model, Pelling (2003) identified three key components of human vulnerability: exposure, resistance, and resilience. In this model, exposure is defined as a product of physical location and the nature of one's environment; resistance is determined by one's economic, psychological, and physical well-being; and resilience refers to one's ability to cope with or adapt to a situation (Pelling 2003; Wisner et al. 2004; Ziervogel et al. 2017). These in turn are determined by one's access to resources, which is related to one's rights and entitlements (Pelling 2003; Sen 1981; Ziervogel et al. 2017). Sen (1981) showed how vulnerability was intrinsically related to household productive capacity as well as entitlements. This perspective is often referred to as the livelihoods approach and is today acknowledged as being critical to a holistic understanding of vulnerability (Cannon 2003; De Satgé & Holloway 2002; Pelling 2003).

Many scholars (e.g., Blaikie 2000; Chambers & Conway 1992; Moser 1998; Sanderson 2000 among others) have employed the livelihoods approach to determine pathways of human vulnerability. Their research has shown that labour, housing, possessions, trade tools, and social networks are key resources used for coping with vulnerability, particularly by the poor. The capacity for coping and adaptation, however, while partly determined by the nature and strength of one's livelihood (De Satgé & Holloway 2002; Moser 1998), is also influenced by available social capital and one's age and gender (Chambers 1983; Lazarus 2014; McDonald 1999; Pelling 2003; Sebastien 2020). However, no standard procedure has yet been established for measuring levels of human vulnerability, either quantitatively or qualitatively (Birkmann & Wisner 2006; Hufschmidt 2011; Villagran 2006).

Vulnerability is a dynamic process (Kelman 2011) and changes constantly both in space and over time. For example, three major differences have been identified between urban and rural forms of vulnerability: urban life is more commodified; risks in urban areas are shaped in a far more complex environment; and high levels of residential mobility cause greater social fragmentation and loss of social capital (Moser et al. 1994). Higher levels of vulnerability identified in contemporary urban as opposed to rural settings may bear testimony to the lack of social and support networks in urban areas compared with more traditional rural societies

(Moser et al. 1994; Von Kotze 1996). Social problems like crime and youth delinquency are increasingly prevalent today in urban settings (Pinnock 2016; Seedat et al. 2009), undermining social cohesion and mutual trust (Giddens 1991; McIlwaine & Moser 2001), and shaping forms of vulnerability, especially in poor communities.

While it is undeniable that understanding vulnerability necessitates consideration of both the tangible and intangible elements in its construction and how these change over time (Kelman 2011; Manyena 2006; Moser et al. 1994; Pelling 2003; Wisner et al. 2004), it is also commonly acknowledged that vulnerability is socially constructed (Cannon et al. 2003; Cannon 2008; Pelling 2003; Wisner et al. 2004). Both the local community and society more generally are critical in shaping both individual and collective vulnerability (Cannon 2008; Cannon et al. 2003; Pelling 2003). While I agree with this social framing of the concept, I believe it discounts other contributing elements that have been notably less explored (Lewis, 1999), such as those more unique to the individual, drawn from their life circumstances, emotions and perceptions.

Human behaviour in any space is shaped by lived experience, social interaction, and communication, as well as cultural traditions, underpinned by individual perceptions (Allen 2006; Jensen 2011; Lindegger & Maxwell 2007; Morrell 2001; Renn 2008; Sebastien 2020; Viljoen 1994). These are influenced by both group identities and individual personalities which, the literature suggests, also shift over time and space in response to constant external changes (Cresswell 2004; Kimmel et al. 2005; Sassen 1998). Thomson (1999: 35) refers to "the collision between old and new ways, and the forging of new understandings of self and society". This is particularly well illustrated in studies of contemporary youth identity, which have highlighted how the weight of the past and variable adherence to traditional values serve to constrain behaviour and influence the construction of modern identities (Mattes 2011; Shildrick & MacDonald 2006; Sommers 2010).

Manyena (2006) has suggested that vulnerability can be understood as the antithesis of resilience; a common debate in the literature (Hufschmidt 2011; Miller et al. 2010; Turner 2010). An analysis of the variety of conceptual understandings and practice methodologies by Miller et al. (2010) finds that the uptake of the term vulnerability in the climate change domain has shifted its conception to a more positivistic one, which assumes that vulnerability can be measured, and thus resilience is shown to be increased when measures of vulnerability are reduced. However, in contrast to the climate adaptation community, vulnerability researchers

focus more on people's response to shocks or threats, rather than on longer-term changes and adaptation. From a political ecology perspective, vulnerability is about far more than measurable indicators may reveal, comprising many intangible elements already mentioned that are often not addressed despite adaptation, so that inherent vulnerabilities may continue (Lazarus 2014).

In a recent letter published on Academia, Theodora Gazi (2021) calls the meaning of vulnerability into question again. Though her focus is on refugees in Europe, Gazi (2021) insists that vulnerability is context-specific and interchangeable over time and space. Gazi (2021) argues that people should not be categorised unquestioningly as vulnerable groups, given that some people are inherently more vulnerable than others, and for a range of reasons even within the same space. Echoing Gazi's (2021) argument, employing 'vulnerability' as a conceptual lens facilitated a more holistic understanding in this study of how young men are made susceptible to risk in the city, in turn shaping their behaviour and identity.

2.4 IDENTITY

It is often contended that individuals develop their identity through the medium of community. Stedman (2014: 565), for example, suggests that "the beliefs one has about oneself as a social actor are the foundations of the self". However, while acknowledging that identity is indeed partially a product of one's social environment, it is also constructed over time by personal histories and the experiences that help to shape "a particular set of prejudices and preferences, joys and terrors" (Morrell 2001: 7). Similarly, Ratele (2016: 140) suggests that an individual's identity is built over time, incorporating early life experiences as well as "attachments, traumas, insecurities and fantasies". One is generally not conscious of all these influences, or perhaps unaware of how much they contribute to shaping who we are and who we become; unless we have particularly analytical type personalities, pausing to reflect deeply on the road we have travelled. Even then, it is debatable whether we really understand all the elements and influences along the way that have contributed to shaping our identities.

Over the life course, our identities are constantly being reshaped as new experiences help to change who we are and how we see ourselves. Self-identity is a dynamic project that not only changes gradually over time, but also in space (Sebastien 2020; Stedman 2014), adapting to the many different environments in which we find ourselves. Thus, the person that people encounter in the workspace is probably quite different from the person one meets every week in church, or at the tavern, and contrasting significantly from the individual we might

encounter in their home environment. We are all vested in many different identities, or "different narratives" (Lindegger & Maxwell 2007: 125). I would argue that this chameleon-like capacity is a kind of built-in human defence mechanism, underlain by life experiences that act as a kind of library or database; an encyclopaedic reserve of knowledge we call on to reconstruct the identity we want to project in certain spaces to reduce our perceived vulnerability in that space.

Thus, shifting away from considering identity as a fundamentally social construction allows us to pay attention to many other critically important elements in identity formation. Theorising about self-identity in our 'modern' world, Giddens (1991: 53) suggests that identity formation is also about how one sees oneself; "the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography". Thus, to understand the identities in which individuals are invested, and to determine how and why they shift over time and space, requires insights into their personal histories. This requires identifying the unique building-blocks that have shaped the characters people present to the outside world in a variety of social environments.

In bringing the discussion closer to the context of this study, the section that follows briefly considers the challenges facing young people today in developing their identities. In a dynamic world of rapid globalisation, young people are increasingly conflicted by a range of influences; challenged to define who they are and which moral registers shape their behaviours.

2.5.1 Youth identities – Shifts in contemporary framings

Life is somewhat precarious and uncertain for young people living in poverty on the margins of society (Brownlow 2005; Dillabough & Kennelly 2010; Frosch et al. 2002; Sassen 1998). Aliber (2001: 27) describes the condition of being poor as one of resignation to "the low probability of ever escaping poverty … discouraging people from taking steps to increase their chances of living a more rewarding life". Hansen (2008: 214) notes specifically the challenges faced by poor young people in the global South who "rather than waiting for adulthood, act out their lives in the here and now under circumstances that are not of their own making, but which they sometimes contribute to changing".

Many have questioned how marginalisation is shaping youth culture today (MacDonald 1999; Ramphele 2001; Sassen 1998). Sassen (1998: 2) calls them "the lost generation"; echoing the concern expressed by many other scholars that an increasing proportion of the youth are

gradually being excluded from the global economy through their inability to find work, which is partly through a lack of education and inadequate skillsets that is condemning them to a life on the urban edge (Dillabough & Kennelly 2010; Morrell 2007; Ramphele 2001).

Growing numbers of young people are living in low-income and migrant communities which, Dillabough and Kennelly (2010: 2) propose, has resulted in "new forms of moral regulation" among the youth, "shaped by urban exclusion, specific local histories, diasporic shifts and migration flows". Dillabough and Kennelly (2010) suggest that this has created new forms of vulnerability associated with greater risk-taking, lack of safety nets, and forced independence. The gradual marginalisation of growing numbers of youths is complex, varying across culture and context; requiring the collection of narrative accounts from the youth themselves to facilitate insights into their lives (Dillabough & Kennelly 2010; Diouf 2005; Sommers 2010). In the context of Africa, where young people currently constitute the largest proportion of the population, changing identities among the youth are noted as a critical area for future study (Diouf 2003; Sommers 2010).

Transition to adulthood among poor youths today is increasingly protracted (Furlong et al. 2003; MacDonald et al. 2005). Previously, a natural progression from school straight into employment, this transition to adulthood is now frequently delayed as young people struggle to enter the labour market; trapped in a form of extended liminality (Finn & Oldfield 2015; Honwana 2014).

Youth identities today are shaped not only in response to pressures emanating from more immediate conditions and localised processes (Shildrick & MacDonald 2006), but increasingly also profoundly influenced by various effects of globalisation; driven in large part by the media (Hadland et al. 2008), particularly social media (Gunduz 2017; Stokes & Price 2017). Globalising fashion trends currently draw heavily on American gangster culture (hooks 2004a; Ratele 2016; Savage & Hickey-Moody 2010) and hip-hop music (Sommers 2010). The increasing influence of a globalising youth culture is gradually supplanting more localised traditional values that is also associated with high levels of youth unemployment on the continent (Devlin 2014; Finn & Oldfield 2015).

In South Africa, young people are also struggling with "the residual weight of the past" (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006: 3), as they adapt to changes engendered by democracy (Mattes 2011; Morrell 2007). While a third of South Africa's present electorate is too young to remember the apartheid past, the legacies of that history continue to shape unequal

development in the country today. Young Black people today face "the same if not greater levels of unemployment, poverty, inequality and hopelessness as their parents" (Mattes 2011: 5). This should not be taken lightly given that unemployment is seen as a trigger of social instability, driven particularly by young unmarried men (Arko-Cobbah 2011; Finn & Oldfield 2015).

Mattes (2011) found that young people in South Africa today are less likely than their forefathers to be active members of community groups dealing with social issues. This lack of engagement suggests a loss of the valuable social capital that once drove the political struggle in the country and led to democratic change.

In a study of school-going youth in Durban, Morrell (2007: 83) found that the immediate concerns of young adolescent boys were "dominated by material security, dealing with precarious life circumstances and avoiding risk". Similarly, Cleaver (2002) identified insecurities among the youth in marginalised areas. Salo (2007), working among poor gangster-ridden communities on the Cape Flats elsewhere in Cape Town, found that unemployment deeply influenced the psyche of men unable to meet social expectations by being providers; instead, men were reliant on others, finding different ways to define their masculine identities.

As Diouf (2005: 230-231) suggests, many young men in Africa "have lost their place and function at the centre of society and now find themselves at the margins, feared, calumniated and avoided". This calls into question their sense of self-worth and the identities they develop in response to their marginalisation as young men.

2.5.2 Masculinity and male identity

While it is perhaps within the realm of geography that we can best explain how masculinity is enacted in different environments, rearticulated in changing geographical and social spaces (Hopkins & Noble 2009), a growing body of other disciplinary literature focuses on the lives of men. The Australian sociologist Connell, for example, has produced an extensive body of work on masculinity, drawing on Gramsci's work on hegemony in developing the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 2005).

Connell (2005) explains hegemony as the configuration of gender practice that is used to legitimise patriarchy, reinforcing the dominance of men over women. However, she suggests that those men who display hegemonic behaviour may not necessarily be the most powerful.

Rather, their demonstrations of hegemony may mask both their perceived and real lack of agency because they cannot meet normative standards of masculinity, which are often culturally prescribed. Connell (2005) also argues that both hegemonic and marginalised forms of masculinity are never fixed but are configured or adjusted according to situations.

In his seminal work 'Masculinities', Connell (1995) provides a historical perspective of how gender roles have changed significantly over time. Looking back to the 1930s, he explains that it was generally believed then that gender roles were clearly defined and psychologically internalised. This separation of male and female roles had obvious benefits for society, contributing to social stability and sustained individual mental wellbeing, with the roles of men and women seen to be complementary (Pleck 1981). Mead's (1930; 1963) anthropological work among primitive societies in the same era, provided clear evidence, however, that these so-called 'sex roles' were not standard, but rather uniquely shaped by culture and tradition. In the late 1950s, Hacker (1957) was among the first to criticise the benefits of predefined sex-roles, stressing how the 'burden of masculinity' had created unfair social expectations of men trying to perform within rigidly defined roles. The rise of feminism in the 1970s confronted these roles and contested functionalist theory, which suggested that in accepting subordinate roles to men, women had allowed themselves to become oppressed (Connell 1995).

Many have suggested that gender studies have generally been conflated with feminist studies (Fordham 2004; Morrell & Swart 2005; Shefer et al. 2007). Morrell and Swart (2005) believe that it was only with the emergence of Gender and Development (GAD) perspectives in the late 1980s and 1990s that the focus of gender research shifted to include men and masculinity. However, despite this, men have generally continued to be 'missing' from development work (Cornwall 2000), and usually neglected by feminist scholars (Chant 2000; Van Hoven & Horschelmann 2005). Thus, while feminist geographers have criticised the discipline for its neglect of women's experiences, even less attention has been paid to the shaping of masculine identities and masculinity in relation to space (Meth & McClymont 2009; Van Horen & Horschelmann 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that masculinities have an explicit geographical context that informs a deeper understanding of how they play out in different spaces. Similarly, Meth and McClymont (2009: 814) note the importance of space in shaping masculine identities, suggesting that "spaces shape the very nature of the experience of masculinity and how it articulates with other key dimensions of social relations".

The last thirty years has seen the rise of 'masculine geographies', with a significant focus on men and masculinity within social and cultural geography (Berg & Longhurst 2003). Jackson (1991) is often considered to be the first geographer to focus on masculinity from a social and cultural perspective (Meth & McClymont, 2009). Increasingly, geographers have begun to contribute insights into the spatial relationships and relationality of changing masculinities, shifting from a sociological to a more cultural perspective (Hopkins & Noble 2009). McDowell (2003) stresses the need to conceptualise masculinity from a more strategic perspective, acknowledging the unique contexts (resources and capacities) shaping its form.

Consideration of the marginalisation of men has also been the focus of other disciplinary studies, such as those of Cleaver (2002) and Xaba (2001), while Gough (2001) has called for research focusing on the 'ordinary man' or the 'everyday man'.

Writing in 1970, Barker (1970: 55) flagged the concern that "those who were treated like boys, behave like boys…who having no responsibility laid upon them, owe nothing to any man". This has great resonance in the South African context of apartheid (Morrell 2001; Reid & Walker 2003; Shefer et al. 2007; Xaba 2001), in which Black men were infantilised, being referred to as 'boys' no matter what their age. This practice, as Suttner (2007) has suggested, was an assault to their manhood, with White people often not even knowing the real names of the Black men they interacted with, something that Fanon (1963) similarly draws attention to in his seminal work on Black identity.

Academic research into the changing lives and identities of men in South Africa has grown, particularly since 1994. Much of this research has been categorised broadly as Men's Studies or Critical Men's Studies (Morrell 2001), and significantly, has also been considered within the context of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence (Hunter 2010; Pattman 2007; Wood & Jewkes 2001; Xaba 2001). Von Kotze (1996) has illustrated the contrast between experiences of masculinity in rural and urban contexts in South Africa, while Meth and McClymont (2009: 913) have explored how the "chaotic [urban] space" has structured the way that men have experienced new forms of marginalisation, influencing their feelings of self-worth and individual sense of vulnerability. In this context, young men with limited skills, who are forced to compete for poorly paid and often piece-meal work in a highly competitive urban labour market, have, it may be argued, become increasingly vulnerable.

The plight of young men in urban areas has, however, generally received much less attention from researchers and policy makers (Morrell & Swart 2005; Ratele et al. 2007). Ratele (2001;

2006; 2008a; 2008b; 2016; Ratele et al. 2007), who has conducted extensive research on South African masculinity, laments this, particularly the lack of narratives concerning men and boys. However, although not captured to a significant degree in formal academic literature, much recent popular South African writing reflects on the lives of young African men; describing their urban lifestyles (Forde 2012; Harbour 2011; Langa 2020; Otter 2007). Otter (2007), for example, explored the lives of young men by living among them in an informal setting. Otter (2007) published his findings in a light-hearted biographical account '*Khayelitsha, uMlungu in a township*', which sold over 10 000 copies, attesting to local public interest in the topic. More recently, Langa (2020) has explored masculinities in the sprawling township of Alexandra in Johannesburg.

Kimmel et al. (2005: 7) suggest that gender identity is constantly in a state of flux; "a constant process, always being reinvented and rearticulated in every setting". This concept of 'fluid masculinities' - changing forms of masculinity that shift, both over time and in response to changing social environments - has also been debated by others (Massey 1994; Morrell 2007; Morrell & Swart 2005; Ratele et al. 2007; Xaba 2001). The possibility for multiple masculine identities to exist in parallel, alternating in response to different situations as an adaptation strategy, has also been explored (Berg & Longhurst 2003; McDowell 2003; Ratele et al. 2007).

The identities of young men in complex urban landscapes are constantly mediated and negotiated in response to the immediate social circumstances in which they find themselves. Masculinity can thus be seen to be socially constructed (Ratele et al. 2007; Salo 2007); the product of particular cultural and other contexts (Lindegger & Maxwell 2007).

The marginalisation of men has been the focus of a growing number of studies (for example Cleaver 2002; Langa 2020; Shefer et al. 2007; Xaba 2001). These have revealed how poverty, crime, health - particularly in relation to HIV/AIDs - and unfair labour practices, among many other issues, structure the ways in which men relate to their worlds (Cleaver 2002; Meth & McClymont, 2009; Dartnall & Jewkes 2013; Gibbs et al. 2014). For example, unemployment has been noted as an important contributing factor in emasculating men and in changing their behaviours (hooks 2004b; Meth 2009; Morrell & Swart 2005; Salo 2007).

However, individual masculine identities are shaped not only by immediate contexts but to some extent by hegemonic norms (Wetherall & Edley 1999), such as those prescribed by traditional culture. Giddens (as quoted by Renn 2008: 28) suggests that individuals "orient themselves within a complex arrangement of traditions, individual routines and socio-cultural

expectations", becoming part of the forces that shape the actions of others. Giddens sees people acting within the boundaries of prescribed social behaviour, following the 'invisible guidelines' that both facilitate and constrain individual actions (as cited in Renn 2008). One of the ways in which social norms shape behaviour is through tradition; as Ratele (2016: 88) suggests, "[t]here are no men or masculinities without traditions".

The role that tradition still plays among modern urban young men, which Ratele (2013) insists has not received adequate focus in the context of African men, is explored in the section that follows.

2.5.3 Changing African masculinities: The role of tradition

The reconfiguration of traditional Black masculinities in informal urban landscapes is the focus of a growing body of research (Hunter 2010; Meth 2009; Morrell 2007: Reid & Walker 2005; Ratele et al. 2007; Sideris 2005; Xaba 2001). Young African men are seen to be slowly abandoning the traditional practices that once guided and shaped their lifestyle choices and behaviour (Thomson 2002), making increasingly less reference to the traditional systems and cultures that once guided their responses to situations and informed their decision-making (Reid & Walker 2005). Hearn (1992), for example, suggests that becoming a man today is no longer mediated through family status and key relationships as it once was, but rather through the 'public eye', a radical departure from old rural systems.

But this change has not been sudden, having historical antecedents. Colonialism, for example, is blamed for initiating the loss of traditional status among men in Africa (Mihn-Ha 2005; Silberschmidt 1992), while the migrant labour system that this process spawned led men's roles to shift still further, shaping their economic function from that of household head to so-called 'bread-winners' (Morrell & Swart 2005). South Africa's political history has also contributed significantly to shifts in masculine identity, from the so-called 'protest masculinity' of the 1970s, through the reign of the young comrades in the 1980s when young men mobilised during the political struggle (Cole 1990; Luyt & Foster 2001; Ramphele 2001; Xaba 2001). More recently, the democratic transition in South Africa has engendered massive social and political change (Moolman 2013), further undermining historically entrenched patriarchal privilege.

Thus, while the status of women has advanced economically (Meth, 2019; Ramphele 2001), and even in legal and legislative terms (Rustin, 2021), to some extent this has come at the

expense of men and served to undermine their economic status; "exacerbated by the lapsing of bride wealth payments and the decline in marriage rates" (Morell & Swart 2005: 103).

Hunter (2010) believes that young men today feel judged not only by other men but also by women. This process of emasculation, particularly in the context of poverty (Salo 2007), has perhaps been manifested in the dramatic increase in gender-based violence (Niehaus 2003; Reid 2003; Ramphele 2001; Walker 2005). Similarly, hooks (as quoted by Kimmel et al. 2005), researching African American men, found that working class men in the United States have suffered emasculation owing to their inability to meet societal expectations of what it means to be a man, and have in response resorted to harming others. In South Africa, high levels of unemployment and the lack of role models, as well as the retraction of traditional patriarchal privilege and general loss of ambition, have seriously undermined masculine identity; leading to what has been termed the 'crisis of masculinity' among young Black South African men (Chant 2000; Cleaver 2002; Morrel 2001; Reid 2003; Ward et al. 2017).

Ratele's (2001) work with young Black professional South African men who have shifted into middle class environments, revealed that even progressive, 'modern' Black men have a particular view of themselves that is partially shaped by more traditional attitudes regarding the place of women. In his study of Zulu youth, Morrell (2007) found that young Black men are frequently trying to reconcile new democratic rights with traditions that define their identity and stress the importance of loyalty to one's clan. This echoes Beck's (1992 as quoted by Morrell 2007: 87) earlier work among township boys, who he found were challenged by life in a "risk society where uncertainty has displaced the certainties provided by tradition" and where "fluidity and disruption are constant" (Van Breda & Swilling 2019; Drivdal 2016). Ratele et al. (2007: 83) similarly assert that urban township life today increasingly involves more immediate concerns of "material security, dealing with precarious life circumstances and avoiding risk".

In South Africa, poor African men have not only increasingly abdicated familial responsibility by not taking wives but have in the process lost social prestige and status (Morell & Swart 2005). Sideris (2005: 119) asks us to consider how the pressures confronting men today *should be* conceptualised, quoting a young rural man to illustrate the dilemmas facing young African men transitioning from traditional to modern urban framings of manhood: "to be considered a man you must have a woman. If you are not married, you can't go to places where men are discussing problems. Without a wife and a child, you are still a boy!"

It is perhaps this "gap between aspiration and achievement" (Miescher & Lindsay 2003: 8) that causes men to feel the need to affirm their manhood in other ways. Living in these fluid and volatile environments, young people are facing multiple, complex, and often unfamiliar challenges that are at odds with traditionalism, which Ramphele (2001: 162) insists has essentially become "dysfunctional in modern society".

In recent times, particularly under Jacob Zuma's presidency, there has been a resurgence of what Ratele (2016) calls 'gender traditionalism' - an explicit attempt to reinstate traditional values and patriarchy. This has been couched within a more political agenda, which sees men's troubles as intricately related to continued White hegemony and racism.

2.5.4 Black identities

Racial identity is important to consider in studying the nature of vulnerability among Black young men. Black identity, was redefined through aggressive forces of colonisation (Fanon 1986), forced to shift from age-old traditions generally based on patriarchal norms and values. Despite subsequent and significant political and ideological changes both globally and across Africa, it continues to inform contemporary understandings of "being black in the world" (Manganyi (1973: 37). Mbembe (2017) insists that the label "Black" was imposed by powerful others as an insult to those so labelled, implying darkness and invisibility. He goes so far as to say that it has a symbolic meaning of 'evil, murder and death' (Mbembe, 2017: 152). Fanon's (1986) book *Black skins, white masks,"* a seminal work on Black identity, suggests that the search for a true African identity continues in an attempt to jettison the colonial perspective for one that African s themselves are more comfortable with. More recently, Ilodigwe (2022) has argued that processes of globalisation have confounded African identity yet further.

According to Beyers (2019) identity is made up of various elements that differentiate one person from another, though he acknowledges that the stereotype of being Black nevertheless forms part of one's identity as a Black person. However, while he agrees that everyone has a specific racial identity, he insists that races have their own internally different cultures. Similarly, Maluleke (2006:26) argues that there is no homogenous African identity and that there are various ways "*being an African*". Appiah (2002), however, is of the opinion that labelling someone from a particular race fundamentally determines their identity, engendering social and psychological 'effects' that influence one's self-view, while Mbembe (2017)

suggests that identity is a social project, with our identities pre-determined by others, what he calls an "assigned identity".

Under apartheid, Black people In South Africa were assigned a very particular identity – one of being inferior, subaltern, and unequal to other races (Beyer, 2109). As Biko once argued (1978), the racism that Black people encountered under apartheid not only existed on an individual level but became institutionalised and made 'official'. In contemporary South Africa these labels have not disappeared completely, with race continuing to shape social identities quite profoundly.

Masango (2006) insists that the African concept of Ubuntu, the belief in being part of a common humanity rather than having an identity unique to oneself, is an intrinsic part of Black identity formation. This fundamental belief was undermined by the South African apartheid regime. Rather, as Biko (1978) pointed out, the labelling of Black people as the '*swart gevaar*' countered the belief in a single humanity. However, in explaining the need for a Black Consciousness, Biko (1978) notes that in South Africa the poor have always been Black – thus to be Black is to be poor and inferior to others. He suggests that in thinking about Black Consciousness, a black man sees himself as being complete in himself…less dependent and more free to express his manhood" (Biko, 1978: 14).

While taking cognisance of the importance of black identity, which remains an important identifier in the context of South Africa, I chose not to weigh in on theoretical debates about racial identity, given that in the informal living environments studied racial identity was a common denominator. Rather, I discuss identity from a cultural perspective, speaking not about all Black men, but specifically those from the Xhosa culture. Beyers (2019) insists that speaking of a uniquely 'black identity' is confusing, that culture cannot be colour-coded[7]. Cultural identity, which may incorporate a specific form of Black identity, contributes a sense of meaning and belonging, though this too is dynamic and changes over time.

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[7] UNESCO (2002) define culture as a set of "*distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group…*" and that this includes peoples' lifestyles, how they live together, their value systems, as well as their beliefs and traditions.

The next section takes up his argument in exploring what the benefits of a feminist approach might be.

2.5 FEMINIST APPROACHES TO STUDYING MEN AND MASCULINITY

Ratele (2016) argues that in studying men and the identities in which they are invested, we should adopt a more critical-sympathetic feminist approach to explore the realities of gender and the way it intertwines with other structures such as racism and power. In his book 'Liberating Masculinities', Ratele (2016: 115) suggests that "gender is a fundamental category if we wish to understand men's lives". Berggren (2014) argues that many critical studies of men and masculinities are poorer for their lack of feminist theory, which can contribute to a holistic understanding of the way power is structured and shapes the lives of both women and men (Salo, 2007). Indeed, in terms of the feminist Hegelian tradition (Gautier 1997), both sides of the gender dichotomy should be problematised.

Renzetti (1997) describes five key feminist methodological principles that help to explain why a feminist approach is so valuable for studying men: firstly, they focus on gender inequalities; secondly, everyday life is a key area of analysis, particularly among those who are the most marginalised; thirdly, they advocate research that leads to action or change; fourthly, they are inherently reflexive; and finally, the outcomes should ensure that the encounter is empowering for those being researched, thus levelling the 'playing field' between the researcher and those being researched.

Feminist theory has been strongly underpinned by the "universal female subordination hypothesis" (Reid & Walker 2005: 4), which has arguably been characterised by negative attitudes to men (hooks 2004b: Seidler 2006). Writing about African American working-class men in the United States, hooks (2004a), for example, suggests that feminism has to some degree led to indifference towards men and their needs. She argues further that many protagonists consider that "feminism gave them permission to be indifferent to men, to turn away from male needs" (hooks 2004a: xiii). While this critique is certainly true of many feminists, it is not always the case. Elliott (2016: 240), for example, adopts a feminist approach in exploring what she terms 'caring masculinities', those that reject hegemonic norms in favour of embracing the value of caring for others, and as such are related to more "positive emotion, interdependence and relationality". In provoking debate around the concept of caring in the lives of men, Elliott (2016) has however adopted a Westernised perspective that does not consider how culture and tradition influence men's views on caring. In the context of the

global South, such considerations are vitally important; playing a key role in the way that men shape their identities. In contrast to individualism typically found in modern day capitalist societies, for example, African cultural norms and mores are built on more collective values. Thus, there is a deep sense of commitment to others; a culturally embedded imperative whereby self-improvement for one means betterment for all, rather than the self-interest pervasive in Western societies.

Some time ago Crenshaw (1994) coined the term 'intersectionality' to encapsulate feminist considerations of the inter-relationship between race, class, gender, sexuality, and people's abilities and entitlements according to these categories. It refers to the inherent complexity derived from the intersection of these and other possible dimensions, and at various scales, from the macro- down to the meso-level (Moolman, 2013). As Levine-Rasky (2011) has argued, one of these dimensions alone is insufficient to explain complexity, particularly in relation to identity-formation. However, as Hopkins & Noble (2009: 815) have suggested, intersectionality recognises that there are many ways in which these dimensions can interact – their 'relationality', which they insist is critical for understanding the 'production of masculinities'. Thus, the term usefully captures the complex project of identity-building among the poor young Black men in this study, and the many factors that collectively shape their vulnerabilities.

More recently, in unpacking what they see as a North and South binary, Gouws and Stasiulis (2015) have flagged what they term 'multiculturalism', the contested space between modern and traditional values in today's modern world. These two concepts acknowledge the complexity of modern life and serve to demonstrate why a feminist approach is relevant to a study of Black men caught in transition; as it were, trapped between modern discourses about human rights that are often at odds with traditional rights and value systems, and co-existing in an uneasy space (Morrell & Swart 2005).

Of course, one must be cautious of applying the term 'feminism', given that there are several types of feminism and growing divergences within feminist sub-fields (Beasley 2015). Beasley (2015) argues, for example, that there is an increasing divergence between what is labelled 'feminism' and Critical Studies of Men/Masculinity (CSMM). Though they both have feminist foundations, she believes that CSMM is somewhat out of sync with the direction of contemporary feminist theorising that considers the fluidity of gender identities, rather than

homogeneous embodied forms of gender identity. For example, rather than using the term 'masculinity', with all that this term suggests, Hearn (2012), a noted CSMM scholar, prefers using the term 'men'; an embodied category that allows for all forms of masculinity. However, as Beasley (2015) argues, this framing distances men's studies from feminist theorising by 'parcelling' a particular set of notions about men together, revoking current feminist thinking around the inherent heterogeneity of gender identity today. This is particularly problematic when working with men developing interventions around issues of violence. Pease (2012), for example, would like to label violence against women as 'men's' violence, but Beasley (2015: 573) counters this, asking whether "men (subjects with male bodies)" are really the problem? She argues that it is a particular kind of masculinity rather than an embodied maleness that is the problem. Similarly, Carter (1993) believes that casting all men as 'baddies' takes us back to typical hegemonic labelling.

A relatively new approach to theorising contemporary masculinities is 'inclusive masculinity theory', as proposed by Anderson (2010). This suggests that in the 21st century, men have become more accepting of different, and perhaps softer and less hegemonic forms of masculinity, shifting the narrower set of behaviours men have valued in the past (Anderson & McCormack, 2018). Such 'non-conforming masculinities' are more acceptable today and, as Anderson & McCormack (2018: 548) found, are more common among younger men, while Roberts (2013) discovered that working class men were more open to alternative forms of masculine identities. However, this approach has been vigorously debated in the literature (see for example O'Neill, 2015), finding that in many ways it offers a return to previous hegemonic discourse that generally discounts the softer emotional side of men, which the next section explores.

2.6 EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES

> "We cannot appreciate masculinities without understanding relations of power and dominance, but we cannot understand power and dominance without also appreciating men's emotional lives" (Hanlon 2012: 66).

In this quote, Hanlon (2012) stresses that it is not possible to analyse the power of men, without also considering the emotional aspects of their lives; in other words, that they are inter-related parts of the same whole rather than antithetical. However, Connell (2005) points out that a common assumption is often made that while women are emotional, men are rational, tending to deny men's capacity to respond emotionally.

People experience a place through its life rhythms and the relationships they form in that space (Allen 2006; Jensen 2011). As social actors, people construct their own reality to give meaning to their social world (Blaikie 2000). Savage et al. (2005: 207) take this a step further, suggesting that identities are shaped by a "networked geography of places", so that each place we encounter contributes to shaping who we are and how we make sense of the world around us.

The way we react to the spaces we encounter and the emotions they generate within us have been referred to as the 'emotional geographies' of space (Bondi 2005; Pile 2010; Stedman 2003). Sebastien (2020) finds that the physical character of a place is important in generating the emotions that individuals feel in relation to it. Place plays a role in every individual's everyday life (Cresswell 2004), becoming imbued with specific meaning and emotions. These develop over time through the experiences one has in a place and the personal histories it contributes to shaping. However, studies of how people relate to the environment around them are still relatively little explored.

Although Meth (2009) has explored the role of place in shaping men's emotional geographies in an informal settlement in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, she suggests that similar personal accounts in informal contexts are relatively rare. She argues that in places where living conditions are very poor, such as in slum areas, place is a critical element in identity formation. It is the quality of both the physical and social landscape and what transpires in that space that influences the way men ultimately feel about themselves, developing acute feelings of inferiority and poor self-worth.

People's emotions also shape the way they rationalise their responses to risk (Lupton 2012; Slovic et al. 2004; Wilkinson 2006). Lupton (2012) believes that as emotions inform the judgements that we make, they should be considered together with reason. She argues that there is a two-way relationship between risk and emotion, such that "emotion configures risk and risk configures emotion" and that emotion is shaped by space and place (Lupton 2012: 2). Thus, as Meth (2009: 858) suggests, men feel emasculated in places where they have no agency to affect change, to the point of feeling 'irrelevant', finding themselves at risk and vulnerable.

Giddens (1991) insists that individuals are constrained by the complex socio-cultural milieu in which they find themselves, and within which they must orientate. In his study of Australian men's sense of belonging, Gorman-Murray (2011: 211) combined the idea of 'gendered

belonging' with 'emotional geographies' and found that "feelings of belonging denote everyday attachments to place". Yuval-Davis (2006a) describes the concept of belonging as multi-layered and unavoidably spatial in nature, in other words, adaptable over space and time.

People as social actors construct their own reality to give meaning to their social world (Blaikie 2000). Our sensory experiences of a particular place fundamentally influence how we frame that place as what it is (Degen 2008). This ultimately contributes towards our sense of a place and our responses to it.

2.6.1 'Sense of place', attachment, and belonging

Humans always 'read' the environment around them, which, as Canter (1977) has noted, is a typical animal survival strategy. Place plays a powerful role in understanding how people create attachment to and derive meaning from their environment (Sebastian 2020). Social scientists have gradually become aware how the physical environment influences individual behaviour. As early as the 1960s, Barker (1963) had noted how the 'texture' of the environment influenced people's behaviour. The concern to consider the role of the physical environment in driving emotional responses that in turn influence behaviour drove the development of environmental psychology as a new area of scholarship. In explaining this new branch of psychology, Proshansky et al. (1976: 4) describe it as a concern to examine the "empirical relationships between behaviour and experience and the physical environment". It considers not only people's experience in a particular environment but also their response to it and how it shapes their behaviour in that space.

Degen (2008) suggests that our sensory experiences in a place contribute to the way that place becomes framed in our mind. Allen (2006) too believes that each place presents a specific atmosphere, a mood, or what he calls its 'ambient qualities'; while Savage et al. (2005: 9) label it 'place aura'. This affects how we respond to each place we encounter "… both to encourage and inhibit how we move around, use and act within it" (Savage et al. 2005: 445). Thus, places can be understood as "moments of encounter" (Amin & Thrift 2002: 30).

The ways in which we interact with our physical surroundings are intricately linked to how we identify with these places (Manzo 2003; Massey 1994). Proshansky (1978) was among the first to question how people derive identity from their surroundings. Proshansky et al. (1976) suggest that it is important to understand not only how a person experiences their environment, but how both individual and social behaviour develops in relation to that environment. The attachment one feels for a place is also based, as Savage et al. (2005: 29) have argued, on

one's cultural roots, and nostalgia that is created by one's history in that place so that "places become sites for performing identities".

More recently, Stedman (2014) has found that places have three essential elements: the physical setting itself; human activities within that space; and the social and psychological processes rooted in the setting. Thus, he acknowledges both the social construction of space and the psychological and physical elements (Stedman 2014); the latter missing from the earlier studies of 'sense of place' developed by Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977).

The term 'sense of place' describes the two-way relationship between people and place (Hay 1988; Steele 1981; Tuan 1977); "an experiential process created by the setting, combined with what a person brings to it" (Steele 1981: 9). Stedman (2014) argues that the more typically phenomenological approach to sense-of-place theory espoused by early proponents like Tuan (1977) and Relph (1976), generally failed to consider the physical properties of the landscape itself, rather referencing the psychological and social aspects and negating any truly holistic study of place. As Manzo (2003) suggests, however, the concept of 'sense of place', together with place attachment (Altman & Louw 1992) - how people feel connected to places - and place dependency (Stokols & Shumaker 1981) - which describes the strength of one's relationship to a place - have generally been used in reference to the place one calls 'home', or even one's immediate neighbourhood. This, however, is conceptually limiting as the basis for analysis if one considers the 'networked spaces' that contribute to shaping identity (Dixon & Durrheim 2000; Manzo 2003), as proposed by Savage et al. (2005).

An individual's sense of place is dynamic, so that the various identities one is invested in are shaped and developed over time, resulting in what has been termed 'a networked geography of places' (Savage et al. 2005). This means that the individual creates their identity from a unique web of experiences in those places that contribute to their emotional responses to the world. From a gender perspective, Connell (2005) argues that while space and place are important in shaping our emotional states, men are generally considered to be more rational and women more emotional in their responses (Lupton 2012). Manzo (2003: 55) suggests that "relationships to places can be a means through which we consciously express our worldview and explore our evolving identity".

Humans adjust to their environment, "creating structure and identity out of the material at hand" (Lynch 1960: 43). Place can be understood as a set of spaces that become meaningful through one's experiences in them (Leonard 2013), and as we slowly develop sentiment in

relation to them (Tuan 1977), whether positive or negative. Yet, while the positive aspects of place have frequently been explored, much less has been said about the negative effects place can have on the psyche, which impacts on place attachment, place identity, and sense of place. In this respect, Relph (1976) posited the dialectic of insider/outsider-ness, which either creates a sense of belonging (as an insider) or of not belonging (as an outsider) in a place. Similarly, Cresswell (2004) has explored spatial attachment in terms of whether one feels excluded or included, feeling either 'in-place' or 'out-of-place'. As Manzo (2003) suggests, bad experiences in a place can cause one to feel alienated: not belonging there.

Drawing on the work of Ignatieff (1994), Gorman-Murray (2011: 211) describes emotional attachments to a place as "spatio-temporal connections entwined with the affirmation of personal and collective identities", which he believes shape one's feelings of security or, quite simply, one's sense of 'being-at-home'. Hay (1998) calls this 'bondedness'- feeling part of the neighbourhood - while the feeling of 'rootedness' he suggests is related to one's length of residence in that place.

Despite the obvious importance in studying people-place interactions, the role of place is still not adequately considered. Place is seen generally through a social rather than a spatial lens, so that the physical characteristics of place itself and how these play on the human mind has been much less considered (Canter 1997; Sebastien 2020; Stedman 2003). Place has an agency of its own, influencing the way people react and behave in it.

Watson (1975), referring to the emotional reactions one has to one's environment as 'image geography', insists that these internalised images influence the way one moves around in a space. Particular spaces influence personal feelings of security and comfort (Meth 2009), while others may engender feelings of discomfort and even fear (Brownlow 2005), so that "even a seemingly minor aspect of our physical environment may be imbued…with a variety of meanings" (Canter 1977: 9). Using cartographic geosophy, a research method whereby people are tasked to draw a map of their environment, revealing their internal thoughts and often subliminal emotions in relation to it, Canter (1977) asked different people from the same neighbourhood to draw a map of it. In so doing, he demonstrated how people perceive and register their living environments quite differently from each other. This reinforces the idea that human behaviour in any place is shaped by individual perceptions, lived experience, and social interaction and communication, but also as Renn (2008) has suggested, by cultural traditions and a measure of common sense.

People's sense of place is also influenced by the status of the place in which they live, influencing their emotional relationship to that environment. However, taken together, both positive and negative experiences of a place contribute to the formation of individual identity (Manzo 2003). Massey (1991) suggests that a low sense of place increases an individual's feelings of vulnerability and their perception of risk related to that environment. Similarly, Lupton (2012) argues that we seldom explore how negative emotions shape the way we rationalise risk in particular places.

2.6.2 Risk perception

Renn (2008) has suggested that we live today in what he calls a 'risk society', an increasingly complex world that has introduced more uncertainties than in previous eras. Giddens (1991), however, debates whether life is riskier now than before, suggesting that while 'modernity' has introduced new forms of risk, it has reduced the overall riskiness of life in many ways too. Most would agree, however, that risk has become an inherent part of modern everyday life in which our actions respond to "contingent happenings" (Giddens 1991: 28).

Renn (2008) believes that risk is a mental construct, and that one's response to risk is driven not by concrete facts alone, but by perception. Perception of a situation is shaped by an individual's "common sense, reasoning, personal experience, social communication and cultural traditions" (Renn 2008: 93), informed by one's unique world view. Wilkinson (2006) agrees that the way in which people rationalise risk is underpinned by cultural meaning.

Risk perception informs and shapes the strategies one adopts in dealing with a situation (Hufschmidt 2011): one's coping strategies. Hufschmidt (2011) prefers to use the term 'reaction', which she says more accurately describes the way one responds to a threatening situation in a way that does not assume a positive outcome. Considering adolescent male behaviour in South Africa, for example, Ratele et al. (2007) describe the so-called 'rebel' identities of young men who assert their masculinity through disruptive and risk-taking behaviour, for which they are rewarded with peer admiration.

Although risk is considered socially constructed, especially by cultural theorists, there is no universal rationality. Rather, sense-making is based on the beliefs and rationalities developed by the individual and shaped by their unique perceptions of risk.

Lupton (2012) believes that although less often considered, the emotional dimensions of risk are constantly changing; she stresses that negative emotions involved in rationalising risk are

much less often considered even though the ways in which one perceives risk can shape one's emotional state of mind. Emotions then also shape one's responses to perceived risks.

