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Title:

***‘Sowungumuntfukenyalo’ – “You are Now a Real Person”*: A Feminist Analysis of How
Women’s Identities and Personhood are Constructed by Societal Perceptions on Fertility in
the Swazi Patriarchal Family**

11 December 2014

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

i. DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment / partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy, in the Graduate Programme in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics,

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Sonene Nyawo, declare that

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RE: Confirmation of Language Editing

To Whom It May Concern

This letter is to confirm that Mrs Sonene Nyawo's PhD thesis was edited by Dr Karen Buckenham.

Cordially

Dr Karen Buckenham

ii. Dedication

To my dear husband Nicholas Thandokuhle Nyawo and our three children, Owenkosi Kuriokos, Nosenzosenkosi Nicole and Yenzokuhle Oswald.

iii. Acknowledgements

“We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline and effort” (by Jesse Owens)¹.

This dissertation stands as testament to the priceless efforts of many people who worked tirelessly to make my dream come true.

I would not have succeeded to complete this study without institutional support. I am therefore greatly indebted to:

- The management of the University of Swaziland, Kwaluseni, where I am employed as a full-time lecturer at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. They generously granted me leave days in the three years of study to attend PhD cohorts and conferences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- My immediate supervisor, the Head of Theology and Religious Studies Department for her unfailing professional and social support, and her willingness to adjust my workload to accommodate my other academic commitments.
- The University of KwaZulu-Natal, particularly the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics for their generous financial assistance for tuition, and also through students' cohorts and conferences. Such support served as a key to open the door to the realisation of my dream.

There are special individuals that have walked the path with me, holding my hand from beginning to the end of this study. I am greatly indebted to:

¹ Jesse Owens' quotes. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quote> [accessed 6 December 2014].

- My supervisor and mentor Prof Sarojini Nadar, whose illuminating views and guidance on creative writing shaped my study to precision. Through her extensive knowledge and experience in feminism she was able to stretch my thinking capabilities beyond familiar terrains of critical engagement. Her commitment to my work, despite her tight supervision schedule gave me an inspiration to endure the task.
- My co-supervisor Dr Sarasvathie Reddy whose intellectual insights also shaped this study from the proposal stage during cohort sessions to its final writing phase of the study. Her words of encouragement even when I was overwhelmed by work pressure inspired me to spend sleepless nights working on this dissertation.

Both my supervisors went beyond their supervision obligation to passionately and sincerely devote unlimited time to my personal needs, and that motivated me to forge forward. Their words of encouragement that, *“Sonene you must walk the stage April next year”*, kept ringing in my ears even in the dead silent nights when I was alone in my study room writing this dissertation.

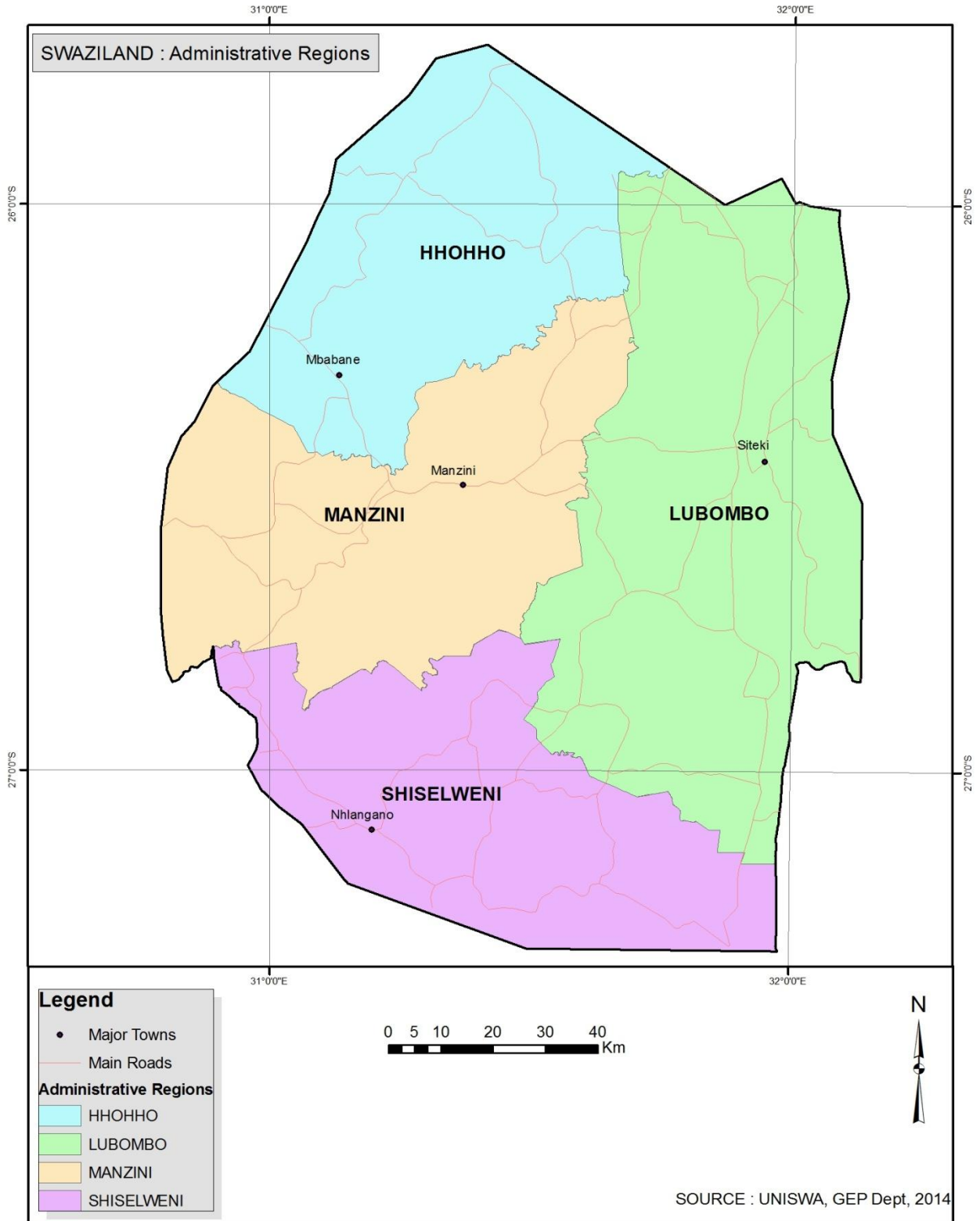
- Dr Karen Buckenham who edited my work with diligence.
- My husband Nick, partner, friend and spiritual father who has been my pillar of strength over the three years of study. His outstanding physical and spiritual support replenished my strength to go an extra mile even when I felt exhausted and discouraged.
- Our three children Owenkosi, Nosenzosenkosi and Yenzokuhle who gave me the space to focus on my work and they endured my conspicuous absence in their lives whilst I pursued my studies.
- My fellow church members at Evangelical Church Matsapha for their prayers and words of encouragement. They always see the best in me even when I am at my lowest point.

The study brought women at the center of the inquiry, making them ‘knowers’ whose invaluable insights enriched the study as they shared their life experiences. I therefore give my special sincere thanks to all the women participants for their time and sacrifice. I’m grateful for their trust and confidence in me that they could open their ‘doors’ so that I could ‘enter’ their world as they shared their personal life stories without reservations. I cannot leave out the male participants in one of the focus group discussions who willingly shared their views on a subject that others would probably label ‘a woman’s thing.’

Other than the participants of the study, I owe a debt of gratitude to my colleagues in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Dr Patrick Mkhonta, Cebisile Mkhwanazi-Dlamini, Nok’thula Vilakati, Gciniwe Nsibande, Nok’phila Thabede, Gugu Tsabedze, Khetsiwe Malaza, Amos Mwambe, Mpendulo Mkhonta and Muzi Maseko for their assistance and support in many different ways.

All praises and greatest acknowledgement go to my Creator God who sustained my health until I concluded my research journey, marking the realisation of my dream.

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vi. List of Acronyms

AWEPON	African Women's Economic Policy Network
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEMSA	Gender and Media Southern Africa
IRF	International Religious Freedom
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NERCOM	National Education Review Commission
OSSREA	Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SCOGWA	Swaziland Committee on Gender and Women Affairs
SGCSE	Swaziland General Certificate to Secondary Education
SWAGAA	Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISWA	University of Swaziland
WLSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
AEO	African Economic Outlook

WHO

World Health Organisation

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Abstract

This study postulates that in Swaziland, socio-cultural religious constructions are embedded in patriarchal structures and systems that uphold and reinforce inequalities between women and men. Conventional values, attitudes and practices are held firmly in intrafamilial relations to ensure continuity of unequal gender constructs. Shaped by this patriarchal worldview, Swazi society places a high value on childbearing as a means to perpetuate the bloodline of the father, and for social cohesion. Hence, a woman is only “*umuntfu*”, a “*real*” person through her reproductive abilities.

Framed within an exploratory and critical feminist research paradigm, the purpose of this qualitative study was therefore to ascertain the relationship between fertility and socio-cultural religious constructions of Swazi women’s personhood. Data were produced from primary sources employing qualitative methodology of interviews and focus group discussions. Through in-depth interviews with a purposively selected sample of participants from three locations in Manzini, Swaziland, the study empirically linked women’s personhood and identity to socio-cultural religious constructions on fertility. The research findings indicate the significance attached to women’s fertility as being defined by socio-cultural religious beliefs and values that are reinforced through socialising agents. Thus, a woman’s ability to bear children (preferably at least one son), grants her status to become a “*real*” woman, on which her identity and personhood is built. Her “achieved” identity or personhood therefore becomes an interpretation of being human amongst others. Findings further reveal that this conventional patriarchal discourse is embedded into the psyche of most Swazi women, such that they readily internalise it in defining themselves as worthless without fulfilling the “motherhood mandate”. However,

there are women who feel robbed of their self-identity by being defined as exclusively suited for procreation, resulting in a tension between a self-identity ethic and the communitarian and familial ethic. Since identity and personhood always hold the possibility of refinement and reformulation, it is contended in this study that socialisation agents in the Swazi society which breed, reinforce and monitor socio-cultural religious constructions on women's fertility be re-examined using feminist lenses. This study argues that a recognition of the manifestations of the injustices of patriarchy in these social structures would consequently provoke advocacy and the implementation of a new feminist cultural orientation that would attach worth to Swazi women for who they are, and not only for their reproductive capabilities. As the Swazi adage notes, "*Maswati, lenaakubeyindzabayetfusonkhe!*" – ("Swazis, let this be of concern to all of us!")

Key terms: patriarchy, feminism, identity, personhood, fertility, constructions, socialisation.

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***‘Sowungumuntfu ke nyalo’ – “You are Now a Real Person”:* A Feminist Analysis of How Women’s Identities and Personhood are Constructed by Societal Perceptions on Fertility in the Swazi Patriarchal Family**

Chapter 1: Introduction

‘Sowungumuntfu ke nyalo’ – “you are now a real person”. These are the words often recited by older women to younger married Swazi women when they become pregnant.² As a Swazi woman, the question which has perplexed me for some time in relation to such cultural idioms and expressions is, does fertility define a woman’s personhood? I have seen marriages disintegrating because what Mercy Oduyoye (1999, pp.105-120) refers to as the “child factor”³; men feeling justified in conceiving children out of wedlock because their wives are “infertile”. I have also met women without progeny who have expressed their frustrations and challenges with cultural and religious systems that insist on their lack of personhood, hence forcing them to seek interventions that would render them “*real*” women, while at the same time they have to cope with a feeling of emptiness throughout their marital life span. This is what has motivated me to conduct an academic study on how women’s fertility is related to their personhood within the Swazi patriarchal family context.

The critical question which I sought to answer in this study was:

²I have reflected on this issue in a previous publication. See Sonene Nyawo, Sarojini Nadar and Sarasvathie Reddy. 2013. ‘Sowungumuntfu ke nyalo’ ‘You are now a Real Person’: Reproductive Self-Determination in the Context of Reproductive Health in Swaziland. *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* Vol. 19 No. 2.Special Issue (Nov 2013), 105-118.

³Oduyoye, M. 1999. “A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in West African Space” in *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honour of Letty M. Russell*. Farley M. & Jones, S. (eds.) Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 105-120.

What is the relationship between fertility and socio-cultural religious constructions of Swazi women's personhood?

1. 1. Background and Location of the Study

Geographical

Swaziland is a small kingdom in Southern Africa bordered by the Republic of South Africa and the Republic of Mozambique. Estimates based on the 2007 population census data⁴ places Swaziland's total population at slightly over 1 million. About 53% of this population is constituted by women (Government of Swaziland 2007 Swaziland Population and Housing Census Vol.4 Analytical Report). Swaziland, whose political name is the Kingdom of Swaziland, is one of the smallest political entities in the African continent, located on the eastern edge of the African plateau. Covering an area of only 17,363square kilometres (6, 704 miles) it straddles the dissected edge of the South African plateau, surrounded by South Africa on the North, West and South, and separated from the Indian Ocean on the east by the Mozambique coastal plain (Edwards, 1996, p.1043; Daly, 2001, p.45;). The land area sustains a homogenous population of about 1.2 million, with an annual growth rate of 2%. It is this ethnic homogeneity of the population which Cazziol has identified as an additional factor that promotes social and political stability (1989, p.29).

Geographically, the country is divided into 4 regions. When it attained its independence from British colonialists in 1968, the country was divided into; Hhohho, Manzini, Lubombo and Shiselweni (Vilakati 1997; Matsebula 1972). Each region has at least one sizeable town to serve as an administrative centre. Otherwise, the country has two major cities: Mbabane and Manzini.

⁴ A population census has been conducted in Swaziland every ten years since 1966. The 2007 population is the most recent one.

Mbabane, the capital city lies on the edge of the Highveld at the foot of Mdzimba Mountains, a sacred place where Swazi Kings and male members of the royal clan are buried (Bonner, 1983, p.34) Manzini is in the Middleveld and it is the country's principal industrial and commercial centre. In between Manzini and Mbabane there is Lobamba, which is the legislative town. Traditionally, the Swazi have been subsistence farmers and herders, but most of them now work in the growing urban areas where there is formal economy (Nyawo 2004). The country's official languages are *Siswati* (a dialect of *Zulu*) and English. Swaziland maintains its own currency called *Lilangeni* (plural: *Emalangeni*), which is at par with the South African Rand (Mzizi 2005; Nyawo 2004). As an independent state, Swaziland has a national flag which is blue, with a yellow-edged horizontal crimson stripe in the center. On this stripe is a black and white Swazi shield, superimposed on two spears and a staff all lying horizontally. The nation's coat of arms, with a lion on one side and an elephant on the other, represents the traditional dual monarchy, in which the king and queen rule the Swazi nation jointly (Matsebula 1972).

This duality aspect subsequently pervades the different structures in the society, and is reflective of the social, political, cultural and religious landscapes; everything operates alongside with other things (Nhlapho, 1992, p.25). Swaziland has, for example a modern or national government, with the prime minister, cabinet, judiciary and the legislative body appointed by the king, running simultaneously with a traditional system of governance also consisting of the king and traditional courts (Nyawo 2004; Nhlapho 1992). The dual system of governance has its challenges, which most often than not, have certain implications on the construction of Swazi women's personhood.

Historical

Swaziland has been ruled by kings since 1745. After Ngwane III, the first king of Swaziland, the Swazi had been united under a monarchy from the Dlamini clan, the ruling dynasty. Space does not allow for a discussion of Swazi kings in the last 269 years; instead a selection of two kings who shaped Swazi religio-cultural history suffices. These are King Sobhuza I and King Mswati II.

King Sobhuza I was also known as Somhlolo, meaning the *Father of Mysteries* (Kuper 1963:5). He was given this name because he left the Swazi people with a legacy that influenced their way of life and philosophy a great deal.⁵ Tradition states that one night shortly before his death King Somhlolo had a dream on his deathbed (Matsebula 1972:13). He dreamt of people of a strange species entering the country emerging from the sea. They were the colour of red mealies, and their hair resembled the tail of cattle. They were bringing with them two things: *umculu* and *indilinga* between which he was expected to choose one for his nation (Mzizi 2005: 442; Nyawo 1994:27; Gamedze 1990:30). When translated these words, respectively, mean a scroll or book and a round piece of metal or money. Cautioned by an unknown voice he chose the *umculu* and rejected the *indilinga* (Mzizi 1998; Kasenene 1993; Cazziol 1989; Matsebula 1987; Perkins 1974). The next morning, he called the royal councillors to relate the dream to them and he warned them to accept the scroll, which was taken to represent the Bible and reject money, and that they should never harm these strangers who were bringing into the country the two items, for that would lead to disaster. According to Mzizi (1998:46), the interpreters of the vision held three positions: that these strangers should be accorded unconditional welcome in Swaziland; that not a drop of their blood was to be shed under any circumstances, and King Mswati II, the

⁵ <http://v1.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/bios/sobhuza-I.htm> [accessed on 5 August 2014].

successor of King Somhlolo, should take the initiative to “hunt” for these people with a purpose of bringing them into the Kingdom (Mzizi 2005; Mzizi 1998; Kasenene 1993) Underlining the importance of the dream, Matsebula (1972:14) remarks that the Swazi had always tried to take heed of the king’s advice of listening to those who brought them the Bible, even though they had found it impossible to avoid the *indilinga*. This fable which is common to the Swazi highlights the importance of the Bible and of Christianity to Swazi culture, and it will be shown later in this thesis that these two factors (culture and Christianity) mutually enforce patriarchy and women’s subordination.

After King Somhlolo’s demise in 1836, his son Mswati, the child of his principal wife Tsandzile, was inaugurated as the King of Swaziland at the age of sixteen in 1840. Unlike his predecessor, Mswati, who is often referred to as the eponym for Swaziland, is presented in Swazi historiography as a fighting king (Matsebula 1972; Kuper 1963; Marwick 1940). Under him (1840-1868) the Kingdom was consolidated and formally established. At the time of his death, Swaziland laid claim to land extending as far as Caroline and Ermelo in the West, the Pongola River in the South, the Lubombo range in the East and beyond Barbeton in the North (Matsebula 1972:23; Kuper 1963:51; Marwick 1960:7). Mswati II is further credited with the class formations and social hierarchy which continue to exist in Swaziland today, as well as for instituting new measures that both practically and ritually centralised authority and strengthened the legitimacy of the Dlamini clan. (WLSA 2000) In view of his achievements in establishing an infrastructure of state that was firm and cohesive, Mswati II deservedly earned a reputation as the greatest King in the history of Swaziland. A similar sentiment is echoed by Cazziol who has rightly inferred that the fame brought to the people of Ngwane by Mswati II led to the

acceptance of the name *Emaswati* (the Swazi) by all his subjects, as well as *Eswatini* (Swaziland) as the name of the country (Kuper 1963:2)

Mswati's early years of his reign also ushered a new phenomenon into Swazi history. Following his father's vision he sent emissaries to Grahamstown in South Africa to invite missionaries to come to Swaziland and bring the *umculu* to his country, hence Mzizi's remark, "Christianity had thus come to Swaziland by royal invitation" (Mzizi, 2003, p.47). The first missionaries arrived in June 24, 1844 and King Mswati II and his nation warmly received them.

Economic

With gross national income per capita of USD 3,362, Swaziland is classified by the World Bank in the lower middle income category. However, there is wide disparity between the rich 10% of the population and the poor who are mostly women (Crossroads International 2012). Most of the high-level economic activities are in the hands of foreigners, but the ethnic Swazi are becoming more active. Swaziland has a relatively mixed economy that incorporates both a modern industrial and an agricultural economy (WLSA - Swaziland 2001). The agricultural sector, which forms the second largest sector in the GDP after manufacturing, has largely contributed to the Swazi economy. The past few years have seen wavering economic growth, which has been further aggravated by the government's inability to create new jobs at the same rate that new job seekers enter the market. Economic growth estimated at 3.5% is expected to decelerate to just over 2% in 2014 as private sector investments remain low. Overgrazing, soil depletion and droughts are persistent problems that also frustrate the unstable economy (AEO 2012).

Traditionally all land is vested in the Swazi King in trust for the nation, and allocated as communal land by the chiefs. Swazi national land constitutes about two-thirds of Swaziland, and

the remaining one-third is held under individual male title (Mzizi 2003). Some of this land is owned by individual Swazis who are mostly men, whilst the balance is privately owned by foreigners. For the Swazi living in rural homesteads, the principal occupation is either subsistence farming or livestock herding. Culturally, cattle which are either bought or received as *lobola* for daughters in Swazi families, are important symbols of wealth and status (Mdluli 2007; WLSA -Swaziland 2008; WLSA - Swaziland 2001; Daly 2001; Nhlapho 1992). However some Swazis now use cattle for commercial purposes.

Notably, Swaziland's economy displays apparent disparities between women and men. The agricultural sector, in which land is an essential resource, is dominated by males. It is difficult for women to access land in their own right, particularly under the customary land tenure system where access to its use is through a male relative. The compulsory attachment to men is explained by Mofola (2011) and other studies (WLSA 2000; 2001; Zigira 1998) as one root cause of poverty, especially among rural women. These studies have further observed that owing to these women's attachment to men, women have become laborers on their husbands' land and the remittance paid out is sent to the landlord, who is the husband. Thus the culture of women's dependence on men is reinforced and further pushes women into positions where they are vulnerable to abuse and mockery in their marital families (WLSA 2001). Despite the 2005 enactment of the Constitution of Swaziland, the second class status of women has largely remained intact, denying women their inheritance rights and stifling their progress as entrepreneurs and traders (IRIN 2010). Economic self-reliance amongst Swazi rural women communities is also derailed by the simultaneous burdens of caring for inordinate numbers of their families afflicted by terminal diseases, financing burial of the dead, coping with the absence

of able bodied workers and attempting to assist large numbers of children struggling to survive without adult care givers (WHO Global Health Observatory 2012)⁶.

However, the economic disadvantage of women is not only with rural Swazi women; it cuts across all sectors. In formal employment, especially in decision making jobs, women are few. They are crowded in informal sectors as cheap textile laborers in the Matsapha industries, street vendors, fruit and vegetable sellers in markets, and as domestic workers, where the earnings are generally lower (Mofolo 2011). As a result women continue to be economically dependent on their husbands or male partners for survival.

Social, Cultural and Religious

The Swazi are a nation state that was established by the early 19th Century. It shares a common language and a common set of traditional values in a society that is both modern and traditional. As noted by Mzizi, the power of tradition is so pervasive in Swaziland that the modern and traditional forms of practice are more often than not collapsed into one. The strong cultural traditions are preserved as cultural heritage by the institution of the monarch and male figures of the society (2004:96). For present purposes it will suffice to describe the traditional social structure of the Swazi, which though it interacted with foreign encroachments like industrialisation, colonialism and Christianity, still exists in present day Swaziland, and it has continued to shape peoples' perceptions (Nyawo and Nsibande 2014; Mofolo 2011; Mdluli 2007; WLSA 2001). This section therefore presents the ancient Swaziland, from which contemporary traditional society draws its tenets. It provides a backdrop that will inform an analysis of the

⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/swaziland-failed-feudal-state/deformed-economy-and-its-consequences> [accessed 25 June 2013].

societal perceptions on women's fertility and their influence in constructing women's personhood.

Different traditions and systems have been modified in various ways, according to the impact of historic personalities and historic contact between ethnic groups (Mzizi 2005; Nyawo 2004; Gamedze 1990; Matsebula 1972). The social organisation in early Swaziland was typical of any other African ethnic group. The family was considered to be an extremely important social structure. The Swazi definition of family extended beyond the single biological unit consisting of parents and their biological offspring. It was a large network extending across various kinship ties including the ancestors. (Booth 1983; Kuper 1947). A single homestead, which was the principal locus of the domestic life for the family, was headed by a patriarchal headman whose prestige was enhanced by the size of his family and the number of other dependents (Kuper 1963). Hence Booth's observation that a single homestead usually had more than one biological unit; "kinsmen of sorts, divorcees, widows and widowers returned to the family" (Booth, 1983, p.21).

Polygamy was regarded as a social ideal rather than a "sexual extravagance", as Kuper prefers to call it, and only aristocrats and the wealthy could afford it. As Kuper (1963, p.4) emphasizes, "many wives were symbols of status, and their children built up the lineage of the father and the size and influence of the homestead". The people lived in huts that were planned according to the relationships between its inhabitants. The huts were shaped like beehives with plaited ropes radiating from neat ornamental pinnacles and binding down the thatching grass. In almost every homestead there was a central sacred structure, the cattle pen and grain storage units, which were underground flask shaped pits. The living quarters, which were enclosed with a reed fence for protection against wind, were grouped in a semicircle with the *indlunkhulu* (great hut) in the

middle. The *indlunkhulu* was the sacred hut that was under the supervision of the most important elderly woman in the homestead, usually the mother of the headman (Kuper 1963).

Within the family, there was a strict hierarchy of authority, according to which the males ruled and held responsibility for the females and children. Brothers ruled their sisters, and sons, even their mothers, when they came of age or succeeded to the inheritance. Because the Swazi classified kin in broad categories, the term father (*babe*) was used in reference to various male figures. It went beyond the confines of “the walls of the house” (Shlongonyane 2004), to encompass the domestic, chiefdom and kingdom. For example in the national family structure, the King was the father and the Queen mother was the mother of the nation. At chiefdom level, the chief was the father and his senior wife or his mother was the mother of the subjects. At domestic level, every parent was a father or mother of every child in the country (Barret 1998; Kuper 1963). As Booth has asserted, children were taught to honor their elders, for the aged were considered to be the repositories of experience and wisdom (Booth 1983:41). This subdivision of age groups, each having a pivotal role to play within the society, made the Swazi homesteads the home for different generations, each with specified functions to perform. Booth identifies the most important roles in the family as those that were carried out by the parents and grandparents in the education of the young. Whilst the father was the leader of the household, the mother often carried the greater responsibility of “maintaining the household, cultivating the fields and child bearing” (Booth, 1983, p.52). Grandparents were responsible for teaching the children the morals of the society through fables.

Since time immemorial, Swazi society has always had a strong cultural identity that permeates all forms of interaction (Nyawo 2004; WLSA 2001; Kasenene 1993; Nhlapho 1992). In traditional Swaziland, sexes were accorded inequality of status. Women were perceived as the

caregivers and homemakers, whilst men were decision makers and authority figures. In the traditional society children were important, especially boys because they would continue the family line (Kuper 1950; Russell 1984; WLSA 2001). As such there was even less personal intimacy between a father and his daughters than between him and his sons, after all the daughters would leave the fathers home upon marriage and produce children for another lineage. That being said, Swazi women within traditional society perceived their status to be much higher than it could be imagined; the areas such as motherhood or role of the bride earned them a high status and extensive rights (Russell 1993). They therefore had no ambition to do things that men did (Nyawo 2004; Booth 1983; Perkins 1975; Matsebula 1972; Kuper 1950). Moreover, in this pre-industrial society there were no professional and other occupations in which women could compete with men. The occupations of both women and men were in relation to their familial roles, with clearly defined gender roles.

Marriage was very important in the Swazi society; it permanently linked all members of the two families, including the ancestors (Nhlapho 1992). There were some cultural practices that reinforced the permanency of the marriage institution; for example if the man died, the women could be “inherited” by one of the male relatives of the deceased through the “levirate” custom⁷ and would raise the children in the name of the deceased. Again, if the marriage was childless, the custom of the sororate marriage was followed, whereby a relative of the woman, preferably her young full sister would be given to the man as his junior co-wife to bear children for her sister. Since Swaziland was a cattle owning society, cattle were paid as *lobola* or bride price to

⁷The levirate custom is derived from the Hebrew Bible – The law for this practice of bride inheritance can be found in Deuteronomy 25:5-6 “5. When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband’s brother to her,⁶and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”

the girl's family. Divorce was rare in the traditional society. A special ox was slaughtered to seal the marriage covenant permanently, and both the living and the dead shared this relationship. By a strict distribution, every category of relative would have a portion of the animal reserved for him by right (Nhlapho 1992; Ferraro 1980; Kuper 1963).

The spirit of cohesion and solidarity in ancient Swaziland extended beyond the family circles to the entire community. Everyone in the community was a neighbor to the other. Neighbors cooperated in myriad ways; e.g. working communally on each other's fields, taking part in hunting expeditions, celebrating each other's family and social events. (Kuper 1950). Neighbors borrowed tools and utensils from each other and performed innumerable services for each other. This confirms the African communitarian notion which Ikuenobe (2006, p.53) claims to be evidence that traditional societies were structured along strict principles of care and cooperation. They were organised to care for the needs of all its members. Hence, if something happened to the individual, whether it is good or bad, it would have an equal effect on the community, and if something happens to the community it also has an equal effect on the individual (Matolino, 2014, p.54). For such a group-centered society, anyone who alienated himself/herself from the life and normal working of the society ran the risk of being regarded as a threat to the entire society. Usually the outcast was branded as a witch; witchcraft symbolized anger, hatred, jealousy, greed, and lust, and this was considered an anti-social activity punishable by dehumanising ostracism, or even by death (Kuper 1950; Booth 2003).

Traditional Swaziland had no systems of positive law, and the community did not create laws in any literal sense. Custom was used as a guide in taking decisions concerning social controls. Collective decisions that were obligatory to all community members were largely intended to contribute to social stability and harmonious relationships within the group (Kuper 1963).

Furthermore, as shown in the historical overview above, Swaziland has a unique history with Christianity. It is believed that Christianity was introduced in Swaziland at the initiative of a cultural figure, King Somhlolo,⁸ and it spread after his death through missionary expansion (Mzizi 2005; Kasenene 1993; Cazziol 1986). As a result Swaziland built its socio-economic and political ideology upon culture and the Bible; thus making culture and religion an intricate and intertwined web. Almost every Swazi would claim to be a Christian if asked of their religion. According to International Religious Freedom (IRF) report (2010), Religious Intelligence Country Profile (2011)⁹ and Nations' Encyclopedia Swaziland¹⁰, most of the population is Christian, with about 40% of the population affiliated with the Zionist Churches, professing a blend of Christianity and traditional religion. About 20% of the population is Roman Catholic. Other Christian denominations that comprise 30% of the population include Anglicans, Methodists, Evangelicals and Charismatic churches. About less than 10% of the population comprise Muslims and other small groups like Jews, Mormons and Baha'is. These statistics confirm those of the Swazi 2007 Census which showed that about 90% of Swazis are adherents of the Christian religion.

There are certain expectations imposed on women in the name of culture and these expectations are aligned to those in Christianity; for example the practice of Levirate marriage as demonstrated above. The duo therefore becomes an inseparable pair in defining the societal status of women and in turn their own conceptions of personhood.

⁸ It is believed that King Somhlolo had a vision whilst performing national rituals; he saw white men coming from the East carrying a book (the Bible) on the right hand and a coin (money) on the left hand. God instructed him to advise the Swazi to 'eat' the book and reject the money.

⁹ Religious Intelligence Country Profile: Swaziland .<http://web.archive.org/web/200806261100027> [accessed 10 September, 2014]

¹⁰ <http://www.nationsencyclopedia/Swaziland-RELIGIONS.html> [accessed 10 September 2014]

1.2. Patriarchal Context of Swazi Society

Swazi society is patriarchal¹¹ in its nature, and by extension its fundamental unit, the family whose basis is marriage, is also patriarchal (Nyawo and Nsibande 2014; Mofolo 2011). According to Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (*hereafter* SWAAGA) Report (2012),¹² which confirms the national study conducted by UNICEF on ‘Violence Against Children and Young Women in Swaziland’ in the IRIN Report (2010),¹³ the patriarchal nature of the Swazi society often fuels behaviour where women are seen as subordinates to men. Even within the legal system, women are considered minors for most of their lives. These studies point at patriarchy in the household, having multiple intimate partners and infidelity, poverty and economic issues, alcohol and substance abuse, harmful customary practices, inaccessibility to key resources such as land and credit, and the misuse of culture to justify harmful actions toward women, as all having contributed to gender inequality and male superiority in Swaziland. Despite its exposure to modern socio-political and economic transformation, the Swazi society has upheld its conventional gender dynamics whereby subservience, deference towards males and asymmetrical gender roles are purported in essentialist terms (Unger 1970:14). The family unit, as Robinson and Richardson (1993) have observed, is central to the reproduction of patriarchal relations and women’s subordination. Family members in the Swazi society are positioned in hierarchical power relations where males have authority over women; they are obligated to comply with the authority that has been defined within these relationships. The husband is therefore culturally accepted as the ruler of the family, and is regarded as the formal

¹¹ Patriarchy is a social system in which the role of the male as the primary authority figure is central to social organisation, and where fathers hold authority over women and children, and property. There have been controversies about the term ‘patriarchy’, but in recent years most forms of feminism tend to agree that patriarchy is a general descriptor of male dominance.

¹² <http://www.swagaa.org.sz/?page-ld=32> [accessed 10 September 2014]

¹³ <http://www.irinnews.org/report/73057/swaziland> [accessed 10 September 2014]

authority to whom the wife and children owe their allegiance. Whitehead (1993:72) has labeled this a pervasive ideology of male superiority which shapes women's views of themselves and their capabilities (Giddens 2005; Kneel 1981; Horner 1972).

This male dominance also extends to control over women's reproductive abilities. Studies undertaken by Ngcobo (2007), Mdluli (2007), AWEAPON (2007), WLSA (2001), Daly (2001), Russell (1993) and Nhlapho (1992) on the dynamics of the Swazi society have shown that the Swazi family is pro-natal, and the ultimate purpose of marriage is procreation; hence women's fertility is highly regarded.¹⁴ Similar findings by Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) in a different African context further reveal that it is the family structure in a patriarchal society that shapes and influences individual reproductive decision making and women's fertility. As we have shown in a previous publication emanating from this study, it is the communal and familial ethic of Ubuntu which takes precedence over the (largely feminist) ethic of self-determination (Nyawo, Nadar and Reddy, 2013, pp.105-118)

The ethic of Ubuntu taking precedence over the ethic of self-determination as shown by Nyawo, Nadar and Reddy is confirmed in Mpfu's (1983:33) assertion that the dowry that is paid when a Swazi woman gets married is to bind her to her husband and in-laws as the price that acquires her procreative capacity. It is also obligatory that she bears children, preferably an '*heir*', for the patriline she marries into. Echoing Mpfu, Russell (1984, p.50) advances that Swazi patriarchy dictates that children belong to their fathers, both culturally and legally, thus they assume the father's identity; "it is through bride wealth that men acquire the right to children and to fertility

¹⁴ Data collected from participants of this study, in both FGDs and separate interviews revealed that traditionally it is expected that the woman must be fertile in order to bear children for the in-laws, such that in childless unions conclusions are reached, without any medical diagnosis that it is the woman who is infertile and she is blamed for the predicament. The man is assumed to remain fertile for the rest of his life; low sperm count, varicose veins in the testicles, sexually transmitted diseases and other causes of male infertility are never considered in a traditional family.

of their wives.” Women are therefore valued for their ability to produce children who would continue the heritage and name of the family, and to guarantee perpetual lineage (Sandallb and Donkor 2007; Nukunya2003; Buor 2002 Gyekye 1996). Hence studies such as those conducted by the Women and Law in Southern Africa (*hereafter* WLSA) –Swaziland Chapter in 2004 and the African Women's Economic Policy Network (*hereafter* AWEPON 2005) demonstrate that in the Swazi family, patriarchy promotes group rights over individual rights. In other words, a man marries a wife for the family, and that assumes that women’s interests are subsumed and protected within the wider community.

Notwithstanding the above, Swaziland as a country has made some effort to protect the rights of its citizens. For example, international conventions related to fair treatment of women, independent of categorical judgments, have been signed. Despite these initiatives an androcentric view which dominates familial and social relations, including women’s reproductive abilities, remain captive to the legislative developments which have taken place.

1.3. Rationale and Objectives for the Study

Being born and bred in such a cultural environment I have developed an interest in the gender imbalances that exist in the Swazi society. My own experiences and those of other Swazi married women motivated me to explore women’s fertility in relation to their social and self-constructions of personhood. As stated in the background, the family unit in the Swazi society is one of the defining principles of its culture, which is patriarchal in outlook. Core to the family’s status is the reproductive capability of the woman, whilst the man assumes amongst others, protective responsibilities of his family. Both women and men are expected to perform tasks to which they are ‘naturally’ suited. They are socialised to accept the inferiority of women and the superiority of men. The male dominance birthed by patriarchy shapes and influences the daily

interactions of the Swazi, ultimately affecting the status of women and their constructions of their personhood based on fertility.

As stated above, the main critical question which this study sought to answer was:

What is the relationship between fertility and socio-cultural religious constructions of Swazi women's personhood?

Sub Questions:

1. What are the Swazi society's socio-cultural religious constructions of women's personhood based on their fertility?
2. How do these socio-cultural religious constructions relate to Swazi women's self-constructions of personhood?
3. Why do Swazi women relate to these socio-cultural religious constructions of personhood in the way that they do?

Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

1. To provide an overview of Swazi society's (women and men) constructions of social roles for women and men based on their fertility
2. To explore how Swazi women construct their personhood based on the Swazi society's socio-cultural and religious constructions of themselves in terms of their fertility;
3. To understand why Swazi society constructs women's personhood based on their fertility in the way that they do

4. To understand why Swazi women self-construct their personhood in relation to fertility, in the way that they do.

1.4. Research Approach: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

This section provides a broad summary and overview of the theories and research methods that guided this study, which will be described in detail in chapter three. The nature of the study, which is located at the intersection between gender, religion and culture, warranted an interdisciplinary approach that draws on African feminist theological and cultural theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Considerations: African Feminist Theological Anthropology

At the heart of this study is the consideration that women are only believed to be “real persons” or “fully human” when they are able to reproduce offspring for their families. Reproductive capabilities or fertility are believed to be the essence of a married woman’s personhood as implied in several studies (Donkor 2008; AWEAPON 2005; Pearce 1999; Haysom 1997; Ginindza 1989). How do Swazi women experience these religious and socio-cultural beliefs and how do they make sense of them in the light of their personhood? This is what this study seeks to uncover.

In order to theorise this relationship between religious and socio-cultural constructions of fertility and women’s personhood, I will draw on theories of theological anthropology as propounded by African women theologians (Nadar 2009; Phiri 2004; Rakoczy 2004; Moyo 2004; Oduyoye 2001; Kanyoro 2001), further to which, I will bring under consideration the work of theorists within Sociology and Cultural Studies (Frie 2013; Cinoglu and Arikan 2012; Giddens 2005; Hogg 2001; Stets and Burke 2000).

African feminist theology provides an appropriate lens for this study because of its focus on gender in African culture and religion which interrogates the experience of living in a hybrid patriarchal space of Christianity and African culture (Kanyoro 2001; Nadar 2009, p.4). This hybridity is a feature of Swazi women's life as shown earlier in this chapter. An African feminist approach takes cognisance of culture as an indispensable variable within gender discourse in Africa and argues that culture shapes and influences the experiences of African women (Kwok 2004; Oduyoye 2001). As noted by Phiri (2004, p.17), culture is a social construct which assigns roles to women and men based on how the society understands the identities of women and men. Whilst Phiri acknowledges that culture is important because it gives people their identities, she also asserts that; "unfortunately African cultures have viewed women as less important than men, thereby making it difficult for women to have valid relationships with self, others, creation and God". (2004, p.17) Hence, culture can provide women with a communal identity and a sense of belonging, while at the same time it can be manipulated and be used as a tool of domination (Kwok 2004). Kanyoro (2002), Oduyoye (2001), Phiri and Nadar (2006) have theorised on the humanity of African women and how it is so intricately tied with religio-cultural and social expectations of women's subordinate status. These theories are employed to interpret the socio-cultural and religious beliefs of the Swazi society's socio-cultural and religious beliefs on women's fertility and how they subsequently frame women's constructions of personhood.

Methodological Considerations

The study employed a qualitative research paradigm, framed within an exploratory and critical research design. It sought to answer the 'what', 'how', and the 'why' of the research issue (Patton and Cochran 2002) through collecting information on personal experiences, perceptions, feelings, attitudes and life stories about societal perceptions on women's fertility and the

subsequent constructions of their personhood based on these beliefs, through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. As described by Atkinson, Coffey and Delamout (2001), and confirmed by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. Its aim is to facilitate a profound understanding of the social reality of people and their cultures in their natural settings, and the meaning they make of their experiences and behavior. (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Seidman 1991). Employing qualitative research techniques I was able to engage the participants in intensive interviews, where I encouraged them to '*dig deep*' (Fraenkel and Warren 2000) and communicate their conceptions on women's fertility and how these perceptions created women's constructions of their own personhood. Moreover, as I was working within a critical research paradigm I also sought, through the process of the interviews, to challenge and critique these prevailing gendered positions within the community. This is commensurate with a critical research paradigm as it actively engages with and challenges dominant assumptions and "taken for granted" ways of knowing, whilst it promotes advocacy for social change (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). This in-depth investigation was carried out in 4 rural, 4 semi urban and 4 urban communities in the Manzini region, selected through non-probability sampling methods, as the sampling section detailed in chapter three will show. In-depth inquiries capitalise on quality rather than quantity and the objective is not to maximise the number of the sample, but to become 'saturated' with information on the phenomenon (Padgett 2004).

1.5. Data Collection Strategies

Data collection and analysis for this study was conducted between January 2013 and July 2014. I selected two qualitative data methods to generate information on personal histories, perspectives and experiences on women's fertility and constructions of their personhood. These were in-depth interviews and focus groups. They enabled me to question and listen and immerse myself in the real world of my participants (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). The semi-structured face to face interviews were directed by a data collection instrument that gave some structure to the interviews to ensure a conversational dialogue with the participants (see interview guide attached as Appendix 1). I selected the interview technique because it offers advantages of focusing on specific experiences and perceptions of individuals engaged in the area of interest (Fraenkel and Warren 2000).

Primary data were collected from a sample of 71 participants, of which 6 focus groups comprising 6-9 participants were created. The biographical details of the participants will be described in chapter three. The study population was chosen on the basis of their closeness to the research topic and their levels of experience as members of a society that holds socio-cultural and religious beliefs on women's fertility. All details of the discussions were recorded as field notes and were safely kept in field diaries and to 'chronicle my own thinking, feeling, experiences and perceptions of the research issue throughout the research process' (Merriam, 1988, p.6).

According to Creswell (2003) and Patton and Cochran (2002) the researcher should select a sample in a systematic way to ensure that the community/users/external actors see it as a credible

and indicative sample. For this study I chose a sample of 71 participants, of which a higher percentage was females. I employed maximum sample strategy to ensure its credibility, and that it covered subsets that would best represent societal beliefs on women's fertility. Explained by Patton and Cochran (2002), this strategy selects key demographic variables that would have an impact on the participants' view of the topic. Participants of this study therefore reflected various combinations of variables, and this minimized bias. These variables were gender, age, the number of children, location, education and marital status. They are presented in sampling grids in chapters four, five, six and seven.

Validity and Reliability

Though validity and reliability are more prominent in quantitative research studies, in a limited way, reliability can be used in qualitative research studies to check for consistent patterns of theme development from the responses of the participants (Creswell, 2003, p.195). The accuracy of the findings of this study was validated through triangulation whereby data was collected from primary sources interviewed at separate times and FGDs. Information accessed in secondary sources like government records, archival materials, web sources and books were also validated. I also employed member-checking where I would take specific descriptions or themes back to the participants and determine whether the generated data were accurate. The section where I clarify the bias that I brought to the study is also meant to validate the data; as Creswell has advised, self-reflection in a study creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers (Creswell, 2009, p.177). Follow-up interviews were also scheduled for further clarity, especially on issues that pertained to cultural practices that demeaned women in the Swazi society. The research guide which initially comprised 35 questions, excluding demographic data questions, was pretested using a smaller sample of 5 female participants from

a semi-rural setting in a FGD. The pretesting helped me to identify a few ambiguities and repetitions in some questions. As a result, questions which I had listed to generate chapter five were modified and collated with questions in chapters six and seven.

1.6. Conclusion

In this introductory chapter I have provided an overview of the academic inquiry that explored the relationship between Swazi women's fertility and their personhood. First, I located the research question within the context in which the study emanated. In broad strokes, I explained the physical environment and the socio-cultural and religious context of Swazi society. The critical question that guided the study, together with sub-questions and the objectives the questions sought to achieve were outlined. Furthermore, there were sections that highlighted theoretical approaches that premised the study, and also the methodological approaches that were employed during data generation. These sections are explained in detail in chapter three and also in each chapter on findings of the study. The next chapter discusses previous studies related to the study whilst showing the gap that the study sought to fill within existing literature. Before we review the related literature it is important to present an overview of the chapter outline as shown below.

1.7. Chapter Outline

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, reference is made to previous research studies on gender related themes that had a bearing on the study. Each theme summarises the focus and orientation of these studies, whilst showing their relevance to the study's exploration of Swazi society's socio-cultural and religious constructions of women's personhood based on their fertility.

Chapter 3: Theories

This chapter discusses the African feminist theological, sociological and ethno-philosophical theories that premised the study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The chapter provides an overview of the the qualitative research paradigm which was framed within an exploratory and critical research design.

Chapter 5: Constructions of Social Roles of Swazi Women and Men in Relation to Fertility

This chapter presents an analysis of how society constructs the personhood of Swazi women in relation to their fertility, through their social, religious and cultural beliefs. It is structured to show the methodological framework that the inquiry employed in generating data, the findings and the African feminist interpretation of the findings.

Chapter 6: Women's Self-Construction of Identity and Personhood in Relation to Fertility Expectations

The chapter provides an overview of Swazi women's own perceptions of their fertility and the constructions of their personhood based on the Swazi society's socio-cultural and religious beliefs. The women's own perceptions are also theorised using the critical feminist paradigm.

Chapter 7: Religio-Cultural Constructions on Women's Fertility

The chapter is an analysis of the interface between Swazi culture and Christianity and how these two variables shape societal views and perceptions on women's fertility, which then impact on construction of Swazi women's personhood.

