



**AFRICAN INDIGENOUS SAME SEXUALITIES IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY: A  
CASE STUDY OF RURAL WOMEN IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

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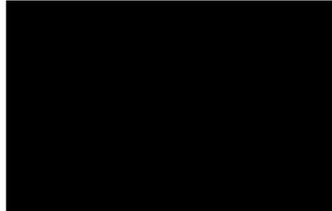
**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

Supervisor: Dr Sibusiso Masondo

February 2021

## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this dissertation has been edited in affirmation of the University of KwaZulu-Natal's policy on language editing.



.....  
Sindisiwe Sithole

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As the supervisor, I hereby approve this thesis for submission.

## ABSTRACT

Gender and sexuality education remain a taboo subject in African communities, a point of view which is not easily transformed. Issues pertaining to sexualities are mostly excluded from everyday social discourses. In rural communities, this topic occupies a sacred space which is entrenched in African traditions. It may be perceived as old fashioned, but the taboo is important to the communities who implement it as it concerns the respecting of privacy. Africans have their own way of doing, living, and teaching, and given the fact that most learning institutions in South Africa adopt Western ways of teaching and learning, this renders the African way of life seemingly less effective and invisible. These are some of the challenges facing the subject of same sexualities. This research follows on from an earlier Masters research that focused on same sexualities among traditional healers or *izangoma*. There are two reasons why this study focuses on traditional healers, firstly, they are known as fonts of libraries of indigenous knowledge, religion and culture. Secondly, the availability of existing research and literature on *izangoma* is a fair starting point for a researcher who intends to investigate indigenous issues. The Masters research revealed several unattended issues on same sexualities, but what has become evident, is the influence the ancestral spirits exert on gender ambiguity.

It is noted that most African communities view same sexualities amongst *izangoma* as something rooted in the ancestral spirits. They believe that the ancestral spirits can modify the sexual behaviour of an individual. Mkasi assert this by saying, if a female *sangoma* is possessed by a male spirit, there is a possibility that she maybe be interested in another female. Since ancestors are not bound by gender, they can possess anyone, irrespective of gender (2012, 148). The *izangoma* community is aware of people who are not heterosexual, but this does not concern them as their sexuality is not a social issue. However, the cultural beliefs of the community at large do not support the practice of same sexuality; they acknowledge their existence but expressing their feelings on the matter is another issue altogether. The decisive turning point was the passing of same sex legislation (The South African Constitution, 1996:2(9)(3)) awarding rights to same sex individuals (hereafter SSI). Democracy provided researchers with a number of opportunities to engage in debates and

to develop theories on this subject, as existing evidence shows that such sexualities do exist in African communities.

Although knowledge on this topic has increased exponentially in recent years, it has remained a contentious and evaded topic in the rural communities of KwaZulu-Natal. Thus, the focus of this research is on women in the rural communities.

This study investigates the perceptions held in many rural communities that same sexualities is an 'abnormal' sexual behaviour. In an attempt to introduce same sex indigenous discourses into rural areas, the research focuses on women in rural communities. The reason for this is that the majority of these women experience challenges in their lives due to the patriarchal social structures in these areas. Traditional structures that determine the day to day functioning of the communities are led by males which invariably result in the oppression of women in same sex relationships. These women are perceived as a threat to traditional structures which favour heterosexual relationships. The males also perceive these women as a threat to their patriarchal hierarchy and its concomitant stability, a behaviour which goes against the status quo, as African traditions are underpinned by patriarchy.

The success of this study depended on the framework used for this study, hence the African indigenous knowledge system was employed in this research. This method provided the researcher with appropriate ethical means to conduct research in rural communities. Moreover, it assisted the researcher to understand issues of morality in these communities while approaching the issue with sensitivity. Through the indigenous knowledge system approach, the researcher has been able to identify several issues, one being that there is a paucity of knowledge on same sex discourses in these areas. Furthermore, certain members of these communities tend to subscribe to urban lifestyles which negatively affect rural life which is still steeped in African traditions. Nonetheless, this research serves as an introduction to indigenous same sex discourse. It is worth noting that the participation of the traditional leaders such as the chiefs, the traditional council and traditional healers in the rural communities assisted immeasurably in finding a suitable approach to this sensitive issue. Moreover, as much as the study is about women, there are also male voices, as in rural communities, men are more vocal than women, particularly when it comes to sexual matters.

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- Members of the LGBTIQ Churches in Durban.
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- Makhosi N. Ndwandwe Bhengu in KwaNgcolosi
- The Gay and Lesbian Network (GLN) in Pietermaritzburg

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my mother Florence Qinisile Khuzwayo and Pastor Bonisile Magwaza, who have been my pillars of strength throughout all the years of my studies.

## GLOSSARY

Abakhongi	Men who are responsible for ilobolo [dowry] negotiations
African culture	African way of life, rooted in African traditions and religion
African	a person of black African descent.
Ambiguous sexualities	Sexual discordance beliefs
Colonialism	Governing systems that have been developed by conquering other nations and enforcing their religion, language and cultural values upon the conquered society
Cross-dressing	Wearing clothing typical of the opposite sex.
Decolonisation	Attempts to reverse the process of colonisation; aims at reversing, restoring and rediscovering what that nation has lost regarding culture, history, religion, economy and so forth
Eunuch	A castrated male
Hermaphrodite	A person having both male and female sex organs
Heteronormativity	belief in a worldview which perceives heterosexuality as the norm
Heterosexuality	Sexual attraction to the opposite gender
Homophobia	Dislike of or prejudice against homosexual people.
Homosexuality	Sexual attraction to persons of the same gender
Ilobolo	Exchanging of gifts or a token of appreciate given to the parents of the bride by the groom's family. It also indicates the beginning of a new relationship between the two families
Ingqwele	A person who is champion in stick-fighting competitions, defeating everyone. (the Zulus stick fighting)
Inkonkoni/ Ngqingili	Both terms are used interchangeably to refer to same sex individuals