Risk interpretation is complex, informed as it is by so many different factors and constantly being shaped and reshaped in response to life. Thus, as Renn (2008: 56) argues, "the number of dimensions that people use to make judgements… make it difficult, if not impossible, to aggregate individual preferences, and to find a common denominator for comparing individual risk perceptions" because such perceptions vary from one person to another and reflect what it is they are really concerned about.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have engaged with various bodies of literature, drawing from many different disciplinary contexts, some quite removed from my own, such as theology and psychology. These have informed what I feel is a holistic perspective on my subject of focus.

Daily life in informal urban contexts is a precarious and constant confrontation with the lived realities of poverty that shapes the way people respond to the world around them. However, while the literature is replete with studies focused on the so-called 'feminisation of poverty' (Chant 2007; Merino & Lara 2016; Olufemi 2000), the consequences for men and the resulting evolution of new urban identities, particularly among young men, has generally been under-explored (Morrell & Swart 2005). This is particularly so in the South African context of the constitutionally driven empowerment of women and loss of male privilege.

In the following chapter, I describe the methodology employed for answering the questions I sought to answer in this study. I explain the process of designing and developing a range of techniques and methods, and identify the challenges encountered along the way.

CHAPTER 3: EXPLORING MEN'S VULNERABILITY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS[8]

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Years of working among informal settlement communities has provided me with substantial insights into the lives of people living in these colourful, yet precarious spaces. Over time it increasingly bothered me, however, that the strong focus placed on women, often driven by imperatives imposed by funders requiring gender counts to ensure their adequate representation, simultaneously discounted the importance of men, inadvertently marginalising their interests. I began to question how any holistic understanding of a phenomenon, any situational analysis, could justifiably exclude a similar focus on men without presenting a biased view.

Over time my interest grew to explore what was happening to men. Although I continued to teach my students and those attending my practitioner training courses about the vulnerability of women and children in the context of poverty and informal settlement life, I began to observe what was happening to men in all my community encounters. Adopting a somewhat feminist perspective, my thinking was to understand the experiences of men in these risky environments; to explore how and why, through their often-discounted vulnerabilities, they might in turn be shaping risks for vulnerable others.

Working for many years among informal settlement communities in the Western Cape region of South Africa, I have engaged closely with residents; becoming familiar with the nature of the risks they face on an often-daily basis, and their incredible ability to cope with adversity. Men are generally considered to generate many of the risks in these marginalised environments (Morrell 2005; Pattman 2007; Shefer et al. 2007), to which women and children are considered most vulnerable (Shefer et al. 2007). Statistically, however, young men are more often the victims of crime and more likely to be injured or die in informal settlement

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[8] This chapter was published as a journal article: Zweig P 2021. Exploring men's vulnerability in the global South: Methodological reflections. *Area* 53: 718-726. (See Appendix C).

fires, suggesting a need to understand the nature of their vulnerability in these urban spaces, about which little has been written.

One of the aims of geographical research is to document those whose voices are often silent in the literature (McDowell 1992; Stubbs 1984). Although Hacker (1957) was among the first to draw attention to the 'burdens of masculinity', research focusing on men and masculinities began sometime later (Pleck 1981). Geographical research on the subject, though slow to start (Connell 1995; Jackson 1991; Rose 1993), soon grew significantly (Berg & Longhurst 2003; Hopkins & Gorman-Murray 2019; Hopkins & Noble 2009; Meth & McClymont 2009). In studying men, geographers have employed a range of methods, from simple interviews and survey-based studies to oral histories and even auto-photography (Latham 2003). Yet as Meth and McClymont (2009: 910) suggest, few have paused to consider the merits of their methodological choices and generally have not been concerned with "the quality and depth of empirical findings, particularly in terms of their propensity to enliven understandings of men".

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, vulnerability is an abstract concept, the meaning of which is often debated (Hufschmidt 2011; Kelman 2011; Manyena 2006; Wisner 2015). It is manifested in both tangible and intangible ways, often shaped by human perception and emotion (Kelman 2011), or what Bondi (2005), Pile (2010) and others might refer to as the 'emotional geographies' of space. It is important to note that the word 'vulnerability' was probably never used in any of my sessions with the young men because it is quite an abstract concept that many of them might have struggled to grasp. In the Xhosa language, no single word really carries the same meaning. This problem of interpretation has been noted by others exploring concepts like vulnerability among non-English speaking populations. For example, Heijmans and Victoria's (2001) work in the Philippines found that no word in the local language existed for vulnerability. In working among Xhosa-speaking informal settlement communities, I generally used the word '*isichenge*', though this really conveys the notion of 'danger' more than actual vulnerability. Without a vernacular word or words to convey the concept, it has always been challenging to explain vulnerability to Xhosa-speaking participants in community workshops. I usually overcome this problem by telling a short illustrative story to demonstrate the meaning and drawing simple pictures on a flip chart of a community threatened by a hazard. I gradually introduce the concept of vulnerability as the story unfolds, explaining it as a consequence of people's exposure to hazards.

Cognisant of this problem of interpretation that I had so often encountered, I started out in my study by explaining to the young men in more simple terms that I wanted to understand what

they worried about, what bothered them, what they found challenging in life, and what was important to them. In this way, I hoped to derive a collection of colourful individual pictures that revealed common vulnerability themes.

Because men are notably less comfortable than women in expressing emotions and intimate personal thoughts (Connell, 1995; De Boise & Hearn 2017), studying the nature of their vulnerability requires careful methodological consideration. Cognisant of this, I carefully considered the methods appropriate for researching the nature of vulnerability among young men living in informal settlements. How does one ask poor marginalised men to speak about their insecurities and challenges? The tools used for researching such sensitive issues must be flexible enough to suit different personalities but should also aim to build the confidence of young men as they reflect on everyday life and its many perceived risks (Meth 2003; Meth & McClymont 2009).

In this chapter, I describe the development and application of an emergent methodology I employed in this study on vulnerability, which was conducted among young Black men living in informal settlements in Cape Town, South Africa. Beginning with a brief introduction to the context of the study, it describes the challenges encountered in seeking methods for studying marginalised young men, and how a suite of adaptable methods gradually evolved, often in consultation with the young men themselves. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approach I adopted.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODS IN MASCULINITY STUDIES

In emphasising the importance of the methodological approach for framing how men respond, Shefer et al. (2007: 8) suggest that these methods should also empower and build their confidence; acknowledging their intelligence and creativity, addressing the "identities they may be vested in that put them at risk, and that open up spaces for them to critically reflect on the identities that they construct". In exploring various 'methodological spaces', Meth and McClymont (2009: 916) have demonstrated the benefits of combining different methods for exploring the contingent nature of what they term 'marginalised masculinities'.

In developing a methodology for working across gender, social, and cultural lines, my own positionality as a White, English-speaking middle-class woman in post-apartheid South Africa had to be considered (Delamont 2000; Finch 1993; McDowell & Harris 2018; Miles & Crush 1993; Mullings 1999; Padfield & Procter 1996; Visser 2000). As Delamont (2000) has

suggested, young men who are unemployed may be reluctant to talk about what they may consider to be their own failure in life.

Understanding the cultural norms and values of the subjects one studies is important (Miles & Crush 1993; Robertson 1983). Although my understanding of Xhosa culture is relatively good, it was admittedly a limiting factor, while my higher social, economic, and educational status initially shaped the young men's attitude to and initial distrust of me. In similar contexts, Walker (2005: 168) found that being an outsider created a "non-threatening space in which to converse". In my case, being a grandmother, someone highly regarded in African culture, presented specific advantages.

Thus, I was quite clear about my own positionality, sensitive to the fact that I was an older White woman studying young Black men, an outsider to their culture and to the impoverished environments in which they lived. Empathy is no substitute for lived experience. Given that I am English-speaking, although having some knowledge of Xhosa, I was also conscious of how I might misinterpret the data. However, the triangulation process I developed and many follow-up discussions held with Thandi Mpambo-Sibhukwana, a cultural expert and my Xhosa interpreter, significantly reduced the chances for misinterpretations[9].

3.3 THE PROCESS DESCRIBED

Piloting my initial research methods, I started by conducting focus group sessions with young men in two field sites to establish whether this kind of forum would generate interactive discussion and reveal themes for more focused research. However, as Langa (2020) notes in his recent study of Black South African adolescents, young men are noticeably inhibited when sitting together rather than interactive. Frustrated by a similar finding during my initial focus groups, I revisited the literature, discovering Taylor (2009)'s research with women in England and Meth's (2003; 2009; etc) significant body of research on men in southern Africa. While Taylor's (2009) concern to understand women's motivations for making life changes echoed my own interests, Meth (2009) described a range of methods she had employed for working with African men.

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[9] I was also fortunate to discuss my early findings with a notable scholar of African masculinities and identity, Kopano Ratele, who noted how they resonated with his own work.

Returning to the field, I enlisted the assistance of librarians working in public libraries in the study sites, a strategy Meth (2009) had suggested. Librarians develop relationships with regular members and willingly identified young men for the study. However, although very engaging and relatively proficient in English, they were not sufficiently representative of the young men I wanted to reach. I then approached an NGO working with young men in informal settlements and worked with young men in their programmes who were willing to be interviewed. Generally less educated, and some with criminal pasts, they presented a broader range of candidates for what I intended by that stage to be a case study-based research methodology.

Eventually the study recorded the lives of 46 young Xhosa men between the ages of 20 and 35. Although most interviews took place during several months of 2018, some were piloted even earlier, in 2016. The strong relationships established with many of the young men, especially the diarists, which were maintained through cell phone conversations after the initial interviews had been completed, delivered unexpected dividends. I have remained in contact with many of them throughout the lockdowns initiated during the pandemic, using WhatsApp to communicate with those who have cell phones, though sadly those without them could not be reached any more. These ongoing communications have provided me with a more longitudinal perspective of some of their lives than I had anticipated.

3.3.1 Case studies in human geography

The case study approach permits intensive study of a small number of cases, generally with the aim of understanding a larger group. Thus, instead of an analytical approach moving from sample to population, case studies draw on cases to develop theories. As such, case studies are useful in grounded methodological approaches that aim to develop theories, rather than prove a hypothesis. In some contexts, however, case studies may result in generating new hypotheses if the topic is being approached from a new perspective or using a different approach (Gerring 2007). This approach is often driven by a lack of information available about a topic, in terms of the quality or quantity, or both.

Another benefit of case study research is the depth of analysis it makes possible, offering opportunities for holistic analysis of richly contextualised and nuanced information (Flyvbjerg 2004), or what anthropologists would call 'thick description' (Geming 2007). Case studies are interpretive and often used to explain causality (Yin 1994); revealing and mapping the causal mechanisms involved in the ways in which people understand and make sense of their world

(Gerring 2007). They are useful in unpacking complexity, especially when a phenomenon does not fit well into existing points of view or common assumptions. When cause and affect are non-linear and causal relationships convoluted, case studies are effective for unpacking the nature of this complexity and making it visible.

Gerring (2007) argues that case studies offer insights into how individuals make decisions, and how they reason and rationalise their choices. The more different the cases are, the better to learn from their differences. This was very useful in determining the range of factors in this study that contributed to an individual's sense of vulnerability to threats in different settings. Theory is enriched by exploring the diversity between cases.

There are many detractors of the case study approach, which is often only considered useful for pilot studies ahead of larger-scale surveys (Flyvbjerg 2004), or even a series of simple anecdotes (Eysenck 1976). However, the approach has gained traction over time and is no longer as derided as it once was. Campbell & Stanley (1996: 6), for example, once rubbished the validity of case studies, which they suggested "have such a total absence of control as to be of almost no scientific value". Campbell himself later retracted his opinion, becoming instead a strong proponent of the method (Flyvbjerg 2004).

The 'cases' referred to in this study were individuals, poor young Xhosa men residing in informal settlements in the City of Cape Town[10]. In each case I began by exploring the individual's life history, identifying key moments that shaped the paths they took and what influenced the decisions they made. Using vulnerability as an analytical lens, I sought to understand how each young man had developed his identity in response to threats he encountered. I also investigated the critical influences and moral registers that guided them. Eventually I was able to establish how the young men in my sample were made to feel vulnerable in these marginalised contexts and contributed to shaping the masculine identities in which they were invested.

Adopting an 'emergent' or grounded approach, methods were developed gradually as research progressed. In the sections that follow, I describe the pitfalls and challenges experienced in

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[10] A table providing details of who these young men were, their ages and place of residence at the time of the fieldwork is included in Appendix A.

seeking effective methods for deriving insights into the nature of vulnerability among poor young men.

3.3.2 The life history approach

My decision to capture life histories came initially from encountering Connell's (1995) work on masculinity. In telling stories, people are caused to reflect on their lives (Miles & Crush 1993). Capturing life stories is a reflexive process that can produce nuanced accounts of people's experiences and practices (Pattman 2007). However, the researcher needs to adopt the role of the student in such an exchange, allowing the storyteller to become the teacher and acknowledging their expertise (Robertson 1983).

As Babbie and Mouton (2007: 284) suggest, life history research is suited "to discovering confusions, ambiguities and contradictions of our everyday life", revealing the subjective realities of people's everyday experiences. Miles and Crush (1993: 85), quoting Portelli (1981), suggest that this approach reveals "not only what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believe they were doing, and what they now think they did". In other words, personal narratives may reveal the logic for decisions that people make, and the opportunities and constraints that determine how life runs its course (MacDonald 1999; McDowell 2003).

Life history research also offers a critical temporal perspective, providing insights into how and why changes occur in a person's life over time (Meth & McClymont 2009). Life occurs against a constantly changing cultural, social, and historical background; a process of continual development that requires individuals to make choices about which direction to take. Gradually, life becomes a 'patchwork' of fragmented recollections, resulting from the "complex interactions between a 'minded self' and an environment" (Clausen 1998: 196). Individuals make decisions shaped by their environment, which contribute to changing their lives, punctuated by key turning points. It is critical to understand the causes and consequences of these shifts that also often involve significant role changes (Clausen 1998).

The life history method is often criticised for being unrepresentative, yet as Babbie and Mouton (2007) argue, context is often more important than generalisability. Similarly, Miles and Crush (1993) insist that because one cannot know how representative life history subjects are, sample size becomes irrelevant. Acknowledging this when shifting to a life history approach, I significantly changed scale; from six survey sites to three, abandoning a large-scale survey of young men to a more focused study of less than fifty.

Clausen (1998) suggests that there are two kinds of life story: those told spontaneously and those elicited by the researcher. Narrative accounts are necessarily 'edited' by the teller, offering the researcher what the narrator believes is required and talking about some issues but avoiding others. Robertson (1983) points out that the story is then reconstructed by the researcher from this account. For the researcher, taking 'loose bits' of history recounted in life stories and creating a structure that faithfully retells the story is challenging, as stories can be related differently by someone else working according to another structure or driven by different interests.

Acknowledging concerns to reduce researcher partiality and influence, I adapted and developed a range of participatory research methods for recording life histories that allowed me to withdraw considerably from the process, thus ensuring that participants had freedom to identify the issues they considered most important.

3.3.3 Participatory research methods

The participatory approach differs from more commonly used research methods that tend to be one-sided, with the interviewee merely a passive participant in the process (Mercer et al. 2008). Generally employed as workshop tools, they are simple to use and interactive, encouraging communication among people from different walks of life with varying levels of education. Much of my community work has involved the use of participatory tools to encourage interactivity and build rapport with community co-researchers. This acknowledges that residents know most about their living environments and can best identify and explain the issues.

Originating in the fields of education and community development (Le Grange, 2001), participatory methods build on adult education principles (Freire 1972), whereby a process of 'guided discovery' is facilitated (Mercer et al. 2008: 173). Emphasis is placed on participants providing their own accounts in their own words and within their own frameworks of understanding (Chambers 1994; Le Grange 2001; Pain & Francis 2003). The methods used are highly visual, using paper and pens to create colourful charts and simple diagrams; allowing people of all educational levels to contribute something to the research process. Chambers (1994), for example, found participatory techniques effective for undertaking research with marginalised groups from cultures quite different from his own.

Although not commonly used in geographical studies, participatory methods have been employed successfully by geographers (for example by Kesby 2000, Mercer et al. 2008;

Pelling 2007; Young & Barret 2001). More recently, Adriansen (2012) took a participatory approach to the life history method, encouraging participants to draw their own life history lines. He discovered that encouraging personal agency had two benefits: causing the participants to reflect deeply as they drew, while providing him with opportunities to probe moments plotted on their lifelines.

Encountering innovative techniques in the literature (Adriansen 2012; Clausen 1998; Latham 2003; McDowell 1992; Meth 2003; Meth & McClymont 2009) led me to a methodological epiphany, fundamentally changing the methodological process to one I was both more excited about and comfortable with. Using participatory tools for working with individuals was somewhat experimental and a leap of faith for me, although I later discovered that similar 'visual projective' techniques are commonly employed in psychology (Roos 2009), although usually in a more focused way. Roos (2009) suggests that through artistic representation, people often project even unconscious thoughts, feelings, and perceptions onto paper, allowing the researcher to gain deep insights into their world.

Conducting introductory interviews with each young man, I asked them simple questions to relax them into the process: where they were born, who had reared them, what kind of house they had lived in. Using colourful pens and flip chart paper, I worked with each young man as they sketched out their life history. Demonstrating how stages in life were represented as bubbles on the chart, I drew the first bubble; each young man then volunteered at some stage to take over. In this way, each 'life map' took on a style of its own. The resulting diagrams resembled mind maps, beginning with birth and early childhood, with subsequent stages in each participant's life plotted along a winding path to the present. Like the mobility charts employed by Clausen (1998), they also indicated how often the men changed residence. As they drew their personal diagrams, we interrogated why and how these spatial shifts had occurred, and what emotions these moves had evoked both then and retrospectively.

In this way, complex life stories began to take shape, and any noticeable gaps or intriguing shifts could be identified and probed further. Using this method also ensured the ordering of events, illustrating how the stages intersected or, alternatively, did not. Trying to establish the chronology of events in life history research is often challenging (Rogaly 2015), yet it was relatively easy using this graphic method of representation. Colour was used differently by each candidate; for example, to emphasise different life stages, special events, and important people or even places. Being non-prescriptive and allowing each candidate to lead the process resulted in life maps that reflected individual personalities. Figure 4 is an example of one such 'life chart'.
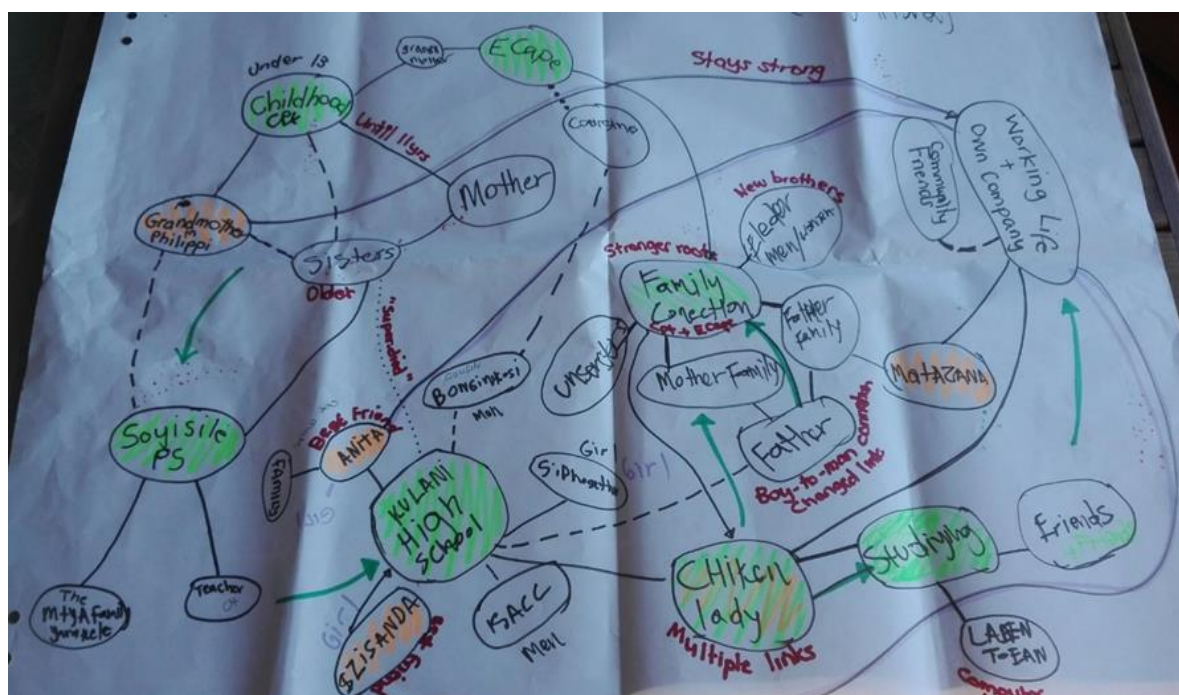
Figure 4 Example of a life history diagram

The drawing of charts effectively encouraged the men to talk while absorbed in their task, providing opportunities to ask them to explain elements in their diagrams in more detail as I took detailed notes[11]. In subsequent sessions, we often returned to these initial charts, filling

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[11] As they recounted their stories and drew diagrams, I collected detailed written notes in my own shorthand, editing these carefully after each session. I did not record the sessions feeling that this might undermine the relaxed atmosphere I was aiming for in the sessions. I would start the next session with the same young man by reading my observations back to him. Together we would also often revisit the diagrams. In this way, based on their feedback, I was able to add further details, correct misinterpretations, or even expand on points, This process of triangulation also helped me to establish their trust while giving them more agency in the research process.

in details as stories were expanded upon and linkages became clear. Often, after reviewing their efforts, in which they took much pride, the young men would offer additional information.

Participants were aware that the methods had been 'invented' for the study by participating in the process of adapting them for their own sessions; that I was piloting them and was unsure how they would work. Inviting their opinions, they willingly provided feedback and modified methods in unique ways. One day, for example, when beginning an interview about relationships and role models without the usual drawing paraphernalia, one young man expressed his disappointment saying, "*I preferred what we did last time*". This elicited a change in my approach. Handing control of the process over to the men participating in my study provided opportunities to note shifts in their mood and emotions as they tackled various topics. While *what* is said during interviews is obviously important, it is also critical to note *how* it is said. As Pattman (2007: 38) suggests, it is important to note "their body language, their emotional tone as conveyed in laughter, silences, interruptions", while always aware that what is being omitted often provides clues to what is really important to participants (Portelli, 1981).

Interview sessions became more relaxed as the young men became familiar with me. To ensure that I had captured their stories correctly, I began each new session by reading back the notes I had made previously, using this as a verification method. The men enjoyed this brief review, seemingly proud of their contributions. Recently, in his study of male adolescents and young men from an informal settlement in Johannesburg, Langa (2020) similarly noted how his participants found the process of life reflection therapeutic, often changing their perceptions about life. This shift in personal consciousness has also been noted by other researchers (Miles & Crush 1993; Thompson 1988). Reflecting on their lives was cathartic, with many of the young men expressing their enjoyment of the process, and some even photographing their charts and diagrams using their cell phones.

These early interviews delivered a broad range of experiences, and recurring themes began to emerge. This caused me to pause to review literature focusing more explicitly on these new areas of interest, considering the questions I needed to ask and the methods I would employ.

3.3.4 The use of personal diaries

To delve more deeply into key themes emerging from the interview sessions, I turned to the use of diary writing with a smaller group. Diary-keeping allows more time for introspection

and reflection, once again shifting agency to the participant in the research process and simultaneously building their self-esteem through a sense of personal achievement (Elliot 1997; Hawkes et al. 2009; Meth 2003; Renzetti 1997). As Meth (2003) explains, diaries do not necessarily deliver a longitudinal perspective, unless this is required by the researcher. Rather, they can be used to record feelings and perceptions about issues, as in this study.

Diary-writing has been used with increasing frequency in geographic research (Elliot 1997; Hearn 2007; Meth 2003; Meth & McClymont 2009; Miles & Cush 1993; Pattman 2007). This process involves writers in the "objectivization of their own experience" (McTaggart 1991: 178). Ideally, diary-writing should happen in a private space, allowing the participants time to consider what they want to divulge, finding ways to express intimate thoughts and feelings they would not normally share (Bujira 2002). Diary-keeping complements rather than replaces other methods when capturing details about everyday life. Hearn (2007), for example, found that diaries generated new material not elicited during interviews. Meth and McClymont (2009: 915) discovered that diary-writing provided men with "the space to reveal multitudinous and disconnected stories covering indeterminate time scales and multiple places". Writing diaries should allow the participant the opportunity to foreground whatever they wish to include in their account (Meth 2003), and in a way that they are most comfortable with.

Although initially doubtful that this method was suitable for my study, given that I was working with young Xhosa-speaking men whose first language was not English, several of them had expressed a love of writing and even poetry in their interviews. This prompted the selection of nine willing diarists from the original group for this phase of the research. Replicating Meth (2003), I provided a guide consisting of only four bulleted points and a short list of topics I wanted the diarists to reflect on in the context of their own lives. This was written inside the cover of each blank book, with my contact details, date of collection, and the amount each participant was being paid to do this task. As most of my candidates were unemployed and all extremely poor, payment was essential, also signalling that I understood the economic context of their lives. Meth (2003) tackles the contentious issue of payment to research participants in economically poor and marginalised environments, finding it to be the responsible and ethical thing to do. Similarly, McDowell and Harris (2016) insist that when working in poor environments, one should pay people for their time.

The nine diarists were asked to write only when inspired to share a thought or emotion, rather than on a regular basis that might have stifled their writing. Contributions of any length were

acceptable, from a simple statement to multiple pages, depending on their mood and inclination. Allowing the young men to express themselves in ways they felt most comfortable with delivered dividends. The resulting variation in styles of expression provided insights into their individual personalities, while the content delivered penetrating views into their worlds. One contributed lyrical verses of rap songs he had composed, full of emotional outpourings about the harsh world he inhabited. Another wrote in more narrative style, interspersed with poetry, a common medium of expression among the diarists. Some filled their diaries from cover to cover, leaving no blank pages, while others wrote only a few pages, particularly those who contributed poetry. Miles and Crush (1993) have suggested that language plays a central role in the way stories are recounted. The Xhosa language, inherently lyrical and idiomatic, lends itself very well to poetic verse. The poetic contributions revealed the deep and otherwise unspoken sentiments and emotions of the young men.

One young man added artistic elements to his diary, covering his book carefully in paper on which he had written "*Ambitious young dedicated boy*", and placing a photograph of himself in the centre. This was notable because although I had encouraged each young man to provide only their first name, both to guarantee their anonymity and as a precaution in case their diaries fell into other hands during the writing process, this young man chose instead to take ownership of his product, which he had taken evident pride in. It included rambling reflections about a range of things that bothered him. Contrastingly, a quiet Rastafarian had taken the concept of 'diary-writing' quite literally, writing short less emotive entries each day. Inadvertently, this served to illustrate the uneventfulness of his life, emphasising his sense of boredom, juxtaposed with times spent in the mountains collecting medicinal herbs, which were highlights in his otherwise relatively unpunctuated existence.

The first diary-writing period was one month in duration. Encouragingly, only one diary was not returned because the young man concerned had left the city. After reading through each diary carefully, I scheduled follow-up meetings with the remaining candidates to discuss their content. This process was then repeated in a second round lasting another month, with diarists contributing their thoughts about other issues I wanted to explore.

The post-diary interviews that followed were guided by a list of questions I compiled for each young man after reading his diary, probing statements they had made or seeking clarification where I had not understood something. The interviews also provided a method of triangulation, testing statements made in the diaries and earlier interview sessions. Aware that some young men had felt unsure about their writing ability, I provided each with positive and

encouraging feedback, affirming their positive contribution to my research. One young man admitted he had started to keep his own diary for recording his thoughts and feelings.

The length of the post-diary interviews varied, but generally lasted nearly two hours. This often depended on the interest-value contained within diaries as some diarists, though quite verbose in their interview sessions, struggled to express themselves in writing. In such cases, follow-up sessions instead provided opportunities to discuss key themes with them in more depth. With Ndumiso, for example, for whom the church was very important, we spoke about the intersection of religion and tradition in urban life. Mcebisi on the other hand explained his dislike of township life, having lived on and off in the city as a student. In this way, I continued to build bonds with some of the participants, with some continuing to send messages from their cell phones to share information about their lives. Even today, several years later, many of the young men continue to communicate with me, inadvertently providing me with a longitudinal perspective of their lives that I had not anticipated.

3.4 THE PROCESS OF ANALYSIS

In searching for a method of analysis, I followed a circuitous route, seeking a way to paint a picture of male vulnerability without losing the subtleties revealed in my findings. Happening upon an article by Hawkes et al. (2009) in which they describe their study of risk and worry in everyday life, I found a method for categorising my findings in such a way that they demonstrated the constitutive elements of vulnerability, both tangible and intangible. Similar, to my study, Hawkes et al. (2009) had used a mixture of interviews and diaries in their research. In their analysis. they had then sorted the most frequently reported worries and perceived risks revealed in their study into broad categories and then tabulated them, representing their identified frequencies across the sample of young men quantitatively. While the quantification was not important to me, the categories they had described struck a chord, echoing some of those from my own study.

Adopting Hawkes et al.'s (2009) analytical approach, I set out to categorise my findings. Re-reading all the diaries, interview transcripts, and the various charts drawn up with the young men, I identified the overarching themes, including both positive and negative elements. During this process, I realised that not only had I identified the key building blocks of vulnerability, but I had also uncovered the ways in which young men coped and some of the strategies they had developed for surviving the vagaries of life on the margins.

I derived an understanding of the power relations that shaped the vulnerability of the young men deductively, from the multiple conversations I had with each young man. My insights were also significantly informed by my own observations and experiences, having spent fifteen years working in various informal settlements.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

3.5.1 Ethical clearance

As this study involved interviews with young men about their lives and the challenges they face, it was imperative to apply for ethical clearance through the regular institutional mechanisms at the University of Stellenbosch. The study, which explored personal risk perceptions and subjective accounts of individual vulnerability, was considered medium risk. Later, as the research process evolved and I incorporated diary-keeping as an additional method, thus shifting from my original methodological plan, ethical clearance had to be sought once again. Although permission was granted relatively quickly, this delayed the continuation of the research for several weeks.

None of the participants' real names were used in the write-up of my findings. Instead, pseudonyms were employed to hide the identity of each young man, thereby guaranteeing their anonymity.

3.5.2 Challenges encountered

While undertaking this research, several challenges were encountered. The most significant of these was the long time-lapse between periods of field research, and later the significant gap between the field research and analysis of fieldwork findings. However, given the grounded approach I had deliberately adopted, this was to some extent a natural part of the process, with interruptions not just the result of more pressing work demands, but also due to pauses taken to consider and develop methods for exploring new themes as they emerged, as well as to revisit the literature around these new areas of focus.

On some occasions, I found the young men's trust in me a little overwhelming, especially when they shared very personal issues with me, and on a few occasions even cried during our one-on-one sessions. As I am not a trained therapist or social worker, on the few occasions that the interview sessions evoked emotional responses, although unfamiliar terrain that was difficult to navigate, at such times I tried to be empathetic, listening rather than offering

advice. Given the low self-esteem of some of the young men, I was very careful to reinforce how much their stories were contributing to the study, while also asking their opinions regarding the methods I had developed; requesting their feedback and ideas for adapting the methods so that they were drawn more deeply into the actual research process.

Overall, I believe that the challenges that I encountered, rather than limiting the quality of my research, only added to the rigour of the work and the depth of insights achieved.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Exploring the perceptions of poor young men living on the margins about the nature of their vulnerabilities required a suite of methods for capturing details about their daily lives, as well as their feelings and deeper emotions. Involving the young men in this process allowed them to adapt methods themselves to accommodate their different personalities. While the research journey derived the depth of understanding I was seeking, it also provided opportunities to reflect on the methods and tools I was using. Using a range of methods ensured that all participants found ways to express themselves on many levels, allowing me to understand the many and varied challenges they faced and the nature of their perceived vulnerabilities.

In the following chapter, attention is drawn to the ways in which the vulnerabilities of young men are constructed; beginning when they are young boys and becoming ever more complex as they traverse through life.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING A PICTURE OF VULNERABILITY[12]

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I describe the factors that contribute to making young Xhosa men vulnerable to the vagaries of life in informal settlements in the city of Cape Town. In adopting vulnerability as my lens of analysis, which Kelman (2011) has argued, is a complex and dynamic process constructed over time, I demonstrate how the identities of these young men are similarly dynamic and contingent, responding to the variety of challenges and threats they have encountered, and the behavioural reactions and emotions these have evoked.

In exploring the constituent parts of young men's vulnerabilities that were surfaced in my empirical research, the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1994) usefully brings them into conversation with each other. I demonstrate how the intersection of different forms of marginalisation significantly contributes, not only to the vulnerabilities of these young men, but also to shaping the particular masculine identities in which they are invested.

Although many of the young men in the study can be referred to as "born frees" (Mattes 2011), those born into a democratic South Africa, it is important to note that they are nevertheless influenced by the vestiges of an apartheid past that continues to shape contemporary life and the performance of identities. This, as Moolman (2013) suggests, is made evident in the intersection of social identities, such as race, class, ethnicity and gender manifested at different scales, from the macro to meso-level. Thus, at the macro scale Moolman (2013) suggests that legislative changes relative to gender rights are reshaping men's social identity, while at the micro-level young men are being reared by those who lived in the pre-democratic era, who are contributing to shaping their world view. This leaves young men in a somewhat ambivalent transitional space in which to construct their identities.

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[12] This chapter was published as a journal article: Zweig P 2022. Views From the Margins: Exploring How Vulnerability Contributes to Shaping Men's Identities in Informal Urban South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies.* p00219096221079313. (See Appendix D).

As I will demonstrate, vulnerability is to some degree socially constructed, the product of traditional expectations, culturally-prescribed norms, and a developing urban culture that increasingly brings these into question. It is also significantly underpinned by the post-democratic empowerment of women that has significantly influenced the nature of women's expectations of men, men's ability to meet these (Clowes 2013; Ratele 2016), given high levels of unemployment, and how the resulting shift in household dynamics is reshaping men's views of themselves and how they construct their masculine identities.

In the sections that follow, key intersecting elements of vulnerability revealed in the study are described and explained, drawing illustrations from the case studies. Beginning with the early life of the young men, the sections progress chronologically through their adolescent years, experiences of schooling, further education and training, and their working lives. The chapter then continues by describing other elements of vulnerability revealed in the study and concludes by reflecting how these elements together constituted the building blocks of the young men's vulnerability. I contend that although many would argue that vulnerability is socially constructed, there are many other elements that should also be considered in any holistic and more situated understanding of the concept.

4.2 STAGES OF LIFE – TRACING BUILDING BLOCKS OF VULNERABILITY

Although it is undeniable that men's gender identities are to some extent socially constructed (Lindegger & Maxwell 2007; Morrell 2001; Van Hoven & Horschelmann 2005), ultimately every individual 'owns' their own masculine identity, which is shaped by their past. It is critical, Ratele (2016: 140) finds that although many factors shape one's identity, "early life, attachments, traumas, insecurities and fantasies" play an important role. It is important to understand the early foundations on which young men's sense of vulnerability may be constructed. Morrell (2001: 7) insists that childhood experiences generate "*prejudices and preferences, joys and terrors*".

4.2.1 Starting from the beginning – Early childhood

Most participants in the study had either been born in the city or in a rural area of the Eastern Cape. Most, though not all, were then brought up in traditional homes in these rural hinterlands, generally by their grandparents, while their own parents were notably absent from this early part of their lives. It is common for grandparents to rear Xhosa children in traditional rural homesteads while their parents continue to work in distant urban areas. Although increasingly Xhosa children are reared from birth in the city, many continue to spend their

formative years growing up in traditional homes in rural areas. Parents then either visit their children during holidays or send for their children to join them in the city at these times. The latter strategy helps to familiarise young children with the urban world they will encounter on later moving to the city, where they typically settle with members of their family in informal settlements or low-cost housing areas.

For boys, childhoods spent in rural homesteads in the Eastern Cape usually involve looking after livestock, roaming the hills with sheep or cows. This is contrasted with girls who traditionally tend to remain near the homestead. However, interestingly, many young men who grew up without female siblings were taught by their grandmothers to cook and clean the house too and were proud of their abilities to do so. One man explained how he even learnt to brew traditional beer for ritual ceremonies, which is quite a deviation from traditional behaviour for men.

The Eastern Cape was recalled by the young men who had spent time there as a place of rolling hills and open fields, where they could wander alone without fear, enjoying the simple pleasures of the fresh air and open landscapes. Many fondly remembered days spent in the rural areas where they derived comfort from traditional values, nurtured and prized in a patriarchal cultural system that considers them the bearers of tradition. These are safe spaces, where life is, for the most part, simple and uncomplicated. As Anathi (Interview 2018) explained, it was a place where he always had "*the sweetest dreams*" whenever he visited there.

Childhoods are thus often spent in places where tradition still plays an important role in guiding expected behaviour and culturally prescribed manners (Sideris 2005). The young men in the study who had been reared in such areas, had started life espousing 'old fashioned' beliefs and values; taught their place in the home and their role as men from an early age. In the rural areas, boys are expected to perform certain tasks and to be relatively independent, for example roaming the hills without supervision from an early age with the family livestock. As young boys, they are inculcated with value systems that are somewhat at odds with the modern values and ideals they later encounter in the city. As Morrell (2001) has pointed out, this engenders competing rationalities about what being a man really means.

While young men are traditionally taught to value themselves and to become the protectors of their families, in contrast, young girls are encouraged to be subservient and subordinate to them, to be respectful to them and serve their needs. As I will demonstrate, this also influences

women's behaviour in relation to men, when they are grown women. What is interesting is that this perpetuation of traditional values in the rural areas is commonly taught to boys by their grandmothers[13]; women who, ironically, have been trapped in a world of male domination all their lives yet serve to reinforce this value system. But as Ratele (2008b: 520) has argued, the inculturation of masculine identities begins in the home where "the process of turning babies into boys and boys into men is usually begun", drawing on tradition to "saturate the bodies, psyches, desires and daily practices of youngsters with images of and ideas about masculinity".

The young men's recollections of rural childhoods took on an almost revered and wistful quality, for the most part starkly contrasted with their encounters in the city. Simphiwe (Interview 2018), for example, an unemployed young man of 20 who was brought up in his father's rural homestead in the Eastern Cape in the care of his grandparents, described his rural home as very traditional. Two of his father's sisters were practicing *sangomas*, or traditional healers, which meant that much of daily life involved ritual and age-old customs. At the age of seven, Simphiwe was quite suddenly sent to live in the city. From being a happy playful child, he was suddenly alone and confused by the unfamiliar urban environment he encountered. Unlike the family he had left behind in the Eastern Cape, the extended family he was sent to live with in an informal settlement in Samora Machel on the Philippi flatlands were devout 7th Day Adventists. They did not follow the traditional customs Simphiwe had grown up with and practised no rituals. Instead, he said (Interview 2018), they "*fed him the Bible*". Simphiwe now lived in an unfamiliar world where his moral registers were at odds with those of his new home. Slowly he withdrew into himself, becoming an observer; an outsider in an unfamiliar world, gradually learning how to project a range of different identities that allowed him to fit into the different environments he encountered. One wonders if he was ever aware which one of these personas was the true Simphiwe, and whether this created any kind of identity dilemma within him. In our sessions, he spoke about how he used

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[13] Young Xhosa children are commonly reared by their grandparents in traditional Xhosa areas of the Eastern Cape. This is a vestige of the colonial and then apartheid-induced circular labour migration that forced many men and women to work in urban areas reserved exclusively for Whites, while their children were not permitted to join them due to harshly monitored apartheid policies, such as the infamous 'pass system' (See for example Dlamini et al. 2021). Despite democratic change, children are still commonly raised in the rural areas where their parents feel they are safer.

these chameleon-like abilities to keep himself safe by blending into the different social environments in which he found himself. Such abilities have also been noted by Ward (2015) in his study of working class masculinity in Northern contexts.

People identify with certain places and not with others, although this changes with time. Simphiwe's experience of moving from his nurturing rural home where he considered himself at home, to feeling alienated in an unfamiliar urban environment where he felt like an outsider, echoes the shift from insider to outsider; the dichotomous relationship to place proposed by Relph (1976). Seamon and Jacob (2008: 45), quoting Relph (1976), suggest that "if a person feels inside a place, he or she is rather here than there, safe rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed". In later interviews, Simphiwe shifted his position, claiming that he had grown to love what he called the '*kasi vibe*': a reference to the vibrancy of the crowded urban townships he had grown accustomed to and where he had eventually become an insider. Despite this, he later claimed that he only placed trust in himself, saying "*Live as if you are alone in the world*" (Interview 2017). Indeed, throughout his diary entries, which were a series of emotional poetic-style outpourings, he expressed his deep loneliness and anxieties[14].

Giddens (1991) suggests that people like Simphiwe who do not develop basic feelings of trust during their childhood, may struggle with feelings of what he calls "*unreality*", which may undermine their ability to have any clear sense of their own identity, to know who they are in later life. Given that identity is dynamic, constantly being created and re-shaped in response to life's stimuli, this means that life becomes a continuous struggle to read oneself; to know who you are and where you fit in, so as to reduce one's perceived sense of vulnerability. As Canter (1977) once suggested, this is part of a natural human survival instinct. This noted sense of guardedness was often reflected in the stories recounted by the young men.

I tried to ascertain whether there were any noted differences in feelings of vulnerability to city life among those young men reared in urban households; in other words, whether there were any noted dividends in being 'city smart'. Among the study sample, I found that unlike those reared in the rural areas, those growing up in the city were less likely to be nurtured by their grandparents, and more often reared by their own parents or other members of the extended family, such as aunts and uncles. This seemed to be as an important variable in determining

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[14] Simphiwe's fears were perhaps not unfounded. Several years after this interview, I was informed that he had been stabbed to death on his way home from a rehearsal for a theatrical production he was involved in.

the outlook of the young men and their life aspirations (these are explored further in Chapter 5). However, I noted significant differences between young men reared by family members with little to no education and those who were better educated. Sipho, for example, was raised by a single illiterate mother in the city, and while he had a very traumatic and insecure childhood that left him scarred, there was no doubt that he had learnt significant survival skills and knew how to navigate the city and keep himself safe. A brief synopsis of his story is provided below to illustrate this.

Sipho's Story

Born in the Eastern Cape, Sipho grew up with an illiterate mother who brought him to the city as a very young boy. The next part of his childhood was spent with his mother living rough among woodcutters in the bush, interrupted by some time spent living in the Eastern Cape family home – a place where he felt happy and safe. Sipho described his mother as a powerless and somewhat naïve rural person who, though she tried to love and care for him, lacked many natural mothering skills, had no support, and drank heavily, so that he was essentially left to bring himself up. Sipho had felt alone and vulnerable, living among the woodcutters where he watched the adults consuming cheap beer, which often led to drunken fights among them, sometimes with fatal outcomes. He had also witnessed his mother being abused by men, even reportedly suffering rape at the hands of these men himself when his mother was absent. Sipho became wiser through his observations. He saw how wood was chopped and stacked, and how it was presented beside the road to attract customers. While the adults were sleeping off hangovers, he eventually saw his opportunity, taking their tools and making himself piles of wood for sale. He described how some of the White ladies who stopped to buy his wood thought he was sweet. A few of them collaborated and began to support him. At the same time, he saved his own earnings from selling wood to buy himself school shoes and other things he needed.