Chapter 8: Construction of Swazi Women's Identities and Personhood based on their Fertility

The chapter examines the extent to which socio-cultural and religious constructions on women's fertility shape women's identities or personhood by showing the correlation between women's self-definitions and socio-cultural religious constructions based on their fertility.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This chapter is the conclusion of the thesis which discusses the theoretical, conceptual, methodological and contextual contribution of the study, as well as personal reflections and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to examine and engage with the literature linked to issues of fertility as they relate to the socio-cultural and religious constructions of Swazi women's identities and personhood. The overall thesis explores this relationship through a feminist ethic of self-determination in relation to an ethic of Ubuntu; how these concepts find expression within various scholarly writings will be explored in the next chapter.

Connell (2003) and Fook (2002) make insightful comments regarding gender systems and power, which are concepts that frame the themes from related literature to my study, which are discussed in the next section. In broad terms Connell (2003, pp3-4) asserts that:

1. Gender relations are an interactive system of connections and distinctions among people; that is what happens when one group in this system affects the others and is affected by them.
2. Gender relations are not artificial but are deeply entrenched in organisational practices, in religious and legal concepts and in the 'taken for granted' routines of people's lives.
3. Gender relations are multi-dimensional, interweaving relationships of power, economic arrangements, emotional relationships, systems of communication and meaning.
4. Gender systems are diverse and dynamic; they arise from different cultural histories and they have changed overtime, and are still undergoing change.

Echoing Connell, Fook (2002, p.46) observes that power in gender systems is pervasive in all facets of life; that includes organised and complex areas like governments, families, discourses and texts. He adds that even though power relations can sometimes be abstract, they are able to intersect with local and lived experiences.

This chapter will therefore begin with a general overview of the research on gender and power in Swaziland in terms of how these power relationships are developed and reinforced by law; the institution of the family and the socio-cultural and religious beliefs and practices with regard to women's fertility or lack thereof. The links that have been made between patriarchy, female sexuality and procreation will be explored throughout. Finally, the chapter will highlight the literature regarding gender-based violence as a manifestation of the gender inequalities which exist within marriage, and will show the importance of this study as it moves the framing of violence beyond the physical to the conceptions of women's personhood and self-worth.

2.1 Gender, Power and the Law in Swaziland

Mofolo (2011) in her study "Investigating the Factors Contributing to the Disempowerment of Women in Swaziland" cites poverty, limited educational opportunities for girls, recurrent gender inequalities, discrimination, abuse, humiliation and degradation of women as major contributing factors to women's disempowerment. Of these factors, the dual legal framework, which establishes a hierarchy of classifications between women and men, is cited as a major contributing factor responsible for women's disempowerment in Swaziland. The dual system is where the Roman Dutch Law operates parallel to Swazi Customary Law (AWEAPON, 2005, p.28). Notably, these two regimes of law are constantly in conflict. Furthermore, the Swazi Customary Law which governs traditional marriage and family law is not codified; hence "it is constantly used by men where it suits them and as a means of enforcing their own agendas against women" (Mofolo, 2011, p.12).

Ginindza (1989), Nhlapho (1999), WLSA (1998), Daly (2001) and AWEAPON (2007) have undertaken studies on women's equalities in Swaziland, as experienced through the infringement of their legal rights. They all claim that the legal framework in Swaziland has exacerbated the

institutionalisation of many discriminatory practices against women, particularly through marriage laws which regard a woman as a legal “minor” (Nhlapho, 1982, p.29) throughout her life. Put differently, her subordinate status is not only defined by familial ties, but also by law (Crook 2007). A valid marriage can be contracted in one of two ways according to Ginindza (1989), either through statutory law or customary law. Zwane (2013), who agrees with the above cited studies, asserts that it is this dualistic nature of the legal system which complicates the issue of women's rights. Since unwritten law and custom govern traditional marriage and matters of inheritance and family law, women's rights often are unclear and change according to where and by whom they are interpreted. Couples often marry in both civil and traditional ceremonies, creating problems in determining which set of rules apply to the marriage and to subsequent questions of child custody, property, and inheritance in the event of divorce or death (Nhlapho, 1982, p.35).

The studies highlighted above draw attention to laws which confirm that women are the most vulnerable group in Swaziland, with regards to legal protection within marriage (AWEAPON 2005). These laws in question include the Maintenance Act, the Age of Majority Act, the Administration of Estates Act and the Deeds Registry Act. Nhlapho (1992) in his book *Marriage and Divorce in Swazi Law and Custom* posits that marriage is both a social and a legal process that establishes a strong bond between two families, and *lobola* is transferred to the woman's family, as specified by both legal systems. The systems also provide that marriages are group-oriented, they emphasize the patrilineal descent of children, and by extension the importance of women's fertility. The marriage payment of *lobola* therefore seals the deal. Nhlapho, supported by Ferraro (1983:14), further observes that the cattle transferred to the woman's family become compensation for the loss of their daughter and her reproductive capabilities. These cattle are

then used to pay *lobola* for the bride to one of her brothers, thus bringing in another “reproductive unit” and keeping the groups in a state of equilibrium (Dlamini, 1984, p.48). The payment of *lobola* is therefore a legal obligation which marks the transfer of the woman’s fertility to the husband’s family. Put differently, it is the fruit of her womb that is purchased for continuity of the family name. This places high a premium on children, making women’s fertility to be very crucial for the survival of every family (WLSA 2008; Ngcobo 2007; Mdluli 2007). Also, *lobola* is used as a control mechanism over the woman and the children that she might bear in marriage, such that she remains a permanent ‘stranger’ in her marital family even after the death of her husband (Ngcobo, 2007, p.535). Other legal tools such as the country’s constitution and marriage governing laws are also designed to put pressure and influence the woman to accept inequalities so that she remains in the subservient position in which she is meant to belong.

A related study by Ferraro (2008) investigated the persistence of *lobola* paying in contemporary Swaziland. His findings revealed that this cultural practice still remains vibrant and efforts to suppress it have been ineffective. Swazi people hold tenaciously to it as a viable practice, subsequent to a reawakening in cultural nationalism that re-emphasizes and strengthens traditional Swazi culture (Daly, 2001,p.50). Generated data cites one of Ferraro’s participants remarking on the importance of *lobola* that;

“... it is an insurance for good treatment of the wife; a mechanism to stabilize marriage; a form of compensation to the wife’s lineage for the loss of a member; a symbol of union between lineages; a mechanism to legitimise marriage; a transference of children’s rights; and the acquisition by the husband of uxorial rights over the bride” (Ferraro, 2008, p.2).

Daly (2001) further lists other areas where women remain legally minors in the view of Swazi custom and statutory law. These include acquiring a passport from the Ministry of Home Affairs, securing a loan from the bank and acquiring land; in each of these instances, a woman needs to secure approval of her husband or any close male relative. Zwane (2013, p.5) draws attention to the conflict within the legal framework in Swaziland which results from the dualistic nature of the system. She makes reference to the constitution that;

It provides that women can open bank accounts, obtain passports, and take jobs without the permission of a male relative; however, these constitutional rights often conflict with customary law, which classifies women as minors. Women routinely execute contracts and enter into a variety of transactions in their own names; however, banks still refuse personal loans to women without a male guarantor. The constitution provides for equal access to land; however, customary law forbids women from registering property in their own names.

WLSA (2008, p.167) when explaining the same point puts it this way;

Obtaining a passport, opening a personal or business banking account, moving from one region to another, purchasing a car, buying land or home require a woman to secure the approval of a sponsor, for example a husband, father, brother or chief.

As Zwane further notes, though the Constitution of Swaziland (2005) states that “a woman shall not be compelled to undergo or uphold any custom to which she is in conscience opposed”, adherents of traditional family practices may treat a woman as an outcast if she refuses to undergo the mourning rite, and a widow who does not participate may lose her home and inheritance (Zwane, 2013, p.8). When the husband dies, his widow must remain in strict

mourning for one month, during which time she cannot leave the house, and the husband's family can move into the homestead and take control of its operations (WLSA, 2002, p.52).

These studies on the legal inequalities in Swaziland echo each other in their observations of the gendered power relationships which this dual system maintains. The codified and uncoded marriage laws are an expression of society's socio-cultural and religious constructions which are reinforced within the family as an institution.

2.2 Gender, Power and the Family

The structure of families are closely guarded and maintained by culture as many scholars have shown (Giddens 2005; Dickerson 2004; Russell 1993). "It is within the family that social construction of womanhood is engineered and perpetuated, and in which process women become unwilling partners to even critique culture", argues Zigira (1998, p.35). Hence, the family is a crucial agent of socialisation, where girls are socialised to be passive, soft-spoken and tolerant through-out their lifespan (Nyawo and Nsibande 2014). In the same spirit WLSA Swaziland has asserted that the interest and position of a family member are compromised by being born a female. From birth a girl is perceived to be a temporary member of the family and when she gets married she occupies an inferior position as a newcomer, an outsider and a non-blood member(1998, p.64).

Within the global discourse feminists have been analyzing conventional relations which favor men in the intra-familial distribution of power and resources (Mason and Taj 1987). Moghadam (2005) and other scholars have linked this power to how families are constructed and have observed that within patriarchal systems, family is viewed as an important societal institution conceptualised as essential - and this underscores the exalted position of men whilst condoning

women's minority positions. This power differential is also clearly evident in the Swazi context as well. For example, many studies undertaken in Swaziland show that although the number of women in Swaziland is larger than that of men, their power is far less than that of men; women continue to be a minority group as a subordinate segment of society (Kioli 2013; Kaur 2012; Mofolo 2011; Crook 2007; Mpofu 1983), yet they are expected to prove their "high quality" (Vitrovitchi, 1997, p.26) through childbearing.

Moghadam (2004:6) points out too that the family is the institution where children are socialised into society's normative system of values and appropriate status expectations. She asserts that it provides a stable emotional environment that cushions the male's ego against any harm and abuse. Conversely, such socialisation renders women powerless and docile and when internalised it generates submissive, compliant and self-effacing behaviors (Unger 1979:35). These observations are confirmed by a study conducted by Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) in a different context that shares many characteristics with the Swazi society. He was examining reproductive decision-making and male motivation for large family size amongst 3,073 Nigerian couples. He argues that sociological and institutional factors favor men in matters affecting marital and family life. As heads of households and custodians of the interests of the lineage, protectors and providers of their families, they are the decision makers, and the wives are expected to abide by their spoken decisions or perceived wishes. Isiugo-Abanihe adds that the wives address their husbands as 'lord' or 'master', or some other appellation that underscores their exalted position. Through bride wealth, the study asserts, a man secures rights over his wife and her children; a wife is expected to bear many children as her contribution to the continuity and viability of her husband's line (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994, p.151).

Similarly, a Baseline Study of the Socio-economic Impact of HIV and AIDS and the Responsiveness of Policy Framework Swaziland (AWEAPON 2005, p.15) points to culture as the conduit for the institutionalisation of inequalities and discriminatory practices against women. It discusses the Swazi as having been socialised to define and assign gender roles which give power and prestige to men, and eventually place women under the guardianship of their husbands and in-laws. The study cites property rights amongst other examples, which best illustrate the imbalances between the gender roles. For example, Swazi women cannot own major assets like land because culture dictates that only males can access land and build homes for their wives and children. For women who head households, their access to land must be facilitated through a male relative, including younger relatives and sons, failing which the women's needs would be ignored. However Mpfu (1983) traces women's subservience back to the time when a girl is born to the family. He argues that it is not marriage that changes the status of a woman; a woman remains minor throughout her life. She is first under the guardianship of her father, and when she marries she comes under the guardianship of her husband. If she is widowed she either remains under the guardianship of her in-laws who can facilitate her inheritance by the brother of the late husband or a close agnate (Whitehead, 1993, p.72), or she returns to her father's custody or other male relatives, especially her sons (Mpfu 1983:31). This is what Oduyoye (1995:5) calls a "compulsory attachment to the males". Daly's (2001) study confirms how patriarchal power is established through such attachment. He explores gender equality rights versus traditional practices in Swaziland. Amongst other things, his study affirms the gender disparities in Swazi families, which he attributes to the long tradition of patriarchal dominance and control that the Swazi nation has upheld. Daly (2001, p.46) concludes, "given

this long-standing heritage, Swazi society has become accustomed to male control and decision-making over family, traditional and societal issues”.

The above studies highlight that in many families, including Swazi families, the inferior position of women is culturally constructed, and the women’s value is determined by their ability to procreate. Girls learn very early of the “motherhood mandate”¹⁵ through cultural socialisation, which also reduces them to being dependents throughout their lives. How does this treating of women as minors assign power to the beneficiaries of the socio-cultural and religious constructs to control women’s sexualities? This is what this study seeks to find out. Furthermore how are women’s personhoods defined by this patriarchal discourse, and how is their “compulsory attachment to males” related to their perceived value in marriage through their ability to bear children, especially male “heirs”?

2.3 Socio-Cultural and Religious Beliefs and Practices Regarding Fertility

Feminist literature shows that patriarchy allows a male superiority ideology to control female sexuality and procreation through cultural beliefs and practices (Rakoczy 2004; Phiri et al 2002; Oduyoye 2001; Martey 1998; Nasimuyu 1993). In cultures similar to Swaziland where the paying of “bride price” is practiced, it becomes the price for acquiring the wife’s reproductive capacity (Russell 1993). The woman is obliged to produce children for her husband’s lineage (Snyder and Tadesse 1995); hence WLSA’s (2001) observation that marriage in a patriarchal society serves specific major functions which are the perpetuation of the woman marital lineage and the provision of her domestic labour. Walker (1990) and Carter and Parker (1996), who share similar sentiments, add that sons are preferred; at least one male child in the family is

¹⁵ ‘Motherhood mandate’ is an expression that explains the women’s compulsory obligation to be a mother. I have borrowed it from Rider, E. A. 2005. *Our Voices Psychology of Woman* (2nd edition). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

regarded as absolutely necessary. It is therefore true, as Oduyoye (1995, p.142) would argue, that motherhood in most African societies is a highly valued role open only to women, but desired by both women and men, as the channel by which men reproduce themselves and continue the family line. So, the actual prestige of reproduction goes to those who 'own' or control the reproductive capabilities of women, such that women are not valued in themselves, but only as valuable objects or means to an end. Other than the continuity of the family name, sons are important for economic support and their permanent residence near the ancestral home, unlike girls who would join their husbands' families after marriage (WLSA 2008; Ngcobo 2007; Russell 1993).

Daly's study also made some important conclusions about socio-cultural beliefs regarding the value of women's fertility within Swazi society (2001, p.46). He argues that procreation is one of the most highly valued cultural obligations in Swazi communities. In terms of beliefs, among others, he cites three major reasons why Swazi society values procreation so much. First, he notes that the birth of a child brings hope in families that parents will be cared for at their old age. Second, fertility is perceived by society as a sign of wealth and prosperity. Third, it is an indication that one's ancestry is sufficiently pleased to allow the couple successful childbirth. Furthermore, Daly cites (2001:49) several examples of how these beliefs are entrenched within cultural practices.

He notes that it is customary if the union is childless that a substitute wife stands in for her sister and bears a child for the spouse. In instances where the man has died before his wife has given birth to children, the brother of the deceased 'inherits' the wife to facilitate the procreation process (Daly 2001; Nhlapho 1992; Armstrong 1985).

In addition to the actual socio-cultural practices which enforce women's subordinate status within marriage, another means of entrenching these beliefs are through folk-songs and other traditions. Mdluli (2007) in her article entitled "Voicing their Perceptions: Swazi Women's Folk Songs", has shed an illuminating insight on how patriarchy shows its face in songs. She has categorized the songs into various themes, but for the purposes of this discussion I will only focus on the love and marriage theme. In her exploration of the love folk songs she reveals the patriarchal traits of a Swazi family in that it grooms a girl child for her final destination which is marriage. She is indoctrinated to believe through these songs that her father's house is not her permanent home, although her father would one day be a wealthy man through the exchange of *lobola* cows for her. Through socialisation which she receives primarily from her mother and grandmother, she emerges to fit into the patriarchal society as a 'full' woman. So, marriage becomes the transitional stage each Swazi girl looks forward to as she grows up in her family (Ngcobo 2007). Drawing on Ashton and Whitting (1987), Mdluli underscores the importance of family that;

It is an institution that bears responsibility for the physical reproduction of society and for the ideological reproduction of its citizens as gendered subjects with certain beliefs, skills and expectations. It is of primary importance in socialising children into specific socially produced heterosexual norms of femininity and masculinity (Mdluli, 2007, p.88).

Mdluli further analyses love songs through which the girl expresses her love for the man - that he has handsome physical features that justify her deep love for him, and she is proud of his choice. Notably, the songs also confirm her strong love directed to the entire extended marital family. The songs clearly demonstrate that the girl would be miserable if she were to remain unmarried. She would feel incomplete, and she would be guilty that she deprived her parents of a valuable

interrelationship with another family which Motsa-Dladla (1994, p.32) explains as “a linking of two families rather than two persons, where the bearing of children is the essential consummation of wifhood”.

Paradoxically, whilst there are songs of appreciation that the girl has finally reached marriage, her much anticipated destination, there are those which communicate the message that she is entering the worst stage in her life, namely death. Mdluli (2007, p.92) cites one such song, as an illustration of societal perceptions on marriage:

Leader (bride): Yelababe ngiyafa mine.

Chorus (bridal party): Yehha!

Leader: Yelabe ngitayifel'inkhonto.

Chorus: Yehha!

Leader: Imilomo ita yonkhe kimi.

Chorus: Yehha!

Leader: Yelababe ngitayifel'inkhonto.

(Oh my father, I will die,

Oh my!

Oh my father, I will die for marriage.

Oh my!

All people will talk bad about me.

Oh my!

Oh my father, I will die for marriage).

The song uses the death metaphor to communicate that there is suffering in marriage. Entering into it is more like committing suicide in your marital home as the bride, having left her father's house; hence the bride calls for her father who has received or will receive *lobola* that she is doing this for him. The song acknowledges that everybody in her marital home will turn against her and speak ill of her. Despite this she will not return home because marriage is an irreversible commitment, and is obligatory to every girl, hence she would rather die than return. The importance of marriage and its implications on the girl and her parents is expressed through song in Mdluli's study.

Mdluli's analysis gives a vivid picture of how through cultural mechanisms such as these songs, women are groomed to sacrifice everything to fulfill the societal expectation that marriage is obligatory and permanent. Mdluli's thinking connects with the views of social learning theorists who list cultural practices within the family as a key agent of socialisation. The songs in this case perpetuate gender biases in marriage. Bandura (1977) and Mischel (1973), who developed the original tenets of social learning theory (Rider 2005), posit that females and males from childhood are schooled to behave in stereotypical ways that are reinforced by socially sanctioned agents (such as the father in this case) who approve certain behaviors that are traditionally accepted. Whilst Mdluli's article is informative, it only gives a cursory glance at the issue of women's fertility, which is arguably perceived to be the most important ingredient in every marriage relationship.

While the studies by Daly and others cited above delineate the beliefs and practices with regard to fertility and women's subordinate status within marriage, they place less emphasis on how these beliefs and practices influence women's constructions of themselves. My study sought to

access the voices of women within childless marriages where they were perceived to have failed in their “duty” to perpetuate their husband’s lineage. This addresses a gap in the literature on gender equality which tends to focus on women in leadership as a measure of the equality gains, and often ignores the constraints that procreation expectations place on women. An overview on the literature on women in leadership in Swaziland will be explored below.

2.4 Gender, Power and Leadership

Swaziland is expected to reach the SADC Gender Protocol target of 50% women in all areas of decision-making processes by 2015, but there is still minimal representation of women in many sectors, and most women are in middle or low management, with little or no decision-making power as boardrooms are still dominated by men. Analyzing the recent 2013 country elections in *Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service*, Zwane (2013, p.6) notes that “Swaziland has hit rock bottom in women’s representation in government, just at the time when the country should be giving its last push for gender equality before 2015”. As it is argued in the training manual on CEDAW, *Gender, Leadership and Advocacy for Members of Parliament* (2011, p.36),

negative stereotyping, systematic and institutionalized oppression of women as well as training women to settle for less instead of wanting the best for themselves and their lives are some of the blockages that society uses to deny women opportunities in areas such as leadership.

This became evident in the 2013 national elections. According to Zwane (2013:2) out of 55 parliamentary candidates representing their constituencies, the electorate voted in only one woman, despite the efforts of the 50/50 election campaign. With King Mswati III’s appointment of the additional 10 parliamentary seats, only 4 women compared to 61 men hold seats, resulting

in women representing a mere 6% of parliament. One theory that explains the low representation of women in the present government is that women who served in the last parliament could not live up to societal expectations;

One of the female members of parliament was always making controversial statements about her personal life in the media and this did not do much to instill confidence in women generally. Unfortunately, if one woman errs, all the rest are judged by her actions...(Zwane, 2013, p.11).

Other factors that Zwane cites are women's poverty which forces them to bribe their constituencies with food parcels and alcohol long before elections, as well as the "pull her down syndrome"¹⁶ which causes the female electorate to be hostile to women who show interest in politics.

A similar scenario is reported by Nyawo and Nsibande (2014) in a study they conducted with 21 female school leaders to ascertain the extent to which socio-cultural factors impact on gender equality in accessing leadership positions in the schools in Swaziland. The fundamental supposition was that the longstanding patriarchal heritage persists and continues to define gender relationships in all subsystems in Swaziland. Education in particular, they claimed, could never be neutral; it is an active supporter and faithful reflector of the status quo (Nyawo and Nsibande 2014:47. If the status quo is predominantly unequal and unjust, education will also be increasingly unequal and unjust (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998:47).

Findings from Nyawo and Nsibande's study revealed that female teachers were less keen to access leadership positions. This was attributed to the resilient socio-cultural context which

¹⁶ <http://www.genderlinks.org.za/article/pull-her-down-syndrome-maintains-the-status-quo-2005-08-01> [accessed 20 October 2014].

legitimised inequality between sexes. According to 2013¹⁷ statistics from the Information Office in the Ministry of Education and Training, female head teachers constituted 35% at primary school level, 17% at secondary level, and only 1 female was head of a tertiary institution. Paradoxically, female teachers' percentage was very high in the schools as compared to male teachers, and most female teachers were highly qualified.

Based on these findings, Nyawo and Nsibande concluded that socio-cultural influences had placed women at a minority position such that they could not aspire for leadership positions in education. Swazi culture socialised them to believe in the leadership skills of males. A majority of female head teachers in the study had no confidence in their leadership abilities. They seemed to have regrets regarding their trespassing of domains traditionally reserved for males; hence most expressed that they had no interest in leadership positions until they were coerced by other people into it. At home, at school and at church, they had been taught that the man was the ruler in all social units and women as subordinates should support male leadership at all costs. It is for that reason that those who found themselves in leadership positions either by choice or by default experienced antagonism especially from other women (Nyawo and Nsibande, 2014, p.54). The hostile attitude from other female staff members was a constant reminder that the female leader was a misfit in a man's world. This pervasive ideology of male superiority, as noted by Young (1993, p.71) shapes women's views about themselves and their capabilities.

Ntawabona (2013) draws related conclusions to that of Zwane (2013) in her study on women's political participation in another geographical context. Her findings reveal that there were gender biases in Uganda that dissuaded women from availing themselves for political positions despite

¹⁷ Data from Teaching Service Commission Information Office. Ministry of Education and Training, Mbabane. Swaziland.

their active participation in voting campaigns. The study highlights the following contributory factors, amongst many, to be; socialisation which made women believe that their place was in the home and politics was a male domain; the women's distorted perception that any woman who joined politics was stubborn and unmanageable, and that she defied social traditions (Ntawabona, 2013, p.57) and what Stevens calls the "normal behavior" of a woman (2007, p.54). The study further cites a woman participant describing female political leaders in Uganda as "stubborn, big headed and arrogant, disrespectful to their husbands and money-minded" (Ntawabona, 2013, p.57). Furthermore verbal and physical violence experienced by women who aspired to join politics, from other women, families and the public, was cited by the study as another reason why women were discouraged from joining the political race. They were also labeled failures in their culturally defined responsibilities as mothers and nurturers. Hence, they were stigmatised as social deviants, and they were accused of being sexually irresponsible. For Oduyoye such women are always a threat to male-dominated societies because they are viewed as "free women"; "free woman is dangerous and is an affront to patriarchy and a direct challenge to the so-called masculinity of men who want to possess her" (Oduyoye, 1995, p.5). Zwane and Ntawabona therefore agree with each other that the male-dominated political environment combined with social and cultural norms work together to prevent women's access to the political sphere.

Connell (1995, p.553) refers to this stereotypical mentality which defines the political sphere referred to above as "hegemonic masculinity". He defines it as a cultural dynamic by which a particular gender claims and sustains a leading position in social life. Whilst the above studies present women as victims of hegemonic masculinity, in terms of access to leadership, how this

hegemonic masculinity which constructs women only as “*real*” if they produce children in their marital families, is a factor that remains unexplored. The contribution that my study sought to present was to show how women’s constructions of self-worth within this environment are not only dependent on leadership positions but by their ability to produce children. My study then highlights that it is not possible to explore women’s leadership in isolation from the constraints placed on them by socio-cultural and religious expectations for procreation. These expectations are directly linked to patriarchal culture, which often leads to violence against women as will be discussed below.

2.5 Gender, Power and Violence

WLSA Swaziland (2001) undertook a study on domestic violence against women in Swaziland, where patriarchal culture was identified as the main contributing factor to domestic violence. It was established that women’s minority status in Swaziland led men to exercise control over women, thus subjugating and violating them. The study identified types of violence carried out in Swazi homes as assault, rape, non-sexual physical domestic violence, sexual physical domestic violence, incest and emotional abuse. The most common was emotional abuse, where the perpetrator inflicts non-physical pain on the victim through insults and name calling. Participants from these studies revealed that there was a veil of secrecy around issues of violence in the homes, such that women who were courageous enough to report such cases to the police would later withdraw the charges even before the perpetrator was arrested. (Zwane 2013)

The studies further linked domestic violence in the homes with the perceived minority status of the women by society, which is reinforced by the marriage contract a man and woman enter into (Zwane 2013; CEDAW 2011; GEMSWA 2006; Mofolo 2011; Nhlapho 1992). The marriage contract allows discriminating cultural practices like *kuteka* (traditional marriage), *emalobolo*

(dowry), *inhlanti* (substitute wife) and *kungenwa* (wife inheritance). A close scrutiny of these practices by WLSA (2002) reveals that they expose women to various types of violence which deprive women of their dignity as human beings. It is sexual violence, emotional abuse, verbal and physical assault as well as the lack of human dignity that my study interrogates which are rife in families where the marriage union is childless or there is absence of male descendants. One of the positions established is that women in this predicament must be ‘deservedly’ punished for being failures in their marriages (GEMSWA 2006). Being classified a failure therefore impacts negatively on one’s personhood resulting in a sense of poor self-esteem.

Zwane’s (2013) reflects on issues of assault which WLSA listed amongst the types of violence. Echoing the same views she adds that women in Swaziland however, have the right to charge their husbands with assault under both the Roman-Dutch and traditional legal systems, and it is mostly urban women that would do so, usually in extreme cases when mediation by senior members of the extended family members has been unsuccessful in stopping such violence. Rural women on the contrary would often have no recourse if family intervention did not succeed, because traditional courts were unsympathetic to “unruly” or “disobedient” women and were less likely than modern courts to convict men of spousal abuse (Zwane, 2013, p.11). Unfortunately, the Roman-Dutch legal system would often give light sentences in cases of abuse against women. Hence, a sense of helplessness would often inhibit women from reporting cases of domestic violence, including being assaulted for their infertility.

The earlier cited studies by WLSA, Nhlapho and Zwane advance the thesis that socialisation is a contributory factor to violence, both in overt or covert ways. At an early age, women learn to accept their socially defined inferiority and subordination to men, and they internalise it as normal. Social norms and practices therefore which expose women to violence would not be

questioned; instead they would be explained as '*umhambo weMaswati*' (obligatory practices for the Swazi). Furthermore these studies speak at length about the payment of *emalobolo* (dowry) as one socio-cultural practice that largely contributes to domestic violence. WLSA's study in particular records responses from women which reveal that the payment of dowry for a woman can have negative connotations for how two people should treat each other within marriage. One participant who felt that *lobola* rendered women the property of their husband is cited to have said, '*mine wangitjela kutsi wangilobola nemathoyi ami*', meaning that when he gave *lobola* to her parents he paid for her excreta as well (WLSA, 2001, p.80).

As alluded to earlier, the perception of *lobola* as a legally accepted price for purchasing the wife's reproductive abilities affirm that a woman is bought and is therefore regarded as property. When she does not fulfill the obligations attached to her "purchase" the studies reveal that violence can ensue. Hence *lobola* reduces the woman into an object, which then predisposes her to being a target of the man's violent behavior (Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu 2007; Ngcobo 2007; Nhlapho 1999; Ginindza 1989). In my study I sought to explore to what extent women who are socialised to regard themselves as property feel that violence against them is legitimised, and how their self-worth as "real" persons is affected by this violence.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed the literature related to various themes derived from the focus of my study. The themes of gender and power as they relate to the law, the family, socio-cultural and religious constructions, leadership and violence were explored. Each theme summarised the focus and orientation of the various studies mostly undertaken in Swaziland. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the overall thesis explores these themes through a feminist ethic of self-identity in relation to an ethic of Ubuntu. How these theoretical concepts find expression

within various scholarly writings will be explored in the next chapter together with the research methodologies employed in this study. The theoretical and methodological insights that framed the study will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Theories

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical underpinnings of my study. Kerlinger (1979, p.64) defines a theory as a,

set of interrelated constructs or variables, definitions and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining natural phenomena.

Theories are basically framed in a manner that enables researchers to understand, interpret, predict and explain any phenomenon they are investigating (Creswell 2009; Padgett 2004; Creswell 2003; Cohen and Marion 1998). They play a central role in helping to scrutinize, decipher and name the everyday, even as the practice of everyday informs theory making (Nnaemeka, 2003, p.358). Furthermore, as noted by Swanson (2013, p.2), theories challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions. This thesis is framed by an African feminist ethic of self-identity in relation to an ethic of Ubuntu. Hence this chapter will begin with a general overview of feminist theories, then proceed to an exploration of African feminist ethical theories. Finally, personhood and identity within the context of an ethic of Ubuntu will be discussed in detail.

As was evident in the previous chapter, the thesis draws largely on issues of gender and power in order to critically explore the relationship between fertility and the construction of women's personhood and identity. As such the research was framed within a critical feminist research paradigm.

3.1. Feminist Theories

There are three major trajectories that can be detected within western feminism: radical, liberal and cultural feminism.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism holds that patriarchy is a universal phenomenon that has existed across time and cultures, and it oppresses all women, irrespective of race, class or ethnicity in varying degrees (Siegel 2007; Clifford 2001; Willis 1990; Daly 1978). This system, radical feminists believe, allows systematic domination of women by men, where men exploit women, and men are chief beneficiaries of this exploitation, whilst women are victims. With radical feminists, the family institution is identified as the primary source of women's oppression in society. (Mackinnon 1989) They posit that men exploit women in families through denying them (women) access to positions of power and influence, and also by relying on the free domestic labour that women provide in the home (Siegel 2007; Gilligan 1990). Most radical feminists in their interpretations of the basis of patriarchy agree that it involves the appropriation of women's bodies and sexuality; they argue that men control women's roles in reproduction and child-rearing (Giddens, 2005, p.115). Radical feminists claim that because women are biologically able to give birth to children, they become dependent materially on men for protection and livelihood (MacKinnon 1989). Siegel (2007, p.41) and Firestone (1971, p.95) describe this as a socially organised 'biological inequality' which leads to 'sex classes' in families. Some radical feminists have picked up male violence against women as central to male supremacy. They submit that domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment are all part of the systematic oppression of women, rather than isolated cases with their own psychological or criminal roots (Giddens 2005). Furthermore the radical feminists find popular conceptions of

beauty and sexuality as being imposed on women by men so that men can produce a certain type of femininity that will serve their interest (Giddens, 2005 p.114). Hence, some radical feminists according to Clifford (2001, p.24) are critical of traditional romantic love because man is the initiator, and the woman is expected to be submissive or at least passive. Giddens substantiates this observation through an example of social and cultural norms which emphasize a slim body and a caring and nurturing attitude that perpetuates women's subordination. The "objectification" of women, as he prefers to call it, through media, fashion and advertising also turns women into sexual objects whose main function is to please and entertain men (Giddens, 2005, p.115).

Walby (1990) in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy* advances that a variety of institutions and practices, including media, religion and education (formal and informal) produce representations of women "within a patriarchal gaze" (Walby, 1990, p.20) These representations influence women's identities and prescribe acceptable standards of behavior and action (Daly 1978). She further distinguishes two distinct forms of patriarchy: private patriarchy and public patriarchy. Private patriarchy is domination of women in the family, at the hands of an individual patriarch, whilst public patriarchy is the subordination of women in public realms such as politics and the labor market, where women remain segregated from wealth, power and status (Walby, 1990, p.21).

According to these theorists, in patriarchal societies men are expected to work outside the home while women are expected to care for children and clean the house. They find this traditional dichotomy to favour men because it enables them to maintain males as economically more powerful than females (Gilligan 2000; Mackinnon 1978); hence the traditional family structure should be rejected, according to radical feminists. Furthermore, radical feminists suggest

changes, such as finding technology that will allow babies to be grown outside of a woman's body, to promote more equality between men and women. This will allow women to avoid missing work for maternity leave, which radical feminists argue is one reason women are not promoted as quickly as men within the workplace.¹⁸

There are also theories that pertain to a feminist radical theological perspective, most eloquently articulated by Mary Daly (Hinga, 1990, p.37). In the same spirit with secular radical feminists that women are oppressed by societal systems, and hence they must be overthrown, she has come to the conclusion that the Bible is useless, and it cannot benefit women in their struggle against oppression. According to Daly “the Bible is not only inherently patriarchal, both in its doctrines and statements about women, but it has also been used as a tool to keep women down” (Hinga, 1990, p.38). She disputes the identification of the male with divinity, whilst she finds the so-called women’s role models in the Bible to be perpetrating the glorification of the male sector (Daly 1973:45). For example, Jesus Christ as the women’s role-model was a sacrificial lamb that could not protest against his crucifixion, and so should women silently suffer oppression. Mary the mother of Jesus also had humility virtues, and the attitude “be it done unto me according to thy will” (Hinga, 1990, p39). According to Daly, imitation of such submissiveness is detrimental to women who wish to break out of their submissive status (Hinga, 1990, p.39). She does not leave out the biblical narratives and the Genesis accounts of creation, which seem to proclaim that the suffering of women, through child-birth, domestication and subjection by men, is their just desert for the role they played in the fall of humanity (Daly, 1973, p.19). Daly therefore advocates a total rejection of the Bible

¹⁸<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/724633/feminism/216007/The-suffrage-movement> [accessed 08 September 2014].

as an irredeemably patriarchal text, and she finds attempts by feminist hermeneutics to re-read it “to be useless if not a destructive task” (Ruether, 1983, p.94).

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminists share some common beliefs with radical feminists in that they argue that oppression is a product of socialisation that keeps men in power positions; hence they are concerned with sexism and discrimination against women in all social units. They believe that women have the same capacity as men for moral reasoning and agency, but that patriarchy, particularly the sexist patterning of the division of labor, has historically denied women the opportunity to express and practice this reasoning¹⁹. Subsequently, women have been secluded from active participation in both the private and public spheres of life; thus, they whimper in low voices at the background (Gilligan 2009:10). Even after the daring women enter the public sphere, they are still expected to perform household responsibilities and nurture their children. Liberal feminists find marriage to exacerbate gender inequalities in families and as such women do not benefit from being married as men do (Siegel 2007). With regards to the skewed sexual division of labor in both the public and private spheres, they advocate that it needs to be overhauled in order for women and men to be equal. Hence, they create and support acts of legislation that remove barriers for women, where they demand equal job opportunities and equal pay between women and men.²⁰ Where liberal feminists differ from radical feminists is that they seek to work through the existing system to bring about reforms in a gradual way (Giddens, 2005, p.115) rather than through a radical overthrowing of the entire system.

¹⁹ <http://www.academicroom.com/topics/what-is-feminist-movement> [accessed 09 September 2014]

²⁰ <http://www.caragillis.com/LBCC/Different%20Types%20of%20Femini.htm> [accessed 10 September 2014].

Just as we have shown above a feminist radical theological perspective that is a branch of the radical secular theory, there is also a liberal or reformist feminist theological theory. Some of the leading reformist scholars are Rosemary Ruether, Phyllis Trible and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. On the less extreme side of radical western feminist theological discourse, they represent the view that “social institutions are not distorted beyond repairs...aspects of culture and religions are salvageable, theology can help women in their struggle for emancipation and justice”.(Hinga, 1992, p.185) Hence they propose the reconstruction of the Bible with the view of emphasizing the central the role of women in it. (Hinga, 1990, p.44).

Cultural Feminism

The cultural feminist approach to gender differs from the earlier highlighted theories in that it addresses women's social locations in society by focusing on gender differences between women and men. Cultural feminism is sometimes called “romantic feminism” or “reform feminism” (Clifford, 2001, p.22). It mostly concentrates on the liberation of women through individual change, the recognition and creation of a “women-centered” culture, and the redefinition of femininity and masculinity.²¹ Whilst cultural feminists find the essentialist understandings of male and female differences to be the major source of women’s oppression, they argue that values that are traditionally associated with women, like nurturing and compassion can greatly contribute to the survival and betterment of societies.(Clifford, 2001, p.22). According to cultural feminists, society constructs human traits and then labels them feminine and masculine. Both women and men would often underrate “feminine” traits like nurturing, empathy, and caring for others, whilst they overrate the “masculine” traits, such as autonomy, aggression, and being unemotional. (Ritzer and Goodman 2003). They further assert that most women, unlike most

²¹<http://education-portal.com/academy/lesson/feminism> [accessed 10 September 2014]

men, continue to spend significant portions of their lives as primary caretakers of dependents, work of great value but either unpaid (within the family) or underpaid (Gilligan 1982). They stress that women are inherently nurturing, kind, gentle, egalitarian, and non-violent (Young 1993), and so women should reclaim and redefine their femininity through identifying, valuing and celebrating their unique characteristics (Giddens 2005).

Appropriation of the Three Feminist Trajectories

What the above overview of the three feminist trajectories has shown is that although feminism has evolved over time, and its approaches differ according to context, its concern is mainly to eradicate gender inequalities, whilst advocating equal opportunities, respect of dignity and social rights for both women and men. Hence, this study on the relationship between fertility and the construction of women's identities and personhood draws partially from each of the trajectories. Radical feminism highlights the 'ugly' face of patriarchy that brainwashes women to think that their ability to bear children is what makes them 'real' women. All three trajectories shared a common belief, which is central to my study, that the patriarchal family as a socialising agent is the primary source of women's exploitation, whilst men are beneficiaries.

While I share many of the views expressed within the three trajectories, my study resonates most with liberal feminism. This is because within radical feminism it is believed that women cannot be liberated from sexual oppression through reforms or gradual change; rather gender equality can only be attained by completely overthrowing the patriarchal order with its power relations that characterise it. Cultural feminists too argue that women's power resides within their biological essentialisms, reproduction being one of them. Since my study is concerned with women's lack of access to power when they cannot reproduce, this theory is lacking.

African feminist theories provide more appropriate lenses through which to view my study phenomenon and it is to this discussion that we now turn.

3.2. African Feminist Theories

African feminist theories are a product of the third wave of feminism. Because of the different perspectives of feminism Clifford (2001, p.21) has asked; “why are there different types of feminism?” She is quick to answer herself that it is because women have different experiences of patriarchy and androcentrism, and therefore different ways of analyzing their causes and remedies. Unlike other forms of feminism that have been criticized for being geared towards white, middle class, educated perspectives (Ritzer and Goodman 2004), African feminist theories are ethically-specific or multiculturalist, and it allows women from various backgrounds, histories and cultures to challenge patriarchal teachings and practices (Nnaemeka 2011; Oduyoye 2001). Feminist theologians in Africa have not ignored the role of religion and culture in perpetuating patriarchy. African feminist theology is therefore a burgeoning intellectual movement that is challenging traditional male theologising. They question patterns of theology that justify male dominance and female subordination such as exclusive male language for God, the view that males are more like God than females, that only males can represent God as leaders in church and society, or that women are created by God to be subordinate to males and thus commit sin by rejecting this subordination (Nadar 2009; Phiri 2004; Hinga 2002; Oduyoye 2001; Maluleke 1997) This point is also captured by Ruether (2002, pp.3-4) when she claims;

Christian feminist theologians started to take feminist critique and the reconstruction of gender paradigms into the theological realm. They began to question male dominance and female subordination and the fact that exclusively male language is used to describe

God. They also began to question the views which held that males are more like God and that only males can represent God and the Church in society. Feminist theologians began to redefine symbols, such as God, humanity, male and female, creation, sin, redemption and church in a gender-inclusive way as social and cultural constructs.

African feminist theology therefore, being a branch of feminist theories, reconsiders and reinterprets African traditions, practices, perceptions and scriptures from a feminist perspective (Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musimbi Kanyoro, Isabel Apawo Phiri, Musa Dube, Madipoane Masenya, Sarojini Nadar). It sees African traditional culture and traditional Christianity as accomplices in perpetuating negative stereotyping, systematic and institutionalised oppression of women as well as training women to settle for less instead of wanting the best for themselves (CEDAW-Swaziland 2004). African feminist theology is an important theoretical lens for my study because, as shown in chapter one, Swaziland is predominantly Christian with a very strong affiliation to traditional culture.

Oduyoye (2001, p.31) names the two ‘partners in crime’ - African Traditional Anthropology and Christian Traditional Anthropology - as being predominantly responsible for women’s subordinate status. In the same vein, Rakoczy (2004) further exposes these anthropological paradigms as having partnered in relegating women to subservience. She proposes a relational anthropological model which is best in emphasizing women’s full humanity and dignity, as opposed to other lopsided models. Concerned about African women’s inferior status being pervasive in the Christian tradition, she advances that women throughout history have languished under the burden of mistaken identity named and defined by men. In her words she claims;

men have decided that women are less human than they are, sometimes almost a different species; women are lower in dignity, needing men to complete them as human; and women are dangerous, seducers of men, surely a mistake in God's creative plan (Rakoczy, 2004, p.28).

Rakoczy further lists renowned early church fathers like Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexander and Thomas Aquinas, to which Oduyoye (1995, p.5) adds the 'protesting monk' Martin Luther, as having been instrumental in perpetuating negative views about women in Christian tradition. Thomas Aquinas in particular viewed women to have been created by God solely for procreation; otherwise in every other activity a man is better helped by another man. He described a girl child as a defective human being, the result of an accident to the male sperm, which was thought to contain the complete human being and to reproduce its likeness, another male (Rakoczy, 2004, p.34). St Augustine of Hippo contended that the girl could only assume some status through her husband when she becomes a wife. Matei (2013), who agrees with Rakoczy, asserts that inequalities between women and men were reinforced by the early church fathers who perceived women as inferiors. She adds;

They devised an ideological system in which the ideas of the classics were adapted to Christian context by being legitimised by the biblical text. They did not stop at disseminating the misogynist ideas which eventually became norms of the "divine order" but they created a more efficient control system which imposed and enforced these norms in society (Matei, 2013, p.24).

In consideration of the influence of the inherited medieval ideologies of the early church fathers on Christianity, Rakoczy suggests what she names relational anthropology, which she claims

brings a new paradigm of “good news” in the Christian tradition that affirms women’s dignity and equality (Rakoczy, 2004, p.30). It is not individualistic as other anthropological models like the traditional dualistic model and the one single nature model, which amongst other things, emphasize women’s role as biological and spiritual motherhood, thus reducing women to only childbearing and nurturing.

Relational anthropology calls for a whole transformation of the patriarchal thinking that identifies males with God and women as the “other” (Oduyoye 2001; Kanyoro 2001; Ruether 1983; Schüssler Fiorenza 1997). Furthermore, it is premised on a holistic approach which stresses one’s relationship with herself/himself, with God and with others. Togetherness, according to Rakoczy, also extends beyond human relationships to include created nature. A truly relational anthropology therefore can be achieved through new understandings and praxis that are truly life-giving, which encompass radical counter-action in the family, church and society; “mothers and fathers must raise their daughters and sons to recognize that both have equal opportunities and responsibilities in the family circle...the pulpit must be used to emphasize the real human dignity of women in marriage and in every relationship”. (Rakoczy, 2004, p.55)

Traditional Christian anthropology as Oduyoye (1999) calls it, is perceived as reinforcing women’s basic experience of inferiority and ‘otherness’, thus relegating them to being viewed as property to men. Carter and Parker add that Christianity elaborates the ideology of female domesticity that lays stress on women’s reproductive and nurturing roles above their autonomy and productivity. Christian teachings underscore the traits of a good Christian mother as submission to the authority of the father and the husband, godliness, decorum, thrift and service to others (1996, p.14).

My study drew largely from the academic discourses on Feminist Theologies in Africa (Nadar 2009; Phiri 2004; Kanyoro 2001; Oduyoye 2001; Oduyoye 1995; Hinga 1990), which basically argue that cultural and religious practices which render women powerless and vulnerable are alive and vibrant to varying degrees in African societies, despite modern encounters; hence they must be reevaluated for the liberation of women to be realised. Premised on this feminist approach, my study sought to go beyond what previous research studies on women in Swaziland have already established, which include women's minority status in various subsystems in the society, demeaning socio-cultural and religious practices, and overt and covert sanctions. Whilst confirming the vibrancy of these practices in Swazi families, my study using feminist lenses, interpreted their impact in creating a woman's self-identity and personhood, such that the woman only becomes '*a real person*' if she bears children. As noted by Nadar (2009), African culture is not homogenous; women in each locality have their own story to tell about culture. This study therefore confined itself within a specific African context.

As it has been repeatedly asserted, the major concern of African feminist theology is patriarchy that has denied or minimised women's full dignity (Rakoczy 2004). The earlier discussions on the feminist approaches within which the study is located typically characterise patriarchy as a social construction resulting in inequalities that disadvantage women, but can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations (Phiri 2004; Oduyoye 1995; Hinga 1990). As noted by Giddens (2005) social phenomena in most societies are determined by patriarchal structures; hence the credence accorded to women's fertility in societies like Swazi society is an outcome of pro-natal aspirations in a patriarchal space which shapes women's thought patterns into perceiving themselves as "real" women once they bear children at their marital homes.

Bem argues that there are three lenses embedded in culture which provide the foundation to explain how biology, culture and the individual psyche interact systematically to reproduce a male power structure (Bem 1993). These lenses are succinctly presented by Ambasa-Shisanya (2009, pp.37, 38) as follows:

- i. The lens of male centeredness through which men are viewed as inherently superior, and their experiences as being the norm, whilst those of women are of less value.
- ii. The lens of polarisation which entails that as an organising principle for the social life of the peoples' cultures, women and men are fundamentally different from one another. Their difference is then superimposed on many aspects of life so that a cultural connection is forged between sex and virtually every other aspect of human experience like sex roles, ways of expressing emotion, and of experiencing sexual desire.
- iii. The lens of biological essentialism which rationalises and legitimises the other lenses by treating them as the natural and inevitable consequences of the intrinsic biological natures of women and men. The lenses also draw from the creation story in the Bible to explain the inferiority of women to men, and the superiority of men whom God created first as Adam, and in his own image.

The relevance of these African feminist lenses to the study lies in its assumption that the male power structure is embedded in social constructions. Women's fertility therefore is controlled by men, which the women themselves have been made to believe accords them status in their marital families. These social constructions can be best understood through social learning theories. During the process of their socialisation, women gradually internalise the societal

perceptions on their fertility, and they assume an identity that is consistent with these perceptions (Nyawo and Nsibande 2014).

3.3. Social Learning Theory

Social scientists seem to agree that human behavior is a result of the process of social learning throughout the life cycle (Kioli 2013; Giddens 2005; Bussey and Bandura 2004; Giddens 1984). Kioli (2013, p.189), drawing on the seminal works of Bandura (1977) and Mischel (1973) argues that behaviour, environment and a person's cognitive factors such as beliefs, plans and thinking, and observation of others' behavior are key factors in social learning. Through socialisation the person learns the societal norms and values which she/he internalises into her/his life (Giddens, 2005, p.108). The socialisation agencies, especially the family, safeguard the societal expectations and perceptions, so much so that they are passed from one generation to the next. However, the argument in this chapter also draws from the insights of Connell (1987), who asserts that socialisation theories should not ignore the ability of individuals to reject or modify the social expectations surrounding sex roles. Giddens (2005, p.108) captures Connell's observation well when he asserts that humans are not passive objects or unquestioning recipients of gender 'programming', as some sociologists have suggested. People are active agents who possess the ability to modify any conventional practices detrimental to their wellbeing. This theory is germane to a study that explores people's perceptions, especially those of the women on their own fertility that constructs their personhood or identities, as experienced in the primary socialisation domain, the family. The section below discusses theories that informed the construction of women's identity or personhood.

3.4. The Ethno-philosophical Paradigm

The philosopher Bernard Matolino in his book called *Personhood in African Philosophy* uses the terms identity and personhood interchangeably. For example, where he engages Mbiti's African communitarian view he claims, "the individual becomes aware of her identity as a self through her culture which is a product and provision of her community". (Matolino, 2014, p.53)

Following Matolino, I use the term identity and personhood interchangeably in this study to explain the impacts of socio-cultural and religious constructions on the women's "self". African ethno-philosophers use the term personhood, whilst sociologists prefer identity (Matolino 2014). Whilst the two mean the same thing they differ in emphasis. However both concepts were important in framing the study.

African ethno-philosophers, such as Matolino (2014), Mbiti (1970), Menkiti (1984), Gyegye (1987), Samkenge and Samkenge (1980), Murove (2012) and Ikuenobe (2006) understand and explain personhood and identity within an ethic of African communitarianism, known in Southern Africa as Ubuntu (Zulu), Unhu (Shona), buntfu (Siswati), botho (Sotho). It is best expressed in the ethno-philosophical paradigms discussed in the works of Tempels (1959), Mbiti (1970), Menkiti (1984), and Gyekye (1987). Matolino (2014) in his book *Personhood in African Philosophy* facilitates a dialogue between these ethnophilosophers on the communitarian view of personhood which he claims dominates African philosophy. Tempels, whose thesis has shaped a majority of communitarian thinkers, speaks of the Bantu notion of living being or living "muntu", which he refers to as force. According to him what makes one a "real" person is not the ownership of the force, but bringing the force to life (Tempels 1959). Tempels' observation is advanced by Matolino (2014, p.48), when he argues that the only way the being is brought to life is through ontological relations that one has with her community; hence the community

commands a sense of self in the individual, leading her to conceive her identity and existence as a communal person. In the words of Matolino this means that “the individual is under strict metaphysical command to be in ontological relations with her surroundings so that she can come to realise her personhood” (Matolino 2014, p.46). Hence, force or the living “*muntu*” as a detached entity cannot effectively adumbrate personhood unless the monitoring structure like culture regulates how it would cooperate with other forces and impact on one other (Matolino 2014).

Relating this insight to the context of the study, generally a Swazi woman would not feel or be considered a “*real*” person by the community unless she fulfills the societal expectation to bear children, since she owes her existence to other people. Borrowing from Mbiti (1970, p.102), the Swazi community makes, creates or produces the woman’s identity or personhood as she is constrained by communal reality to live according to stipulated cultural standards to make sense of her existence. Her fertility is therefore important because it secures her space in the community and gives her identity. Matolino (2014, p.54) confirms this observation by saying the individual becomes aware of her identity as a self through her culture and she feels obligated to procreate and to pass onto progeny the cultural values that she has inherited from her community. Put differently, the woman’s fertility becomes important to pay the debt she owes to the community and to fulfill all the pre-set obligations that society demands from her. Thus, having an identity that you are a “*real*” woman goes beyond that you have a body and a mind, but it comes after you have accepted and met certain standards of social and communal responsibility to achieve recognition (Ikuenobe, 2006, p.54). Women therefore, who cannot bear children automatically disqualify themselves from obtaining personhood because they have failed to display conduct befitting of personhood (Matolino, 2014, p.33).

As alluded to above, within a communitarian view, personhood is portrayed in terms of the primacy of the social reality in the individual's sense of the self (Tempels 1959). The individual therefore becomes a specific entity operating within the confines of the society; "even something as personal as marriage or bearing children is not seen as meant for individual benefit or enjoyment but to be shared with the rest of the clan" (Mbiti, 1970, p.136). Mbiti further claims that marriage and children belong to the kinsmen[sic] as opposed to being an individual event; hence his popular assertion that "whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1970, p.141). These observations accentuate the community as the ontological determinant of personhood (Menkiti, 1984, p.172); hence it has to be guided by a certain communitarian ethic that would regulate people's behaviors. As noted by Matolino (2014, p.53) this ethic is developed, dictated and monitored by society, such that any independent outlook that guides ones behavior remains unjustified and without recognition if it does not reconcile with communal aspirations, expectations and injunctions. However, the individual cannot learn the ethic and be appreciative of it other than through being taught by other members of the community (Mbiti 1970). Thus,

She needs and depends on other people to develop her faculties such as that of thought, free will and language. This, then, makes the individual indebted to those who have come before her and her contemporaries because these people have been the custodians of the cultural assets that she now uses to develop into a fully functional person (Matolino, 2014, p.53).

Bearing children for your marital family to ensure its continuity is therefore part of the communitarian ethical code, which also renders you a functional and ethically sound member of society.

Whilst Mbiti and Menkiti's radical communitarian positions places emphasis on the primacy of community for self-identity construction, Gyegye's moderate view brings a new dimension to the debate. The radical theorists, Mbiti in particular, do show the duality of equals between the community and the individual in constructing identities, but they seem to prioritise the reality of community over that of the individual (Matolino 2014). Gyegye (1987, p.38) acknowledges the significance of community realities in the formation and development of personhood since a human being is born into an already existing community, but he warns against an exaggerated role that is sometimes given to the community. Different from the other ethno-philosophers, his moderate communitarian view does recognise individual rights which grant the individual personal responsibility towards herself in determining her station (Matolino, 2014, p.67). According to him, one has personal dreams and aspirations peculiar to her, which together with other things that belong to the domain of the individual, can form one's personal identity. This moderate theory therefore accommodates possibilities purported by other theories like African Feminism that women in particular can develop personal identities that are not defined by communal realities. In other words one can be a "*real*" woman, with or without children who, culturally, are supposed to define her. She can follow an ethic that would direct her on ways to conduct her behavior in order to be considered as worthy of the term person (Matolino 2014).

3.5. The Sociological Paradigm

Sociologists have theorised about the impact of culture in creating one's identity. Giddens (2005) argues that culture is concerned with those aspects of human societies which are more learned

than inherent; hence norms and values that culture dictates form the common context in which individuals in a society live their lives. Sociologists often speak of primary and secondary socialisation when referring to the primary channel for the transmission of culture over time and generations by social agencies like family, school, church and media (Giddens, 2005, p.28). Primary socialisation occurs at infancy and childhood where the child learns language and basic behavioral patterns, whilst secondary socialisation takes place later in childhood and into maturity (Connell, 1987, p.52). Furthermore, sociologists often speak of identity as having three closely related forms; namely role identity, social or group identity and personal identity. Social identity theory, like the theories of the African ethno-philosophers discussed above sees group membership as the driving force for identity formation; identity theory explains assigned roles as major factors that construct identities; and personal identity theory asserts that personal values are important to explain identity and identity formation values.

Identity Theories

Identity is a multi-faceted concept that can be studied and analyzed from different perspectives (Fearon 1999). However, a broad definition of identity presents it as the understanding that people hold about who they are and what is meaningful to them (Giddens 2005:29). Owing their theorising to the readings of Erik Erikson (1950), the earliest exponent of identity, later sociologists and social psychologists (; Thoits 1986; Linville 1987; Nagel 1995; Stets and Burke 2000; Stryker and Burke; 2000) have unpacked the concept of identity and formulated some identity theories. A recent study undertaken by Cinoglu and Arikan (2012) used the arguments of the listed theorists as its springboard to explain identity construction. Exploring social identity to explain identity formation, Stets and Burke (2000, p.225) argue that individuals place themselves in social categories which are parts of a structured society and they exist only in relation to other

contrasting categories; for example women versus men, black versus white. Each category has more or less power, prestige and status. The authors further observe that the social categories herald individuals in that they are born in an already prescribed society. Individuals then draw their identities mostly from the socio-cultural and religious constructions. Other social identity theorists (Tajfel 1981, Tajfel and Jonathan 1979) have argued that an individual is linked to the social world through a conception of the self-composed various social identities. As elaborated by Giddens (2005) these characteristics can be seen as markers that indicate who, in a basic sense, that person is, whilst at the same time placing that person in relation to others who share the same attributes. Examples of social identities are mother, married, girl, teacher, Christian and student. It is further observed by sociologists that an individual has multiple social identities which work simultaneously to show the many dimensions of his or her life. However, there would be a primary identity in one's life which would inform and shape the secondary identities that one has developed (Stets and Burke 2003). That is why sociologists would often speak of the power of master status which cuts across all other statuses that an individual might have (Cinoglu and Arikan 2012:1115).

Identity theory concerns itself with the formation of the '*me*', whilst exploring ways in which interpersonal interactions mold an individual sense of self (Hitlin, 2003, p.119). As articulated by Stryker and Burke (2000) identity theory holds that individuals are a compilation of discrete identities, often tied to their social roles which become salient as situations call for them. Expressing similar sentiments, Stets and Burke (2000) have pointed out that in identity theory, the core of an identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation into self of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its

performance. These expectations and meanings form a set of standards that guide one's behavior in a given context (Burke 1991 in Stets and Burke 2000:225).

Social identity theory and identity theory according to Hitlin (2003) describe the fundamental interplay between the individual and social world, in as far as the construction of one's identity is concerned. The relationship between the two theories is further illustrated by Hogg et al. (1995) and Turner et al. (1987) in Stets and Burke (2000), where they speak of the de-personalisation as the central cognitive process in social identity and self-verification in identity theory. De-personalisation is seeing the *self* as an embodiment of the in-group prototype, rather than a unique individual, whilst self-verification is seeing self in terms of the role containing the meanings and norms that the person associates with the role. So, as noted by Stets and Burke (2000, p.232);

...the processes of depersonalization and self-verification show us that membership in any social group or role includes one's identification with a category, and the behaviors that we associate with the category...and both processes refer to and reaffirm social structural arrangements.

Stets and Burke (2000) believe that identity formation is a process that begins with self-categorisation, where one realises and internalises the roles that society expects her or him to fulfill. Put differently, the self learns to become the individual that her or his society wants her or him to be. In their words they assert: "the 'self' is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorise, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications" (Stets and Burke, 2000, p.241). Sharing similar sentiments, Thoits (1986) concludes that the core of an identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role, and

the incorporation into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance. These expectations and meanings then shape and channel one's behavior. It is worth noting that generally, sociologists and social psychologists understand self to start with the presupposition that there is a reciprocal relationship between self and society. Drawing on Stryker (1980) and Stets and Burke (2003), Cinoglu and Arikan (2012, p.1123) assert that the existence of this reciprocal interaction between self and society could be a proclamation of the acceptance of not only the power of self over society, but also the power of society over the self in its identity formation. This leads us to the third perspective that explains identity formation process, which is personal identity theory.

Personal identity theory defines the process of self-development through which an individual formulates a unique sense of himself or herself and their relationship to the world around them (Giddens, 2005, p.29). Hitlin (2003) argues that this sense of '*self*' is built up over time as the person embarks on and pursues projects or goals that are not closely identified with the community, but are a personal property. In the words of Hewitt (1997, p.93), "personal identity emphasises a sense of individual autonomy rather than communal involvement...but, it is subject to social patterning through values". Personal identity theorists emphasise that whilst the cultural and social environment is a factor shaping self-identity, individual agency and choice are of central importance (Stets and Burke 2003; Hiltin 2003; Hewitt 1999). As articulated by Giddens (2005, p.698), it is the individual's constant negotiation with the outside world that helps to create and shape his or her sense of self. More so, self-identities are not fixed or static; they are an outcome of an ongoing process, and therefore open to change and challenge (Connell 1987), as societies shift from traditional to modern. In line with Connell's insight, Kiecolt (1994), when examining the process of identity change, outlines stressors that can cause one's

identity to change. She claims that a stressor has power to force or encourage individuals to make a new cost-benefit analysis, where they evaluate their identities, calculate the merits and demerits of having them, and then decide to either maintain or discard them (Kiecolt, 1994, p.51).

3.6. Conclusion

The above theories provide the conceptual framework for the discussion of Swazi women's identity and its construction. They not only explain the identity formation process but also offer insights concerning the processes that shape societal perceptions about women's fertility. Premised by these identity theories I argue in this study that Swazi women have their role identities and social identities constructed by society around their fertility. It is their fertility that qualifies them to be 'real' women and mothers. Their social roles and familial identifications therefore help them to acquire a sense of *self* that is socially patterned by patriarchy. However as identity theories, through personal identity theory, do acknowledge that an individual can categorize *self* as a unique entity, distinct from other individuals, such that she can act in terms of her own goals and desires rather than as a member of a group or category (Hoggs andMullin 1999), it is possible that Swazi women can attain self-worth. The extent to which this is possible will be explored in the analysis contained in later chapters. Having now sketched the theoretical and conceptual framing of the study, the next chapter will provide a detailed overview of the research design of the study and the research methodology that was employed.

Chapter 4: Feminist Research Methodologies

...[F]eminist discourse raises crucial questions about knowledge not only as being but as becoming, not only as a construct but as a construction, not only as a product but as a process. In other words, knowledge as a process is a crucial part of knowledge as a product...By focusing on methodology (and sometimes intent), feminist scholarship brings up for scrutiny the human agency implicated in knowledge formation and information management. We cannot assume critical thinking without asking crucial questions about what is being thought critically and who is thinking it critically (Nnaemeka, 2003, p.363).

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research design of the study. The study was located within a qualitative critical feminist paradigm. As such the methods of data production, the sampling, methods of data analysis, and the ethical considerations, including reflexivity, all align with feminist methods of knowledge production as described by Nnaemeka above. The key characteristics of feminist methods of research are the following: They embrace a “suspicion of master narratives of knowledge”; encourage creative use of tools for knowledge gathering and dissemination; promote subjectivity and reflexivity within the research process; and most importantly the methods serve to empower participants during the process (Nadar, 2014, p.18). Put simply, feminist methods affirm that the process of research is as important as the product (Nnaemeka 2003; Phiri and Nadar 2010). In the same vein Letherby (2003, p.5) has this to say about feminist researchers:

...for them feminism is “theory” and “practice”; they start with political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women’s lives through social change. They are concerned to challenge the silence in mainstream researchwhilst

highlighting the fact that the researcher's choices of methods, of research topic and of study group population are always political acts.

In feminist research therefore, stresses Mama (2011, p.13);

it is clear that despite the pressure to remain within positivist conventions, feminist researchers in the region have sought to give voice to women through methods that allow and encourage the articulation of previously unavailable narratives – story telling, oral histories, biographies and life stories reflect growing awareness of the limits of the androcentric archive and the colonial and postcolonial information systems that have silenced women and suppressed their perspectives.

4.1 Study Research Design

In planning my research design, I intentionally incorporated feminist values throughout the data production and analysis. As a Swazi woman who has intimate knowledge of the cultural contexts which mould and shape women's ways of being, I had to be sensitive in the way I designed my research process. Creswell (2009, p.5) explains a research design as a plan of study that provides the overall framework for producing data which fulfils the central aim of the study. The central aim of the study was to explore the relationship between fertility and socio-cultural and religious constructions of Swazi women's personhood. A qualitative exploratory and critical research approach was chosen to fulfil the above aim, because of its potential to capture women's in-depth lived experiences in relation to societal norms, values and beliefs that define women's fertility. Furthermore, this method allows critical analysis of the generated data and the related literature to the study, using feminist and identity theories. Babbie and Mouton (2001, p.63) explain that an exploratory study entails finding out people's opinions, behaviours, attitudes and

feelings, in order to obtain a better and insightful understanding of the phenomenon being investigated.

In addition to being exploratory the study was also critical. The intention of a critical study is to expose enduring structures of power and domination, in order to not only deconstruct the discourses and narratives that support them but also to advocate for social justice (Meena 1992, 1992, p.26). This is in line with feminist methods of research as described above. This paradigm emphasizes that social reality is viewed and interpreted by the individual according to the individual's ideological stance (Letherby, 2003, p.4). The African feminist approach, which provided the primary lens in interpreting data for this study is located within this paradigm.

4.2 Data production procedures

To achieve the study objectives, qualitative data generated in a period of 17 months, from February 2013 to July 2014, were derived from primary sources through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews (IDIs) and narrative interviews. Narrative research is promoted within feminist scholarship because it “differs significantly from its positivistic counterpart in its underlying assumptions that there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p.2). Hence data was sourced not only using a variety of methods, but also from a variety of participants who formed the research sample. Data was produced with male and female participants in rural, urban and peri-urban areas in the Manzini region in Swaziland. The interview and discussion guides were deemed appropriate instruments for a study of this nature because they allowed for in-depth orally conducted interviews and discussions, which were open to further probing and to any emergent findings, without any predetermined constraints on outcomes. Also, they allowed participants to respond to questions about ‘how’ and, in particular ‘why’ they thought, felt and

behaved the way they did (Ambasa-Shisanya, 2009). The semi-structured questions as argued by Cohen and Marion (1998) allowed for open-ended questions to be posed to supply a frame of reference for participants' answers, while they simultaneously provided a facilitative degree of structure on the answers and expressions from the participants, as opposed to fixed and closed questions or predetermined responses presented through an attitudinal scale, aligning itself with feminist approaches. Hence, they were appropriate for the research inquiry which sought participants' opinions and expressions on women's fertility and constructions of their personhood. FGDs, in-depth interviews and narratives were recorded and transcribed into themes with direct quotations from participants to be presented in the findings.

The study research interview guide that was used (see Appendix B) translated the research objectives into questions. It comprised 37 questions which solicited data from different samples for each of the four chapters that present findings. The first 5 questions required demographical details of the participants. The demographical details are presented in each chapter in sampling tables. Questions 6-37 were standard open-ended questions carefully crafted in accessible and sensitive language with an intention of enabling the study population to identify with the issues probed and would not feel alienated. These 32 open ended questions were designed to also allow the participants the latitude to express themselves elaborately. The 32 questions were distributed as follows:

Chapter	Number of questions
4	9
5	9
6	7
7	7
Total	32

4.3 Location of the Interviews and Focus Group Discussion

A key characteristic of feminist research is to create a safe and welcoming space for women to share their experiences and narratives (Nadar 2014, 2009; Ackermann 2003; Oduyoye 2001; Haddad 2000). As stated above, primary data were produced through face to face semi-structured interviews that took two to three hours each. These were conducted in places where the participants of the study felt relaxed. Some preferred their homes, whilst others chose to be at their community halls or churches. Choosing their own spaces where they would be comfortable and more inclined to speak was important because the place where an interview is carried out has an impact on the responses that one gets from participants (Patton and Cochran 2002). Establishing good rapport with study participants in their own spaces also yielded good results, such that prior to the interviews open communication was initiated on gender issues that were not directly related to the study. My positioning as a feminist researcher was made clear to the participants from the outset. During such conversations I established participants' points of interest from their responses. Also, as much as possible, all forms of distractions and interruptions were eliminated during interviews. Such attentive listening skills allowed me to

further probe the participants' responses through prompts and interjections to allow for personal reflections. Such interceptions were interspersed with deliberate moments of silence especially employed as a means to allow participants private space to deal with sensitive issues laden with personal meaning.

The interviews and FGDs were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The open-ended interviews with the participants varied in length, from two to three hours. I also recorded field notes in conjunction with the interviews, which were later complemented with follow up "cultural probes" (Gaver, 2002, p.13) with the participants, conducted telephonically to solicit clarity on certain issues that had been recorded then transcribed following the interviews. "Cultural probes" were adapted for purposes of this study due to the need to collect complementary data. According to Gaver (2002) cultural probes offer fragmentary glimpses into the rich texture of people's lives. They can allow the researcher to extract authentic narratives. The fact that I shared a cultural orientation with the participants and my own feminist positioning provided a vantage point for the co-production of data.

4.4 Sampling Approaches

For this study I opted for a sample of 71 participants, out of which a higher percentage were females. I divided these participants into 4 different samples as it shall be explained below. A maximum sample strategy was employed to ensure credibility of the sampling procedure by ensuring that it covered subsets that would best represent societal perceptions on women's fertility. As explained by Patton and Cochran (2002) this strategy allows the researcher to select key demographic variables that would be more likely to represent more authentic participants' view on the topic. Participants in this study therefore reflected a variety in terms of combinations

of variables and this helped to minimize bias. These variables were gender, age, number of children or none, location, education and marital status.

Like in most qualitative studies, one of the sampling strategies employed to determine the sample was purposive sampling, which was selected on the basis that it enabled me to rely on personal judgment to select the sample population believed to be most amenable to provide quality data (Fraenkel & Warren 2000). The sample size stated earlier was determined on the basis of theoretical saturation, which is to reach a point during data production when new data would no longer bring additional insights to the research questions (Bernard, 1995, p.43). The sample of participants was drawn from 3 locations in Manzini; to represent rural, semi-urban and urban population attributes. This enabled me to get as much representative a sample as possible of the residential areas from a cross-section of the population in terms of ideological and doctrinal differentials (WLSA 2001). A total of 6 focus groups were convened with a range of between 6 and 9 participants. Four of the six focus groups were drawn from churches in Manzini through purposive sampling. These churches were also located in the rural, urban and peri-urban areas. The fourth focus group comprised student teachers from UNISWA, whilst the last one consisted of self-employed women who live by selling their produce at one of the markets in Manzini.

Six women were selected to form a sample unit which represented a particular subset of the female population in Swaziland, which in the words of Oduyoye "...for whatever reason do not join in the increasing and multiplying of the human race" (1999, p.106). This subset is what the Swazi society has labelled '*tinyumba*' to mean barren. The sample was profiled in a manner that concealed their identities to ensure confidentiality.

In the first instance, selection of the six participants followed specific purposes which the study intended to achieve by identifying a potential participant through local print media. She was reported as “the celebrated blabbermouth who frequently calls the radio station offering free opinion in just every subject” (*The Weekend Observer*, 6 October, 2011). When further interrogated by the journalist she expressed that being a habitual caller to the radio station was a survival strategy to ease stress caused by her inability to beget children for her marital family. I then arranged for an interview session with her, after which a chain referral began. The referrals allow for snowball sampling which is used to identify participants who could not have been easily identifiable (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004, p.32). For this study these participants comprised women who were in childless marriages for many years. I telephoned these women to obtain consent for participation in interview sessions for 2 to 3 hours at their respective homes. Through their social networks, I was subsequently able to locate 5 other participants who were in a similar situation, and they were six in total. Therefore for purposes of this study snowballing allowed me to locate relevant participants to the conceptual questions to be posed during the course of the study (Nabacwa 2009; Salganik & Heckathorn 2004; Harding 1987; Smith 1987). This is in line with my feminist method of research which values women’s networks and communities.

Another sampling method that was used was convenience sampling, where participants in the first FGD were selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity. Their selection was based on the relative ease of access to my workplace in Manzini. The group comprised six teachers each of whom held a Diploma in Education, and were now pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Education with the University of Swaziland. The sample was readily available to me because of the University of Swaziland being my work station. With the second FGD I

handpicked a sample from a township population using insider knowledge and professional judgment. Their selection was based on certain traits which included age, gender, education, religious affiliation, marital status and the sex of their children.

Notably, the three sampling techniques (snowballing, convenience and purposive sampling) that the study employed in formulating its sample size were based on non-probability techniques that did not allow any randomisation in selecting a sample, which could limit generalisations of the results (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). However, to circumvent a potential sampling error I selected the best and most experienced participants to represent the perceptions of Swazi society's socio-cultural religious constructions on women's personhood based on their fertility.

The saturation point of the sought data for the second sample was reached with a total of three FGDs comprised of eight participants in the first group, nine in the second, and five in the third, giving a total of twenty-two female participants, all of whom resided in Manzini. Some of the women were emotional as they shared their experiences in trying to meet societal expectations that every woman should bear children. Hence the findings captured some detailed narratives which some of the participants consented to have reproduced in detail in the study. I then selected one woman from each of the FGDs for further probing after realizing that a follow-up in-depth interview with them would yield rich data for the study.

Another different sample comprised purposively selected 12 females; 8 were interviewed as individuals, whilst the remaining 4 formed a focus group. I also conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with the last sample of 20 women selected on the basis of their varied experiences as members of the Swazi society. Details of these study populations are reflected in each chapter on data presentation.

4.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Framed within an exploratory and critical research design, women's opinions, attitudes and feelings were sought in order to critically analyse, using feminist lenses, how socio-cultural and religious constructions reinforce each other in their perspectives of Swazi women's fertility that shape women's identities. Transcripts and field notes drawn from interview responses were further interrogated and analysed systematically, based on an inductive methodology which finds patterns in data in the form of thematic codes. As explained by Patton, inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis (1980, p.47). Interviews were mostly conducted in the vernacular, after which the data were translated and transcribed into English by myself. Participants had access to transcripts to verify if they were correctly represented. I read through the validated data transcripts several times and then identified a range of subthemes under which the responses were classified. From these subthemes I extrapolated emergent issues which were then discussed along with interpretation of the findings.

4.6 Reflexivity

As in all feminist qualitative studies, subjective understanding is expected to be reached through the exchange of ideas, interaction, and agreement between the researcher and participant (Letherby, 2003, p.5). Whilst in traditional research, the researcher is expected to embrace an objective stance and set aside any preconceived knowledge (Smith 1987), within feminist research the researcher is considered a co-participant in the production of knowledge and subjectivity is embraced rather than repudiated. Accordingly, this can only be accomplished within a framework and approach that encourages immersion of the researcher into the research

setting of the participants. A hands-off approach where the researcher attempts to distance him or herself from the research setting will never be able to achieve this goal (Creswell 2003). This approach in which the study is located is the critical analysis paradigm, as it has been stated above. It requires the researcher to define her personal framework for observation and understanding, which shapes what she sees and how she understands it (Babbie and Mouton 2001, p.63). It is for this reason that I have included a section on personal reflexivity in this chapter, considering that reflexivity is an important component of the feminist research enterprise (Rider 2005).

According to Russel and Bohan (1999, p.405) reflexivity involves knowing how our personal lives influence our work and recognising that we are indeed intertwined with our research and participants. My inclusion of reflexivity in this study shows that I acknowledge that this study is also influenced by my values and belief systems. Rather than pretend that these values do not exist, feminist scientists propose that researchers clearly state their values so that readers can determine what biases these values may have introduced to the research (Rider 2005). Feminists do not claim that their research is value free, as people that are often driven by the agenda of improving women's lives (Cosgrove and Mchaugh, 2000, p.815). In what follows is a reflection on a personal transformation that inspired me to undertake this research enterprise.

It was in 2000 that I decided to pursue post graduate studies with the University of Natal (hereafter referred to as the University of KwaZulu-Natal). Having been promoted to be lecturer at William Pitcher Teacher Training College, with 12 years' experience as a high school teacher, the Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training easily granted me study leave, and I enrolled at the university as a full time student. I was convinced that this was the appropriate time for me to upgrade myself academically because I had proven myself to be a '*real*' woman to both my

natal and marital families. I was now a mother of 2 boys ('heirs') that would continue the family line and 1 girl that would bring wealth to the family. I had also nursed my ailing mother-in-law until she passed on at the age of 92. These attainments were more of a milestone to my natal family than myself. My in-laws heaped accolades on them for having raised a 'wifely material' woman. Notably, even though the credit was given to my family, especially my mother on behalf of my late father, I also felt fulfilled that I had placed my parents on a pedestal for the world to see that they were capable of raising high 'quality' children. To affirm the achievement of this status in my marital family, one elderly woman who approached me after the funeral of my mother-in-law had this to say;

...ungumfati mbamba Sonene; kujabula unyoke lowakutala. Utakhele umuti lokute lowuyakwemuka wona' (you are a 'real' woman Sonene; happy is the woman who gave birth to you. You have built yourself a home that no one will snatch away from you).

Overwhelmed by the support I received from my husband and members of my immediate family that I should further my studies, I engaged in extensive preparations for my temporary relocation in South Africa. I had a deep quest to pursue courses related to African feminist issues at an advanced academic level. Being brought up in a male dominated society, I had interacted with women who had confided their inner secrets as victims of patriarchal attitudes in their families. In the words of Njoroge (1996, p.6), some were in betrayed relationships and broken marriages; others had bruised ribs and blackened eyes, and bloodied faces. There were even those that often attempted murder and suicides due to stress. I therefore yearned to search for a deeper understanding of patriarchy and its nuances in the Swazi space.

Just a month before my departure I was hurt to the core by irresponsible comments made by a member of my church. It was on an early Sunday morning when my husband received a call from one man in our church who held a senior position then. He had heard rumors that I would be leaving shortly for studies in South Africa, following 4 other married women who had gone earlier to study abroad. With a fuming voice, he told my husband that as pastor of the church it was high time that he stopped the ‘craze’ that women in the church ‘abandoned’ their families to pursue studies outside the country. He argued that women should not be allowed to further their studies because “*batofike bagane lamanye emadvodza lesikolweni, futsi batawudvwala bangahloniphi emadvodza abo*” (they will have extra marital affairs wherever they would be studying, and they will be proud and not respect their husbands). He further cited cases of women whose marriages had broken down because they left for studies abroad. My husband calmly responded by saying it was not fair to judge people by the failures of others; every woman was unique, and if opportunities for studying availed themselves, women should grab them without any hesitation. I was disturbed that there could be Christian men in the church who harbor deep-seated masculine mistrust of Christian women as “daughters of Eve” and therefore the temptress of men (Clifford, 2001, p.30). How could a senior member of the church despise us so much that he would view our interests in studies with suspicion? I indignantly asked myself. This was the incident that confirmed my aspirations to acquire a deeper understanding of androcentric views prevalent in Swazi social units and how to unmask them.

My first encounter with an African women theologies course brought some transformation in my personal life. The course lecturer explained African women’s theologies in the first lecture as a narrative theology that uses story as a legitimate method and a source of theology; through it African women are able to tell their own stories of pain and patriarchal oppression as a means to

analyze and overcome such oppression (Nadar 2009). As a practical exercise the lecturer assigned us to write personal stories where we felt we were victims of demeaning cultural practices in our families. It was for the first time that I could express on paper the repressed feelings of anger and pain stemming from my painful experience of being raised up in a polygamous family where my mother was ill-treated by some family members after the death of my father. My recollections of my siblings and myself as objects of humiliation and ridicule at our own home opened up old wounds, and I became emotional. Little did I know that taking a journey to myself and squarely facing my past through story telling on a piece of paper would be so therapeutic. This reminds me of Haddad's (2000, p.5) insight on the importance of African women's life stories - that they are a source of theology. Hence they tell their personal stories and study the experiences of other women, especially those whose stories remain unwritten. Landman uses a befitting description of women's stories when she calls them "sacred" (1999, p.3), whilst Nadar refers to them as "data with souls" (Nadar 2014, p.18).

The course made me better acquainted with the principles of feminist studies. I was exposed to prolific African feminist writings of African Women Theologians like Mercy Oduyoye, Teresa Hinga, Isabel Phiri, Sarojini Nadar, Musimbi Kanyoro, Nyambura Njoroge, Musa Dube, Dorcas Akintunde, Grace Wamue, Mary Getui, to name but a few. Their theological acumen made sense to me because I could locate myself within the diversity of other women's experiences. It was the first time that I heard of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, established at the initiative of African women theologians, with Mercy Oduyoye as the visionary. I was made to understand that the Circle brought a turning point in the history of African theology. Through it African women theologians were able to carve a space for themselves, which both welcomes, and takes seriously their experiences from within varied African contexts (Nadar 2009:2). I

consequently developed a passion for this type of theology, which offered an alternative to the largely male-dominated African Theology. I learnt of how Oduyoye (1989) had critiqued African theology for being predominantly a male affair that excluded women's voices, making it a lopsided theology that flew with "one wing". I was also exposed to how African women theologians critically analyzed African culture and religion as accomplices in shaping women's experiences either positively or negatively. With these intellectual discoveries I began to view things differently because knowledge is power.

I was now able to engage critically with my own Swazi space, which emphasises gender differences and relations, and subsequently places women and men in hierarchical positions. I discovered that these ideals are consciously upheld as the guiding ideology of the nation, and are passed from generation to generation. I now realised that women's relegation to a subservient position was strongly embedded in the male-centered heritage of the Swazi cultural institutions. The predominant Judaic-Christian tradition in the Swazi society also served to legitimise hegemonic masculinities. My critical analysis of my own locality consequently sparked an interest to do advanced studies and research on the religio-cultural complexities and their implications on the women in Swaziland. I also wanted to add a voice to the many prolific writings of African women scholars who draw serious attention to the subordination and other oppressive realities and manifestations of the trammels of culture and religion on women in Africa.

An article that gave me direction on which research area to pursue was 'A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space' by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Amba Ewudziwa). This is where Oduyoye broke silence on a taboo subject, after years of agony in an infertile marriage. Even though she wrote this article after 20 years in marriage, she claimed that

bruises and the sounds of the stone throwing, intentional or unintentional, were still fresh in her mind (Oduyoye, 1999, p.112). She posited that the “child factor” (Oduyoye 1999, p.107) that predominates in African spaces pressurises society to place high value on biological reproduction, such that a woman’s worth is judged by biological procreation; hence women’s identities are determined by their healthy biological functioning.

Oduyoye’s life story provoked me to reflect on my own experience after I got married in 1990. It was like friends, fellow Christians and relatives expected me to have a ‘protruding’ stomach within a week after the wedding ceremony. One elderly woman in my church approached me two months after the wedding and said “*solo unefigure kani, utawuba ngumuntfu nini?*” (you are still maintaining your figure, when will you be a ‘real’ person?). It dawned on me that no matter how hard I would try to be a perfect woman, all my efforts would be futile until, as Oduyoye (1999) has aptly put it, I fulfilled the expectation of church and society that I shall increase and multiply through biological reproduction. This expectation unfortunately caused a lot of anxiety and stress. So, when I gave birth to my first born (luckily an ‘heir’) 18 months after marriage, I reiterated the words of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist after becoming pregnant that “the Lord has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among people” (Luke 1:25). Presumably, many Swazi women-in-waiting experience this kind of relief when they become “*real*” women.

I was privileged to meet Mercy Oduyoye in Ghana in 2001, after I had been awarded a bursary by the University of Natal for an Exchange Program in African Christianity. She shared some thoughts on the creation of the Talitha Qumi Center at Trinity College, as well as her vision about African women’s theology assuming a recognisable position in scholarship. From our casual conversation, which I could relate well to with my experience as a woman from the

southern part of Africa, I found Teresa Hinga's (2002, p.85) observation to be true that as African women we live in an increasingly intimate global village; effects of patriarchy experienced in one corner of the world are also felt at the other corner of the globe. I was therefore challenged to also make a contribution to women's theology through further exploration on women's fertility, which was one of the pertinent issues that captured my attention in Oduyoye's scholarly works.

My personal penchant for women's fertility was confirmed when I returned home from Ghana. As Oduyoye has rightly asserted: "in Africa, lives and relationships are ruined daily because of the 'child factor', especially by childlessness within marriage" (Oduyoye, 1999, p.108). A church woman who had lived with her husband for 25 years in a childless union, had this to say when we met for the first time after my return; "*umyeni wami ungishiyile ngoba ngisehluleki; uyofuna labatamenta indvodza*"(my husband has deserted me because I am a failure; he is gone to search for those that would make him a man). Her husband had gotten a child out of wedlock, and he had left his home to cohabit with the mother of his child. What irked me was when some church members seemed to condone the man's illicit affair, and they justified that he had to beget a child that would ensure his immortality and the survival of his clan. Sadly, the wife was even coerced to accept her husband's child or face consequences. When the husband eventually abandoned her she was told to blame no one but herself. There were many similar cases that I got to know about now that I had developed interest in the subject of women's worth through procreation; hence the desire to conduct research on the construction of Swazi women's identities as determined by their fertility.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

Drawing from the 4 ethical principles discussed by Beauchamp and Childress (1983) and others, namely respect for the rights of participants; practicing justice; doing good and not causing harm, I adhered to ethical obligations towards the participants of the study. I arranged for a preliminary session with participants, where the intentions of the study were explained and to indicate what participation in the study entailed, and that each participant had a right to decline or withdraw their participation at any time. In some cases, especially with those who could read and write, I provided a brief write-up on the background, aims and objectives of the study for their perusal. Once they had consented to participate in the study, they were requested to endorse their signatures on the approved consent form by the ethical clearance office at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix for ethical clearance granted). In cases where the study has reported life narratives that are sensitive, participants were asked for their permission to capture some excerpts from their stories in the study, and they consented. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. As a result all data on confidential information and conversations on audio are stored in a secure place. I also took special caution on how to phrase sensitive questions which were likely to stir up some anxieties from the participants. A good rapport was also established with all participants, based on mutual respect as human beings. Furthermore, I practised fairness in reporting the findings by ensuring accurate representation of the sentiments of the participants, within the context in which they were discussed. After transcribing the data I engaged the individual participants of the study and one member of each focus group to cross check the accuracy of transcriptions.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the feminist principles which governed the research process as well as the details of the production of the data. I demonstrated my commitment to feminist research practice, through the methods employed in data production and analysis as well as through a focus on reflexivity. The following chapters present the findings and the analysis of the data which was produced in the study.

Chapter 5: Constructions of Social Roles of Swazi Women and Men in Relation to Fertility

5.1 Introduction

For me childlessness in the West African space has been a challenge to my womanhood, my humanity and my faith (Oduyoye, 1999, p.119).

Many African women in childless marriages can identify with Mercy Oduyoye's reflection on her marital experiences as a woman without biological progeny. This study shows how her experiences are also reflected in Swazi society. The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of Swazi society's socio-cultural and religious constructions of women's personhood in relation to their fertility. The data for this chapter was sourced from both women and men. Before we engage in a discussion regarding Swazi society it is helpful to situate the context of the discussion within the wider African setting.

In her revealing article entitled "A Coming Home to Myself", Oduyoye, as cited above, laments over the painful experiences she had to endure because of her inability to conceive her own children. She even shares coping mechanisms that she developed against the "child factor²² syndrome" in a West African space. John Mbiti, whose perceptions on childlessness Oduyoye critiques,²³ confirms the African beliefs regarding the "child factor"- that without procreation marriage in African communities becomes a total tragedy. He asserts, "a person who therefore has no descendants quenches the fire of life and becomes forever dead...to die without children is to be completely cut off from human society....to become an outcast" (Mbiti, 1990, p.131). Fertility is therefore crucial in any African community for the survival of the clan names and for

²²A term that Oduyoye uses to explain the obsession that Africans have about begetting children.

²³ In Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 1999 'A Critique of Mbiti's view on Love and Marriage in Africa,' in *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona and Sulayman S. Nyang. Berlin:Mouton de Gruyter, 341-65.

the incarnation of family ancestors; hence the “child factor” syndrome in African families (Oduyoye 1999). This study is being undertaken in Swaziland with the aim to explore women’s identities as products of social constructions on fertility.

This chapter presents an analysis of how society constructs the personhood of Swazi in relation to their fertility, through their social, religious and cultural beliefs. The chapter is divided according to the following themes which emerged from the data:

- i. The roles that Swazi society ascribe to women and men in the family;
- ii. The significance of children in the Swazi patriarchal family;
- iii. Gender preferences of the children;
- iv. The challenges and implications of childlessness; and
- v. Societal perceptions on the infertile partner in the marriage.

While a comprehensive overview of the research design and methods was provided in chapter 3, it is necessary here to state the profile of the participants from whom the data was sourced for this chapter. The three tables below provide an overview of the individual participants (Table 1); and the focus group discussions (Table 2 and 3)

Table 1 Key Participants

Age	Number of years in marriage	Location	Education	Marital status	Religious affiliation	Pseudonym
50-60	35	Peri-urban	Higher secondary school	Married	Christianity– Evangelical Church	Mrs A
40-50	28	Rural	Secondary school	Married, but deserted	Christianity– Evangelical Church	Mrs B
30-40	15	Urban	Tertiary	Married, but processing divorce	Christianity– Roman Catholic	Mrs C
40-50	20	Rural	Primary school	Married	Christianity – Jericho Church in Zion	Mrs D

Source: Fieldwork March to May 2013

Table 2. 1st Focus Group Discussions participants

Sex	Age	Location	Marital status	Religious affiliation	Pseudonym
Male	40-50	Urban	Married	Christianity – Africa Evangelical Church	M1
Male	30-40	Peri-urban	Married	Christianity – Church of the Nazarene	M2
Female	40-50	Peri-urban	Divorced	Christianity – Winners Chapel	F1
Female	40-50	Rural	Married	Christianity - Methodist	F2
Female	30-40	Urban	Married	Christianity – Eagles Wings Ministries	F3
Male	30-40	Rural	Married	Christianity - Methodist	M3

Source: Fieldwork March to May 2013

Table 3. 2nd Focus Group Discussions participants

Sex	Age	Education	Marital status	Religious affiliation	Pseudonym
Female	30-40	Tertiary	Single with children	Christianity – New Covenant of Jesus Christ	F4
Male	30-40	High school	Single, with children	Christianity – Church of Christ	M4
Male	40-50	Tertiary	Married	Christianity – Church of Jesus Christ	M5
Male	40-50	High school	Married	Christianity – Swedish Free Church	M6
Female	40-50	High School	Married	Christianity – Free Evangelical Church	F5
Female	40-50	Secondary school	Single with children	Christianity – Church of the Nazarene	F6
Female	40-50	Tertiary	Married	Christianity – New Covenant of Jesus Christ Ministries	F7

Source: Fieldwork March to May 2013

As is evident from the tables above, the data were collected from 17 participants shown in the profile tables. The participants comprised 11 females and 6 males, of which 2 were aged 50-60, 8 aged 40-50, 6 aged 30-40 and 1 aged 20-30. Eleven of the participants were married, whilst 3 were single parents, 2 were married but deserted by their spouses, and 1 was divorced. Regarding their educational background, 10 had tertiary qualifications, 4 had O' Level certificates, 2 had gone up to secondary school and 1 had primary education. In terms of religious membership, all

the participants were Christians, but were diversified in that they represented the three Christian ecumenical bodies in Swaziland and their affiliates.

5.2. Findings

5.2.1. Four Key Narratives

Much of the analysis in this chapter is drawn from the personal interviews as well as the three focus group discussions. Below I have cited four key narratives which set the scene for how women experience Swazi socio-cultural and religious beliefs about infertility. The analysis which follows these narratives brings into dialogue the personal interviews as well as the three focus group discussions. Nadar (2009, p.140), in her article “Her-stories and Her-Theologies: Charting Feminist Theologies in Africa”, identifies storytelling as a key method used by African women to theologically make sense of their pain and experiences as victims of patriarchal oppression. The following are life stories of the four women whom I have coded as Mrs A, B, C and D respectively (see chapter on methodology for how anonymity was managed in the research process).

Mrs “A”

Kimi kuba bete umntfwana kufana nekubabete umuti;ubalite, futsi uyokufa ulite [she broke down into tears] -For me, having no child is like having no home; you are nothing, and you will die a nobody. After much trying without success, I fostered my nieces and nephews just to have a feeling of motherhood, hoping my husband would appreciate having children around. Lo and behold bitterness mounted in my husband as his family and close friends made sly comments about these children. The in-laws and my husband pressurised me to drink different concoctions despite their knowledge that I am a

Christian. Barrenness drove my husband to trade his Christian values and he became hostile towards me and the fostered children. After 20 years of pain and struggle in the relationship, my husband then deserted me for younger girls whom he thought would make him a father.