Sponsored by this group of middle-class White women, he later matriculated at a multi-racial school. Reflecting on the friendships he formed with his school mates, he described them as necessarily superficial as their lives were so different from his. He regretted that he had not had a childhood like other

children, always responsible for looking after himself, for feeding, sheltering, and even clothing himself. Learning survival skills from a very early age, but finding himself repeatedly vulnerable to new things, he developed coping strategies as each situation presented itself, constantly adapting. Today he remains a reclusive and pensive man, constantly analysing the world around him, deeply concerned by what he observes. The contrasting spaces he has occupied have granted him a range of different perspectives and a broader world view than many other young men. Sipho confessed that he had never had a relationship with a woman, fearful of committing himself, and cynical of intimacy and sharing.

Sipho's mother was an unfortunate victim of her own naivety, forcing him to fend for himself from an early age. But while the White ladies were supportive and changed his life around, it is doubtful that had they encountered a young girl they would have left her to fend for herself on the side of the road. As other examples from the case studies showed, there is a kind of unsurfaced gendered logic evident here – even when still boys it seems, there are expectations of their ability to cope, to be strong 'little men'.

In this sense, Sipho's story can be contrasted with another young man from the same settlement who grew up in a more nurturing and educated family. Vuyo was raised by both his parents in their home in Masiphumelele. He described his mother, who is not Xhosa, as very strict and modern in her outlook, while his father who is strongly traditional, had instilled in him the importance of Xhosa cultural norms and beliefs. This mix of moral registers posed little problem to the young man, who was, as a result, brought up on a mixture of city manners and Xhosa customs, both encouraging respectfulness. This was reinforced by completing his initiation in the Eastern Cape at his father's traditional rural home. Vuyo tracked easily through primary school and later completed matric at the local high school. Both his parents work and have kept a close eye on his development, ensuring that he 'tows the line' and achieves well at school. Vuyo today is a self-assured young man who has started his own small local business.

For the men who were not reared in the city, however, the shift from living in a simple rural environment to a complex urban milieu was generally a traumatic experience, whether this happened in their early childhood or later in their adolescent or even adult years. Their experience of this transition is explored in the next section.

4.2.2 Life in transition – Adapting to urban life

The transition of young men from rural to urban life, noted in many studies (Becker 1974; Moolman 2013; Morrell 2001; Reid & Walker 2005; Shefer et al. 2007), was a key theme emanating from this study, illustrating the dynamic nature of male vulnerability in response to changing living environments. It also demonstrated how boys and young men were generally expected to adapt to very different and unfamiliar living environments and toughen up and fend for themselves no matter what their age. This contrasted with the treatment of young girls arriving from rural areas.

The shift to the city was generally orchestrated for the young men by family members, so that on arriving in the city they were accommodated and supported by family, extended family, or other kin; becoming dependent on them until they could get on their own feet. For the most part, women were instrumental in organising these moves that were generally either related to receiving an urban-based education or finding work in the city. Unless the young men managed to find well-paying jobs after leaving school, however, their dependency seemed to continue, and very often the young men remained reliant on other people, generally women, to feed, clothe, and house them.

Several young men spoke about their traumatic adaptation to urban life. Mbuyiselo (Interview 2018), for example, remembers his loneliness and fear living with unfamiliar kin in the city, confused by the complex faster-paced city life he encountered. Similarly, Mcebisi (Interview 2018) recalls his struggle adjusting to informal city life, unable to sleep because of the offensive smells and terrifying sound of gunshots, remaining at home for several days, peering over the fence before eventually daring to venture out. He wrote:

> *I couldn't adapt to the environment on how people live, the shacks that people are residing in, and they call them their houses/rooms. Back at home shacks are built for livestock especially lambs and calves* (Diary 2018).

Mcebisi's negative impressions were later reinforced following a violent attack in which he lost an eye. Sipho, who spent part of his childhood in the city living rough among woodcutters, remembered pining for his rural home, saying:

> *I remember one day I even wanted to cry. I really longed to go back to Eastern Cape because I already thought that Western Cape or Cape Town wasn't good for me. But there was no way I could go back* (Interview 2018).

Sipho, now 31, experienced a range of traumatising experiences that continue to haunt him, shaping his reclusive nature and reflected in the deep pensiveness about life expressed in his diaries.

People who are anxious about the possibility of danger around them may respond by trying to blend into the landscape, to avoid becoming a target (Giddens 2005). Once again, Simphiwe fits this analysis, having adopted a range of different personalities during his life to keep himself from harm – becoming a gangster while attending a mixed-race high school in Mitchell's Plain, and later detaching himself from this tough identity by pretending for a while to be gay and hanging around with a group of girls when his gangster identity was discovered and his life threatened. Being brought up in the home of a religious aunt and uncle who provided everything for him, he added a pious church-going character to his other personas, all the time ensuring his survival in these different spaces in which his life was playing out by adopting a range of somewhat conflicting personalities.

On arriving in the city from rural areas, young men encounter many unfamiliar hazards. Bongani (Interview 2018), for example, who was reared by a single working mother, remembers learning to navigate traffic on his own for the first time in Khayelitsha, something foreign to him coming from a rural village where he had seldom encountered cars. He contrasted his experiences with young girls arriving from rural areas, who he claimed were always accompanied when venturing out, demonstrating gendered differences in 'learning the city'. Similarly, Mncedisi (Interview 2018), now a journalist, recalled his mother departing early for work on his first day at school, leaving him to tackle this daunting first encounter by himself, admitting how scared he felt not knowing what to do, and defensively trying to act 'cool'. Retrospectively, Mncedisi considered this to be his first day of independence, at the age of eight! He qualified this by explaining that in the Xhosa culture one is taught independence and "*familiarised with life*" from an early age. Whether this expectation of male independence from such an early age represents Xhosa rural traditions carried across into urban environments, a deliberate strategy to toughen young boys growing up in the city, or merely a survivalist response of a mother without support in the city, could not be determined but certainly requires further probing.

Young boys arriving from the Eastern Cape are often regarded disparagingly by those born and reared in the city, particularly if they live or attend school in one of the older more established townships in the city, such as Gugulethu. Newly settled areas are more likely to accommodate more recent Xhosa migrants. As newcomers, they are considered 'country

bumkins', speaking a deep rural form of the Xhosa language and often not very proficient in English. Anathi explained how rural boys will typically stick together at school, avoiding the '*Cape Borners*[15]' who label them "*amagoduka*", literally 'people from the home' or '*Blueliners*' - a reference to the overnight busses that typically bring them into the city from the Eastern Cape. Anathi said he was teased at school and made to feel like an outsider; so he and other boys recently arrived from rural areas, who similarly felt alienated, would stick together.

Besides these often unnerving first experiences that boys and young men encounter on arriving in the city, they are also shocked by the seemingly endemic levels of crime and violence. This is not just a perception, however, as growing levels of crime and violence in South Africa are particularly prevalent in informal areas, and statistically young Black men are the most frequent victims (Ratele 2016; Seedat et al. 2009; Silber & Geffen 2009). For young rural boys and men arriving in the city, this is a particularly frightening revelation. Samkelo (Interview 2108), for example, an only child sent to the city to attend high school, recalled his shock witnessing violent attacks on ordinary people in the streets, especially over weekends. Arriving at the age of twelve from a rural area, Rolihlahla (Interview 2018), today a vociferous gender-rights activist working to protect women from sexual violence, recalls having to walk through a gangster-ridden area to school each day. After several frightening encounters, twelve-year old Rolihlahla acquired a small gun that he kept concealed in his school sock. The ability of someone so young to acquire a weapon reinforces the inherent criminality of contemporary urban South Africa (Ratele 2016; Seedat et al. 2009).

But it is not only rural migrants who are fearful of crime and violence. Mpendulo, who was born and bred in the city, continues to be traumatised by the violence, describing dead bodies he has seen lying in the street on weekends and the pervasive criminality of the streets. Recalling the end of an otherwise peaceful day selling medicinal herbs at the taxi rank he wrote:

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[15] "*Borner"* is a slang name for Xhosa people 'born' in the city. *Borners* generally believe themselves superior to those from the Eastern Cape, who are considered rural simpletons or '*amagoduka'*, literally those from the home. I had assumed on commencing this research that most of my candidates would be '*borners*', and was surprised when almost every young man, even if born in the city, had been raised in the Eastern Cape.

> *I was walk home but on the way I pass by V-Section I saw a dead body lay*
> *in the street there was also police who was looking the body* (Diary 2018).

His account has an almost surreal quality of a moment suspended in time. In another account he recalls watching an armed robbery at a local mall:

> *…there was robbery there by Shoprite. I hear some guns shooting but I don't*
> *know what happened, who was shot. This was not the first time there was*
> *robbery there by Shoprite Plaza in Site C that place is more gangs.*

Thus, even those accustomed to urban life feel vulnerable in the face of increasing levels of violence. Lelethu (Interview 2018), raised from birth in Masiphumelele, noted how the streets had become increasingly dangerous over recent years, mentioning that in his childhood there was relatively little crime, drugs were not a big problem, and one could walk around without a care. Similarly, Vuyo described how fast life was changing there, due to the continued influx of newcomers. He noted the high levels of drug use and violence, particularly among young teenage boys.

Arriving from the Eastern Cape, many young boys are left under the supervision of extended family who can neither protect them nor control their behaviour in the densely settled settlements of contemporary Cape Town. A survivalist culture is developing among young adolescents who band together into small 'crews' and wander around the streets, so that even young men feel threatened by them.

However, in the study, I found that generally, those raised in the city were found to be well-versed in urban culture and more streetwise. Their ability to read the street not only made them less fearful, but perhaps also less vulnerable. Kanelo, for example, was also born and bred in Masiphumelele, proudly referring to himself as a 'Cape Borner'. He claimed (Interview 2016) that he made friends easily and never felt uneasy in the streets, having a passion for what he termed "*kassie life*", referring to the vibrancy of life on the streets where he grew up, claiming that it "*ran through his veins*". Masiphumelele was, however, his only real frame of reference; a secure space to which he always returned despite trying to live elsewhere on several occasions. This suggests that he had only learned his own streets rather than being generally streetwise. This echoes the findings of Shildrick (2006), who in her study of youth culture in Britain, found that residence in a particular neighbourhood significantly influenced the cultural identity of young people living there.

The excerpts above demonstrate how, from an early age, young men become acutely aware of their physical vulnerability in informal urban spaces. Yet, perhaps ironically, they are continuously deriving identity from these same surroundings (Meth 2009; Rose 1995; Ward et al. 2017), which in turn shapes their behaviour.

It is in experiencing working life outside of what may have become familiar and 'readable' living environments that young men begin to feel vulnerable in new ways.

4.2.3 Working life

In tracing the life histories of the young men, their working lives became the next point of focus. Interestingly, despite being in their twenties, some young men had no work experience at all. They were still entirely supported by their families, typically hardworking mothers who bought them the designer clothing and shoes some needed to maintain 'face' on the street. Many others had shifted from one piece-meal job to another; some young men had even started small businesses of their own, and yet others had focused on educating themselves and held good positions for longer periods of time. None, however, had manged to stay permanently employed, no matter their level of education.

Isivile, who completed high school, had always found it hard to obtain work, shifting from one job to another. He started his working life off-loading containers, but then contracted tuberculosis and was unable to work for some time. Once recovered, finding work again proved difficult and Isivile eventually signed up for the government's Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP). EPWP is a short-term job creation programme that pays a minimal daily wage for maintaining public facilities, typically street cleaning. In Isivile's case, he was responsible for maintaining a children's play area. After a while, he found another poorly paid job off-loading containers for a supermarket, but given his weakened health, found the work of moving heavy merchandise around too physically demanding, taking on cleaning or gardening jobs instead. He explained that transport to work was always a problem, remembering how he had for a time had to rise at four in the morning to make it to a job on the other side of the city by seven o'clock. Reliant on public transport that consisted of multiple short trips to reach his destination, cumulatively costing him much of his daily wage, he was often late for work, which resulted in deductions being made from his already meagre income.

Despite achieving a matric school-leaving certificate, Isivile was forced to take on menial jobs that paid very little, generally requiring long hours of heavy, boring manual labour. Like many

other young African men without specific skills, he was cast into a large nameless pool of labour where the competition for scarce work opportunities made him feel utterly dispensable and worthless. Like many others, he also experienced long periods of unemployment in-between short-term work and dreamed of starting his own small business; though he had no capital to do so, living as he usually did from hand-to-mouth.

The boredom men feel when having nothing to keep them occupied was also brought into focus in the study. Anathi (Diary 2018) described, for example, how weekends were filled with boredom for young men who take to "*drinking as if they had lost hope*". Mpendulo's diary (2018) was strongly indicative of the uneventfulness of life without work. His entries were short and sweet, recounting his daily activities which were noticeably quite limited; revealing a life punctuated by very little, other than on the occasional days when he sold medicinal plants on the street and even rarer forays into the mountains to harvest them.

Mpendulo's diary brought into stark relief the realities of unemployment that has more recently been described in the context of young men in Nairobi by Lockwood (2020). Lockwood (2020: s.p.) quotes from the diary entry of a young unemployed man: "*I woke up late because there was nothing I was doing*". These and similar comments recorded in diaries of other young men in Lockwood's (2020) study revealed lives of joblessness, piece-meal labour, and constantly searching for ways to make money. This is also reflected by Finn and Oldfield (2015), writing about young men in Sierra Leone, who become 'stuck' or 'idle' because of unemployment. In many respects, they reinforce Diouf (2005: 231), who contends that young men in Africa have "lost their place and function at the centre of society".

However, there were many young men in the study who were more upbeat about life, generally those who had familial support or someone else who championed their interests, encouraging them to succeed and to grasp opportunities to uplift themselves. Mcebisi, for example, who had spent his formative years with both his parents in Johannesburg and was later brought up by his paternal grandparents in the Eastern Cape, was strongly encouraged to educate himself. His father had a good job working for a parastatal, while his father's sister was a teacher. Mcebisi came to the city after completing school, with the aim of studying further. However, when both his parents passed away in quick succession, he was left with no one to fund his studies and took a job at a local hardware store. Starting in the despatch section, his work ethic and outgoing manner soon caught the attention of the manager, who shifted him to the retail section and gave him increasing responsibilities. After several years, during which he earned enough to fund his younger brother to move to the city to attend teacher's training college, he

left his job to attend full-time college himself, supported by his brother who had by then qualified as a teacher and secured a post at the local primary school. Mcebisi has continued to educate himself, eventually becoming a high school teacher, though he cannot secure a permanent position.

Similarly, Mbuyiselo, though raised in a rural village in the Eastern Cape, fortuitously later joined his estranged father who was a teacher in the city (Interview 2018). Feeling more secure after a few years spent living with unfamiliar and unwelcoming extended family in another part of the city, he shifted to a school in the vicinity of his father, where he did well at business economics and accounting. His father's support and encouragement, though they never became close, influenced Mbuyiselo's outlook on life and he subsequently managed to set up and run a series of small businesses, eventually purchasing his own car. Today he is an enthusiastic young man with a positive outlook on life. His businesses, however, are all located within the settlement where he lives and feels secure.

But not many young men in the study group had the good fortune to have the support and encouragement of their family. Despite achieving well at school and grasping any opportunities that come their way, many are in a continuous battle to escape the bonds of township life and poverty, constantly struggling to find permanent work that pays them commensurately for their skills.

Ndumiso discovered that he had an aptitude for Mathematics in Grade 10 and began tutoring struggling classmates in his spare time (Interview 2018). His poorly educated parents, who came from a rural village in the Eastern Cape and were struggling to survive and feed five children in the city, failed to appreciate his talents. On becoming aware of his efforts to help other students, one of his teachers introduced him to an international tutoring group who recruited him into their programme. When their funding term ended, however, Ndumiso, who by now had lost both his parents and was living in a room in his sister's house, was left without work. He started his own tutoring business, working out of public libraries, which is where I encountered him. His income was limited by the nature of his client base – poor young school learners – and he was living from hand to mouth. Ndumiso had wanted to study megatronics and had an aptitude for this area of scientific study, yet his environment limited his chances, cutting him off from the mainstream where his skillset could earn him a decent living.

The peripheralisation of poverty further marginalises young people like Ndumiso (Dillabough & Kennelly 2010; McDowell 2003; Sassen 1998), by significantly limiting their contact with the outside world. Although initially my study had also sought to track the mobility of young

men in the city, it soon became evident that their lives could more aptly be described as 'immobile'. Due to their limited means and unemployment, or under-employment, they were highly dependent on very localised social networks to survive, for the most part resulting in rather insular lives.

Although poor people may travel beyond their settlement boundaries for work, poverty generally limits any other engagement with the outside world, leaving them somewhat disconnected from mainstream city life, often 'cocooned' within their living environment. This concept of 'mooring' as the opposite to mobility has been noted in the literature (Hannam et al. 2006; Motte-Baumvol & Nassi 2012). This leaves people susceptible to the threats and challenges of their immediate survivalist environment.

4.3 OTHER KEY ELEMENTS OF VULNERABILITY

It is in exploring the banalities of everyday life that we really discover the truth about deeper issues (De Certeau 1984; Le Febvre 1958). Thus, it is perhaps only through an understanding of people's everyday living conditions and life ways that one can truly understand how they are made vulnerable and what they are vulnerable to (Hufschmidt 2013; Lewis 1999). While it cannot be denied that, as Lewis (1999) suggests, there are inherent and generalised levels of vulnerability, for example in environments of deep poverty, it is evident that not all people are vulnerable to the same degree, or even in the same ways and at the same time. In defending Relph's (1976) phenomenological approach to the study of human experience, Seamon and Sowers (2008) have suggested that the strength of his approach lies in considering aspects of everyday life that are usually taken for granted and rarely questioned. It recognises the multiple dimensions of human experience, from the individual's unique personal situation, shaped by their gender, age, physical characteristics and intellect, to their personal histories, shaped by the social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances, as well as the environment in which they live. This complexity speaks very clearly to Crenshaw's (1994) concept of 'intersectionality' which brings these together into one conversation.

The section that follows describes and explains a range of vulnerability elements related to everyday life and living conditions that the young men revealed in the study.

4.3.1 Physical threats

The physical threats that the young men are vulnerable to are described in this section and include both the hazards commonly encountered in the everyday lives of the young men and

specific experiences that also make them vulnerable. The living environments in which these are manifested are characterised by acute levels of poverty and poor quality of life, where men often feel powerless and consequently lack self-esteem, which limits their self-confidence.

4.3.1.1 Violence and crime

There are many statistics that attest to the high levels of crime and violence in South Africa. In his analysis of death statistics, Donson (2008), for example, found that 80% of those who had died of non-natural deaths in 2007 were men, three quarters of whom were Black males. For every female death there had been 6.5 deaths among males. The report revealed several other interesting trends relative to this study. For example, most deaths had occurred among young adults, typically men between the ages of 15-29 (36%) and 30-44 (34%), while over one third of deaths had been caused by violence (Donson 2008). Cape Town claimed the highest injury mortality rate and the highest rate of violence. Almost a third (32%) of injuries that resulted in death had occurred in informal settlements (Donson 2008).

This and other more recent studies indicate that the highest rates of crime occur among men, (Morrell 2012; Ratele 2016; SAPS 2012), and that most men murdered in the country are between the ages of 15 and 35 (UNODC 2011), almost the same age group targeted in this study. Thus, while young men are certainly the perpetrators of most violent actions and crimes (Dartnall & Jewkes 2013; Silber & Geffen 2009; Wood & Jewkes 2001), they are most frequently also the victims, often deeply traumatised by their experiences (McDowell & Harris 2018). bell hooks (2004: 27) puts much of the blame for men's lack of emotional outlets on patriarchy and the unspoken rule that men do not cry. Though writing about poor African-American men, she observed that ''*patriarchy demands of men that they become and remain emotional cripples…. imprisoned by a system that undermines their mental health*''.

Mcebisi, for example, was attacked and seriously injured one night during a robbery. After losing an eye in the ensuing struggle, he became depressed and even considered suicide. He explained that because Xhosa culture dictates that men should not express personal anguish, he had concealed his depression. His college lecturers, noticing a change in his usually cheerful demeanour, insisted he attend counselling sessions, which he admits aided his recovery. He states in his diary (2018), however, that these days he is constantly scanning his environment for threats, particularly given that he often sees the man who attacked him:

> *It really terrifies me… and it's worse than that, you do see this person who was responsible for your injury or the harm that took place in your body.*

> *You do see this person running around the streets. Sometimes you feel like*
> *fighting back.*

Mcebisi is conflicted as he is still incredibly angry and, though not usually an aggressive man, desires revenge deep inside. As he often teaches at the local high school, he must instead maintain a professional image and set an example, particularly to his male learners.

Mcebisi noted that crime had reached endemic proportions, describing the settlement where he lives as a place where "*people are killing each other on a daily basis, there is a lot of robberies in our society*" (Diary 2018). Similarly, in interviews but especially in his diary, Mpendulo illustrates the pervasiveness of crime in daily life in the informal areas. He writes:

> *There is too much crime in this place, it is not safe on the street you can't*
> *walk anywhere you like because something can happen to you* (Diary 2018).

He illustrates this by describing an incident he witnessed on his way home:

> *…I saw a dead body lay in the street…they tell me that the man who die was*
> *a gangster…The gangsters fight each other there is no life for them because*
> *it is easy to be killed.*

Many others described the inherent danger of the streets. Rolihlahla, for example, has been shot three times. Anathi delivered numerous stories about crime and violence in his community, insisting that most 'guys' carry a knife as a safety weapon, claiming that he always visited his girlfriend armed with a knife because it involved walking right across his settlement in Philippi. On one occasion, Anathi and his girlfriend were confronted by '*skollies*', young men who loiter around the streets waiting to ambush innocent people, and he was forced to defend them with the knife, though no one was hurt. Though Kanelo (Interview 2016) had not been a victim of crime himself, he said that most of his friends had been attacked and even stabbed.

Isivile, however, explained how dangerous it was even in high school, describing how gangsters would typically come into the school grounds to take cell phones and cash from learners as well as teachers (Interview 2018). He explained how young men were pressed into joining local gangs for fear of victimisation. Other young men in the study similarly remarked

how difficult it was to avoid being drawn into gangs – not only due to peer pressure but also weighing up what would keep them safer in the long run; being part of a gang or distancing oneself and thereby becoming a target.

Providing some insights into this dilemma, Mfuneko explained during an interview that if you were not part of a gang or 'crew', you did not fit in and would be treated 'badly'. In justifying why he had joined a crew for a short period, he said: "*in Black communities you have to be someone*". Membership of a group is important in positioning yourself in your community and establishing your identity because "*…you are judged on who you go with, what you wear, girls go with your lifestyle*". Mfuneko had joined a group calling themselves 'The Africans', who all adopted a particular dress code that set them apart from other crews. Belonging to a group provides young men with a group identity and offers an important way to reduce their susceptibility to harm. Mfuneko's crew consisted of eight young men who hung out together at school. However, he described how later, when they became involved in criminal activities, he withdrew from this group.

Isivile (Interview 2018) also described how gangs typically hang out on train stations and even on the trains, targeting college students who are known to carry resources such as cell phones, tablets, and laptops. He explained that the railway security guards were relatively powerless against the perpetrators, who often carried guns and knives.

The fear of crime forces young men to adopt protective behaviour. Luva, for example described how the fear of crime forces him to stay indoors after eight at night because of the presence of *skollies* who openly smoke drugs and often carry knives, while guns are becoming more common these days (Interview 2017). Otherwise, his social life consisted of hanging out and listening to music at the homes of friends, attending choir practice, and meeting his friends at church on Sundays. He explained that he avoided the taverns where he was likely to be targeted by criminals who frequented such places, and generally only went out on weekends when he could travel with friends who had a car to a well-known nightspot in Khayelitsha where private security firms ensure patrons' safety.

On the other hand, Lwasi (Interview 2017) admitted to feeling quite safe walking around in Khayelitsha because he had grown up there from an early age, could 'read the street', and knew most of the young men, even the local *skollies*. He said he feared nothing because he felt that God had a plan for him. Lwasi, however, did not frequent local taverns or popular nightspots, preferring to watch movies at home or visit the street food vendors in a nearby

suburb with friends, also only when able to travel there by car. Thus, although Lwasi might feel safe on the streets during the day, he did not appear to frequent the streets at night.

Apart from crime, however, there were many other hazards the young men encountered in daily life in informal areas of the city to which they were vulnerable, which are described briefly in the sections that follow.

4.3.1.2 Fire

Fire is an all-too-common hazard in informal settlements, with the City of Cape Town noted as the 'fire capital' of the world due to the frequency with which fires occur in the city's poorer areas (Donson 2008; Gqirana 2015; Zweig et al. 2018). While the causes of such fires are often not possible to ascertain, studies have noted that after young children, young men are the most frequent victims of informal settlement fires (Pharoah 2009; Van Niekerk 2009). Most of the young men in the study had witnessed informal settlement fires on several occasions, noting the hardships experienced by those affected, while some recalled their own traumatising experiences of fire outbreaks.

While living alone as a teenager, Alakhe recalled that his shack burned down, forcing him to move in with extended family for a short time until he could muster resources to start over. Though not affected materially himself, Mpendulo (Diary 2017) described a fire he had observed destroying a small shack while the occupants were absent:

> *It was hard to stop the fire because that house was lock. People who stay*
> *near try to stop the fire, but I think most of everything in the house was gone.*
> *I think that the people of the house don't feel right when they get to their*
> *home.*

Similarly, Isivile described how a fire that broke out in a neighbour's house one evening soon spread, eventually engulfing 26 other shacks, in one of which a small child died. He believed the fire was caused by a drunk off-duty security guard. In studies of informal settlement fires in the city, it has been noted that fires often start because of drunken behaviour, particularly among young men living alone who typically fall asleep after evenings spent in taverns, leaving meat cooking and candles burning (Morrissey & Taylor 2006; Pharoah 2009).

Misumzi (Interview 2018), however, described how a fire was deliberately started on the ground floor of the double-story, eight-roomed shack where he lived with his brothers. After

the tenant downstairs had an altercation with his girlfriend, she returned after dark and poured petrol on his bed, setting it alight. The tenant had fortunately gone out, but the fire spread rapidly, blocking the only exit route on the lower floor. Misumzi and his friend were still awake upstairs and immediately opened the windows, causing the fire to rush upstairs, forcing them to leap from the balcony to save their lives. Occurrences of arson are common in poorer areas of the city, and often the reason why fire causation goes under-reported: nobody wants to be a whistle-blower or attribute blame for fear of retribution. Thus, although fire is often the result of cooking accidents or candles left burning, it is also an easy weapon used by those wanting to vent their anger.

Fires affect informal settlement dwellers not only materially but also on an emotional level, though this less tangible impact has not been sufficiently explored. In his diary, Ndumiso revealed how traumatised he was after witnessing a fire incident near his own dwelling. His writing style at this point in the diary took on a poetic quality that so many of the young men employed when discussing emotional topics:

> *One day someone did the unforgivable, leaving a paraffin stove on, or was it a loose connection? The free electricity had been reconnected after another prolonged protest. The resultant flames engulfed the home, destroying an entire livelihood. Most of all they will remember the young girl consumed by the flames. On that day she was sick, so she stayed home alone, she could not run. As the paramedic carried her lifeless torso, her unconscious waving arms seemed to say goodbye to the bemused survivors.*

In 2017, a survey of residents' fire experiences in another settlement in the city (Zweig et al. 2018) established that most residents had experienced a fire outbreak at least once in their lives. Apart from establishing how commonly fires were experienced, the survey also revealed high levels of trauma experienced not only by those directly impacted but, as in the case of Ndumiso's account above, also those who witness the devastation and loss of others. The impacts of fire can gradually increase people's vulnerability, creating what Chambers (1983) has described as 'the ratchet affect': reversing any previous development gains as households slip into deeper poverty (Oelofse 2003; Pharaoh 2009; Scholtz 2015).

Flooding is another common threat to those living in settlements in Cape Town that similarly exacerbates people's existing vulnerability to settlement life.

4.3.1.3 Flooding

Many informal settlements in the city are established on marginal land prone to flooding during the wet winter months (Desportes et al. 2016; Drivdal 2015). Khayelitsha and Philippi are located on the Cape Flats, a vast flat area interspersed with sand dunes that was originally a network of lakes and wetlands. It is also on the wetland section of Masiphumelele, located some distance from the Cape Flats, where newcomers typically settle since all other space is already densely settled. While settlers initially colonise areas of slightly higher elevation because of the flood risk due to the high water-table, these soon become crowded, forcing newcomers onto lower elevations. Often settling during dry summer months, new settlers only become aware of the flood-prone nature of their homes during winter rains, typically falling between April until September.

Anathi's house in Kosovo in the Philippi area is recognised as one of the Cape Town's most flood-prone settlements. Anathi describes his experience of flooding there, which causes his home to fill up with so much water that everyone must climb on furniture to avoid getting wet:

> *...eish! What is wrong with this rain? Does it mean I have to wake up and pull my couch against the door and ask my sister to squeeze herself against the music [system].*

In the course of my work, I have undertaken numerous community-based risk assessments in informal settlements around Cape Town. In one, euphemistically called Sweet Home Farm, which is located in another flood-prone area of Philippi, men and women's perspectives on

Figure 5 Flooding in QQ Section, Khayelitsha (Photo provided by Ndumiso)

flood risk were found to be different (DiMP 2009). While most women ranked crime as their priority risk, the men ranked flooding as the most pressing issue. Women, it seemed, found other aspects of life far more challenging and took flooding in their stride, pragmatically adopting simple coping mechanisms, such as wrapping important possessions in plastic and placing them on top of cupboards; men on the other hand, were overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness. From the image of flooding in QQ Section in Khayelitsha (Figure 5), it is clear why men should feel so disempowered.

Rather than developing simple coping strategies like the women, men become frustrated by being unable to fix the problem. Perhaps it brings their lack of agency into stark relief. Isivile described how people in his flood-prone settlement in Khayelitsha were surprised by flooding during the very wet winter of 2011. In response, his household concreted the floor and placed bricks around the house to stop the water coming in. This is really the limit of mitigatory actions that can be taken to reduce household level flood risk, and as Desportes et al. (2016) found in their study, there is little collective response to flooding, with everyone struggling for their own survival and immediate needs.

Thus, for young men with limited income and few resources to hand, there are limited ways to reduce flood risk. Ndumiso, who lives in a flood prone section of Khayelitsha, described how it is frequently flooded in winter months, sending real-time photographs via WhatsApp (See Figure 5 above), a platform some of the young men used to communicate with me, to demonstrate the nature of their living conditions. These descriptions echoed those reported by Desportes et al. (2016) in another settlement in Philippi, where people have become resigned to living with their feet literally in the water.

4.3.1.4 Hunger and shelter

When describing the challenges of life in informal areas, food insecurity and hunger were also often mentioned. Unless supported by family, extended family, clansmen, or friends, many young men in the study lived independently from a young age, and often alone. Unlike women, who develop critical social capital in the form of women's support networks, young men do not seem to have similar social capital that they can draw on for survival.

Sipho (Interview 2018), for example, was left to fend for himself when he was a very young child, while his mother visited her family in the Eastern Cape, leaving him in the care of men who immediately absconded all responsibility for him, leaving him all alone. Waking one night feeling desperately hungry, he recalled feeling around in the dark and discovering a jar

containing some grains of rice, which he ate. When the sun rose the next morning, he discovered that the jar was also full of ants which he had ingested along with the raw grains. That moment seems to have been a defining one in his young life, realising that he had to do something to survive.

Similarly, Rolihlahla (Interview 2018) was left alone when his mother went into hospital. He described rummaging through rubbish bins next to the fresh produce street traders in search of something edible to eat, mostly fruit, but also potatoes that he could cook over a fire. In describing his experiences of working at the local high school, Mcebisi noted in his diary how some of the young men he was teaching could not sustain attention. Meeting with some of them after school, he discovered that many were living alone and unable to fend for themselves, coming to school hungry. He wrote:

> *…most of them are boys and they come to school with old clothes/uniform, they are completely different from other students. So, this boy told me that they only eat when they are at school, and I have asked, what do they eat during the course of the weekend, and he told me that sometimes they go to the four-way stop and beg for food from the commuters* (Diary 2018).

Thus, these young men had been abandoned and left to fend for themselves but had continued to attend school just to access food, operating in pure survival mode. Being young Black men and given their ragged appearance, society tends automatically to label them criminal and dangerous, with car windows remaining firmly closed against them.

Anathi, who did have a loving family but one which often had no breadwinner, was driven to steal from the storage cupboards of his high school feeding scheme to provide food at home. In his diary, he describes the lack of food when there was "*no porridge in the morning, no bread after school*". His crimes were eventually discovered, but he only received a reprimand that made him feel ashamed that his actions had left other children hungry. Yet the school headmaster understood the context of his crime, allowing him to return to school. Anathi's crime was only to be hungry and to have found an opportunity to provide food for his family.

In a study exploring the prevalence of food insecurity among poor communities in Cape Town, Battersby (2011) found that in both Philippi and Khayelitsha, only 10% of households were relatively food secure. In the survey, 27% of households were comprised of single men, many newly arrived from the Eastern Cape and other rural areas. With men notably less likely to develop social networks than women, it is no surprise to discover that many of them go

hungry. Food insecurity is often overlooked in relation to young men, who often live alone in the city, fending for themselves in environments of extreme poverty and high levels of unemployment.

4.3.2 Unemployment

The scale of unemployment and underemployment in Africa is increasingly considered a trigger for social instability (Arko-Cobbah 2011; Diouf 2005; Finn & Oldfield 2015), especially amongst young unmarried men. In South Africa, where there are very high rates of unemployment, young people living in poverty are particularly affected by the lack of jobs (Altman et al. 2014). Many of those seeking to educate themselves drop out of school or college for financial reasons (Letseka et al. 2010). Those born since the democratic change in South Africa, the so-called 'born frees', "face the same if not greater levels of unemployment, poverty, inequality and hopelessness as their parents" (Mattes 2011: 5). Pieterse (2011) believes this is driving a social development crisis, with more than half of youths under 24 in South Africa unable to find work.

Unemployment significantly shapes both men's identities and their everyday practices (Cornwall et al. 2016; hooks 2004a; Morrell & Swart 2005; Silberschmidt 1992). Many participants described how joblessness contributed to their feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness, reiterating the findings of Shefer et al. (2015). Isivile (Interview 2018), for example, felt like 'a loser' because he was unemployed, while Misumzi at 24 years and also relatively new to the city (Interview 2018), believed unemployment forced his dependence on others, denying him any personal agency.

Mthuthuzele (Interview 2017), aspiring to be a sound engineer but only working occasionally as a DJ, insisted that men do not cope well with unemployment and other disappointments in life, often turning to drugs or heavy drinking and becoming abusive in their relationships. Revealing how unemployed young men are concerned that they are judged by others, Anathi (Diary 2018) explained:

> *...if you are a man and not doing any effort for the family in terms of providing for them, he will be known as a useless man not only by women, even by those surrounding. The time that men is not working is not recognised as a man but when it first works that's where the dignity start to grow among the people.*

Illustrating how this concern influences life choices, he described how young men in his neighbourhood often drop out of school to work for local taxi owners, seeking to provide for their families and impress young women; noting how although this delivered immediate dividends, they had no longer-term plans.

Kanelo, who is now 24, has never had a job. He already has a child with a young woman who does not live with him and is studying at college while her parents care for their child. Although he aims to marry her eventually, Kanelo was being supported by his mother at the time and had no plans for how he would support them, even though he claimed that he would also pay 'lobola[16]'. His dreams were thus rather more idealistic than practical as he was making no attempt to become independent, financially or otherwise[17].

Describing the short time he spent with family in the Eastern Cape, Kanelo (Interview 2016) noted how hard everyone worked in traditional rural areas, waking up early every day to tend cattle and work on the farm. He thought their lives were boring and slow, compared to life in the town "*where it was all happening*". His opinion contrasted notably with those of many other young men in the study who had been reared in the Eastern Cape and had grown up working hard there and contributing directly to household livelihoods. Perhaps it can be argued that many city-raised children like Kanelo lack a strong foundational work ethic and the desire to fulfil traditionally prescribed male roles as head of the household.

Marital rates have been dropping gradually since the 1960s among young Black South Africans (Reid & Walker 2005). Hunter (2010) argues that one of the constraining factors influencing this trend is the growing rate of unemployment that has made it increasingly difficult for young men to afford to pay *lobola* and support their own household. As a result, men without traditionally prescribed marital rights must find other ways of asserting their manhood.

Hegemonic male rights and privileges, however, continue to be enforced in couple relationships, with the man asserting his dominance in violent ways, while women, especially

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[16] In southern Africa, it is customary for the bridegroom and his family to make a payment called "*lobola*", traditionally in cattle or cash to the bride's family before the marriage.

[17] After spending time in prison, Kanelo, moved in with his mother who ran a local creche and employed him to work there. Kanelo did not enjoy this work and although he claimed he was now a religious man, having given up drugs and alcohol, he admitted that he was struggling with his demons.

those raised traditional homes, continue to accept such behaviour although it is at odds with their democratic rights that are enshrined in the Constitution. The transition to political democracy in South Africa has been identified as challenging men's traditional roles as head of the household (Sideris 2005). Despite the establishment of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) in 2005, which by 2011 was significantly contributing to reducing poverty through the provision of various welfare grants (Altman et al. 2014), young people in the country have limited access to such grants. These grants, which are mostly in the form of the Child Support Grant for young women with children, exclude any form of support for poverty-stricken young men (Altman et al. 2014).

Connell (2005) suggests that the assumption has been created over time that a core part of being masculine is being a breadwinner. Hunter (2005) has argued that in South Africa, poor Black men are increasingly unable to fulfil this role, even though this was not always a traditionally prescribed role. Colonialism gradually destabilised the traditional role of men in African society, reinterpreting and shaping their role as head of the household with unassailable patriarchal rights, to one of breadwinner and provider (Morrell & Swart 2004). The gradual shift in traditional gender roles caused men to lose "their status, power and self-esteem" (Morrell & Swart 2004: 103). Sideris (2005) has provided key insights into the effects of this shift on male identity in rural parts of South Africa where traditions are more strongly entrenched. A loss of perhaps 'taken-for-granted' traditional forms of Black male identity has left men feeling insecure and vulnerable.

Meth and McClymont (2009: 913) revealed the underlying emotions generated by the inability of poor Black men in settlements in another part of South Africa to support their households, with one of their participants stating: "*I'm not a real man because I'm not working*". The man in question clearly believed that a 'real' man should be employed and oversee decisions in his household, of which he should also be the head. Similarly, in his diary (2018), Anathi speaks at length about the perceived role of men in his community:

> *Men are easily judged and if you are a man and not doing any effort for the*
> *family in terms of providing then he will be known as a useless man, not only*
> *by women but by those surrounding…. If you are a man you are a man no*
> *matter what and women won't give you support if you are a non-provider.*

This comment echoes the work of Morrell and Swart (2004) who found that many Black men today cannot meet the requirements of being a man in the traditional sense, and in failing to

live up to these ideals have lost their self-esteem. This, as Silberschmidt (1999) has also noted, leads to heightened gender antagonism.

What I feel many people often fail to appreciate is the boringness of life for those who live in poverty, especially those who have little or no work. Living in a small shack, there is not much else to do but sit around all day. In his diary, Mpendulo unwittingly reveals his unpunctuated existence, writing entries in his diary only on days when there was something for him to write about, but on a few occasions describing days spent doing nothing. He describes one such day of boredom,

> *I think it was a nice day for at least I did something for the day. Later I was*
> *thought to see the other brother who stay near by my place. I was home late.*
> *I think the day was much better than the other days*".

Mpendulo considers days when he has something constructive to do to be 'good days'. Thus, young men without work feel particularly powerless and unable to achieve either the traditional expectations of them as men or providers, or modernist ideals that see them as breadwinners.

4.3.3 Powerlessness and lack of personal agency

> "*The darkness had overcome me, and my life has turned into a joke*".
>
> (Simphiwe's diary, 2018).

This extract from Simphiwe's diary demonstrates the feelings of powerlessness and constant struggle for a better life, often expressed by young men in the study. The feelings of powerlessness are complexly situated at the intersection of both gender and racism in South African contexts. As Yuval-Davis (2006b: 155) notes, Black men and women live in a society that creates both gender-based norms and cultural expectations, which "racism operates simultaneously to deny", so that Black men are seldom viewed as powerful in the context of a marginalisation that has continued into the post-apartheid era.

Anathi writes frankly about his frustrations (Diary 2018):

> *Do I deserve all this shit which I'm going through? Why should I always*
> *feel the pain, which is caused by the people around me? Why can't I live a*
> *normal life the same as people my age?*

He goes on to describe the hardship of everyday life, living in a crowded dwelling with his unemployed alcoholic father, several younger siblings, and an older sister and her young disabled daughter. After his mother passed away, his sister began frequenting the nearby tavern, often with her father, absconding from any maternal duties, while his younger siblings had dropped out of school and his father had become prone to violent rages. Anathi had taken on responsibility for everyone, feeling trapped in a world he could not walk away from to explore his own horizons.

Mfuneko (Diary 2018), brought up by a single mother with his siblings in another flood-prone settlement, expressed his anguish about the harshness of life in his poetry after his mother, the only breadwinner, suffered a stroke and had to give up work:.

> *I am the greatest witness of life cruelties,*
> *I am the greatest witness of life brutalities*
> *I have seen life brutalise the innocents,*
> *I have seen life paralyse the kindest.*

These diary extracts illustrate how some young men experience periods of deep despair, reinforcing Cleaver's (2002: 3) argument that pervasive poverty has a "demasculising effect" on poor men. In illustrating this, I draw from the verses of an 'ode to poverty', written by Sipho:

> *Oh poverty, you took so many lives*
>
> *You broke so many souls*
>
> *You crippled so many bodies*
>
> *You twisted and damaged so many minds.*

Despite his moments of despair, however, Sipho is determined to lift himself out of poverty. In the final verse of this long rambling poem in his diary (2018) he declares:

> *I for one will fight you, I will chase you away from me*
>
> *I will tell you straight that you are not part of me*
>
> *I will break that long chain that is you*
>
> *I will scatter all those heavy pieces of steel into the ocean*
>
> *I will make sure that anything that belongs to you is destroyed.*

Many young men in the study group were similarly unemployed, or underemployed; dependent on various members of their families to support them, most often mothers or older sisters.

The noted indifference of some other young men perhaps suggests their lack of self-confidence but also their resignation to fate. Sommers (2012) has noted how young African men who fail to find meaningful employment and achieve socio-economic upward mobility can become 'stuck' and 'idle'. During a focus group discussion, school dropouts Zanemvula and Xola explained how they were restricted to poorly paid unskilled jobs, while Siya, now in his early 30s who failed to matriculate[18], experienced similar limitations, living precariously from one job to the next. Ntonipho, however, who had matriculated and tried unsuccessfully to study Information Technology, also survived doing piece-meal jobs. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, none of these young men had any longer-term plans or personal aspirations.

4.3.4 Limited prospects

Generally, young matriculated men in the study had dreams of better futures for themselves and their families, mirroring aspirations expressed by young men in another South African study (Morrell 2005), and the more recent work of Maqoma (2020: 1), who argues that "*the personhood of an African is constituted by communal reality*". Thus, the focus on people other than oneself is considered by many African scholars to be fundamental to African philosophy about life (Gyeke 1997; Ikuenobe 2006; Mbiti 1970; Menkiti 1984). Their selfless focus on family rather than individual interests starkly contrasts the image often portrayed of young township men satisfying narrow self-interests. Although education was generally perceived to be a route out of poverty, some dreamt of developing small businesses, which they believed would gain them respect. However, most of the young men were reliant on family or friendship networks to survive, lacking even moderate resources to realise their dreams.