*Presently, I no longer afford utility bills and daily sustenance because he was the breadwinner in the family. He claims to have no obligation to support me financially because I did not have his child. Life is very difficult for me, and I had never imagined that I would one day be a case of charity in my church. Furthermore, there are many hostile comments from some fellow members of the church that, why do I bother and waste money on these non-biological children instead of enjoying the little money offered to me by 'good Samaritans'. Some would state categorically clear that the money and food hampers they offer me are a gift to me not anyone else. They would ask, '**utihluphelani ngebantfwana labangesibo bakho?**' directly translated to mean why do you bother yourself about children who are not biologically yours?*

Such comments lead me to conclude that even my own brethren joins the multitudes that punish me for not having my own children; they are so insensitive and judgmental. The greatest punishment was when I was expected to take in my husband's child he got out of wedlock, and I resisted because I felt I was not yet ready after the betrayal. The in-laws accused me of being disrespectful; the society labeled me a failure that did not even deserve a home. My husband too could not understand why I was hurting if there was a girl that had restored his dignity in the family and the society at large. That was the final straw as my husband left me to cohabit with the mother of his child.

I still live in my past and I am not sure whether I would ever live above the circumstances; if only I had children I would still be a happy couple with my husband [she sobbed]. When times are hard, with no food on the table, my memory lane retreats to the life when I had plenty and the hurt is inconsolable. Nonetheless, I still call my husband now and again during Valentine's Day, I hold on to the thought that one day he will come back home.

The above finding is supported by another participant:

Mrs "B"

The whole family conspired and colluded with my husband to have extra marital affairs since all attempts to fall pregnant had failed. They showed solidarity with the woman he presumably had impregnated by housing her and they would summon my husband in the pretext to deliberate on family issues yet they wanted him to spend time with the girl friend. However it later transpired that the child was not his [she giggled].

*I have been verbally assaulted by my mother-in-law and my own husband for being infertile. My husband would tell me in my face that he is interested in a fertile woman who will make him a father. At one point I had to fight with his heavily pregnant girlfriend to the dismay of my mother-in-law. She was so incensed with me that she spit on my face in rage, and said, "**hamba uyotala bakho bantswana nyumba ndzini!**"– go and get your own children you barren woman!*

I have had to endure public humiliation because my husband's affairs and the sexual escapades were made public knowledge. He allowed his girlfriends to belittle me, and they would insult me over the phone. When all this happened society seemed to

sympathize with my husband, as a man whose name would be forgotten after his death, and they justified his misdemeanors.

My husband would disappear for days and emerge after a week or two with no explanation. In his sexual ventures he spent my hard earned money and sold my livestock without consultation or my consent, just to entertain his girlfriends. He refused to work as he saw no reason to. In his distorted view, he could not accumulate wealth or work since he had no child to inherit his wealth. The home we live in was solely built from my pocket and I have continued to feed him up to this day. Today, he is a terminally sick bitter old man whom I have nursed at his deathbed, but he has never said thank you [she paused, and her mood changed].

I am now damaged, both psychologically and emotionally; the area of intimacy has shut down and I don't think I can ever be interested in a man. My experience in this marriage has been too traumatic to be forgotten. More so, it always pains me to think that I have had to endure so much in my family because I could not make my husband a man.

A similar assertion is supported by evidence of what Mrs “C” described:

Mrs “C”

If only I had children I know that I would not be processing a divorce right now. My husband and his family have always wanted a child whom I could not give them. He has had extra marital affairs in his attempts to be a father, a misdemeanor that everyone seems to understand and justify. I have lived in fear in this relationship knowing that I'm vulnerable to many health hazards. I had to come to a painful decision which no one applauded, even my closest family members, that of walking out of the marriage. My

parents felt they were failures now that I wanted to end the marriage. To them it would be a scandal in the society that I would not die and be buried at my marital home.

As a religious person, my fellow Christians are dissuading me from processing the divorce; they claim that I made an oath before God that 'until death do us part, not marital affairs nor the absence of children. I have had to live a life in pain, more especially because I receive no psycho-social support from people I would expect would at least understand my predicament. Instead they are more concerned about their statuses in the society. If only I was capable of getting children, and make my husband a man, I would not be in this emotional turmoil.

Mrs "D" echoed these sentiments:

Mrs "D"

The journey we have travelled as a couple without children has been rough and bumpy. I am greatly indebted to my husband who has stood by my side even when family members and society blamed me for not making him a man whom society would accord some special recognition, that he was the father of so and so. His Christian values have made him firm in his commitment to our marriage. However, even though I'm old now, far beyond the reproductive period, I still feel that void deep down in my heart that I was unable to fulfill societal expectations on what is defined as a real woman. We have tried to raise adopted children from our families, but it always pained me to know that I lived under surveillance; my in laws would be very finicky on how I treated the children. It would be like I'm not capable enough because I'm inexperienced in mother care. As a

result most children would not stay for lengthy periods with us, and right now we are in the sixties in age, and there is no one we are staying with.

I still remember the pain of waiting in anticipation every month that I would miss my menstrual periods and it would not happen; the pieces of advice that society would offer me, which would sometimes call for me to compromise my faith; the emptiness that I have failed in my most important duties as a woman; staying with someone I know very well that his name will not continue after his death; coping in a society that blames me for failing to continue the family line— all this is killing [her voice was cracking and she was fighting tears]. However, my faith in God, and the love I get from my husband give me the reason to live.

The narratives presented above, poignantly capture how women experience Swazi society's views regarding their fertility. There are a number of themes which emerge from their narratives as well as the interviews and focus group discussions. In what follows, a detailed analysis of these themes will be presented. The themes are as follows: gender roles ascribed by Swazi society to females and males; the significance of children in the Swazi patriarchal family; Gender preferences of the children, challenges and the implications of childlessness and the societal perceptions on infertility in marriage.

5.2.2. Gender Roles in the Swazi Society

As the narratives above have generally shown, one of the primary gender roles assigned to women is reproduction. Other participants of the study confirmed that women and men in the Swazi society are assigned specific roles based on their biological differences. From birth, girls and boys are taught feminine and masculine chores respectively, and they are socialised to fit

into cultural gender ‘pigeon holes’; hence the rigid labor division in families (Lerner 1986). Participant F3 added that the gender roles are sharply defined and safeguarded by social taboos to ensure that the sexes do not trespass on each other’s boundary. That is why the elderly in the family when reprimanding a girl for carrying out a masculine chore would say *intfombatani ayikwenti loku*’ meaning ‘a girl is not supposed to do this’. Also a boy who performs domestic chores would be ridiculed and be called *indvodza mfati*, - a ‘man/woman’ man - to dissuade him from intruding into a feminine domain.

The Roles of Women

Most participants raised childbearing and nurturing as the primary roles for women. Women play this role through execution of domestic chores such as cooking, fetching water and wood, instilling good values in their children and they also provide for their partners’ needs. As care givers they share a strong bond with their children, as they provide them (children) with emotional, psychological, economic and spiritual support. Participant F1 made further reference to the first language that a child picks up, that it is known as *‘lulwimi lwamake lolimunya ebeleni*’, - mother tongue that you suck from the breast; this underscores the role that a mother plays as the role of nurturer in her family.

Another observation that transpired in focus group discussions (FGD’s) was that when the woman nurtures a girl child she knows that *ukhulisa umfati wemuntfu, futsi wentela uyise* - she is raising somebody’s wife on behalf of the father, who will execute her primary role of reproduction and parenting in her marital home. Until you fulfill this obligation, claimed participant F3, you remain *sidzandzane* at your marital home – a woman in waiting – and you do not qualify to be trusted with sacred values and beliefs. Notably, in the words of participant M2,

It never occurs to parents that they might be raising a potential failure in marriage, and a married young woman that is unable to conceive becomes a great humiliation to the families, especially to her father.

Hence there are interventions that the families agree to employ to protect their images and dignities in the society. According to F3, because culturally it is allowed that a man can have more than one wife, and he is celebrated and respected as *inganwa* or a charmer, the two families can arrange that a younger sister or close relative to the wife be given to the man to reproduce on behalf of an infertile wife. However, participants F1 and F2 expressed that in some cases, the arrangement may not necessarily be formal, but the man can have extra marital relationships to “try his luck” with other women and be justified. The childless woman would have to endure all the pain and not give up the marriage to protect the name of her father, “after all you marry for your father, and you reproduce children on behalf of your father”, observed participant F6. In substantiating her remark, she made reference to the conversational ritual that takes place on the first day of the three day long traditional wedding. The bride crawls to the mother in-law and she kneels in front of her, and the conversation goes:

Bride: *Ngitocela inkhonto* – May I please be accepted into this family.

Mother in-law: *Utfunywe ngubani* – Who has sent you?

Bride: *Ngu babe wami longu...* - My father, so and so (you call him by name)

So, the married woman should live with conscious awareness at her marital home that her father’s name is at stake, and she must protect it at all cost, even if it calls for denial of her own dignity and happiness.

Participant M5 raised an intriguing observation about the paying of dowry by the in-laws to the girl's family. As the term 'bride-price' for dowry suggests, something is being bought from the girl. Participant M5 supported by participants M4, F3 and F7 noted that culturally, *kusuke kutsengwa sinye*—it is the fruit of the womb that is being bought, and the obvious expectation is that she must reproduce children at her marital home, preferably an heir as first born. That means for all intents and purposes, her husband's lineage attains rights over her sexual services and her reproductive and nurturing powers. However, as participant F2 posited, *"her own patrilineage remains in contact with the husband's lineage, and they work mutually with one another to solve any problems that the couple may experience, including childlessness"*.

Participants F1, F2 and F3, agreeing with each other, associated gender roles with the behaviour of the fetus. They claimed that one can predict the gender of the fetus from its movements in the womb. The movements of female fetuses, as potential nurturers, are neat and gentle, whilst those of males are aggressive and jagged. They associated the aggressiveness with intelligence, claiming that males are more intelligent than women; that is the reason why at school boys choose harder subjects like science and math, whilst girls choose softer subjects that are arts oriented. The three women forcefully asserted that as early as six months male toddlers show signs of high IQ; hence they would prefer outdoor activities that would challenge their thinking capacities, whilst girls remain indoors to play with domestic toys. When asked how the gender roles and behavior patterns were instituted, the participants revealed that they are "natural, divine and fixed". Most female participants in the FGDs emphasized the divine order of roles, asserting that God created men to be leaders, endowing them with the ability to protect and guide their families; hence the aggressiveness in their behavior patterns.

The Roles of Men

Most participants' responses to the questions on gender roles show that in general, Swazi families are excited at the birth of a boy because that guarantees continuity of the family lineage; hence boys are given names such as *Vusumuzi* meaning 'revive the family name' or *Gcinumuzi* meaning 'keep the family' or *Muziwakhile* meaning 'the family name is established'. As the boy grows up it is reinforced that he is expected to play this important role. Participant M4 confessed that such expectations pressure them as males to engage in sexual intimacy earlier in life, and to also have multiple sexual relationships in order to get as many children to extend the lineage. Some participants also expressed that men play an important role as heads of households. Boys are socialised in a way that they have power and control over certain issues in their families. Participant M6 made an example about himself that he is the last born amongst girls, but his sisters are his responsibility, and they cannot make independent decisions without consultation.

Another role for men therefore is that they are custodians of the interest of their lineages. They are also protectors and providers for their families. Furthermore, they are decision makers pertaining to family life and the society at large. However, there are specific duties that go with these roles, and society determines what a man ought to do and not to do. Participant M3 claimed,

Njengendvodza yeliSwati awuhlali edladleni ubuke make wakho emehlweni utawuze uphuphe, ufanele kuba sesangweni noma uye entsabeni uyogawula, nome uye etinkhomeni, noma kuphi nje, kodvwa ngaphandle kwelikhaya.

As a Swazi man you do not hang around the kitchen and be with your mother, lest you lose value; instead you must be at the kraal or occupy yourself with outdoor activities

like fetching wood from the mountain or mending livestock in the veld, or go wherever, but outside the home.

The duties of males in the family therefore are to look after cattle in the veld and to ensure their safety in the homestead by mending the kraal. Also they clean the surroundings of the home to protect the family members from environmental dangers, and also for the community to see that “*kunendvodza lapha kabana*” – there is a man in that homestead, asserted participants M1 and M5.

Other than the labour duties in the family, men take care of community responsibilities like *kuhlehla*, where they offer free services like weeding the fields and harvesting grain at the chief or king’s homestead. Participant F7 however, noted that usually men enjoy offering these services at the community level, but not in their own homes. When probed further she expressed that men embark on altruistic activities to earn accolades from the community that would boost their ego.

Changing Roles?

Responses to this question varied; some participants expressed that the traditional duties of confining the girl child to the kitchen and the boy child to the kraal are slowly changing, but the social-cultural expectation of men to maintain the family name through procreation and women to bear children has not, and will never change. Other responses were that from a societal perspective these traditional roles and responsibilities have generally not changed, but there has been a major shift in what some individual modern families practice; for instance, they focus on career paths instead of grooming their girls for marriage. This inspires the children to be more geared towards academic prosperity than to be obsessed with procreation. Nonetheless, it still

remains the dream of every parent to be called *mkhulu noma gogo wabani ngalelinye lilanga*-grandfather or grandmother of so and so one day, asserted participants F1 and M3. Other responses noted contemporary dynamics like education and technologies, but claimed that these dynamics have minimally altered the thought patterns of Swazis; for example if a woman is educated and is employed she is expected to still weed and harvest the fields by contributing money for the provision of these tasks. A last set of the responses reveals that these roles are changing overtime; and advances in technology and interaction with western culture and religion are contributing to these changes. For example, participants F3, F7 and Mrs D assert that arranged marriages are now dwindling even though most fathers still wish that they receive dowry for their daughter from prospective future partners.

The above responses then channelled the discussions to interrogate the question that if these roles are slowly changing or not changing what exactly was the basis of their construction? Common answers to this question were that the roles were constructed by the great grandfathers of the Swazis to form their identity as a nation, and they are passed down the generations for continuity. In the words of participant M5 whose observation was applauded by the others:

...this is our pride as Swazis, our late King Sobhuza II advised the nation not to be overwhelmed by foreign influences and denounce what makes us Swazi. I cannot imagine myself for example not making decisions in my family; that would be irresponsible of me. Also, I cannot allow my girl to marry without dowry being given to me by her future husband; I would have failed in my duties as a father.

Some participants added that these roles are “natural”; a boy and a girl are “wired” differently, and they respond to what they feel when they execute their duties. Participants F1, F3, F6, M2

and M5 made reference to the Bible, arguing that the roles were divinely instituted. They cited the creation story as a classic example that God created Adam first, and assigned him with the leadership role, whilst Eve was to bear children, and be submissive to her husband. They therefore expressed that the roles that women and men should play are from God. As already asserted, the primary role assigned to women is that of child-bearing, and this is because children play a significant role within Swazi family and society as we shall see below.

5.2.3. The Significance of Children in the Family

likhaya ngaphandle kwebamntfwana lifile... empeleni kufana nekutsi ute lona, futsi kufana nekutsi uhlulekile kwenta lowakutela kulelikhaya nasemhlabeni

A home without children is dead, in fact it is like to have noneand it is like you have failed in your duties which you came to execute in your marital family and on earth in general. [She broke down].

This emotional remark from participant Mrs C who did not have biological children was echoed in all the discussions as the question on the significance of children in the family was interrogated. It was clear from the responses that children are so significant that *ngaphandle kwabo, ayikho imphilo* - without them, there is no life, as participant F3 categorically stated. The data revealed that children are a source of security; bearing children provides elevated status; children are a form of emotional therapy; and children ensure the continuity of the family name. Each of these will be discussed in turn below.

Children as a Source of Security

Swazis have a proverbial saying that goes, “*kutala kutelula*”, which means you get children to take care of you in your old age. They add that childless parents would die a shameful death; *batawudliwa tinja*—‘they will be eaten by dogs’. So, according to participants F4, F5 and F7, the priority to have children in the family as a source of security intensifies the couples’ quest to have children at whatever cost; hence some men for example would conceive children out of wedlock, whilst some women would fake pregnancy and snatch newborn babies from their biological mothers in hospitals. Participants F1, F2, F3, F5 and F7 daringly commented on the security that children give specifically to their mothers by revealing that as long as you have children in your marital home you remain a lifetime beneficiary in the man’s inheritance. For instance, you may desert your husband, and remarry in another family, but when he dies, *uyalandwva utozilela bantfwana bakho, futsi udle egameni lebabantfwana bakho*— you are recalled to mourn on behalf of your children, and you qualify to get a share in his inheritance. Also, children assure you as a woman that you are permanent in your marital home; *utawugcina sifungo sakho sekutsiutawufela khona emtini* – you will fulfill your promise that you will die at your marital home.

Children as a Source of Elevated Status

Children accord parents defining titles that earn them respect in the family and the society at large. Participants F2, F6 and F7 noted that the woman in particular remains a bride in waiting until she proves her worth by giving birth to her first born. Thereafter she receives a tag-name that defines her; she becomes “*Nabobani*” – the mother of so and so, which then accords her a certain status that now qualifies her to be trusted with family rituals and secrets. In some families her dress code even changes to accentuate that she is now a member of her marital home in full; her status is elevated, and her father’s dignity is preserved. *Until then, she hangs about as a wife-*

in-waiting, claimed participant F5. Participant M4 made a thought-provoking revelation when he argued that it is not only the status of the woman that is at stake in the event that the couple is childless. He said:

A man without his biological children walks as if he is naked in the community. People do not respect him, and even during community meetings they do not trust him for a sound contribution on any issue that is being discussed, in fact no one takes him seriously. He remains a 'boy' until he is rescued by going out of wedlock to scavenge for children, even if it means getting one from a 'tree'.

These sentiments were echoed by participants M5 and M7 who revealed that men who do not have children experience some emptiness in their hearts that deflates their ego. He therefore further pleaded that people should understand that as men they sometimes get involved in illicit affairs not by choice, but you are pushed by the quest to be recognized as a “real” man. Also the pressure from their parents and relatives to continue the family name through procreation becomes unbearable, and they eventually succumb to it.

Participants Mrs A and Mrs C in separate interviews confirmed the above observations in their life stories as women without biological children. They expressed that cultural expectations lead men to be too conscious about their status which ought to be maintained through procreation, even if it is by “hook or by crook”, claimed participant Mrs A. Thus they explore all possible routes to fulfill these expectations, at the expense of their wives. Also the in-laws shift the blame for childlessness to the women because culturally it is believed that a man cannot be infertile.

Participant Mrs B said:

I know what is to be despised and humiliated by my in-laws because no one defines me as Nabo bani-the mother of so and so. I know how it feels to be verbally, emotionally and physically assaulted by your own husband for questioning his extra marital affairs with any girl who he thinks will give him a child; ngihlale ngitsi ebe ngingemntfwana ngabe angi nje – I always conclude that if only I had my own child, I would not be like this [she broke down].

Children as a Source of Emotional Therapy

Female participants in particular shared similar views on the significance of children as a form of emotional therapy to them. They claimed that in the case of broken relationships for example, children become your reason as a woman to remain in your marital home, *uhlalela bantfwana bakho*, in spite of all hardships. So, without children some couples may feel it is not worthwhile to remain in an unstable relationship. Other than the love and warmth received from children, Swazi society believes that they can also revive chemistry between estranged parents. A single mother participant F4 also pointed out that when she has regrets about a relationship that never worked out between her and the father of her children, the bond she shares with her children is therapeutic, and she feels complete and satisfied.

Children as a Source of Continuity of the Family Name

Male participants in particular stressed the significance of the boy child bringing about the continuity of the family name, even after the death of the father. The boys who survive him are a reminder to the community that their father once lived and he deserves to remain alive in everyone's memories. Thus, his name according to participant M3 is prolonged and through his offspring the name of the family will be perpetuated. So, at an early age the boy child is

socialised for the patriarchal role of a father in the family. Also, through child bearing, Swazis believe that family ancestors are reborn in that some children resemble them physically, and they (the children) would have their personality traits and characteristics.

From the responses of the participants detailed above it is clear that the value assigned to children in Swazi society is deeply significant and important in securing stability and status. It is not just children that provide these benefits, but male children in particular are preferred as we shall see below.

5.2.4. Gender Preferences of Children

Participants expressed that all children are important but boys are the more preferred in many Swazi families, for the simple reason that boys' offspring will assume the family name and the lineage will be extended. Traditionally, an extended lineage is a sign of blessings and prosperity. Women participants noted that most Swazi women do not feel complete when they have not produced a male heir for the family. In the words of participant F3, *“they can have as many as five girls, but without a boy child they do not consider themselves full women, probably because they know the expectations of their in-laws”*. Also, some familial relations have broken down because the women who are believed to be responsible for creating the sex of the child have failed in their 'duty'. Cases were cited by the women participants whereby in-laws would pressurise their son to get a male child out of wedlock, or the wife will be made to adopt a male child that will oversee her husband's property. Girls are regarded as non-permanent members of the family who are children in transit.

To emphasize the point of boys being the preferred gender, participant F2 commented on the reaction that elderly members of the family show upon arrival of a girl child: “they would

jokingly, but mockingly say to the woman, *utele ingwandla letawuhamba* - you have given birth to a prostitute that will leave the family.” It also came out clearly in the discussions that in some families, girls are valued for their potential to be profit making entities and ego boosters to their fathers, through the dowry that will be paid by their marital families. However, participant M2 raised a counter argument that culturally girl-children are valued as human beings that must be protected not in the sense that they are a property that will bring profit to the father, to be considered as important members of the family. He blamed infiltration of foreign norms and values into the Swazi cultural mentality, which has subsequently depreciated the value and dignity of women in the Swazi society.

From the above discussion it is clear that with the exception of some views, generally boys are the preferred choice for married couples. This pressure to produce boys, but also to produce children is exacerbated when couples experience challenges in conceiving.

5.2.5. Challenges of a Childless Couple

Responses of the participants reveal that challenges faced by married childless couples in a child-oriented society like Swaziland are numerous and daunting. For the purposes of this discussion I have narrowed these challenges into being internal and external in nature.

Internal Challenges

From birth, both girls and boys are socialised to think that their fulfillment would come with procreation. It would never cross their minds that there could be a possibility that they would be unable to conceive children. Failure to meet this societal expectation therefore leads to profound grief and sadness: “you feel as if you have robbed your family and society of something precious, and you never forgive yourself”, asserted participant Mrs D. That means as a childless

couple you must endure sadness and pain daily, and that creates emotional and psychological stress on you. Eventually you develop insecurities that are accompanied by a sense of being alienated. The couple also struggles with an inferiority complex as society, through disparaging utterances, jeers at them that they are made to feel valueless and incomplete. Furthermore the woman in particular agonizes in silence and perpetually, as she observes other mothers celebrating their ability to conceive. In the case of participant Mrs B her anxiety and anguish went so deep that seeing a baby and being invited to baby showers by religious friends felt “like a knife piercing her heart”.

Some people especially in the churches are not sensitive to the predicament of childless couples, claimed participant F2. She added:

...capable mothers would stand up in church to share their excitement in their testimonies where they brag about their children. There you are, seated in the pew, with no testimony to share about your God who generously gives children to other women, but not you; this is very hurting, and you even doubt your faith in God. At the same time you must force a smile on your face and pretend to be happy for the achievers.

Childless couples therefore find it difficult and challenging to fit in social circles where everyone talks about their children and no one seems to understand their ordeal. In addition to these internal factors there are also external factors which pose challenges to childless couples.

External Challenges

Female participants in childless marriages agreed with each other in separate interviews that the pressure that in-laws exerted on them to conceive children against all odds becomes too overwhelming. In addition to visiting one hospital after another where they undergo

uncomfortable medical tests, they are also coerced to undertake certain traditional rituals which are dehumanizing, and are contrary to their religious beliefs. The pressure to get children also becomes so unbearable that the couple is compelled to have illicit affairs. The man would sheepishly succumb to the pressure, and finds himself a mistress who might get pregnant for him. In many cases the wife is forced to accept the illegitimate child as a full member of her family, and also appreciate the “kind gesture” by the mother of the child to have rescued her husband from shame. In the case of participant Mrs A after impregnating a mistress, her husband deserted their matrimonial home to cohabit with her. Since then, he has never set his foot in their home, and he abandoned all his “manly” responsibilities. Some women too can be pushed by the pressure to get pregnant through extra-marital relationships. In most cases they would not abandon their homes; instead they would pretend as if the children belong to the husband. The pressure therefore has the potential to taint the childless couples’ relationships with adultery which becomes a lifetime scar.

Another potentially crucial challenge that the participants raised was the society’s perception about adoption. They argued that society does not encourage adoption, and couples who go against the grain and adopt are made to pay dearly for that. Living under surveillance, where every member of the society scrutinizes their parental behavior toward the adopted child, is very punitive and intimidating to childless couples. Participant Mrs D further observed that even the government laws on adoption are too cumbersome and insensitive; for example you are heavily screened by government officials to ascertain your ability to be a parent. This, according to the participant, mentally traumatizes and subordinates the parental abilities of the couple that wants to adopt a child. Adoption is a difficult process because it exposes the infertility of the couple and it is usually the woman who is blamed for infertility as many of the participants confirmed.

The participants indicated that the woman is blamed as being solely responsible for their predicament. The woman is accused of being morally promiscuous before marriage, and that she must have committed habitual abortions which weakened her womb muscles beyond repair, rendering them incompetent to carry any life. Culturally, it is perceived that men cannot be impotent and hence unable to get children; he is productive even at his old age. Participant Mrs B shared an experience about her mother-in-law who verbally assaulted her for an altercation she (the participant) had with one of her husband's girlfriends that was pregnant with his child. "My mother-in-law was so incensed with me that she spat on my face and said, *awutali nje utsembe kutsi utawushaya labatalako*, you do not give birth to your own children just because you want to fight those who are fertile." The husband too in a rage told her directly that he was sick and tired of staying with an infertile woman; she should return to her parental home. Paradoxically, this participant has her own child from a previous relationship as proof that she is fertile. Her husband has none. It also turned out that the girlfriend he was bragging about was pregnant with another man's child, not his. Furthermore, society labels the supposedly barren woman a witch. She is accused of mystically eating up the children before conception to prevent continuity of the family lineage, and this is an unpardonable sin with members of the lineage. The challenges experienced by childless couples, as reflected above, indicate how the Swazi cultural and social beliefs contribute to the construction of a diminished personhood for women. In the following section I will theorise this diminished sense of personhood experienced by the women.

5.3. Analysis of the Findings

This section interprets the above findings using feminist theoretical lenses. The emergent issues drawn from the data are categorized in themes which proceed as follows: family as an

institutional location, gender roles viewed in binaries, the value of motherhood and the woman's attachment to the father figure.

5.3.1. Family as an Institutional Location

It came out clearly from the data that the family is a fundamental unit in the Swazi society. It is the first environment where girls and boys are oriented in gender roles that society ascribes, and they are socialised in cultural norms and values. The gender roles go with a rigid labor distribution which determines the allocation of duties that each gender is expected to perform. It also emerged from the interviews that gender roles, duties and responsibilities are perceived to be "natural, divine and unchangeable", and anyone who transgresses the gender limits is labeled a social deviant.

Therefore, I would argue, the family in the Swazi society can be interpreted as an institutional location that creates and reproduces gender inequalities. Kabeer's (1996, p.17) study on gender as an institution, defines an institution as a framework of rules for achieving social or economic goals. She further claims institutions produce, reinforce, and reproduce social relations, thereby creating and perpetuating social difference and inequality. I therefore find the family institution to be the breeding ground for patriarchy which ascribes gender roles and also informs societal perceptions on Swazi women's fertility based on these roles. Similarly, Swart in her article "Dignity and Worth in the Commonwealth of God" (1991, p.130) has explained patriarchy as:

...the power of the fathers, a familial, social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labor – determine what part women shall and shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

It is clear from the findings presented above that the Swazi family operates as a patriarchal institution in line with Swart's and Kabeer's definitions. Whilst family is an important institution, I contend that there is a need to reorient its structures to attach value and respect to every member and eradicate gender discrimination, thus creating mutual, familial relations between females and males. The data in this chapter has clearly shown that in Swaziland societal expectations continue to relegate women to the bottom of the patriarchal hierarchy, and as Ackermann, et al.(1991) have noted, they have survived at the bottom of the pyramid by building their own pyramids of hurt within that sub-structure.

Other than family, Kabeer has identified the State, the market and the community as other institutional locations which produce and reproduce social relations. Notably, gender and other inequalities are reproduced through the interaction of these four institutions, creating a situation which disadvantages the minorities (not in terms of numbers, but powerlessness) in multiple ways. The institutions produce inequalities that ascribe to each individual a certain position in the structure and hierarchy of the society, and they determine the roles and responsibilities that each person should be confined to. Thus, gender inequalities are not only confined to familial relations; it's a network between institutions. So, "bringing about institutional change requires critique, negotiation, bargaining, and reciprocity at all levels and in all domains" (Kabeer 1996, p.20).

Evidence that the institutional locations are interlinked, and are 'partners in the crime' with regards to reinforcing inequalities, is demonstrated in what Connell (2000) calls "hegemonic masculinity"²⁴ which through socialisation centrally networks the institutionalisation of men's

²⁴ Connell (2000) explains "hegemonic masculinity" as the cultural dynamic by which a particular gender claims and sustains a leading position in social life.

dominance over women from family throughout the other locations. For example, occupations in Swaziland are sex stereotyped, with women concentrated in those identified with femininity, and men with those perceived to demand masculine traits. The few women who go against societal expectations and aspire for ‘manly’ occupations find themselves caught up in a dilemma of conflicting roles. They have to display personality traits of aggressiveness, dominance, emotional control and self-confidence culturally attributed to males, whilst at the same time showing passivity, nurturance, empathy and helpfulness, culturally attributed to women. This “double-bind” which women are caught in forces them to creatively negotiate the binary roles ascribed to gender, which will be discussed below.

5.3.2. Gender Roles Viewed in Binaries

The societal perceptions on ascribed gender roles in the Swazi family breed social relations that are concerned with how power is distributed between the sexes. They also define the ways in which responsibilities and claims are allocated and the ways in which each are given a value (CEDAW, 2011, p.15). From the discussions with the participants of the study, who were represented across the spectrum in terms of age, education, gender and marital status (as shown in the demographic data tables), it was evident that Swazis find it difficult to differentiate between sex and gender differences. They use the biological difference between women and men as a rationalisation for the different gendered social roles that limit and shape their attitudes and behavior. As aptly put by Philips (2006, p.36), “sex differences are used to create gender differences which are then explained as sex differences which in turn require gender differences, and so on”. Underscoring this assertion, she makes reference to the socialisation of boys and girls; that at an early age, boys are helped to acquire a masculinity that allows them to assume and maintain the position of power, whilst girls are taught to cultivate a submissive femininity.

These binary gender roles and responsibilities in the Swazi society therefore can be perceived as “the costume, a mask, a straightjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance” (Lerner, 1986, p.238). The resulting difference in behavior is then explained as natural, unchangeable and God ordained, thus justifying the inequalities in the society. Hence, many participants in the study pointed out that gender roles, packaged with gender division of labor must be accepted without question. However, this begs the question that if these roles are natural, fixed and divine why would they have to be enforced so rigidly? Why would society not allow nature to take its course? In other words, if this claim on roles being fixed was as “natural” as it is asserted, then it would not be necessary to deny women equal opportunities with men because they (women) would be incapable of competing with them anyway²⁵. As postulated by Hattery (2001:15), if women were ‘naturally’ inferior, men would have nothing to fear; the fact that many men feel threatened by a woman who gives them competition raises doubt about the validity of this claim.

Data have shown evidence that gendered roles stem from social norms which Namabira and Kamanzi (2013, p.87) describe as the formal and informal rules that govern what people can and cannot do as they go about their daily life. They add that these gendered social norms stem from the society’s values of what it means to be a “real” woman or a “real” man. These are people’s lists of prescribed values and proscriptions that individuals are assessed as being properly ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ in terms of their attitude and degree of compliance with them. Such norms guide what women and men say, what they wear, and how they behave (2013, p.88). Members of the society at various levels regulate these social norms through parent-child, school –student and church-Christian relationships. For instance it is drummed into a woman’s mind

²⁵<http://www.sexarchive.info/ATLAS-EN/html/the-social-roles-of-men-and-wo.html> [accessed 12 June 2013]

from childhood that what defines a good woman is submission and passivity, and that their source of self- knowledge is lodged in others, not in the self (Belenky et al., 1986, p.10).

Ironically, the key proponents of claims which romanticise patriarchy as if it benefits women are the women themselves. This is what Nadar and Potgieter in their article entitled “Liberated through Submission? The Worthy Women’s Conference as a Case Study of *Formenism*”²⁶ have named *formenism*. They define *formenism* as an ideology constructed, endorsed and sustained by women, who subscribe to a belief in the inherent superiority of men over women. They add that it advocates that men are the chief beneficiaries of the social positioning, and that the women will benefit from increased male responsibility and leadership. When comparing feminism with *formenism* they assert;

Whereas the aim of feminism has been to deconstruct the ways in which patriarchy oppress women and to reconstruct a more equitable society, *formenism* seeks to entrench and romanticize patriarchy as a system of “natural order” that does not harm women and indeed betters their lives (Nadar and Potgieter 2010, pp.143-144).

The *formenism* mentality was also evident in the responses of the female participants of the study, who sought to subjugate and trivialise women’s potential, and to always believe “that they too would benefit from increased male responsibility and leadership” (Nadar and Potgieter, 2010, p.143). This belief was so strong that the participants conceptualised leadership roles for men right from the fetal stage as was evident in the vociferous claims that the male foetus was more aggressive and active indicating a heightened intellect. Notwithstanding the claims of

²⁶Nadar, S. and Potgieter, C. “Liberated through Submission? The Worthy Women’s Conference as a Case Study of *Formenism*,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Volume 26, Number 2, Fall 2010.

superiority of the foetus, it is acknowledged that the only way to obtain this elevated status is through the institution, hence the value placed on motherhood by society.

5.3.3. The Value of Motherhood

As already asserted, Swazi society attaches high value to the motherhood which entails the woman's capability to bear children for her marital lineage and nurturing. Her fertility accords her 'high quality' status in her family, especially if she produces an heir or sons. The family is assured of its continuity and its permanence in its ancestral residence, unlike girls who are "strangers in transit". Oduyoye aptly captures this point when she asserts that motherhood is a highly valued role open only to women but desired by both men and women and the entire society. She notes that through motherhood men reproduce themselves and continue the family name. The actual prestige of reproduction, therefore goes to those who 'own' or control the reproductive capabilities of women; "to this extent, women are not valued in themselves, but only as valuable objects or means to an end" (Oduyoye 1996:117). Her insight is well illustrated in the life stories of the women in childless unions described above. These women were valued by their husbands and in-laws not for who they are but as a means to an end.

As "incapable" and silent observers in their marital homes they are expected to comply with any decision that the man makes; if he wants to marry another woman that will give him children she must not object, and if he conceives a child out of wedlock she must accept it. Also cultural undercurrents that women are second class in the social hierarchy indoctrinate women to think first and more about the next person than themselves. With their role as child bearers for instance, they are usually obsessed about the man's name being forgotten after he dies if she fails to give him a child. She can sacrifice her dignity and happiness to rescue the man from shame. So, having children is not about her, it is about him. Nadar and Potgieter (2010, p.146) are

therefore right in their observation that women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that they are to sacrifice their happiness and live for others, and to have no life but affection. The life experiences which the female participants shared inspire further questions. Does a woman in a patriarchal oriented society have a life that is solely hers or does she have to always play to the public gallery? Where exactly does she belong, her parental or her marital home or neither of the two?

This is where the ethic of self-determination is in tension with the African communitarian ethic of Ubuntu. Murove's comments which are illuminating in their own terms highlight well the tenets of the ethic of Ubuntu - that as an individual you are morally accountable to others. He is not alone in this perception; other African communitarian thinkers like Mbiti and Menkiti echo him by asserting that people cannot exist independently, but corporately as they owe their existence to each other. Subsequently, the community becomes the ontological determinant of one's personhood (Mbiti 1970; Menkiti 1984). Notably Menkiti in particular argues that one's self-identity is meaningless compared to communal realities; one story only matters when told through the realities of the community. However, over-emphasis on these community realities at the expense of personal identity thwarts the women's self-determination to express their identities in personalised perspectives. As shown in the data, some Swazi women struggled with this tension between the ethic of Ubuntu and the feminist ethic, and they were frustrated that the communal ethic took precedence over their personal identities (Matolino, 2014, p.56).

At childhood a woman is made aware of her destiny, that somehow she is a wife-in waiting who is being prepared for the role of motherhood that she will fulfill elsewhere, away from her parental home and for the purpose of community. As Ngcobo (2007, p.534) has put it, from earliest childhood she is an outsider and she eagerly anticipates marriage which will usher her to

a place where she will finally belong. To her dismay, when married, she does not attain the independence and sense of belonging she had yearned for; “instead she is reduced to a permanent state of dependence and estrangement...an outsider, who is always the first suspect when things go wrong, and nothing will change this until probably in old age where she will exercise authority and train younger women” (Ngcobo, 2007, p.534). Her authority until she gets married is controlled and owned by her father.

5.3.4. The Woman’s Compulsory Attachment to the Father Figure

The data in this chapter has shown that Swazi society perceives a woman as a minor whose strings remain attached to a man throughout her life. As Mpofo (1983) has observed, she is first under the guardianship of her father, and when she marries she comes under the guardianship of her husband. If she is divorced or is widowed either she returns to the guardianship of her father or other male relatives especially her sons. In other words, a woman’s identity is always defined by males; society ensures that she is not autonomous but dependent on a male. She lives a male controlled life even in adulthood. For instance, at marriage even though the powers to control her are transferred from her father to the husband’s lineage, her patrilineage still holds the right to meddle in her affairs such that it remains in constant touch with her husband’s family.

It is this patriarchal dependency syndrome that indoctrinates women from their earliest childhood to exhibit character traits that are presumed to be feminine. Society ascribes certain traits on women; that they are warm, expressive, nurturing, concerned about others more than themselves (self-sacrificing), and concerned more with people than with things. This resonates well with the African worldview which foregrounds community over individual autonomy. The irony is that this “community consciousness” is rarely required of men who exercise autonomy and authority over others. So males are presumed to be independent, aggressive, direct, unemotional, dominant

and competent. Hence society does not attach the same value to these traits; its patriarchal orientation dictates that the masculine traits are deemed to be more valuable, and they form the reference point for personhood in the society. Therefore women would accept anything to remain attached to a man and live under his authority, accepting insults, ridicule, marginalization, dehumanization and illicit affairs. Also, they are conscious about the preservation of the image of the man in the society. For example, as shown in the data, some women would choose to rather suffer in their marital homes than to embarrass their fathers by deserting their unscrupulous partners, and return to their patrilineage as ‘failures’.

The androcentric control further extends to her sexuality, as shown in the data. Interference of the in-laws on matters that pertain to her fertility is proof that women are not “mature enough” to control or manage their own sexuality.

5.4. Conclusion

The focus of the chapter was to explore societal perceptions on women’s fertility in Swaziland. Data were gathered through oral interviews with selected individuals and focus groups in the Manzini region. An interpretation of the data through the lenses of African feminist ethics has depicted the Swazi patriarchal society as having certain perceptions about women’s fertility which are based on the social roles that it ascribes to women and men. These expectations are communicated through sex role stereotyping, which defines women as subordinate to, and dependent on men. The stereotypes premise gender fitting behavior to a variety of rigid roles ascribed to women and men on the basis of their sex.

The gendered role expectations are deeply embedded in cultural norms and practices such that they are perceived as natural, eternal and fixed. This is how male dominance inserts itself into

the psyches of women to readily accept themselves as inferior to men. The role of women as nurturers and child bearers is top on the priority list of roles, making their fertility to be the primary concern in every Swazi family. Reflections on the generated data have also shown that the woman, who remains a perpetual minor under a compulsory attachment to a male, always lives to prove her value in marriage through her ability to beget children. Her husband's lineage at marriage acquires rights over her sexual services and her reproductive powers. This is attributed to the patriarchal institution (Swart 1991 and Kabeer 1996) which limits women to their child bearing and nurturing functionalities. In the next chapter I present the women's own perceptions of their fertility in the Swazi patriarchal space.

CHAPTER 6:

Women's Self-Construction of Identity and Personhood in Relation to Fertility Expectations

6.1. Introduction

An African woman is part of the cornerstone of the nation. She is and continues to be a key player within the fabric of society, yet her voice and perspectives are not featured with the billboard proportions that other voices enjoy (Carter and Parker, 1996, p.11).

The objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of Swazi women's own perceptions of their fertility and the constructions of their personhood based on the Swazi society's socio-cultural and religious beliefs. As stated in chapter four, the data for this chapter was sourced from women only. Whilst an African woman is important for the survival of the nation as captured in the above quote and confirmed by the discussion in the previous chapter, her voice always whimpers in the background and her perspectives are ignored, repudiated or trivialised. I have therefore created space for the women in this chapter to express in their own voices and on their own terms how they perceived their fertility without fear that their voices would be drowned by the voices that are "preferably heard" in a gendered society (Rider, 2005, p.14). As the novelist Arundhati Roy says, "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard".²⁷ Through focus group discussions and individual interviews, and consistent with the research problem, objectives and theoretical framework, this chapter presents an analysis of the women's perspectives. It is divided according to the following themes which emerged from the data:

²⁷ Novelist Arundhati Roy in her speech she delivered at the 2004 Sydney Peace Prize lecture at Seymour Theatre Centre, University of Sydney. Available from <http://sydney.ed.au/news/84.html?newsstiry=279> [accessed 26 November 2014].

- i. Children secure women's worth
- ii. Women's infertility and their self-worth
- iii. The women's sex preferences of their children
- iv. Infertile woman and her childlessness
- v. Family interventions in childless marriages

Whilst a comprehensive overview of the research design and methods was provided in chapter four, it is necessary here to explain how the findings have been structured. There are demographic details of the 22 participants who formed 3 focus groups, and their narrative responses to interview questions organised in themes. There are also excerpts from life stories of female participants, one participant from each focus group, whom I selected for further probing on personal issues they raised in the course of the discussions. Middleton (1993, p.129) underscores the importance of personal narratives in feminist studies which Nadar (2009, p.6) and Oduyoye (2001, p.10) confirm in that these stories enable women to reveal their "hidden narratives" that have "remained unwritten". Furthermore, through these narratives a feminist researcher produces rich data textured by the women's own interpretations of their experiences in their respective social contexts (Roets & Goedgeluck 1999; Atkinson 1998). Hence, feminist life stories negotiate openness, expose hegemonic power arrangements and inherent silences, and they also highlight secrets of oppression (Roets & Goedgeluck, 1999, p.86) in social institutions. Nganga (2011, p.18) explains these institutions as;

...humanly devised constraints that structure human interaction. They are made up of formal constraints (rules, laws, constitutions), informal constraints (norms of behavior, conventions, and self-imposed codes of conduct), and their enforcement characteristics.

6.2. Distribution of Demographic Data

The six tables (Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) below provide a distribution of the demographic characteristics of the participants based on age, number of children, sex of the children, education, marital status and place of location. As evident in the tables participants of the study were of the age bracket between 20 and 70. The number of children that they had was between 1 and 6, and most of their children were of mixed sexes. A high number of the participants had acquired tertiary education, whilst also a high number was married. Those who lived in urban locations were many, and were followed closely by those who resided in rural areas.

Table 1. Distribution of participants by age and their pseudonyms

Age	No. of Participants	Pseudonyms
20-30	4	FA, FB, FC, FD
31-40	7	FE, FF, FG, FH, FI, FJ, FK
41-50	6	FL, FM, FN, FO, FP, FQ
51-60	4	FR, FS, FT, FU
61-70	1	FV
Total	22	

Source: Fieldwork, August 2013

Table 2. Distribution of participants by number of their children and their pseudonyms

No. of children	No. of participants	Pseudonyms
1	1	FB
2	4	FD, FE, FJ, FN
3	7	FA, FR, FQ, FS, FV, FH, FM
4	2	FO, FP
5	6	FC, FE, FG, FI, FK, FL
6	2	FT, FU
Total	22	

Source: Fieldwork, August 2013

Table 3. Distribution of participants by sex of their children and their pseudonyms

Sex of children	No. of participants	Pseudonyms
Mixed	14	FA, FB, FC, FF, FH, FJ, FL, FM, FN, FO, FP, FR, FU, FV
Boys only	6	FD, FG, FK, FQ, FS, FT
Girls only	2	FE, FI
Total	22	

Source: Fieldwork, August 2013.

Table 4. Distribution of the participants by education and their pseudonyms

Education	No. of participants	Pseudonyms
Tertiary	13	FA, FB, FD, FG, FH, FI, FK, FN, FO, FQ, FR, FT, FU
Secondary	7	FC, FE, FJ, FM, FP, FS, FV
Primary	2	FF, FL.
Total	22	

Source: Fieldwork, August 2013

Table 5. Distribution of participants by marital status and their pseudonyms

Status	No. of participants	Pseudonyms
Single parents	4	FD, FL, FQ, FU
Married	18	FA, FB, FC, FE, FF, FG, FH, FI, FJ, FK, FM, FN, FO, FP, FR, FS, FT, FV
Total	22	

Source: Fieldwork, August 2013

Table 6. Distribution of participants by location and their pseudonyms

Location	No. of participants	Pseudonyms
Urban	9	FA, FD, FE, FH, FL, FM, FR, FS, FU.
Rural	8	FB, FF, FG, FJ, FN, FP, FT, FV
Peri-urban	5	FC, FI, FK, FO, FQ,
Total	22	

Source: Fieldwork, August 2013

6.3. Excerpts from Life Stories

Analysis in this chapter is drawn from 3 focus group discussions and personal interviews with 3 women I selected from the focus groups who consented to share their personal stories. My selection of these women was influenced by their openness to share their experiences and because their stories were different from the rest of the participants; two had children after long years of anguish in their marriages, and one had borne girls only. Below I have cited excerpts from the life stories of the three women whom I have coded as participants FQ, FI and FE respectively (see chapter on methodology for how anonymity was managed in the research process).

Participant FQ, who could not conceive until her eighth anniversary, had the following story to share:

For some years, after I had become a wife, I had no children. Life became bitter with my in-laws especially because I was the only wife in the family for whom lobola had been paid. After endless consultation with various medical doctors and pastors, I eventually conceived. At least now I could feel that I had space in my marital family. However, the joy was short-lived because I lost the baby at full term through spontaneous abortion. I conceived again after a year and the same tragedy befell me. As a Christian couple we prayed and fasted but I never conceived again, until my father in-law coerced my husband into taking me to a traditional healer. I had never been to a traditional healer before but I had no choice. I somehow was ready to try anything at this point to redeem my marriage and my father's name and to acquire status in my husband's family. I stayed for months at the traditional healer's home but to no avail.

My husband called for a family meeting and pleaded with my father-in-law to have me recalled. Again, we pursued the medical route and after certain procedures I conceived. This time around I made it to full term and I gave birth to a baby girl. I was so excited that finally I was “a woman,” and so were my families. However, when I gave birth to a girl again, there was no excitement at all because my father in law had made it clear that this time it had to be a boy. I felt so depressed that I had disappointed my in-laws. I would get remarks such as I was not serious with life. Fortunately, it was not before long that I gave birth to a baby boy and I felt complete, safe and secure in my marriage.

The above finding is supported by participant FI:

After five years of agony and emptiness, I became a full woman by giving birth to a baby girl. I had my second pregnancy, and I got another baby girl. In his great disappointment, my husband named the girl child Mhlobiso, meaning “a decoration”. To this, he justified this name by saying that the child had no special significance; she was nothing but a decoration. He eventually stopped maintaining the family. His family intervened by encouraging him to try having a boy outside of his marriage. The illicit relationship became a public affair much to the pleasure of the in-laws, while I helplessly watched my value as a wife diminishing greatly. A baby boy was born and was immediately separated from his mother to reside with his father at my marital home. It’s clear that the primary aim of the illicit affair was simply the procurement of a son and an heir. I was commanded to mother and nurse this child as the argument was, this was done in my favor to give me dignity and also save my marriage. Despite the pain and the hurt, I had no alternative but to adopt this child as mine. My husband eventually resumed family responsibilities; he bought food, paid bills and school fees and he gave me more

than enough money to clothe the children. I attribute all these responsible gestures to the arrival of his inkhosana – his heir.

A similar assertion is supported by evidence of what participant FE described:

I'm a mother of five girls only; how I wish I had at least one boy. In my twenty-five years of marriage I have never forgiven myself for failing my husband. Disappointment was written on his face whenever I came back from delivery. I will never forget an experience I had when I gave birth to my fifth girl. When he came to fetch me from hospital, he asked the nurses the gender of the child. When he heard that it was a girl he got angry and left the hospital without seeing me and my baby [she broke down and cried]. I had to hire a taxi to take me and my 'unwanted' child home. How I wish I could rewind the clock to my productive years, and make another attempt for a baby boy so that I can feel complete.

The narratives presented above, demonstrate that Swazi women essentially live their lives defined by relationships, and their sense of self is embedded in these definitions. There are a number of themes which emerge from their narratives as well as the focus group discussions. In what follows, a detailed analysis of these themes will be presented. The themes are as follows: Children as a source of women's worth: boy children as women's security; hegemonic control over women's sexual health; demeaning rituals and language to women's dignity; gender socialisation; and girl children as a source of wealth.

6.4. Children Secure Women's Worth

As the narratives above have generally shown, the major desire for every woman is to have children, especially boys, to gain a sense of self. When asked therefore to share their experiences on arrival of their children, the participants' faces beamed with excitement. Most shared

sentiments that giving birth to a child was the most significant experience of their lives. Explaining reasons for this significance participant FF claimed,

Ngelisiko leSiswati umfati ngumfati ngemntfwana (according to Swazi culture a woman is a woman because she can bear children). At least through child birth we are able to give the best treasure to our husbands, in terms of family progression, thus fulfilling family expectations and mine, and the divine purpose for every woman. Also you feel secured that you have now acquired the much desired and anticipated status to become a full woman at your marital home. Hence you are called Nabo bani – the mother of so and so - normally you are called by your first born son.

Substantiating this claim regarding the security that children give to their mothers, the participants cited traditional phrases that express this idea. Participants FD, FH and FS said, *'umntfwana ligadze lakho, udla ngaye'*, meaning a child becomes your weapon which you throw to anyone in the family in order to gain favours. Similarly, according to participant FI, *'umntfwana sicela phalishi'*, meaning your marital family can only listen to your voice and attend to your needs through your child. Nhlapho (1992, p.51) also sees the importance of children in Swazi society in terms of prestige, perpetuation of the clan, labor and security for old age.

In stark contrast, participant FC, a mother of five children amongst the participants, who had remained silent for some time, eventually opened up to express her regrets on having children. In her words she said,

If I could turn back the clock, I would have no children. They are 'parasites' that bring nothing but misery. The unprecedented burden that comes with their arrival, especially when they are intrusive and strangely nagging makes me to envy a barren woman.

In response to this remark, whilst the other participants acknowledged the many responsibilities attached to raising children, they maintained that giving birth to children to qualify as a 'real woman', could not even compare with the responsibilities of being a mother; their elevated status was first in their life priorities.

A single mother of five, participant FL, in one of the FGDs shared the pain of being disowned and rejected by one's own family, and other social agencies, if one bears a child out of wedlock. She claimed that Swazi culture is very punitive to such women, and it attaches a lifetime stigma to them, whilst on the other hand the men who impregnate young girls are celebrated in their families. Other participants added that in case the woman would get married in future, she loses certain privileges at her marital home because culturally, '*ute asephukile*', literally meaning she has joined the family already 'broken', having lost her virginity. The child she bore out of wedlock cannot be accepted in her marital home; s/he is called by derogatory names like '*ulikati lesiganga lelicedza imphuphu*'- s/he is a wild cat that undeservedly consumes food for rightful members of the family. It was further observed that even the children that the woman will bear in marriage would lose certain liberties and privileges. For example her son cannot be elevated by the family as an heir to succeed his father after death. It is like the son is punished for the sins of her mother. However, the women argued that it was not childbearing that gave them a 'full' sense of self. Participants FB, FG, FK and FQ in particular, observed that it was rather giving birth to at least one boy child that would ensure continuity of the family name; hence their preferences of either boy children only or mixed sexes.

6.5. Women's Infertility and their Self-Worth

Questions on women's fertility and its impact on their self-worth changed the mood of all the participants; they became somber and distressed. Notably, all the participants in the three focus groups had children, but they empathized with infertile women and imagined how they (the infertile women) felt about their predicament. Responses revealed that womanhood in Swazi society is measured in accordance with your ability to give birth to children. Other African research studies on the status of women have confirmed the view that generally in Africa, women are encouraged to marry and bear children in order to express their womanhood to the full (Donkor 2008; Ngcobo 2007; Isiugo-Abanihe 1994). Nukunya (2003:2) adds that children are of such importance in traditional societies that the inability to bear them is considered a great tragedy, and the woman who fails to bear children suffers humiliation, ridicule and abuse. Failure to fulfill this expectation therefore renders an infertile woman a nonentity at her marital family home and the entire society in general. Infertile women, according to most participants, live in indescribable agony; they feel incomplete, worthless, cursed, and having failed in life. Some participants emphasized that infertile women live in frustration. They always dread the day their partners would succumb to family pressures, and develop interest in other women that could make them fathers. Participant FS had this to say about barrenness:

It is a curse, which turns a virtuous wife into an outcast, not only with the in-laws, but with her husband and the entire community. The woman can be modest, educated, beautiful and wealthy, but without children she is nothing because most Swazi families value children more than her good traits.

It also emerged from the responses that being barren is distressful because one loses certain rights and privileges. For example participant FU noted that a senior wife can have her position

forfeited, and be regarded a junior if she does not have a child, except in rare cases whereby the family is supportive to the wife. The family would select a male child from the extended family *kutsi angene esiswini sakhe* (that the male child “enters” into her womb), to be adopted by the barren woman in order to redeem her family’s dignity and grant her status at her marital family. (Swazis use the statement “*kungena esiswini*” when referring to traditional adoption of a male child by a childless couple. The child must “enter” the women’s womb because it is assumed that she is the one that is infertile). Furthermore, it transpired from the discussions of the second focus group in particular that Swazi families view infertility in different dimensions; it does not only refer to the inability to conceive, but also to failing to carry the baby to full term, which is what is referred to as spontaneous abortion. Participant FQ who had this experience remarked:

No matter how many times a wife may conceive, as long as there is no child playing in her compound, that woman is considered barren.

Participant FI a mother of three girls added that giving birth to girls only is considered by some families as another dimension of infertility; the mother of the girls is viewed as barren because none of her offspring will continue the family name. She is therefore likely to receive similar treatment to that of a barren woman. Consistent with the findings of Donkor (2008, p.22) on traditional causes of infertility, the participants listed curses by ancestors, supernatural causes, evil heart, malevolent spirits, promiscuity and witchcraft as causes of women’s infertility.

Data from the focus group discussions and personal interviews have shown that a woman’s inability to bear children subjects her to demeaning language which wrecks her self-worth. Below is a list of derogatory expressions listed by participants, which families often use to describe a childless woman:

- Ungumgodzi longagcwali* - She is a baggage bin that never gets full
- Unguzimzimi lodla bantfwana bakhe ngekhati* - She is a cannibal that eats her own children inside her womb
- Abegwadla asemncane, akhipha tisu yaphela imbewu* - She was promiscuous as a teenager, and she committed multiple abortions such that her fertile ovaries were destroyed beyond repair
- Wemitsa tigadla* - She is always pregnant with fibroids
- Ungumtsakatsi* - She is a witch
- Unenhlitiyo lembi kutsi angakhulisa bantfwana* - She is too bad hearted to be trusted with raising children

The participants expressed that the pejorative and sneering labels that barren women are called traumatize and lower their self-esteem such that they view themselves valueless social misfits. They then exhibit various reactions to their frustrations. Some withdraw from their families and live as loners, more so because they are sometimes excluded from some family celebrations and ritual performances. Orji, Kuti, and Fasubaa (2002) further attribute the barren women's withdrawal to insecurities caused by fear of being expelled from the husband's house or joined by other wives who are "woman enough" to give children to the family. Other women, however, according to some participants, develop 'thick skins' which can turn them into 'monsters'; for

example they become angry at everyone in the family, especially children. When asked who the main perpetrators of derogatory language were, all the participants echoing each other blamed their fellow women. Therefore, women would become enemies against each other, depleting each other's personhood.

The participants also cited extreme cases whereby barren women would have phantom pregnancies. Their subconscious would lead them to believe that they are pregnant and they would experience certain pregnancy symptoms, when in actual fact they are not. Two participants, FJ and FU in separate focus group discussions further made reference to cases that local print media had reported, whereby barren women would fake pregnancies, and then visit hospitals to snatch new born babies from their biological mothers. The participants argued that the pressure to have children was so insurmountable that these women risked their lives and stooped low to commit such reprehensible crimes to buy favor from their marital families and redeem their marriages. It clearly emerged from the discussions that the woman's inability to bear children and the reactions of the society to her predicament negatively impacts on her esteem such that she feels useless and incomplete. Whilst the women that have children celebrate their self-conceptualisation as it has been shown above, the sterile woman never accepts her fate; she keeps on trying every suggestion made to her, even those that would be demeaning to her, as we shall see below.

6.6. Boy Children Secure Women's Worth

As shown in the demographic data, the children of thirteen participants were of mixed sexes, whilst six had boys only, and two had girls only. Their responses to the questions on child's sex preferences varied with person to person. Most expressed that the children should be of mixed

sexes; boys would continue the family name, whilst girls would bring wealth to the family through *lobola*. Participant FJ even said, as the others nodded in agreement,

...today I am so proud that through me, my father had to build a kraal which he never had, to keep the cattle that my husband paid to my family.

Other participants stated that whether the child was a boy or a girl was of less importance to them; what mattered was to have someone that would accord them the status of being called ‘the mother of so and so’. However, as put by participant FP, a mother of three boys and one girl,

the immediate society and in-laws always look forward to the birth of a baby boy. The pressure becomes so overwhelming that we are impelled to pray for more boys than girls. Otherwise, as mothers, we do not necessarily have any preferences concerning the sex of our children.

One of the participants, FF, assenting to this view shared her personal experience that it was not until she gave birth to her second child, a boy, that the father-in-law personally congratulated her and said, ‘*ngukhatsi usebente mbamba kenyalo makoti*’ loosely translated as ‘now you have really worked daughter in-law’. She added,

...as a result my second baby receives so much attention from my in-laws such that they even volunteer to babysit him, something that never happened with the first born baby girl.

Other responses revealed that some participants preferred boys to girls, especially those who had boys only. Participants FK and FS, two of the six that had boys openly admitted that they had no regrets that they were raising boys only, and it was what they had always wished for. When

asked why they had no interest in raising girls, they claimed that “*emantfombatana akeva; bancono bafana*”- girls are delinquents; boys are better. Participant FT, a mother of six boys added that she preferred boys because they would maintain the home after her death, and her marital family name would also survive through her. She claimed to have been fulfilled that she was a conduit to a long lifespan of her marital family name. Participants who mothered girls only disappointedly claimed that they had made every attempt to have baby boys without success. However they had counselled themselves to accept their ‘fate’. One of these participants FI positively remarked,

...after all, my girls will take care of me when I’m old and helpless, unlike boys who lack in nurturing instincts.

If childbearing impacts on the woman’s self-conceptualisation, such that she feels important, especially if she bears at least a son, how does a woman who does not have children view herself?

6.7. Infertile Woman Deals with Her Childlessness

Responses to the question on measures that a childless woman takes to deal with her condition are summarized by the following observation made by one participant,

She tries everything, even what can be viewed as extremes by those who have not experienced the pain of living in an empty nest. Her earnest desire is to become a ‘full’ woman at her marital home and the society at large.

Echoing one another the participants expressed that some attempts of childless women to conceive children can be degrading but they prefer to sacrifice their dignities in order to protect

their marriages, buy favor from their in-laws as well as to have an identity. They made reference to traditional practitioners whom these barren women consult who sometimes end up sexually abusing the women. Participant FA shared a painful experience of a childless relative who consulted a traditional practitioner, and it was prescribed that she should go to the river at dawn and strip naked in the presence of the traditional practitioner. The two eventually became intimate, and she became pregnant with his child. Besides the traditional practitioners, the women consult Christian prophets for prayer whose consultations and prescriptions tend to be very costly. They also visit various medical doctors both locally and outside. Furthermore, they try various herbs and diets that are recommended to boost women's fertility. When asked why it is only the women's infertility that needs to be treated, they responded by stating that culturally it is very rare for a man to be considered infertile.

Participant FV commented on the vulnerability of childless women as they seek for help wherever possible. She cited pastors who would take advantage of the women's fate and use Scripture verses to manipulate them to offer huge sums of money to the pastors in return for "God's favor". Several of the participants made reference to the story of Hannah in the Bible that the pastors commonly cite to convince the women that it is God who opens and closes the womb; hence one should offer money to God through the pastor to buy his favor. As a result, as participant FQ claimed,

Sebaphela labomake ngunaba bafundisi mbumbulu, ngesizatfu sekutsi bafuna nabo kutivela babantfu, bemukeleke emindenini yabo (childless women have lost a lot of money to deceitful pastors who take advantage of their situation and exploit them. The women's main quest is to be 'complete' women, and be accepted in their marital families).

The participants in their responses would always emphasize that Swazi people live as a community. That means, as Matolino (2014, p.33) notes, an individual cannot exist independently but corporately within the network. A young man therefore would marry a wife for his family, and he would consult his parents and relatives for input when making decisions. In the event that the wife fails to conceive, her in-laws are culturally obligated to institute certain interventions that would solve the problem, as the discussion below illustrates.

6.8. Family Interventions in Childless Marriages

It emerged from the discussions that in-laws would first consult herbalists to acquire herbal concoctions that would boost the woman's fertility. The in-laws, especially the sisters of the man, can also date a young girl on behalf of their brother, who they think can make him a father. If all that fails the in-laws would coerce the childless couple to visit traditional practitioners because most Swazis do not perceive childlessness as a medical condition. However, participant FJ further noted that,

it's not only the in-laws who put pressure on the wife; even the wife's family are always vigilant so that their daughter does not tarnish the family name by not producing children; they ensure that akawutseli lomndeni wakubo ngenhlamba - she does not bring insult to the family - especially in the event that the in-laws paid lobola for the woman. Her childlessness therefore makes the parents feel guilty that their daughter is failing to meet the expectations of her marital family.

When probed further on the association between *lobola* paid for the woman and her fertility, the participants argued that at the heart of this cultural practice lies the woman's ability to produce

offspring for her marital family. This view is underscored by Nhlapo (1992, p.48) in his book *Marriage and Divorce in Swazi Law and Custom* when he says:

The Bantu of Southern Africa have a saying: ‘cattle beget children.’..... Although a man acquires a woman with his cattle, the Bantu refer only to the children that woman will bear. Hence, children born when *lobola* has not been paid belong to the maternal grandfather, not the biological father.

Adding to the list of family interventions, an elderly participant, FV, made reference to a traditional ritual that families used to perform in earlier days to ascertain who was infertile between the man and his wife. Even though in a childless union the suspect would always be the woman, there were exceptional cases where families would perform rituals that would determine the infertile partner between the two. The couple would urinate over sorghum seeds, which would be separately put in two different calabashes at a secluded spot in the sacred house until the seeds germinated. Germinating seeds would represent the partner who was fertile, and *vice-versa*. In the event that the seed of the wife would not germinate the two families would agree on giving to the man *inhlanti* (co-wife), preferably a young close relative that would bear children on behalf of the barren wife. This ancient custom of the sororate which is still practiced in some families is explained by Fannin (1967, p.11) as:

An arrangement whereby a man has a preferential claim to his wife’s sister or sisters, whom he can marry to bear him children if the wife is infertile. ...where no young girls are available, a full brother of the bride is pointed out, indicating that when he marries and begets daughters, one of them will serve to cure any infertility defects her aunt may encounter in her marriage.

The participant added that if it turned out to be the man that was infertile, elders of the family would secretly organize that the wife would have a sexual encounter with the man's brother or close relative to conceive on behalf of the infertile husband. This would be concealed as a top family secret, only known to the elders that orchestrated the plan. In fact, as pointed out by one of the participants, the two would be called by the elders behind closed doors, and the elders would say,

siyanitfuma kutsi nente lomsebenti, emvakwaloko kute lokunihlanganisako – we are sending you to do this 'work', and when completed there should be no strings attached.

All responses to questions on family interventions depicted women's fertility as an important phenomenon on which the survival of every family hinges. Reference was also made to cases where a man dies unmarried but has a fiancée. As affirmed by Kuper (1947, p.89), the family of the deceased may still pay *lobola* for the lover and then provide a relative from amongst themselves to marry her so that she can bear children for the family. In the case of a wife of a deceased husband the relative would cohabit with her to raise the children of the deceased. This custom is known as '*kungena*,' meaning to enter the hut to raise seed for the deceased (Nhlapo, 1992, p.51).

Pursuing an issue that transpired in earlier discussions on the different dimensions of infertility, the participants were asked how a woman that had girl children only would deal with her "infertility". Most participants made reference to traditional wisdom whose custodians are elderly women in the marital home. The elderly women would give the woman *timbita kugucula sinye* – traditional herbs that will change the position of her womb for the woman to conceive a boy, or they would instruct the man that after sexual intimacy he should climb down on the right

hand side of the bed. The right hand side has cultural significance in that it is associated with the good and accepted in the society. The elderly would also tutor young women in taboos that would guide her both as a woman-in-waiting and an expectant mother. These taboos act as societal controls that set boundaries within which the women would live, and she would do everything carefully not to break any of them (Nassaka 1996, p.165).

As these interventions are instituted the barren woman is expected to comply with all the decisions that the family makes on behalf of their son; whether she likes them or not. Illustrating this point one participant noted that the Bible is also used to tutor the barren woman into complying with her in-laws' decisions. The families often cite the creation story that Eve was created from Adam, the head of the family. All the descendants of Eve should therefore be submissive, uncomplaining and cooperative with the descendants of Adam, who are men. The interventions instituted by families on the barren woman to help her conceive, as reflected above, demonstrate to us the value of women's fertility in Swazi families. Barren women had no identity because it would always be determined by her ability to procreate. Conversely, as data revealed women whose children were of mixed sexes perceived themselves as '*real*' women, whilst those who had girl children found themselves 'incomplete'. In the following section I will theorise the women's own perceptions of their personhood based on their fertility.

6.7. Analysis of the Findings

This section interprets the above findings using feminist theoretical lenses. The emergent issues drawn from the data are categorised into five themes; boy children as security for women, hegemonic control of women's sexual health, demeaning rituals and language to women's dignity, gender socialisation in families and girl children as a source of wealth.

Boy Children as Security for Women Status

As shown in the data almost all participants preferred boy children over girls for security of their status in their marital families. Also, shaped by societal beliefs and norms, boy children enabled them to view themselves as ‘full’ women that would perpetuate the family name through their male children. Put differently, the women themselves construct their personhood around their ability to procreate children, especially male children. They internalise all the dynamics of the male dominated social hierarchy which subsequently shape their self-conceptualisations that they can only be appropriately defined by male children (Nganga 2011; Kardam 2005). In that way men are able to reproduce themselves through social institutions, norms, values, traditional and religious cultures, so that their legacies would thrive down the generations. These inequalities, as further noted by Nganga (2011, p16), are very subtle making it difficult for women to find their way out of them. Clifford (2001, p.16) elaborating on the impact of the subtle social conditioning asserts;

It reinforces women’s reluctance to develop a sense of personal worth. Studies show that women, far more than men, tend to have low self-esteem....many women spend much of their time trying to figure out what other people want of them, especially what male “significant others” want.

Ngcobo (2007, p.540) comments on the plight of women that whether single, married, divorced or widowed, they are defined by their relationship to men, a father or a husband or a son; women accept their culturally defined position that they may only live through men. Drawing on the anguished cry of the main character, Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Ngcobo asks this

question: God when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? (2007, p.540).

Women also prefer boy children because they grant the women some social "autonomy" that they enjoy within clearly defined perimeters of the male-dominated homestead system (Carter and Parker, 1996, p.12). This autonomy grants women access to the only type of power they can control, and to old age security through their married sons (Kandiyoti, 1988, p.279).

Elderly women in particular would seek to ensure their sons' life-long attachment and loyalty to them, whilst suppressing the romantic bond between their sons and their wives. Hence, there is usually tension between the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law as they both compete for recognition by the son. This is because the power to control centers on the male child, who defines the woman's identity. So, to release him to be attached to another woman, his wife, impacts negatively on her personhood. Again, it is women turning against each other, a 'game' that beneficiaries of patriarchy always enjoy to watch. It is for this reason that Njoroge (1996, p.13) finds the struggle to liberate women from discrimination hard to achieve. In her words she claims, "we, too, become greedy for power, money and status; we, too, can exercise domination, control and exclusion, just like our brothers". However, it is possible to understand why the elderly women embrace the 'queen bee' attitude; they are victims of the 'queen bee syndrome' weaved into the hegemonic fabric, meant to divide and rule women in patriarchal societies. Hence, as Njoroge (1996, p.13) states, women need to be challenged to work in solidarity to recover their violated dignities, affirm one another and work on their imperfections so as to empower one another. Men do not only have control over women through their boy children, but also over their (women's) sexual health, as shown below.

Hegemonic Control over Women's Sexual Health

Giddens (2005, p.119) has explained hegemony as the social dominance of a group, exercised not through brute force, but through a cultural dynamic which extends into private life and social realms. The National Gender Policy of Swaziland (2010, p.10) has defined sexual health as an aspect of health that enhances personal relations, respect for the security of the person and the physical integrity of the human body, and the right to make decisions on sexuality and reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence. The participants' perceptions on their own fertility as presented in the findings are shaped by hegemonic constructions of sexuality that establish hierarchal relationships between femininity and masculinity. "Male centeredness" places men in an inherently superior position, whilst declaring their experiences as the norm. These hegemonic constructions as posited by Connell (2000) provide scaffolding for skewed relationships between women and men to be accepted as "natural" whilst inevitably legitimising dominance and submission. With reference to sex preferences of their children, some women expressed that all sexes were important to them but they preferred boys over girls to please and also meet the expectations of their families. Such mentalities are characteristic of hegemonic control in gender regimes, whereby women live their lives to serve and satisfy the interests and ascendancy of the dominant group. This gender order is accepted by the subordinates as natural, divine and unchangeable (Nganga 2011; Kardam 2005; Oduyoye 2001).

As also noted by Schippers (2007, p.87), hegemony legitimates ascendancy, and also inspires everyone to consent to and go along with social dominance. The excitement overtly expressed on the women's faces when asked about their experiences at the arrival of their children led me to conclude that a woman lives to prove her 'high quality' through childbearing. Failure to fit into this hegemonic 'jacket' results in misery. This is well demonstrated in the life stories of

participants FB, FI and FE. For participants FB and FI they were able to later meet the expectations by producing male offspring, thus their personhood was constructed and their worth was redeemed in their marital homes. FE on the other hand, (who had five girls only) had a diminished sense of identity because she felt like she owed society some debt or “treasure”.

Women’s sexual health embraces reproductive rights which are supposed to grant women freedom to decide on issues that pertain to their sexuality. However, the presented scenarios in the data show that cultural undercurrents deprive women of these rights, such that they have no control over their sexuality. It emerged that the ‘bride price’ in actual fact purchases her womb from her father, not the body (Nhlapo, 1992, p.48), and ownership of her womb now transfers to her marital home. This is evident in the rituals families perform to redeem childless unions, as cited by participants. For example when elders in her marital family have proven that their son is sterile, arrangements can be made with close relatives to surreptitiously give service to their property, the ‘bought womb’. Though not forced, the woman would submerge her dignity and ethics and comply with the ‘deal’. It is not only the intervention measures instituted by the in-laws in the event that a couple is childless that belittle the women, but also the rituals and the expressions used to describe her predicament, as discussed below.

Women’s Dignity and Demeaning Rituals, Language and taboos

African feminist scholars have shown researched links between demeaning rituals and women’s dignity (Donkor 2008; Ngcobo 2007; Oduyoye 1999; Martey 1998). Moreover, research on language within gendered societies shows how language evolves into discourses which give “expression to meanings and values; they are regarded as having the power to organise how a topic is talked about, understood and acted upon” (Christ, 1989, p.16). This discursive power

which is evoked by pejorative and discriminatory language works against women who are infertile as the data has shown. Having tried so hard and failed to be '*real*' women, they are called derogatory names, which blame them for having robbed their marital families a future. They become victims to verbal violence, which Oduyoye (1995) says it is even more pernicious than battering. The rituals that families perform to redeem an infertile couple can also be demeaning to women. For example, if the family establishes through ritual performances that it is the man that is sterile (though it is very rare), his "deficiency" will be treated as a top secret to protect his ego, yet in the case of the woman the substitute wife will be married publicly; after all an infertile woman does not have any ego to lose. Also, it is the woman that usually consults traditional and modern practitioners, prophets and pastors for help, where she becomes vulnerable to abuse. As confirmed by Olshansky (2003, p.264), women who experience failure each month as the arrival of menses signals another cycle without conception, are ridiculed and demeaned through rituals and language, and as a result they experience a loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, which may even lead to a feeling of being less attractive. It is not only the rituals and language that deplete the women's self-esteem, but also the taboos. Nassaka explains taboos as;

something which religion or custom regards as forbidden. They act as regulators of behaviour in society; breaking them is an abomination in society that is met with bad luck, rejection and even death. Taboos therefore inculcate fear and prevent or lessen the commission of sin" (1996:165).

However, Nassaka claims that even though taboos have a patriarchal agenda to fulfil, there are those that are healthy in that they bring social order, control behaviour and regulate misconduct in society (1996, p.166). This confirms Phiri's (2004, p.17) submission that on one hand there

are cultural practices that promote fullness of life for both women and men, and they should be encouraged, whilst on the other hand there are those cultural practices that are hurtful, and they should be stopped. In the case of taboos women are usually the victims of the hurtful ones that also cause fear and anxiety as they live in their world of 'do's and don'ts' (Nassaka 1996:174). This hinders the full development and meaningful participation of women in social and cultural affairs. Most taboos are meant to regulate and control the women's sexual behaviour. This affirms the patriarchal definition of women that they are a 'weaker' sex, and they are not mature enough to act responsibly on issues pertaining to sexual matters. Also, they cannot be trusted enough to uphold moral values without supervision from these cultural mechanisms. This is what Rakoczy (2004, p.292) would classify under sexual violence against women, which she believes women should be empowered to deal with. Drawing on the criteria that Traitler-Espiritu (1996, pp.75-77) claims would guide women in asserting the goodness of their bodies and learn to act on their own behalf, Rakoczy (2004, p.293) challenges women not to be passive but: affirm their bodies as intrinsically good and beautiful, in opposition to patriarchal calls to improve their bodies according to male norms; claim their right to bodily integrity, including sexual integrity, and to decisions concerning their bodies and claim their right to health and wellbeing as defined by themselves.

Lerner would argue that demeaning language rituals and taboos are results of patriarchal concepts built into all mental constructs of societies, which had remained invisible over the centuries (1993, p.3). These concepts projected men as whole and powerful and females as deviant, incomplete, physically mutilated and emotionally dependent. This understanding was founded on the fact that men and women were created differently, and therefore their biology, respective needs, capacities and functions are not the same (Lerner, 1993 p.4). In a patriarchal

society, men are viewed as naturally superior, stronger and more rational whereas women are viewed as naturally weaker, intellectually and rationally inferior, emotionally unstable and incapable of being involved in politics (Lerner, 1993, p.4). Therefore, men were designed by God to be dominant (Lerner, 1993, p.4). Men, being more rational, explain and regulate the world and have control over a woman's sexuality and her reproductive functions. Women sustain daily life and are responsible for the continuation of the human race and have no rights over men. Only men can act as a go-between with God and humans; women can only mediate with God through men (Lerner, 1993, p.4).

It also emerged from the data that perpetrators and custodians of derogatory language and rituals are the women themselves. This is what Connell (2000) labels as *emphasized femininity*, which he explains as women's compliance with their subordination, oriented to accommodate the interests and desires of men. So, whilst one admits that it is the women that oppress one another, they are not beneficiaries to hegemonic masculinities; as are the men. They sacrifice their dignities, happiness and support to one another in order to protect men. Men usually capitalise on this women's error, accusing them of being enemies to one another. They would often defensively ask in some gender platforms, "*have you ever seen men involved in ritual performances for women? It is the women against each other*". However, the issue here is not who performs what to who; it is who is meant to benefit from the performances. Connell observes that hegemonic masculinity ensures male dominance, whereby all men benefit on some level, though most do not have to be on the front lines or embody hegemonic masculinities. (1995, p.187). Whether the demeaning rituals and language are perpetuated through *emphasized femininity* or hegemonic masculinities, the fact remains that they diminish the victim's

personhood, and retard reasoning and development. Why would women turn against themselves, knowing full well that “a house divided against itself will not stand?” A discussion on socialisation which shapes women’s perceptions may shed some light on this question.

Gender Socialisation in Families

Demographic data of the participants showed some diversity in their age, educational background, number of children and location. However they had similar thought patterns on their fertility, which I attribute to gender socialisation. Social learning theory helps explain some of this. Socialisation, according to Clifford (2001), Riley (1989), Ruether (2002,p.1985), and Lerner (1983), trains women to understand themselves in terms of patriarchal super-ordination and subordination of being in the center or being on the margin. Further it leads them to internalise that they have to accept and adapt to things as they are. Gendered social norms which Namabira and Kamanzi (2013, p.88) have explained as formal and informal rules which govern people’s behavior stem from societal values of what it means to be a ‘*real*’ woman or a ‘*real*’ man. Fertility therefore is a societal value that defines a ‘*real*’ woman in Swazi marriages, and through socialisation, which is chiefly supported by biological essentialism, women are taught to accept patriarchal norms, values and beliefs as ‘natural’, ‘divine’ and obligatory. Failure to fulfill this expectation results in social sanctions which range from verbal violence to social alienation. Women attach value to themselves in patriarchal terms, which they accept as unchangeable, and this shall be illustrated below.

Girl Children as a Source of Wealth

Most participants viewed themselves as sources of wealth to their families, especially their fathers, and they were content with that. Their perceptions reminded me of a young woman I met in the streets of Manzini one morning. She was wearing a white T-shirt printed '*I am worth twenty cows*'. The 'bride wealth' that pays for women's fertility also accrues to the family wealth and status because culturally the number of cattle accumulated by the head of the family reflects the homestead's social standing and wealth. This confirms Vidrovitchi's (1997, p.18) insight that girls are valued for their dual role as producers and reproducers; they are a source of wealth, a promise of work and a guarantee of children. Paying bride wealth also entitles the husband to any wealth that his wife will accumulate after marriage. In most customary systems this practice is portrayed as a part of a rich African heritage whose disappearance would result in people's loss of identity and sovereignty. It is also claimed that it gives extra dignity and respect to the woman, and helps to keep marriages together (WLSA 1982). The culturally imposed "benefits" of *lobola* are so emphasised in families that women can view themselves as sources of wealth, and therefore important. Through socialisation women are made to believe that they are a source of wealth to their families in that the number of cattle controlled by their fathers reflects his prestige and the homestead's social status and strength.

6.8. Conclusion

Working from the premise that culture has polarised genders, allowing men to be portrayed as and to feel inherently superior, and women to fatalistically accept their inferiority, I have explored Swazi women's perceptions on their fertility. Through oral interviews with twenty-two women I have established that women of different ages, educational background and location, perceive themselves as conduits to a long life span of their marital family names. Their main

contribution to society is to ensure continuity and viability of their husbands' line. Cattle are paid to their parental families in exchange for their fertility. The arrival of a child therefore allows them to "become someone" in their families and society, resulting in the construction of their personhood.

The Swazi women's construction of their personhood being shaped by socio-cultural and religious beliefs on fertility affirms the African communitarian theory that it is the community that creates and produces an individual (Mbiti, 1970, p.135). This, as Matolino (2014, p.53) argues, holds destructive consequences particularly for women's personhood in that they become constrained by a communal reality to live accordingly to societal expectations. Thus, women can only ever make sense of their existence within the community. That said, it is not enough to blame Swazi women's diminished sense of self with regard to fertility only on the communitarian ethic. We have to go further to recognize that this communitarian ethic is founded on patriarchy. Hence African feminists challenge societies to question the lopsided status quo that seeks to safeguard the interests of men, whilst pushing women to the bottom of the pyramid. They argue that women should not passively accept their 'fate' and prop up patriarchy; rather with bruised and anguished voices, women should shout to recover their full humanity (Nganga 2011; Ackermann 2003; Hinga 2001; Kanyoro 2001). As Oduyoye (1995, p.81) has noted, "unlike beauty, oppression does not lie in the eyes of the beholder; it tags at the soul of the one who feels it".

Why do Swazi society and the women themselves construct women's personhood in the way explained in the preceding chapters? This is the question that I will address in the next chapter, where I shall explore the relationship between Swazi culture and Christianity as they reinforce each other in their perspectives of Swazi women's fertility.

CHAPTER 7:

Swazi Society's Socio-Cultural and Religious Constructions of Women's Fertility

7.1. Introduction

*It seems that the sexist elements of Western culture and **Christianity** (my emphasis) have simply fuelled the cultural sexism of traditional African society (Oduyoye, 1995, p.183).*

I begin this chapter with two scenarios I selected from data, which best illustrate Oduyoye's point in the above citation, that traditional culture and Christianity are interconnected. Kabonde (1996, p.213) confirms these sentiments by stating that "cultural teachings are so intimately related to religious teachings such that religion cannot be divorced from culture; thus the two act upon each other, they influence each other and they propagate each other". The narratives presented below are about women who were "trying to make it in a patriarchal male dominated society". (Carter and Parker, 1996, p.21), where their fertility and their ability to bear children, especially sons would qualify them to be "real" women, both at home and in church. They set the scene for achievement of the chapter's objective, which is to discuss Swazi society's socio-cultural religious constructions of women's personhood in relation to their fertility.

Scenario 1

Participant F11, who was in a childless marriage shared how she had endured long years of suffering due to socio-cultural and religious expectations that she should fulfill the expected 'duty' to biologically increase and multiply (Oduyoye 1999). She claimed to have tried everything possible to conceive without success, including consulting every gynecologist in Swaziland, performing traditional cleansing rituals and attending healing and deliverance

services advertised in local newspapers. As a Catholic, she often prayed for a child and even recited the Catholic prayer for a child daily with her husband during their devotional hour. She paraphrased the prayer as follows:

God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; you who gave a child to Abraham..... Seeing the tears of Hannah, Lord you gave her a child. Elizabeth who was barren in her old age, you blessed her with a child. You who are the giver of all perfect gifts, we ask you to bless us with wonderful children..... The days, months and years of our sorrow and pain for not having a child, we surrender them to you. We forgive every person who has insulted us or made fun of us because we were not blessed with a child. Jesus, our Lord and Master, bless those who have hurt us. Amen.

From the prayer we infer that the God of the listed patriarchs gave a child (a son) to Abraham, the head of the family, and to the miserable Hannah and barren Elizabeth he also gave a child (son). Children (especially the sons) are a ‘perfect gift’ and a blessing from God. Put differently, those who do not have this ‘perfect gift’ are cursed; hence they are ridiculed and belittled by society. Oduyoye confirms this insight by drawing attention to the fact that notable patriarchal, priestly and prophetic names in the Bible refer to the sons of women who passed through agonies of childlessness to have baby boys - Isaac, Samuel and John the Baptizer (1999, p.115).

Scenario 2

One of the local newspapers, *Times of Swaziland*, published a series of articles on a miracle prophet who makes his followers eat grass and stones and showers them with miracle money which they find in their bank accounts. An article published on Monday May 5, 2014, by the

newspaper, entitled ‘Pregnant Women Flock to Choose Babies’ Gender’ quoted the prophet saying;

I can change the sex of your child in your womb, and you can give birth to a baby of your choice(*Times of Swaziland* May 5, 2014).

The pregnant women were reported to have queued before the prophet, who they referred to as ‘god’, and wanted him to pray that they would give birth to baby boys that, culturally, were a priority in every family. The article featured a picture of a pregnant woman in the queue with the prophet laying his hand on her tummy praying that she would deliver a baby boy.

The two scenarios signal the interface between Swazi culture and Christianity and how these two variables shape societal views and perceptions on women’s fertility. Hence, the main research question that this chapter sought to answer was: how does traditional Swazi culture interface with Christianity and to what extent do they reinforce each other in their perspectives of Swazi women’s fertility? The chapter is divided according to the following themes that emerged from the data:

- i. Socio-cultural constructions of the status of women and men;
- ii. Religious constructions of the status of women and men;
- iii. Socio-cultural constructions on women’s fertility;
- iv. Correlation between socio-cultural and religious constructions of women’s fertility; and
- v. Christian values that reinforce societal perceptions on women’s fertility.

7.2. Socio-Cultural and Religious Context of the Swazi

As shown in the introductory chapter, Swaziland is a patriarchal society that shares a unique history with Christianity that began with a dream by King Somhlolo. Christianity interacted with

a society whose cultural and religious memory was intact, and had not been disturbed by any imperial or cultural imposition. Swazis, as with all traditional societies, were a highly religious people, with their religion integral to their culture and to their daily life. Kings were mediators with the transcendent realm through their ritual functions and were held to be descended from divinity (Mzizi 2003). It was therefore easy for Swazis to accept King Somhlolo's vision on the coming of Western missionaries as divinely willed, resulting in Christianity making its home within Swazi religio-cultural thought (Nyawo 2004).

The advent of Christianity in Swaziland therefore is unique in that it was at the initiative of a religio-cultural figure, the king, who was and is viewed as a unifying factor and a symbol of culture and religion to the nation. As Kasenene observed;

Unlike in most African countries, missionaries did not come to Swaziland on their own initiative, they were invited by the Swazi authorities, and they received an enthusiastic welcome when they arrived. All this was because of Somhlolo's dream (1993, p.44).

Subsequent kings of Swaziland carried out Somhlolo's vision and continued his religious legacy such that many Western missionaries faced no obstacles as they made inroads into the country. Swaziland consequently built her socio-economic and political ideology upon shared values and the Bible; thus making culture and religion an intricate and intertwined web. The duo share similar beliefs and values on women's fertility, and they reinforce each other in constructing women's identities.

Whist traditional culture co-exists with Christianity in Swaziland, almost every Swazi today claims to be a Christian if asked of their religion. Religious demographic data given by

International Religious Freedom (IRF) report (2012) estimates 90 percent of the Swaziland population to be Christian, about 2 percent to be Muslim, and less than 10 percent to belong to other religious groups such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and small numbers of Jews and Baha'is.

Members of the Christian denominations include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Charismatics, and Evangelicals. Most Christians in Swaziland are Zionists, who practice a blend of Christianity and indigenous culture, thus becoming an “African version of the received European Christian faith” (Mzizi, 2003, p.47). The cultural aspect in Swazi Zionism strongly connects with royalty, especially the King of Swaziland, who is the Patron, such that “one can perceive it in terms of an entrenched Christo-cultural faith, or some form of civil religion” (Mzizi, 2004, p.96).

Swazi culture, being patriarchal, resonates with the patriarchal tenets in Christianity, and the pair becomes an accomplice in their views of the different statuses in the society. That is, there are certain sanctions and expectations imposed on women in the name of culture, and Christianity affirms and conforms to them (Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu 2007; Kanyoro 2001). The duo therefore becomes an inseparable pair in defining the status of women as subordinate actors of history, thus shaping the societal perceptions of their fertility in the family. Also, it gives men the status as heads of households and decision-makers, all of which gives them control over members of that family (WLSA 2001), including women's reproductive abilities.

Given the context of the study where a fusion of patriarchal traits between culture and religion exists, this chapter draws on African Feminist Theology to understand how Swazi culture and Christianity reinforce each other in their perspectives of Swazi women's fertility. The double dose of oppression and subjugation from Swazi culture and Christianity, which women suffer as

they struggle to earn status in their marital families through their fertility, becomes an ethical concern (Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu 2007).

7.3. Data Presentation

Framed within an exploratory and feminist critical research design, as stated in the introduction, women’s opinions, attitudes and feelings were sought in order to ascertain the extent to which Swazi culture and Christianity reinforce each other in their perspectives of Swazi women’s fertility.

The 2 tables below provide an overview of the individual participants (Table 1), and a focus group discussion (Table 2).

Table 1 Key Women Participants and pseudonyms

Designation	Age	Marital status	Location	Religious affiliation	Pseudonyms
Leader of Christian Women’s fellowship	51-60	Married	Rural	Evangelical Church	F8
New Testament scholar	41-50	Married	Urban	Roman Catholic Church	F9
Lady pastor	51-60	Single	Urban	Nazarene Church	F10
Gender activist	31-40	Married	Urban	Roman Catholic	F11
Medical practitioner	41-50	In separation	Peri-urban	Africa Evangelical Church	F12
Teacher	31-40	Married	Peri-urban	Charismatic Church	F13
Leader of Christian Women’s Fellowship	41-50	Married	Urban	Free Evangelical Church	F14
Biblical scholar and gender activist	51-60	Married	Rural	Methodist Church	F15

Source: Fieldwork June to October 2013

Table 2 Women Participants in the FGD and pseudonyms

Age	Location	Marital status	Education	Religious affiliation	Pseudonym
21-30	Rural	Single	Primary	Zionist Church	F16
31-40	Rural	Single	Non-literate	Anglican Church	F17
31-40	Rural	Married	Non-literate	Zionist Church	F18
41-50	Rural	Widowed	Non-literate	Free Evangelical Assemblies	F19

Source: Fieldwork June to October 2013

As is evident from the tables above, data were collected from 12 women participants whose selection was based on demographic factors that included age, designation, location, marital status, education and religion; 3 were aged 51-60, 4 aged 41-50, 4 aged 31-40 and 1 aged 21-30. Seven participants were married, whilst 3 were single parents, 1 was married but had separated from her spouse, and 1 was widowed. In terms of their locations, 6 lived in rural areas, 2 in peri-urban areas, whilst 4 stayed in urban areas. Of the 12 females, the 8 key participants were educated, whilst the 4 that participated in the focus group discussion were non-literate, with one having gone up to lower primary level. In terms of religious membership all participants were Christians, but were diversified in that they represented different denominational backgrounds.

Much of the analysis in this chapter is drawn from personal interviews and a focus group discussion. Whilst the key participants consented that I could only use their designations in the profile tables, the participants in the focus group discussion preferred to remain anonymous. There are a number of themes that emerge from their responses, which also comprise excerpts from their personal stories. In what follows, a detailed analysis of these themes will be presented. The themes are as follows: The status of women and men according to Swazi culture; the status of women and men according to Christianity; socio-cultural constructions women's on fertility;

interconnectedness between Swazi culture and Christianity on women's fertility, and Christian values that reinforce societal perceptions on women's fertility. These will be discussed in turn below.

The Status of Women and Men According to Swazi Culture

All the key participants in separate interviews and the 4 participants in the focus group discussions found Swazi culture to have a tremendous influence in all facets of life, and by extension the status of both women and men in the family. This pervading influence of culture was best expressed by participant F12, who asserted,

...culture leaves no area of a Swazi person's life untouched. It is in our language, our idioms; it permeates our workplaces, our schools, and the way we spend leisure time; hence it is no surprise that it shapes our views on gendered status in Swazi families.

Participant F15 confirmed this as follows:

if we as a nation have even received an international accolade that we have preserved our culture and traditions, then that should tell you something about the far-reaching end of culture in Swazi society, so far-reaching that it influences, to a very large extent, the way we as Swazis define women's status in the family which is the basic unit of society.

Women's Status

Seven participants, F9, F10, F11, F12, F13, F14, and F15 viewed culture as negatively influencing women's status, whilst the remaining five, participant F8, F16, F17, F18, and F19 identified some positive influences. The seven participants expressed their perception of Swazi culture by making references to cultural practices that degrade women's status. These practices

include the paying of *lobola*, *inhlanti* and *kuhlawula*. According to participant F11, *lobola* sometimes reduces women to “purchased” items. For this reason, some women could hardly challenge decisions affecting them that have been dictated to them by husbands. This was also true for *inhlanti*, the young co-wife, who “culturally, is afforded little room to make her own and independent decisions whether to join her sister or aunt’s marital family or not”, noted participant F15. *Kuhlawula* too, which loosely translates as paying “damages” to a girl or woman’s family impregnated before marriage, is another practice that according to the participants, promotes stigmatisation of women who have had children outside marriage. Participant F14 explained the significance:

The fact that during this ceremony a cow, unlike in other ceremonies, is killed outside the homestead and eaten wholly, leaving no residuals, to me, sends a clear message to people, that this is an anathema.