Anathi, though unemployed, kept himself busy by volunteering at a local youth NGO and was troubled by the lack of commitment among other young men in his community, who he

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[18] Matric is the final year of high school in South Africa. On graduating, one receives a Matric Certificate and is said to have 'matriculated'.

believed were happy loitering all day rather than being more proactive. Questioning their lack of drive, he asks in his diary (2018):

> *Tell me is that the life you wanna live for the rest of your life? Don't you wanna see yourself as somebody one day, someone as a role model to every young child out there… why brothers you undermine yourself this much?*

Given the reality of life for young Black South Africans living in environments of poverty today and the limited opportunities for them to escape these shackles, a legacy of an apartheid past of which most have no memory, it is perhaps no surprise that young men as described here, stand on street corners passing the time of day. For those who, for one reason or another, did not even complete school, there is little chance of formal employment, while all piece-meal and unskilled work is hotly contested. Many of those interviewed in the study had never had a job, while others had only found poorly paid menial and boring labouring work that at best bought them a few beers and some meat at the end of the day. Most, however, had already fathered children, though the mothers of these children generally still lived with their parents, having limited expectations of support from the fathers of their children. When enquiring about what their girlfriends were doing with their lives, I noted marked differences in the ambitions of the young women compared to their boyfriends. Many of these young women were either studying or working, and many were claiming child support grants, which gave them some level of independence.

Thus, although according to Xhosa custom men's roles are prescribed, they are unable to meet these increasingly remote ideals, stuck in a kind of extended liminality as they fail to transition into a working life and the responsibilities of supporting their own households, which has been noted in other studies (Finn & Oldfield 2015; Honwana 2014). This, I would argue, is contributing to an increasing lack of agency among many young men such as those that Anathi reaches out to in his diary entry below, lamenting the failure of his friends to attend a workshop at a local youth NGO:

> *That's exactly how young men are… for them everything is about money, they don't wanna experience new things and explore the world … Do you think about your future when you waste every single second playing cards? Do you really love yourself when everything you do is just eat and sleep?*

The lack of interest noted by Anathi is also reflected in the work of Mason (2015) who investigated the meaning of life in African contexts. Mason (2015) found that a low sense of

meaning in life is much more than just an abstract concept, having negative longer-term effects on psychological well-being and behaviour.

I wanted to understand whether there was a pervasive lack of ambition among young men from poor environments, where many might only envisage lives of menial labour and piece-meal work. I asked each young man if they had ever had any dreams, either when they were younger, or perhaps still had such ambitions. Though some did not appear to have given it any serious thought - like Zanemvula, who had not completed school and had no dreams for a better future - most of the other young men, despite limited opportunities, had some aspirations. Though some were more realistic, wanting to start up a small local informal business, such as a car wash or a cooked meat stand ('*shisa nyama*'), others had bigger dreams. For example, Bungi wanted to become a chef, while Thando had always wanted to be a lawyer even though he did not finish school, and Xola wanted to study medicine. Kwanele, on the other hand, was good with his hands and loved art and had always wanted to study engineering or industrial design. Similarly, Vuyo, who did part-time work at a bakery, had also wanted to study something creative like graphic design. An interesting finding was that many of the young men wanted to do something creative involving art, music, or even dancing.

Alakhe had discovered his talent for art, grasping opportunities to explore his talent at every turn. He had worked hard to achieve his goals, furthering his education through scholarships and self-funding, eventually starting his own small photography business. Although he had improved his standard of living and was able to help his family, his success had come at a price, making him the target of other people's jealousy. He explained in his diary (2018):

> *In my community people when they see you as educated… the thing they*
> *want from you is a secret of making money. After they get jealous of me and*
> *I get to be a witch.*

Thus, success engenders the contempt of others struggling to survive in marginalised environments, undermining those endeavouring to uplift themselves, a consequence also noted by Henson (2001) in her South African study of young Black surfers.

Alakhe, though not supported financially, had the love and emotional support of older sisters and an older woman who took him into her home for a short period. Using life history diagrams to trace the defining influences that have shaped their lives revealed the central role women play in shaping their behaviour and their identities. The role of women in the lives of

the young men was critical in either providing support, as in Alakhe's case, but also in contributing to their perceived sense of vulnerability.

4.3.5 Relationships with women

> *You are my sun and moon, you are my words and tune*
> *My earth, my sky and my sea*
> *You are my light in darkness, you are my peace and happiness*
> *My hope, my forever love.*
>
> (Simphiwe's diary, 2018).

This poem from Simphiwe's diary reveals great tenderness towards women, illustrating an emotional vulnerability that stands in stark contrast to other accounts of informal settlement men that I had engaged with (Barker & Ricardo 2005; Dartnall & Jewkes 2013; Hearn 2012). Many participants similarly expressed deep feelings of love for young women, especially in their diaries, but admitted to feeling challenged to sustain relationships by their lack of resources and limited prospects, echoing Cornwall's (2003) study of young Nigerian men.

With limited resources to call on, young men are acutely aware of the lack of control that they have over life. They expressed frustration about their lack of agency in relation to young women, who were often perceived to be materialistic and demanding, deliberately attracting men who could provide for them. During his absence to attend college in the city, for example, Mcebisi, a 35-year-old unemployed teacher at the time, found that his girlfriend and mother of his 3-year-old son, was cheating on him, "*...with another guy who had his own car and a lot of money*" (Interview 2018), who was providing material things he could not provide. Anathi, similarly, feared his girlfriend would leave him, saying:

> *Just wonder if she can say it's over because I'm not working ...what kind*
> *of man is this who cannot even buy a loaf of bread* (Diary 2018).

His fears are compounded by the demands she makes on him:

> *When passing a shop or when interested in something she will ask you to*
> *buy it for her. Imagine she knows you are not working but she will ask you*
> *for something!* (Diary 2018).

His feelings of inadequacy often manifest themselves in violent behaviour towards her, especially when he has been drinking and has the 'courage' to confront her.

While it is acknowledged that violent physical behaviour continues to reinforce male hegemony over women in contemporary South Africa (Dartnall & Jewkes 2013; Jewkes et al. 2015; Morrell et al. 2012; Reid & Walker 2005; Wood & Jewkes 2001), several young men insisted that such behaviour is expected and reinforced by women themselves, which is consistent with the literature (Frosch et al. 2002; Hunter 2010; Ratele 2001; Salo 2007; Talbot & Quayle 2010; Wetherall & Edley 1999).

The increase in women's rights in South Africa is acknowledged to be shifting men's roles as well as their sense of themselves (Gibbs et al. 2014; Morrell et al. 2013; Reid & Walker 2005; Thompson 2002). While most of those interviewed claimed to have a 'modern' outlook towards women and marriage, supporting the ideal of gender equality, they nevertheless continued to command respect from women. Again, this reveals how young men are grappling with the contradiction of a contemporary rights discourse that empowers women, and the simultaneous retention of more traditional Xhosa cultural values that are important for defending their manhood. These conflicted values are illustrated in diary entries from Ndumiso, a 26-year-old part-time maths tutor and devout member of a charismatic church, who wrote:

> *After thousands of years of male dominance we are standing at the beginning of the female era, when women will rise to their appropriate prominence* (Diary 2018).

His values seem conflicted, however, as Ndumiso also insists that:

> *The woman must listen to her husband because the man is the master of the house. The first thing that you as a man should follow is the edict, a man should honour his wife more than he does himself …. If the man does not fulfil his role, then it is the woman who must bring it respectfully to his attention* (Diary 2018).

His ambivalence demonstrates the competing value-sets he tries to accommodate – Xhosa traditions, Christian beliefs and democratic values - which have also been noted in the literature (Meth 2009; Morrell & Swart 2004; Ratele 2014; 2016).

Another way in which young men claim male privilege is in the negotiated payment of 'damages' to the families of young women who have borne their children out of marriage. Most of the participants in the study, though still unmarried, had already fathered children. Their perspectives on marriage were quite telling of the shifting values among poor young men. Luvo, for example, met his current girlfriend at church, but already had a four-year-old daughter from a previous relationship. Despite his parents' good marriage, he had watched his sister's marriage fail and saw no value in this institution, not expecting to ever get married himself. His rejection of marriage was partly because he was disenchanted with the idea of marriage, fearing the hurt of rejection and break-up, but also because of the noted expense of having a wedding.

In Xhosa culture, failure to pay damages denies men paternity rights. Not having paternity rights means that male children cannot, in accordance with tradition, be introduced to their father's ancestors, become members of his clan, or be initiated at the father's family home (Mfecane 2018). This illustrates the continued role of tradition in providing signifiers of manhood among young men denied other forms of agency.

Many men today have grown up without fathers or other male role models (Ratele et al. 2012; Richter et al. 2012; Thompson 2002). In their absence, most young men in the study had been raised by grandmothers or single mothers who they also frequently identified as their heroes. These women play a significant, yet often ambivalent role in shaping masculine identities (Cornwall 2003; Hunter 2005; 2010; Morrell et al. 2013; Salo 2007; Talbot & Quayle 2010), providing both a feminine touch and perpetuating traditional male hegemonic practices. Ndumiso, for example, said his mother had taught him about Xhosa culture and "*to understand the role of women in relation to men*" (Interview 2018). This suggests that in rearing young men, women may themselves be perpetuating traditional gender rights and practices that contradict modern values and the different expected behaviours young men encounter in the city. Accommodating contrasting value sets is challenging and confusing, especially for those reared in traditional rural areas before moving to the city.

The relationships between poor Black men and women in South Africa are shifting. No longer seen as the protectors, providers, and household decision-makers they once were, as Ramphele and Richter (2006: 80) explain, men have become "deeply troubled". Many feel disempowered by their dependence on women to support and care for them, contradicting the once taken-for-granted patriarchal-based value system that once assigned women with an inferior status to men. This has created a discord between the normative cultural expectations

of them as men, and the reality of the environments of deep poverty where they feel vulnerable and demoralised, made powerless through unemployment.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The empirical research presented in this chapter provides a more grounded understanding of these young men; demonstrating how they are conflicted by their loss of traditional behavioural registers in urban contexts, and how this is shaping the complex alternative urban identities they find necessary for survival. It reveals how and why young men become vulnerable to the vagaries of life, for it is in these marginalised spaces where their masculine identity is most challenged, not only by the physical nature of their living environments, but also by their lack of power to elicit change. In informal living environments they struggle to fulfil their roles as men as prescribed by Xhosa tradition, providers for and protectors of their families. Instead, they are constantly conflicted, trying to forge a meaningful life in a society that is changing and in which their roles are shifting and their identities often becoming somewhat ambiguous.

Vulnerability is a difficult concept to define, illustrated by the number of different definitions one can draw from and the fact that there are no universally accepted measurements or models for it, or indicators of it (Birkmann 2006; Hufschmidt 2011). It is structured from a range of different elements that develop over time and space. The findings described in this chapter suggest that the term 'intersectionality' offers a useful way of unpacking the concept of vulnerability in the context of this study. Moolman (2013) contends that the concept of intersectionality is useful for interpreting practices of masculinity and the lived realities of men. In this study, the building blocks of vulnerability among young Xhosa men living on the urban margins are manifested as different forms of marginalisation that intersect in interesting ways. These include gender, being men in contemporary South Africa where their roles and entitlements have fundamentally shifted; their age - too old to be included in youth programmes, yet not yet transitioned into adulthood through gainful employment (Finn & Oldfield 2015), denying them opportunities to establish independent households of their own but rather dependent on others. It has also highlighted the expectations still placed upon them as Xhosa men charged to protect and support families of their own and judged in such terms by both men and women. All this against a background of pervasive poverty that undermines their agency, thereby emasculating them.

Although referencing the lives of Black women in her discussion of intersectionality, Yuval-Davis (2006b) finds that the people who are located at these intersections "by virtue of their specific identities, must negotiate the traffic that flows through these intersections" (Yuval-Davis, as cited in Centre for Women's Global Leadership 2001:1). In demonstrating how the vulnerability of young Xhosa men is constructed, I have revealed how poverty, gender, age and the binaries of modern and traditional, rural and urban life, intersect in complex ways, shaping the identities that these young men are vested in, and their world view which at the same time is underpinned by a fundamentally communitarian spirit that is truly African.

In the following chapter, the focus turns to how young men address the challenges they encounter, describing the role models they draw from, and the various strategies and mechanisms they employ in trying to cope with the risks they encounter in life.

CHAPTER 5: COPING MECHANISMS AND ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In deconstructing vulnerability, it is also critical to consider its 'flip side': the ways in which people anticipate, cope with, or adapt to perceived threats or hazards (Pelling 2003; Wisner, 2016). To do this, according to Nussbaum (2011), it is important to consider not only people's personal attributes but also the specific political, social, economic, and environmental contexts in which they have the freedom and opportunities to develop such capabilities. The term 'capability' incorporates the range of capacities that people develop to respond to threats or adversity, including both short-term coping strategies and longer-term adaptations (Pelling 2003). When such capacities are constrained, however, such as through processes of marginalisation that render them invisible and voiceless, people are made powerless and therefore vulnerable (Wisner 2016). Thus, in determining the building blocks of their vulnerability, the study also sought to understand how the young men dealt with adversity, both in the context of everyday life and in relation to deeper, generally less surfaced existential dilemmas.

In the sections that follow, I describe key coping strategies identified in the study. These include the role of mentors and role models, which varied from relatively short-term influences that led some young men to make specific decisions, to interactions that led to fundamental shifts in their moral codes or overarching personal principles. Thereafter, in exploring the less tangible theme of spiritual guidance, I discuss traditional and religious beliefs and how these are often manifested in seemingly contradictory ways and even at the same time. I demonstrate how the individual attitudes of young men build on these and other influences in navigating life on the margins, discussing the importance of mental space for self-reflection and decision-making. Lastly, the chapter explores how these variables contribute to meaning of life, young men's ambitions for the future, and the noticeably Afrocentric ways in which these are framed.

5.2 ROLE MODELS AND CRITICAL INFLUENCERS

It was important to consider the role players who had influenced the young men, and how they had contributed to shaping the decisions they made and the paths they followed. Although Ratele (2016) suggests that guides tend to increase the likelihood that men will lead healthy

and successful lives and sustain a relatively positive approach to their future, not all influences revealed in this study could be considered as positive ones. It became evident that while influential people had been instrumental in shaping some of the men's outlooks on life, often affecting key shifts in direction, their absence in the lives of others was also significant.

Figure 6 provides an example of an adapted participatory method, the Venn Diagram, used in the study to track key influencers in the lives of the young men. This diagram demonstrates how complexity was simplified through graphic representation, allowing me to probe issues further. The 'bubbles' represent key moments that the young man identified in his life, while the lines joining them signal how strong relationships were; using dotted, dashed, or solid lines to indicate the varying strength of these relationships and how they may have changed over time.

Figure 6 Venn diagram identifying key role players in a young man's life

In the following sections I discuss categories of influencers identified in the study, using extracts from the case studies to illustrate their roles in shaping the lives of the young men.

5.2.1 The role of family

Close family members, such as grandmothers, mothers, fathers, and even clan members were among those most frequently identified as key role players and role models. They are discussed here in order of their noted importance across the sample.

5.2.1.1 Grandmothers

Grandmothers had significant influence in the lives of many of the young men, who often considered them their role models. They were more commonly cited as key influencers among those reared in the Eastern Cape, while those raised in the city more often identified their mother, or a favourite aunt or uncle.

The interview sessions revealed that grandmothers influenced their grandsons in two seemingly contradictory ways. While they taught discipline and traditional values and norms, providing their earliest indoctrination in patriarchal rights, if the grandmothers were very elderly and the household lacked young women or girls, grandmothers taught their grandsons how to tackle household chores such as cooking and cleaning; duties usually fulfilled by women in a traditional home. In some respects, this taught young men the modern values of sharing household responsibilities with women, but also helped some to survive later when alone in the city.

Anathi (Interview 2018) explained, for example, that while living alone with his grandmother, who he said he considered to be his real mother, he did all the cleaning and cooking, proudly describing the dishes he had learned to make. Many other young men similarly recounted how they were brought up doing what they said was normally considered women's work, such as brewing traditional beer. Misumzi (Interview 2018), who similarly lived alone with his grandmother in the family compound, described watching, from a distance, the other children playing, while he performed chores all day for his grandmother and longed to join his friends.

It was frequently grandmothers who encultured young boys in their traditional role as men, perpetuating the patriarchal dividend and traditional rights they would later invoke in their relationships with women. Fikile (Interview 2018), for example, had been reared in the city by his grandmother in what he described as a traditional Xhosa home, where they followed all the traditions and conducted ritual ceremonies. Isivile, on the other hand, had been reared by his grandmother in the Eastern Cape, where she had taught him 'rules he should follow'. In some ironic twist of fate, the very same women whose lives had been controlled by men in

accordance with this patriarchal system were the ones who perpetuated these practices, while simultaneously also teaching men other non-traditional gender roles.

5.2.1.2 Mothers

Mothers also featured prominently in many of the young men's stories. Rolihlahla (Interview 2018), for example, described his mother as a tower of strength. He explained that "*she was a very different type of human being, a very powerful woman*". In illustrating this, Rolihlahla described how she had brought him to the city from the Eastern Cape; he remembers how she went to the Belville rubbish dump where she scrounged enough materials to build them a shack in Site B, Khayelitsha. Perhaps her fortitude is part of the reason he is employed today in the NGO sector, a vociferous campaigner in the fight to stop violence against women.

Mfuneko (Interview 2018) was raised by a strict mother in Masiphumelele, who he deeply respected. During his teenage years, when his friends became involved in criminal activities, he became conflicted. After being involved with his 'crew' in the mugging of a foreign national one night, fearing violent community retribution and his mother's wrath, he turned away from them, becoming absorbed in his studies to appease her.

Lwasi (Interview 2017) grew up initially with his grandfather in the Eastern Cape and later came to live in the city with his mother who was a working professional. He reflected on how he benefitted from both his grandfather's teachings, which he claimed taught him respect and tradition, and later the oversight and strong guidance he received from his mother. On Lwasi's arrival in the city, his mother sent him to English-speaking schools where he was a receptive learner, later progressing to study a business degree at the University of Fort Hare. Lwasi described himself as someone who had goals for himself. Similarly, Mncedisi's (Interview 2017) mother, who he described as 'self-taught' rather than well-educated, had a good job with a legal firm. Surrounded by educated people, she decided that this is what she wanted for her son. When I met Mncedisi, he was in his final year at a college, studying journalism.

Mfuneko claimed that his mother was central to his life, someone who could 'make a plan' around any problem. The poetic outpourings in his diary, however, presented a young man emotionally affected by the hardships he had watched his mother face, lamenting the absence of his father in his life. His mother had explained to him that his father had abandoned her when she fell pregnant, and she would never reveal his identity. Mfuneko would later discover that his father lived in the same settlement and repatriated with him, only to be let down by

him on many occasions. He contrasted this behaviour with that of his mother who "*always kept her promises*".

In contrast to the young men's admiration for their mothers, the absence of their fathers was often lamented. This was hardly surprising, as Richter et al. (2012) point out that South Africa has one of the highest rates of paternal absence globally.

5.2.1.3 Fathers

Generally, when fathers form part of their children's lives, they not only perform better at school, but feel more secure and have higher levels of self-esteem (Richter et al. 2012). Contrastingly, a lack of fatherly input has adverse consequences, especially for male children.

Many of those who grew up with their fathers living in the house, or whose fathers played a significant part of their lives less directly, seemed more emotionally balanced and had more positive outlooks on life than those who had lacked this input. When speaking about their future dreams and ambitions, frequently it was the young men who had grown up with their fathers who seemed to have more forward-looking visions for themselves. Luva (Interview 2018), for example, grew up in the Eastern Cape and later came to live with his father in the city after finishing school. His father had a permanent job in a construction company and encouraged his children to further their education. Both Luva's older siblings had already completed tertiary studies and found good jobs. Encouraged by his father and his sister, Luva enrolled to study Electrical Engineering but was later forced to withdraw when he failed to obtain a bursary to complete his studies. After his father retired to the Eastern Cape, his sister continued to encourage Luva to seek vocational training.

When asked about his father, Fikile (Interview 2018) shut the conversation down with a strong statement, "*My father was not part of my life*". His father, it turned out, lived in the same street yet had never developed a relationship with his son. Mzingisi (Interview 2018), however, was less hostile about his absent father. Mzingisi explained that although he had been provided with everything he needed when growing up, he had missed having a father because one was supposed to learn from a father.

Although, as it has been noted, the absence of fathers is a growing phenomenon in South Africa (Langa 2020) and globally (Richter et al. 2012), it is important to understand the implications of their absence in the context of Xhosa culture. Knowing one's father is particularly important for young Xhosa men, connecting them as it does to their father's

ancestors and the dividends of support and security this is meant to provide, as well as by becoming members of their father's clan (Mfecane 2018; Richter et al. 2012). It is also critical for fathers to be involved in a young man's *ulwaluko,* the traditional circumcision ritual that forms the rite of passage into manhood. Xhosa manhood is built around the concept of *indoda*[19], which is earned through the *ulwaluko* process. This ritual is about much more than the physical process of circumcision. Young men are removed from society for up to six weeks, during which time they receive instruction from male elders who are their guardians throughout this process, teaching them how to be good Xhosa men and what community expectations of their conduct and responsibilities will be moving forward (Mfecane 2016). It signifies the end of childhood and the adoption of manly traits, affording young men particular traditional rights and privileges, such as membership of their father's clan, which in turn entitles them to the protection of his ancestors. It also permits young men to get married and form their own household, and to join other men in community discussions (Mfecane 2016; Ntombana 2011). Being an *indoda* thus defines men's status in Xhosa society (Mfecane 2016). To be able to undertake this process, it is therefore important for Xhosa men to know their real fathers.

Several young men in the study went to great lengths to track down their biological fathers so that they could perform this ritual, though often unsuccessfully. Such quests are consistent with the literature (Mfecane 2018; Nduna & Jewkes 2011). Mfecane (2018: 297) explains that young men want their father to arrange their initiation so that he can be introduce them to his ancestors, who they believe have "the power to transform their lives positively and pave a way for them". When young Xhosa men suffer from misfortune, or personal problems, they often believe that their ancestors are angry with them, frequently because of their father's failure to introduce them through ritual ceremonies.

Alakhe, for example, who suffered from chronic ill-health that could not be explained medically, spent time trying to trace his father, believing that a run of bad luck he was experiencing was because he had not been introduced to his father's ancestors. Unlike many other young men, however, Anathi did find his father, living with him for several years. He mentions this good fortune in his diary (2018), saying:

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[19] *Indoda* is a traditionally circumcised man. Only such men are considered 'real' men in Xhosa society.

I was happy that I had a father. I told him that I wanted to do imbeleko[20] he said
we gonna do it…. Most men they don't stay with their fathers like me.

Indeed, not all the young men were so lucky, blaming their misfortunes on disconnection from their father's clan and ancestors. Mzingisi (Interview 2018) felt that failure to meet his father's ancestors, due to his father's absence in his life, and holding his mother's and not his father's surname, had brought him bad luck.

5.2.1.4 The importance of clan kinship

In Xhosa culture, every person has a family surname in addition to a clan identity, which provides them with the protection and guidance of their ancestors (Mfecane 2018). Clan names are also very important signifiers of status. At birth, each child is recognised formally and welcomed as a member of their clan in a ritual ceremony called '*imbeleko*" (Bogopa 2010; see also Footnote 20 below).

Rolihlahla and Lwasi both spoke about the importance of belonging to a clan in the lives of Xhosa men. Rolihlahla (Interview 2018) explained how it gives one a sense of identity and belonging, often offering a bulwark in times of adversity. Sipho (Interview 2018), who lacked any immediate family to turn to in times of trouble, described how he had once tracked down his 'clan brother' when working in an unfamiliar part of the city. Although he admitted this was a rather tenuous relationship, this clanship link was useful in finding him a place to live in an area that he was not familiar with. Sipho explained that although traditional clan connections are supposed to be strong, this had not been so in his case. Given that Sipho had not grown up with his father, who would have been instrumental in connecting him with his clan, this is perhaps hardly surprising.

Lwazi (Interview 2017) explained that men without fathers had adapted by seeking out surrogate father figures, often drawing on their clan-based membership in doing so, in the belief that their ancestors would help them connect with such extended members of their 'family'. Other members of the family also played critical roles, often filling the void left by lost or absent parents.

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[20] *Imbeleko* is the Xhosa ritual of introducing someone to their ancestors.

5.2.1.5 Other family members

Family support is a critical factor in reducing the vulnerability of young men (Richter et al. 2012). In the Xhosa tradition, the brother of one's mother, who is referred to as *umalumi,* also holds a very important place, often fulfilling roles of absent or even irresponsible fathers. In Anathi's case (Diary 2018), his maternal uncle played a significant part in his upbringing, especially at the time of his initiation. Although Anathi's father was not absent in the physical sense, he was a heavy drinker prone to long periods of unemployment, and certainly not a positive role model. Anathi's admiration for his maternal uncle knew no bounds, as illustrated by this quote from his diary (2018):

> *You raised your voice uncle saying no matter what I'm going to the bush. You allowed me to your house as my father didn't have one… You made sure everything got done according to the traditional way and you stood for it. Thank you, Uncle.*"

But paternal uncles were also noted in the life stories of some young men. In Mcebisi's case (Interview 2018), his father's brothers not only provided him with a place to stay and found him a job on his arrival in the city, but also mentored and guided him. It was building on this strong foundation of familial support that Mcebisi was later able to educate himself and his younger brother, who followed him to the city from the Eastern Cape.

People outside the immediate family had also made notable impressions on the young men, often providing the direction that their parents could not provide. These people, external to the men's immediate living environments, are discussed next.

5.2.2 People external to the immediate living environment

In the absence of strong family-based support, many of the young men interviewed had found other role models and mentors who had influenced the decisions they made and the directions that their lives took consequently. Their roles were found to have been critical in introducing them to alternative perspectives and shifting the mindsets of some young men, which were often limited by the insularity of lives lived in peripheral urban spaces.

5.2.2.1 Teachers

Teachers featured frequently in the stories of the young men, providing mentorship and other forms of guidance and support. Teachers were often the people who had pointed out their

personal strengths to them, giving them direction and offering them career advice. Some young men reflected how their teachers had taken on roles as their spiritual guides, and at times had even performed the duties of surrogate parents.

Msumzi (Interview 2018), for example, was deeply influenced by teachers from his rural village school. He explained how his teachers had helped him to learn to adapt to situations he might encounter in life and to try to respond positively to adversity. Msumzi did not single out a particular teacher but claimed that they had all played a part in shaping him by teaching him about life. He explained that some teachers were also good listeners to whom he could speak about anything, again raising the issue of trust that was so often surfaced in my conversations with the young men.

Paki (Interview 2018) grew up in an informal settlement in the city with parents who both drank excessively. He would frequently sleep over at other people's homes when his parents got into drunken fights. Though he claimed that growing up in hardship had made him a stronger person, he also admitted that he had failed to make friends at school because he was shy and perhaps unsocialised due to the nature of his home-life. Paki had nobody to confide in until he got to high school, when his English teacher became central to his life, listening to his problems and encouraging him in his schoolwork.

Mpendulo (Interview 2018) spent a lot of time in the library reading up about things that interested him. His Life Science teacher in high school had noticed this natural curiosity and encouraged it. She mentored and guided him, even allowing him to visit her at home during after school hours, a relationship they have maintained to this day. Based on his interests, Mpendulo's teacher believed that he should attend medical school, and tried unsuccessfully to get him a small job at a local clinic. Although Mpendulo was unable to pursue this course of study, today he runs a stall at a Khayelitsha taxi rank where he sells medicinal herbs, about which he is well-informed due to his continuous quest for knowledge. This endeavour is perhaps not so far removed from his teacher's earlier aspirations for him.

Similarly, Alakhe (Interview 2018) had a very caring science teacher in high school, who he described as being "*like a social worker*" because of the way she understood and advised him. She encouraged Alakhe to explore his talent for various art forms, and today he continues to seek opportunities to expand his creative and other skillsets. For example, Alakhe once signed up at the Learn-to-Earn Centre in Khayelitsha to advance his computer skills. Today, he has a small photography business, and when I met him, he had just helped to organise an

exhibition in Khayelitsha promoting township art. Alakhe is fiercely proud of the independence that education and training have earned him.

Ndumisa's talent for Mathematics (Interview 2018) was noticed by his high school teacher who, he said, had made the subject fun and inspired him. Ndumisa's teacher found him an opportunity to become a tutor for an international education NGO working in Khayelitsha. Though the organisation later withdrew from South Africa at the end of their project cycle, Ndumiso continues to tutor high school children, using rooms in the local library as a teaching space. Despite his noted abilities, however, he has never had the opportunity nor the resources to study to become a teacher, continuing to survive on the limited income he earns from tutoring poor local children.

Lelelthu (Interview 2016), who grew up in the city, was fortunate enough to attend a mixed race, ex-Model C school[21]. Here he received a good education and was deeply influenced by his Maritime Studies teacher who urged him to study to become a shipping agent. Together with his mother, they encouraged him to take on various internships after school and to study further. Lelelthu was completing his N6 in Public Management[22] at the time of our interviews.

Many young men in the study had been reared by parents who had received little or no education themselves. A legacy of the segregated apartheid education system that provided inferior schooling to people of colour, many could offer little or no assistance with their children's schoolwork nor understand their desire for an education. Sipho's mother, for example, was illiterate because she was raised in a rural area where schooling was seldom available to girls. Lack of education among parents was a significant stumbling block often noted in the study, not only because parents could not assist with schoolwork, but also because they then often failed to understand the value of education or their son's desires to further their studies.

In some cases, the role of parents in giving guidance was often taken up by external organisations who could also provide broader worldviews than those the young men were

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[21] Model C schools were an interim arrangement introduced by the apartheid government in 1991 for governing Whites-only government schools in South Africa. The term "Model C" is still commonly used to describe former Whites-only schools.

[22] N6 is a post-matric qualification in a practical vocation.

typically exposed to at home. These external organisations and the role they played are unpacked in the next section.

5.2.2.2 Development organisations

Many development organisations and NGOs working on the ground in informal communities around Cape Town provide critical functions that the state has not been able to provide, particularly in areas such as youth and child development or vocational training. They offer valuable opportunities for young people to get involved in their communities and make a difference through their collective efforts. Many young people are drawn to volunteerism by these organisations, for which they sometimes receive a small stipend.

Such organisations had performed important roles in the lives of many of the young men in the study. For example, a youth development organisation had introduced Anathi (Interview 2018) to community development work through their volunteer programme. Here, he received training in running youth guidance programmes. Similarly, Samkelo (Interview 2018) was introduced to volunteerism, enjoying the time he spent with an organisation working with young children. Samkelo explained how his work for the NGO had offered an escape, although he later became over-committed and distracted from his own studies.

External organisations offer exciting opportunities to poor young people, broadening their worldviews through interesting experiences, such as field trips to other places, hosting foreign donors, and arranging visits for foreign experts. Samkelo (Interview 2018) had been introduced to an Education NGO by the Deputy Principal at his high school. Here he had received tutoring, which improved his grades at school and enabled him to eventually be accepted to study law at a local university Through this voluntary work for the organisation, which involved training peer educators among the youth, he was also taken hiking and camping, which exposed him to other realities outside of his immediate area for the first time.

In many instances, 'volunteers' are unpaid for their work, although the men I interacted with were keenly aware that money is being spent on other seemingly unnecessary things, as this excerpt from Anathi's diary (2018) reveals:

> *Uba Taxi for the first time. Yho Uba is very expensive, from Khayelitsha to Samora is R120. What the fuck! That could have lasted me for a week to go to my mentoring classes. Mr [X] didn't mind at all, he just said 'that's about $10, Ok no problem'.*

It was disconcerting to discover how little some of the well-intentioned members of these organisations understood of the home circumstances of their young volunteers, and how unaware they were of how abandoned many young men felt when the services they had provided so willingly were no longer required, finding themselves left once again with nothing to do. There was notably limited, if any, follow through, such as placement in jobs based on the newly learned skills the young men had gained. Still confined to living on the periphery, opportunities remained hard to find. In his diary, Alakhe (2018) reflected how despite the trainings and internships he had completed through various organisations, he was still unable to obtain a 'good' job:

> *In terms of education, I have done many things. Only one thing I am worried about is that am getting old without getting a proper job. I am getting internships/learnerships. I trust myself but it's difficult to find a permanent job.*

Similarly, Bongani (Interview 2018) was provided with a two-year bridging course after finishing school by a large international Christian organisation. This transported him into an unfamiliar world, attending school with people from other racial groups, living in the relative luxury of the school hostel, eating regular meals, and even travelling overseas on several occasions on school trips. But Bongani came from an impoverished background where his inferior schooling soon caused him to fall behind the rest of the class. He found the workload intense, with numerous assignments expected each week. Without his own laptop initially, he could not keep up, but even once provided with one, he found it unfamiliar and still failed to keep pace with his peers. After completing this intensive two-year programme, Bongani had relatively little to show for it and returned home to find that his parents had separated. His father continued to support him on the meagre income he made from shoe repairs. When I met Bongani, he was still without work and living with his father in a shack in Khayelitsha. Bongani was keeping himself busy with arranging soccer tournaments for young children, trying to keep them off the streets and out of trouble, perhaps a vestige of his Christian training of the previous years.

These findings illustrate the often short-lived benefits of so many well-intentioned interventions provided to young men like Bongani, who are perhaps left feeling even more frustrated afterwards, knowing that beyond the boundaries of their poverty-stricken neighbourhoods lie numerous opportunities that remain just out of their reach. It was evident, though, that the young men benefitted in a variety of less tangible ways from these short-lived encounters. Samkelo, for example, who went camping and hiking in the mountains with the

organisation he worked with, found that these experiences had exposed him to the world outside of his settlement. He explained that he had started to view 'township life' quite differently afterwards, suggesting that his encounter with the organisation shifted his perspective as well as his consciousness.

The section that follows looks at the role of more localised institutions and role players, who potentially better understand the context of the everyday lives of the men in this study. Whether these local institutions and role players provide more significant support is discussed next.

5.2.2.3 Religious role players: Churches, pastors, and tabernacle brothers

The important role that religion played in the lives of many of the young men (discussed in more detail in Section 5.3 below), was for me a somewhat surprising finding of the study. Though I was aware of the deep spirituality of African people (See for example Mbiti 1970 and Masango 2007), I did not expect to encounter this among young men from informal areas. Religious services, however, provided the young men with opportunities to meet other people in safe spaces and share communal meals, and typically involved music, choral singing, playing musical instruments, and even dancing, all of which were very appealing to the young men's softer sides. Ndumiso (Interview 2018), for example, was a member of a charismatic apostolic mission church where he felt a deep sense of belonging; a place of peace where healing ceremonies were conducted, offering hope to those in dire need.

Anathi had always been very close to his mother who had tragically passed away, leaving a void in his life; a space later filled by the local pastor and his wife. While the pastor would select inspirational "*notes for the day*", as Anathi called them (Interview 2018), which explained biblical verses that the pastor felt had relevance for the problem presented, the pastor's wife would listen to Anathi and offer him 'motherly' advice. Anathi felt conflicted, however, in opening up to her about what he saw as his failures as a man:

> *…his lovely wife she also a mother to me as she would always say whenever we*
> *in need of something we should talk to her, but that's not easy. I am a man and*
> *I wish I could do the best I can to look after my family.*

The role of religious leaders seems to fill the void often created by a lack of familial support, and the waning belief in the power of ancestors to intercede in contemporary contexts.

Charismatic religious groups that have developed in urban spaces are perhaps more attuned to the realities of life in these complex urban landscapes.

As the next section explains, not all the role models that influenced the young men and the decisions they made were necessarily positive ones.

5.2.3 Negative influences

In mapping the young men's life histories, it was possible to identify gaps in individual timelines and probe them a little further. Often the young men themselves, having built their trust in me over time, began to fill in these gaps in subsequent sessions. Inevitably, these constituted the 'bad' times and their 'naughty stories' that they had been ashamed to tell me about initially, not wanting to damage the positive image they felt I had already created of them.

Kanelo (Interview2016), for example, had spent time for robbery in Pollsmoor Prison and believed that even prison life had had its advantages, claiming that he had toughened up there and learned how to stand up for himself. Trying to explain what he considered to be the 'positive' influence prison life had had on him, Kanelo said: "*prison teaches you a positive life where the gangs have rules that you have to follow*". Kanelo had attended a local high school that offered a maritime studies programme, taking military subjects for matric and clearly enjoying the culture of discipline that this involved – gang life for him had similarly provided rules and boundaries. Growing up without men at home, Kanelo had been mentored in prison by men for the first time in his life, which seems to have filled an important void in his life. He believed that the time spent with the gangsters had given him the self-confidence that he had lacked before. Thus, Kanelo's love of military style discipline had not been encouraged or harnessed in constructive ways.

Other young men described the influence of gangsters and thieves in their lives, impressed by their material wealth and swarve attitudes. Simphiwe (Interview 2018), for example, who had never had a father figure of his own, joined a gang while in high school so that he could hang out with the 'big boys'. After stabbing a boy from school during a gang fight that resulted in the boy losing a kidney, he was clearly impressed when the boy's father donated his own kidney to save his son's life. Simphiwe was markedly affected by this show of parental love and later turned away from crime.

Anathi (Interview 2018), on the other hand, had started off his criminal activities trying to provide food for his family, stealing from the storeroom of his school feeding scheme. Although his family knew what he was doing, they turned a blind eye through their dire need of sustenance. Anathi's activities became more daring, however, when he later befriended a gangster who encouraged him to rob people on the trains with him. At first, he had admired the man's courage and enjoyed the thrill of it, but when his partner was later arrested, Anathi turned away from crime. Anathi would later join a youth NGO in his area, helping to mentor young men who were turning to crime.

Mfuneko (Interview 2018) had become part of a 'crew' while in high school. Such groups, as McDowell (2000) found in her study of young men in Westernised contexts, form important roles in building adolescent identities in poor, marginalised communities. In justifying membership of a crew, Mfuneko explained that "*in Black communities you have to be someone*" because not being part of a group leaves you alone and vulnerable. His small crew of eight, one among many in the neighbourhood where he lived, created their own identity by adopting a name, wearing clothes in a certain way, and listening to particular music. Although a harmless friendship group initially, the crew later started to smoke cigarettes, then cannabis, eventually beginning to perpetrate criminal activities. In Masiphumelele where Mfuneko lived, a group of women, who he referred to as the Bambanani, were actively trying to reduce crime by tracking down offenders and physically punishing them. Fearing that his mother would hand him over if these fearsome ladies came looking for him, Mfuneko withdrew from the group to focus on his studies, eventually completing his matric while many others in his crew dropped out of school.

What made the difference in Simphiwe's case was his deep respect for his mother, who in the absence of a father figure, was very strict and even imposed a curfew on him. Others who lacked role models were not so fortunate. Vuyo (Interview 2017), for example, who had spent much of his teenage life living alone, admitted that avoiding peer pressure to join local gangs had been hard, insisting that staying safe required constant vigilance and keeping to oneself.

Mncedisi (Interview 2017), on the other hand, who grew up with a determined mother who had inspired him to take his education seriously, declared his abhorrence for these local 'crews', explaining that in his opinion, young men who joined them were actually "*seeking belonging*", whereas he believed that life should be about deciding what you really want to achieve. His mother provided Mncedisi with a strong moral compass, while so many others lacked such guidance; not seeing the value in capacitating themselves to move out of poverty.

5.2.4 Lack of role models

Not all the participants in the study were able to identify a role model or personal mentor. Sipho (Interview 2018), for example, now in his early thirties, who had grown up living rough in an old army tent in the bushes among woodcutters on the outskirts of the city with an illiterate mother, had literally reared himself. Sipho had determined his own moral registers, differentiating between what he considered right and wrong. Sipho's life among the drunken woodcutters had profoundly influenced his early outlook on life. Quietly observing their behaviour, he became reflective and soul-searching, determined to rise above what he considered a meaningless existence. In befriending the White middle-class women from a nearby affluent suburb who stopped to buy wood from him, and later supported him through school, he encountered a very different and perhaps confusing alternative reality. Later, his sojourn at a relatively good high school, which was sponsored by the ladies, exposed him to yet another world, and with it a set of moral values that initially shifted him away from his Xhosa culture. After finishing school, he was provided with an office job in one of lady's companies and began to experience a much better standard of living; one quite different from those living around him.

Sipho became deeply conflicted, however, when his peers began to prepare for their traditional initiation. This really mattered to him, and after some thought he gave up his job to attend the bush ceremony with his age-mates. At this point, failing to understand the importance of this ritual for him, the White ladies withdrew from his life. Sipho made this life-changing decision, informed by his perceptions of what was more important. Neither the White ladies nor his own age-mates could appreciate the competing value systems he had to choose between: traditional values that would establish him as a good Xhosa man or rejecting these in favour of a more individualistic value system that is centred around the accumulation of material assets that, it seems, mattered less to him. Sipho's choice is perhaps indicative of the continued value that young Xhosa men place today on their cultural traditions, especially the *ulwaluko* that marks them as men in their communities.

Sipho later fell on hard times and turned to crime, landing him in prison for a short stint, where he encountered various forms of hardship, particularly hunger. He noted how the hierarchy worked in prison, with the "*ntsizwa*"*,* or gangster leaders, always enjoying privileges, while "*underdogs*" like himself suffered in silence. Sipho confessed that this got him thinking about life and the genuine people he had encountered along the way. Over time, Sipho developed a somewhat pessimistic view on the hierarchy of life, which he described in his diary (2018):

> *The simple truth is that what I have learnt when I was young is that the father*
>
> *beats the mother, the mother beats the child, and the child beats the dog.*

It seems that the lack of foundational norms and values left Sipho confused and self-questioning, holding himself aloof from those around him and fearing to trust anyone. He admitted that he had never had an enduring relationship with anyone, unable to allow anyone close enough to share his thoughts and feelings, and still spending much of his time alone in quiet reflection. Sipho feels overwhelmed at times by the poverty and hardship around him and often leaves the settlement where he lives to spend time in a homeless shelter in a nearby suburb. Here Sipho can do a day's work in return for board and lodging, can sleep easy, and relax in the security of his surroundings and the kind people he encounters there.

Though not typical of the young men interviewed in the study, Sipho may offer an example of many other young men left to fend for themselves from an early age, though unusual in his good fortune to be supported for some years by people from outside his culture. Despite his traditional initiation, which radically altered the course of his life, he is not a traditional man and still lacks the foundational moral registers that guide many of the other young men I encountered.

My investigation into people who significantly influenced the lives of the young men in my study echoed, to a large degree, Langa's (2020) recent study of young men in Alexandra township in Johannesburg. Langa (2020) similarly noticed how young men without role models in their life, and those who had received little or no guidance from anyone, tended to suffer from emotional problems. In contrast, as Ratele (2016: 116) has noted, "the more models men and boys have access to, the higher the likelihood that some will be viable, even liberatory, healthier and more sustaining".

For some of the young men in the study, this void was filled with guides of a more spiritual nature; this is unpacked in the next section.

5.3 SPIRITUALITY

In trying to interpret and navigate the complexities of life in the city, many young men spoke of the belief systems that they were invested in that guided them in life, providing spiritual guidance and often moral parameters they drew on when dealing with challenges in their lives. These included traditional belief systems and forms of religious faith, with some even managing to accommodate both simultaneously.

5.4.1 Tradition

As Wahab et al. (2012: s.p.) have noted, people and culture are inseparable throughout sub-Saharan Africa, a place where one's "culture supplies you with broad, standardised, prefabricated answers and formulas" for dealing with any situation. Thus, they argue that the role of tradition must always be considered in understanding African lives.