The inferior status of a woman is also evident in the way her marital family controls her fertility, claimed a middle aged gender activist. In her view, barrenness grants in-laws the legal and customary right to interfere in the marriage of a childless couple. The in-laws at times consult traditional doctors, without the wife’s consent, so as to fix this "crisis". They may also perform unbecoming rituals in an attempt to correct the wife’s "problem". She is expected to adhere to any suggestions made by in-laws so as to ensure that her marriage is "healthy" and there is no breakdown of relationship between her, the husband and her in-laws.

Participant F11 emphatically explained the culturally defined woman’s status in these words;

...the woman in my opinion and it’s not just an abstract opinion mind you, I’m a mature Swazi woman, above 50 and therefore, I believe I speak authoritatively because I have experienced what I’m sharing, both from my biological family and in my marital family,

how culture defines me as a woman, and how it defines my status. So for me, the woman is the primary servant of the family; that is how I have felt as I have walked through life as a woman.

This insight was substantiated with the observation that a Swazi woman is defined by what she does for the family and not by what she receives from the family. When she gets married for instance, the primary concern of her marital family is what she is bringing to the family. As asserted by participant F13, a middle aged professional woman,

Getting married is not about the relationship per se; that is, how we are going to live with this person as in-laws, or how we are going to share our life with her. It's about what value she is going to add to the family. And therefore, for the duration of her married life, a Swazi woman is under surveillance on what value she is bringing or what she has brought to the family; that is what defines where she stands in the family.

That means her asset value is measured by how she is able to attend to the wishes of everyone in the family, from a small child to the senior, and the most senior of her marital family.

As alluded to earlier, some participants viewed culture positively as granting a remarkable status to women, *especially those who respect their husbands, in-laws and the entire extended family*, claimed participant F8, a participant who leads a Christian Women's Fellowship. For example, in-laws would force their son to pay dowry for his wife, and in a polygamous family, the senior wife assumes the responsibilities of her mother in-law when she dies. Furthermore, it was noted in the focus group discussion that,

If the woman has cows whether she obtained them as a gift from her father or from the ones her son in-law pays her (insulamnyembeti), those cows belong to her, and the whole

family would know that her husband doesn't have a say. The husband would always seek for the wife's permission to sell her cow. She has the right to refuse, with full backing and protection from her in-laws.

Some participants in the focus group discussions also observed that the status that Swazi culture accords women is evidenced in the light chores that they do in the homes, which are meant to preserve the women as “weaker” but precious gifts in every family. However, participant F18 pointed out another reason for such division of labor in the families. In her words she claimed;

Assigning women jobs that require a lot of physical effort is detrimental to their fertility; we should note that a "real" wife in Swazi culture is one who can conceive for posterity, and also her status is defined by her fecundity.

On cultural practices that “fix” barrenness, some participants viewed them positively in that they basically served to redeem and preserve the women’s status. Participant F16 who spoke passionately about Swazi culture made an example of her aunt (elder sister of her mother) regarding this issue. She claimed that her aunt, who was married to a chief, remained barren despite all attempts to "fix" her barrenness. As a result, her (participant’s) mother, *inhlanti* (co-wife) was brought into the family to bear children on behalf of her elder sister. Subsequently, her mother bore nine children and one of the sons was given to the barren aunt so that she could raise him as her biological child. The participant viewed this cultural practice as appropriate because it secured her aunt's status in the chief’s family, now that she had a son. Noteworthy, is that the same tradition according to the participant, also earned her aunt the status of Queen (*Inkhosikati*) in the chief's royal residence because Swazi tradition denies a barren wife the status of *Inkhosikati*. But, in this particular case, the *inhlanti* rite qualified her aunt to be one.

Men's status

All participants in separate interviews expressed the view that culture accords men a high status in the family. The man is regarded as the “head” of the family and therefore a decision-maker. He is expected to provide for his family, perform errands that require “masculine strength”, whilst the woman remains in the kitchen – cooking, washing nappies, clothes and utensils, to name a few ‘feminine’ chores. His high status is also evidenced in many privileges like land ownership, that men enjoy. In some cases, even a married woman cannot act unilaterally or represent herself in traditional courts; she must ask her male relatives to act on her behalf. Swazi culture therefore, socialises men to believe that they have a higher status than women in the family.

Adding a new dimension to the cultural influence on men’s status, participant F15 asserted,

Swazi culture does not place as much demand on the man as it does on the woman to earn approval and status. As a woman, I have felt that a Swazi man does not even have to work very hard to earn his status because its ready-made for him; he just has to move into it, whilst for the woman, it's a daily struggle to get approval or to earn a certain status and she is forever under surveillance.

Further deliberations revealed that this kind of status protects men from facing many cultural sanctions, which women cannot escape. As participant F15 noted, *...and that explains why Swazi culture is so forgiving to men; what is a misdemeanor for a woman or even a serious taboo is something that a man can get away with a slap on the wrist, whilst the woman can ‘fry’ for the same offence.* She added that it was intriguing that mostly it would be women that would feel very sorry for a man who would be vilified by his critics in society; *even sorrier than we feel for a woman who is being tossed about in a marriage or a pre-marital relationship.* So, according to

Swazi culture, the men have the status, preset for them, ready-made to move into; yet with the woman, she is always on trial and being tested, so much so that multiple sarcastic and contemptuous definitions can come out of that entire cultural surveillance process. And, the man would be justified to have extra-marital affairs. Her view is supported by Moyo (2004, p.73) who claims that gender injustice in communities also manifests itself in the common moral discourse which demands unwavering obedience from women whilst men get away with their aberrant sexual behaviors. For most women she adds, *their marriage certificates become their death certificates as they have to remain married to their husbands even in cases where there is unfaithfulness.*

On the contrary, all the four participants in the focus group discussions glorified Swazi culture for according men their 'rightful' status as leaders of their families. Agreeing with one another they claimed that men have authority to make decisions for their families without consulting their wives. Cultural practices like polygamy and surrogacy were explained by the participants as being beneficial to the women too, especially in the case of barrenness. This confirms the social learning theory which posits that through socialisation administered by agencies of social controls, women internalise social norms and values, and they find these norms to be advantageous to them (Giddens, 2005, p.164). The theme below explores the same issues on the unequal status of women and men, but within a religious context.

The Status of Women and Men According to Christianity

Participants submitted that Christianity shared some similarities with Swazi culture. However, some viewed the interrelationship in negative terms, whilst others were positive. Most key participants explained Christianity as having contributed immensely in developing chauvinistic attitudes towards women in churches; *“for example there are fewer ordained women pastors in*

Swaziland because church leadership is a male domain”, claimed participant F10. Participant F15, explained Christianity as a religion esteemed for its values, yet paradoxically, its values are used to reinforce negative societal perceptions of women’s status, whilst endorsing male dominance in families. She added that women’s submission is overemphasized in Christianity in an attempt to uphold what the church advances as “Christian values”. This overemphasis forces women to remain in marriage despite difficulties and ill-treatment from her husband and in-laws for fear of defying Christian religious principles. This observation was echoed by participant F13, who asserted that Judeo-Christian religious traditions encourage the ill-treatment of women and suppress female voices in the name of religion. This suppression of female voices creates room for patriarchs to be abusive whilst "retaining" their status before God. It was further observed that Swazi Christian men would justify their immoral escapades by making reference to patriarchs like Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon, who were polygamists and had concubines whom they sexually exploited to gratify their lust.

Some participants submitted that Christianity has promoted the oppression of women in that it grants men excessive superiority in society. Similarly, Swazi culture upholds male superiority and dominance in society and it suppresses female voices. The participants emphasized that these two orientations are equally oppressive to women because Swazi Christians would often cite the Bible as their point of reference for repressive action against women. A similar response stated that Christianity has largely contributed to stereotypical perceptions of Swazi women in that the Bible presents a man as a decision maker, and the woman a subordinate. This leads to some Swazi Christians presupposing that God “Himself” supports the subordination of women and their treatment as second class citizens. The Christians would maintain that the Bible is God’s

authoritative voice and therefore, they should literally follow whatsoever it presents. *The creation story in Genesis is often cited to explain the status of women and men according to the Bible*, claimed participant F15.

Arguing from a different perspective, participant F10 claimed that Christianity can only be oppressive if it is couched in culture or dressed up in culture or disguised as culture; otherwise Jesus Christ, the foundation of Christianity practiced inclusiveness. He accorded status to his female contemporaries by breaking the barrier between women and men. The participant further cited Christ strongly opposing the stoning to death of a woman of “loose” character who was caught committing adultery. The remarkable status that Jesus accorded women was evidently demonstrated at resurrection, when he gave Mary Magdalene (a woman) an important message to tell his apostles that they would meet in Galilee - Matthew 28:10.

...so my take is that authentic Christian doctrine teaches that a wife and husband have an equality before God even though the husband takes the leading role and the wife the secondary role in the family. Nonetheless, their roles complement each other, added participant F10.

This view is shared by Madiba (1996, p.276), who asserts that Christianity in itself is inherently liberative; the problem is that “our male dominating structures have ignored the visionary tenets of the gospel to suit their own designs and enhance their earthly power”.

Participant F16, F17, F18 and F19 argued that God’s divine order places women at a subordinate position to men. As shown in the creation story Eve was created out of Adam’s rib to be a helper and to procreate. They also made reference to biblical narratives which glorify men as “kings” and “masters” to their wives; for example Sarah, as noted by participant F18, would always call her husband Abraham “king”. They lamented that contemporary women were now violating

God's divine order by "demanding" equal status between sexes. God's order, emphasized participant F16 is that, *indvodza ibe semphumalanga, umfati abe sentshonalanga* (the man must be at the east and the woman be at the west). This polarised status between women and men created by socio-cultural religious constructions also shapes societal perceptions on women's fertility, as it shall be discussed below.

Swazi Socio-Cultural Constructions on Fertility

Data revealed that Swazi culture does shape people's perceptions on women's fertility. Women's fertility according to Swazi culture is important for the family name to be perpetuated. Aptly put by participant F9, *women's fertility is primarily important for ensuring that there will be, for example a Nyawo family tomorrow and for generations to come; it is mainly for posterity.* Participant F15 emphasized that whilst women's fertility is essential and sacred for the continuity of the male lineage, it is not to benefit her. She further illustrated her point by saying,

...that is why you would hear from death announcements the bereaved family of an unmarried Swazi man summoning all his children from former partners to come and attend the funeral, even if the man did not play any role whatsoever in the lives of these children that he fathered and did not take any responsibility for. They all must come and pay their last respects. However, we have never heard it being required for a woman who is deceased and leaves behind children that she had outside marriage. No! [She frowned].

Hence, as observed earlier on, what could be seen as a misdemeanor for a woman is not regarded so for a man; it is to be understood that the man had a need.

Furthermore, it was observed that Swazi culture defines woman's fertility more in androcentric

terms. Her fertility is there to serve a male need, and there is premium placed on male children. That is why even in today's modern society there would still be couples who would have as many as 5-6 children because the earlier births were girl children. According to participant F15, the obligation that the woman should bear at least one son for her marital family creates much anxiety and stress for the woman to want to prove her worth. If she fails and the man conceives a child out of wedlock, the in-laws would press for the child's receipt, incorporation, and integration into the family, without any consideration of the women's feelings of betrayal. In the words of F11,

...that the wife feels hurt and betrayed is disregarded and for me, it's really a source of concern that women's fertility is defined in terms of utility value to patriarchal interests, which are interests outside her.

It also came out strongly from the responses that a 'really fertile' woman in the Swazi family is the one that can produce an 'heir' for the family; *it is a crisis for the patriarchal family structure, if a boy is not forthcoming; it's a crisis, I repeat*, stressed participant F11.

To support her argument, participant F11 drew on the observation that people who apply and advertise in the local newspapers to change their surnames are mostly males born out of wedlock, and they are changing from a maternal surname to the biological father's surname. For them, it becomes very important to define their identity from the male line and reclaim their place in the patriarchal family structure.

Participant F15, pointed out that despite Swazi society's encounter with modern cultures, the indigenous perception on the importance of woman's fertility remains intact:

hence customary measures like finding inhlanti, (co-wife) that are part of ancient Swazi culture may appear to have been dispensed with, but the man would still find a way of

“fixing” his problem of a childless marriage without having to resort to those outdated customary measures.

She added that because childlessness is viewed as such a major challenge in Swazi culture, the culture will be very forgiving of the men, if he “fixes” it in anyway, at his disposal; for instance, he can conceive a child with the younger sister without any intentions of marrying her, or from a next door neighbor, without any care of the relational implications.

Data revealed that a “barren” woman could also be one that has given birth to children with disabilities. Participant F13 who had one child that was mentally challenged shared her experience as an ‘infertile’ woman as follows,

Childlessness in Swazi traditional frameworks is not only the inability to produce children but it also refers to giving birth to a disabled child. Personally, I gave birth to a mentally ‘retarded’ boy. Such births are associated with witchcraft or curses from the mother's side. Swazi culture and traditions uphold that a ‘real’ child is one who is mentally healthy. So, mine is not regarded as a child. As a result, he is not considered when food is dished out. By extension, they do not even see him as a child for any purpose whatsoever. According to societal expectations I still need to give birth to a “proper” child.

Women’s fertility therefore that defines a ‘real’ woman in a Swazi family goes beyond her ability to procreate; her offspring must be mentally and physically healthy.

When comparing earlier submissions on the women’s conceptions of their own fertility with the socio-cultural constructions of women’s fertility, it becomes clear that women’s thought patterns are shaped by societal perceptions. Put simply, women are products of their environment. In

what follows below is parallelism between the co-existing cultures which shape societal perceptions on women's fertility.

Interconnectedness between Swazi Culture and Christianity on Women's Fertility

All participants could identify some affinities between Swazi culture and Judeo-Christian traditions, which impacted either negatively or positively on women's survival in their families. To most key participants, Christianity perpetuated oppression and male dominance in the society. They made reference to the Old Testament narratives where women were treated as second class citizens, and were segregated and prejudiced in society. They further noted that God's pronouncement against Eve after the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, which was related to child bearing, justifies the ill-treatment of women in most cultures. As asserted by a female pastor,

Thus, women are seen as objects of procreation, ideally fashioned by God for productiveness. Perhaps it is on this account that Jews and Swazis perceive women as instruments that serve to retain male lineages through giving birth to male children.

According to participant F11, the value of a woman's fertility in such cultures attempts to answer why Sarah in the Bible supported the idea of Abraham sleeping with Hagar (surrogacy). Swazi culture is also characterized by similar attitudes especially in situations parallel to that of Abraham and Sarah; hence it allows polygamy and surrogacy especially on the basis of women's infertility. Elaborating on Abraham's narrative, the participant argued that if Sarah had to "persuade" her husband to be sexually intimate with her maidservant who would bear a son that she would adopt, it reflects the magnitude of the pressure from the Jewish society for being childless. Another striking example from the Bible that participants cited was the story of Hannah and Penninah. Hannah had no peace due to her barrenness and subsequently, she became

an object of ridicule to Penninah. Perhaps, as participant F10 argued, *Penninah was “plan b” for Elkanah after discovering that Hannah his first wife could not have children that would make him a man.*

Participant F9 and F11 raised concern about St Paul’s writings that they propagated gender imbalances and the “child factor” mentality. They made reference to 1Timothy 2:8-15 which reads:

Therefore I desire that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness with self-control.

The two participants submitted that Christian scriptures are replete with several passages which are often cited in churches to reinforce cultural stereotypes on male dominance over women and women’s childbearing obligation. Their observation was similar to that of WLSA (2001, p.76) which also noted that the church ignored texts which uphold gender relations of equality, mutual respect, and the promotion of humanity of women.

Reflecting on these biblical narratives led most individual participants, at separate interviews, to the conclusion that Judeo-Christian women were used as sexual tools for child bearing, and God seemed to have condoned such acts. They claimed that some Swazi men would therefore feel justified to have casual sexual relations or multiple sex partners in order to beget children, under the pretext that it is a biblical norm. More so, in Swazi culture, as noted by participant F14, a

promiscuous man who begets children everywhere is given a heroic name, *inganwa*, whilst a woman involved in the same sexual “decadence” is labeled a harlot (*ingwandla*) that is dangerous to every man. It is also believed that such a woman does not have the “fruit of the womb”. As a result, she is culturally banned from any interaction with a married couple. Similarly, men in the Jewish culture were not expected to be in the company of harlots especially in a public space. A harlot was treated as a private object; in the same mentality, Swazi culture refers to such a woman as *intfo yangasense*, which translates to a private object. Swazi society frowns upon any man who makes a public appearance with his ‘private object’, also incapable of producing any offspring.

The emphasis laid on women’s fertility by Swazi culture and Judeo-Christian traditions doubles the anxiety and stress for Swazi Christian women who are childless, such that they become vulnerable to different manipulations. A Christian woman in the medical field, F12 who had been jilted by her husband for being infertile, had this to say;

Barrenness tears one's heart apart especially because some ill healthy women like HIV positive women manage to conceive despite their unfit bodies. Furthermore, there are expectant mothers who exercise induced abortion yet some of us desperately need babies but we cannot conceive. This then worries one especially when you are a devout Christian because as Christians we believe that God can solve all our problems.

Participant F12 claimed to have tried everything, including various medical procedures which have disfigured her womb and left permanent scars on her tummy. Other than the physical scars, she had suffered emotional stress caused by stigmatisation both at church and in the family, that

she was not a “real” woman. Subsequently she confided with an elderly pastor-prophet to get spiritual and emotional therapy. As she explained:

I started sharing my problems with him. He then offered to "pray" for me so that he could "exorcise" the "demons" that he claimed possessed me. But the manner in which he offered to pray for me was questionable. This is because he literally wanted to have oral and/or sexual intercourse with me in that he desired to place his "holy" hand on my vagina or insert his penis in my vagina, claiming that these two were some of the methods he used to “fix” serious problems like mine. He added that the Almighty God works through miracles therefore I should not be terrified by his lewd suggestions. I lost my cool and out of anger I gave him E20.00 and chucked him off my house. I was surprised by his licentious behavior especially because he claimed to be a prophet of God. This compounded my problem and once again, I could feel the pain and vacuum of childlessness which cannot easily be filled.

Issues of this nature, as Kanyoro (2001, p.159) has observed, illustrate the reality of women’s powerlessness and vulnerability in the face of socio-cultural and religious prescriptions. In addition to the interconnectedness between Swazi culture and Christianity which can be liable to abuse, as we have seen in the above narrative, there are Christian values that reinforce socio-cultural constructions on women’s fertility, as shall be discussed below.

Christian Values that Reinforce Societal Perceptions on Women’s Fertility

Participant F15 explained Christianity as a foreign religion that came into the country around 1844 and made a pervading influence, such that today the Swazi population is predominantly Christian. As a result, it influenced Swazi traditions, and successfully reinforced the already existing traditional religious thought patterns of the Swazi. She claimed that Christian values

resonated with Swazi culture especially in their emphasis on the “child factor” which mounts a lot of pressure on women.

In contrast, participant F10, claimed that it is Swazi culture that pervades the church; *culture does not leave even the tiny corner of a Swazi untouched, the church treads on the footsteps of culture, with regards to the values it inculcates to people*. This participant was of the conviction that the church would need to be transformed or to be ‘born again’ to be able to wean itself from the pervading influence of cultural values that uphold fertility. Then, it would be able to provide a new alternative or vision on the proper meaning of motherhood. Presently, Christianity, just as Swazi culture, defines motherhood according to biological function, such that even a teenage mother becomes a full woman, now that she is the “mother of so and so”. *How I wish we can learn as a church that ‘make’ (mother) has a broader meaning that also accommodates women without biological children*, lamented participant F15.

Agreeing with each other, participant F9, F11, F13 and F15 criticised the biblical language that is often used to glorify fertility. Participant 15 noted that;

Just in the first chapter of the Bible, there is ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’, I think a literal interpretation of the text influences people’s views on fertility of women. Over and above, the creation stories in Genesis - that a man was created first and from the rib of the man, a woman was created - reinforces the belief that a man owns a woman’s body and soul.

These participants also identified patriarchal definitions in the Bible which mount pressure on women to bear children for their marital homes, whilst also perpetuating relational imbalances in Swazi families. According to most participants, the Christian emphasis on children being a gift and a blessing from God causes acute anxiety for women. The opposite of blessing is curse; so,

every woman would want her marriage to be divinely blessed, than being cursed, observed participant F14 in a childless marriage. The biblical narratives on infertile women like Sarah, Hannah and Elizabeth, which then shows God opening their wombs to conceive, influences socio-cultural constructions on women's fertility; people believe that it is always the woman that is infertile in a childless union, added participant F9 and F12. Furthermore, it was noted that the Bible presents women as nurturers that should ensure that children are always in good health from as early as the child's development in the mother's womb. It is on this account that the wife of Manoah for example, was instructed not to take alcoholic drinks when pregnant with Samson. Some participants also raised concern about the emphasis that the church puts on people's status about relational living; thus treading in the footsteps of Swazi culture. As observed by participant F15, *lisontfo ligcizelela sigaba kune budlelwane* (church emphasises status more than relational living). Most women's teachings in the churches are on women's submission under the God-ordained male leadership in every structure of the society. Thus women in childless marriages are socialised to accept any oppression, dehumanisation and marginalisation that they suffer in their marital homes. Any female independent thinker who questions such teachings is labeled a radical, and therefore a social misfit; *the greatest genius of patriarchy is to put women against one another*, added participant F15.

The above data have shown women as victims and survivors of the Swazi society's socio-cultural and religious constructions as they reinforce each other in their emphasis on women's fertility in every home between Swazi culture and Christianity. In the following section I will theorise this intricate web as experienced by Swazi women.

7.3. Analysis of the findings

This section interprets the above findings using feminist theoretical lenses. The emergent issues drawn from the data are categorised in themes which proceed as follows: Swazi culture and Christianity as an intricate web; the emphasis on the child factor in both traditions; interplay between Swazi cosmology and Christianity; and dichotomy in the participants' views.

Swazi Culture and Christianity as an Intricate Web

Responses from participants on questions that sought to ascertain the relationship between Swazi culture and Christianity with regards to women's fertility noticeably captured the intricate web between the two orientations. Data have shown that both traditions were perceived to assign unequal status to women and men, thus placing women at the margins of the society, whilst men enjoy their 'divine' right of dominion. These findings confirm Kabeer's (1996:16) observation that inequalities are interlinked through interaction between different traditions or institutions, creating situations which disadvantage individuals and groups in multiple ways.

Participant F15, made an interesting observation on the different statuses that women and men assume in the society. She viewed a man's status as "ready-made", whilst a woman has to work hard to earn a certain status that will unfortunately not benefit her, but the patriarchal agenda. I find this to be what Giddens (2005) has fittingly defined as an "ascribed" status and an "achieved" status; the 'ascribed' being the one assigned to you on the basis of biological factors like sex, whilst the 'achieved' is the one that is earned through an individual's own effort. It is worth noting that both Swazi culture and Christianity work jointly in creating these polarised statuses; hence they reinforce each other in shaping Swazi people's thought patterns on women's fertility. It is typically the case that both traditions place high premiums on biological parenting,

whilst exerting a great deal of pressure on women to try very hard to earn their status through child bearing. A woman's reproductive abilities are being externally controlled without her consent, in other words. As Donkor (2008) has noted, patriarchal discourse defines women uniquely as solely suited for procreation and nurturing, and through patriarchal institutions that favor men, they (men) are able to control women's fertility. Sharing a similar perspective, Moyo (2004) posits that patriarchy operates through sexual socialisations which have overlaps in their purposes such that most subordinate women's sexual lives to men. In the process, she adds, "women find themselves in a position of sexual powerlessness as sexual objects at the service of men" (Moyo, 2004, p.12).

From the responses it is evident that there is a subsection of Swazi women that is fully aware that the intricate web between the two traditions downplays their humanity, but what lacks now is advocacy against those degrading cultural and Judeo-Christian practices. What needs to be addressed first is what Rankin (2003, p.5) calls the general culture of silence around sex, which socialises women to think that a "good" woman is the one that remains silent and submissive on issues concerning her reproductive concerns. The culturally and religiously defined status, which women have to achieve whilst men have it ascribed to them, is through child bearing. This interpretation of the data is captured in the discussion below.

The Emphasis on Child Factor in Both Traditions

Data revealed salient features of Swazi culture within the Christian cultural corpus, and *vice-versa*. One of them is the credence that both traditions give to children, such that women without progeny are ridiculed for failing society as they have not fulfilled its expectations. The life stories incorporated in the data, amongst many, evidently illustrate this point well. It is also

confirmed by Oduyoye (1999, p.112) who narrates touchingly her personal journey through childlessness in her article “A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space”, where she states; “many are the traumas in the quest for a child of one’s own”. Culture and religion are often cited as the main justifications that endorse any form of abuse against childless women, including women who have children with disabilities and those who have girl children only. It is even worse when the so-called “prophets” of God take advantage of the situation and emotionally blackmail the desperate women to just gratify their self-interests. I have noted that the new wave in Christianity of charismatic theology has introduced “breakthrough” services and healing camps which attract childless women who seek powerful prayers that would deliver them from generational curses that block the blessing of children. Some pastors who are opportunists would heartlessly manipulate the distressed and status-deprived souls to build up their personal wealth and fame. Swazi culture and Christianity therefore, having indoctrinated women to think that infertility is the worst fate a woman can experience in life, causes a childless woman to do anything which would grant her the status that she is a “*real*” woman.

Responses also revealed the importance of children in both Swazi religion and Christianity evident in the well-defined duties relating to procreation and childcare. Cultural practices in both institutions, like paying of *lobola*, are meant to underline the importance of these ‘wifely’ duties. Notably, in this particular practice, it is the father of the bride that is entitled to the wealth accumulated by his daughter. And through bride wealth cattle, the husband acquires exclusive rights over her reproductive abilities that she should ensure continuity of her marital family; hence the importance of a male child that would inherit both the property and title of the male lineage. One then understands the earnest desire for Swazi women to fulfill the family and

church expectations to be “true” wives. They identify with biblical examples of women whose desire for children was finally granted against all odds: Sarah, who conceived despite her being elderly and menopausal; Hannah, who conceived after prayer and enduring years of torment by her co-wife because of her barrenness; Rebecca, who overcame barrenness and conceived twins; Rachel, whose desperation led to her asking her husband to have children with her servant; and Elizabeth, whose barrenness was ended at old age by divine intervention (Mate, 2000, p.559). The barren Swazi women therefore wait in anticipation that the God of the barren women in the Bible is the same God that they serve, and so he will answer their prayers and give them children.

Given the above, it is clear that the eradication of all forms of women’s oppression caused by societal, cultural and religious patriarchy, through a critique of the cultural and religious dimensions both in African culture and religions as advocated by African feminist theologians is required (Phiri 2004). Their theological and methodological frameworks are significant in engaging these issues. Kanyoro (2001a; 2001b) adds that it is not enough to analyze culture without reference to the people who are beneficiaries and victims of the culture; “here is where the need arises for a gender sensitive cultural hermeneutics because it performs two functions as it addresses issues of culture, while being critical of that culture from a gender perspective” (2001b, p.164). Rakoczy (2004, p.150) highlights the three arguments that underpin feminist hermeneutics. Paraphrased, they are that: the Bible has been used a tool to subjugate women and deplete their personhood; the authority of the Bible has been internalised; and Scriptures must be re-read and re-interpreted. Cultural hermeneutics therefore, is a key to the liberation of women in Africa because it opens the eyes of African women not to blindly succumb to socio-cultural and religious expectations (Kanyoro, 2001a, p.106). As Hinga (1990, p.34) has further observed,

cultural hermeneutics “is meant not only to counteract the oppressive impact of the Bible, but also to create hope and a will to change oppressive situations and structures”, thus affirming women’s human dignity and personhood. Vasanthakumar (1997, p.43) drawing on Casalis (1984) posits that hermeneutics has four dimensions:

it translates a divine message into human words; it transposes what was said “at that time” into contemporary categories; it reclaims possession of the text and its meaning from those who have unwarrantedly locked them away; and it revives the past in order to retain its value for the present.

Application of liberative hermeneutics therefore, in the socio-cultural and religious context of the Swazi would mean re-reading and re-interpreting the biblical narratives which data have shown that Swazi society uses to abuse women and also to glorify “the child factor syndrome” (Oduyoye 1995). This would manifest injustices against women, whilst at the same time be an empowering force.

Swazi women do not only deal with the “child factor” pressure, but also the impacts of the interplay between indigenous cosmology and Christianity, as discussed below.

Interplay between Swazi Cosmology and Christianity

In African traditional thought, as the same notion prevails in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, children are the crowning glory of marriages (Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu 2007). However, it is believed that there are malevolent powers of demons, spirits, witches or sorcerers which are the root cause for calamities and social ills, rendering biological infertility a spiritually caused condition (Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu 2007). They attribute this religio-cultural worldview to three factors: first is the belief in a world in which evil supernatural

powers act as the cause of misfortune; secondly the need to create appropriate ritual contexts and sacred spaces within which the world of benevolent powers could be invited to intervene in crises; and thirdly, the belief in a sacramental universe in which physical things often act as vehicles for spiritual ones (2007, p.4343). Echoing Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu, Hock (2002, p.63) asserts that the Christian tradition has nourished the religio-cultural beliefs by providing effective symbols, with the symbol of Satan as personification of an evil being, and by presenting itself as a source of supernatural power that deals with all evil. Subsequent to the restructuring of the receptive traditional cosmology by Christianity, there exists a dichotomy between evil powers (Satan's powers) and good powers (Jesus' power), which in turn pave the way for new methods of dealing with evil (Hock, 2002, p.65). In his predictions of the interplay between the African traditional and Christian orientations, Hook (2002, p.63) asserts;

May be Christianity would have passed by in the religious history of Africa just as some kind of a comparably successful anti-sorcery movement, had it not evoked a transformation of traditional cosmology by its dynamic interaction with African traditions.

It is very unfortunate that the victims to this interplay and dichotomy are the women, especially those categorised as infertile; that is, as revealed by data, women without biological children, those who have girl-children and those who have disabled children. They are said to be either bewitched or terrorised by malevolent powers and demons. As observed by Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu (2007, p.65) "there is no critical attention to the possibility that even in God's scheme of things some couples may be destined never to have children of their own". As far as I am concerned the false hope on the possibility that one day the supernatural power will provide a solution to the women's barrenness delays their acceptance of their predicament. As a result very

few childless women are able to live a fulfilled life without necessarily having a biological child, a boy child or a physically healthy child. Also, because fruits of the womb are held in both traditions as paradigmatic of God's blessing and favor and Christian uprightness, a childless woman would often perpetually work hard to earn God's favor or would resign with guilt that she might have wronged God somewhere to deserve the curse of childlessness.

As alluded to above, both traditional cosmology and Christianity take seriously the presence of spiritual forces as causal explanations for all calamities and social ills, including bareness (Donkor 2008); hence each has its own prescriptions to deal with any crisis. This becomes burdensome to childless women because they have to try all these prescriptions, which are often costly and degrading to their dignity.

Diversity in the Participants' Views

It was interesting to capture the diverse perceptions and viewpoints on Swazi women's fertility represented by the literate and non-literate, the young-elderly, and the rural-urban dichotomy. The rural, non-literate sample glorified Swazi culture and view Christianity as important institutions that hold families together and thus beneficial to women. Conversely, the rural but literate and the urban-literate sample engaged critically with the two traditions, but they did not totally reject these two traditions. I find this approach to be in line with the major focus of the African feminist theological discourse, which positively views culture and Christianity to be integral to women's histories, but concerned with injustices in them which need to be exposed and addressed. Hence, it advocates the gender sensitive religio-cultural hermeneutics (Kanyoro 2001) discussed above, which would re-interpret culture and religion, and salvage the women's heritage in them that could be used in the women's quest for their restoration. Rakoczy (2004,

p.30), when referring to texts that reinforce the patriarchal bias, as shown in the data, calls them both “good news” and “bad news” to women. But, as she asks a question that she wants the reader to answer, “shall we take scissors and cut up the Bible, saving the texts which offer us life and consigning the rest to the scrap heap?” (Rakoczy, 2004, p.143). The answer is that we cannot; instead we should, in her words “develop new ways of interpretation which can help women hear good news” (Rakoczy, 2004, p.143). The participants’ critical responses of the interconnectedness between Swazi culture and Christianity, and how the two traditions have successfully fulfilled the patriarchal agenda give glimpses of hope about Swazi women’s restoration. What Rankin (2003, p.43) refers to as the culture of silence around women’s sexualities is slowly phasing out.

Christian Theology versus Christian Feminist Theology

In the socio-cultural and religious context of the study, I have discussed that western Christianity came to Swaziland by royal invitation through male western missionaries. These missionaries introduced “Christian theology” which according to Clifford (2001, p.29) is;

“a gender blind” concept because it is faith in God being brought to understanding from the perspective of male experience... this is the type of theology that only incorporates the lived experiences of relationship to God of Christian men, and women’s experiences of God relatedness are excluded.

Matei (2013), Rakoczy (2004), Clifford (2001), and Riley (1989) attribute the adaptation of Christian theology into the biblical texts and social contexts to the influence of Greek and Latin classics on early and medieval church fathers. They argue that over the centuries many Christian theologians have treated women not only as “dissimilar species” but also as a defective one

(Clifford, 2001, p.30). Drawing on *Tertullian, On the Apparel of Women, Augustine, On the Trinity Book, and Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae*, Clifford summarises the theologies of church fathers as follows;

Tertullian (ca 160-225b) characterized women as “the devil’s gateway,” Augustine (ca 354-430) argued that man alone can fully image God; a woman images God only with her husband, Aquinas (ca 1225-74) influenced by Aristotle spoke of women as “defective” and “misbegotten” (Clifford, 2001, p.30).

The distinctive feature of Christian theology therefore is the exclusion of women’s relational experiences with God. The least to happen when women’s experiences happen to be embraced in theological discourse is to pick on negative female figures in the Bible to warn society about the dangerous species known as “women” (Clifford, 2001, p.29). For example, I have observed in my society that it cannot be a successful tent revival meeting without male evangelists preaching about the story of the “promiscuous” Samaritan woman that met Jesus at the well (John 4:1-33). Emphasis is put on the woman’s loose character that could only change if she would drink from Jesus’ living water, and she would not thirst again. The prompt response of the Samaritan woman to the “good news” of Jesus, and that she was the first evangelist in Samaria, a gentile territory, can either be mentioned haphazardly in sermons, or not at all. Other examples of biblical women characters that are usually represented negatively in churches, and who church women are warned against, are Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 21:1-28) and Queen Vashti (Esther 1:1-22). Queen Jezebel is often portrayed as an evil-hearted manipulator that led astray her husband King Ahab of Israel and the entire nation into idolatry; her good traits - that she was a strategist, an intelligent, courageous and tactful woman - are never mentioned in sermons. Similarly, instead of stressing the courage of Queen Vashti to safeguard her dignity against all odds,

pastors' sermons usually focus on the price she paid for being disrespectful to her husband's command. The last example of a woman's character is Ruth who is always cited as a point of reference to young women in terms of their relationship with their in-laws. Her sacrifice of her own happiness to remarry at her homeland and her decision to relocate to a foreign land in order to serve her mother-in-law is what is emphasised in most sermons. That "Ruth is a role model not because she is docile and submissive, but because she transcends her gender and her ethnicity to ensure her survival" (Nadar, 2000, p.81) is least mentioned in sermons.

In contrast, there is Christian feminist theology, which seeks to liberate theology from a centuries-long patterns of "patriarchal myopia", where women's lived experiences of their relationship with God are incorporated in theological discourse (Clifford, 2001, p.29). This is congruent with the definition of feminism articulated by Oduyoye (1986, p.121); that feminism has become the shorthand for the proclamation that women's experiences should become an integral part of what goes into the definition of being a human. Christian feminist theology seeks to read the Bible "with African eyes" that would help women to recognise their potential to effect positive social change, whilst developing a greater sense of their human dignity (Rakoczy, 2004, pp.174, 175). This can be effectively facilitated through employing feminist theological hermeneutics, a criterion which looks at whether a particular text promotes male advantage at the expense of women's dignity or any group of people whose life has been diminished by patriarchy (Clifford 2004, p.37). As further noted by Clifford, this feminist approach,

...is interested in more than raising awareness of the manifestations of patriarchy and of constructing a liberating interpretation of biblical revelation and church teachings; it seeks to make a difference in the Christian community and civil society (2001, p.37).

7.4 Conclusion

The main purpose of the chapter was to determine the relationship between Swazi culture and Christianity on women's fertility. Data revealed that males in the Swazi society are accorded priority over females in cultural and religious aspects of everyday life. Also Christianity is tinged with cultural elements that are male-centered and patriarchal (Uchem 2003), such that it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between Swazi culture and Christianity. The history of the advent of Christianity in Swaziland and the affinities that Swazi culture and the Judeo-Christian traditions share, were identified as chief contributory factors to the knotted relationship that the two share.

African women theologians' call for the re-examination of culture and religion from a gender perspective has been useful to this analysis. As confirmed by Mofolo (2011), feminism is a critical stance that engages the patriarchal gender paradigm, in an attempt to reconstruct it in order to include women in full humanity, whether they are fertile or infertile. It is not enough therefore to only unearth the truth that cultural teachings are intimately related to religious teachings on women's fertility, and "the two act upon each other, they influence each other and they propagate each other" (Kabonde, 1996, p.212) There has to be a concerted effort between women and men to untangle the patriarchal machine, for the Swazi society to be able "to see with two eyes, to hear with two ears, to walk with two legs and to work with two hands" (Swart, 1991, p.131). In the next chapter I will discuss the construction of women's personhood and identity by socio-cultural, religious beliefs, based on the women's fertility.

CHAPTER 8:

Construction of Swazi Women's Identities Based on their Fertility

8.1. Introduction

In today's world, we have unprecedented opportunities to make ourselves and to create our own identities. We are our own best resources in defining who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. Now that the traditional signposts have become less essential, the social world confronts us with a dizzying array of choices about who to be, how to live and what to do... (Giddens, 2005, p.30).

Society is saturated with various imageries that people use to construct their identities. Brown *et al* (1994, p.814) argue that people creatively and actively employ available cultural symbols, myths and rituals as they produce their identities through social agents like family, school and church, mass media and technology. These social agents determine the standards of living and they shape the expectations that people have to meet and/or live up to, whilst defining what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior (Willis 1990). However, Giddens in the above quote postulates that traditional signposts have lost value in contemporary society as people are now their best resources in constructing their own identities.

In the light of these submissions, this research sought to answer a number of pertinent questions to examine the processes that contribute to the construction of women's identities in Swazi patriarchal families: Can the Swazi woman construct her identity on her own terms? Does she have choices on how to live her life with fulfillment at her marital home, or is she always required to prove her 'high quality' by fulfilling certain expectations? This chapter sought to answer such questions through in-depth interviews with 20 Swazi women. The following themes

emerged from the data: women's self-definitions and the construction of their identities and personhood; society's definitions of women and the construction of their identities and personhood; family's constructions of women's identities and personhood; influences of family members' perceptions on women's fertility; principal agents that shape women's identities in the Swazi society; and the impact of socio-cultural and religious constructions on women's self-worth.

8.2. Data presentation

Demographic characteristics of the participants

As shown in the profile tables 8.1 to 8.6 below, of the 20 female participants interviewed 1 was aged 61-70; 4 were 50-60; 5 were 40-50; 8 were 30-40; and 2 were 20-30. With regards to the number of children 2 women did not have biological children; 4 had 1 child; 8 had 3 children; 3 had 4; 2 had 5; and 1 had 6. 13 of these mothers had children of mixed sexes, 4 had boys only and 1 had girls only. In terms of their level of education 11 had been to tertiary; 5 had secondary education, whilst 4 had primary education. A high number of participants were married, 13 in all, whilst 5 were single parents, 1 was a single adult, and 1 was divorced. In terms of their residential locations in the Manzini region, 6 resided in urban areas; 9 in peri-urban areas; and 5 rural areas. All participants subscribed to the Christian faith, but were from different denominational backgrounds, which included Roman Catholic Church, Church of the Nazarene, Zionist Churches, Ministry Churches, Evangelical Church and Anglican Church. The following tables show the participants' population and their allocated pseudonym in the different variables.

Table 1. Distribution of participants by age and their allocated pseudonym

Age	No. of Participants	Pseudonym
20-30	2	F20, F21
31-40	8	F22, F23, F24, F25, F26, F27, F28, F29,
41-50	5	F30, F31, F32, F33, F34
51-60	4	F35, F36, F37, F38,
61-70	1	F39
Total	20	

Source: Fieldwork, April to June 2014

Table 2. Distribution of participants by number of their children and their pseudonyms

No. of children	No. of participants	Pseudonyms
0	2	F20, F22
1	4	F21, F28, F26, F27
3	8	F24, F29, F33, F34, F35, F36, F38, F39
4	3	F23, F30, F32
5	2	F25, F31
6	1	F37
Total	20	

Source: Fieldwork, April to June 2014

Table 3. Distribution of participants by sex of their children and their pseudonyms

Sex of children	No. of participants	Pseudonyms
Mixed	13	F23, F24, F31, F29, F30, F32, F33, F34, F35, F36, F37, F38, F39,
Boys only	4	F21, F28, F26, F27
Girls only	1	F25
Total	18	

Source: Fieldwork, April to June 2014

Table 4. Distribution of the participants by education and their pseudonyms

Education	No. of participants	Pseudonyms
Tertiary	11	F21, F24, F30, F32, F33, F34, F35, F36, F37, F38, F39
Secondary	5	F22, F25, F26, F28, F31
Primary	4	F20, F23, F27, F29
Total	20	

Source: Fieldwork, April to June 2014

Table 5. Distribution of participants by marital status and their pseudonyms

Unmarried	1	F22,
Single parent	7	F21, F26, F27, F30, F31, F36, F39
Divorced	1	F24
Married	11	F20, F23, F25, F28, F29, F32, F33, F34, F35, F37, F38,
Total	20	

Source: Fieldwork, April to June 2014

Table 6. Distribution of participants by location and their pseudonyms

Urban	6	F20, F21, F25, F29, F34, F37
Rural	5	F22, F23, F24, F30, F35,
Peri-urban	9	F26, F27, F28, F31, F32, F33, F36, F38, F39
Total	20	

Source: Fieldwork, April to June 2014

8.3 Summary tables on responses

Table 7a: *Who are you and why?*

Participant	Who?	Why?
F28	<i>I am a complete woman</i>	<i>Because I have a home; I was smeared with red ochre when I joined my marital family, and I have borne them a son</i>
F21	<i>I am a woman, but incomplete</i>	<i>Because I am caring, patient and sacrificing, but I was unfortunate that the father of my children could not marry me to give me a full status as a woman</i>
F22	<i>I have a positive self-concept as a daughter of my father, single but looking forward to be a mother one day</i>	<i>I believe that I am a unique single Swazi woman, nurtured in a functional family, and therefore important in the society</i>
F23	<i>I am the 'fruit' and society is the 'tree,' and society will benefit from me in future.</i>	<i>Because I draw principles of life from the society, and it provides support to me as I live my womanhood</i>
F33	<i>I am a real woman</i>	<i>Because I have children</i>
F35	<i>I am a full woman, but a subordinate at the same time</i>	<i>Because cultural norms and values have shaped me to submit to authority at my home. But the fact that I have children makes feel good</i>
F20	<i>I am not a complete woman</i>	<i>Because I do not have children</i>
F26	<i>I am not a full woman</i>	<i>Because I have only one son who is disabled</i>
F36	<i>I am both complete and incomplete</i>	<i>Because I have children and I am not married</i>
F29	<i>I am nothing</i>	<i>Because I do not have my own biological children</i>
F39	<i>I am somebody's property</i>	<i>Because my boyfriend controls my sexuality</i>
F27	<i>I am a good woman and a mother</i>	<i>Because I bore a child for my boyfriend to prove that I am a 'wife' material</i>
F32	<i>I am a proper woman</i>	<i>Because I am submissive, and I accept all decisions that my husband makes without queries, including accommodating children born out of wedlock</i>
F24	<i>I am both a mother and a failure</i>	<i>Because I have children of both sexes, but divorced</i>
F34	<i>I am a real woman and a mother</i>	<i>Because I have never experienced any difficulty at conception of all my children</i>
F30	<i>I am a complete human being</i>	<i>Because even though I am not married, my family accepts me unconditionally</i>
F25	<i>I am not a full woman</i>	<i>Because all my five children are girls</i>

<i>F38</i>	<i>I am real woman</i>	<i>Because I am a married with three children</i>
<i>F31</i>	<i>I am not a complete woman, but I have accepted myself that I am a single mother</i>	<i>Because I have five children, yet I am not married</i>
<i>F37</i>	<i>I am a real woman that every woman would envy</i>	<i>Because I am a mother of five boys that would perpetuate the family lineage and my name too, as a mother to many generations live on.</i>

Table 7b: How does society define you and why?

<i>Participant</i>	<i>How</i>	<i>Why</i>
<i>F34</i>	<i>As a real woman</i>	<i>Because I have children that are the family's future investment</i>
<i>F21</i>	<i>As an incomplete woman and a failure, as society calls me 'ingcugce'-a derogatory term that explains a single woman</i>	<i>Because culturally you remain a single parent and less important if you are unmarried, regardless of age and your reproductive abilities</i>
<i>F22</i>	<i>As a daughter to my father who society holds in high esteem, and a potential woman</i>	<i>Because society respects my father and has given him a high status</i>
<i>F20</i>	<i>As pride of the society and a replica to mother who exhibits good cultural qualities of a true Swazi woman</i>	<i>Because society admires a young woman who respects culture, and has kept her virginity</i>
<i>F33</i>	<i>As a real woman that adequately executes her feminine obligations</i>	<i>Because of her ability to procreate and bear children</i>
<i>F23</i>	<i>As a minor or even a child</i>	<i>Because culturally the man as a leader should make all decisions</i>
<i>F29</i>	<i>Not as a human being</i>	<i>Because I don't have children, and therefore I have failed society</i>
<i>F26</i>	<i>Not as a real woman</i>	<i>Because real women are those who bear healthy and normal children</i>
<i>F30</i>	<i>As potential husband snatcher</i>	<i>Because I have children, yet I am not married</i>
<i>F25</i>	<i>As nothing and a</i>	<i>Because I failed to make my husband a man</i>

	<i>pathetic failure</i>	
<i>F31</i>	<i>As an investment</i>	<i>Because my father will receive lobola from my prospective future husband</i>
<i>F27</i>	<i>As a potential woman</i>	<i>Because I got a child before marriage, a good sign that I am a capable woman</i>
<i>F32</i>	<i>As a real woman who is patient, caring and understanding</i>	<i>Because I have my own biological children, and I accept children gotten out of wedlock by my husband</i>
<i>F24</i>	<i>As 'libuya'-one who has failed in marriage and has returned to her parental home, which becomes an insult to her father</i>	<i>Because my marriage did not work out, I am blamed for being the source of trouble in the relationship</i>
<i>F35</i>	<i>As a mother of 'so and so', and a true woman</i>	<i>Because the family name will thrive through my children</i>
<i>F28</i>	<i>As a failure in life</i>	<i>Because I could not bear an 'heir' for my marital family; my children are all girls</i>
<i>F39</i>	<i>As a real and stable woman</i>	<i>Because I am married with children</i>
<i>F36</i>	<i>As an unstable woman and a social misfit</i>	<i>Because I have children from different men, and I am not married</i>
<i>F37</i>	<i>As a real women who deserves some special honor</i>	<i>Because I bore the family five boys that will perpetuate the family name through generations.</i>
<i>F38</i>	<i>As complete women</i>	<i>Because I am married with three children.</i>

The following are narratives of data presented in the summary tables 1 and 2.

Women's self-definitions and construction of their identities and personhood

Table 1 displays nine participants who defined themselves as complete women because they were married with children of both sexes. Four viewed themselves as incomplete because three had children but were not married, and one had children, but was divorced. Four defined themselves as not real women because two of them did not have their own biological children, whilst one had girl children only, and one had a disabled son. Two single parents perceived themselves as a man's property because they had to first prove their worth by begetting children

to their boyfriends before they were considered for marriage. One single adult claimed to have a positive self-concept, which notably, was defined within the perimeters that she was a daughter to her father.

The women who defined themselves complete/full/real, on the basis of their marital status and their ability to have children further claimed to have character traits such 'kutigcogca' (well-behaved), 'kutihlonipha' (self-respect) and 'kutitsiba' (self-controlled), which further authenticated their womanhood. Their sentiments are best represented by participant F38, who said,

Mine ngingumfati swi; ngangena ngelisango, ngagcotjiswa libovu, ngalotjolwa na babe wadla ngami. Ngase ngitala indlalifa ekhakhami. Ngakoke, angitikhinyeti ngalutfo, ngingumfati sibili – I am a full woman; I entered marriage through the front door in that I was smeared with red ochre and lobola was paid to my father. Also I gave birth to an heir for my marital family. Therefore I don't have any complex, I am a true woman.

In the case of the single women, they had children but were incomplete because they never got married. They expressed that societal perceptions which dictate that they should have been settled with a man put pressure on them which would result in self-pity. In the words of participant F26,

Being a single mother is not easy; you struggle to raise your children, especially the boys who always want a father figure that they will relate to, whilst at the same time you need to put an extra effort to convince society that you are not a "bad girl."

The same applies with participant F24 who also experienced rejection from the society that she had failed her family by returning to her natal home; hence she was 'libuya', a derogatory name

which best describes her as a disgrace to her father. She claimed that even though she considered herself a 'real' woman because she had children, she also felt that she was lacking. She blamed herself for not being "woman enough" to tolerate hardships in marriage which every Swazi woman would be socialised to endure. Negative attitudes that she is a failure also impact badly on her children such that they are considered misfits in society. However, participant F30 who claimed to have worked hard to build self-confidence had this to say when asked about how she defined herself:

I am successful because after failing to live up to the societal standards, I fought very hard to turn the negatives into positives, that is, having children, then raising them almost singlehandedly until they became adults. Now that they are successful at least society can have something positive to say about me.

As shown in the summarised responses in the table 1, four women defined themselves as not real women. The two participants that never had children reported that they could not define themselves any better than to state clearly and unequivocally that they were failures in life. They blamed themselves for depriving their families and the entire society of the joys of having perpetual family names, participant F25 too was haunted by the reality that she could not bear an heir that would carry on her husband's legacy after his demise. Participant F26 asserted that ideally, she was supposed to be a woman first before all things and then a mother and a wife,

However, having a disabled son makes it hard for me to confidently claim the status of either being a mother or wife. This is because this status is not automatic; it is dependent on the ability to fulfill certain societal norms and standards. This is beside how I feel about myself as a person or a woman. No matter how self-assured one can be, my

inability to give birth to another child while I have a disabled one is enough to jerk me out of the status of being a wife or even a real woman.

As shown above two single mothers defined themselves as “property” to their boyfriends who controlled their bodies. When asked to elaborate on their experiences, they revealed that they were coerced to have children to prove their “high quality” that they were fertile before they could be married. Participant F39 further observed,

Men also have control over our bodies because they do not consult us if they want to remove the condom during sex; women simply have no control over the use of the condom, but bear the consequences. Again, most men still hold on to negative views and outdated myths about female contraceptives, especially the pill. Most women would succumb to the pressure from their male partners to stop using contraceptives.

So, for the single mothers, being a mother did not happen by choice, but by compulsion; hence they would define themselves more as “property” to men, than mothers. Conversations with participant F22 who claimed to have a positive self-concept revealed that her self-definition was influenced by cultural norms and values that shaped her reflections. She had pride in that she was a “daughter to her father,” who would bring wealth to her family through *lobola*. Her self-concept therefore was determined by her socialisation as a young woman that her worth relied on what she was capable of doing in her father’s house. Besides the women’s self-definitions, Swazi society also has its own definitions of women, as it is discussed below.

Society’s definitions of women’s identities and personhood

Responses to the question on how society defines women and the reasons for such definitions showed that society expected to find a wife and a mother in every Swazi woman. Society in this

discussion is used in a broad sense to refer to socio-cultural and religious constructions, which the preceding chapter has presented as inextricably intertwined. Data showed six women that society defined as “*real*” women, four as not “*real*” women, four as potential women, one as a minor, and five as incomplete women, *missing one piece to complete the puzzle* (in the words of one participant) and also potential husband snatchers.

All participants in separate interviews argued that the societal definition of a woman varied according to their marital status and their ability to produce children. Those that society confirmed as “*real*” women were fertile, and had demonstrated their fertility by producing children, especially male children. As participant F33 stated:

Society defines me as someone who adequately executes my feminine duties. Furthermore, my ability to procreate and rear able-bodied offspring who in turn have contributed so much to the community makes me a ‘real woman’ who has lived up to societal standards and expectations.

Conversations with the participants further revealed that society expected women to exhibit certain character traits which would define them as true women. They listed nurturing, sacrificial love, respect, submission and humility. Any woman who failed in these “wifely” duties could be ordered to return to her parental home to be tutored on what it meant to be a “*real*” woman or the husband would marry a substitute wife. A related cultural practice was also cited by some of the participants, which involves allocating a child to a barren woman following some ritual *kufakwa kwemntfwana esiswini semfati*, (‘inserting’ a child in the womb of an infertile woman). She would in turn raise and treat this child as if he was her own. Since this would be done officially,

the child would be highly respected and be eligible for inheritance. Participant F26 who did not regard herself as a “*real*” woman because she had a disabled child, had the following to say:

From the point of view of Swazi society I have not met the standard or fulfilled the requirements of being a wife. By society, in this case, I refer to anyone besides me, and this includes my own family especially my parents. They too are getting desperate as it has been years since I had my first son. So they are always anxious that I give birth to another child. They worry that my failure to add to the family by producing another child - a normal child - could jeopardize my marriage. Their fears are not unfounded because, after all, they themselves are Swazis and they understand how society interprets such a scenario. To them the prospects of being unable to have another child seem ominous. They now even view themselves as failures, especially in relation to their in-laws, as I am the only one among their three daughters for whom they received cows, in fact many cows, as lobola. Again, I am their only daughter who appears to have a stable husband and stable family, so it's frightening them to think that I might not have another child. Even though I have a son, knowing how my parents and my in-laws interpret my situation, I feel as if I have no child at all and that I am not different from any medically confirmed sterile woman out there. To the Swazi society, cordial relations between in-laws are maintained through procreation. In the absence of children and grandchildren the relations could, at best, be severely strained and, at worst, die a natural death.

Apart from that, even in the working environment, once your colleagues know that you have a disabled child, and that you are struggling to have another one, they quickly and automatically classify you as barren. Whenever there is a conversation going on, you are sidelined from the talk of “mothers and their children” as if you don't have a child at all.

Also, nobody consults you for any advice, and you just feel like an outcast. They make sure you hear pity-party stories about miracle babies and the age of the mothers, so that you could be comforted and continue to believe that it is still possible to conceive; but peculiarly nobody mentions anything about your disabled son. So, in essence in the eyes of the people, I am not different from a barren woman. It's so disturbing because in some cases even though they try to be polite in their comments, you still feel hurt. What kills me most is the knowledge that until I have a "proper" child, this could be "my life story".

Responses from the single mothers showed that society defined them as failures or husband snatchers or incomplete individuals. Participant F39 noted the following,

Society defines me as a failure because unmarried women with children are regarded as people with loose morals and therefore husband snatchers. If you are not married, many people in society will not even recognize or respect the other achievements you have made in life, notwithstanding that you have children.

Participant F27 further observed that regardless of age and "feminine" behavioral traits, the societal depiction of what defines a "real" woman remains fixed. In her words, *noma ngabe ungakanani, uma ungakatekwa uyintfombi* (irrespective of age, if you are unmarried you remain a "girl"). Referring to herself, she pointed out that society defines her as an 'intfombi' regardless of her advanced age. The only reason she perceived herself a "real" woman was her grown up children; not that she was a complete woman according to societal standards. Participant F21 put it well when she said,

So, society has no space for single women. Single women and unmarried single mothers are perceived as poor role models for young girls; hence, derogatory words or

disapproving terms – such as ‘ingcugce’, ‘umtalakanye’, ‘lijikamlente’, ‘umshwedla’ - are used to describe a single woman or an unmarried single mother.

The women who viewed society as defining them as minors argued that it expected them to perform certain tasks and be subordinate to their male counterparts, to the level of being equal to children. They could not make decisions in the families, even those that concern their own sexualities, and they would be obligated to obey their male counterparts to the detriment of their own happiness. In this regard, participant F30 noted that,

Growing up, a woman is socialised to accept her fate – which is that she was born to suffer and be under perpetual male dominance. A woman who challenges this position is viewed negatively as a social misfit, and is hardly accepted as a normal woman.

Participant F23 expressed the view that Swazi society perceived and treated her as a second class citizen. This was because of the long institutionalised Swazi culture that gives preference to men, whilst imposing countless cultural sanctions on women.

Put another way, Swazi culture has positioned me in an awkward space that deprives me of many advantages as a human being and a Swazi citizen; I cannot own land because I am not married, unless my son acquires the land on my behalf, as if I am dead.

It was further observed that Swazi society perceived single mothers as unstable individuals; the reason being that Swazi society only recognised married women in firm familial relationships, under the leadership of men. The husband as the head and decision maker in the family would protect the wife and provide her with stability. Participant F28 claimed,

For a single mother, a husband is the only missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle that is required to make her a complete or full woman, the situation is worse for those who do not have children because they are perceived to be having two missing pieces.

For the singles who were “potential” women in that they either gave birth to children before marriage or were mature adults, society perceived them as an investment to their families. They would bring wealth to their families through *lobola*, and also be ego-boosters to their male relatives, especially the father. It was further revealed that this category of women would usually live under the shadow of their fathers. Participant F22 attesting to this observation said,

In my view, Swazi society defines people in terms of their socio-economic and cultural background. For instance, if one’s father is held in high esteem, the girl is respected on the basis of the status given to her father. However, this does not rule out the fact that one can earn respect by virtue of their good conduct.

A common feature in the responses of the single parents is that most seemed to have overcome the negative images and labels society had given them, and they placed value on themselves despite their past failures in life. But that does not deter society from defining them, and all women in different categories. It is not only the wider society that constructs identities and personhood of women, but also the Swazi families’ embrace these definitions, as it is shown below.

Family’s constructions of women’s identities and personhood

In response to the questions on reasons why family members would define women in the ways stated in the previous section, participants noted that their mentality on the various roles and status in the family determine their various outlooks on women’s definitions. For instance, if the

man regards himself a “master” over his “servant” wife he could shout at her even for minor infringement, thus blatantly belittling her. He could use “short-cuts” to fix his wife’s barrenness without her consent. He would even use “his right” to demand sexual intimacy from his wife without protection, and the wife would be expected to oblige, with or without reservations. Participant F32 sharing her personal experience as a married woman with children, stated that family members’ definitions of women were influenced by their different socio-cultural backgrounds fashioned by different ideologies. In her case the family members grew up with some pre-conceived stereotypes which emphasised fertility, whilst relegating women to inferior positions in the family. Sharing a similar view participant F28 put it this way,

The various family members’ definition of women are shaped by culturally-postulated stereotypes from the family members, and women therefore are what society says they are and it becomes quite difficult to think differently.

Reference was made to the belief that males are culturally “installed” as kings in their homes, and by extension, society guarantees them superiority status. All else therefore is expected to fall under their control and manipulation. Anyone who challenged this social order is viewed a rebel and a social misfit. Another participant who affirmed this view stated that the favorable or advantageous environments within which men were brought up shaped their thought patterns and actions concerning their romantic relationships with women. For example men abused women on the basis of social influence; by extension, social influences would lead men to perceive women as people whose primary role is to be ‘baby factories.’

However, participant F29 apologetically pointed out that the family members’ definitions of women were beyond their control; *it’s not anything they can deal with or control, it is how they*

are socialised as cultural beings, she claimed. She added that cultural values were ingrained and internalised from the moment a baby was born into a gender insensitive world. In her case her husband was at his wits end regarding her inability to conceive again. Socialisation had taught him that he should have another child even if it would just be one child, to redeem him from humiliation in his family that he fathered girls only. Notwithstanding that he loved his girls so dearly; it would kill him not to have another child, as this would have some connotations for him as a man and a husband. Drawing on her personal experience as an ‘infertile’ woman participant F20 reached this conclusion;

For a barren woman like myself, who is at the epicenter of it all, its agony, but in all honesty, some of the family members do not set out to hurt you, but barrenness represents all they pray against, or wish against. They know societal implications of one’s barrenness, and thus they do not want to be associated with it in any way. The in-laws feel embarrassed by it not because they have something against you, and anyone else around you, but they are haunted by societal expectations.

Participant F27 who blamed culture as the force behind negative perceptions of single mothers seemed to understand why family members defined women in her category in the ways stated above. She argued that Swazi culture highly values girl’s virginity, and this is evident in the cultural practices such as *Umhlanga* (Reed dance) where unmarried young women would converge at the traditional headquarters to publicly confirm their virginity. Therefore one is defined a failure if she conceived children before marriage because her ‘value’ depreciates, in terms of the number of cattle his father would receive as *lobola* from her future husband. The girl would be perceived as someone who has no values and therefore a bad example to all young women in one’s community. Participant F31 added that Swazi society is such that any mother in-

law will struggle to accept a daughter in-law that has had children before marriage; she is viewed as an “embarrassment” to her marital family. Her private life is unreservedly shared with anyone who cares to listen that *‘makoti akasiye intfombi; ute asabhobokile’* (the bride is not a virgin; she has already been sexually penetrated). In case you were lucky to be accepted in terms of status, you would be lesser than the woman who joined your marital family without a child. Therefore, perceptions of family members on women’s fertility have certain influences on women and men that are married, as it is elaborated below.

Influences of family members’ perceptions on women’s fertility

Data revealed some reasons why family members had certain perceptions on women’s fertility. According to participant F24,

The husband will see himself as a man because he has children; for the wife, it gives her status of being considered a real woman by her in-laws; and for the mother in law, she would want to see her lineage continuing.

Echoing the above assertion participant F20 observed,

For the husband, having no child is the most difficult thing to bear. The knowledge that there is no one to perpetuate his name in this world could be a source of extreme frustration and desperation. Actually one man once confided in me that not having a child is not different from that you never existed because when you die, there will be nothing to show that you ever lived.

So, according to participant F37, procreation is important not only for the continuation of the lineage, but also because it serves as confirmation and proof of an individual’s life and existence

in this world. However, it was unfortunate that society would always blame the wife when years passed by without a child; she would be severely punished for being barren by everyone, including friends, in-laws and even siblings. *Every word that you utter as a barren woman is always subjected to intense scrutiny and is even doubted, precisely because you do not have children, and are therefore inexperienced,* claimed participant F23.

Other responses were critical of the Swazi culture which promotes the idea that a woman must succumb to the domination by men and her in laws. As observed by participant F35,

One is socialised to accept that as long as you are a woman you are to respect and submit. As a married woman you remain a permanent stranger in your marital family; you are only there to perform a major function, which is to procreate for the lineage to continue.

Therefore, family members would uphold a woman's fertility because she gives birth to children and increases the family's descendants. Commenting on women's fertility as matter of urgency to family members, participant F28 said,

You can imagine if you are not able to conceive; it is like the lobola paid to purchase your womb was wasted. That is why traditionally your family must give you inhlanti (substitute wife) to bear children for you. It is a curse not to bear children by the way, and there is always something wrong with a woman, who cannot produce.

The participants also reported on some of the myths and widely held beliefs concerning woman's barrenness in families. There is a belief that angry family ancestors could be communicating a bad omen through the barren woman. This, according to participant F32, becomes stressful to the infertile woman because she has to live with the guilt that she is at the center of any family

predicament at her marital home. Participants added that in some families, a woman's infertility would be associated with her supposedly earlier sexual misdemeanors, whilst in other families she would always be suspect for having committed a series of abortions as a youth. Infertility being a serious concern to the family, elders would then pursue alternative cultural measures that would provide a solution. These would include, *kulandvwa kwenhlanti*, (finding a substitute wife) or *lisiko lekuchamela emabele* (urinating on the sorghum ritual). Participant F39 further highlighted that the husband of the barren wife could be dispatched by the elders of the family to a faraway place to carry out a 'special' assignment. In his absence, the barren wife would become pregnant by the man's brother or a close relative. Very few people would know what exactly had suddenly happened to the wife that had been "barren". This issue would not be discussed and it would be treated as part of what would be called *'tibi tendlu'* (family secrets). No DNA would be required because everyone would affirm that the child is not illegitimate. As participant F23 emphasized,

It doesn't really matter how it all happened, the child is judged to be legitimate and the ends justify the means. Thus, it can be argued that Swazi culture and traditions are what shape the thought patterns of family members on women's fertility.

It also transpired from the discussions that socialisation greatly influenced the dominant perceptions on women's fertility in the family. Through the socialisation process Swazi men are made to believe that the primary role of their wives is to procreate; hence they would value their children, especially boys more than their wives. This would normally create a situation whereby the boy children would bond with their fathers to ensure that patriarchal ideas would be inculcated into the boys. It is believed that ideas that would advance the legacy of the family should be received by the boys. Ordinarily, mothers would bond with girls to compensate the

"love" fathers fail to evenly distribute and also to groom them for motherhood. As for mothers-in-law, it was observed that they critically scrutinize the relationship their sons have with their wives, whilst they treat their daughters-in-law as second class citizens. For example, participant F29 asserted,

One can be called names over trivial issues, be accused of wasting "family money" and be blamed for any disorder in the marital family. Also, take for instance, the case of men who are sexually dysfunctional or infertile due to impotence or diabetes, Swazi culture shifts the blame to the wives by accusing them of bewitching their husbands.

In summary the above data have shown the influences of family members' perceptions on women's fertility, which they basically draw from socio-cultural religious constructions; hence these constructions shape women's identities through social agents, as it will be discussed below.

Principal agents that shape women's identities in the Swazi society

Participants identified the following principal agents as responsible for shaping women's identities in Swazi society; family, school, church, media and technology. Their observations confirmed studies (Schippersl 2007; Giddens 2005; Connell 2000; Gilbert and Gilbert 1987) that people's identities are shaped within the context of the family, institutions, mass communication and media.

Family is the first socialising agent that creates women identities. Participants argued that family created certain images of what defined a proper woman. Participant F34 noted,

As a woman, you would like to be relevant and do things that will please your family, which are mostly learnt from the senior family members. Family will influence you to do

what they like other than your own choices even in terms of education and the type of marriage you would want. For example in marriage, they would tell you to marry traditionally if you want to fit socially or be considered a 'full' wife by your marital family, much against your wish.

Participants further argued that once your personal wish was suppressed, and you complied with cultural expectations and demands, you would develop an identity fashioned by cultural socialisation. In the case of young women, mothers would join hands in constructing the girls' identities. In the words of participant F23,

Your mother is expected to mould you and initiate you to womanhood. When you get married your mother-in law assumes that responsibility. Furthermore you are also shaped by women regiments if you happen to be a member of the Swazi Lutsango regiment. All these women join hands to instill a cultural value system that shapes you as woman to exhibit the expected behavior. To challenge the status quo, is considered disrespectful.

Concerning schools as another agent of socialisation, participants expressed the view that the education system in Swaziland is such that it channels women to feminine roles, and men to masculine roles. They further noted that in the selection of subjects in the school curriculum, students would be channeled in such a way that women would choose the so-called "soft" subjects that would lead them to the so called feminine jobs, like nursing. Participant F34 lamented saying, *even in sports it has been that way, for some of us we had no opportunity to choose the sport we would like because it was manly.* However, some participants noted some improvement in the schools' curriculum, where the number of girls pursuing science courses

seems to be increasing. What remains a concern is that these changes in the schools' curriculum have a minimal impact in creating new identities for women which have no strings attached to conventional practices. In this regard the comment by Kenway *et al* (1997) is instructive that, in spite of social changes and increased educational opportunities for all, women are still expected to perform their traditional roles as home makers and mothers, which impact on their identities.

Responses from two participants on how media and technology construct women's identities revealed that women are often portrayed by these two related agents as subordinate to men. To validate her point participant F31 made reference to short stories and plays aired on radio (*umdlalo wemoya*) that women would be consistently portrayed as beggars at their marital homes, and "properties" to men. She further cited a play aired over radio, where the female character married to a wealthy man could not bear children, and his family had to find alternatives to save the man's dignity in the society. According to participant F31 such stories stressed the importance of women's fertility, that in order for you to "keep your man", and have a status at your marital home, you would have to be fertile. Women therefore constructed their identities according to the expectations of the society.

Another pair of participants, F30 and F32 viewed media and technology positively as providing opportunities especially to the youth to employ various images as they construct their identities. This media-saturated world provided wide-ranging sources of cultural opinions and standards to young people. These sources include radio, television, music, advertising, magazines, social networking and Internet. Therefore, being surrounded by influential imageries portrayed in these sources it is no longer possible for an identity to be constructed merely in a small community and only to be influenced by family (Hamley, 2001, p.162). However, media and technology was singled out by participant F36 as socialising agents that could positively empower women to

define themselves differently; thus constructing identities that would not be legitimated by cultural sanctions. Put into context, the women's self-worth would not be determined by their fertility.

With regards to church as a socialising agent, participants viewed the church as another powerful agent that works cooperatively with the above mentioned social units in shaping women's identities. Women are groomed in ideal church values and 'wifely' duties, through church programs that teach them the values of an ideal woman of God. For example they would be taught how to be good mothers to their children, good wives to their partners, and to be virtuous brides (*bomakoti labaqotfo*) to their immediate in-laws and the extended family. As attested by Hamley (2001 p.164) who sees identity formation as a process that involves constant and continuous updating, the participants traced the process from childhood where the child would be socialised by her/his mother to be this and that. The girl child for example, would be taught by her mother to understand and interpret bible stories that emphasize motherhood or child factor. Furthermore the mother would model her religious life in both the personal and institutional levels for the girl to emulate. She would also encourage her girl to integrate with peers who share the same religious worldview. So, the formation of one's identity would begin in the family, and be reinforced or updated at church and at school.

Participant F35 coming from a different angle, which was not necessarily contradictory though, argued that the principal agents that shape woman's fertility are primarily culture, socialisation and tradition. Thus, in whatever sphere, either with families, church or peers, the "live wire" and engine that propagates these ideas would be the aforementioned agents. According to the participant, these agents would interpenetrate the church and its esteemed religious beliefs to the extent that even pastors in childless unions would divorce their "barren" wives and remarry, and

he would be justified. The yearning and need to procreate therefore would override any other sanctified teachings and values which ministers and Christians have held for many years.

Participant F33 further shared a life experience in their quest as a family to have children,

My father is a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church but at some point he advised my husband and I to seek the services of a spiritualist, 'umbhorofidi' as they are popularly called, disregarding any value he deposited in me as he brought me up. At that time, that appeared to be the only solution, as my husband and I took his advice. Some rituals were performed and we were also given traditional herbs to use. We religiously administered them even though no results came out of it. At that time, my husband had not been ordained a pastor but a deacon in the church, the right hand man of the Apostle or senior pastor; the desperate need to have a child drew him to the door of a spiritualist.

Having identified family, school, church, media and technology as key players in identity construction the participants submitted that these transmitters shaped societal perceptions on women's fertility in that they socialise women into believing that a "complete" woman was one with a child or children, and amongst them was at least a boy. Also, as these agents repeatedly advanced the importance of having a child or children, women would be pressured to "live up" to these expectations. For example families would pressurise young women on the importance of getting married and being a mother to such an extent that they would try all possibilities to meet those expectations. Participants stressed that socialisation was fixed in the minds of both adherents of Swazi culture and Christians. They further noted some apparent commonalities in the way the principal agents would influence societal perceptions on women's fertility hence the construction of their identities. What remains now is to assess the impact of these socio-cultural

religious constructions on the women's identities. This is what is discussed in the following section.

The impact of socio-cultural religious constructions on women's self-worth

Self-worth is the value one assigns to oneself where there is a sense that one deserves to be respected and treated well (Giddens, 2005, p.29). One's self-worth can be defined either externally, where one feels worthy through other people's approval of one's performance, or internally where personal value is given priority when assessing oneself, without people approving one's actions. Frie (2013, p.505) cites implicit cultural values that people adhere to, as agents that impact on the development of self-worth. He sees these values as reflections of specific socio-cultural practices which people learn in everyday interaction with society from childhood. Responses on the impact of societal perceptions on women's fertility and on their self-worth revealed that it is both negative and positive.

Some participants pointed out that the societal perceptions exerted pressure on the women because societal norms stated that every woman should be fertile and should have her own biological children. These cultural expectations were demeaning and intimidating to women because they confined them (women) to a streamlined behavior, and they become inclined to value themselves on the basis of what society expected from them. The expectation of a male child in any family exerted pressure on the women to attach their identities to male children; hence they would be called by the names of her son. As participant F34 noted, a woman could have a daughter as her first born child or even two, but she would be defined by her son's name, not the daughter's name. Therefore, as mentioned by participant F35,

At the end of the day women's identities are molded and shaped by societal expectations or social ideas, that a real woman is the one that is fertile, and she produces an heir for the family.

Participant F33 added that it would be very unfortunate if a woman could not bear children for reasons beyond her control; that would mean she would have to live without the identity that children gave to their mothers. She asserted, *you remain a girl because you are not the mother of so and so*. The impact of socio-cultural and religious constructions therefore was that the woman's identity or self-worth was highly dependent upon her fertility. *Without a child, she has a very low-esteem which tends to affect the way she relates with her family members, community and society as a whole*, emphasized participant F20.

However, some participants found the societal perceptions to have a positive impact on the self-worth of a woman in the sense that, some social ideas and values inspired Swazi women on good values like working hard to provide for one's family as a mother, and to pursue moral uprightness that your children would emulate. Notably, the woman's good character traits would benefit her home as she pursued her role as a mother and a home maker. She would then derive pleasure and satisfaction that would enhance her self-esteem.

However, according to participant F29 in an infertile union, who claimed to have no identity,

...for a woman with this predicament, it is a daily struggle to convince yourself that you are a mother or a woman; the question that bothers you is, you are the mother of who? You therefore live with a poor self-esteem, which cannot be boasted by your profession, your wealth, and even Christ, but giving birth to a child.'

The mother of a disabled son questioned how she could walk with her head held high, and claim to be a “*real*” woman when Swazi society and culture has taught her that until she gave birth to a socially fit individual, sound enough to maintain the lineage of the family you are married to, you are neither a woman nor a mother? In her words,

‘no matter how much you can convince and counsel yourself, it is imperative that you have to bring a healthy child into this world to qualify to be a wife and mother, till then, the struggle continues.’

The above data have shown the socio-cultural religious constructions on women’s fertility that shape Swazi women’s identities. In the following section I will theorise the constructions of women’s identities and personhood based on their fertility.

8.4. Analysis of the findings

This section interprets the above findings using feminist and sociological theoretical lenses. The emergent issues drawn from the data are categorised in themes which proceed as follows: construction of women’s identities; “*Self*” in women; the impact of socialising agents; and the antidote.

Construction of women’s identities

As alluded to in the theoretical framework on identity and social identity theories in chapter 3, people’s identities are composed of self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular groups or roles (Stets and Burke, 2000, p.225). Also these self-views can be tied to and sustain the self as an individual, such that the individual acts in terms of her own goals and desires rather than according to societal expectations (personal identity). Data in this study has shown that some Swazi women

had their identities constructed by societal perceptions on what defines a woman and the roles women play as married mothers. This supports the ethno-philosophical theories that in the African communal understanding one's identity and personhood is externally constructed, which according to Ikuenobe (2006, p.58) identity and personhood;

...does not just describe a human being with body and mind but also an individual who indicates by his actions that he can accept and meet certain standards of social responsibility to achieve recognition.

Nonetheless, some women's responses showed a shift in these African communal notions. Whilst they had the socio-culturally and religiously constructed group and role identities, they had also formulated personal identities in which they viewed themselves as individual entities with personal wants and wishes. Hence they were critical of societal perceptions which categorized them as "properties" and "slaves" to men, and they claimed to have achieved personal identities too at varying levels. However these women could not empower other women on the shift in self-conceptualization due to fear of breaking the "prescribed" African communal ethic that "essentially calls upon the individual to be responsive to communal dictates..." (Matolino, 2014, p.33).

Based on these findings I submit that there are situations where meanings and expectations associated with group and role identities would clash with the meanings of personal identities. It is either that the woman would act without regard to the role and group identities in her behavior, so as to maintain personal identities or she would be defined by societal perceptions. In the case of the few women who queried their roles as mothers and being men's properties, they struggled to balance their personal identities with the other identities. Whilst they had inwardly developed

a positive self-concept they found themselves obliged to still act according to the societal expectations of a woman. Stets and Burke are right in saying a person cannot be guided by role and group identities and still have her personal identity unaffected. She is likely to adjust her personal identity to adapt to situations than to modify more structurally constrained role or group identities; the reason being that once a role or group identity becomes established personal identity may have little impact' (2000, p.229).

Kneel (1981, p.12) has argued that biology is not the sole determinant of a woman's destiny but that cultural influence plays a major role in determining the path that her life takes, and that the culturally induced differences between women and men stem from a long and effective socialisation. Data have shown socialisation's influence in shaping Swazi women's thought patterns about what defines a real woman in accordance with societal perceptions on women's fertility. Socialisation is grounded on a powerful traditional belief system that in Kneel (1981) consists of three major components. Drawing on Cooper and Marshall (1977) Kneel (1981, pp.41,42) lists these components as the assignment of mutually exclusive sets of traits to women and men; the division of labor according to sex; and the investing of a higher value on male traits than on female traits. This insight is confirmed by responses from participants that clearly demonstrate the strongly traditional Swazi belief system which places more value on males so that to be a real woman she has to be fertile, and bear at least one son amongst her children; failing which society would not consider her a real woman, and that would impact badly on her identity construction. As Kneel (1981, p.42) has rightly noted, this also "deprives the woman of the full realization of all her potential".

'Self' in women

The data in the study revealed that fertile women especially those who have given birth to at least one male child have a positive sense of self which allows them to perceive themselves as real women in line with societal perceptions. *Self* theorists (Stryker 1980; Thoits 1986; Linville 1987; Nagel 1995; Stets and Burke 2000; Cinonglu and Arikan 2012) have shown that *self* is created out of the interpretation between society and the individual by the mind; that is when a woman in this particular context, would know that she exists as a distinct individual in the society. The interaction between self and society shows that one's identity is a product of what is approved and confirmed by society (Cinonglu and Arikan, 2012, p.1116). However, in a society where the woman's self-concept is developed whilst couched in patriarchal language the woman's fertility becomes crucial that she would bear children that would define her. At childhood, as shown in the data, the girl child interacts with the patriarchal society which places emphasis on "the child factor" (Oduyoye 1999), and as she grows up she is groomed to be a mother and somebody's future wife. Giving birth to children therefore means she has "hit the target", and she consequently assumes an identity that she is a 'real' woman. Stets and Burke (2000, p.226) assert that the nature of the society and its perceptions become the defining indicator of the identity of *self*.

Dickerson (2004, p.337) further unpacks the concept of self to include self-doubt which women of the 21st century grapple with. She notes in her article 'Young Women Struggling for an Identity' in *Family Process* that according to cultural expectations a few decades ago women had one major goal to achieve; to get married and have children. They would feel like failures if they failed to measure up to this standard, and self-doubt would creep in. Women of the 21st century, she claims, suffer a double dose of self-doubt because in addition to being mothers they now have their careers, which demand that they perform satisfactorily despite the pervasive and

insidious expectations embedded in culture and religion. According to Dickerson (2004) as the woman wrestles with what she believes she should do and what she might want to do, self-doubt sets in, and she loses her sense of direction. Hence, in line with Dickerson, we can infer that whilst Swazi women's identities are social constructions drawn from their capabilities to procreate, they are equally vulnerable to self-doubt which might be caused by failure to meet all expectations.

The impact of socialising agents

I identified from the data family, school, church, media and technology as the major socialising agents in the Swazi society. Siraj (2012) in her article 'Smoothing down ruffled feathers: the construction of Muslim women's femininity identities' in *Journal of Gender Studies*, makes reference to a femininity discourse which is crowded with messages on appropriate feminine behavior propagated by religion, society and media. She claims that women are influenced by this discourse regardless of how it is expressed, because it constitutes "what it means to be a woman and in so doing controls the behavior of individual women" (Crowley and Himmelweit, 1992, p.65). Put differently, as noted by Skeggs (1997, p.98) femininity as a social script genders women and they become 'specific sorts of women', shaped by and dependent upon the social, cultural and religious environment that one inhabits. That means social institutions like family, school, church, media and technology socialise women to behave in ways considered typical for women, based on care and nurturing as a mother. These institutions are supported by the social, economic and legal structures of the society (Kneel, 1981, p.42). Women who do not display womanly qualities are perceived to be lacking in femininity (Siraj, 2012, p.185). The socio-cultural and religious constructions therefore that are regulated by the social agencies create and shape Swazi women's identities and personhood. The emphasis society puts on women's fertility

shapes their thinking and behavior to an extent that fulfilling those expectations makes them feel complete and secure. Those without biological children on the other hand have to live with the deep quest to be 'real' women, and to cope with having no identity, unless they fight against all odds to accept themselves as complete human beings.

From the women's responses I inferred that the socialising agents have the potential to create an identity crisis amongst Swazi women. The participants, though not emphatically, expressed that they noted some social change in the schools' curriculum in that girl children now choose subjects that will enable them to venture into careers that were conventionally cut out for boys. Furthermore, there are women who, whilst they are mothers or nurturers, assume leadership positions at their workplace. For example they are head teachers and managers in both the public and private sector. Societal expectations force these women to display personality traits of aggressiveness, dominance, self-confidence, ambition, emotional-control and rationality, which traditionally are attributed to males. Women in leadership then find themselves in a dilemma because there is a conflict between how society perceives them and what their professions demand from them. This results in an identity crisis, which is what Kneel (1981, p.52) calls 'a double bind situation.' Most women, because of fear of contradicting societal expectations, would not want to 'trespass' and occupy leadership positions. The few who take up the challenge would either underrate or place restrictions on their abilities and eventually fail in their leadership or they would exaggerate their performances, and act 'manly' to prove their capabilities to the 'suspicious' society. As a result a woman who succeeds in leadership is spitefully referred to as '*umfati lonemasendze*' (a woman with testicles).

The Antidote

Data from the study have revealed that most Swazi see themselves as mothers, which is an embodiment of the in-group prototype that Hogg *et al.* (1995 in Stets and Burke 2000) have explained as a cognitive representation of the social category containing meanings and norms that a person associates with the social category. The women also viewed themselves in terms of their roles as mothers, which have meanings and norms attached to them. Having established that Swazi women therefore behave according to societal expectations, and the socially defined shared meanings are incorporated into their identity standards (Stets and Burke 2000), how can they attain personal identity – where they will experience themselves as ‘*real*’ women and unique individuals, without any strings attached to their fertility?

Identity theorists have argued that gender identities are not static, but fluid; they are always in a process of continuous reformulation as individuals experience different life situations. However, I would submit that Swazi women’s identities cannot be reconstructed unless the religio-cultural milieus born by patriarchy are ‘combed’ out to eradicate injustices against women. An African gendered analysis is helpful here for as Kanyoro asserts ‘gender analysis seeks to identify such injustices and to suggest a societal correction’ (2001, p.38). Notably, African feminism does not completely demonize culture; it advances that culture contains positive and negative, liberative and oppressive elements; so, the negative and the oppressive elements that dehumanise people created in God’s image must be eradicated (Martey 1998). An African context like Swaziland where women’s identities are constructed through patriarchal socialisation that women are supposed to get married and have children to qualify as ‘*real*’ women, therefore warrants gender critical analysis.

8.5 Conclusion

The aim of the chapter was to ascertain the extent to which socio-cultural and religious constructions on women's fertility shaped women's identities. Findings on women's self-definitions and that of the society based on women's fertility showed some correlation. Women's fertility was identified as very important to both the woman and her marital family, for it qualified the woman to be "*real*", thus granting her identity and personhood. Data from the study also revealed that transmission of societal perceptions on women's fertility was through social interactions with agencies of socialisation, which were identified as family, school, church media and technology. These agencies construct both role and group identities for Swazi women, based on their ability to become wives and mothers. Hence, being fertile was a priority which determined the identity status of every woman in their marital families. However, there were also some women who had developed a sense of individual self-worth which could not thrive because it was suppressed by group or role identities. There was yet another subsection of women who claimed to have no identity at all because they either did not have biological children or had given birth to the disabled. It became clear from the responses that women's fertility was very important in a patriarchal space for it gave women some identities that qualified them to be "*real*" woman.

Feminist analysis of the findings has advanced that since identity construction is not static, identities can always be reformulated to take a new shape. As noted by Cinoglu and Arıkan (2012, p.1116) identity is very flexible; it can change according to its environment, context and expectations. Therefore a reorientation of societal perceptions will result to new identities. As advanced by African Feminists (Nadar 2009; Kanyoro 2001a; Oduyoye 1995), unless the injustices bred by societal perceptions on women's fertility which shape their identities are

unmasked and addressed, Swazi women will remain defined by their fertility. There has to be a re-socialisation which will place value on women as human beings, and they will be appreciated for who they are, not what they are capable of doing. This will impact on their *self* which is the primary actor in identity formation. Even women without children will then find value in themselves, and develop self-concepts that are not necessarily approved and confirmed by agencies of socialisation. In the concluding chapter I will provide a theoretical explanation of how this value that women can find in themselves despite their fertility status may be achieved.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

The study was undertaken in the patriarchal context of Swaziland. Like elsewhere in the world, the term feminism in Swaziland has negative connotations, and any person suspected of being associated with feminist discourse is labeled a social deviant. In Swaziland a woman who swims against the tide and addresses feminist related issues is often negatively and spitefully referred to as '*lomfati lo uyi Beijing*,' (this woman is Beijing), a name tag drawn from the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women which some Swazi women delegates attended. Swazi society generally holds negative views about this conference, which was misconstrued as a strategy by the West to disrupt the natural order that keeps the Swazi society intact. As a result, the Swazi women delegates (viewed as radicals) who were eager to implement the commitments made at the conference, sought to establish a National Platform for Action, identifying five priority areas that required gender reforms; however, they faced antagonism (WLSA 2001). This confirms observations captured in Nadar's opinion editorial article 'I dream of freedom to use the F-Word' (*Sunday Tribune*, August 17, 2014:20), that society regards feminism more of "a swearword unmentionable in polite company...and feminists are a bunch of freaky fanatics who want to change the natural order." I would argue that these negative perceptions make it all the more imperative for feminist researchers to scrutinise societies and unmask the injustices of patriarchy.

This chapter therefore concludes the research journey undertaken in the above described context that sought to explore Swazi society's socio-cultural religious constructions of women's personhood based on their fertility. The chapter highlights theoretical, conceptual,

methodological and contextual contributions of the research study to the existing body of knowledge on women's fertility vis-à-vis the construction of their personhood. The chapter concludes with personal reflections and recommendations for future research.

9.2. Achievement of study objectives

Chapter one that set the scene for the study stated some critical questions which were to be answered through the achievement of four objectives. To reiterate, the objectives were as follows:

1. To provide an overview of Swazi Society's (women and men's) socio-cultural religious constructions of women's personhood based on their fertility;
2. To explore how Swazi women construct their personhood based on the Swazi society's socio-cultural religious constructions of themselves in terms of their fertility;
3. To understand why Swazi society constructs women's personhood based on their fertility in the way that they do;
4. To understand why Swazi women self-construct their personhood in relation to fertility, in the way that they do.

As indicated in the introductory chapter, the study was undertaken within a gendered society that is a "hybrid" of culture and religion; hence it has socio-cultural and religious constructions that define a "*real*" woman. Through socialisation carried out by social agents like family, school and church, individuals learn about their socially defined roles that they should follow in any given position. In the words of Giddens (2005, p.29), these are "pre-set moulds which society has prepared for women and men." These roles are assigned based on sex, and women are

culturally and religiously obligated to prove their “high quality” through their ability to bear children. Hence, their reproductive ability constructs their personhood or identity, especially if they produce heirs or sons. Failure to meet this obligation renders one a failure and an “incomplete” woman. As the girl grows up she is pressurised by these socio-cultural constructions as if she owes society a certain debt, which when settled, will enable her to be a beneficiary by attaining the status of a “*real*” woman.

The study further established that Swazi women are mostly products of socio-cultural religious constructions. Their thought patterns are shaped by these gendered settings such that even their personhood is largely a product of what society approves and confirms. They viewed themselves in terms of their roles as mothers and wives. Because of this indoctrination, a woman without children would think that infertility is the worst tragedy a woman can ever experience in life and she would do anything that would subsequently grant her status of a “*real*” woman. With regards to women’s personhood in the gendered Swazi society, it is invested more in the women’s relationships, and externally controlled; thus the women are deprived of their sense of individuality. My interpretation of the socio-cultural constructions presented throughout this study, using feminist theoretical lenses, revealed that women’s worth is tied to their reproductive capabilities, ultimately resulting in the achievement of personhood. The study has shown a need for re-socialisation in Swazi families and churches, which will place value on women as human beings, not for what they are capable of producing. A re-oriented socialisation will therefore impact on the women’s “*self*” which is the primary actor in identity formation. Even women without children will then find value in themselves, and develop self-concepts that are not necessarily approved and confirmed by agents of socio-cultural religious constructions. Having explained what the Swazi society’s socio-cultural religious constructions of women’s’

personhood based on their fertility are, how they relate to Swazi women's self-constructions of personhood, and why Swazi women relate to these socio-cultural religious constructions of personhood in the way that they do, below is a discussion on how the study extended the theoretical, conceptual, methodological and contextual parameters of the existing body of knowledge on this subject. I will discuss each of these in turn.

9.3. Theoretical: from a communal African ethic to a feminist ethic of personhood

The main focus of the study was on the construction of Swazi women's identities and personhood based on their fertility. It is therefore important that I demonstrate how the study has contributed to the existing body of theories on personhood.

African communitarian thinkers (Tempels 1959; Mbiti 1970; Menkiti 1984; Gyekye 1987 Matolino 2014) speak of the Bantu notion of Ubuntu as an African ethic that takes into account the rich ethical traditions of black people (Murove 2013), and how it regulates behaviour. Murove further claims that African communalism enshrined in this African ethic was regrettably trivialized by colonial anthropology, which vehemently attacked it for retarding modernization. Ubuntu therefore is the post-colonial quest for a rebirth of an African identity. Echoing the African communitarian thinkers discussed in chapter three, he underscores that Ubuntu is based on the worldview of relationality, that as human beings to attain ultimate wellbeing, which this study refers to as personhood or an identity, we must depend on one another. He asserts, "...it is in the reality of our dependence and interdependence with each other that we attain the fullest of our humanness" (Murove 2013:37). In their definition of Ubuntu, which is similar to that of Murove, Samkange and Samkange (1980, p.39) list the values of Ubuntu as kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people, a code of behaviour, an attitude to other people and to life.

Implications of the above argument to the context of the study are that a Swazi woman would not feel or be considered a “*real*” person by community unless she fulfills the societal expectation to bear children, since she owes her existence to other people. In other words, the Swazi community is ethically obligated to make, create or produce the woman’s identity or personhood as she is constrained by the communal reality to live according to stipulated cultural standards to make sense of her existence. Her fertility is therefore important because it secures her space in the community and gives her identity. She feels obligated to procreate and to pass onto progeny the cultural values that she has inherited from her community for the African ethic to continue to survive. So, she owes her existence to the community; hence she must fulfill all the pre-set obligations that society demands from her. Thus, having an identity that one is a “*real*” woman goes beyond that one has a body and a mind as an individual; instead the status of a real woman is only attained after one has accepted and met certain standards of social responsibility (Ikuenobe, 2006, 58), thus fulfilling the African ethic. Failure to meet this communal expectation by being barren or giving birth to a child with disabilities or being a mother of girl children only, therefore automatically disqualifies one from full personhood.