At the height of the apartheid era, Becker (1974) noted how the importance of tradition among African men was shifting. Forced to leave their rural homes to provide their labour in the cities, though retaining their cultural beliefs and traditions, African men were gradually adapting their beliefs and traditions in ways that were more attuned to urban contexts. More contemporary studies have highlighted the continued importance of tradition in urban areas, and the critical role it still plays in shaping male identity and defining men's roles in the city (Miescher & Lindsay 2002; Morrell 2001; Ratele 2013; Shefer et al. 2007). Ratele (2016) argues, however, that contemporary studies of African masculinity generally fail to consider how much tradition still contributes to shaping and defining contemporary African manhood. This study revealed that traditional mores and values and the societal and personal expectations associated with them strongly influence the outlook that many young urban Xhosa men have on life and their role as men.

Xhosa tradition centres around belief in ancestors (Bogopa 2010), perpetuating strong urban-rural linkages that oblige city-dwellers to return to their ancestral homes to conduct certain rituals. As Rolihlahla (Interview 2018) explained, Xhosa people are inherently spiritual and generally have great respect for the elders and their ancestors, from whom they seek direction. As an illustration, he mentioned that when advising someone who is facing a problem or trying to make an important decision, Xhosa people will commonly suggest that they communicate with their ancestors, using a phrase, which translated means, "*Go and dream about it*". The reply to this might be "*I didn't sleep well*" if such sanction was not thought to be forthcoming.

Most, though not all of the men in this study claimed to uphold Xhosa traditions, believing in the power of their ancestors to influence their lives. Mzingisi, a 26-year-old University student, on being accepted to study law, for example, conducted a ritual to thank his ancestors for his good luck. When Phumzile was accused of theft and lost his job at a pharmaceutical company, he burned the herb *mphepha*, commonly used in Xhosa homes to summon the ancestors, seeking to protect himself from witchcraft.

Links to the ancestors are also reinforced during male initiation rites (Gqola 2007; Mfecane 2018; Ntombana 2011), even for those born and bred in the city. Kanelo (Interview 2016), for example, who had few ties to the Eastern Cape, nevertheless travelled to the family home for his initiation. Despite his modern upbringing, he was very respectful of the process, which he explained was about much more than circumcision because it also taught him the customs of "*his people*" and especially "*how to be a good Xhosa man*". Kanelo stressed the importance of the process, explaining that young Xhosa men are said to see the world through "*wooden glasses*" until they have been initiated. Field (2001) has similarly noted how initiation continues to be an important rite of passage into traditional forms of manhood in urban areas today, shaping young men's sense of male identity through the indoctrination of age-old traditions[23].

Lelethu (Interview 2016), born and raised in the city, who claimed that he did not enjoy the Eastern Cape and rarely visited his ancestral home, had also nevertheless attended his initiation there. He explained that the initiate school had taught him about his cultural traditions, which he felt "*showed you a bigger picture about how to be a Xhosa man*". This was somewhat surprising given that he lives in a house where tradition is seldom practiced and continues to do chores around the house for his mother, which is somewhat at odds with traditional male roles.

While ancestor worship is a support mechanism for some young men, others admitted their abhorrence for this continued practice, describing their reluctance to '*go to the bush*'[24] For example, although Mncedisi and Mthuthuzele believed initiation taught young men important life lessons, they did not feel it accommodated the realities of modern urban life. However, many young men seem to uphold these age-old customs because of societal pressures. They were concerned that they would be considered boys by other men and by women, who will not marry uninitiated men who culturally are still considered to be boys (Field 2001). Mthuthuzele (Interview 2017), who describes himself as a 'non-traditional' man, explained

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[23] The teaching of Xhosa tradition involves instruction in rituals and customs, culturally defined relationships with family members, community and the ancestors. It also involves teaching about culturally nuanced practices involved in everyday life (Sideris 2005).

[24] A colloquial term for returning to ancestral areas in the Eastern Cape for circumcision and initiation rituals. Although this ritual rite of passage can be conducted in urban areas today, usually in peripheral 'bushy' areas, all the young men in my study had done so in the Eastern Cape.

that in Xhosa culture and in informal settlement communities more generally, if you are not initiated, you are considered to be a boy and are frowned upon by those around you. Thus, even non-traditional young men maintain the traditional rite of passage into manhood, not only fearing the wrath of their ancestors, but also rather more tangible threats of social rejection. Initiation also elevates their status as men to whom others, particularly women and younger men, must be subservient. In environments of deep poverty, initiation thus remains an important signifier of male identity and, as the study revealed, is important for men's sense of self-worth and personal agency. Those who are not initiated are also thought to be more likely to suffer from bad luck, including sickness (Mfecane 2018).

The traditional male roles and values inculcated during initiation are generally taken very seriously by young men. During the process, they are expected to relinquish childish behaviour and to become responsible adults, taking their place as the man of the house (Mfecane 2016; 2018; Ntombana 2011). When asked for his opinion, Mncedisi (Interview 2018), a final year journalism student, did not hesitate to support the continued practice saying, "*The bush is perfect!*". Trying to put it into perspective for me as a cultural outsider, Mncedisi explained that it was like a tertiary education, a kind of finishing school where men are taught to cope; they are thrown together with others they do not know and have to live with them at close quarters for a several weeks. Mncedisi later revealed his ambivalence by suggesting that the teaching of traditions was somewhat out of context in the urban environment that most Xhosa people live in today.

Failing to be initiated also has consequences for the power dynamics within the households of young men. For example, Bongani (Interview 2018), who does not support the initiation tradition and has not been to the bush, cannot claim rights to his father's house when he dies. His inheritance passes instead to his sister who, as is her cultural right, will take over the family house and may force him to move out. Similarly, Mpendulo (Interview 2018), who forfeited his chance of initiation by spending the funds saved for this on furthering his education, will not succeed his father one day as man of the house, nor inherit the family home. Traditional rites of passage are therefore critical, not only in marking young Xhosa men's transition into manhood, but also in determining their rights and privileges (Mfecane 2016; 2018).

Referencing another enduring traditional custom, Mfecane (2018) mentions how one's given name is very important in most African cultures; a signifier of one's identity and believed to influence one's character. This was illustrated by Alakhe (a pseudonym) in his diary (2018):

> *My name they said my mother gave it to me because I am the only boy at home…I*
> *followed my name as I grow up, I knew what its mean…To me my name is like a*
> *song with new audience that I must make them happy when they hear my name.*
> *It means Our Home, I am just that home to my sisters, to my cousins…*

Alakhe demonstrates how traditional beliefs and values still significantly influence the ways in which men construct, or try to construct, their roles as men. Before being initiated, boys may lead carefree lives without responsibilities (Ntombana 2011). After initiation, they are considered true men and can become heads of their households and members of their clan and are expected to be role models to their sons by leading healthy, moral lives.

Most participants in the study were fiercely proud of their cultural heritage, trying to accommodate tradition into modern life. Mcebisi (Diary 2018), for example, said: "*I am a very traditional man and I fully respect my rituals as well as my tradition*". Despite his traditional beliefs, however, he found the tradition of abducting young women, which is still practiced in parts of the Eastern Cape, quite repugnant. He wrote (Diary 2018):

> *In my opinion, as black people or Xhosa in particular, we should not embark on*
> *something that we can see it suppress other people's rights even though we know*
> *it comprises part of our culture.*

Although fundamentally at odds with democratic principles enshrining the rights of women in contemporary South Africa (Maluleke 2012), traditional male privileges are perpetuated in rural areas, often in shockingly hegemonic ways. When asked how young men accommodate such contradictory rights and roles, Samkelo (Interview 2018) explained that it was possible to accommodate both systems, with modern life providing one perspective and tradition another.

Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (2002) suggest that accompanying cultural change, one often finds counteracting processes of cultural preservation. Similarly, Thompson (2002) has remarked that traditional perceptions about what constitutes appropriate behaviour are increasingly questioned by boys and men growing up in a world so different from that of their fathers. This is particularly the case when people feel vulnerable and need to associate meaning and causality to their circumstances.

It has been noted that in times of duress, the resurgence of old superstitions and even witchcraft may arise (Redding 2004). A South African disaster management officer once

explained to me[25] that she had established that the inexplicable increase in the number of single unit fires in an informal settlement in her area of jurisdiction was attributed by residents to allegations of witchcraft. Working for over more than a decade on hazard causality in settlements across the city, I was aware that the dwellings of people accused of witchcraft are often torched by superstitious neighbours trying to destroy the so-called witchery. During fire monitoring work I was undertaking more recently in another large settlement (Zweig et al. 2018), the community leader attributed the reason for a small fire there to what he termed a 'cultural cleansing process', which was undertaken by the community following an accusation of witchcraft. Of course, this is never mentioned to emergency responders, so attribution is simply recorded as another incident of unknown cause.

Superstition and belief in evil entities are still important in Xhosa cosmology today. Redding (2004) has identified the strong belief in such practices in rural areas, while Henson (2001) has discovered its continued practice in urban areas. During an interview, Bongani (2018) specifically mentioned the prevalence of witchcraft, which he said was still practiced in the Eastern Cape but also in urban areas. Another young man explained this is the context of his own experience, describing how after suffering a terrible accident as a child in a rural village, his parents were advised by a traditional healer (*sangoma*) that this was due to witchcraft. Once he had recovered, he was summarily packed off to the city to ensure his safety. Similarly, Alakhe (Interview 2018) believed that the run of ill-health he suffered during his adolescence was attributable to the fact that he had never known his father nor been introduced to his ancestors, who were therefore angry.

Aidala (1985) has argued that as one transitions into adulthood, one's worldview naturally expands, and it is at this point that the values and traditions one is raised with are typically questioned. Even the gender roles one was raised on and that provide the foundation for one's identity up to that point may feel at odds with the socio-cultural realities one encounters in the broader world beyond the family horizon. In this confused transitional space, Aidala (1985: 289) argues that young men begin to question their manhood: "How shall I be a man and how will others know me?" This is aggravated in environments of poverty where traditionally prescribed gender roles are increasingly difficult to achieve. Many men, it seems, turn instead to religious faith and the alternative value systems this provides them.

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[25] This was part of my ongoing community work, though not linked to this study.

5.4.2 Religion

Rapid social change, such as that experienced in South Africa in the era of democracy, has challenged once accepted cultural norms and value systems, presenting, as Aidala (1985: 288) has argued, some confusion around gender roles, so that young people find themselves "without adequate guides to ascribe meaning, articulate and order values, designate goals". In such times, religion often provides a kind of bulwark, offering an alternative "morally absolute set of definitions and rules to follow" (Aidala 1985: 288). In her study of young people in Zambia, Hansen (2008) discovered that churches were critical in keeping young people busy, attracting them with music, social activities, and outings, with many drawn in by charismatic preachers who also reinforced the role of men in society, justified in reference to biblical texts that perpetuated patriarchal value systems. My interrogation into the role of religion among young men significantly echoed these findings.

Several of the young men in the study had turned to the church for support, especially charismatic Zionist churches, where the colourful pomp and ceremony seems to replace those of the Xhosa rituals that many of the participants were raised on. For Anathi (Diary 2018), another noted attraction seemed to be the ceremonial aspects that in many ways seemed to substitute the traditional rituals of his childhood in the Eastern Cape. Spiritual guidance from church ministers helped several of the young men to attribute meaning to their lives and build their confidence and belief in something better.

Ndumiso (Interview 2018), for example, claimed that he was "*born into the church*". In explaining his view about gender roles in contemporary South African society, he framed his views in terms of his religious beliefs. He explained:

> *Though feminism rightfully calls for the end of male domination and abuse and*
> *for equal rights for women, it is vital to get to the root of the distortion that our*
> *focus in life as men and women must not simply be to satisfy our own needs, but*
> *to serve God.*

Ndumiso hints at the contrasting values he tries to incorporate, but ultimately his view remains 'fairly' traditional.

For Likhaya (Interview 2018), arriving as a young adult from a very traditional home in the Eastern Cape where he was raised by his grandfather, his encounter with the city was quite terrifying at first. Finding that he could not relate to his age-mates in the city, he sought the

company of older men from whom he felt he could learn, but generally stayed at home feeling too scared to go out. A friend eventually introduced him to the Zionist church, which he discovered was a safe and friendly space where he continues to spend his Sundays, working all other days as a *Big Issue* magazine vendor at a busy intersection in the city. Finding that his new Christian beliefs clashed with the Xhosa beliefs in the ancestors on which he had been raised, he claimed that on becoming a 'Christian' he had shunned such beliefs.

Bongani (Interview 2018) was introduced to outreach work by his local church, inspiring him to start an organisation of his own to help other young people in his community, arranging informal soccer tournaments to keep children off the streets and away from crime. Explaining his motivation, he said: "*I just want to give back at an early age before it's too late*". This fatalistic approach to life was often noted in the study, suggesting that poor young men like Bongani feel sufficiently vulnerable to anticipate premature death.

Christian forms of religion as noted in this study offer ways in which the role of men as head of the house and provider and defender of women is perpetuated, and the role of women as good mothers and wives in more submissive roles may be retained. Indeed, Aidala (1985) has noted how biblical framings of manhood are often fairly like traditional understandings of men's roles in society, offering alternative justifications for the perpetuation of patriarchy.

Membership of religious groups also seemed to provide other support mechanisms and networks highly valued by many of the young men, such as providing safe spaces in which they could socialise. Many centred their social lives around their church, attending all-day services one day of every weekend. For Likhaya and Luva, church formed the pivot around which their weekly activities were organised. Likhaya and Luva were also *amakhaya,* a Xhosa term for young men coming from the same rural village, and an important cultural bond among young Xhosa men. They shared a small shack in a settlement in Philippi and sold the *Big Issue* Magazine together at the same intersection every day, except on Sundays, which they spent in Church. Luva (Interview 2018), who was raised in a rural village in the Eastern Cape, found himself at a loss when arriving in the city where he could not relate to other young men of his own age. He admitted that he felt scared in the city and that when he was not working, he spent most of his time at home where he felt safe. His ambition was to eventually return to his rural village to set up a home of his own, yet he found traditional ways that persisted there and with which he had grown up to be at odds with his new Christian beliefs. This was perhaps reinforced by the fact that he had not been initiated, never having had someone to support him in this process or cover the associated costs.

Ndumiso (Interview 2018), on the other hand, found much more than just security through his church membership, and not only attended church every weekend but also belonged to his church band, attending practices several times a week. The communal meals eaten after every Sunday service were also an important event, when he ate very well compared to other days. Similarly, for Mpendulo, the tabernacle of the Rastafarians offered respite from the drudgery and gloom of daily life, a place where meals were taken together and music formed an integral part of religious rituals.

Both traditional and religious belief systems serve to reinforce the importance of patriarchy, defining the expected roles of men in a society that is in the process of slow transition, and providing them with legitimacy as men in a world in which gender roles are fundamentally changing. Some young men managed to navigate both traditional and religious value systems, as explained in the next section.

5.4.3 Accommodating different belief systems

It is evident that many young Xhosa men today are developing hybrid male identities, drawing on both modern and traditionally defined roles, shifting between the two as circumstances dictate. The confusion that this 'hybridisation' creates for young men was evident in the ambivalent attitudes to tradition that they expressed in the study. Alakhe, for example, comes from a long line of traditional healers, but now attends church. In his diary (2018), Alakhe describes his ongoing struggle to accommodate tradition in his new urban lifestyle:

> *I believe in education and also in spirituality even though I am confused which*
> *part/side I must take, her side traditional or the evangelism.*

Anathi, a very spiritual young man who believed himself to be psychic and his dreams prophetic, burns *mphepha*, a traditional herb, almost every day to communicate with his ancestors. He explains in his diary (2018) how "*It keeps me close to God and my ancestors*". Many other young men similarly spoke of communicating with ancestral spirits when troubled or making important decisions. Mbuyiselo (Interview 2018), for example, claimed that the church was central to his life, attending church every Sunday. However, he also believes in his ancestors and Xhosa rituals, and claimed that he needed to return to the Eastern Cape to "*clear his head*" as he was going through some personal problems. Mbuyiselo explained that this is where he could best communicate with his ancestors and ask them to show him the way.

When asked how they accommodate both ancestral worship and Christian belief systems, Bongani explained that the two systems do not clash, saying, "*You cannot put your culture away for church, you were born with it*" (Interview 2018). Thus, although he attends church every Sunday, he also follows traditional rituals, typically in June and December, burns *mphepha* for communicating with his ancestors, and drinks traditional beer. It is important to note though that the church ceremonies he attends involve the ritual slaughter of animals and much singing and dancing, demonstrating how charismatic local churches have taken on many of the trappings of tradition that is familiar to their congregants.

Despite his devout Christian beliefs, Anathi continues to uphold traditional practices based on ancestral worship, calling on both belief systems in his times of despair. He says:

> *The best I can do is do them both, go to church and pray the ancestors as they would block my ways if I don't do as they please* (Diary 2018).

He describes in his diary (2018) how he continues to follow the Xhosa tradition of burning traditional herbs in his home to call on his ancestors:

> *The burning of mphepha has become an everyday thing for me and I feel much better when burning it. It helps me keep close to God and my ancestors. When burning it I would pray and pray my ancestors too.*

Here Anathi demonstrates a process of adaptation taking place as the line becomes blurred between different belief systems. In the example given, he uses the same conduit for communicating with his ancestors as he does for communing with his Christian God. He makes time for this regularly, despite living in a crowded home where space for faith-based rituals is notably hard to find, as the next section explains.

5.4 SPACES FOR REFLECTION

Another issue that emerged in this study was the noted lack of personal space men experienced, not only in terms of privacy for undertaking daily activities like ablutions due to the informal nature of their living conditions, but also just having space in which to quietly reflect. Informal settlements are vibrant and noisy spaces where dwellings are generally small and cramped. As one of the young men remarked, informal settlements in the city are generally densely settled with dwellings situated close together, if not abutting each other, so that whatever is being said in one house can often be heard in the neighbour's house. He described

how conversations between neighbours can be conducted without even leaving the house, simply by speaking out loud. Out on the street, however, where one must constantly be on one's guard, it is not possible to become lost in one's thoughts either. Where does one then have the space to ponder and reflect, to make the big decisions that young men need to make about life? The next sections unpack some of the ways in which the men in the study find or fail to find spaces for privacy and reflection.

5.5.1 Noted lack of privacy

The issues of privacy and crowding on the human psyche have been noted for some time (Wicker 1973), particularly in the environmental psychology literature (Proshanksy et al. 1976). Proshansky et al. (1976) have argued that freedom of choice is critical in shaping the way people behave in relation to their physical environment. They suggest that privacy provides moments for emotional release from the tensions that build up in everyday life, simultaneously allowing space for quiet reflection (Proshansky et al. 1976).

The lack of individual privacy in so-called 'urban ghettos' was already being noted back in the 1960s (for example by Goodwin 1964, Lewis 1961, and Schorr 1966). Westin (1967), also writing at that time, believed that privacy was an essential human function, answering to the need for autonomy and sense of individuality in which a person makes conscious choices and exercises some control over their environment, including their ability to have privacy when they desire it. Westin (1967) developed a typology of privacy, a continuum ranging from solitude, the highest state of privacy when someone spends time alone and out of the view of others, to increasingly less private space. Seen from another perspective, Wicker (1973) has investigated the effects of crowding on human behaviour, coining the terms 'manning' and 'under-manning'[26] to describe the respective effects of crowded and uncrowded spaces on the human psyche.

The lack of space in which to study in crowded and noisy informal environments is a significant drawback for young people living there. It was mentioned by Anathi, whose home in Kosovo, Philippi was situated adjacent to a tavern where noise continued into the night. In

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[26] Wicker wrote in the early 1970s when the use of gender-loaded words like 'manning' was not yet significantly questioned. However, his reference here is really to 'humankind' and intended to be gender neutral. It felt appropriate for the context in which I used it here.

an interview (2018), Anathi described his frustrations with trying to study in a crowded home where even the couch on which he slept was too short to accommodate his long frame. During his matric year, he took to working during the quiet early hours when others were sleeping. Similarly, Sandla (Interview 2018), who came to the city from the Eastern Cape after his initiation to complete high school in the city, had moved in with an older sister who was living in a one-room shack with her boyfriend in Samora Machel, Philippi. They worked different hours and needed to sleep at odd times, so when Sandla came home from school and wanted to study, the light bothered her boyfriend who needed to sleep. The lack of quiet space in which to study was further aggravated by children playing noisily outside and taverns operating into the early hours of the morning. Given the lack of personal space typically found in informal homes, local public libraries have become critical resources for young learners and students seeking quiet places in which to study. Indeed, many of the young men I met frequented such places, which were also, I suspect, where many of them wrote their diaries.

Having privacy, a personal space in which to think and reflect, is also critical for making decisions, from small everyday ones to much larger life-changing choices. Ndumiso (Diary (2018) describes this lack of privacy in very straight terms:

> *What happens next door is never secret. You can overhear someone snoring in the next room as if he is just next to you. You can chat with someone next door without leaving your home.*

Similarly, Sipho mentions the importance of space in which to think in his diary (2018), in which he explains that in making decisions about life one needs to "*sit down and think and plan…build a boundary wall*". His comment illustrates the exasperation some men feel when needing space to think.

Similarly, Mpendulo describes the frustrations he feels in crowded spaces when having to stay at home with his family in their small shack on a rainy day. He writes (Diary 2018):

> *That day was cold there was rain, so I was at home the whole day seating at home. I stay with my family at home but sometimes they stress me, and I am not happy at home sometime.*

Mpendulo illustrates how living at such close quarters creates notable tensions in the home, especially when there is little to occupy oneself with.

For Sipho, however, seeking solitude has gradually become a way in which he copes with life. He explains how he developed this behaviour over time, allowing him to shut off the world around him:

> I *started enjoying being alone and isolated because this helped me to avoid arguments and fights* (Diary 2018).

He goes on to describe how straight after school he would disappear into the bushy areas on the slopes of the local mountains, a place few other people frequented, to gather wood quietly on his own. He continues to seek solitude regularly so that he can ponder about life.

For men like Mpendulo and Sipho, natural environments are places where they are afforded opportunities for personal reflection, and to relax in their surroundings.

5.5.2 Communing with nature

People's experiences with nature are, according to environmental identity theory (Clayton 2003), integral to their sense of self and well-being. Spending time in nature offers a temporary escape from daily life that also serves to reduce mental fatigue (Hartig et al. 1991). Such moments connect the human psyche in both tangible and intangible ways to the non-human natural environment (Raymond et al. 2010), offering a disconnection from the complex, noisy, and often contested spaces of daily life.

In contrast to many studies of place that adopt a social constructivist approach, Stedman (2003) adopts a phenomenological stance, focusing on the actual properties of place. Others have also explored how these influence our feelings towards specific places, in other words "how we sense that place" (Sebastien 2020). Stedman suggests (2003) that the physical world around us influences our behaviour and our feelings of attachment, providing background to our life experiences (Sebastien 2020). This resonates for young men like Mpendulo, a shy young man who feels a profound sense of dis-ease and fear in his everyday surroundings, for whom nature offers an alternative environment in which he expereinces mental peace and attachment – a space in which he can think and dream and where time seems momentarily suspended. This contrasts significantly with the lack of privacy and open space in crowded urban settlements.

The beauty of nature was deliberately sought by some men in the study, offering them places of solitude and quiet peacefulness. For Mpendulo, finding opportunities to commune with

nature helped him to cope with the distressing scenes of death, violence, and disease he described in his diary. These descriptions are contrasted with the peace he derives from watching waterfalls and gathering herbs in the mountains. He writes (Diary 2018): "*I had to go to the mountain with the other brother, we need to be close to nature*". His tone in this extract suggests a sense of urgency to 'escape' from the urban world. Retreating into safe spaces provided by nature reiterates Massey's (2008: 131) belief that "We escape from the city maybe to replenish our souls in contemplating the timelessness of the mountains, by grounding ourselves again in "nature". Echoing this, Mpendulo describes a day harvesting herbs for stocking his natural medicine stall in his diary (2018):

> *We wanted to get also to the waterfall on the mountain … the day was nice to me, and I enjoyed the walk. That day was a nice day I can't forget because I was out, we walk up to the mountain with my brother because we just wanted to be around nature.*

This love for the natural environment, contrasting so vividly with the slum environments of everyday life, may also explain the attraction many other young men expressed for rural Eastern Cape landscapes. Luva (Interview 2018), for example, explained how he loved the smell of nature in the Eastern Cape and hated the polluted air in the city. Many others described their love for these scenic rural areas, even those who had not been raised there. Not only did their accounts describe the simplistic nature of life there, presenting a stark contrast to their lives in the city, but they also expressed their love for the physical elements of the natural environment and the peace this offered. Wandering in the hills without fearing for their personal safety at every turn, they could relax and enjoy their surroundings.

Places in this sense become imbued with meanings, shaping our relationships with them. Thus, those who feel disempowered, sensing their lack of agency and vulnerability in noisy urban settlements, may not develop any attachment to them, while traditional areas, which are considered non-threatening, are where men have a deeper sense of belonging. Perhaps one can also argue that the traditional rural environments in which many of the young men were raised or attended cultural ceremonies from time to time, are places where the natural 'system of things' is maintained according to customary norms and mores, and where the perpetuation of patriarchy ascribes men with unambiguous roles. As Savage et al. (2005: 29) suggest, place attachment is based on one's "cultural and communal roots, history and nostalgia… sites for performing identities". Places thus have specific meanings for everyone, playing an important role in creating the tapestry of their lives (Cresswell 2004).

As Moos (1973) once argued, rural and urban environments offer quite different 'behaviour settings', a term he borrowed from Barker (1968), who originally coined the term to explain how behaviour is significantly determined by the environment in which it occurs.

However, many are unable to escape from threatening environments and retreat into nature. The study found that young men often sought creative forms of emotional outlet, as the next section explains.

5.5.3 Creative outlets

Many of the young men expressed their love for a variety of creative pursuits, which provided an emotional release. These ranged from art, singing, DJ-ing, playing musical instruments, and various forms of dancing, to writing poetry and even composing rap songs. These artistic outlets presented opportunities to the young men to express their otherwise often hidden emotions. Such uninhibited forms of creative expression are strongly endorsed in Xhosa culture too, as music and dancing form an important part of ritual life.

Many of the young men attended churches where music was also a central part of the weekend devotion, singing in a choir, playing in a gospel band, or just singing along with the congregation. Mpendulo, for example, really enjoyed drumming sessions spent with his Rastafarian brothers at their tabernacle.

Alakhe (Diary 2018), who was a talented young artist, joined an organisation that was reaching out to budding young Black artists from poorer areas of the city. Here he had a fortuitous meeting with "*a very powerful woman in my life that grounded me till now*" (Interview 2018), who became his mentor and convinced him to pursue a career in art, which he continues to support himself on.

Since returning home from a term spent in prison, Kanelo (Interview 2016) had turned to dancing, something that he had learned to do in an outreach programme while incarcerated. He explained how dancing was a wonderful, new, and exciting revelation that had helped him to refocus and had given him purpose. He had established a dance troupe that performed various new dance styles at the local community centre and enjoyed acting whenever there was an opportunity.

When offered the chance to become one of the diarists in the study, Mfuneko expressed his enthusiasm, but requested to write his entries in poetic verse. He confessed that he had been

known for writing rap music at school and was even encouraged by his teachers to perform one of his 'numbers' at his final matric valedictory. Indeed, the poetic style he adopted in his diaries greatly enhanced his ability to express the pent-up emotions he found hard to surface during interviews. Similarly, several other young men interspersed their diary entries with short poetic verses, many of which have been quoted from in this dissertation.

Through their pursuit of creative pass times, the young men found not only emotional outlets, but many also desired to use their talents to earn a living. Sipho (Interview 2018), for example, had even created his own blog in which he discussed his art and promoted his skills, hoping to attract customers. Similarly, Alakhe (Interview 2018) desired an artistic career, deriving satisfaction from using a variety of art media that gave him a deep sense of purpose and direction.

5.5 MEANING IN LIFE

Another aim of the study was to determine whether the young men saw purpose in life. I wanted to understand what meaning, if any, they attached to their lives and how this might in turn influence their behaviour. Meaning in life can be defined as "the capacity to recognise order, coherence and purpose in life, as well as to set, pursue and attain goals" (Mason 2015: 635). Mason (2015: 637) finds that low meaning in life can lead to an "existential vacuum" that can have negative consequences for one's psychological well-being.

The young men's attitudes to life were strongly influenced by the circumstances in which they had grown up, the role players, mentors, and key influencers they had encountered along their paths, and the coping mechanisms for dealing with life that they had developed. As Frankl (2006) has suggested, the discovery of meaning in life often requires one to develop defiant attitudes in the face of adversity. This is well illustrated in the case of Sipho, who had spent much of his childhood living alone, caring for himself, and had become a very private person, keeping to himself most of the time. Quietly observing other children just "*being kids*", he regretted never having felt the simple joys of being a child. Sipho explains his take on life in one of his diaries:

> *…when making your life you leave everything behind and focus on your goal…your mind is always filled with positive thoughts, you avoid negative people and surround yourself with positive people...*

In our sessions, Sipho often insisted that he had a fundamentally positive outlook on life. However, it almost seemed that in doing so he was trying to reinforce this conviction within himself, as he was clearly a very reclusive person who was greatly troubled by what he observed around him[27].

Similarly, Msumzi, who had spent much of his young life on his own, was consciously 'self-focused', turned inwards and not letting anyone get too close to him. It was evident that the insecurity experienced in the formative years and early lives of some of the young men had denied them the ability to place trust in anyone. The issue of trust was another important element frequently surfaced by many of the young men.

Giddens (1991) has emphasised the inherent link between risk and trust. It is notably hard to derive meaning from life when one's trust has been broken or one has been let down in some way. In Phumzile's case, his unfair dismissal at work caused irreversible reputational damage that has denied him employment in the field for which he trained so hard. Describing his internship with a large pharmaceutical chain (Interview 2018), Phumzile expressed his love for the work, enjoying the intensity of the training he received and feeling proud of his achievement. His girlfriend had just given birth to their son and his life seemed to be 'on track'. However, when a purse went missing at the pharmacy, Phumzile was accused of the theft and his life changed significantly. In his case, it was evident that the young Black man in the shop 'took the rap', cast as the villain because of his identity as a young Black male, unable to defend himself. Today, he is still unemployed with permanent reputational damage that denies him other opportunities in the field he grew to love. He said (Interview 2018), somewhat wistfully, "*Things don't turn out the way you want them to*"; illustrating the resignation many young Black men seem to have developed in response to the vagaries of life on the margins - the fine line that exists between 'making it' and falling back into a seemingly endless cycle of poverty. Phumzile's fatalistic attitude also reinforces Sommers' (2010) contention that urban youth in Africa suffer from constant frustration due to unmet aspirations. On the other hand, Frankl (2006: 635) insists that "meaning is discovered when people

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[27] I had not anticipated the extent to which many young men would open up to me in these sessions. Being somewhat unprepared and, given the dearth of counselling services available in informal areas, I was caused to confer with several professional friends, namely Thandi, an authority on Xhosa culture and trained high school teacher who helped to shape this study (and to whom this work is dedicated), and Flicky Gildenhuys, a professional counsellor who mentors to young people. Together they guided me in providing support to the young men.

dedicate themselves to live for someone or something beyond the self". These contrasting outlooks were both evident among the young men.

Anathi had many dreams, with some more immediate and relatively attainable, while others were more idealistic and probably out of reach. He said (Interview 2018):

> *You shouldn't be the type of man who doesn't have dreams for the future you should be a reasonable man.*

He writes about his ambitions in poetic form in his diary (2018):

> *From ghetto hoping for suburb, it's a dream*
>
> *Buying a new car, it's a dream*
>
> *Studying music production at Boston, it's a dream.*

Anathi's more immediate ambition was to open a street-food stall selling cooked meat, pairing this with a car washing business. After working part-time at a car wash, he had noted that he could earn a living from owning one himself with minimal outlay, especially if he could offer waiting customers and passers-by something to eat too. He was torn, however, between a need to earn a living and his love for community work that had been stimulated by working for a local NGO and for which he received little or no remittance. Anathi was also assisting a small informal crèche to acquire resources, wanted to open an after-school facility in Kosovo where he lived, and to initiate weekend and school holiday programmes for local children to keep them off the street because "*they are the new generation of tomorrow*" (Interview 2018).

In seeking to uplift themselves from a meaningless life of poverty, many of the young men saw education as a pathway to success, as I discuss in the next section.

5.6.1 Education and training

Many of the young men expressed a desire to study further or to train in a particular field. Some even had dreams of attending university. While most were thwarted by a lack of funds, many others had failed to achieve matric grades that qualified them to apply. Lelethu (Interview 2016), for example, who had taken maritime subjects in high school hoping to channel his way into a maritime or naval career, had high hopes of becoming a shipping agent and had applied to several colleges, but had not been accepted.

Paki (Interview 2018), on the other hand, worked as a shop assistant for a large retail company to raise funds to attend college. He eventually completed a commercial matric in financial and project management, achieving distinctions and also becoming chairman of the Student Representative Council, which earned him a bursary to attend the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town. After contracting tuberculosis, however, he had to drop out. He then did a learnership at the retailer he had worked for previously but complained that such opportunities, though well-intentioned, offered no opportunities for subsequent work placement. Today he is packing shelves for another retailer, but still aims to enrol for a diploma in financial management if he can obtain another bursary. The kinds of challenges that Paki encountered in trying to get an education is typical of marginalised young men the world over.

Inferior education at local settlement schools is also a common drawback to those wanting to further their education. Mthuthuzele's (Interview 2017) sister was a soldier in the Cape Corps, able to afford to send her own children to private schools. Mthuthuzele said that he could see the difference and felt 'robbed' because he had not received such a good education in the Eastern Cape and later at a local township school. When he eventually got into college, he noted that he was at a distinct disadvantage, 'lacking the basics'. Similarly, Samkelo (Interview 2018), who managed to acquire a bursary to study law, said that after just passing the first semester, he failed two subjects in the second, finding that expectations at university were much higher than he was used to at school. His bursary, though covering his fees and accommodation, was not sufficient to cover other costs, such as transport, printing, and photocopying. Samkelo took a job to pay these costs and help his family, and continued volunteering at an NGO. It was just a matter of time before things fell apart. In his third year, his bursary was not renewed, and Samkelo had to move back home where the crowded living space made it hard to concentrate. He eventually dropped out and at the time of our meeting, had given up all hope of studying further. Samkelo had applied instead to train as a policeman just to secure a permanent job to support his family and his girlfriend, who was by then pregnant with his child. Samkelo thus encountered a range of challenges in his quest for an education, and on becoming a father had to give it all up to support his child. This contrasts significantly with young girls who fall pregnant but want to study further, who are often supported to do so by their parents and can also claim a child support grant.

The young men who had fathered children generally did not live with their children or the mothers of their children. Typically, young women continued living with their parents, who

looked after children to enable their daughters to further their education. There appeared to be limited expectations of the fathers, other than to provide financial support. Here again, an interesting situation arises in Xhosa culture. If young men do not pay damages to the parents for impregnating their daughter (currently an amount of around R5 000), he cannot claim paternity rights (as explained in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.5). This is a significant issue for young Xhosa men because of enduring beliefs in the wrath of ancestors, seemingly no matter how 'modern' they are, and because of its impact on clan membership of the children. For this reason, young men cannot continue to study but must work to raise money to pay damages and continue to support their children. The young mothers, on the other hand, earn a significant amount of money for their families through the payment of damages, sometimes receiving child support from the father if he is working, and child support grants from the state to which they are also entitled, all of which enables them to study further. It presents another interesting area of vulnerability in the lives of young township men that contrasts significantly with young women in this context. It is also yet another example of the contrasting and confusing moral registers young men must accommodate in adhering to traditionally prescribed norms and upholding women's rights in democratic South Africa.

Mcebisi's experience, however, is testament to the importance that educated people and a supportive family can play in young men achieving their ambitions and advancing themselves. After being accepted to study journalism at Damelin College in Cape Town, he managed to acquire a sponsorship from the private company for whom his mother was working. Being an educated woman and having a good job, she had access to opportunities for her son that were out of the reach for so many others. After completing his coursework, however, Mcebisi struggled to find an internship required to complete the programme. Eventually, being taken on at a local magazine, he threw himself into his work, regularly publishing articles. Unlike so many others living on the margins, Mcebisi had an educated and supportive mother who was able to harness opportunities only available outside his immediate environment.

The location of most informal settlements on the periphery of the city serves to isolate young people, denying them access not only to opportunities but also to information. During fieldwork over many years spent in these settlements, I have often noted the thirst for information among young people who want to do something meaningful with their lives, or access capital to start up a small business without knowing where to seek support.

Many of the young men who participated in the study, however, only aimed to find a well-paid job so that they could afford families of their own. Becoming good fathers was very important to them, as discussed next.

5.6.2 Fatherhood

In their seminal work on fatherhood, Richter and Morrell (2006) demonstrate how understandings of fatherhood have changed over time and how men have struggled and sometimes failed to meet the expectations associated with being fathers. While young men commonly build their masculinity around their work or careers, marginalised youths with limited prospects tend to focus instead on their familial responsibilities and anticipation of fatherhood (Morrell 2007). Confronted by poverty on a daily basis, they have a different perspective that "affects the way they view and act in the world" (Morrell 2007: 88), placing more emphasis on their role as fathers than providers. Fatherhood thus becomes a primary signifier of masculinity in a world in which other expressions of manhood have become unachievable (Morrell 2007; Ratele et al. 2012; Shefer et al. 2007). The value placed on family and fatherhood was echoed by all the young men in this study.

Alakhe (Diary 2018), for example, was upbeat but nervous about fatherhood, saying:

> *My love will give like stream of water that goes to the community… When I get my first born, how will that affect me? I have built a house, went to college. I think I am prepared for anything*.

Mbuyiselo (Interview 2018), reflecting on his parents' absence during his childhood, insisted that he would never abandon his child the way he had been and would do better. Simphiwe (Interview 2018) was quite definite about his plans to be a father, saying: "*I wish I can get married. I also plan to have four kids in my life, two guys and two girls*". Deprived of family life during their own childhoods, these romanticised anticipations illustrate how the dreams of the young men often revealed their own deep insecurities.

Reflecting on the importance of fatherhood among African men, Miescher and Lindsey (2003: 8) insist that the need to affirm their manhood "is a reminder of the gap between aspiration and achievement which provokes anxiety". Richter and Morrell (2006), placing this more firmly in the context of Black men in South Africa, point out that there are two fundamental factors to consider: the persistence of high levels of unemployment that affects young men in

particular and the legacy of apartheid racial emasculation whereby all African men were 'infantilised' (Morrell 1998); in other words, always considered 'boys' rather than men.

Despite their lack of resources and often strong religious beliefs, most of the young men in the study were already fathers, though none were married. Many took an active interest in their children. Mbuyiselo (Interview 2018), for example, though no longer with the mother of his son, had taken responsibility for his son, transporting him to and from school, paying his school fees, and providing other items that his child needed. He also took his son to church every Sunday, though the mother attended a different one.

Local Christian churches seem to accommodate sex outside of marriage, adapting perhaps to declining marriage rates associated with growing unemployment and poverty (Hunter 2005, 2010; Morrell & Swart 2005; Rudwick & Posel 2014), making it difficult for men to "assert their manhood through traditional avenues" (Reid & Walker 2005: 15). Although most young men in the study desired marriage, this was contingent on working to pay *lobola* and support their households. Thus, despite the increasing uptake of modern values, young Black men are still concerned to maintain traditional roles as the providers in their relationships, "fulfilling their perceived male roles with a sense of desperate manhood" (Ratele 2001: 248). Yet, while the number of women who have children has been counted, no such similar counts have been made among men (Posel & Devey 2006).

The pinnacle of manhood is therefore not to have a wife anymore, as this is for the most part unachievable and unrealistic, but to be a father (Morrell & Swart 2005). Anathi offers interesting insights into the importance of fatherhood for poor, young Black men. He says in his diary (2018):

> *A month ago was women's month. Just imagine. I would always have this question why women are celebrated the whole month and men ain't celebrated at all you would find only fathers are recognised and if you not a father then you out of the league it's as if you don't exist.*

As already mentioned, according to Xhosa traditions, men who impregnate women outside of marriage may only claim paternity of the child if they have paid 'damages' to the parents of the woman who carries their child. Many young men will typically borrow from friends and family to pay this fee to the parents to ensure their right to introduce the child to their ancestors in the *imbeleko* ceremony. This is particularly important in the case of boy children who

normally also become part of their father's clan. Should they not pay damages and claim rights to the child, their children will instead be claimed by the mother's family.

Fatherhood was an important issue that was incorporated into dreams that the young men expressed about their futures. Mpendulo (Interview 2018), for example, said his father had taught him a lot and that he too wanted to be a good father like him.

The findings here echo those of Morrel's (2007: 79) study of adolescents from different racial and socio-economic backgrounds, suggesting that in talking about fatherhood, young men "expose the gendered contours of their identities".

In addition to the tenderness that the men expressed towards children and the importance they attached to fatherhood, many of them also expressed quite altruistic sentiments towards their communities. This finding is discussed in the section that follows.

5.6.3 Helping others

Mason (2015) insists that most meaning in life research is based on Westernised worldviews that are starkly contrasted with more collective African notions. Exploring this in an African context, Mason (2015) found that the desire to contribute to others was a prominent theme. This is particularly evident in South Africa, where collective notions such as '*ubuntu*' and '*bathu pele*'[28] are taken very seriously among African ethnic groups. Although it was somewhat surprising to identify these notions in a study of young men living in the city, it certainly was a common theme.

Mcebisi wanted to inspire people in his community to envisage alternative futures for themselves. Already working on and off in teaching posts when I met him, though failing to find a permanent position, Mcebisi was upbeat about becoming a motivational speaker. He was hoping to instil positive ideas in the minds of children, to '*make them believe in themselves, try to picture and make them comprehend the world and its challenges...*'. Viewing education as more than just about teaching subject content, Mcebisi had a more holistic vision for the role of teachers and educators that incorporated mentoring children to develop positive approaches to life. He believed

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[28] *Ubuntu* literally translated means 'I am because you are'; in other words, a person is only a person because of other people. *Bathu Pele*, which means 'people first', has been adopted as a government mantra used on official documents.

that teachers should encourage children to be 'proactive' by developing realistic future objectives that they could work towards.

Yet Mcebisi himself, despite realising his own dreams of a good education, was still struggling to get ahead. After completing a degree and a teacher's diploma, he was forced to move back into a shack when he failed to find work. He realised, however, that many of his classmates were in the same predicament. I wondered how he remained so positive about life.

When asked about his future during an interview, Mfuneko, despite his often fatalistic sentiments and comments about life, said that he wanted to improve his own life circumstances so that he could give back to his community and give others the chances that he had not had.

Such altruistic attitudes reflect a deep-seated communitarian value system of African people that has been noted, in particular by many African writers (for example Ikuenobe 2006; Maluleke 2012; Maqoma 2020; Mbiti 1970; Menkiti 1984; Mfecane 2018). As Mbiti (1970: 141) once stated in his seminal work on African philosophy, it is only in relation to other people that "*the individual becomes conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities*". This reiterates the deep-seated sense of responsibility Morrell (2007) described among young Black learners in his study of high school boys in South Africa. It was a noted point of difference between the racial groups in the study in which boys from other races, expressed more egotistical and individualistic dreams of building careers for themselves. It hints at the sense of anguish young Xhosa men feel when unable to meet expectations that they set for themselves in terms of their African-orientated value system.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In exploring the strategies and coping mechanisms of the young men that have been described in this chapter, I have shown how these have either contributed to protecting them or to making them more vulnerable to the vagaries of life on the margins of the city. Their stories have demonstrated how life experiences and even particular role models they have interacted with at strategic points in their lives have shaped their attitudes and informed their approaches to life and are key to understanding how they navigate life. However, they have also demonstrated how conflicted they are by contrasting moral registers they encounter.

While the challenges these young men face are in many ways similar to those of young people from many other cultures from around the world, their African identities inform some fundamental

differences that serve both to provide moral direction, but also confound how they decide what is right and wrong and how they behave in these urban spaces of marginality.

Despite developing a range of protective mechanisms, the young men were still notably vulnerable, however, and in some respects their adherence to traditional mores, rather than providing the patriarchal dividend so often described in the literature (Clowes 2013; Connell 2005; Hearn 2007; Motsemme 2002; Ratele 2008a; Walker 2005), often only served to make them more vulnerable. Young men often set unrealistic and unattainable targets for themselves in trying to be 'real' men in traditionally prescribed ways.

The study reveals that neither hegemonic nor complicit forms of masculinity can be used to explain the identities that these young men have developed in response to the challenges of life that they encounter. While the case studies demonstrate that any form of generalisation is problematic, yet there are commonalities, not least the complex intersectionality of the ways in which these young men are becoming increasingly marginalised, confused by the conflicting moral registers they encounter in spaces where traditional mores bang up against modern human rights discourses. Rather, the vulnerabilities that have been revealed suggest an alternative framing of masculinity, one that captures the chameleon-like qualities and plural forms of masculinity that these young men adopt in navigating life on the margins.

Using vulnerability as my analytical lens I have illustrated the many ways in which these young men are made susceptible to the challenges of life in these areas. In describing the hardships, in revealing their emotions in relation to the threats and challenges they encounter, both in daily life and in other ways, it became evident that they are deeply troubled and vulnerable.

Having described the vulnerabilities and the coping mechanisms of the young men in the preceding chapters, I come now to consider how they construct their masculine identities in contemporary South Africa in light of, and in response to, their noted vulnerabilities. In the next chapter, I argue that these identities are shifting and contingent, yet fundamental for surviving in these complex urban spaces and in dealing with the vulnerabilities that have been noted here.

CHAPTER 6: SITUATED MALE IDENTITIES

"We need to theorise men in their situatedness" (Ratele 2016: 132).

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary South Africa, poor young Black men like Anathi, whose life was described at the beginning of this dissertation (see Prologue, page 14), are being confronted with new circumstances that are generating their particular vulnerabilities, which in turn are influencing the ways in which they shape their identities (Morrell, 2002; Walker, 2005).

In navigating the variable landscapes they encounter, I argue that men shift interchangeably between different masculine identities, a process that has also been noted by others (Gorman-Murray & Hopkins 2014; Morrell 2001). They adopt what Ward (2015) has termed 'chameleonlike' qualities, using this as a coping mechanism – a strategy to reduce their perceived vulnerability in different spaces. The concept of 'plural masculinities' proposed by Aboim (2010) could usefully describe how Simphiwe, for example, who was orphaned early in life, developed several contrasting identities for navigating different social environments in which he felt vulnerable,

It is imperative to understand how these young men feel, the nature of their emotional responses, in a changing society that no longer defends their rights (Furlong et al. 2003; Walker 2005), responding to the question that Reid and Walker (2005: ix) pose: "What about the boys?".

6.2 REVISITING VULNERABILITY

At this point I return to the analytical lens adopted in this study, namely vulnerability, in stating my theoretical position. It has been argued (Bankoff 2012; Cutter 2006; Kelman 2011; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 2002), that vulnerability needs to be understood, not as a static 'condition', but rather as a dynamic process with temporal dimensions. Bankoff (2012:43) usefully suggests that it takes the form of a continuum, stretching from the past, through the present and into the future. Despite the acknowledged importance of this temporal dimension, however, it remains the least explored aspect of vulnerability (Cutter 2006), but one that was central to the methodological approach taken in this study. By tracing the life stories of the young men and identifying the turning points in their lives, I wanted to understand the key

elements, or building blocks, of their vulnerability, shifting to consider the challenges the young men were facing in their everyday lives.

As Bankoff (2012: 46) has argued, although "*all people are vulnerable in one way or another, to some extent'* their adaptation or maladaptation to the environments they encounter in life, determines how they construct their vulnerabilities. Vulnerability develops from the intersection of many different variables which have been explored in this thesis. I argue that is a useful lens through which to interpret the complex identities in which these young men are invested.

6.2 MULTIPLE AND SHIFTING IDENTIES

Young men living in informal settlements and other poor environments develop multiple and contingent identities as they navigate their way in these precarious spaces. In his book about identity formation in the modern world, Giddens (1991: 54) has argued that "people engulfed by such anxieties may seek to blend with the environment so as to escape being the target of dangers". Thus, identities are dynamic, or as Massey (1994) has suggested, they are relational, shifting in time and place.

As Morrell and Swart (2004: 104) point out, many young people in developing countries today are trying to accommodate two co-existing realities: "an urban modern reality and a pre-modernist and traditional reality". This binary was evidenced in this study, with young men found to be trying to accommodate both customary and new democratic value systems.

In the context of South Africa, however, Moolman (2013) believes that men's identities are also significantly shaped in relation to the past, referencing both old traditional values but also the lingering vestiges of apartheid and the racial identities this evokes, while also trying to accommodate significant changes brought about by democratic change. This has resulted in what Reid & Walker (2005) explain as masculinities still in transition. As Moolman (2013: 96) suggests this creates places of "ambiguity, multiplicity and contradiction", where traditional and modern forms of masculinity co-exist, though perhaps somewhat uncomfortably.

Mncedisi (Interview 2018) explained how, despite his education - he was completing a degree in journalism when I met him- he still considered himself to be a very traditional man, stating "*I am not modern, but I am equipped with different knowledges*". He believed that it was impossible to ignore that young men have different knowledge systems because, to coin his own words, "*they shape our identity*". He qualified this by stating that women were generally not as connected to tradition as men. Does this suggest that women living in the city are not

similarly challenged to accommodate tradition to the extent that men do? I would argue that it is generally men who cling to tradition because in environments, particularly of poverty, it continues to define what it means to be a man, prescribing their roles as men, even though these may be at odds with the realities of life on the urban margins. Thus, the way young Black men build their identities today is, as Kimmel et al. (2005) suggest, playing out against a backdrop of history, tradition, and the contemporary and often marginalised environments in which they live.

6.3 THE CONTRIBUTION OF 'PLACE'

> "A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security" (Lynch 1988: 4).

In the seminal work from which the quote above is taken, Lynch (1960) explores the images people create of the city, insisting that the physical and visual character of places they inhabit significantly influence their sense of well-being. Through people's lived experiences, places also become imbued with social meaning. There is no doubt that in environments of poverty where there is much visual squalor and evidence of human suffering, sense of place contributes significantly to people's psyche and sense of identity. In the context of this study, it was revealed that young men's limited sense of self agency and feelings of powerlessness in these spaces, aggravated by entrenched Xhosa traditions that prescribed their roles as builders of the home and defenders of their households, were contributing to their perceived emasculation.

In this study, the young men's perceptions of the impoverished environments in which they lived were quite unambiguously described. Mcebisi (Diary 2018), for example, referred to informal settlements as "*filthy and unpleasant places*", while Sipho (Diary 2018) said of his urban surroundings: "*The place itself looks miserable, people are always angry – and hungry…this is what I see on a daily basis*". Anathi (Diary, 2018) describes a typical morning in more direct terms:

> *You find pow pow* [pooh] *among the street in the morning. Imagine are you gonna have good through the day? Absolutely no. Jumping dirty water, alcohol bottles, plastics, papers, sewage, blocked drains etc. that's not a good morning at all*.

The young men's impressions of the places in which they live significantly shaped their place attachment and feelings of belonging, or perhaps of 'not belonging' in that space. As Rose insists (1995: 89), "part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place", suggesting that young men's sense of themselves is tainted by their impoverished urban surroundings.

In his diary, Ndumiso (2018) provided small cameos of daily life as it was happening around him. Like many of the other young men in the study, he was quite philosophical about living in poverty in an informal settlement, in his case Site C, a sprawling area of Khayelitsha on the Cape Flats where the number of settlements continues to proliferate, increasingly on marginal pieces of land prone to flooding in the wet winter months. Ndumiso writes (2018):

> *Our homes are still single homes, expertly partitioned with cheap cloth or cardboard. The divisions consist of a kitchen for meals if there is ever anything to cook. In it is a puffing paraffin stove and a few tins converted into pots. This is where the children sleep. Each night they watch in shame as rat's babies on top of pots even excrete there. The bedroom is for prayers and keeping valuables.*

Although generally upbeat and confidently chattering whenever we met in face-to-face sessions, a totally different Ndumiso emerges in his diaries in which his vivid descriptions of daily life reveal his sense of hopelessness in the circumstances in which he lives. In one such entry (2018), he describes the start of a typical day for a shack-dweller:

> *Each morning one lights the paraffin stove to warm the bubbling water. The same pot is used for washing and cooking a small meal. The face is the most recognised part so that takes priority. After that a small portion of thick porridge with warm water and a pinch of salt for taste, and probably some sugar if they can afford it. Nothing for lunch. The day has commenced.*

It is clear from his accounts that he lives a hand-to-mouth existence in which each day is very much like the one before. The highlight of his life is organising soccer games for children in his street. He describes a street scene during a game:

> *Soccer day, worn out shoes demarcate the playing field. The game which reached a climax is interrupted when a pack of stray dogs nails a bitch on heat. Everyone abandons the match and tracks the action to its finale.*

These descriptions paint a vivid picture of a living environment underlain by hopelessness, perhaps reflecting lives that are not much better than the stray dogs that the young soccer players stand and watch. Jensen (2011) suggests that it is people's engagement with their physical living environments, how they view the world and their place in it, that is key in shaping their identities.

In contrast, traditional rural areas were generally more positively etched in the memories of young men who grew up there, considered places of beauty, security, and warm family relationships; representing another life, a haven to escape to. In trying to explain the links that Xhosa people maintain with their rural homes, Rolihlahla (Interview 2018) explained that while for White people their home is a physical structure, the place in which they live; for Xhosa people, however, "*where the umbilical cord has fallen is home*"*,* referencing the tradition of burying the umbilical cord at the place of birth.

Great affection was shown towards rural, more traditional homes. For example, in his diary, Anathi (2018) speaks of the rural homestead where he grew up, in very warm terms:

> *Home will always be home. When you at home you feel like you had been born again. No stress and nothing but the sweetest dreams*.

Even Fikile, an urbane 30-year-old, born and bred in the city, described his traditional rural home as "*a very peaceful place*" (Interview, 2018). Vuyo, who was 21 on arriving in the city (Interview, 2016), felt much safer in his rural home, finding people generally more respectful there and men's roles unambiguously defined. This hints that the attachment young men express for rural areas is related not only to its scenic beauty and peacefulness, but also to the deep Xhosa traditions practiced there, which continue to shape their masculine identity.

6.4 SHIFTING ROLES

Sassen (1998) once noted that the identities of poor young people growing up on the urban margins are increasingly being shaped by exclusion. This, as Dillabough and Kennelly (2010) suggest, is driving a significant change in their moral registers, undermining many of the checks and balances that guided previous generations, but which are gradually losing their relevance in the worlds they encounter today. In the global South, where traditional norms and mores still hold significant sway, young people are further conflicted by changes that are gradually reconfiguring culturally prescribed behaviours. These changes have consequences for the ways in which they construct young people's identities (Morrell 1998; Shildrick &

McDonald 2006), with some young people continuing to accommodate tradition more than others.

Young men also struggle to accommodate shifting gender rights and to reconfigure their own roles in response to the increasing agency of women. In his diary (2018), Ndumiso explains how he believed men's contemporary roles have shifted in relation to those of women:

> *A few decades ago, men were considered to be providers and protectors; today a lot of discussion is centred around gender equality and nowadays women around the world are fighting fiercely to make sure their rights are respected. It may seem that the traditional notion of males is dying out as women today have equal opportunities, are able to provide for a family, the amount of stay-at-home dads has significantly increased as women are pursuing their careers.*

Thus, Ndumiso believes that the increased agency of women is slowly reversing traditional male and female roles and shifting the power relations between them. Men no longer have unassailable power over women, who are beginning to assert their own rights. In his diary (2018), Ndumiso describes how economic power is shifting the power dynamics in contemporary relationships:

> *Today more women are earning higher salaries and can afford to be pickier while choosing a partner, and often ladies are the initiators of divorce.*

Ndumiso believes, however, that men are partly to blame for this shift by failing to move with the times. While women are making the most of any available opportunities to educate and uplift themselves and to improve their lives, Ndumiso feels that men are often not as eager to do so. He finds it frustrating that men are disempowering themselves and believes that they "*should catch up in order not to be left behind*" (Diary 2018).

In yet another extract from his diary, Ndumiso encapsulates the frustrations expressed by many young men in the study when he notes men's general loss of control, especially those who are already marginalised through poverty. He writes (2018):

> *It is vital for men to become better and stronger to prove their ability to remain protectors. Improving their own skills, setting and achieving goals, being masculine – this is what expected from men!*

Here, despite his professed modern outlook, he continues to reference more traditionally prescribed roles. In what could be considered as a *cris de coeur,* Ndumiso writes (Diary 2018):

> *So who is a man today? A hunter and protector or the nurturer who takes a maternity leave and lives with a bread-winning wife?*

Given the high rates of unemployment in South Africa today, though statistically generally still higher among women than men (StatsSA 2011; StatsSA 2018), young African men are struggling hard to embrace alternative identities in which their role is no longer that of provider, primary breadwinner, or head of the household. As Cleaver (2002: 3) explains, when economic changes happen that make men's role of provider difficult, if not impossible, "men's fundamental identity is called into question". Rather than an unquestioned patriarchal right to command respect, today men must earn it yet are constrained by their position in society and their ability to do so. Perhaps this begs the question, where are these young men positioned in the urban social hierarchy today? Are they, as some have suggested (Finn & Oldfield 2015; Hansen 2008; Honwana 2014; MacDonald et al. 2005), caught in long-term spaces of liminality, waiting perpetually to transition into the role of adult men in the way that they still define themselves and that society expects of them? I would question, however, whether these roles *are* even expected in a rapidly changing world that seems to be moving on, with or without them.

This study suggests that in trying to navigate changing socio-economic realities, women's new political rights and the powerlessness engendered by chronic poverty, men continue to draw on tradition to reassert their dwindling control. Many also reference religiously defined forms of masculinity, which similarly continue to reference gender roles somewhat out of sync with modern realities and particularly unachievable in environments of poverty. Both these belief systems ascribe men the role of protecting and providing for their families, to whom women must be subservient and respectful. Religious definitions of manhood are not too dissimilar from those prescribed by Xhosa tradition, and thus offer a comfortable alternative to men transitioning from traditional to modern value systems.

Given the contexts mentioned above in which men reference their masculine identities, the concept of 'respect' also needs to be considered. Mthuthuzele (Interview 2017) explained how the initiation process of *ulwaluko* teaches young men about respect. He felt, however, that this was often taken out of context, considered by men to be 'physical' forms of respect that must be shown to them, rather than respect that should be earned. The term was referenced

repeatedly by the young men when describing their frustrations about life. Respect is also discussed in relation to male identity in the literature (Gibbs et al. 2014; Gorman-Murray 2011).

Lack of respect for them as men seemed key to the young men's perceived vulnerability in the contexts of poverty in which they lived, where, as Morrell (2005) has explained, identities are seldom formed in relation to working life or careers, nor are they built around material accumulation, or the deliberately fashioned identities described among poor youths in Britain (McDowell 2000), or that contribute visual forms of identity for young African American men (hooks 2004a). Young Xhosa men in the study sought ways to command respect from others, challenged to achieve such respect, other than in referencing religious or traditional rights or, as has been noted (Dartnall & Jewkes 2013; Hearn 2012; Talbot & Quayle 2010; Wood & Jewkes 2001), in commanding respect in more aggressive and even violent ways.

In describing the people who the young men themselves admired when we explored their role models and key influencers, it was always those who held power and took control of situations, whether these be stoic grandmothers, powerful maternal uncles, or even gangsters, who earned their respect. It was these same traits that they wanted to adopt for themselves in seeking the respect of others.

The importance that most of the young Xhosa men placed on initiation as a rite of passage comes into clearer perspective when considered in the context of earning 'respect'. In undertaking *ulwaluko, y*oung men earn a measure of respect as men among other men, and also among women. Uninitiated men, on the other hand, are not granted even a modicum of respect, and are still considered boys (Gqola 2007). Yet, in a society in which most other men are also initiated, this traditional practice still fails to earn them the level of respect they seek. In environments of deep poverty, men must earn respect in other ways too. Among Xhosa men, the issue of respect is deeply ingrained, as this comment from Mcebisi's diary (2018) indicates:

> *I grew up in an environment where everyone respect and practice cultural ceremonies and they pay respect towards our ancestors.*

In contrast, Sipho (Diary 2018) lamented how this is changing, especially among young people in poor urban areas, saying:

> *No respect no blessings, and that is why our communities these days are in*
> *chaos.*

In Sipho's opinion, the loss of this fundamental tenet of tradition explains why the world around him is becoming such a negative space.

Mcebisi demonstrated how Xhosa men are struggling to reconcile modern and traditional value systems when he went on to talk about his views on marriage. In describing his perfect wife, he stressed that because tradition was so important to him, she would need to have a traditional background to understand his adherence to culture and the ways this makes him think, stating that she *must* be respectful to him. Although he said that they would share responsibilities and be equal partners in a marriage, he also stated that she "*must know her role*" and not contest his decisions. He put this into better context by explaining that he was no longer with the mother of his child because she had not treated him with the respect he deserved. It must be noted that Mcebisi teaches part-time at the local high school, where he mentors many of the poor young men he feels a deep empathy for, considering this an important role in his life. His status as a well-educated man also earns him the respect of his peers, but it also brings into question how he advises other young men he encounters in the course of his teaching work.

Clinging to outmoded forms of manhood that are no longer justifiable in relation to modern rights discourses, the desire to earn respect is, I would argue, provoking anguished responses from men trying to reclaim their once unassailable rights in a world in which they have become increasingly powerless. I suggest that these shifts are creating existential anxieties that are too often played out in aggressive ways as the young men try to survive in the complex urban environments they encounter.

6.5 SURVIVAL IN THE URBAN JUNGLE

Our world views are constructed fundamentally by our perceptions, built on our sense of security, our fate and fortune, as well as our underlying uncertainties and our feelings of fear and danger in the world (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 2002). As a World Bank (2014: s.p.) report notes, "Individuals are not calculating automatons, rather people are malleable and emotional actors whose decision-making is influenced by contextual cues, local social networks, and social norms, and shared mental models".

In trying to explain why he found informal settlement life so threatening, Mcebisi described typical street scenes in the township where he lived. These included the presence of drug addicts with cravings so harsh that they would rob you in broad daylight on the street or in your home, robbing your house whether you were in it or not. He writes (Diary 2018):

> *If you are walking on the street, you always need to be on the lookout or aware of these people.*

Having already lost his eye during an attempted robbery in his own shack, Mcebisi remained traumatised (Diary 2018). He felt that the environment where he lived was not a good place to bring up children, nor "*appropriate for people who still care about their lives*" (Diary 2018). This last comment infers that many people feel quite hopeless and even have a fatalistic attitude to life in these impoverished spaces. As Mfuneko so eloquently puts it in his poetry: "*Tomorrow is not promised to anyone*" (Diary 2018).

Mfuneko lives in a crowded shack on a wetland with his siblings and his crippled mother. His life has been a constant battle waged against many odds. The poems in his diary surface the more negative sentiments expressed by many other young men when asked about their futures. In one of the verses in his diary (2018), Mfuneko uses vivid metaphors to describe his feelings of hopelessness and despair:

> *Life paralyse the spine and brutalise the pillar of courage, for a man to fall and for hopes to go blind.*

Others were more upbeat about survival in these places. Kanelo, for example, claimed that it is in town where "*everything is happening*" (Interview 2016). He considered the city to be the place where he felt most comfortable, where he felt confident and made friends easily. However, he is insulated by his mother's support and although in moments of truancy he has tried to live elsewhere in the city, he has always returned home to what he knows best. Thus, he is deeply connected to life in this place that he calls home.

Lelethu (Interview 2016), on the other hand, started life with his father, with whom he spent some time and who he considered to be his role model. His father passed away when he was still quite young, however, and Lelethu has continued to live with his widowed mother and older siblings. Describing his mother as a modern woman who is very strict, he explained that she had even imposed curfews on him to limit his social activities and keep him on the straight and narrow, as well as taught him life skills, morals, and values.

These two examples reveal young men conflicted by the circumstances in which they find themselves: wanting to get ahead yet held back and feeling trapped by their circumstances. The difference between the emotions expressed during interviews, which were generally upbeat and positive, are contrasted by the more emotional outpourings expressed in the diaries, which reveal different and perhaps more reflexive states of mind.

In reviewing the interview transcripts, I had the overwhelming sense that many young men tried hard to hide their feelings of vulnerability by maintaining a façade that belied their true fears and insecurities. Some even tried to raise their own spirits during interviews by adopting 'tough talk', as if in so doing they were trying to convince themselves of the positives to be found in lives lived in poverty and struggle, about which they did not really feel that upbeat.

Vulnerability in the lives of young men living in informal settlement environments takes many different forms; many of them quite hard to fathom because they are relatively abstract, often manifested as emotional issues that are generally kept quite hidden from public view. Ndumiso summed up his take on the unfairness of life saying, '*Everyone deserves a second life, especially in our informal settlement*". These and other comments reveal a man deeply troubled by his impoverished surroundings, where he observes people around him struggling to survive. Ndumiso's feeling of powerlessness seems to permeate every page of his diary.

While many sensitivities were surfaced in the interviews, and especially in the diaries, the young men also revealed a range of strategies they use to defend themselves against possible threats of all kinds. Simphiwe, for example, who is of slight frame and short in stature and thus lacking in physical prowess, had developed an unusual survival strategy. Adopting chameleon-like qualities, he played different roles in different spaces.

A key theme coming out of the study was the issue of trust, already mentioned briefly in Chapter 4. In a physical living environment that is constantly changing, being able to trust someone is central to one's feeling of well-being and security. A person lacking trust may obsess about trying to read and interpret the world around them, "preoccupied with apprehension of possible risks" (Giddens 1991: 53). Even those born and bred in the city, like Mpendulo, struggle with fundamental trust issues. In his diary, Mpendulo (2018) comments that:

> …*for the youth who grow up in this place there are so much things which are not right you can't trust anyone.*

Similarly, Mpendulo, who is also a *borner,* reflected on the lack of trust in his diary, insisting that no-one could be trusted.

Giddens (1991) suggests that individuals living in complex environments, such as those in the informal settlements described here, may tend to keep to themselves, trusting their own council above that of anyone else. Simphiwe explained that his strategy was always to exude self-confidence, though trusting no-one. During an interview (2018), he was vehement that one should "*live as if you are alone in the world, don't depend on other people*".

Many of the young men expressed similar misgivings about trusting people, preferring to keep to themselves. Yet in isolating themselves, they increased their susceptibility to threats in other ways.

6.6 CONCLUSION: VULNERABILITIES EXPOSED

In a departure from most vulnerability studies that tend to regard men as the generators of risk, this study aimed to demonstrate how young men living on the margins of society in the global South are themselves being made vulnerable (Clowes 2013). Exploring themes that emerged from the analysis, this chapter has related the perspectives and experiences of young Xhosa men living in informal urban environments, revealing how their masculine identity is being shaped by both the very real physical threats and their perceived vulnerabilities in these precarious places.

In demonstrating how "both material and discursive forms of power" are manifested (Pelling 2003: 4) in the lives of marginalised young men, and the means they use to cope, the notion of "hegemonic" masculinity (Connell, 1983) is challenged, demonstrating how this term does not fit comfortably within the context of poor young men eking out an existence in the global south.

In the final chapter that follows, I revisit the aim of the study, demonstrating how the identities of young men living in in the informal settlements of Cape Town are being shaped in response to their perceived vulnerabilities. The contributions the study makes to our understandings of these young men is explained, and suggestions are made about possible ways forward.

CHAPTER 7: VULNERABILITIES REVEALED

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study sought to determine the nature of poor young Xhosa men's vulnerability in informal urban spaces of the city, exploring the factors that contribute to shaping their particular vulnerabilities, and how and why these develop over time. I wanted to understand how young men's sense of vulnerability may influence the identities they invest in and the coping strategies they develop in response to the risky environments in which they live. In asking these questions I am responding to Ratele (2016: 44) who has stressed how important it is to understand the *vulnerability* (his emphasis here) of Black young males (2016: 44), and which Seidler (2006) insists has generally not been considered. Rather, as Shefer et al. (2007: 3) contend, it has largely been ignored in favour of a more dominant view of men as "perpetrators", who make others vulnerable (Clowes 2013; Hearn 2007).

7.2 DECONSTRUCTING VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability is constructed over time (Bankoff 2012; Cutter 2006; Garcia-Acosta 2002:) and is constantly changing in response to social cultural actions, physical environments, and the decisions people make based on their belief systems and risk perceptions (Renn 2008). This makes it critical to adopt a longitudinal perspective to unravel how people's vulnerabilities develop and are shaped over time and space in ways that are complexly intertwined (Oliver Smith & Hoffman 2002), as well as how they cope with or adapt to either real or perceived threats.

There is a strong relationship between how we engage or associate with our living environment, how we make sense of it and perceive it, and the way in which we construct our identity around it (Canter 1977; Jensen 2011; Massey 1994; Proshansky et al. 1976; Sebastien 2020). As we move from one place to another during our lives, each place forms part of a tapestry that weaves itself into the intricate story of our life and who we become (Savage et al. 2005). Theoretically, critical relational geography considers how power relations shift in relation to these different spaces, creating an undulating landscape of changing agency and emotions (Amin & Thrift 2002; Massey 2005). Over their lifetime, every individual is caused to shift from one environment or situation to another, adjusting each time to the power dynamics of the place in which they find themselves, navigating and negotiating their own place within each new space. This can be an exhausting and stressful process. As McDowell and Harris (2018) have recently argued, men not only create fear but have fears of their own

when living in rough environments. Space and place are important factors contributing to the emotional states and responses of those who encounter them (Brownlow 2005; Lupton 2012). People feel a rich sense of attachment to and association with some places but not others, developing what might be considered a somewhat subliminal, or unsurfaced emotional geography of life.

For young dispossessed and increasingly marginalised men, the places where they feel most comfortable are bound to be where they feel most in control of their situation. Once again, from a relational geography perspective, this suggests a direct relationship between our sense of place in any environment and our sense of power within it. Thus, in the marginalised urban informal spaces and the complex interstices of the city in which these young men live out their lives, they feel relatively powerless, having little or no agency. These same spaces contribute to shaping their identities, who they are and what they become. Many of the young men had a keen sense of this, deeply troubled by their powerlessness and angry at their lack of capacity to change things for the better.

Low sense of meaning in life, without goals or ambitions to work towards, can lead to frustration about one's very existence, or what Mason (2015: 636) terms an 'existential vacuum'. People who experience such a void can be psychologically affected, turning to violence and substance abuse, and also potentially experiencing depression (Mason 2015). In this study, however, although the young men's sense of dependence and personal agency was aggravated by unemployment, and they lacked prospects, many had surprisingly altruistic aims of helping others around them. The young men seldom expressed totally individualistic aspirations, which is far from the egotistical image generally portrayed of young men. This may be due to their strong adherence to their culturally prescribed roles as Xhosa men, inculcated during the *ulwaluko* rite of passage. As Mfecane (2016 & 2018) explains, it also reflects the traditional Zulu communitarian conception of self, *umntu ngumntu ngabantu*, which means 'a person is a person because of others'; versions of which are found throughout African religion and philosophy and fundamentally underpin African approaches to life (Banda 2019; Maqoma 2020; Mbiti 1969; Mokhoathi 2021).

Mason (2015) has argued that most 'meaning of life' research adopts Westernised notions of meaning, emphasising that African worldviews incorporate more collective concepts, such as

'*ubuntu*' and '*batho pele* '[29]*,* which has similarly been argued by many African scholars (for example Banda 2019; Maqoma 2020; Mbiti 1969; Mokhoathi 2021). Thus, though they may have had dreams of bettering themselves and improving their own circumstances, it was surprising to discover that the young men always couched their dreams within their role as Xhosa men in providing for others and improving the lives of their family through their own efforts.

As Frankl (2006) has suggested, people discover meaning in life by dedicating themselves to something or someone beyond themselves. Illustrating this, Morrell's (2007) multi-cultural study of young high school adolescents found that, whereas young men from other racial groups had individualised and egotistical aspirations centred around themselves, wanting to build successful careers and make money, young Africans all wanted to build their own futures to help others. This suggests that cultural context is critically important in understanding how men build their masculine identities (Mfecane 2016 & 2018; Ratele 2016) and how they judge themselves.

The role of tradition in shaping men's identities in contemporary South Africa, while somewhat diminished compared to previous eras in the context of young Xhosa men, is nevertheless still a powerful force that continues to shape their actions, decisions, and responses to the world around them. Thus, as the study revealed, some men do not espouse old cultural traditions, yet to some extent they feel compelled to adhere to them through a fear of rejection and of being seen as less than men by those around them; a powerful social force that is serving to perpetuate cultural traditions.

The study found that most young Xhosa men experience a rite of passage through initiation that not only reinforces the notion of patriarchal privilege, but also clearly defines their roles and responsibilities to others. Even those with limited or no ties to traditional homes in the Eastern Cape felt that Xhosa traditions provided important values, and defined their responsibilities to care for, protect, and support their families. This is critically important in marginalised urban contexts, where men's roles tend to become less clear and more uncertain, and where they are challenged to adjust to modern democratic value systems; although this is also where the laws of the street and basic survival often override all other systems, making

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[29] As explained previously, *ubuntu* literally translated means 'I am because you are', which means that a person is only a person because of other people. *Bathu Pele* means 'people first'.

little or no reference to the cultural tenets they were reared on. Inculcated with traditional values that guarantee them power and agency (the patriarchal dividend), based on little more than their biological status as men, young men lose such status in the city, where they feel powerless to shape their own destinies, to make decisions that shape their own life trajectories, and where life often becomes a string of unmet aims and objectives.

As such, young men adopt a range of different identities, or "plural identities" as per Aboim (2010), that are complexly intertwined and no doubt confusing and conflicted.

7.3 MEN IN THE CITY – CONFLICTED INDENTITIES

> "…young men…have lost their place and function at the centre of society
> and now find themselves at the margins" (Diouf 2005: 231)

In theorising about men, we must, as Ratele (2016: 132) suggests, consider their 'situatedness' that places their lives in context. He emphasises that the way men experience the world and their actions within it are influenced particularly by race and gender so that we can only really understand men if we take these two structures into account (Ratele 2016). This echoes Crenshaw's (1989) concept of 'intersectionality', which she developed around the premise that oppression of and discrimination against women was characterised by the fact that they were Black, women, and working-class. However, it can be argued that in the context of poor men in the global South, the word 'men' could be substituted for women, particularly in the context of South Africa where the rights of women have been enshrined within the Constitution, which to some extent has come at the expense of men, simultaneously disadvantaging them (Yuval-Davis 2006b). As Ratele (2008b: 517) has argued, disregarding "the intersection of gender, poverty/unemployment in male lives" can qualitatively reduce the value not just of gender studies, but also of research into poverty and development. As Ratele (2008b) emphasises, exploring these intersections avoids consideration of men as a homogenous group and in a pervasively negative light.

Mfecane (2018) argues that most research into African masculinity and identity to date has been couched in Western theoretical framings that are completely at odds with the realities of African men's lives. He believes that the inherent complexities of African's men's experiences, and what he calls "the essence" of African personhood, are generally overlooked in such studies (Mfecane 2018: 292). Mfecane (2018) suggests that apart from the physical body and social actions that men perform, there are many other intangible elements that remain invisible, yet have an even greater influence on men's identity and behaviour. Among

the Yoruba in Nigeria, for example, everyone is believed to have two distinct personae, the one they present to the outside world and another "hidden private self" (Mfecane 2018: 295 quoting from Lienhardt 1985: 143), while in Cote D'Ivoire people are believed to be incarnations of their ancestors. Another key difference between Western and African culture is the fundamentally communitarian nature of African lives, as opposed to the pervasive Western concern with individuality, as has already been mentioned.

The way in which masculine identities are formed is concerned as much with the personal psyche as it is with power and social standing; in this context, tradition and institutional laws, social rules, and customs all play a role. While there is no doubt that one's identity is constructed from social, economic, political, religious, and cultural elements, it is significantly shaped, as Ratele (2016: 140) suggests, by one's early life, the attachments one makes along the way and one's emotional responses to the "traumas, insecurities and fantasies" experienced. Together, these constitute the emotional geography of one's life. Similarly, Morrell (2001) argues that identities bear the imprint of personal histories, with one's formative childhood years contributing significant influences in one's perceptions later in life. These elements are referenced in constructing our worldviews and the way we respond to life.

Thus, as Pieterse (2011: 9) has suggested, we need to delve deeper in developing "a much more psychologically attuned and culturally inflected discourse on identity and everyday life" in urban African settlements. This study has contributed to addressing this quest in relation to the lives of young African men, given their noted invisibility in current literature on risk and vulnerability in informal urban spaces in Africa.

7.4 LOOKING FORWARD

In a paper delivered at a conference on Informal Urbanism, Fernandez-Maldonado (2006), insisted that the process of urbanisation is changing the world as we know it. She believes that the main actors behind this change are young people who, in their quest for progress and opportunities for betterment, must overcome many obstacles. While it may be true that young people are driving change around the world and shaping the way in which cities of the future are evolving, there is no doubt that many young people are also failing to overcome the "immense spatial, social, economic and cultural obstacles" that Fernando-Maldonado (2006: s.p.) speaks of. Many remain trapped in what could be described as the liminal spaces created by new forms of marginality that constrain them to lives lived in poverty from which it is difficult to extricate themselves, though they may have every desire to so. Young people are

also adapting to new and quite different moral registers that are developing in these urban spaces.

In failing to meet expected responsibilities, such as those prescribed in the traditional patriarchal system, young Xhosa men have developed what I call conflicted identities and are forced to assert their manhood in other ways, often through aggressive and even violent behaviour. As has been noted by Ntombana (2011), unruly behaviour is not condoned by tradition either but has become corrupted and needs to revert to its purer essence. Rather than providing hegemonic dividends, as noted so frequently in the literature (for example Anderson & McCormack 2018; Connell 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Morrell 2001; Morrell et al 2012; Ratele 2001; 2008a; 2008b; 2016; Shefer et al. 2007), patriarchy today provides young Xhosa men with other less noted benefits as well as significant challenges. While it is still the moral compass that continues to guide their perceived roles in a society that seems to have forgotten them, it also defines the roles and responsibilities they aim for and aspire to. In this way, patriarchy contributes to young men's feelings of powerlessness when failing to meet their prescribed obligations. As Morrell et al (2012: 19) suggest what is needed is a more benign form of patriarchy that *"builds on existing family and community rather than seeking a more radical reconfiguration of domestic forms of social organization"*.

Given the continued centrality of tradition in the life-worlds of young Xhosa men, there is an imperative to accommodate it in ways more attuned to modern urban society, rather than demonising it. In addressing their perceived emasculation, men can be re-empowered in ways that, rather than entrenching hegemonic masculine traits, rebuild the fundamental traditional values that have become confused and conflicted in contemporary urban contexts. In this way, men's need to assert their masculinity in ways that put others at risk can be overcome by drawing on the very same traditional values that once guided their decisions and provided their moral registers, accommodating a new form of patriarchal dividend more suited to modern contexts and yet aligned to old traditional values.

This study revealed that there is a desire among young Xhosa men today to accommodate conflicting value systems, reconfiguring deeply entrenched traditional values in new ways that help to address their currently conflicted identities and feelings of disempowerment. While traditions such as *ulwaluko* and *imbeleko* continue to be followed, even by modern urbanised young men and those who are devout Christians, and they continue to be accepted practice in broader settlement society, it is time to adapt such traditions in ways that will prevent men from feeling so conflicted by trying to accommodate competing value systems that currently

do not speak to each other. As Mbiti (1986: 174) once argued about Xhosa tradition, "morals have evolved in order to keep society not only alive but in harmony". Morals guide people in doing what is right and are good for both their sake and that of their community.

7.5 FINAL NOTES

In heeding calls to understand men's emotional registers in relation to their marginality (for example from Langa 2020; Meth 2009; Ratele 2016; Shefer et al 2007), this study has revealed how and why young Xhosa men living in informal settlements in Cape Town are made to feel vulnerable and their manhood threatened. I have shown how in relation to this, their emotional registers influence the identities they invest in and shape their behaviours. My findings suggest that culture plays a critical role in their 'identity projects', finding that traditional norms and values continue to inform the decisions young men make and influence their behaviour in a democratic society in which new moral registers have evolved over recent decades that are often at odds with the tenets of tradition.

Although studies of men have often referenced hegemonic forms of masculinity, implying that it is perhaps the normative form of male identity, (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), in truth few men really 'enact' such forms of masculinity (Ratele 2016: 49). Nevertheless, the concept of hegemony is very useful as a measure against which to compare and contrast other forms of masculinity. The study has revealed that masculinity can take a variety of forms that may co-exist, with men being simultaneously invested in several different identities, using them interactively as each situation demands – what I refer to in Chapter 6 as '*situated identities*', referencing their 'emotional geographies'.

Using adapted participatory methods and diary-keeping to interrogate the nature of the young men's perceived vulnerabilities, noting their emotional responses to challenges they have encountered along their life paths, I have identified the multiple, fluid, and often competing identities that young men assume to survive in the city. This had caused me to challenge the notion of 'hegemonic' masculinity that has been both supported and criticised, although predominantly in Western scholarly literature (Aboim 2010; Connell 1983 & 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Meth 2009; Pleck 1981).

In adopting an interpretivist theoretical approach to my study, my aim was to understand the differences between these young men, how they interpret their roles in relation to others, and how they give meaning to these roles. Given the uniqueness and complexity of each case presented here, I suggest that masculinity must always be considered to be relational, with

each man 'positioned in relation to power' (Ratele 2016: 46). This differs in each space he encounters, ranging in form from hegemonic to subordinate. I have demonstrated how each young man's identity is constantly being shaped by the different social and physical environments he inhabits and moves between.

Drawing on Crenshaw's (1994) concept of intersectionality in explaining this relationality, I contend that a number of elements contribute to shaping the vulnerabilities of these young men, informing how they construct their identities as men. These include their marginalisation through poverty and unemployment. As Mfecane (2013) has argued we need to appreciate how these challenges impact on their masculinity. Their continued belief in the traditional tenets of male identity, as prescribed by their Xhosa culture, is in turn being confounded by democratic principles that have shifted these roles to align with more globalised, read Westernised, notions of what it is to be a good man in contemporary society. But their vulnerability through marginalisation is also related to South Africa's unique history of racial subjugation, in which Black identities have historically been shaped by exclusion and lack of entitlement through legalised repression (Motsemme 2002).

In South Africa, with its unique history of racism, classism (as related to racism), and the subordination of Black people, first under colonial rule and then in terms of apartheid ideologies (Lemon 2021; Posel 2011: Smith 1992), Black men, I argue, have adopted a variety of masculine identities that coexist somewhat uneasily. Thus, while traditional forms of masculinity, as prescribed in Xhosa culture, are fundamentally hegemonic, being 'patriarchal', poor young Black men who continue to suffer the effects of racial and classist-derived forms of hegemony, have not been able to draw on such dividends in the city, and as a consequence have adopted 'subordinate' and 'marginalised' masculine identities.

While I acknowledge that 'marginalised masculinity' (Meth 2009) is perhaps a more appropriate term to use in the context of these young men, Connell (2005) has emphasised, that neither hegemonic nor marginalised forms of masculinity are static, but rather constantly being reconfigured in response to particular situations and changing social relationships. I suggest that the words 'marginalised', 'subordinate' or even 'complicit', still fail to capture sufficiently the masculine identity projects of these young men, many of whom are trying hard to change to accommodate new and shifting expectations placed on them as men. I suggest rather that the term 'transforming' masculinities better encapsulates the transitional space of male identity-making in the context of these young men.

No longer youths, yet not quite men in the traditionally defined sense of the word, in not being able to establish a home of their own with a wife who respects them they are "lost in space" (see Zweig 2016), traditional men who espouse modern values too. Once again referencing Ratele's work (2016), I concur with his view that culturally exalted forms of masculinity tend to override or even 'silence' other ways of being a man and yet still need to be considered when trying to understand young Black African men who continue to reference them.

I also argue that in trying to understand how these young men construct their identities in the city, it is critical to determine the nature of their responses, not only to their social but also to their physical living environment. This involves understanding the 'geography of their emotions', their sense of place and belonging, or of not belonging in a particular place, which also references the particular power dynamics they encounter in that place. The physical characteristics of informal living environments for men who lack agency, those who are unemployed and spend their time 'stuck' in such places, is often overlooked, yet is critical to consider given the pervasively emasculating effects these impoverished places have on their psyches as men. In such places, where they have limited opportunities to demonstrate culturally and socially exalted forms of manhood (Barker & Ricardo 2002), men are challenged to meet these somewhat unrealistic expectations, not only by other men, but also by women.

Wilkinson (2006) believes that how people perceive threats is profoundly influenced by the cultural meanings they reference. In this study I have demonstrated how culture informs how young men rationalise perceived threats, often referencing the power of the ancestors in explaining the nature of their vulnerabilities and their capacities to deal with them. I have shown how cultural change in South Africa is shifting the way men define and practice their masculinity, continuing to reference age-old cultural beliefs, even though they may consider themselves to be 'modern' in their outlook. The study has also demonstrated how, against a backdrop of rapid urbanisation and global influences that are shaping new rationalities and alternative moral registers, these young men's responses are also changing. This echoes Lupton (2012: 4) who suggests that the way young men rationalise risk is constantly being "configured and reconfigured", presenting unique challenges to their identities as men.

Thus, while not disputing the agency of young men in creating risks in the marginalised environments described in this study, I have sought to contribute to filling a noted gap in our urban understandings, by exploring how young Xhosa men themselves experience the

vagaries of informal settlement life, identifying the threats they face and how they are made susceptible to them.

Both the real and perceived expectations of others, and their own desire for credibility, dignity, and respect, strongly influence how young men perform masculinity in impoverished informal environments where their culturally prescribed roles as men have become unachievable (Shefer et al. 2007; Ward et al. 2017). Thus, although Connell (2005: 84) suggests, "*men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command"* this has, perhaps, the unintended consequence of challenging poor young men to claim such dividends in environments of poverty where they are increasingly unachievable.

Through nuanced empirical research, this study has revealed how young men are currently conflicted in not knowing quite how to accommodate change without forfeiting the very essence of what it is that they believe makes them men. Ratele (2008b) believes that more empirical research is necessary to establish whether men really want to change, to move with the times. But, perhaps, as Hearn (1996: 214) has argued, it is better to study "what men think or feel" than to talk more narrowly about forms of masculinity. Mfecane (2018: 292) insists, however, that most definitions of masculinity fail to appreciate "*the complex life experiences of African men*" in contexts very different to those referenced in Western ontologies, while Ratele (2014) similarly argues that most South African studies of masculinities seem unaware of the importance of African culture. This suggests, then, that we should adopt a far more culturally attuned and Afro-centric approach to understanding poor young African men that considers the ways in which they are made to feel vulnerable. This means challenging our preconceived notions about the masculine identities we think they are invested in. Further research in other areas of South Africa, and indeed in other parts of Africa, is critical to understand how the identities of men from other ethnicities are being conflicted.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A contains a list of the participants in the study, using their pseudonyms.

Appendices B, C and D contain Word versions of the three articles submitted for publication. (Please note that the formatting of each article conforms to the formatting required by the journal concerned and differs from that of the dissertation).

APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

APPENDIX B: CHAPTER 2 PUBLISHED ARTICLE

Chapter 2: Published article	Zweig P 2016. Lost in space? Considering young men as drivers of urban informal settlement risk. *Urban Forum* 27: 383-398).

APPENDIX C: CHAPTER 3: PUBLISHED ARTICLE

Chapter 3: Published article	Zweig P 2021. Exploring men's vulnerability in the global South: Methodological reflections. *Area* 53: 718-726.

APPENDIX D: CHAPTER 4: PUBLISHED ARTICLE

Chapter 4: Published Article	Zweig P 2022. Views From the Margins: Exploring How Vulnerability Contributes to Shaping Men's Identities in Informal Urban South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies.* p.00219096221079313.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

Details of young men in the study

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Settlement Area	No.	Pseudonym	Age	Settlement Area
1	Vuyo	22	Masiphumelele	24	Ndumiso	26	Khayelitsha
2	Kanelo	24	Masiphumelele	25	Isivile	20	Khayelitsha
3	Lelethu	21	Masiphumelele	26	Fikile	30	Khayelitsha
4	Mbuyiselo	31	Masiphumelele	27	Bongani	34	Khayelitsha
5	Mcebisi	33	Masiphumelele	28	Luva	25	Khayelitsha
6	Mfuneko	23	Masiphumelele	29	Lwazi	25	Khayelitsha
7	Sipho	31	Masiphumelele	30	Mbulelo	29	Khayelitsha
8	Misumzi	25	Masiphumelele	31	Phumzile	28	Khayelitsha
9	Mncedisi	25	Masiphumelele	32	Alakhe	33	Khayelitsha
10	Paki	32	Masiphumelele	33	Lucky	27	Philippi
11	Kwanele	32	Masiphumelele	34	Likhaya	21	Philippi
12	Vuyisani	21	Masiphumelele	35	Lisolethu	26	Philippi
13	Zanemvula	22	Masiphumelele	36	Bungi	19	Philippi
14	Xola	21	Masiphumelele	37	Khanyisa	32	Philippi
15	Ntonipho	28	Masiphumelele	38	Thato	30	Philippi
16	Thando	28	Masiphumelele	39	Sandla	32	Philippi
17	Thokosani	22	Masiphumelele	40	Simphiwe	20	Philippi
18	Unathi	21	Masiphumelele	41	Anathi	24	Philippi
19	Axolisile	21	Masiphumelele	42	Lucky	27	Philippi
20	Siya	33	Masiphumelele	43	Rolihlahla	37	Philippi
21	Mpendulo	32	Khayelitsha	44	Samkelo	27	Philippi
22	Mthuthuthuzele	32	Khayelitsha	45	Bongi	23	Philippi
23	Mzingisi	26	Khayelitsha	46	Xolisile	22	Philippi

APPENXIX B: CHAPTER 2 PUBLISHED ARTICLE

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Lost in space? Considering young men as drivers of urban informal settlement risk.

Abstract

In today's rapidly urbanising world young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds are becoming increasingly marginalised. Young men in particular are adapting to very mobile forms of existence. Navigating complex and unfamiliar urban landscapes, they must constantly interpret and adapt to changing circumstances in order to survive. Living in shifting informal urban environments they have of necessity developed survival strategies and new behaviours, drawing on traditional beliefs combined with new urban experiential knowledge. However, while women and children are generally considered most vulnerable to the growing levels of risk associated with everyday life in densely-settled informal urban settlements, the particular vulnerabilities of the itinerant young men who live there have generally been disregarded or at best are poorly understood. This presents a critical gap in our understanding of urban risk in South Africa. Answering to a research imperative that seeks to understand the nature of the mobility of young black South African men living in informal settlements, and the vulnerabilities associated with their fluid and generally insecure livelihoods, this paper contributes a new perspective to current understandings of urban risk, presenting a review of key bodies of literature and relevant theoretical debates drawn from disparate disciplinary perspectives.

Key Words African men. Mobility. Informal settlements. Urban risk. Vulnerability

Introduction

Globally, more than a billion urban dwellers currently live in informal environments, increasing, it is estimated, by 10 million inhabitants annually (IFRC, 2010). In sub-Saharan Africa more than 60% of the population is already living in slum conditions (UN Habitat 2010). Sandercock (1998:7) believes that in response to this proliferation of informality it is critical to develop a better understanding of people's livelihoods, in other words *'a new kind of cultural as well as political and economic literacy'* to inform a new urban planning paradigm. Pieterse, acknowledging these new urban realities, anticipates that *'slum urbanism'* will in future continue to characterise African urban landscapes, suggesting that '*the shanty city is by and large the real African city*' (2011: 6).

Southern scholars have contested the dominant northern framings of urbanism, seeking theoretical approaches more suited to the realities of this urban evolution in more southern contexts (Mabin A 2014; Oldfield 2014; Roy 2014). In Roy's discussion of the concept of '*worlding*' for example, which she describes as '*a perennial process of a lived and imminent contingency*' that counterbalances the theory of 'globalisation', she suggests that the global south is becoming the heart of a new world order that is being '*recreated through the urban revolution*' (2014:14). Given these concerns it is imperative to develop new theoretical frames of understanding of a different African form of urbanism (Comaroff & Comaroff 2011) from the perspective of the people who inhabit these spaces (Pieterse 2011).

These densely settled, generally unplanned and inadequately serviced urban areas are becoming hot-spots of urban risk (Pelling 2003; Pelling & Wisner 2012), strongly rooted in social and economic vulnerabilities associated with unstable sources of livelihood, deplorable living conditions and poor governance (Birkmann *et al 2010;* Moser 1996*;* Pelling 2003). Hewitt suggests that there is a positive correlation between increasing urban density and rising levels of risk (1997). Indeed, it is generally poor marginalised households living in crowded informal settlements and low-cost housing areas that are most vulnerable to hazards such as fires, severe weather events and seasonal flooding, located as they generally are in risk-prone and ecologically-fragile areas.

Disaster risk research among informal urban communities has found young men to be significant drivers of risks such as informal settlement fires (Pharoah 2012), while there is a wealth of other literature that casts young men as the perpetrators of escalating levels of crime (Cock 2001; Diouf 2003; Urdal & Hoelscher 2009; Wood & Jewkes 2001), with obvious consequences for the communities in which they live. Thus, it is essential for development planners and policy makers alike to understand the role of young men in generating everyday risk in order to find solutions that will effectively reduce risk and ensure sustained developmental gains that are often undermined through their actions.

Forced to compete for poorly paid and often piecemeal work (Cleaver 2002; Meth 2009) in a highly competitive urban labour market, young black men with limited skills have in response adapted to a particularly mobile form of existence (De Haan 1999). Navigating their way in these complex urban landscapes, their identities, this paper argues, are constantly mediated and negotiated in response to the changing circumstances in which they find themselves.

This focus on young men is a departure from the emphasis of previous urban risk and development studies which, while generally considering women and children to be most vulnerable to growing levels of urban risk (Anderson 1994; Blaikie et al 2014; Budlender 2004;

Enarson & Morrow 1998; Fordham 2004; Niaz 2009), fails to consider the vulnerability of young men and their role in shaping and driving risk in the communities in which they live. Indeed, the particular vulnerabilities and insecurities of itinerant young men in these environments has been generally disregarded and is poorly understood, presenting a critical gap in our contextual understanding of urban informal areas. Do young men's perceived vulnerabilities perhaps shape the way in which they themselves drive urban risk through their actions?

This paper explores the key bodies of literature that might inform such a research question, seeking to understand how inherently mobile lifestyles and livelihoods may influence shifting and alternating urban identities, individual coping strategies and adaptive responses, ultimately influencing the ways in which young men, often unwittingly, become drivers of urban risk. This literature review will also probe the reconfiguration of traditional black masculinities in urban landscapes, where young men are slowly abandoning the traditional practices that once guided and shaped their lifestyle choices and behaviour. It will also explore young men's feelings of attachment and '*sense of place*' as a consequence of their mobile urban livelihood strategies. For comparison, shifts in global youth identities will also be considered. Finally, these contrasting bodies of literature are related to the urban risk and vulnerability literature.

The questions raised in this paper are thus multi-faceted, posing the challenge of integrating disparate yet inherently related bodies of knowledge, referencing literature from a wide range of disciplines. Areas of focus include mobility and migration; gender studies related to changing masculinities; urban everyday risk and vulnerability; livelihoods studies; African and global youth identities, as well as place attachment. In providing an overview of these areas of literature this paper aims to demonstrate their contribution to a fundamental understanding of young men as risk drivers in urban informal contexts.

Mobility and migration

Cresswell (2010: 18) describes mobility as '*an entanglement of movement, representation and practice*' hinting at the complexity inherent in mobile livelihoods. Mobile livelihoods require adaptation to new and unfamiliar urban spaces. Individuals are constrained by the complex socio-cultural milieu in which they find themselves, and within which they must orientate (Renn 2008). Within geography, 'critical mobility thinking' (Jenson 2009) has considered mobility conceptually, exploring the relationship between power networks, the formation of identity and sense of belonging in a given place (Jensen 2011). Lynch's (1960) ground-breaking work on mobility by contrast is far more structural and urban-focused in its approach, exploring constructs such as paths, nodes and enclaves. Lynch's work however, strikes chords with that of Jensen,

finding that mobility inherently '*produces meaning, identity and cultural signification'* (Jensen 2009: 141).

In recent years global migration research has focused strongly on rural to urban migration (Bakewell *et al* 2007; Barrios *et al* 2006; Cresswell & Merriman 2011; Nguyen *et al* 2013; Tacoli *et al* 2015). This has also been reflected in the work of South African scholars (Crush *et al* 2005; Landau & Segatti 2009; Peberdy 2010), particularly since the 1990s and the democratic transition (Bekker 2001: Cross 2003; Posel 2004), which saw the rescinding of repressive *apartheid* laws that once prohibited and severely restricted the movement of black South Africans from the impoverished previous homeland areas to the cities (De Jong & Steinmetz 2006). Increasing movement to the cities is also clearly reflected in the South African national census data (StatsSA 2001; StatsSA 2011). Studies have shown, however, that this movement is not only restricted to the major metropolitan areas but is also occurring in smaller towns and villages across the country (Cross 2006; Geyer *et al 2015;* Kok 2003: Posel 2004; Todes 2001; Wentzel *et al* 2006). Migration flows to smaller towns and secondary centres may in fact be even greater than those to metropolitan areas (Cross 2006). A recent study by Jacobs & Du Plessis (2016) shows clear evidence of higher migration patterns among young single men under the age of 35, particularly to the Western Cape.

But while the increasing scale of urban-to-urban movement has been noted as an emerging trend (De Jong & Steinmetz 2006), the smaller movements of people in and between urban areas have received less attention in the literature (Cross 2006; Kesselring 2006). Inter- and intra-urban mobility has become a common livelihood strategy among the urban poor, particularly in their quest for employment opportunities and access to services (Cross 2003; Simone 2009), although Geyer *et al* would argue that *'a decision to migrate is seldom based on a single consideration'* (2002: 25). Despite the paucity of research around the relationship between intra- and inter-urban mobility and labour access (Landau *et al* 2011), an HSRC survey in 2001-2002 found that the most commonly cited reason for internal migration in South Africa was the quest for employment, particularly among young unmarried men (Wentzel *et al* 2006).

Migration movements have a long history in South Africa, but appear to have escalated since the late 1990s when unemployment reached records heights (Cross 2006; Todes 2001). But while the start and end points of these movements have been recorded, the paths and stops in between have not been tracked (Cross 2006), suggesting a research prerogative. Olago (2011) argues that these smaller scale movements are particularly significant for demographers and policy-makers, while Jacobs & Du Plessis (2016) stress the implications for municipal planning, resource allocation and budgeting. Olago (2011) is of the opinion that most local authorities currently do not have clear understandings of the poor communities within their jurisdiction and that this lack

of information has inadvertently created distance between them. This reiterates Robert's (1994) contention that a fundamental challenge to municipalities is their lack of knowledge about local communities so that '*at best, decisions and planning are being shaped by officials with a limited empirical knowledge of the population which they serve*' (1994: 17).

We need, therefore, to understand not only the reasons for mobile livelihoods, but the nature of this movement and the importance of social capital and migrant networks in facilitating this process (Wentzel *et al 2006).* In a more recent study of South African urban migration trends, Geyer *et al* (2012) describe what they call '*systemic and varied'* migration patterns among low-income populations that are not apparent at broader scale, suggesting the need for micro-scale case studies to explore these movement patterns in more detail.

Surely then, the inherent mobility noted among poor young African men must influence the shaping of *fluid* identities, their coping strategies and adaptive responses. Cross (2006) found high levels of social dislocation among the intra-urban migrants studied, evidenced by low marriage rates (Rudwick & Posel 2014; Viljoen 1994) and generally short term relationships, which she believes reflects *'the pressures of second generation urban life in unstable community contexts'* (2006: 222). This hints at the inherent insecurities of life, particularly among a high proportion of mobile young men.

Human behaviour in any space is shaped by lived experience, social interaction and communication as well as cultural traditions, underpinned by individual perceptions (Renn 2008; Viljoen 1994). These are influenced by both group identities and individual personalities which, the literature suggests, also shift over time and space in response to constant external changes (Cresswell 2004; Kimmel et al 2005; Sassen 1998). Thus, mobility, while now a defining feature of modern life, is also inherently related to the formation of new identities (Freudal-Pedersen *et al* 2016). Rogaly (2015) establishes a clear link, for example, between mobility and shifting masculinities while Thomson, in speaking of migration (1999), makes reference to '*the collision between old and new ways, and the forging of new understandings of self and society'* (1999: 35).

The next few sections of this paper explore some of the literature around changing identities from a variety of perspectives. Beginning with masculinity and male identity, the paper goes on to consider changing youth identity and the influence of modernisation on traditional African culture in an urbanising world.

Masculinity and male identity

While it is perhaps within the realm of geography that we can best explain how masculinity is enacted in different environments, rearticulated in changing geographical and social spaces

(Hopkins & Noble 2009), a growing body of other disciplinary literature focuses on the lives of men. The Australian sociologist Connell, for example, has produced an extensive body of work on masculinity, drawing on Gramsci's work on hegemony in developing the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell 2005).

Connell (1995) describes how theorists in the 1930s believed that gender roles were clearly defined and psychologically internalised, with obvious benefits for society, contributing to social stability and sustained individual mental wellbeing. The roles of men and women were seen to be complementary (Pleck 1981). Mead's (1930; 1963) anthropological work among primitive societies in the same era, provided clear evidence, however, that these so-called 'sex roles' were not standard, but rather uniquely culturally defined. In the late 1950s Hacker (1957) was among the first to criticise the benefits of predefined sex-roles, stressing how the '*burden of masculinity',* had created unfair social expectations of men trying to perform within rigidly-defined roles (1957).

The rise of feminism in the 1970s confronted these roles and contested functionalist theory (Connell 1995). Women, feminists averred, had accepted subordinate roles to men, allowing them to become oppressed (*ibid*). It has been suggested that gender studies have generally been conflated with feminist studies (Fordham 2004; Morrell & Swart 2005; Shefer *et al* 2007). Morrell & Swart (2005) believe that it was only with the emergence of Gender and Development (GAD) perspectives in the late 1980s and 1990s that the focus of gender research shifted to include men and masculinity. However, despite this, men have generally continued to be '*missing'* from development work (Cornwall 2000), usually neglected by feminist scholars (Chant 2000; Van Hoven & Horschelmann 2005).

The last thirty years has seen the rise of *masculine geographies,* with a significant focus on men and masculinity within social and cultural geography (Berg and Longhurst 2003). Geographers have begun to contribute insights into the spatial relationships and relationality of changing masculinities, shifting from a sociological to a more cultural perspective (Hopkins & Noble 2009). McDowell (2003) stresses the need to conceptualise masculinity from a more strategic perspective, acknowledging the unique contexts (resources and capacities) shaping its particular form. Consideration of the marginalisation of men has also been the focus of other disciplinary studies, such as those of Cleaver (2002) and Xaba (2001), while Gough has called for research focusing on the *'ordinary man'* or the *'everyday man'* (Gough 2001: 170). Writing in 1970, Barker flagged the concern that '*those who were treated like boys, behave like boys ...who having no responsibility laid upon them, owe nothing to any man' (Barker, 1970: 55).* This has great resonance in the South African context of apartheid (Morrell 2001; Reid & Walker 2003; Shefer *et al* 2007; Xaba 2001).

Academic research into the changing lives and identities of men in South Africa has grown, particularly since 1994, much of it broadly categorised as Men's Studies or Critical Men's Studies (Morrell 2001), and also significantly considered within the context of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence (Hunter 2010; Wood & Jewkes 2001; Xaba 2001). Von Kotze (1996) has illustrated the contrast between experiences of masculinity in rural and urban contexts in South Africa, while Meth and McClymont (2009: 913) have explored how the '*chaotic [urban] space*' has structured the way men have experienced new forms of marginalisation, influencing their feelings of self-worth and individual sense of vulnerability. In this context young men with limited skills, forced to compete for poorly paid and often piecemeal work in a highly competitive urban labour market have, it may be argued, become increasingly vulnerable and have consequently adapted to a particularly mobile existence.

The plight of young men in urban areas has, however, generally received very little attention, from researchers and policy makers (Morrell & Swart 2005; Ratele et al. 2007). Ratele, who has conducted extensive research on South African masculinity (2001; 2006; 2008a; 2008b; Ratele *et al* 2007), laments this, particularly the lack of narratives concerning men and boys. However, although not captured to a significant degree in formal academic literature, much recent popular South African writing reflects on the lives of young African men, describing their urban lifestyles (Forde 2011; Harbour 2011; Otter 2007). Otter (2007) for example, has explored the lives of young men by living among them in an informal setting, publishing his findings in a light-hearted biographical account *Khayelitsha, umlungu in a township* that sold over 10 000 copies, attesting to local public interest in the topic.

Kimmel *et al (2005: 7)* suggest that gender identity is constantly in a state of flux, '*a constant process, always being reinvented and rearticulated in every setting'*. This concept of *fluid masculinities*, changing forms of masculinity that shift, both over time and in response to changing social environments, has also been debated by others (Massey 1994; Morrell 2007; Morrell & Swart 2005; Ratele *et al*. 2007; Xaba 2001), while the possibility for multiple masculine identities to exist in parallel, alternating in response to different situations as an adaptation strategy has also been explored (MacDowell 2003; Ratele *et al*. 2007).

The identities of young men in complex urban landscapes are constantly mediated and negotiated in response to the immediate social circumstances in which they find themselves. Masculinity can thus be seen to be socially constructed (Ratele *et al* 2007; Salo 2007), the product of particular cultural and other contexts (Lindegger & Maxwell 2007). However, individual masculine identities are shaped not only by immediate contexts but to some extent by hegemonic norms (Wetherall & Edley 1999), such as those prescribed by traditional culture.

Changing African masculinity: tradition versus urban life

The reconfiguration of traditional black masculinities in informal urban landscapes is the focus of a growing body of research (Hunter 2010; Morrell 2007: Reid & Walker 2003; Ratele *et* al 2007; Sideris 2005; Xaba 2001). Young African men are seen to be slowly abandoning the traditional practices that once guided and shaped their lifestyle choices and behaviour (Thomson 2002), making increasingly less reference to the traditional systems and cultures that once guided their responses to situations and informed their decision-making (Reid & Walker 2003). Hearn (1992), for example, suggests that becoming a man today is no longer mediated through family status and key relationships as it once was, but rather through the '*public eye*', a radical departure from old rural systems.

But this change has not been sudden, having historical antecedents. Colonialism, for example, is blamed for initiating the loss of traditional status among men in Africa (Mihn-Ha 2005; Silberschmidt 1992), while the migrant labour system that this process spawned led men's roles to shift still further, shaping their economic function from that of household head to so-called 'bread-winners' (Morrell & Swart 2005). South Africa's political history has also contributed significantly to shifts in masculine identity, from the so-called *protest masculinity* of the 1970s, through the reign of the young comrades in the 1980s when young men mobilised during the struggle (Luyt & Foster 2001; Ramphele 2001; Xaba 2001). More recently, the democratic transition in South Africa has engendered massive social and political change (Moolman 2013), further undermining historically-entrenched patriarchal privilege.

Thus, while the status of women has advanced economically (Ramphele 2001), to some extent this has come at the expense of men and served to undermine their economic status, '*exacerbated by the lapsing of bride wealth payments and the decline in marriage rates'* (Morell & Swart 2003:103). Hunter (2010) believes that young men today feel judged not only by other men but also by women (2010). This process of emasculation, particularly in the context of poverty (Salo 2007), has perhaps been manifested in the dramatic increase in gender-based violence (Niehaus 2003; Reid 2003; Ramphele 2001; Walker 2005). Similarly, bell hooks, researching African American men, found that working class men in the United States have suffered emasculation owing to their inability to meet societal expectations of what it means to be a man and have in response resorted to hurting others (Quoted in Kimmel *et al.* 2005). Reid suggests that high levels of unemployment and the lack of role models, as well as the retraction of traditional patriarchal privilege and general loss of ambition have seriously undermined masculine identity, leading to what he terms a '*crisis of masculinity'* among young black South African men *(2003: 215).*

Ratele's (2001) work with young Black professional South African men who have shifted into middle class environments revealed that even progressive, 'modern' Black men have a particular view of themselves that is partially shaped by more traditional attitudes regarding the place of women. In his study of Zulu youth, Morrell (2007) found that young black men are frequently trying to reconcile new democratic rights with traditions that define their identity and stress the importance of loyalty to one's clan. This reiterates Beck's (1992) work even before democratic change among township boys who he found challenged by life in a '*risk society where uncertainty has displaced the certainties provided by tradition*' and where '*fluidity and disruption are constant*' (Beck 1992 as quoted by Morell 2007: 87) It is also reflected in the work of Ratele *et al* (2007) who assert that urban township life today increasingly involves more immediate concerns of *'material security, dealing with precarious life circumstances and avoiding risk' (2007: 83)*.

In South Africa poor African men have not only increasingly abdicated familial responsibility by not taking wives but have in the process lost social prestige and status (Morell & Swart 2003). Sideris asks us to consider how we should '*conceptualise the pressures confronting men*' today (2005: 119), quoting a young rural man to illustrate the dilemmas facing young African men transitioning from traditional to modern urban framings of manhood: *"To be considered a man you must have a woman. If you are not married you can't go to places where men are discussing problems. Without a wife and a child you are still a boy!"* (Sideris 2005: 119).

It is perhaps this '*gap between aspiration and achievement*' (Meischer & Lindsay 2003:8) that causes men to feel the need to affirm their manhood in other ways. Living in these fluid and volatile environments young people in particular are facing multiple, complex and often unfamiliar challenges that are at odds with traditionalism, which Ramphele (2001) insists has essentially become '*dysfunctional in modern society*' (2001: 162).

Youth identity

Scholars have questioned how marginalisation and mobility is shaping youth culture today (MacDonald 1999; Ramphele 2001; Sassen 1998). Sassen (1998: 2) calls them '*the lost generation',* reiterating the concern among many scholars that an increasing proportion of the youth are gradually being excluded from the global economy through their inability to find work, partly through a lack of education and inadequate skill sets that is condemning them to a life on the urban edge. Growing numbers of young people are living in low-income and migrant communities which, Dillabough & Kennelly (2010) propose, has resulted in '*new forms of moral regulation*' among the youth, '*shaped by urban exclusion, specific local histories, diasporic shifts*

and migration flows' (2010: 2). This they suggest has created new forms of vulnerability associated with greater risk taking, lack of safety nets and forced independence.

The gradual marginalisation of the youth is complex, varying across culture and context, requiring, as Dillabough & Kennelly (2010) suggest, the collection of narrative accounts from the youth themselves to enable robust interpretation. In the context of Africa, changing identities among the youth are a critical area for future study (Diouf 2003). The crisis of youth identity on the continent is being driven by exogenous pressures, emanating from both global and more localised processes, such as the increasing influence of global culture at the expense of traditional values (*ibid)* and democratic change. Young people currently make up the majority of the African population (*ibid*), and in southern Africa unemployment is highest among the youth, currently estimated to be around 43% of young men (Devlin 2013).

While a third of South Africa's present electorate is too young to remember the apartheid past, they face '*the same if not greater levels of unemployment, poverty, inequality and hopelessness as their parents*' (Mattes 2011: 5), a serious issue given that unemployment is seen as a trigger of social instability, particularly among unmarried males (Arko-Cobbah 2011). Mattes (2011) believes that young people also are far less likely than their forefathers to be active members of community groups dealing with social issues, suggesting a loss of social capital. In a study of school-going youth in Durban, Morrell found that the immediate concerns of young adolescent boys were '*dominated by material security, dealing with precarious life circumstances and avoiding risk'* (Morrell 2007: 83).

Given the insecurities identified among the youth, particularly in marginalised areas (Cleaver 2002), changing masculinities in response to urbanisation, the empowerment of women, increasingly mobile livelihood strategies, and shifts away from traditional mores and norms, new forms of vulnerability may be developing among young men in South Africa today that are inadvertently driving risk.

Urban everyday risk and vulnerability

Exposure to risks and their potential impacts shapes the nature of human vulnerability (Pelling 2003), in other words one cannot interrogate risk without considering the associated underlying vulnerabilities.

Renn believes that risk is a mental construct, and that one's response to risk is driven, not by concrete facts alone, but by perception (Renn 2008). Perception of a situation is shaped by an individual's *'common sense, reasoning, personal experience, social communication and cultural traditions'* (*ibid:* 93), informed by one's unique world view. Risk perception informs and shapes

the strategies one adopts in dealing with a situation (Hufschmidt 2011), which most would call coping strategies. Hufschmidt, however, prefers to use the term '*reaction',* which she says more accurately describes the way one responds to a threatening situation and that does not assume a positive outcome (2011). Considering adolescent male behaviour in South Africa, for example, Ratele *et al (2007)* describe the so-called 'rebel' identities of young men who assert their masculinity through disruptive and risk-taking behaviour, for which they are rewarded with peer admiration (2007: 123).

The concept of vulnerability has been variously defined (Adger 2006; Cannon 2008; Hufschmidt 2011; Kelman 2011; Manyena 2006; Pelling 2003) and has been frequently used in the analysis of marginalisation, powerlessness and defencelessness (Adger 2006). Lewis (1999) has shown that the socio-ecological and political perspective of everyday life is critical to understanding people's vulnerability. Vulnerabilities are partially created through the decisions that we make and our subsequent actions, which have historical antecedents (Garcia-Acosta 2002). However, while vulnerability can be considered socially constructed (Cannon 2008), Kelman (2011) believes that it is critical to explore the more intangible aspects of vulnerability such as individual emotions.

Vulnerability is seen to have three key components, namely exposure, resistance and resilience (Pelling 2003). While exposure is a product of physical location and the nature of one's environment, resistance is determined by one's economic, psychological and physical well-being and resilience refers to one's ability to cope with or adapt to a situation (*ibid).* These in turn are determined by one's access to resources and are essentially rights-based (*ibid).* Sen showed how vulnerability was intrinsically related to household productive capacity as well as entitlements (1981). Sen's entitlements perspective is often referred to as the livelihoods approach and is today acknowledged as being critical to a holistic understanding of vulnerability (Pelling 2003).

Many scholars (Blaikie 2000; Chambers & Conway 1992; Moser 1998; Sanderson 2000 among others) have employed the livelihoods approach in determining pathways of human vulnerability. Their research has shown that labour, housing, possessions, trade tools and social networks are key resources used, particularly by the poor, for coping with vulnerability (Pelling 2003). The capacity for coping and adaptation, however, while partly determined by the nature and strength of one's livelihood, is also influenced by available social capital as well as one's age and gender (Pelling 2003). However, no standard procedure has yet been established for measuring levels of human vulnerability, either quantitatively or qualitatively (Birkmann & Wisner; Gall 2007; Hufschmidt 2011; Villagran 2006).

Three major differences have been discovered between urban and rural forms of vulnerability: firstly, urban life is more commodified, secondly urban risks are shaped in a far more complex environment, and thirdly high levels of residential mobility causes greater social fragmentation and loss of social capital (Moser *et al* 1994). Higher levels of vulnerability identified in contemporary urban as opposed to rural settings may bear testimony to the lack of social and support networks in urban areas compared with more traditional rural societies (Moser *et al* 1994; Von Kotze 1996*)*. Social problems like crime and youth delinquency are increasingly prevalent today in urban settings (Pelling 2003), undermining social cohesion as well as mutual trust (McIlwaine & Moser 2001) and shaping forms of vulnerability, especially in poor communities. Pelling (2003) has identified the local community as a critical element in shaping both individual and collective vulnerability.

Numerous researchers have considered men's vulnerability, particularly with regard to their relationships with women (Cornwall 1979; Fordham 2004; Hunter 2010), although Seidler (2006) suggests that vulnerability is notably lacking in any discussions of hegemonic masculinity. In the context of vulnerability, place attachment and feelings of belonging among young urban men should perhaps also be considered. In exploring this context, the next section briefly reviews some of the relevant '*sense of place*' literature.

Sense of place

People experience a place through its life rhythms and the relationships they form in that particular space (Allen 2003; Jensen 2011), so that people as social actors construct their own reality in order to give meaning to their social world (Blaikie 2000).

While Lynch believes that '*...people adjust to their surroundings and extract structure and identity out of the material at hand'* (1960: 43), Degen (2008) suggests that '*the sensory experiences offered by a particular place are a key element in framing this place as what it is'* *(Quoted in Jensen 2011: 264)*. Allen frames this more succinctly as the '*ambient qualities*' of an urban locale, which he says creates *'a particular atmosphere, a specific mood, a certain feeling that affects how we experience it ... both to encourage and inhibit how we move around, use and act within it'* (2003: 445).

Given these arguments, young men's feelings of attachment and 'sense of place', or the lack thereof in the shifting urban environments in which they live and work, should inform a more insightful understanding of how they react to their surroundings (Brownlow 2005; Gorman-Murray 2011; Ignatief 1994; Meth 2009). This is acknowledged as a critical yet under-developed area of scholarship (Hopkins & Noble 2009). In his study of Australian men's sense of belonging

Gorman-Murray combined the idea of '*gendered belonging'* with *'emotional geographies'* and found that '*feelings of belonging denote everyday attachments to place'* (2011: 211). Yuval-Davis (2006) describes the concept of belonging as multi-layered and unavoidably spatial in nature, in other words adaptable over space and time. Cresswell (2004) explored spatial attachment in terms of whether one feels excluded or included, feeling either *'in-place'* or '*out-of-place'* in a particular environment. This suggests that inherently mobile lifestyles or livelihood strategies may result in an unavoidable lack of familiarity with one's living and working space that undermines place attachment and sense of belonging.

Drawing on the work of Ignatieff (1994), Gorman-Murray (2011: 211) describes emotional attachments to a place as '*spatio-temporal connections entwined with the affirmation of personal and collective identities'* which he believes shape one's feelings of security or, quite simply, one's sense of '*being-at-home'*. Hay (1998) calls this *bondedness,* or feeling part of the neighbourhood, while the feeling of *rootedness* he suggests is related to one's length of residence in that place (Hay 1998). Particular spaces influence personal feelings of security and comfort (Brownlow 2005; Meth 2009) but sense of place is also influenced by the status of one's place of residence, Massey (1991) suggests that a low sense of place increases an individual's feelings of vulnerability.

Seeking an understanding of young men as drivers of urban risk

> *"...in some ways boys, men and their particular vulnerabilities have been ignored or obfuscated in the dominant view of men as perpetrators"*
>
> *(Ratele et al 2007: 30)*

Daily life in informal urban contexts is a precarious and constant confrontation with the lived realities of poverty that shapes the way people respond to the world around them. However, while the literature is replete with studies focused on the so-called '*feminisation of poverty'* (Chant 2007; Marino & Lara 2016; Olufemi 2000), the consequences for men and the resulting evolution of new urban identities, particularly among young men, has generally been under-explored (Morrell & Swart 2005). This is particularly so in the South African context of the constitutionally-driven empowerment of women and loss of male privilege.

This literature review begins to address an identified gap in our understanding of the young male informal settlement dweller in South Africa today, seeking to understand his role in generating new forms of urban risk in response to his own feelings of powerlessness and marginalisation, and whose movement into these urban spaces Geyer (2002) suggests has consequences for receiving communities.

Further empirical research, informed by the issues presented in this literature review, is critical to a more grounded understanding of these young men, interrogating their levels of mobility, how they are conflicted by their loss of traditional behavioural registers in urban contexts, and how this is shaping complex alternative urban identities necessary for survival in new and unfamiliar spaces. It may also help us to understand the role that young Black men may play in driving risk in informal urban communities.

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APPENDIX C: CHAPTER 3 PUBLISHED ARTICLE

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Exploring men's vulnerability in the global South: Methodological reflections.

1. INTRODUCTION

Working for two decades among informal settlement communities in the Western Cape region of South Africa, I have engaged closely with local residents, becoming familiar with the risks they face on an often-daily basis, and their incredible ability to cope with adversity. While men are generally considered to generate many risks in these marginalised environments (Morrell, 2005; Pattman, 2007; Shefer et al, 2007), women and children are frequently cited as most vulnerable to them. This tends to disregard how susceptible men themselves are to risks, though perhaps in different ways. Statistically, for example, young men are more often the victims of crime (Shefer et al, 2007) or informal settlement fires, suggesting a need to interrogate *their* vulnerability in these urban spaces, about which little has been written.

Although Hacker (1957) was among the first to draw attention to the "*burdens of masculinity*", focused research on men and masculinities only began much later (Pleck, 1981), while geographical research on the subject, though slow to start (Connell, 1995; Jackson, 1991; Rose, 1993), soon grew significantly (Berg & Longhurst, 2003; Hopkins & Gorman-Murray, 2019; Hopkins & Noble, 2009; Meth & McClymont, 2009). In studying men, geographers have employed a range of methods, from simple interviews and survey-based studies to oral histories and even auto-photography (Latham, 2003). Yet as Meth and McClymont (2009) suggest, few have paused to consider the merits of their methodological choices and generally have not been concerned with "*the quality and depth of empirical findings, particularly in terms of their propensity to enliven understandings of men*" (2009: 910).

Cognisant of this noted shortcoming, I carefully considered the methods appropriate for researching the nature of vulnerability among young informal settlement men. How does one ask poor marginalised men to speak with candour about their insecurities and challenges? While the tools for researching such sensitive issues have to be flexible enough to suit different personalities,

they should also aim to build the confidence of young men as they reflect on everyday life and its many perceived risks (Meth, 2003; Meth & McClymont, 2009).

The paper describes the development and application of the methodology used in a qualitative study of vulnerability conducted among young black men living in informal settlements in Cape Town, South Africa. Beginning with a brief introduction to the context of the study, it describes the challenges encountered in seeking methods for studying marginalised young men, describing how a suite of adaptable methods gradually evolved, often in consultation with the young men themselves. The paper concludes by reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approach adopted.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN CAPE TOWN

The City of Cape Town, South Africa's second largest metropolitan area, has since the early 1990s attracted the settlement of thousands of Black people, previously denied rights to the city under the apartheid regime (Graham, 2006; Zweig, 2015). Today the chronic shortage of housing, partly a legacy of the pre-democratic era, continues to grow driven by natural population growth and on-going in-migration from rural and other urban areas, driving the number of those living informally. A ubiquitous feature of South Africa's contemporary urban landscape, there are currently over four hundred informal settlements in Cape Town alone. As an economic hub, the city continues to attract in-migration, particularly from the Eastern Cape, traditional home of the Xhosa people.

Informal settlements are generally established on marginal pieces of land unsuited to formal development, with dwellings typically constructed from tin, wood, plastic sheeting, cardboard and other recycled materials, offering little protection from the elements. Living environments are harsh, with shack fires a frequent scourge and flooding common in winter. In addition, there are many social problems, with high unemployment leading to alcohol and drug abuse, household violence and endemic levels of crime, while food insecurity is common to most informal homes (Battersby, 2011).

While women, children and the elderly are considered most at risk to these and other hazards, the vulnerability of men in these environments is often disregarded, although statistically young men are more often victims (Hearn, 2007; Seedat et al, 2009). Thus, while democratic change in South Africa, has constitutionally enshrined the rights of women and children, it may have inadvertently overlooked men, driving up their vulnerability in poverty-stricken environments.

Masculinity in marginalised environments is a growing area of scholarly focus, particularly among feminist scholars (for example Shefer et al, 2007; Walker 2005) seeking to understand how masculine identities develop in response to the lack of opportunities and evolving urban cultures in the global South that are quite different from those in the North. Men's identities in impoverished South African urban settlements are being constructed in response to political, socio-economic, physical, and institutional change, though still strongly underpinned by African culture and tradition (Morrell et al, 2012; Ratele, 2016).

Employing 'vulnerability' as a conceptual lens, the study explores how young men are made susceptible to risk in the city and how this in turn is shaping both their masculine identities and influencing their behaviour. Vulnerability is an abstract concept, the meaning of which is often debated (Huffschmidt, 2011; Kelman, 2011; Manyena, 2006; Wisner, 2015). Kelman (2018: 284) usefully describes it as 'a process', developing over time and in context. In other words, it is constantly being reshaped in response to the risky situations people encounter and the degree to which they are able to cope. No matter how defined, however, it is manifested in both tangible and intangible ways, often shaped by human perception and emotion (Kelman 2011), or what some might refer to as the 'emotional geographies' of space (Bondi, 2005; Pile 2010). As Hanlon (2012) suggests "…[w]e cannot appreciate masculinities without understanding relations of power and dominance, but we cannot understand power and dominance without also appreciating men's emotional lives' (2012: 66). Studying men, who are notably less comfortable than women in expressing emotions and intimate personal thoughts (Connell, 1995; De Boise & Hearn, 2017), thus requires careful methodological consideration.

RESEARCH METHODS IN MASCULINITY STUDIES

In emphasising the importance of the methodological approach in framing how men respond, Shefer *et al* (2007) suggest the methods used should also build their confidence, acknowledging their intelligence and creativity, addressing the *"identities they may be vested in that put them at risk, and that open up spaces for them to critically reflect on the identities that they construct"* (2007: 8). In exploring various *"methodological spaces"* Meth and McClymont (2009) have demonstrated the benefits of combining different methods for exploring the contingent nature of what they term *"marginalised masculinities"* (2009: 916).

In developing a methodology for working across gender, social and cultural lines, my own positionality as a white, English-speaking middle-class woman in post-apartheid South Africa had to be considered (Finch, 1993; McDowell & Harris, 2018; Miles & Crush, 1993; Mullings, 1999;

Padfield & Procter, 1996; Visser 2000). Understanding the cultural norms and values of those one studies is important (Miles & Crush, 1993; Robertson, 1983), and though my understanding of Xhosa culture is relatively good, it was admittedly a limiting factor, while my higher social, economic and educational status initially shaped the young men's attitude to and initial distrust of me. In similar contexts, Walker (2005) found being an outsider created a *"non-threatening space in which to converse",* while in my case, being a grandmother, someone highly regarded in African culture, presented specific advantages.

Cognisant of these methodological considerations, I was concerned to identify appropriate methods for studying male vulnerability.

TALES FROM THE FIELD

The first young men were recruited by residents I knew who canvassed for volunteers on my behalf. I began by meeting them at local rendezvous points, conducting interviews in my car, but soon began to consider my own safety, while limited space constrained my methodological options. After reading how Meth had recruited young men in South Africa, enlisting the help of librarians in local settlement libraries, I adopted the same strategy. However, this seemed to bias the sample towards better educated young men. When the next library lacked a quiet interview space in which I could work, I contacted a local youth NGO working with troubled young men who not only offered me working space but recruited willing volunteers from their programmes.

Interviewing in informal areas presents challenges. Although I have often interviewed people in informal dwellings, this was not safe for a woman conducting interviews alone with young men. Although I would have liked to interview young men in the street, such a strategy would also have been highly risky

Upon reflection, I felt that my final sample, including studious young men, ex-gangsters and school dropouts, those with familial support and those without, those reared traditionally and those enculturated with urban lifestyles, provided a broad spectrum of young men from these environments.

Adopting an 'emergent' or grounded approach, a range of different methods were developed gradually as field research progressed. The innovation in my approach was in taking simple participatory methods I normally use in workshops to encourage participation from members of informal settlement communities and using them instead with for in-depth and more personal encounters with individuals. This required some adaptation, often even with the creative assistance

of the young men as we explored the methods together. Later, the use of diary-keeping to supplement the participatory methods was also kept relatively non-prescriptive, with diarists asked to ponder several key issues while documenting their daily lives and noting what bothered them.

The methods employed also accommodated different personalities, from shy types needing some encouragement, to verbose young men with a lot to say – all adjusted the methods in their own way. This allowed me to reduce my power over the process, allowing the young men more freedom to express themselves, gradually building their confidence. Whenever a young man seemed uncomfortable with a certain method, we could adjust them to suit their personalities.

In the sections that follow, I describe the pitfalls and challenges experienced in seeking effective methods for deriving insights into the nature of vulnerability among poor young men.

The life history approach

In telling stories people are caused to reflect on their lives (Miles and Crush, 1993). Capturing life stories is a reflexive process that can produce nuanced accounts of people's experiences and practices (Pattman, 2007). My decision to capture life histories to determine the building blocks of young men's vulnerabilities came initially from encountering Connell's work on masculinity. As Babbie and Mouton suggest (2007:284), life history research is suited *"to discovering confusions, ambiguities, and contradictions of our everyday life",* revealing the subjective realities of people's everyday experiences. Miles and Crush (1993) quoting Portelli (1981) suggest that this approach reveals "*not only what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believe they were doing, and what they now think they did" (1993: 85).* In other words, personal narratives may reveal the logic for decisions people make and the opportunities and constraints that determine how life runs its course.

Life occurs against a constantly changing cultural, social, and historical background, a process of continual development, requiring individuals to make choices about which direction to take. Gradually, life becomes a '*patchwork*' of fragmented recollections, resulting from the *"complex interactions between a 'minded self' and an environment"* (Clausen 1998: 196). Individuals make decisions shaped by their environment that contribute to changing their lives, punctuated by key turning points. It is critical to understand the causes and consequences of these shifts that often involve significant role changes (Clausen, 1998).

The life history method is often criticised for being unrepresentative, yet as Babbie and Mouton (2007) argue, context is often more important than generalisability (2007). Similarly, Miles &

Crush (1993) insist, that because one cannot know how representative life history subjects are, sample size becomes irrelevant.

Clausen (1998) suggests there are two kinds of life story, those told spontaneously and those elicited by the researcher. Narrative accounts are necessarily 'edited' by the teller, offering the researcher what the narrator believes is required, talking about some issues but avoiding others, while Robertson (1983) points out how the story is then reconstructed by the researcher from this account. For the researcher, taking 'loose bits' of history recounted in life stories, creating a structure that faithfully retells the story is challenging, as stories can be related differently by someone else working according to another structure or driven by different interests.

Acknowledging concerns to reduce researcher partiality and influence, I developed a range of participatory research methods for recording life histories that allowed me to withdraw considerably from the process, ensuring that participants had freedom to identify what they considered most important.

Participatory research methods

The participatory approach differs from more commonly used research methods that tend to be one-sided, with the interviewee merely a passive participant in the process (Mercer et al, 2008). Generally employed as workshop tools, they are simple to use and interactive, encouraging communication among people from different walks of life with varying levels of education. Much of my community-based work has involved the use of participatory tools to encourage interactivity, building rapport with community co-researchers, acknowledging that local residents know their living environments well and can best explain the issues.

Originating in the fields of education and community development (Le Grange, 2001), participatory methods build on adult education principles (Freire, 1972), facilitating a process of '*guided discovery*' (Mercer et al, 2008: 173). Emphasis is placed on participants providing their own accounts in their own words and within their own frames of understanding (Chambers 1994; Le Grange, 2001; Pain and Francis 2003). Methods used are typically highly visual, using paper and pens to create colourful charts and simple diagrams, allowing people of all educational levels to contribute something to the research process. Chambers (1994) found participatory techniques effective for undertaking research with marginalised groups from cultures quite different from his own.

Although not commonly used in geographical studies, participatory methods have been employed successfully by geographers (Kesby, 2000, Mercer *et al,* 2008, Pelling, 2007; Young and Barret, 2001). More recently Adriansen (2012) took a participatory approach to the life history method, encouraging participants to draw their own life history lines. He discovered that creating space for men's agency had two benefits - causing them to reflect deeply as they drew, while providing him with opportunities to probe moments plotted on their lifelines. Encountering innovative techniques in the literature (Clausen, 1998; Latham, 2003; McDowell, 1992; Meth, 2003; Meth P. & McClymont, 2009), led me to a methodological epiphany, shifting my approach to one I was both more excited about and comfortable with. Using participatory tools for working with individuals was somewhat experimental, although I later discovered that similar '*visual projective*' techniques are commonly employed in psychology (Roos, 2009). Roos (2009) suggests that through artistic representation people often project unconscious thoughts, feelings, and perceptions onto paper, allowing the researcher to gain deep insights into their world.

Rather than reflecting generic life stages, the exercise aimed to help each young man surface what *they* considered to be the defining moments in their lives. Johnson-Hanks, (2002; 872), refers to these as important moments of intersection, the 'vital conjunctures' or 'experiential knots' that shape people's lives. These provided pivots around which the young men built their stories and explained their perceptions and feelings, helping me to identify the nature of what it was that made them vulnerable. Similarly, Thompson et al (2202) found that letting participants identify their own 'moments' was enlightening, not only revealing unexpected moments of transition, but also facilitating a voyage of self-discovery for participants. Being non-prescriptive and allowing each participant to lead the process, resulted in life maps that reflected individual personalities. Figure 1 below is an example of one such 'life chart'.
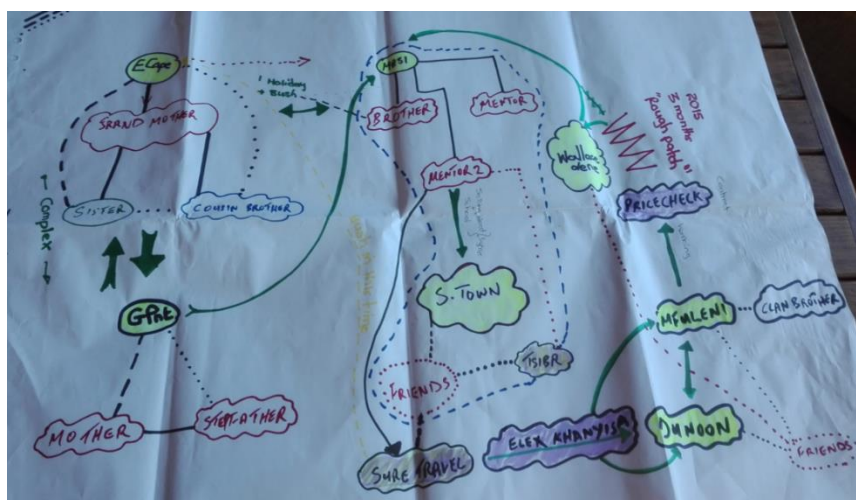

Figure 1. Example of a life-history diagram

Given that oral storytelling is intrinsic to Xhosa culture, it was perhaps not surprising that the young men's engagement improved notably when structured interview sessions were abandoned for a mode of expression with which they were more comfortable and familiar. These 'conversational narratives' (Lucas, 2007:27) also subtly shifted the balance of power, allowing them more ownership of the process, while my role was reduced to that of patient listener and chronicler, encouraging interesting digressions while keeping to time. Asking the participants to draw while recounting their stories accommodated the Xhosa tradition of avoiding eye contact when speaking to people, diverting the young men's attention to their drawings, which was also useful when participants felt awkward, ashamed, or emotional allowing them to keep their eyes averted.

The participants were aware from the outset that the methods had been 'invented' for the study, that I was unsure how they would work and was piloting them. Inviting their opinions, they willingly provided feedback and modified methods in unique ways. One day, for example, when beginning an interview about relationships and role models without the usual drawing paraphernalia, one young man expressed his disappointment saying *"I preferred what we did last time"* eliciting a change in my approach.

Providing the young men with the space in which to lead and guide the research process was enhanced by providing them with pens and paper with which to explain and express themselves. For example, when speaking about his childhood in a rural area, one man felt the need to provide me with more context and drew the layout of his village, explaining the traditional hierarchy and process of daily life, while another participant sketched a diagram to explain his belief system, indicating his place in it. In turn I was provided with opportunities to note shifts in the mood and emotions of the young men as they tackled various topics, noting things they preferred not to talk about. This reiterates Pattman (2007) who suggests that while *what* is said during interviews is important, it is also critical to note *how* it is said, while what is being omitted often provides clues to what is really important to participants (Portelli, 1981).

Over time due to their growing trust of me some young men felt encouraged to open up further, often providing details they had previously omitted or describing emotions associated with their experiences. For example, if a young man seemed to be reluctant to discuss something during a session, we would move on to something else. In a succeeding session the same young man might volunteer to revisit the same question offering more information. Perhaps after some reflection, although having felt sensitive or even embarrassed before – for example omitting to mention

someone who had passed on, a stint spent in prison, using drugs, a failed relationship, they felt more comfortable talking about them.

Quite a few young men said they found the process of talking about their lives therapeutic, with many expressing their enjoyment of the process. Similarly, Langa (2020) in his recent study of young men from an informal settlement in Johannesburg, noted that his participants found the process of life reflection therapeutic.

By the end of the first phase of field research several central vulnerability themes began to emerge.

The use of personal diaries

To delve more deeply into the key themes emerging from interview sessions, I turned to the use of diary writing with a smaller group. Although given the option to write in their mother tongue, all the participants chose to write in English, although reverting to Xhosa sometimes when making statements. These were translated by a Xhosa interpreter I had worked with for some years.

Diary-keeping allows participants more time for introspection and reflection, once again giving more power to them in the research process, while simultaneously building their self-esteem through a sense of personal achievement (Elliot, 1997; Hawkes et al, 2009; Meth, 2003; Renzetti, 1997). As Meth (2003) explains, diaries do not necessarily deliver a longitudinal perspective, unless this is required by the researcher. Rather they can be used to record feelings and perceptions about particular issues.

Diary-writing has been used with increasing frequency in geographic research (Elliot, 1997; Hearn, 2007; Meth: 2003; Meth & McClymont:2009; Miles & Cush, 1993; Pattman, 2007). Involving writers in the "*objectivization of their own experience*" (McTaggart 1991: 178), ideally this should happen in a private space, allowing them time to consider what they want to divulge, finding ways to express intimate thoughts and feelings they would not normally share (Buyra, 2002). Diary-keeping complements rather than replaces other methods when capturing details about everyday life. Hearn (2007), for example, discovered that it generated new material not elicited in interviews, while Meth & McClymont (2009) found it provided "*the space to reveal multitudinous and disconnected stories covering indeterminate time scales and multiple places*" (2009: 915). Diary-keeping should present writers with opportunities to foreground whatever they choose, ideal for the grounded approach I was taking.

Although initially doubtful that this method was suitable, given that I was working with young Xhosa-speaking men whose first language was not English, several of them had expressed a love

of writing and even poetry. This prompted the selection of nine willing diarists from the original interview group for the next phase of the research. As I wanted to surface their fears and concerns to identify what it was that made them feel vulnerable, I asked them to describe events happening around them and their thoughts and feelings about these and other issues that bothered them. Replicating Meth (2003), I provided a brief guide consisting of a short list of topics I wanted them to reflect on in the context of their own lives. I asked the diarists to write only when inspired to share a thought or emotion, rather than on a regular basis that might have undermined the candidness of their writing. Contributions of any length were acceptable, from a simple statement to multiple pages, depending on their mood and inclination.

Allowing the young men to express themselves in ways they felt most comfortable with, gave them more freedom. Some used different mediums depending on their mood - from poetry to free style writing, to simple yet emotive descriptions of daily life. The variation in forms of expression provided penetrating views into their life worlds. One diarist contributed the lyrical verses of rap songs he composed, something his high school teacher had once complemented him for and encouraged. They were full of emotional outpourings about the harsh world he inhabited and what he thought about his life. Another wrote in more narrative style, interspersed with poetry, a common medium of expression among the diarists. Some filled their diaries from cover to cover, leaving no blank pages, others wrote only a few pages, particularly those who contributed poetry. Miles and Crush (1993) have suggested that language plays a central role in the way stories are recounted. The Xhosa language, inherently lyrical and idiomatic, lends itself very well to poetic verse. The poetic contributions revealed the deep and often unspoken sentiments and emotions of the young men.

Another young man added artistic elements to his diary, covering his book carefully in paper on which he had written "*Ambitious young dedicated boy*" placing a photograph of himself in the centre. This was notable because although I had encouraged each young man to provide only their first name in their diary guaranteeing their anonymity, and as a precaution in case their diaries fell into other hands during the writing process, this young man chose instead to take ownership of his product, which he had taken evident pride in. It included rambling reflections about a range of things that bothered him. Contrastingly, a quiet Rastafarian had taken the concept of 'diary-writing' quite literally, writing short less emotive entries each day. Inadvertently this served to illustrate the uneventfulness of his life, emphasising his sense of boredom, juxtaposed with times spent in the mountains collecting medicinal herbs, highlights in his otherwise relatively unpunctuated existence.

There were two month-long periods of diary-writing in which the diarists contributed their thoughts about specific themes I wanted to explore further with them.

Post diary interviews

After reading through the diaries, I scheduled follow-up interviews with each diarist. These were relatively unstructured sessions, mostly seeking clarification where something was not clear, but also providing a method of triangulation, testing statements made in the diaries or in earlier interview sessions. Aware that some young men had felt unsure about their writing ability, I provided each with positive and encouraging feedback, affirming their constructive contribution to my research. One young man admitted he had started to keep his own diary for recording his thoughts and feelings.

The length of the post-diary interviews varied but were generally around two hours in duration.

Conclusion

Exploring the perceptions of poor young men about life on the urban margins to determine how their vulnerability was constructed, required various methods for facilitating engagement with them, not only to understand their daily lives but also insights into their feelings and emotions. Using a range of methods specifically adapted to encourage disclosure and overcome constraints often noted when exploring emotional issues with men, but also considering culturally appropriate modes of self-expression, ensured that all participants found comfortable ways to share their stories. This provided intimate views into the many and varied challenges young marginalised men face, the somewhat ambivalent masculine identities they are vested in and the nature of their perceived vulnerabilities in informal urban areas.

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APPENDIX D: CHAPTER 4 PUBLISHED ARTICLE

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Views from the margins: Exploring -how vulnerability contributes to shaping men's identities in informal urban South Africa.

Introduction

Anathi is twenty-four, unemployed and living with his family in a densely populated informal settlement in Cape Town, South Africa. Shortly after his birth in the city, like many young Xhosa children, he was sent to the rural Eastern Cape, the traditional home of his ethnic group, to be reared by his grandparents. Here he was inculcated with Xhosa beliefs and customs that invested him with traditional rights and privileges as a male. On starting school, he re-joined his parents in a crowded urban informal settlement, slowly adjusting to a precarious and at first unfamiliar urban lifestyle. As a young schoolboy he committed petty crimes, helping to put food on the table, later becoming more daring, robbing local train passengers. In his final school year, becoming serious about his future, he studied hard to achieve a Matric. Today, despite his education, he survives doing piece meal jobs and volunteers at a youth NGO.

Anathi shares his home, a cramped shack made of wood, tin and other recycled materials, with a large family. They are provided with communal water and sanitation facilities and a limited, supply of household electricity by the local authorities.

Despite his hardships, Anathi remains hopeful of improving his life, continuously seeking opportunities to do so. He admits that when he drinks, he occasionally beats his girlfriend, but insists he will marry her once he can afford his own home. Perhaps surprisingly, given his traditional upbringing and ancestral beliefs, Anathi is devoutly religious, spending his Sundays in Church.

Anathi's identity is continuously conflicted by the contrasting influences he encounters, a melange of traditional norms, strong Zionist Christian beliefs and modern city ideals. While his masculinity can sometimes be described as hegemonic, as in his domination of his girlfriend and the patriarchal privileges he references in their relationship, it is simultaneously shaped by his own marginality in this urban space. Anathi is typical of many poor young Black men, made vulnerable by the environment in which he lives.

In contemporary South Africa, poor young men like Anathi are being confronted with changes that are causing them to question their identities as men (Morrell, 2005; Walker, 2005). As Morrell (1998) suggests, colonialism and then apartheid 'infantilised' Black men, considering them 'boys' rather than men. This imprinting in their psyches I believe continues to influence the masculine identities they invest in today despite more than two decades of democracy that has sought to right these previous wrongs. Since democracy, however, state-led policies have shifted the balance of power yet again, enshrining women's rights in a progressive constitution, simultaneously challenging Black men's once unquestioned traditional patriarchal rights and powers. Amidst social change, men are being made vulnerable by poverty underlain by high levels of unemployment, increasingly unable to perform their culturally prescribed roles as providers and protectors of their households (Meth 2009; Reid and Walker, 2005; Walker, 2005).

The masculinity of poor young Black men in South Africa is in *"a state of flux, reconfiguration and change"* (Reid & Walker, 2005: 2), a 'crisis of masculinity' (Cleaver, 2002; Morrel, 2001). Living in precarious informal settlement environments men perceive themselves to be vulnerable and, Meth (2009) argues, are afraid. Finding a correlation between men's emotions and their sense of place, she argues that informal living environments make men feel powerless, irrelevant, confused and conflicted, unsure how to assert their manhood. Denied other forms of power some practice hegemonic forms of masculinity. As Connell (2005) argues it is not only powerful men who adopt hegemonic behaviours, but also those lacking other forms of power.

However, while women and children are generally considered to be most at risk in informal settlements (Budlender, 2005; Chant, 2008; Goldblatt, 2009; Pelling, 2003), young men are more frequently considered to generate risk (Diouf, 2005; Hearn, 2007; McDowell and Harris, 2018; Shefer et al., *2007*; Ward et al., 2017). Their own susceptibilities in these environments are generally disregarded or poorly understood (Diouf, 2005; Hunter, 2010; Seidler, 2006), presenting a critical gap in our understanding of vulnerability in these contexts.

Responding to Reid and Walker's question, 'W*hat about the boys?'* (2005: ix), this paper argues that if we are to influence change among young men to reduce the acknowledged risks they pose to others, we need to understand how *they* are made vulnerable in a changing society that challenges their identities as men (Lindegger and Maxwell, 2007; Walker, 2005).

Beginning with a focus on the concept of vulnerability, the paper explores how young men living on the margins cope with the precariousness of urban life, describing the factors that contribute to making them vulnerable, exploring their emotional geographies and how their identities are constructed. The paper concludes by reflecting how their sense of powerlessness both

contrasts with and explains the hegemonic forms of masculinity generally ascribed to them in much of the literature.

Vulnerability as a conceptual lens of analysis

Employing 'vulnerability' as a conceptual lens, this study explores how young men are made susceptible to risk, shaping the range of masculine identities they invest in and their behavioural responses. Chambers (1983), in his analysis of rural poverty, was among the first to apply this concept, which was later taken up in many other disciplinary contexts. As a result, vulnerability has been variously defined (Adger, 2006; Hufschmidt, 2011; Manyena, 2006; UNISDR, 2017; Wisner et al, 2004). UNDRR (2017), for example, currently defines vulnerability as "*conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual… to the impacts of hazards".* Kelman (2018) has similarly argued that vulnerability is a dynamic process. However, any truly holistic study of vulnerability, should consider not only how people are exposed to threats, but also how they cope with them (Wisner, 2016).

Understanding vulnerability necessitates considering both the tangible and intangible elements in its construction and how these change over time and in relation to space (Kelman, 2011; Manyena, 2006; Pelling 2003; Wisner et al, 2004). It is also commonly considered to be socially constructed (Cannon et al, 2003; Pelling, 2003; Wisner et al, 2004). and while I agree with this framing, I believe it often discounts other less explored elements (Lewis, 1999).

In attempting to identify the building blocks of individual vulnerability, this study explores how young Xhosa men experience the vagaries of informal settlement life in the city, identifying the threats they are made susceptible to. Challenging the "hegemonic" forms of masculinity (Aboim, 2010; Connell, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Meth, 2009) often ascribed to them, the findings demonstrate the multiple, fluid and often competing identities young men assume to survive in the city.

Materials and methods

The study was undertaken over two years with forty-six young Xhosa men aged between 20 and 35 living in informal settlements in Cape Town. Site selection drew on my working experience in city settlements. Participants were initially recruited with the assistance of public library staff, a local pastor, and a youth NGO, and continued through snowball sampling.

Adopting 'vulnerability' as a conceptual lens required the development of made-for-purpose research tools that would deliver both a longitudinal perspective and identify both tangible and

intangible facets of vulnerability. Various qualitative research methods were employed as themes began to emerge.

Elements of vulnerability identified during a first phase of focus group and life history sessions were explored more deeply during a second phase, using adapted participatory mapping techniques, conversational sessions and diary-keeping, the latter undertaken by a smaller group willing to participate further. Encouraged to 'journal' only when feeling the desire to write, feedback from diary-keepers ranged from simple entries written several times a week, to longer infrequent descriptive narratives, poetic verse and even rap music lyrics, delivering richly nuanced information that provided deep insights into the young men's lives. Gradually their experiences and perceived vulnerabilities were revealed.

While my positionality as a middle-class white woman, might seem questionable in a study of young black men from a different culture (Meth, 2009; Visser, 2000; Walker, 2005), it was key to building trust among the young men. My distance from their living environments, physically, socially and culturally, encouraged them to take me into their confidence. As an outsider, and given my status as a grandmother, I became a trusted confidant they spoke with candidly about their lives. (As I will demonstrate, grandmothers play significant roles in the lives of Xhosa men).

Seeking identity: No longer youths, not yet men

Life is precarious and uncertain for young people living on the margins of society (Brownlow, 2005; Frosch et al., 2002). Aliber (2001, 27), describes being poor as resigning oneself to *"the low probability of ever escaping poverty … discouraging people from taking steps to increase their chances of living a more rewarding life".* Hansen (2008) more specifically notes the challenges faced by poor young people in the global South who *"rather than waiting for adulthood, act out their lives in the here and now under circumstances that are not of their own making, but which they sometimes contribute to changing"* (2008, 214). In South Africa, young people are also struggling with "*the residual weight of the past*" (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006: 3) as they adapt to changes engendered by democracy.

While young men commonly build masculinity around work or careers, marginalised youths tend rather to focus on familial responsibilities and anticipation of fatherhood. Confronted by poverty daily, they have a different perspective that "*affects the way they view and act in the world"* (Shafer et al., 2007: 88), placing more emphasis on their role as fathers than providers. Fatherhood is a primary signifier of masculinity in a world where other expressions of manhood have become unachievable (Morrell, 2007; Ratele et al, 2012; Shafer et al., 2007;). The value young men placed on family and fatherhood was strongly echoed in this study.

Alakhe, a self-employed artist brought up by older sisters, was upbeat but nervous about fatherhood saying *"My love will give like stream of water that goes to the community… When I get my first born, how will that affect me? I have built a house, went to college. I think I am prepared for anything"* (Diary, 2018). Mbuyiselo, a part-time driving instructor, reflecting on his parents' absence during his childhood, insisted he would never abandon his child as he had been (Interview, 2018). Simphiwe, raised by an illiterate single mother, was quite definite about his plans to be a father saying *"I wish I can get married. I also plan to have four kids in my life, two guys and two girls"* (Diary, 2018*).* Deprived of family life during their own childhoods, the romanticised reveries of the young men reveal deep-seated insecurities.

Reiterating the importance of fatherhood among African men, Meischer and Lindsey (2003: 8), insist that their need to affirm manhood *"is a reminder of the gap between aspiration and achievement which provokes anxiety".* Despite their lack of resources and often strong religious beliefs, most of the young men studied were already fathers, though none was married. Local churches seem to accommodate sex outside of marriage, adapting perhaps to declining marriage rates associated with growing unemployment and poverty (Hunter, 2010), making it difficult for men to *"assert their manhood through traditional avenues"* (Reid and Walker, 2005: 15). Although most of the young men desired marriage, this was contingent on working to pay *lobola[i]* and support their households (Rudwick & Posel 2014). Thus, despite the increasing uptake of modern values, they were still concerned to maintain traditional roles as the providers in their relationships, *"fulfilling their perceived male roles with a sense of desperate manhood"* (Ratele, 2001: 248). Many were notably frustrated being unable to fulfil these roles given their limited means. Unemployment significantly shapes men's identities and everyday practices (Cornwall et al*., 2016;* Morrell and Swart, 2005). Reiterating Shefer et al. (2015), many described how joblessness contributed to feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness. There are limited chances of formal employment, while unskilled work is hotly competed for. Many of those interviewed had never had a job, while others had only found poorly paid menial work that at best bought them a few beers and some meat at the end of the day. This undermined their feelings of self-worth and personal agency. Isivile, for example, (Interview, 2018), felt like 'a loser' because he could not find work, while Misumzi, (Interview, 2018), believed unemployment denied him independence and personal agency.

Mthuthuzele, (Interview, 2018) insisted that men do not cope well with unemployment and other disappointments in life, often turning to alcohol and drugs, and becoming violent. Revealing young men concerns about being judged by others, Anathi explained

"...if you are a man and not doing any effort for the family in terms of providing for them, he will be known as a useless man not only by women, even by those surrounding. The time that men is not working is not recognised as a man but when it first works that's where the dignity start to grow among the people" (Diary, 2018).

Illustrating how this influences life choices, he described how young men in his neighbourhood dropped out of school to work for local taxi owners, seeking to provide for their families and impress young women, noting how this only delivered immediate dividends, denying them better futures.

Desire for credibility, dignity and respect strongly influences how young men perform masculinity in these impoverished settings (Shefer et al, 2015; Ward et al., 2017). Using life history diagrams to trace defining influences that shaped their lives revealed, among other things, the central role women play, discussed in the next section.

The role of women in shaping male vulnerability

You are my sun and moon, you are my words and tune

My earth, my sky and my sea

You are my light in darkness, you are my peace and happiness

My hope, my forever love. (Simphiwe's diary, 2018).

This poem from Simphiwe's diary reveals a perhaps unexpected tenderness towards women, an emotional vulnerability that contrasts most portrayals of African men. Many others similarly expressed deep feelings of love but were challenged in sustaining relationships by their lack of resources and limited prospects.

Echoing Meth (2009), the young men often expressed feelings of powerlessness in relation to women, who they perceived to be materialistic and demanding, only attracted to men who could provide for them. During his absence to attend college, for example, Mcebisi, caught his girlfriend and mother of his three-year-old son, cheating on him *"...with another guy who had his own car and a lot of money"* (Interview, 2018), providing things he could not. Feeling 'disrespected' he ended the relationship, though continuing to support his child. Anathi, on the other hand, feared his girlfriend would leave him, saying *"Just wonder if she can say it's over because I'm not working ...what kind of man is this who cannot even buy a loaf of bread"* (Diary, 2018). His fears are compounded by the demands she makes on him, *"When passing a shop or when interested in something she will ask you to buy it for her. Imagine she knows you are not working but she will ask you for something!"* (Diary, 2018). His feelings of inadequacy often manifest themselves in

violent behaviour towards her, especially when he has been drinking and has the 'courage' to confront her. But while it is acknowledged that violent physical behaviour continues to reinforce male hegemony over women in contemporary South Africa (Dartnall and Jewkes, 2013; Morrell et al, 2012; Reid and Walker, 2005; Wood and Jewkes, 2001), young men insisted that such behaviour is expected and reinforced by women themselves, which is consistent with the literature (Frosch et al., 2002; Hunter, 2010; Ratele, 2001; Salo, 2007; Talbot and Quayle, 2010; Wetherall and Edley, 1999).

It is accepted that the increase in women's rights in democratic South Africa is shifting men's roles and their sense of themselves (Gibbs et al., 2014; Morrell et al, 2013; Reid and Walker, 2005). While most of those interviewed claimed a 'modern' outlook towards women and marriage, supporting gender equality, they still commanded respect from women. Again, this reveals how young men are grappling with the contradiction of a contemporary rights discourse empowering women, and the simultaneous retention of traditional Xhosa cultural values important for defending their manhood (Meth, 2009; Morrell, 2001). This conflict is illustrated by Ndumiso, a part-time maths tutor and devout member of a charismatic church, who wrote *"After thousands of years of male dominance we are standing at the beginning of the female era, when women will rise to their appropriate prominence"* (2018). However, he also insists that

"The woman must listen to her husband because the man is the master of the house. The first thing that you as a man should follow is the edict, a man should honour his wife more than he does himself …. If the man does not fulfil his role, then it is the woman who must bring it respectfully to his attention" (2018).

His ambivalence demonstrates the competing value sets he tries to accommodate - Xhosa traditions, Christian beliefs and democratic values.

Another way young men claim male privilege is through tradition, such as in the negotiated payment of 'damages' to the families of young women who bear their children out of marriage. In Xhosa culture, failure to pay damages denies men paternity rights, so that male children cannot, in accordance with tradition, be introduced to their father's ancestors, become members of his clan, or be initiated at his family home. This illustrates how tradition continues to provide signifiers of manhood among young men denied other forms of agency.

Many men today grow up without fathers or other male role models (Ratele et al, 2012; Richter et al., 2012). In their absence, many in the study were raised by grandmothers or single mothers who they also frequently identified as their heroes. These women play a significant yet often ambivalent role in shaping masculine identities, (Cornwall, 2003; Hunter, 2005 and 2010; Morrell

et al, 2013; Salo, 2007; Talbot and Quayle, 2010), providing both a feminine touch and perpetuating traditional male hegemonic practices. Ndumiso, for example, said his mother had taught him about Xhosa culture and "*to understand the role of women in relation to men*" (Interview, 2018), suggesting that women themselves are entrenching traditional rights and practices that contradict the modern values young men encounter in the city. For those reared in traditional rural areas accommodating contrasting value sets is challenging and confusing.

Life in transition - adapting to urban life

Many Xhosa children today spend their formative years in traditional rural homes, later moving to the city where they typically settle in informal settlements. This transition to urban life, noted in many studies (Bekker, 1974; Moolman, 2013; Morrell, 2001; Reid and Walker, 2005; Shafer et al, 2007), well illustrates the dynamic nature of vulnerability.

Several young men described their traumatic adaptation to urban life. Mbuyiselo (Interview, 2018), remembers his loneliness and fear, confused by the complex faster-paced city life he encountered. Similarly, Mcebisi (Interview, 2018) remembers his initial struggle adjusting to informal city life, unable to sleep because of the offensive smells and sound of gunshots, scared to venture out. He said, *"I couldn't adapt to the environment on how people live, the shacks that people are residing in, and they call them their houses/rooms. Back at home shacks are built for livestock"* (Diary, 2018). His negative impressions were later reinforced following a violent attack in which he lost an eye. Sipho, who spent his early years in the city living rough among woodcutters with his illiterate mother, remembered pining for his rural home saying, *"I remember one day I even wanted to cry. I really longed to go back to Eastern Cape because I already thought that Western Cape or Cape Town wasn't good for me. But there was no way I could go back"* (Interview, 2018). Now thirty-one and reclusive by nature, he remains deeply traumatised by experiences from this period of his life.

On arriving from rural areas, young men encounter many unfamiliar hazards in the city. Bongani (Interview, 2018) was reared by a single working mother and remembers being left to learn to navigate traffic on his own. He contrasted his experiences with young girls arriving from rural areas who were accompanied when venturing out, demonstrating gendered differences in 'learning the city'. Similarly, Mncedisi (Interview, 2018), recalled his mother departing for work on his first day at school, leaving him to tackle this alone, admitting how scared he felt not knowing what to do. Whether this expected independence from such an early age represents rural traditions persisting into urban environments, a deliberate strategy to toughen boys raised in the city, or evidence of mothers lacking support in the city could not be determined.

In South Africa, crime and violence are more prevalent in informal areas. For young boys and men arriving from rural areas, this is a frightening revelation. Samkelo (Interview, 2017), an only child sent to high school in the city, recalled his shock witnessing street violence. Arriving at the age of twelve, Rolihlahla (Interview, 2018), recalls traversing a gangster-ridden area on route to school. After several frightening encounters he acquired a small gun that he concealed in his sock. His ability to acquire a weapon reinforces the inherently violent character of contemporary urban South Africa (Ratele, 2016). Even Mpendulo, born and bred in the city, is traumatised by the violence he witnesses (Diary, 2018), suggesting that even those accustomed to urban life feel vulnerable in these surroundings. This is not just a perception, however, as statistically, young Black men are the most frequent victims of crime in South Africa (Ratele, 2016; Silber and Geffen, 2009).

The examples above demonstrate how, from an early age, young men become aware of their own vulnerability (Meth, 2009; Rose, 1995; Ward et al, 2017), which contributes to shaping their identity and their behaviour in these urban spaces.

The contribution of 'place' in shaping identity and behaviour

Allen (2006: 445) believes that it is the character of a place *"a particular atmosphere, a specific mood, a certain feeling, that affects how we experience it… both to encourage and to inhibit how we move around, use and act within it"* (Allen, 2006: 445). Similarly, Lynch (1988) suggests that the "imageability" of a place determines our attitude and responses to it. Considered in the context of 'masculine geographies', Hopkins and Noble insist that *"… spaces shape the very nature of the experience of masculinity"* (2009: 814). Yet, although place has been acknowledged as key in shaping masculine identities in Western contexts, (Gorman-Murray, 2014; Hopkins and Noble, 2009; van Hoven and Horschelmann, 2005; Ward et al., 2017), it has been less considered in informal contexts of the global South. Meth (2009: 856) suggests that South African informal settlements are '*both containers and reflections of complex politicised emotions'.* She finds that the qualities of these neglected spaces significantly impact on men's feelings of self-worth, making them feel inferior and irrelevant.

Young men's perceptions of their impoverished living environments were quite unambiguously described in this study. Mcebisi, for example, referred to informal settlements as *"filthy and unpleasant places"* (Diary, 2018), while Sipho said of his urban home, "*The place itself looks miserable, people are always angry – and hungry…this is what I see on a daily basis"* (Diary, 2018). Anathi describes a typical morning in more direct terms,

"You find pow pow [pooh] among the street in the morning. Imagine are you gonna have good through the day? Absolutely no. Jumping dirty water, alcohol bottles, plastics, papers, sewage, blocked drains etc. that's not a good morning at all" (Diary, 2018).

These impressions shape place attachment and feelings of belonging …or perhaps of 'not belonging' in that space. As Rose insists, "*part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place*" (1995: 89), suggesting that young men's self-identity is tainted by their impoverished surroundings.

In contrast, rural areas were more positively etched in the memories of young men reared there, places of beauty, security and warm family relationships, representing another life elsewhere. Anathi spoke affectionately of his rural childhood home. *"Home will always be home. When you at home you feel like you had been born again. No stress and nothing but the sweetest dreams"* (Diary, 2018), while even Fikile, a thirty-year-old, born and bred in the city, described his traditional rural home as "*a very peaceful place*" (Interview, 2018). Vuyo, already twenty-one on arriving in the city, (Interview, 2016), felt safer in his rural home, finding people there respectful and men's roles unambiguously defined. This hints that the attachment young men expressed for rural areas is also related to the deep Xhosa traditions practiced there, which continue to shape their masculine identity.

The role of tradition and culture in shaping male identity

The continued importance of tradition in shaping male identity and defining men's roles in the city has been noted by many (Meischer and Lindsay, 2002; Morrell, 2001; Ratele, 2013; Shefer et al, 2007). Most men in the study were fiercely proud of their cultural heritage, accommodating it to varying degrees in their urban lives. Mcebisi for example said, "*I am a very traditional man and I fully respect my rituals as well as my tradition"* (Interview, 2018). Despite this, however, he found the tradition of abducting young women still practiced in the Eastern Cape, quite repugnant. *"In my opinion, as black people or Xhosa in particular, we should not embark on something that we can see it suppress other people's rights even though we know it comprises part of our culture"* (Diary, 2018). Thus, despite democratic change that purports to uphold women's rights, traditional forms of male privilege persist in rural areas that undermine them. Samkelo (Interview, 2018), explained that such contradictions were easily accommodated, with modern life providing one perspective and tradition another.

Thus, young Xhosa men today develop plural masculine identities, drawing on both modern and traditional roles, shifting between them as circumstances dictate. The confusion this

creates was evident in the ambivalent attitudes they expressed. Alakhe, for example, descended from a long line of traditional healers, but now a devout church member, described his struggle to accommodate both belief systems. *"I believe in education and also in spirituality, even though I am confused which side I must take, her side traditional or the evangelism."* (Diary, 2018).

Belief in ancestors is central to Xhosa tradition (Bogopa, 2010). Most men in the study believed in the power of their ancestral spirits to influence their lives, communicating with them when troubled or making important decisions. Anathi regularly burned *mphepha,* a traditional herb, saying, *"It keeps me close to God and my ancestors."* (Diary, 2018)*,* while Mzingisi, a 26-year-old student, conducted a ritual thanking his ancestors for his luck on being accepted to study law at university (Interview, 2018).

Links to the ancestors are reinforced during male initiation rites (Gqola, 2007), even for those born in the city like Kanelo, who with few remaining ties to the Eastern Cape, nevertheless travelled there for his initiation[ii] (Interview, 2017). Despite his modern city upbringing he was very respectful of the process, which he explained was about much more than circumcision, teaching him the customs of 'his people', especially "*how to be a good Xhosa man*". He stressed the importance of the process for his personal self-growth, explaining that young Xhosa men are said to see the world through *"wooden glasses"* until they have been initiated (Interview, 2016). Field (2001) has similarly noted how initiation remains an important rite of passage, even for young urban men, shaping their identity through the indoctrination of age-old traditions.

Not all of those interviewed were traditionalists, and many were reluctant to 'go to the bush'[iii]. Mncedisi, (Interview, 2018), for example, believed initiation taught young men important life lessons, but felt it was at odds with modern urban realities. Nevertheless, many upheld customs due to social pressure, concerned to be considered boys by other men, but also by women who will not marry uninitiated men (Field, 2001). Initiation elevates their status as men to whom others must be subservient. In environments of deep poverty, it remains an important signifier of male identity, providing men with self-esteem and personal agency.

Traditional male roles and values inculcated during initiation are taken very seriously and include relinquishing childish behaviour, becoming a responsible adult and 'man of the house'. Failing to be initiated has consequences for household power dynamics. Bongani (Interview, 2018), who has not been initiated, cannot inherit his father's house, this right passing instead to his sister. Similarly, Mpendulo (Interview, 2018), who spent funds saved for his initiation on furthering his education, will not succeed his father as man of the house or inherit the family home. Traditional rites of passage are therefore critical, not only in marking transition into manhood, but also in determining male rights and privileges.

Globally, transition to adulthood is becoming increasingly protracted, particularly for poor urban youths (Furlong et al, 3003; MacDonald et al., 2005). While historically a somewhat natural progression from school into employment, transition to adulthood today is frequently delayed as young people struggle to enter the labour market, trapped in a form of extended liminality that the next section explores.

Powerlessness and struggle

"The darkness had overcome me, and my life has turned into a joke" (Diary, 2018).

As another extract from Simphiwe's diary demonstrates, young men's feelings of powerlessness were consistently expressed in the study, echoing Meth (2009) who similarly discovered that marginalisation due to poverty engendered feelings of powerlessness among Zulu men. Anathi writes frankly about his frustrations

"Do I deserve all this shit which I'm going through? Why should I always feel the pain, which is caused by the people around me? Why can't I live a normal life the same as people my age" (2018).

Mfuneko, brought up by a single mother in a flood-prone settlement, expressed his anguish in his poetry

I am the greatest witness of life cruelties, I am the greatest witness of life brutalities

I have seen life brutalise the innocents, I have seen life paralyse the kindest…

(Diary, 2018).

These extracts illustrate how some young men experience periods of deep despair, reinforcing Cleaver's (2002) argument that pervasive poverty has a *"demasculising affect"* on poor men. Similarly Meth (2009) found that informal living environments shape the complex geographies of men's emotions. Illustrating this, Anathi, working with a youth NGO, noted the lack of commitment among young men in his community, who he said preferred to loiter all day rather than being proactive about their futures. Addressing them in his diary he asks,

"Tell me is that the life you wanna live for the rest of your life. Don't you wanna see yourself as somebody one day, someone as a role model to every young child out there… why brothers you undermine yourself this much?" (2018).

Later, lamenting the failure of his own friends to attend a workshop, he says

"That's exactly how young men are… for them everything is about money, they don't wanna experience new things and explore the world … Do you think about your future when you waste every single second playing cards? Do you really love yourself when everything you do is just eat and sleep?" (2018).

Perhaps this noted indifference suggests young men's lack of self-confidence and resignation to fate. During a focus group discussion, school drop-outs Zanemvula and Xola lamented how they were limited to poorly-paid unskilled jobs, while Siya who failed Matric, similarly lived precariously from one job to the next. Ntonipho, however, had completed school and tried unsuccessfully to study IT, survived doing piece meal jobs. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, none of these young men had any longer-term plans or personal aspirations.

Generally, those who had completed their schooling desired better futures for themselves and their families, mirroring aspirations expressed by young men in another South African study (Morrell, 2005). This selfless focus on family debunks the image often portrayed of young men satisfying narrow self-interests. Although many perceived education as a route out of poverty, others just wanted to earn people's respect by starting their own businesses. Although, most lacked resources to realise their ambitions, reliant on family or friendship networks to survive, Alakhe was different. Having funded his own education, he started his own photography business, could support his family and was independent. But his success had inadvertently made him the target of people's jealousy. He explained, *"In my community people when they see you as educated… the thing they want from you is a secret of making money. After they get jealous of me and I get to be a witch"* (Dairy, 2018). Thus, his success had perhaps made him vulnerable in another way, by engendering the contempt of those struggling to survive around him.

While young men are statistically the perpetrators of most violent crimes (Silber and Geffen, 2009; Wood and Jewkes, 2001), they are most frequently also victims, deeply traumatised by their experiences. Mcebisi, for example, was attacked and seriously injured one night during a robbery. After losing an eye in the ensuing struggle, he became depressed and even considered suicide. He explained that he had concealed his depression because Xhosa culture dictates that men should not express personal anguish. His college lecturers, noticing a change in his usually cheerful demeanour, insisted he attend counselling sessions, which he admits aided his recovery.

Other young men described their trusted support mechanisms. Anathi, for example, turned to his church for solace, while Alakhe had an older female friend who listened to him and gave him advice. For Mpendulo, adopting Rastafarian values, natural healing methods, and finding opportunities to commune with nature helped him to cope with the death, violence and disease described in his diary. These are contrasted with the peace he derives from watching waterfalls

and gathering herbs in the mountains. Retreating into safe spaces provided by nature, echoes Massey's belief that we*" replenish our souls in contemplating the timelessness of the mountains, by grounding ourselves again in 'nature'* (2008: 131), perhaps explaining the attraction young men had for the rural Eastern Cape.

In navigating the landscapes they encounter, men seem to shift interchangeably between different identities as a coping mechanism (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins, 2014; Morrell, 2001) – a strategy to reduce perceived vulnerability in different spaces. The concept of '*plural masculinities*' proposed by Aboim (2010) usefully explains how Simphiwe, orphaned early in life, developed contrasting identities for navigating different settings. For example, while attending high school in a gangster-ridden area, he projected a tough image, eventually becoming a gang member himself. In his own neighbourhood, however, he continued attending church with his aunt and uncle, presenting a very different persona. Befriending a group of young women, he adopted what he described as an effeminate character to earn their trust. Mfuneko, on the other hand, was raised by a strict mother whom he deeply respected, so when his friends became involved in criminal activities, he was conflicted. After being involved in the mugging of a foreign national one night, fearing violent community retribution and his mother's wrath, he turned away from 'his crew', absorbing himself in his studies.

Family support and guidance, as Mfuneko's story illustrates, is a critical factor in reducing the vulnerability of young men (Richter et al., 2012). Those from nuclear families had a stronger moral grounding than those without close kin. For example, Mpendulo explained how his strict mother kept him on the right track (Interview, 2018), while Bongani's father was his stabilising influence. By contrast, Vuyo who had spent much of his teenage life living alone, admitted that avoiding the pressure to join local gangs had been hard, insisting that staying safe required constant vigilance (Interview, 2016). Simphiwe's survival strategy was not to trust anyone saying, *"Live as if you are alone in the world, don't depend on other people"* (Interview, 2018). Many of the young men expressed similar misgivings about trusting people, preferring to keep to themselves, reiterating Giddens theories on the importance of trust in modern identity formation (1991).

Conclusions: Vulnerabilities exposed

In a departure from other studies of urban life that tend to regard men as the generators of risk (Dartnall & Jewkes, 2013; Wood & Jewkes, 2001), this study aimed to demonstrate how young men living on the margins of society in the global South, are made vulnerable themselves (Clowes, 2013). Vulnerability describes not only the threats people are exposed to, but also their ability cope (Wisner, 2016). This can only be understood holistically by studying people's everyday practices,

their risk perceptions and the strategies they develop to protect themselves. Exploring several themes emerging from doctoral fieldwork, this paper related the perspectives and experiences of young Xhosa men living in informal urban environments, revealing how they adopt a range of identities in response to their perceived vulnerability in these precarious places.

In demonstrating how *"both material and discursive forms of power"* are manifested (Pelling 2003: 4) in the lives of marginalised young men, and how they cope, this paper challenges the notion of "hegemonic" masculinity (Connell, 2005), demonstrating how this term does not fit comfortably within the context of poor young men in the global south. Rather it speaks to other more complex forms of masculinity, demonstrating how young men as suggested by Aboim (2010), construct multiple identities to survive. Complex and complicit, these identities are simultaneously hegemonic and subordinate, shaped by the politics of power in the marginalised spaces they inhabit.

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[i] In Southern Africa, it is customary for the bridegroom and his family to make a payment, '*lobola,'* traditionally in cattle or cash to the bride's family before the marriage.

[ii] While it is possible to conduct this ritual in urban areas today, none of the young men in my study had done so, all of them travelling to the Eastern Cape, even those who had never been there before.

[iii] A colloquial term for returning to ancestral areas in the eastern Cape for circumcision and initiation rituals.