The African feminist ethic which feminist scholars and activists advocate, just as the African ethic, also calls for important values such as respect, kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people, good attitude to other people and to life. Notably, however, it does not stipulate biological conditions that women and men should meet in order to be accepted by society. It only advocates placing value on the person whether she is fertile or infertile, woman or man, black or white. This ethic also emphasizes togetherness and relational living, but first with yourself, with God and with other people. When embraced therefore it can give life and dignity to every member of society, including fertile and infertile women. Women

will be treated not as a means to an end, but as ends in themselves (Nyawo, Nadar and Reddy, 2014, p.115). Their personhood or identity will be more personal than social, and their ethical conduct will not necessarily be realised within the realm of social reality and in the course of interaction with other people (Matolino, 2014, p53). Since both ethical theories share the same definition of what is ethical, but still remain in conflict, I propose that the African ethic be open to accommodate another independent ethical outlook that engages critically with what defines personhood. This would address Mangena's (2009) concern that African woman's ethical view is not respected because of the whims and caprices of patriarchy which is camouflaged in the communitarian philosophy of Ubuntu.

Nnaemeka's submission in her article, "*Nego-feminism: Theorising, Practicing and Pruning Africa's Way*" also seems to provide a solution to this tension. She explains *nego-feminism* as follows:

First, it is the feminism of negotiation; second, it stands for "no ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of "give and take/exchange" and "cope with successfully/go around." African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines. In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts (2003, p.378).

This type of feminism is different from those which discard culture as completely dysfunctional and oppressive to women. Through it Nnaemeka argues that culture should not be discredited as retarding development, rather attempts should be made to find out in what ways culture can better enhance development. Hence, she proposes “building on the indigenous” (Nnaemeka 2003, p.361), which by indigenous Nnaemeka does not necessarily refer to the traditional or what happened in antiquity, but she means “whatever the people consider important in their lives, whatever they regard as an authentic expression of themselves” (Ake, 1988, p.19). To allay fears to those who may think this is a mammoth task, Nnaemeka reminds us of the flexibility of culture that it is “dynamic in the sense that it derives its meanings, evolution, and reformulation from people’s encounter with and negotiations in it in the context of historical imperatives. Data in this study showed some Swazi women experiencing the tension between the two types of ethics. Whilst the majority were comfortable with their identity being defined socially based on their fertility, there were a few that felt that their sense of “*self*” which they had built over time was being suppressed. Their personal identity which emphasizes a sense of individual autonomy is given preference over a primary communal involvement. This is also where we see social identity prioritized and propagated by an African communal ethic in tension with personal identity advocated by an African feminist ethic.

The socio-cultural and religious constructions of women’s fertility can be reformulated by Swazi society who could heed the call by *nego-feminism* to “build on the indigenous”. This will lead to the construction of the true ‘*self*’ in every Swazi woman, which is not necessarily defined by relationships. The acquiring of personal self or inward empowerment is what Nnaemeka (2003) calls true development. Expanding on Nnaemeka’s AungSan Suukyi (1995) observation on inward empowerment (1995, p.18) asserts:

At its heart there must be a sense of empowerment and inner fulfilment. This alone will ensure that human and cultural values remain paramount. When this is achieved, culture and development will naturally coalesce to create an environment in which all are valued, and every kind of human potential can be realised (1995, p.18).

9.4. Methodological

This research was a collaborative enterprise between the participants of the study and myself as a researcher. Traditionally, participants are subordinate to researchers, and researchers are the “experts” who extract “relevant” information from the “subjects” (Rider, 2005, p.36). This is an exploitative relationship that feminist researchers reject because they believe that researchers and participants are interdependent and they should share an egalitarian relationship rather than a hierarchical one (Cosgrove and McHung 2005:817). In this view, the researcher is not an “expert”, that is one who already knows more than the participant, but one who has much to learn from the participant. This collaborative inquiry therefore permits participants to have a voice in telling their story.

There were 71 participants in this study whose voices I engaged with and illuminated for analysis and interpretation. That is why some of the women’s life stories as victims and survivors of patriarchy are captured verbatim in the data. Their struggle in trying to carve territories for themselves within their families in order to be accepted as “*real*” women, on the basis of their fertility, deserved to be heard and recorded. Along with other academic feminists I believe that conceptions of knowledge and truth that are accepted and articulated today have been shaped throughout history by male-dominated majority culture (Belenky et al., 1986, p11). According to Cosgrove and Mchugh (2000, p.825), the male experience has been so powerfully articulated and they have etched powerful templates into the literature and our minds. So, this study was

methodologically significant in that it allowed Swazi women to speak in their own voices, but also where necessary to be mediated by a Swazi woman, instead of a foreign male as is common in research practice of this nature. As it is illustrated in the preceding chapters, women without progeny in particular had their voices locked into a world of silence for many years, and for some of these women it was their first time that they shared their deep-seated hurt and bitterness, and powerlessness in their relationships. Their narratives depicted them as having essentially lived their lives in silence, some even “looking for nourishment in the most barren soil, the church which tells them to shut up” (Belenky et al., 1986, p.101).

Hence this study, through being collaborative, transformed both the participants and myself as the researcher. Drawing on our own perspectives and life stories we were able to make sense of our externally constructed personhood that is invested in connections to others (Cosgrove and Mchugh 2000). This approach is also a contribution to knowledge on the investigative methodology of storytelling as an effective feminist inquiry. As stated in chapter three, Nadar (2014, p.18) finds women’s stories in the feminist discourse as “data with soul”. She posits that storytelling contributes profoundly to knowledge production by putting a human face to research, whereby;

Feminists boldly declare that story is a legitimate and scientific part of research – the telling of stories, the listening to stories, the construction of stories in a narrative in order to represent research findings – all of these processes are counted as legitimate components of the research process and an essential part of feminist epistemology. And nowhere does this notion of narrative research cohere more than in Africa (Nadar, 2014, pp.20, 21).

Below are reflections of four participants of the study on their personal impressions of how the study transformed them as they shared their narratives.

Excerpts from personal research journeys of a selected sample

Participant F7

At first this was just another research and the interview questions were not different from any data collection tool. However, as I participated in focus group discussions and I heard other participants unraveling their sad experiences, my own deep-seated grief for having one child that is disabled was catapulted to the fore. Their stories resonated with my own hurdles which had been safely tucked in my closet. The hardest was when they had to disclose skeletons that that included ill-treatment by the in-laws as well as their husband. This study therefore made me to have respect and empathy for other women, and also to realise I am not alone in the struggle of being barren; my story is their story.

Participant FS

The biggest lesson I learnt in this study is that until a woman holds and breastfeeds her own child, the yearning and the longing is unbearable, and you live with deep emptiness in your heart. I also learned to understand the pain of bearing out your dirty linen and how you actually feel after doing so. In as much as it was therapeutic in that I experienced a sigh of relief that at least someone knows how I feel, having opened a door to your home, or expose the private domain of your life, leaves an awkward feeling of nakedness, even though anonymity is guaranteed in a project of this caliber.

Participant F21

Upon further reflection on the interview sessions, especially the life stories, it dawned to me that I should bracket off societal perceptions drummed on my head since childhood that you become a 'real' woman when you have children. I learnt to be less judgmental on people because many women go through experiences that one cannot fathom. I also realised that I should count my own blessing, that at least I know how it feels to have a baby, even though it is a girl. Again, I have a husband who has never uttered an ugly word calculated to voice a disappointment in my inability to bear him the expected child, a boy. I am now eager to stand in solidarity with other women who are struggling to meet societal expectations to become mothers.

Participant Mrs B

In all the 25 years in a childless marriage, it was the first time that I got an opportunity to share my miserable life of waiting in anticipation every month that I would miss my menstrual cycle, and it never happened. No one seemed to understand my pain, not even my fellow church women. Instead everyone, up to today, casts stones on me, blaming me for breaking my own marriage. Spending two hours therefore, with someone who listened to my story made me feel important and valued. I also hope that my story will help other women who are in the same predicament as mine.

As can be seen from the participants' narratives above, the purpose of their stories did not only fulfill the data production strategy of the study, but in line with feminist research methods also provided an opportunity for them to critically reflect on and transform their own lives. This was an empowering and cathartic process for both the participants and myself as a researcher.

If the study has transformed women's lives through the safe space that it provided for the women to open up and share how they have experienced power differentials in the patriarchally defined families, it is important that I also show its relevance to the context. In the next section I show the implications of the research output to Swaziland.

9.5. Contextual

A contextual contribution to the body of knowledge is basically bringing new insights into established concepts, from a specific context. This study contributes to existing knowledge by critically analyzing societal constructions in a specific patriarchal context of the "*many Africas*" that Oduyoye (1999) talks about by bringing a general African feminist hermeneutic to bear on a specific Swazi context. A reorientation of social structures like family and church within this Swazi context is therefore proposed through the findings of this study, which would subsequently impact on people's behaviours. As argued by social learning theorists, acquisition of behaviour is through a combination of observation, imitation and differential reinforcement (Bussey and Bandura, 2004, p.41). So, once gender sensitive contexts are created, people would begin to attach value and respect to one another.

African feminist theology argues for the inclusion of culture and religion within feminist discourse and a deconstruction and reconstruction of the same (Hinga, 1990, p.37). As explained by Nadar (2009, p.4), African women's theology has a specific focus on interrogating the experience of living in a hybrid patriarchal space of Christianity and African culture. According to Martey (1998, p.39), it analyzes how women have been defined by patriarchal society, not only in socio-economic and political terms, but also in religious and cultural terms. Kanyoro (2001, p.162) sees this as a theological engagement with gender issues, which seeks to expose harm and injustices that are in society and are extended to Scripture and the teachings and

practices of the Church through culture. Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu (2007, p.438), also arguing from a feminist perspective, find culture and religion to have enough evidence to demonstrate that certain symbolic values in these traditions have been used to justify women's subordination to men.

Phiri (2000), also an exponent of African women theologies, acknowledges culture as an integral part of an African theology, but further argues that cultural practices that are hurtful to any group should be challenged. "Unfortunately, all African cultures have viewed women as less important than men..." Phiri asserts (2000, p.61). Maluleke (1997, p.21) addresses Phiri's concern by heaping praises on African Feminist Theology - that it comes with a new approach that mounts a critique of both African culture and African Christianity in ways that are different from what mainstream African theologies have done. African theologies, as noted by Oduyoye (1995, p.182), have generally ignored the relation of god-talk to issues of gender, thus propagating inequalities between women and men. At the center of this perspective also lies the concern for justice, hence its focus to manifest and critique injustices against humanity. Moyo (2004) has also confirmed that this perspective focuses on women's struggles to grapple with religio-cultural definitions of women in relation to men, and how these definitions perpetually conflict with the quest for gender justice both in church and society. Further than manifesting and critiquing injustices, it seeks to answer the "so what" question which Nadar (2009, p.141) has identified as activism.

A study that is framed by an activist concern needs to define its relevance for change in society. What would be the relevance of this study to policy formulation in Swaziland? Given the

definition for policy by Haddad (1995, p.15), there can be no policy formulation without research that would inform it. She defines it as an explicit or implicit single decision or group of decisions which may set out directives for guiding future decisions, initiate or retard action, or guide implementation of previous decisions. Every policy therefore reflects the needs of the groups it affects, which could primarily be unearthed through research. It must undergo a process of implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This implies that every policy becomes subject to review in line with economic, sociological and political changes. This research therefore has a bearing on policy reviews, as it shall be illustrated in the next paragraph, or can even inform formulation of new policies on gender related issues. Furthermore the study may inform church policies and procedures on how churches should reread and reinterpret scriptures in the light of women's worth.

2010 National Gender Policy

The Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland is State Party to several human rights instruments that seek to promote gender equality and respect for the rights of women. Its operational National Constitution promulgated in 2005 has clauses that align with gender related international treaties.²⁸ Chapter 3 in particular, has a Bill of Rights which provides for respect and protection of human rights and the Rights of Women. Furthermore, the country has instituted what has been dubbed National Vision 2022 articulated in the National Development Strategy, where gender equality is amongst the priority areas. Having ratified the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Swaziland recently established the 2014 Gender and Family issues Department, as a national machinery to accelerate progress towards attainment of gender equality and

²⁸Statement by H.E. Mr Zwelethu Mnisi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Swaziland, at the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 28 February 2011 New York.

empowerment of women in the country.²⁹ Through a consultative process, this department housed at the Deputy Prime Minister's office produced the current National Gender Policy in 2010.

The policy claims in its foreword to provide a vision which aims at improving living conditions of women and men, including practical and forward looking guidelines and strategies for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of related constitutional provisions.³⁰ Amongst its glossary terms I have picked up definitions of four terms that have relevance to the study. These are reproductive health and reproductive rights, and sexual health and sexual rights. Paraphrased, reproductive health is defined as the state of physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to reproduction, including the ability to have children and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so; reproductive rights are basic rights of women and men to decide freely and responsibly on issues of sexuality, free of discrimination, coercion and violence; sexual health is the enhancement of personal relations, respect for security of the person and the physical integrity of the human body, and the right to make decisions concerning sexuality and reproduction; sexual rights are human rights of women and men to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality (National Gender Policy, 2010, pp.9,10).

The policy further recognizes that Swazi society is characterized by inequality between women and men; hence its aim to manifest the challenges caused by gender disparities versus behavioral practices that are legitimised by culture. It lists government's initiatives to achieve full and

²⁹ Swaziland Country Progress Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, June 2014 <http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploads/swaziland-beijing-review-report> [accessed 14 October 2014]

³⁰National Gender Policy 2010.The Kingdom of Swaziland, Mbabane.

coherent participation of both women and men in various areas of development. These include the National Vision 2022 that spells out strategies to eliminate gender gaps to all citizens, the Swaziland Committee on Gender and Women Affairs (SCOGWA), which serves as the main coordinating body for the development of a gender program, and the government's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) in 2004, to name but a few. Through these initiatives, there would hopefully be gender balance in all socio-economic, legal, religious, cultural, political processes, and women empowerment by now.

Amongst the four objectives that the policy tabulates, one reads "to identify, conserve and promote positive aspects of Swazi traditions and culture in order to promote equitable opportunities and rights for both males and females in all aspects of development" (National Gender Policy 2010:18) The broad objectives are broken down to generate nine thematic program areas, with each having a policy statement, objectives and strategies to be employed to attain the objectives. The theme that has relevance to the study is family and socialisation. The policy gives credence to the family as an institution that preserves and transmits cultural values down the generations. The family as a chief agent of socialisation bears the responsibility to prepare the young on their diverse roles as boys and girls. The government therefore should ensure a conducive family environment where women and men, boys and girls would fully enjoy their rights and develop their full potential or capability.³¹

There are some strategies that the policy suggests could be employed to achieve the theme's objectives. They include the following: to promote positive cultural practices; to develop programs to promote self-esteem of both women and men from adolescence stage to adulthood; to advocate for integration of human rights and gender awareness education into community

³¹ Swaziland Government National Policy 2010, p19.

belief systems, school and tertiary curricula; to develop programs to bridge the information gap between the young and adults, mainly with respect to ensuring the passing on of best indigenous knowledge, skills, culture and traditions; to create programs that will strengthen the extended family support units to promote socialisation and address the emerging social challenges; and to introduce same life skills for both women and men at family level to the work place (National Gender Policy, 2010, p.19).

The above discussion indicates that the Swaziland Government is generally in support of the advancement of gender and family issues. Notwithstanding, the critical concern is that the international and national provisions discussed above seem to be theoretical, and only exist on paper, detached from the people's realities; as Wekesa (2013) has noted they are not translated into meaningful gain at the grassroots level. The findings of this study suggest that a reason for this dissonance may lie precisely in the focus on the family, which this study has shown to be a patriarchal constructed space which does little to enhance the reproductive rights of women, and instead promotes the idea that women are only means to an end. Policy will therefore need to take cognizance of an uncritical reliance on family or cultural values as a solution to gender inequalities.

As Wolpe, Quinian and Martinez³² have argued, policies regarding gender inequalities have to confront deeply held beliefs and social practice, some of which they admit are difficult to challenge, and they are a potential source of conflict and contradiction. That means a gender policy formulated in a context that condones male supremacy and dominance over women should engage critically with patriarchy, and not stroke its ego. A policy formulated using gender

³² A report by the Gender Equity Task Team in the Department of Education, 123 Schoeman Street, Pretoria, October 1997 financed by The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, p22.

lenses refrains from employing cosmetic concepts couched in patriarchal language, which in the long run, will achieve little. It must be conscious of patriarchal attitudes that become so internalized during the socialisation process such that they are taken as natural, as this study has significantly shown. Subsequently, even in places where equality is supposed to exist, that is in tiers of government, these attitudes tend to prevail (Kaur, 2012, p43). A study therefore that proceeds from an African feminist vantage point can better inform National Gender Policy because, whilst it does not completely condemn culture, it unearths the ‘hoodwinking’ elements of culture that can have serious implications for women’s personhood.

1952 Adoption of Children Act

Swaziland's adoption law is contained in the Adoption of Children Act, 1952. Adoption is also practiced under Swazi customary law. The Act recognizes the Swazi customary law of adoption but it has not tried to integrate it. Swazi customary law of adoption is simply concerned with the custody of a child, without affecting status; the child remains the child of its natural parents.³³

The Adoption of Children Act³⁴ explains who can and cannot be adopted; who can and cannot adopt a child. In many respects this law has primary concern for the child. A child is defined as a person less than nineteen years. Thus, no person less than 25 years can adopt a child. Where the child to be adopted is 16 or more, the person wishing to adopt must be at least 25 years older than the child. Such person must also satisfy the court that they are of good repute, are fit and proper persons to be entrusted with custody of a child and that they are possessed of adequate means to maintain and educate the child.

³³<http://www.savethechildren.dk/admin/public/downloads.aspx?file> [accessed 20 October 2014]

³⁴<http://www.unicef.org/swaziland/sz-publications2005//l/evaluation> [accessed 20 October 2014]

The purpose of the Act is to bestow upon that child a better quality of life by ensuring that its adoption will provide her/him with a stable home and with parents better able to provide it with a stable home and with parents better able to provide for its welfare and material needs. In addition, the adoption confers upon that child the surname of its adoptive parents and in law, the child is deemed to be the legitimate child of the adoptive parents. The Act also balances the interest of the child with those of the adoptive parents and those of the natural parents. To this end for instance, the Act requires that the consent of the natural parents be obtained in writing before an adoption order can be made. The adoptive parents are also required to allow the natural parents or the guardian appointed by Minister of Home Affairs access to the child for the first two years of its adoption.

Responses mostly from women participants in this study who were involuntarily childless as a result of sterility revealed some mixed feelings about Swaziland's adoption law. A majority preferred not to adopt any child because they viewed the law to be discriminatory and nerve-racking. Whilst they legitimised the priority the law accorded to the child, they found it to be insensitive to the emotional needs of a childless couple, especially the woman. For example, the provision in the law that they should 'live under surveillance' for two years, or for a lifetime in the case of the Swazi customary law, was frustrating and belittling. They found the law to be exacerbating the societal perceptions that barren women were inexperienced and incapable of being mothers, hence the need for close supervision. My study of societal perceptions on fertility and women's construction of their identities and personhood therefore, may better inform the

review of adoption procedures of this dated law, to take into consideration the emotional needs of the adoptive parents.

The draft Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill of 2009

Swaziland's parliament, which operates in a bicameral system consisting of both the house of Assembly and Senate, has to finalize this bill into full enactment of a law. The bill deals with a comprehensive range of issues including rape, incest, indecent assault, abduction, abortion, brothels, bestiality, and commercial sexual exploitation. The enactment of the legislation therefore would mark the beginning of an era where human rights, dignity and bodily integrity of vulnerable and violated individuals in society would be recognized and protected. This is the same bill which Mabuza³⁵ makes reference to in the country's statement to the United Nations. She asserts that violence against women in Swaziland, in the form of unequal power relations, sexual and reproductive health amongst others, is a human rights issue because it infringes on the women's right to dignity and their sexual and reproductive health. Hence, the various legal, legislative and policy initiatives that Swaziland has put in place to prevent and eliminate gender based violence. This includes the draft Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill, currently before the 10th Parliament for consideration.

My study on the implications of socio-cultural and religious beliefs and perspectives on fertility to women's identity construction can better inform deliberations on this bill, where patriarchy is explored objectively. One of the mechanisms stated in the bill to support its operations is the piloting of what Mabuza (2013, p.3) calls an age appropriate and culturally sensitive program on

³⁵ Statement by H.E. Ms. Khangezile Mabuza, Principal Secretary at the Deputy Prime Minister's office as head of delegation of the Kingdom of Swaziland at the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York 11 March 2013.

sexuality education for adolescents and youth. As this study discusses family as the chief socialising agent where gender roles are clearly defined at birth, it would challenge legislators to engage deeply with the dynamics of sexuality education

9.6. Contribution to the “intellectual community”³⁶

Feminist scholars in the African region have spent the last decade working collaboratively with writers and activists at various locations on the continent to build an intellectual community, around a shared goal of strengthening the feminist politics of gender studies in African universities.At the institutional level, Africa’s universities remain steeped in patriarchal institutional cultures in which women are generally vastly outnumbered, and their intellectual contribution relegated to the fringes or steadfastly ignored. We have entered the twenty-first century faced with renewed global economic crisis, with surging militarization and with intensifying cultural and religious fundamentalists, which threaten the best advances made by democratic and feminist struggles during the late-twentieth century. This global climate is likely to continue to negatively affect intellectual landscapes and academic freedom, unless locally grounded efforts are made to sustain and strengthen liberatory scholarship, including feminist scholarship (Mama, 2011, p.4).

This research study has been undertaken by a feminist scholar employed in one of Africa’s universities that Mama makes reference to in the above quotation, the University of Swaziland. This is the main national university in the Kingdom of Swaziland, established more than half a

³⁶ A term used by Amina Mama in feminist review conference proceedings 2011, available from www.feminist-review.com. She uses it to refer to the spaces for the articulation of critical gender perspectives in African universities, in which knowledge is then exchanged across contexts.

century ago. Space does not allow me to elaborate on the patriarchal institutional culture deeply embedded in the operations of the University of Swaziland, but I can only confirm Mama's blanket observations about Africa's universities that women are indeed relegated to the fringes in all aspects.

The Department of Theology and Religious Studies which is located in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Swaziland, Kwaluseni, has existed since the establishment of the institution more than fifty years ago. Influenced by the history of Christianity in Swaziland, the department has always offered courses that are predominantly based on Christian theology. These courses dovetail the subject Religious Education, which was first known as Bible knowledge, offered from primary to higher secondary school level. In line with the SADC "Protocol on Education and Training" which Swaziland ratified in September 1997, the University introduced the semesterised system five years ago. Departments have been tasked to revise their course offerings and also inject new courses that could be relevant to the global market and contemporary academic trends. The Department of Theology and Religious Studies amongst its new courses has proposed gender and religion related courses to be taken as both prerequisites and electives, which I believe will "open some small but important spaces for the articulation of critical gender perspectives" (Mama, 2011, p.5). This research study therefore which interrogates socio-cultural and religious constructions in relation to women may provide a base for critical engagement with hegemonic realities in the lived experiences of Swazi women. As this study was an eye-opener to me as a researcher, it will similarly empower Swazi women to join hands with other African women members of the intellectual community,

to unapologetically commit themselves to radically transform the unequal gender relations that continue to be a pervasive feature of African social realities, and to working

across the boundaries of nation, ethnicity, class and creed, and to upholding women's right to bodily and sexual integrity (Mama, 2011, p.9).

Furthermore, through the semesterised gender program, the University of Swaziland will now be part of what Mama finds to be a major achievement of the last decade; that is the growth of feminist networking that spans academic and activist communities (2011, p.19).

The study may not only make an intellectual contribution at tertiary level, but also to education in the school system as shown below.

The school, which the study has identified as one of the socialisation agents that constructed women's identities and personhood, has its straight-jacketed curriculum inherited from the British colonialists that made inroads into the country at the same period as the western missionaries. Its levels are organised as follows (Nyawo 2010, p.2):

- Pre-school education which caters for children between 3-5 years of age. At the moment it is not compulsory;
- Primary education which lasts 7 years and the official entry age is 6 years. At the end of Grade 7 learners sit the Swaziland Primary Certificate Examination;
- Secondary education which lasts five years, and is divided into junior secondary (a 3-year program leading to the junior certificate (JC) and senior secondary (a 2-year program that prepares students for IGCSE/HGCSE/SGCSE).

Although a lengthy discussion is not possible here, it is necessary to consider how Religious Education (RE) has evolved over the years since the colonial era, making Swaziland schools a playground for Christian theology. Christian western missionaries pioneered formal education in

Swaziland and first among their priorities was to establish schools for Swazi children. They used education as the most effective tool for evangelization. Cazziol (1989, p.46) states the aim of missionary education was to teach new converts to read and write, and the brightest amongst them could be trained to be evangelists. Bible Knowledge (R.K.) or Scripture, as the subject was called then, became a core subject in most schools.

In the 1960s research inputs, theoretically informed by the pedagogical arguments of Jean Piaget, were presented by educational psychologists (Nyawo 2010). They posited that if religious instruction had to be of any relevance in the school curriculum it had to become child-centred. This approach emphasized relating the moral teachings of the Bible with everyday experiences, as opposed to the rote-learning of dates, names, places and events outlined in the Bible, or even the memorization of key biblical verses (Cazziol, 1989, p.5). In response to this new approach, the traditional Bible-centred syllabus was reformed to integrate the Bible with social and personal topics called life-themes; hence the subject name changed from Bible Knowledge to Religious Knowledge (R.K.). However, whilst the local syllabus was being modified to incorporate the life themes, none of them related to gender issues.

Another syllabus restructuring was carried out in the early 1970s. These theories presented religion as a holistic human phenomenon, whose instruction should not only be limited to Christianity; it should incorporate other major religions. An inter-faith syllabus was developed and briefly piloted in one school in Swaziland, but “was soon discontinued because no other school appeared interested in adopting it” (Nyawo, 2010, p.5). All schools, with exception of one, remained with the old syllabus which comprised the Old and New Testament and Christian Doctrine. Of note is that the old syllabus introduced in the 1960s survived all educational

reforms, and it maintained its Bible-centred approach, “despite the change of name of the subject from Bible Knowledge to Religious Knowledge” (Nyawo, 2010, p.8).

The introduction of IGCSE/HGCSE by Cambridge in Swaziland in 2005 brought another shift in Religious Knowledge. It was adopted subsequent to global educational demands. In 1985, the government set up a commission known as the National Education Review Commission (NERCOM) tasked to make an inquiry into the applicability and relevance of the curricula offered in schools. In its findings the commission reported that the curricula that Swaziland inherited from the colonialists was now irrelevant to the lives of learners, and less applicable to their realities and the aspirations of the society (NERCOM 1985). As a result, it was established that schools were fast producing ill-prepared learners who are hardly absorbed by an ever-changing working environment; hence they end up being frustrated school leavers. The commission then recommended that the government should adopt a model which would have efficacious educational methodologies that would nurture the higher order cognitive and interpersonal skills in the learners (Nyawo, 2010, p.11). The commission also emphasized the socio-cultural relevance of any curriculum; that it must not be detached from the real world in which the learners live. Instead it must be closely aligned to the values and work skills of the world. In compliance with the recommendations, the Ministry of Education in Swaziland formulated a new policy known as the National Policy Statement on Education which was based on the importance of quality education (MOE 1999a).

A new program for secondary schools was subsequently introduced in 2006, whose aim, amongst others, was “to align the education system with international education standards, and strive for cost effectiveness in education” (MOE, 2005, p.2). The new program would embrace the vision that secondary education should provide, which would be “a flexible, responsive and

integrated curriculum which will satisfy world-class learning standards compatible with higher and further education and the world of work” (MOE, 2005, p.5). This improvement therefore paved the way for a new paradigm in the Religious Education (R.E.) curriculum. The curriculum changed from being Bible-based to the multi-faith model, but again there was no theme on gender.

IGCSE has been gradually phased out to open space for the implementation of Swaziland General Certificate to Secondary Education (SGCSE). SGCSE is a localised program, tailored after IGCSE. According to the Ministry of Education and Training and the Examinations Council, the localisation process was driven by the need to develop an internationally recognized programme that was more relevant to the needs of pupils in Swaziland. This new innovation has also brought some changes in the RE multi-faith curriculum at higher Secondary level; instead of the four religions that were studied under IGCSE (Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Swazi Traditional Religion), Judaism and Islam had been dropped. This history on the evolution of RE in Swaziland indicates a Christian theologically-oriented school system insensitive to gender realities. A locally grounded feminist study, such as this one, therefore, that manifests the impact of the school in constructing gender imbalances through its curriculum, may contribute significantly to the creation of a new intellectual community.

9.7. Contribution to Christian church community

Since the Scriptures were written in a patriarchal historical setting we should not be surprised that they are permeated by that ideology. The rule of fathers over all females of every age is the primary worldview of the Scriptures which it maintains is mandated by God. No wonder that feminist biblical scholars are concluding that the Scriptures are

often very bad news for women since they reinforce and legitimise the patterns of society which oppress and dehumanise women (Rakoczy, 2004, p.154).

Data in this study have shown women being victims of the androcentric bias of Christian theology which resonated with Swazi cultural tenets, resulting in women suffering a double dose of patriarchy's marginalization. Madiba (1996), in her assessment of African women's position in church and society, argues that black women have a common plight; they are bound together as a distinct socio-historical group by oppression perpetuated by a male-dominated and patriarchal society. She further eloquently captures this point when she asserts;

Tradition has assigned very specific roles to women in church and society. Women have been labeled as sinners, temptress, child bearers, servants and subordinates. Consequently they have been limited to performing domestic tasks, serving children, old and the sick, as nurses, nuns, mothers, fundraisers and tea-makers (1996, p.275).

The Christian community in Swaziland generally ignores discussing issues that relate to the subordinate position of women, who are the largest population in every church; "ironically they are the busiest in the church, and without them churches can be bankrupt" (Madiba, 1996, p.276). As Schüssler Fiorenza and Collins (1985, p.4) have observed,

although women are the majority of people still going to church and of those joining the religious orders, the church is officially represented by males only. Although the church is called "Our Mother" and referred to with the pronoun 'she' it is personified and governed by fathers and brothers.

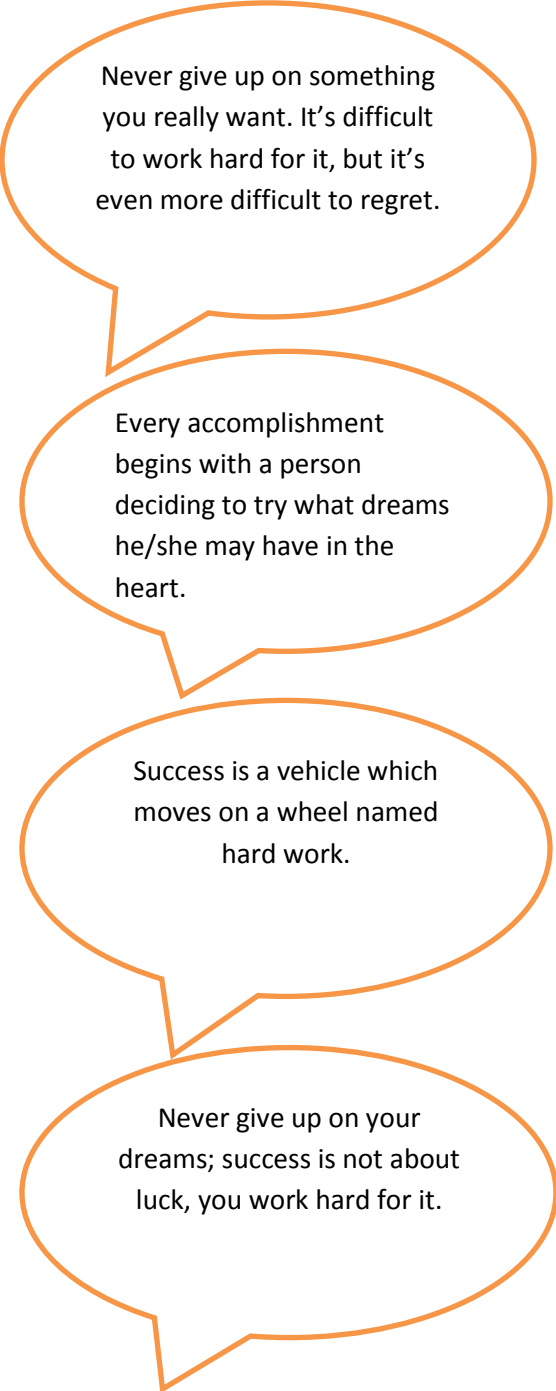
Relating this to the context of the study, the church has not come out to empower women on how to construct their personal identities and not fatalistically accept their subjugation as part of a

woman's 'package'. Also, it does not equip infertile women on skills to cope with barrenness, and be enabled to perceive themselves complete women, even without children. Madiba (1996, p.213) has remarked on the church's insensitive attitude to disadvantaged women and said, "the church has not yet adequately addressed itself to women's problems, and how they can reasonably protect themselves from unnecessary pain, both physically and psychologically". There are other issues that pertain to women's sexualities which the church does not address forthrightly and empower women to face certain predicaments in their lived experiences. Instead the church would support all women's activities where women would be schooled on how to be good wives that would satisfy their husbands sexually and produce children for them, especially the 'heirs'. In this age of HIV and AIDS, some church women have lost their lives, whilst others are infected by their partners because they (the women) would be taught at the women's meetings that it was 'ungodly' to either withhold conjugal rights from their irresponsible partners or use protection.

The research study therefore will challenge the church to re-examine its approaches to women empowerment in terms of their dignity as complete human beings. This empowerment goes beyond economic projects that would increase market and profitability for women's income, and thus alleviate poverty. It focuses on internal development, which would enable Christian women to stand against any prejudicial treatment that would degrade them and restrict them to child bearing. Furthermore the study will challenge the church to critically engage with the Christian theology that was pushed down its throat by western missionaries, to the detriment of Christian women in particular. As suggested earlier, whilst this approach acknowledges that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984, p.15), it does not completely discard them; instead it looks for "seeds of hope" in them,

which will counteract the bitter fruit of oppression down the ages and will provide ways for women to claim Jesus as true liberator and savior (Rakoczy, 2004, pp.103, 104).

9.8 Personal reflections on research journey



Never give up on something you really want. It's difficult to work hard for it, but it's even more difficult to regret.

Every accomplishment begins with a person deciding to try what dreams he/she may have in the heart.

Success is a vehicle which moves on a wheel named hard work.

Never give up on your dreams; success is not about luck, you work hard for it.

This section begins with catchphrases³⁷ that summarize my experience in the research journey; that it was characterized by hard work geared towards realizing a dream that has been successfully accomplished. An earlier section also captured excerpts from a selected sample of participants of the study, where they share their own impressions about the study. In synopsis, we all share similar sentiments that the research transformed us to better understand the different faces of patriarchy and the implications of the various conceptions of women's fertility within the patriarchal space. Also it was therapeutic to withdraw repressed feelings of hurt, anger and bitterness from our subconscious mind, and we expressed them openly through storytelling. Below is my personal reflection on the research journey.

Stages in my journey

I relate very well with Roche (2000, p.177), who in her personal reflection on her research journey uses the metaphor of a 'child' to describe it. As she has rightly observed, a research study needs nurturing from conception, infancy to adulthood and beyond. It must not be abandoned; one should inquire what it would take to support it and take it through to adolescence and to maturity. Hence the earlier cited catchphrases that realizing one's dreams calls for hard work and determination since success does not come by chance. It cannot be undertaken in a half-hearted way. As Roche (2000, p.175) has asserted, research is a serious business that requires one to be fully devoted to it; it is an expensive business in terms of money, resources and time, especially if you had to travel long distances, as I did, for consultation and supervision.

As stated in my personal reflexivity in chapter three, it took me twelve years to deliver the 'child' I had conceived in 2000. Nurturing it in the three years of PhD study since 2012 has been

³⁷<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/discovery> [accessed 23 October 2014].

an enriching experience that has not only stretched my intellectual capacities, but also transformed my perceptions in terms of a woman's supposed 'value' in a patriarchal home. This confirms Proust's³⁸ quote on research, that research is "a real voyage of discovery not consisting of only new landscapes, but developing new eyes."

Calls to PhD study

As captured in my motivation, I was inspired by the academic exposure in African Women Theologies at Honors level, to pursue African feminism at an advanced level. This was a course that whets my appetite, and I began to understand my realities as an African woman, born and bred in a patriarchal society. Since then, I decided that there was nothing more interesting in social sciences than gender studies and religion. My permanent appointment as lecturer at the University of Swaziland then opened doors for me to pursue my dream to undertake a PhD study. This coincided with the university-wide restructuring of programs and courses, and my department in its new structure had gender and religion featuring prominently. I was therefore encouraged to seek professional development through pursuing doctoral studies in this new discipline. My studies in Gender and Religion would undoubtedly add professional value to the department and to the students that would be under my tutorship. Their academic interactions with gender and religion courses would empower them to deal effectively with the sociological constructions that have had certain implications on women as minorities and men as superiors in Swaziland and beyond. Enrolling for doctoral studies offered by thesis also worked to my advantage because my department did not have a full staff compliment so that I would qualify for study leave. I therefore had to take the risk to study whilst working; if you do not risk in life you achieve nothing, you become nothing and you end up being nothing.

³⁸Marcel Proust quotation in <http://www.quotegarden.com/feminism.html> [accessed 23 October 2014].

Reflection on the process

I consider the whole year of 2012 as a period of initiation to PhD study. Initiation was characterized by four cohorts at Pietermaritzburg campus which helped me refine my research idea into a precise research title. These cohorts inspired me to work hard in order to complete my research proposal within the first year. However the long distance I travelled to the university and the financial implications made me realise that I would need to be more self-motivated than local students in order to finish my studies within the specified time. A dream being a goal with a deadline, I set targets for myself on specific tasks that I had to accomplish on certain dates.

Year 2 and year 3 were data generation and data analysis periods of study. The exploratory and critical nature of the study yielded much information, which called for hard work. Organising interview sessions with individual and focus group participants, recording and transcribing our conversations were rather cumbersome. One had to have inner strength, intellectual honesty and commitment to spend sleepless nights compiling the data material into a coherent report, more especially because I did all these simultaneously with my professional, community and family responsibilities. Some of the conversations weighed heavily on my emotions because they were painful. The participants would be so emotional such that taking notes or sticking to the interview questions would have seemed cruel to them as they shared their traumatic experiences. In such cases I would then arrange for a second interview session to continue with the questions when the participants would be calm.

I would have wanted to have more focus group discussions probably with males only also to capture their perspective on socio-cultural religious constructions on women's personhood based on their fertility in some pages of the study, but I realised that I could require an additional three

years to complete the study. Also I would have liked to provide space to more women to share their life stories as they experienced patriarchy, but time constrained me.

However, this research would not be complete even after it has been bound because it will provoke further reflections with the readers on certain gender related issues of interest. Using Pienaar's (2006, p.3) expression, through it, I might have only laid a foundation and a couple of bricks for a small two-bedroom house. Others will come along and complete the building. Some will build an extra room, and years later a developer might tear it down and rebuild it to be office space.

9.9 Study limitations

This study was an activist research. Mama explains that such studies are premised on an ethic of politics of solidarity. They require the researcher to not only to disregard the academic canon by not maintaining distance, but actually go a great deal further, to actively relate to and engage with the 'research subjects' and explore ways of joining them and supporting their struggles (2011, p.14). However, Mama sounds a word of caution that the ethic of solidarity demands a high degree of self-awareness and reflexivity in that;

it necessitates that as researchers we take careful cognizance of our own subjectivity, manifest in our multiple positioning as political, institutional, ethnicized, gendered, sexualized and classed subjects from particular locations. Furthermore, those we research will have their own perceptions of us, as we are 'read' and responded to accordingly, in ways that will never be fully apparent to us (Mama 2014:14).

Carrying out a feminist research within a patriarchal space where I was born and bred, and as an insider who also had a certain social position, was advantageous, but also taxing and emotionally

draining. My local identity as a Swazi enabled me to freely access the selected participants, and they opened up to share confidential life stories that depicted their lived experiences as “victims and survivors” (Rider 2005) of socio-cultural and religious constructions. At the same time, being an insider had certain implications for my own subjectivity and interpretation of data. Notwithstanding, this study has enabled a critical transformation of myself as a researcher as well as the participants and it is my sincere hope that the findings of this study will critically transform Swazi society to recognize women as “real” people in their own right and not as a function of their reproductive capabilities.

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Swazi Observer, 13 October 2014. "Curbing violence, abuse among women critical". By Winile Masango.

APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH GUIDE

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Age: 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60

3. Marital Status: Single parent Married Widowed

4. Location: Urban Peri urban Rural

5. Religious affiliation:

CONSTRUCTIONS OF SOCIAL ROLES OF SWAZI WOMEN AND MEN IN RELATION TO THEIR FERTILITY

6. What roles does Swazi society ascribe to women and men in the family?

7. What is the basis for constructing these gender roles?

8. Have these roles evolved overtime? Elaborate.

9. What is the significance of children for a married couple in Swazi society?

10. What challenges are faced by the family in the event no child is born out of the marriage union?
11. What are the implications of childlessness for the wife and for the husband?
12. How does the arrival of a child change the status of a woman and of a man?
13. Does the Swazi family prefer boys or girls? Explain
14. Is it possible for Swazi Society to view a man as possibly infertile? Explain.

WOMEN'S SELF-CONSTRUCTION OF PERSONHOOD IN RELATION TO FERTILITY EXPECTATIONS

15. How does a woman feel when she eventually gets a child?
16. How does the arrival of the child significantly change her worth and status in the family and community?
17. How does a woman feel when she does not get a child?
18. How does her infertility impact on her self-worth and image in the family and community?
19. Do you have any preference for boys over girls or not? Explain.

20. How many of each do you prefer? Why?

21. What measures are taken by the woman to deal with her own childlessness?

22. What interventions are instituted by the family to deal with childlessness?

23. What happens in the event the family is unable to get a boy child in particular?

RELIGIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS ON WOMEN'S FERTILITY

24. To what extent does Swazi culture influence the views of Swazi people on women's status in the family?

25. To what extent does Swazi culture influence the views of Swazi people on men's status in the family?

26. What are the essential features of Swazi patriarchal society that inform the perception of society on women's fertility?

27. How does Christianity define the status of women and men in the family?

28. How do these definitions promote female inferiority status and male dominance in the family?

29. To what extent does Christianity contribute to stereotypical perceptions on Swazi women in the family?

30. What are the Christian values that reinforce societal perceptions on women's fertility?

**CONSTRUCTION OF SWAZI WOMEN'S IDENTITIES AND PERSONHOOD BASED
ON THEIR FERTILITY**

31. How do you define yourself? Why.

32. How does society define you? Why?

33. From your experience why do family members who occupy the different statuses (husband, wife, son and daughter, mother in law) define you the way they do?

34. From your experience why do family members who occupy the different statuses (husband, wife, son and daughter, mother in law) hold certain perceptions about women's fertility?

35. What are the principal agents that shape women's identities in Swazi society (e.g. family, school, church, peers, and technology)? Elaborate.

36. How do these agents or transmitters inform societal perceptions on women's fertility?

37. What is the impact of these perceptions on the woman's self-worth?

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APPENDIX 2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this form is to explain the nature of the study so that you may have the necessary information for agreeing to participate in it willingly. All aspects of your participation in the study are described below. If after reading this form, you have any questions or concerns, please discuss them with me Mrs. S. Nyawo the researcher whose name and contact details appear at the end of this form. Once you are entirely satisfied with this explanation and freely consent to participate in this study, you may indicate your willingness to participate by signing in the space provided below.

Request for your participation in the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study I am conducting as an individual academic piece of work under Gender and Religion Program offered by the School of Religion Philosophy and Classics at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. . This study seeks to obtain information about societal perceptions on fertility in Swazi patriarchal family.

Purpose of the Study

This research study seeks to explore the perceptions on fertility in Swaziland and how these perceptions construct women identities in Swazi patriarchal families. The findings of the study will contribute meaningfully to academic discourse in general, to African Women scholarship and also to public knowledge.

Your Involvement in the Study

You have been identified as part of the study population. As such, you are requested to be one of my interviewees. I request an in-depth oral interview of one to two hours, twice a month for a period of three months.

Interview /Data Gathering Procedures

I will write down your responses and also record them on tape.

Benefits & Risks of the Study

There is no material benefit that you will receive for participating in the study. It is expected that the results of the study will educate fellow citizens about your views regarding women fertility. There is no predictable risk of physical injury associated with your participation in this study. Also be assured that the information that you will share will be held in confidentiality.

Consent Statement

I understand the explanation provided in this form about the study I am being asked to participate in. In light of this, I voluntarily agree to participate in the study. I have been given a copy of the consent form which I have signed and will keep.

Signature & contact number

Date

Researcher's Signature

Contact Details *Snyawo*

Tel.: (00268) 25170217

Fax: (00269) 25184391

Mobile: 76125593

E-mail: snyawo@uniswa.sz

Name of Supervisor

Prof. S. Nadar

Dean of Research

College of Humanities

APPENDIX 3



29 April 2013

Mrs Sonsee Nyawo
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Nyawo

Protocol reference number: HSS/0200/0130
Project title: Sowungumuntu ke nyalo' "You are not a real person": A Feminist Analysis of how Women's identities are constructed by societal perceptions on fertility in the Swazi Patriarchal Family

EXPEDITED APPROVAL

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Collings".

.....
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)

/ps

cc Supervisor: Prof S Nadar
cc Academic Leader: Professor P Denis
cc School Admin.: Mrs Catherine Mburugan

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Founding Campus: ■ Edgerwood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville