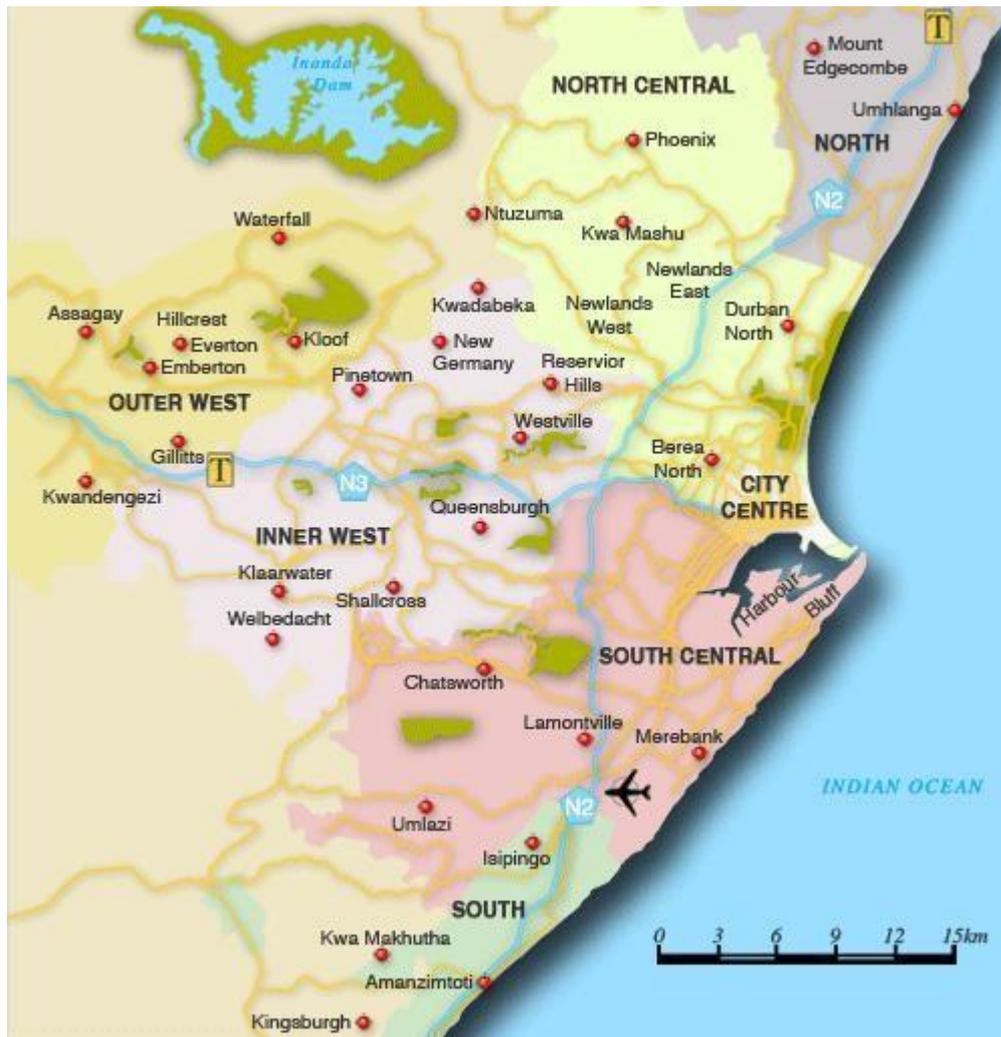
Iqhikiza	A fully grown female who gives advice to younger females and ensures moral behaviour amongst them.
Isangoma a person	who connect with the spiritual world through ancestral spirits
Ishoba lenkonkoni	Divination tool made of a wild a wildebeest's tail used by izangoma and known to have detecting powers
Isitabane	Concept used to refer to same sex individuals
Itshitshi	A young woman who is still a virgin
MSM/WSW	Men who have sex with men /women who have sex with women
Ncukumbili	Refers to someone with two opposite sex organs
Nomkhubulwane	Mother Earth, Zulu Goddess responsible for rain, nature, and fertility
Patriarchy	a system of power relations which gives economic, social and political power exclusively to males; . a system that perpetuates inequalities between male and female
Polygamy	A marriage agreement, practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time.
Sexual orientation	a person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are attracted
Transmen	a male in a female body
Ukuphehla	The removal of hot blood on the sexual organ, the process lessen the sexual instinct or desire
Ukusoma	Non-penetrative intercourse

Umemulo.	A ceremony that signifies that a girl is entering womanhood and ready to be married - by this ceremony parents express their appreciation for her good behaviour
Umhloniyane	A ceremony conducted for a girl when entering a teenage state or when she reaches puberty stage

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

GLN	Gay and Lesbian Network
GPMF	God's Presence Ministries of Faith
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersex and queer/questioning.
MSM/WSW	Men who have sex with men /women who have sex with women
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
SSC	Same sex communities
SSI	Same sex Individuals
SSP	Same sex practice
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
VMCI	Victory Ministries Church International

## KwaZulu-Natal Map



<https://www.roomsforafrica.com/dest/south-africa/KwaZulu-Natal.jsp> (Accessed 04 February 2020)

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## Disclaimer

The main objective of this study was attempting to find space for indigenous same sexualities in the contemporary traditional communities. To achieve this, the study explored the indigenous knowledge system as it considers traditional laws and cultural beliefs of rural people.

I would like to acknowledge that participants in this study shared different gender and sexual identities. Some participants indicated that they identify as transgender men, gender diverse persons, lesbians and some identified simply as men and women. For the purposes of the study the researcher explored indigenous knowledge system to engage society on same-sex relationship or practices, this meant that some of the transgender men were to be addressed or identified as women. This is because the indigenous society addresses them according to the nature of their socialisation and this was the reality of the study engaging with traditional healers.

The researcher opted to integrate the western terminology transgender men or transmen with feminine pronouns to indicate the discrepancies, clashes, confusion, and controversy one experienced conducting this research. Acknowledging as well that it is impossible to do away with Western discourse when conducting Indigenous research. As Chilisa refers to this process as a third space. Articulating that, “third space is where western and indigenous knowledge meet. By blending the past and the present allows SSI in the indigenous community to benefit from western knowledge and *vice versa*.” (2012: 19). It is by no means or purpose that the researcher is purposefully dis-regarding the gender identity of transgender and gender diverse persons. It is by no means of dis-respect that the research does not use the correct pronouns for transgender men who have indicated as such. However the research is articulating knowledge as shared in interviews and in focus group discussions.



## CHAPTER 1

### General Introduction to the Study

#### 1.1 Introduction

Same sexualities amongst African communities have been a controversial issue within the field of gender and sexualities. Several researchers have attempted to find reasons why African communities deny the existence of the same sexualities. However, the evidence presented by various scholars has demonstrated its existence in African communities (Mkasi, 2013). Although the confirmation was a positive development, the approaches employed to study such practices among Africans was problematic and still is today. African scholars have lamented the use of western approaches as templates for studying African phenomena, as these approaches do not demonstrate the realities of African experiences. It has been a struggle to extract information from rural traditional communities, using dominant western academic tools. This study attempts to find indigenous ways to research the same sexualities in African communities and will argue for some of the existing approaches in this area of study.

#### 1.2 Problem Statement

This project builds on an earlier study that examined same-sex relationships amongst female traditional healers (*izangoma*) [*Z- plural form and S- singular form*] in KwaZulu-Natal. One of the results revealed by the study was that *izangoma*, who are regarded as custodians of culture, were involved in same-sex practices, and ancestral spirits provided a safe space for them to practice same-sex without being subjected to social censure. The problem is that this privilege is not extended to ordinary people in same-sex relationships, but was the privilege of the *izangoma*, who are protected by the ancestors and their position in society as traditional leaders (Mkasi, 2013: 47). It is further noted that while the same sexualities have been tolerated by some traditional communities before democracy, contemporary same sexualities amongst ordinary people are contested by both traditional and some modern communities. The study, therefore, intends to explore these variations by posing the following questions: What differentiates current from previous same sexualities practiced by *izangoma* and ordinary people? Why do communities recognise certain factors of homosexual behaviour (spirit possession) but refuse to recognise other factors that could lead

to the same behaviour? Lastly, why do most traditional communities feel threatened by contemporary same sexualities, particularly when both traditional communities and contemporary societies reject same sexualities? Cases of hate crime and physical abuse have occurred in some townships while in some rural areas there have been incidents of verbal abuse, both in the family and in the community. Unfortunately, women are more vulnerable to such abuse and many victims do not receive justice as most of the perpetrators are not prosecuted, or if prosecuted, are acquitted because of lack of evidence (Dumse 2014).

### **1.3 Literature Review**

Lack of both historical documentation and adequate literature is a challenge to researchers studying in the field of African sexualities, as there is insufficient information to fully substantiate assumptions made in the study. Existing historical documents on African sexualities are the work of anthropologists from the colonial era which may not be a true reflection of the culture of indigenous people (Tamale, 2011: 15). According to Epprecht, Same-sex practices were noted in South African communities long before colonisation. Same-sex practices among Africans were first recorded in the 1920s, where South African prisoners formed same-sex relationships, a known and common practice amongst male prisoners at the time. However, these practices only involved 'thigh sex' which reflects an element of respect towards African culture. It must be noted that men did not continue with this practice once they returned to their homes, which shows that although this practice was common knowledge, it was not accepted as the norm in traditional communities (2013: 58). Nongoloza in Zackie Achmat (1993:99) asserts this when he states:

As to the practice of *hlobonga* which you complain of as existing among the Ninevites in jail, in that the soldiers subject the piccanins to immoral practices that have always existed. Even when we were free on the hills south of Johannesburg some of us had women and others had young men for sexual purposes.

Apart from the works from the colonial era, contemporary scholars such as Patricia Collins (2005), Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (2005), David L. Morgan (1988), Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe (1998), Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde (2009), Nikki Sullivan (2003), Lynne Segal

(1997), Jeffrey Weeks (1989, Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid (2003), Adriaan Van Klinken and Musiiwa R. Gunda (2012) have recently been working on African same sexualities and have contributed positively to the debate. The work of the above-mentioned scholars demonstrates that there was never a time when same sexualities did not exist in African societies and this work provides evidence of indigenous same-sex practices in African societies. Moreover, African Traditional Healing, Religion, and Culture are interwoven, therefore, ambiguous sexual identities have been in existence in African culture from time immemorial. However, there was no evidence that people engaged in same-sex relationships until after 1994. The democratic dispensation introduced a culture of human rights that allowed same-sex individuals to express their sexuality freely without repercussions. There is enough postcolonial and contemporary data on African same sexualities, even though it is framed in Western discourse. African feminist scholars argue that post-colonial analyses of African sexualities are analysed and presented by Western scholars whose analyses are often skewed by colonialism (Smith, 1999: 65). Furthermore, Western analyses focus on sexual identities, while African perspectives on same-sex relationships are not linked to identities; even those occurring amongst *izangoma* are not attached to specific identities (Peplau, 2001:11). It is noted that Western discourse on gender and sexualities encourage African women to challenge their traditions and to undermine their culture. African culture is perceived as an oppressive influence that impacts negatively on the lives of women and has nothing positive to offer African women (Sullivan, 2003: 81). To further undermine African culture, the South African Government's strategies promote a western culture that seems to emphasise individualism; people are no longer interested in the wellbeing of the community, but rather, are more concerned about themselves. The African view underpinned by *Ubuntu* declares that no one person can live alone, members of the family and the community are as important as the self. This is confirmed by Sefa Dei et al. who maintain that "the individual is supported by the family and the family by the community" (Sefa Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg 2000: 75). Furthermore, the South African Bill of Rights (South African Constitution, 1996: 2(9)(3) ascribes rights to same-sex marriages and is structured in a manner that conflicts with traditional laws because such marriages are not practical in patriarchal societies (van Zyl, 2011: 335).

Since the previous research showed that African Traditional Religion provides space for same-sex practices, the researcher decided to continue working with traditional healers in this study. The possibilities of finding a proper approach were through the African indigenous approach. It is believed that, if indigenous communities understand same-sex practices concerning spirit possession, there is a possibility of engaging in debate and finding an appropriate indigenous approach to provide ordinary people in same-sex relationships with a space of their own. Elders from traditional communities were included in the study because they infuse discussions on sensitive issues such as in rural communities with their experiential wisdom. Through their contributions, it was possible to approach it from an African worldview, which created space for indigenous communities to confidently engage in same sex discourse. It is noted that the exclusion of the elders negatively affects the development of indigenised same-sex discourses in the community and within the families of same-sex individuals (SSI).

The greatest challenge of this research is that it deals with a sensitive issue; it is not an easy subject of discussion for both the researcher and the communities. Even though the researcher is partially an insider as a traditional healer, it does not simplify matters because as an insider, one is expected to be as ethical and critical as an outsider. This situation can become complicated for insiders because they are often seen as traitors, collecting information to benefit the outsiders (Smith, 1999:139). Nonetheless, it is the intension of the researcher to improve same sexuality discourse, as Van Zyl suggests, it is said that "a theoretical framework should be developed to "(re)indigenize" Africa which should include principles of interdependence, participation, and sharing, and in particular, to locate same-sex families within contemporary kinships systems. The tensions between legal rights and belonging in a community need to be addressed and resolved to ensure the full inclusion of lesbian, gay and same-sex individuals and couples in South African communal and national life" (2011:355). This study attempts to tap into this area, as suggested by Van Zyl, who views same-sex relationships through the lens of indigenous communities.

## **Rationale**

The rationale of the study is to provide an indigenous approach to same sexualities which seems to be lacking in the field of gender and sexualities. Most African scholars who are advancing in this field adopt Western framework and they ignore indigenous knowledge system. Whereas, there are some sex individuals in indigenous communities who are still figuring out their sexuality. To engage such individuals requires one to touch base with indigenous knowledge system on the subject. To close the gap of indigenous approach to this field, the study attempted to explore same sex discourse within indigenous knowledge systems to acknowledge cultural beliefs of same sex individuals in indigenous communities.

## **Hypothesis**

The study proved that Western knowledge dominates the field of sexualities and has impacted the indigenous understanding of same sexualities. This is demonstrated when the indigenous concepts are not used in academic discourses, not even used by the general public as they are perceived to be derogative. Nonetheless, the indigenous leaders and elders of the communities were more willing to communicate when using indigenous concepts. Furthermore, the study proved that Western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge systems can work together however one has to tread carefully in terms of terminologies, and the understanding of anatomic body versus gender identity, which is the inner sense of being.

### **1.4 Location of the Study**

Since this is a follow-up study, it provides an opportunity to work with people who participated in the previous study. The previous study was conducted in the rural areas outside Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. The current study was conducted in the same geographical area but utilised a different approach. The current study was initiated in Durban Central and spread to different rural communities depending on the location of a participant's family of origin. The reason for the study reaching out to rural communities was because the study involved families of same-sex individuals (SSI), participants who have disclosed their sexual identity to their families were selected. After all, their families were deemed part of the study.

For this study, those who lived with their partners, those who were married and had their own families, and those who still had not disclosed their status were interviewed.

### **1.5 Key Research Questions**

The key research questions revolve around, Why traditional societies seem to be threatened by contemporary same sexualities? Another consideration is, Why traditional communities recognise spirit possession as some factor of same sexualities but refuse to acknowledge other factors leading to their behaviour?. It begs the question of why traditional societies still deny same-sex practices even when there is evidence to this effect? and What are the general understandings of the Constitution regarding Human Rights, sexual orientation, and same-sex marriages? Lastly, How can traditional communities accommodate people of different sexualities or same-sex identities?

### **1.6 Research Sub-Questions**

One may ask why ambiguous sexual identities are associated with spirit possession in African Traditional religion and what differentiates African Traditional religion from those occurring outside this religion. Research should consider the views of indigenous leaders in the legalisation of same-sex marriages and how this sexual orientation or same-sex relations are addressed in traditional communities. Further questions to consider are the relationship between Human Rights and same-sex relationships and also the spiritual life of the LGBTIQ+ community. Lastly, there is a need to address the issue regarding the reason for violence towards homosexual people in modern versus rural communities

### **1.7 Objectives**

The main objective of this study was attempting to find space for contemporary same sexualities in traditional communities. To achieve this, the study explored the indigenous knowledge system as it considers traditional laws and cultural beliefs of rural people. People in rural communities still comply with these laws and are still attached to their traditions. Moreover, to achieve the main object, there was a need to establish whether traditional communities had adequate knowledge on different sexualities and if so, whether they engaged in such discourses. The study further looked at the impact of Western theories on

African same sexualities, interrogating the methods and paradigms used to produce knowledge on the same-sex relationships.

Attempting to find space for contemporary same sexualities in traditional communities was one of the priorities. However, this could not be achieved as people's interest was more on acquiring more knowledge on SSIs before they could disclose their wellbeing in the community. Therefore, awareness and education programmes were concerns that required attention. Nonetheless, the study established that African traditional religion was tolerant toward different sexualities. It attempted to provide a way forward on how SSIs can position themselves in a heterosexual community.

### **1.8 Description of the Study**

Research conducted amongst female traditional healers revealed that African traditional religion provided a space for indigenous same-sex practices in traditional communities. People with ambiguous sexual identities have always existed, although homophobic attitudes were not as prevalent then, since such sexualities were not a matter of concern. These only became problematic after the democratisation of South Africa, when people began to openly express their sexuality. This was viewed as a threat to traditional social structures and the institution of marriage in particular. Furthermore, un-contextualised Western post-colonial and contemporary discourse employs conceptualised and analysed data from Western paradigms, interpretive categories from human rights perspectives. While this approach presents a nuanced view of African same-sex practice in traditional societies, scholarly work and presentations on same sexualities reveal a lack of African indigenous perspective.

### **1.9 Theoretical Frameworks**

To substantiate indigenised same sexualities in African communities, the study adopted feminist approaches framed in indigenous knowledge systems. The first such approach is 'decolonizing methodologies' by Linda Tuhiwai Smith and another is 'Indigenous research methodologies' by Bagele Chalisa. Two other frameworks are used for additional support in this study, such as African cultural feminist hermeneutic and African womanism.

### **1.9.1 Feminist Approach and Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

The study rests on the work of feminists Linda Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* and *Indigenous Research Methodologies* by Bagele Chalisa. Smith challenges traditional western ways of knowing and research and calls for the 'decolonization' of methodologies and a new agenda for indigenous research, while Chalisa's work provides the study with an indigenous framework research paradigm. As much of Chalisa and Smith's work overlaps, only relevant sections were utilised in this study. The work of Chalisa and Smith differs in that Smith is concerned with how colonisers have undervalued indigenous cultures. The historical interpretations of African culture show a lack of respect for indigenous cultures and thus devalues the humanity of indigenous people. Chalisa focuses on African indigenised research methodologies that emphasises respect and the ethical standards of indigenous communities. She also provides researchers with research methodologies that are appropriate for indigenous traditional research.

Another relevant work for this study is *African Sexualities: A Reader* edited by Sylvia Tamale. Her work is useful in this study because it provides the groundwork for African sexualities. Various authors contribute different perspectives of African sexualities and same sexualities. More importantly, the study positions the reader at the centre of gender and culture presented from an African perspective and context.

### **1.9.2 Cultural Feminist Hermeneutic**

Cultural hermeneutics is important to this study because it will be used to interrogate gender equality concerning African culture. By adopting this framework, the researcher will employ a feminist lens to empower women in indigenous communities without degrading African culture, particularly as feminist approaches originate in the West. African Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics developed from the work of scholars such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) and Musimbi Kanyoro (2002) and is a framework favoured by African women theologians to analyse the relationship between African culture and religions with the experiences of women in Africa.

Oduyoye and Kanyoro believe that African women need to be freed from male oppression which is often perpetuated by African culture. These feminist scholars share the concern that many African women are suffering and their needs neglected because of their gender. They argue that women are treated as inferiors who are incapable of participating meaningfully in public debate. Cultural hermeneutics was developed to interrogate cultures that were oppressive to women. However, these feminists concur that it is not enough to interrogate culture, but also to scrutinise it through a feminist approach which became known as feminist cultural hermeneutics. The use of feminist cultural hermeneutics enables women to interpret their situation from a female point of view. Moreover, feminist cultural hermeneutics seeks to promote gender equality within a culture as the female gender is often undermined. This is evident in discourses on homosexuality, where often males are willing to discourse on homosexual men rather than lesbians (Mkasi 2013). Thus, Oduyoye concludes that 'there is a need for gender-sensitive cultural hermeneutics because it doubles in addressing issues of culture while being critical of that culture from a gender perspective' (Kanyoro, 2002: 18).

The feminist cultural hermeneutics framework is used as a tool to interrogate cultural practices that are harmful to women while reinforcing those that are life-affirming (Kanyoro, 2002:5). This enables the separation of positive information from the data and avoids oppressive and discriminatory discourses. Kanyoro views culture as a "two-edged sword that gives women their identity, integrity, and way of life, yet also reinforces its patriarchal forms of domination on every woman and girl" (Kanyoro, 2002: 66).

In an attempt to liberate women, Oduyoye initiated the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989. The aim was to create a space for dialogue where women could share their experiences and interrogate cultural practices that were abusive to women. It encouraged women at a grassroots level to speak out about matters that concerned their sexuality instead of suffering in silence. This framework enables women to speak out so that they can create their knowledge from their experiences. Oduyoye highlights the fact that 'The complexities inherent in cultural debates require space and safe environment of mutual trust and mutual vulnerability for dialogue to take place' (Kanyoro 2002:18). For this reason,

researchers need to be more sensitive and avoid research frameworks that cross-cultural boundaries (Tamale, 2011:12).

### **1.9.3 Black Feminism and Africana Womanism**

African feminist writings that could be useful for studies that focus on Black African women are Black feminism and Africana womanism. All writings and researches are valuable as they add to the African feminist perspective and support the view that Black and White feminism cannot be addressed collectively. Black feminism is concerned with the importance of family rather than individualism and centres on the natural order of life, family, and a complementary relationship between male and female (Aldridge, 2003:193). Africana womanism differs from Black feminism and African feminism because it has its roots in African culture. Africana Womanists are exclusively concerned with African women and do not include non-African women. Hudson-Weems defines it as follows:

Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana womanist. Its agenda is unique and separate from both White feminism and Black feminism, and to the extent of naming in particular, Africana Womanism differs from African feminism (Hudson– Weems, 2001:137).

Africana womanism offers an opportunity to women to discourse on their experiences on their terms; at the same time, it does not deny the fact that women are oppressed in different ways. Hudson-Weems continues by stating "the female gender is the centre of life, the magnet that holds the centre of the social cosmos intact and alive" (2004, 66). Thus, emphasising an awareness of the power and value of women in Africa. For instance, the Zulu nation has a ritual to appease Mother Nature called *Nomkhubulwane*. *Nomkhubulwane* is regarded as a powerful female intercessor between the Creator and humanity during times of catastrophes such as drought (Biyela, 2013:38).

## **1.10 Research Methodology**

This empirical study employed a qualitative methodology to gather data on rural women in same-sex relationships. The research is also a literature-based study and draws on feminist theories such as African feminist cultural hermeneutics and indigenous knowledge systems. The benefit of qualitative research is that it supports various ways of data collection such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observations (Simon, 2011:1).

### **1.10.1 Population and Recruitment**

The topic of this study emanated from the work of two centres that exposed the researcher to the field of research. The researcher worked at the University of KwaZulu-Natal as a research assistant at the Sinomlando Centre in 2000 and was drawn to the work of the Centre for Constructive theology, particularly to a project called "*Broken Women – Healing Traditions?*" at Inanda and Kwa-Ngcolosi. Inanda is a peri-urban area lacking proper infrastructure. The level of poverty varies; the buildings are close to each other and there is not enough land for agricultural use. Most people are unemployed and as a result, the crime rate is very high. Kwa-Ngcolosi is more rural than Inanda, with a traditional lifestyle and more agricultural land. Although the unemployment rate is high, the lifestyle is less chaotic compared to that of Inanda. The Centre often deals with issues of women, including gender and same sexualities.

During the study of female traditional healers, the researcher undertook to do further research in the same area. Some of the participants in this study were also part of the previous study so the focus of the study was familiar to them. The purpose of the consent form was also addressed, which indicated that participants agreed to be part of the future study and were fully aware of what the study entailed. However, the recruitment process was not easy because some participants who agreed to participate in 2013 were unavailable during the interviews.

### **1.10.2 Recruitment**

The participants were from Durban, KZN, and the surrounding rural areas (refer to section 1.4. above). The participants were invited to a Newlands West workshop to introduce them

to the forthcoming research. The intention of involving parents or members of the family in the study was explained to them. The study involved two groups of participants, a group consisting of parents and a group of LGBTIQ+ individuals. The study was introduced, and the intentions and objectives were clearly stated. The participants were provided with information on the risks and benefits of the study and also explained the procedure which included the agreement between the researcher and the participants. The function of the consent form was explained and was written in both English and isiZulu; the participants were assisted in completing the forms. They were also provided with the opportunity to comment and to ask questions.

### **1.10.3 Sampling Method**

The study adopted purposive sampling, the most common sampling strategy used in qualitative studies as it allows the researcher to select participants who understand the purpose of the study or who can relate to the topic. Most of the participants have been involved in similar studies and thus were aware of the nature of the study. A purposive sample is used to study a difficult population that is not easily obtained, such as participants in same-sex relationships.

### **1.10.4 Sampling of Participants.**

The sample of this study was selected through recruitment workshops and from a previous Masters study. The study intended to focus on females, but male traditional leaders were also included. Moreover, males are franker when discussing sexual issues and there is more work done on male same sexualities than on females. The researcher conducted eleven individual interviews, four group interviews, and three informal interviews which were more conversational than interviews. This involved two parents, two traditional leaders, two AIC leaders, two chiefs, one teacher, one policeman, one policewoman, one social worker, and one Home Affairs manager. Most of these participants often supported the parents' views (refer to appendix 5). Same-sex individuals who formed part of the study were between the ages of eighteen and sixty. A workshop attended in Pietermaritzburg dealt with LGBTIQ+ issues in African communities and hosted a combination of LGBTIQ+ individuals and people from heterosexual communities such as Church leaders, traditional leaders, and traditional

healers. The researcher facilitated this workshop and requested permission to use the data collected from this workshop, which was provided in the form of a written document.

#### **1.10.5 Data Collection**

The study adopted three methods of field data collection, that is, research workshops, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. This method of triangulation is important to ensure corroboration of the research findings. Besides the three said methods, participant observation was used as one of the relevant tools in qualitative research. Church conferences and academic conferences that focused on LGBTIQ+ issues were also used as sources of information. The participants in the focus group and workshop were willing. Participants comprised LGBTIQ+ individuals, SSI, family members, and community members. The researcher was granted permission to use video and audio equipment during the interviews and the group discussions.

#### **1.10.6 Individual Open-ended In-depth Interviews**

Individual interviews or one on one interviews are used in qualitative research to obtain rich information on the topic. An unstructured open-ended questionnaire was designed which promoted a free flow of conversation and encouraged the participants to express themselves in their own words (Denscombe, 2007:166). The purpose of one on one interviews is not only to obtain answers to the questions but is to understand the experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of that experience (De Vos, Strydom, Fouch, Delport, 2011: 293). Individual interviews afford each participant privacy and provided a space for the interviewee to freely answer personal questions about their sexuality. Moreover, this space enables the participants to decide whether they want to be part of the focus group or the workshop or participate through individual interviews only.

#### **1.10.7 Focus Group Discussions**

The focus groups were conducted as a result of individual interviews; participants willingly elected to be part of the focus groups. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to share their views openly. Questions were not directed at particular individuals and anyone

could respond without the risk of being labelled. However, the groups were divided into LGBTIQ+ and heterosexual groups and each group met on their own as a group. If the group comprised both communities, questions were not specific, and participants tended to generalise personal issues because they did not want to be associated with so-called 'immoral behaviour'. McMahan and Rogers in Morgan state "A focus group is the use of group interaction to produce data and insights that will be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan, 1988:12).

### **1.11 Data analysis**

The data collected was interpreted through the lens of the African indigenous knowledge framework and cultural feminist hermeneutic. This approach is used to interpret cultural beliefs, values, behaviour, and issues of morality in African indigenous communities. The African feminist approach suggests African methods of accessing and sharing knowledge, such methods include oral narratives or storytelling and sharing. These are common methods used by African women to share individual or collective experiences. The indigenous framework research paradigms provide the researcher with suitable tools to collect and analyse data discussed under the theoretical framework section. The questions were structured around the themes which would answer the research questions, and which were identified during the transcription of the data.

#### **1.11. 1 Information Dissemination Workshop**

The research was conducted to benefit South African learning institutions, rural communities as well as the LGBTIQ+ communities and remained mindful of the interest of the group being researched (Weber-Pillwax, 2004: 81). The findings will be presented to the participants after the study. The findings will also be shared with all the other stakeholders, individual participants, the organisations, and the Churches involved. The findings will be presented in the local languages which are isiZulu and English. The research findings will be presented orally, written, and in visual forms in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous publications and forums (ABC Message Stick – Cultural Protocols, 2002). Feedback will also be given in the form of a meeting; this is important because the "first beneficiaries of indigenous knowledge must be direct indigenous descendants of that knowledge". (Smith, 1999:118). It is also important

to ensure that information is not skewed in any way when reporting, and the data analysis must be authentic.

### **1.11. 2 Data Storage and Disposal**

After the completion of the research, hard copies of notes, transcriptions, and translated interviews will be stored in a secured environment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal where it can only be accessed by the research team and by agreement. The files will be stored on a computer and will be password protected while the research is in progress; these will be disposed of on completion of the research. The data will be stored on a university computer under a password that only the researcher and the supervisor can access.

### **1.11. 3 Validity, Reliability, and Rigour**

In qualitative research evaluating or measuring the validity of the study is a challenge because this methodology is used to understand a human phenomenon such as same sexualities. Human studies are problematic because behaviour and experience change over time (Stenback 2001:551). Nevertheless, any study must demonstrate validity, thus the researcher adopts various methodologies of data collection. Triangulation is mostly used in qualitative research because the researcher can compare data collected from individual interviews, focus groups, and workshops. Comparison of the findings confirms the reliability of the study, as defined by Olsen who states:

Triangulation means mixing approaches to get two or more three viewpoints upon things being studied. The resulting dialectic of learning thrives on the contrast between what seems self-evidence in the interview, what seems to underlie the lay discourse, what appears to be generally true in surveys, and what differences arise when comparing all these with official interpretations of the same thing (2004:4).

Moreover, comparing data collected from other sources increases the validity of the study as the participants can disagree or agree with specific issues presented to them. The researcher or expert of the researched topic plays a critical role in invalidity because they authenticate the information from the general public. In this case, LGBTIQ+ organisations are experts in the area of gender and sexualities while the traditional leaders are the experts in indigenous

knowledge systems and African culture. Both participants and experts can rectify errors of interpretation (Simon, 2011: 3). The validity, reliability, and rigour of the data collected are tested against some of the published academic works and others in the public domain. Apart from the triangular methods, workshops, seminars, and conferences attended also strengthened the data.

#### **1.11. 4 Research Ethics Confidentiality**

The study identified participants, disclosed and undisclosed, and also involved members of the family. Therefore, it was important to ensure confidentiality and take all possible measures to reduce risks to the participants. It is known that SSI may claim to live a disclosed life when they are away from home, but their parents or families are often not aware of their children's identity. Usually, parents live in the shadow of their children's sexuality who are indirectly living a closeted life. Thus, it is important to ensure that the knowledge that is shared in this research is not disclosed in a way that may create a risk to their lives. The researcher is also aware that this topic poses risk and may even lead to physical harm to the participants, thus precautions were taken to ensure that the venues where the interviews or workshop took place were secured (Denscombe, 2007:143).

The consent form entailed the information that ensured the participant's protection. The forms also ensured voluntary participation and protection of the participant and the researcher. The intention of the consent form was verbally explained using the local language, which is isiZulu, as some of the participants were not fully literate. It is therefore important that the oral traditions are part of this research (Ilutsik, 2001).

The sections referring to the roles of the participants and the researcher and the reason for obtaining permission from the participants to join the study were carefully explained. The participants were made aware that they were free to withdraw from the research whenever they felt uncomfortable participating. Participants were informed that the study would not use their names, but pseudonyms, which should limit the risk of identification. Moreover, confidentiality was maintained throughout the research to prevent stigmatisation and the participants were assured that the information shared would be treated as confidential.

### **1.11. 5 Risk Management**

The gatekeeper's letters of consent (Traditional leaders, Church leaders, and LGBTIQ+ organisations) were submitted to the institution, which gave the researcher consent to conduct the study in the selected communities; the researcher also requested individual consent from the participants. LGBTIQ+ organisations were contacted during the research partly to safeguard any traumatic reaction that might occur during individual interviews. It was important to identify an organisation where the participant could be referred to for counselling should the need arise. The interview questionnaires are attached as per Appendix 1, the contact details of the LGBTIQ organisations are attached as per Appendix 2; the ethical clearance is attached as Appendix 3, the informed consent form is attached as per Appendix 4 and the background information of participants is attached as per Appendix 5.

### **1.11. 6 Measuring the Risk of Participants**

As mentioned above, the targeted group were women in same-sex relationships, disclosed and undisclosed. Some of these women live together and some are married. In this situation, the assumption is made that these women live openly as couples in the community. Most of these individuals have relocated from their place of origin to live a disclosed life in urban settings. However, this does not mean that they do not deserve protection, and provision for this was made accordingly. The second group, the parents or family members of these individuals, were interviewed individually in their environment to ensure privacy.

### **1.11. 7 Anticipated Problems and Limitations**

There are several challenges in this study because same sexuality is a sensitive subject and the study did not reach the targeted number of participants. Some participants initially were keen but withdrew later, some were occupied elsewhere, and others did not provide valid reasons. Some participants withdrew after the study presentation which indicated that they were not ready to involve their parents. Securing interviews with traditional leaders such as the chiefs was not a problem, however, pre-arrangement was important since traditional leaders have many responsibilities and limited time. Traditional communities are sceptical of academic researchers because they disclose information to outsiders, and many times it

benefits others rather than the communities who are the owners of knowledge but do not benefit from engaging with researchers. The position of the researcher as a *Sangoma* simplified access to traditional leaders. Inviting participants to be part of the study was not a challenge, the challenge was the resources to conduct the research.

In conclusion, this chapter introduces the study, highlights the intention of the study, and what led the author to research indigenous same sexualities. It also gives a detailed background on the study and where the study was conducted, it gives an overview of the literature review that the researcher will use to ground the research. The problem that led to the study is also explained. It further described the methodology that the study adopts and further explained the precautions taken by the researcher to ensure the confidentiality and safety of the participants.

### **1.12 The Scope of the Study**

**Chapter One** forms the introduction to the study, providing a detailed background to the study, research design, research problem, theoretical framework, and methodology. This chapter further explained the precautions taken by the researcher to ensure the confidentiality and safety of the participants.

**Chapter Two** contains the literature review and focuses on African traditional religion and Christian religion and their views on same sexualities. The chapter interrogates the impact of Christian Religion on African traditional culture and religion and how the negative perceptions of coloniser writing impacted African religious beliefs. It further explores the Christian teachings on African sexualities and how this religion affects African teachings on sexualities. It also demonstrates that African traditional religion offers a safe space for same sexuality.

**Chapter Three** presents the history of African sexualities in pre-colonial, colonial periods, and contemporary same sexualities in indigenous communities. It explores African sexual practices from an African indigenous perspective, looking at the positive impact of these practices concerning African religious beliefs. The chapter gives a brief overview of precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial same sex practices in African indigenous communities

**Chapter Four** deals with the theoretical frameworks which frame the study in indigenous knowledge systems and the postcolonial indigenous research paradigm. It furthermore discourses on feminist cultural hermeneutics which was initiated by African women theologians and Africana Womanism. The indigenous knowledge system framework and African feminist perspective on African sexualities will enrich the discussion on African same sexualities.

**Chapter Five** focuses on the experiences of rural women and the experiences of SSI are discussed across two chapters, chapters five and six. Chapter five focuses on the indigenous concepts, terms, and same-sex identities. It also looks at issues of identity, dress code, non-authentic and genuine same-sex identities, and same-sex identities and the ancestors.

**Chapter Six** continues the discourse on the experiences of same-sex individuals, with the focus on community attitudes towards same-sex identities and looking at issues of secrecy and denial in the community. It further explores learning institutions and religious institutions and how these institutions deal with issues related to the same sexuality. Matters of acceptance, traditions, practices, transitioning, families, children, and marriage of same sex individuals are scrutinised.

**Chapter Seven** discusses how the data is collected and interpreted using a postcolonial indigenous research paradigm and the indigenous knowledge systems. Various themes emerged from the data collected in chapter five, and in this chapter African indigenous concepts of SSI are confirmed, and the role of language is highlighted in the naming and labelling of SSI, examining the origins of the isiZulu concept of same-sex persons.

**Chapter Eight** concludes the thesis and demonstrates the situation of SSI in rural communities; it also provides the way forward on how SSI should position themselves in a heterosexual community. Moreover, the issues of secrecy, the existence, and religious beliefs of SSI are analysed. The data is interpreted with regards to the position of schools, rural communities, families of origins, transition processes, and the children of SSI and concludes with traditional ceremonies.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature review: African Traditional Religion Versus Christian Religion and African Same Sexualities**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This study explores African traditional religion and same-sex relationships in indigenous communities of KwaZulu natal. However, it may not be overlooked that African traditional religion has been impacted, and to some extent influenced greatly by Christian religion. There is a process of inculturation that takes place at the grassroots level where African traditional religion is always integrated with the Christian religion. Having said that it will be unjust to

this project to not have a section that explores how African traditional religion has been impacted by the Christian religion, which often directs how churches approach issues of sex and sexualities in contemporary society. I hope to determine the impact these religions had on each other and how their influence on each other impact how both these religions respond to issues of African same-sex relationships. Further examine whether the two religions tolerate or accept different sexualities, and how these identities are understood within these religions. It is important to bear in mind that these two religions have not been treated equally. Historically the African traditional religion and its belief system were undermined by the Christian religion, which was accepted as the leading religion.

## **2.2 The impact of Christian Religion on African Traditional Religions**

The arrival of Europeans particularly the missionaries initiated considerable changes in many parts of Africa and played a significant role in the colonisation of African countries. Discourses on the arrival of Christian missionaries in the early 16th century created the impression that they came to spread the Gospel and render spiritual care to the Europeans who settled in Africa. However, the missionaries were assisted by the colonialists to expand their agenda, which was ultimately to civilise and Christianise Africans by influencing Africans to abandon their cultural-religious beliefs. As much as some of them would have chosen not to be part of the colonial regime, they needed each other to achieve their goals of Christianising and westernising Africans. Iroko et al. states that “for most of the colonial period, education was in the hands of the Christian missions, who sought not only to convert Africans but also to inculcate Western values. Christianity challenged traditional belief systems and promoted the diffusion of new ideas and modes of life” (Ikoro and Ekevere, 2016: 3).

The missionaries introduced the notion of civilisation to their congregations teaching philosophy which they believed would improve black lives. The missionaries hoped that this would redirect them from their resources, knowledge, and beliefs and reach for a better future that would ensure eternal life. However, the African view of identity, religion, and culture did not fit into this mould. Tamale summarises this as follows, "Africans were encouraged to reject their previous beliefs and values and to adopt the "civilized ways" of the whites" (2011: 23). This demonstrates how Christianity undermined African indigenous

religion(s). Africans were placed under pressure to “abandon their religion and culture, [and] adopt western values” (Okon, 2014: 203).

Even though Christianisation and colonisation occurred simultaneously, the slave trade was the main enterprise for the Europeans at that time. The coloniser treated the African slaves inhumanely, to the extent that the missionaries became involved, as they viewed the slave trade as an abomination and constantly reminded the Europeans of their culture of respect towards the other. They suggested trading with commodities rather than with humans and proposed the abolishment of human slavery (Njoku, 2013: 222). Some of the slaves volunteered to proselytize for the Christian religion and were better suited for this task due to their skin colour and thus would relate better to the African communities. Njoku continues by saying that, European descendants came to Africa in large numbers in search of African resources. The arriving missionaries were from various European countries. As more people entered Africa, other religious groups also began to emerge. Religions such as Islam became a threat to the Catholic Church as this influx led to a struggle for power between the Islamic and Christian faiths (Njoku, 2013:226).

### **2.2.1 African Sacred Spaces**

The priority for the missionaries was the preaching of the Gospel to explain their understanding of God. The view the missionaries held of God was different from the views held by the Africans on God and religions. These different views led to clashes between the two religions, which negatively impacted the work of the missionaries, as they attempted to diminish and negate the beliefs held by the Africans, which were closely linked to their practices, rituals, and festivals. For the missionaries' quests to succeed, they had to modify the core beliefs that enabled Africans to worship God.

Njoku states that:

The missionary theologians invented numerous pejorative names to refer to the traditional religion and their visible leaders, custodians, and their chief priests. There was also a general disregard for the sacred objects, the sacred spaces, places, and shrines, the sacred observances, rituals, totems, and taboos of the traditional religions. Indeed, flouting these observances and taboos, violating these sacred places and objects, were

the rule rather than the exception among the Christian missionaries both Catholic and Protestant (2013: 227).

This was practically enforcing Christianity and the abandonment of African culture and religion. The colonial government did not only focus on religion and culture, but also on establishing political and economic structures to suit the European way of living. The missionary enterprise played an important role in the process of initiating the dominance of western cultural systems (Njoku, 2013: 218).

### **2.3 African Indigenous Religion(s) and African Culture**

The reason for the ongoing struggle between the foreign religions and indigenous religions was based on the notion that Africans needed a more worthy religion. The missionaries viewed African religion as inferior at best and made it their mission to bring the only true religion into Africa. Chidester in Bain-Selbo (2003) provides a nuanced view of the encounters between Africans and colonisers. He refers to this as the practice of comparative religion because they used their foreign categories to describe African traditions and practices. In the initial encounters the missionaries failed to recognise African religious practices as an expression of their religion and as a result, they concluded that Africans had no viable religion. The missionaries later acknowledged their error but denounced African religion as false. During the late colonial period, Africans were said to have a religion but were seen as inferior to that of the colonisers (2003:2). When the missionaries finally acknowledged that the African religion was indeed a viable belief system, they did all they could to persuade Africans to follow the Christian faith, as they were determined to instill their beliefs on the masses. African religion was not only about faith and spirituality but encompassed the economy, politics, history, and African culture. The religious lives of Africans were interpreted by Europeans in their terms and as such failed to reflect African religion and culture accurately; they also lacked understanding of the African principle of '*Ubuntu*' which reflects the essence of the African ethos.

## 2.4 Christian Teachings on African Sexuality and Same Sexualities

Most post-colonial literature tends to describe African people as sexual beings who do not have control over their sexuality. This view was probably based on observations of certain cultural practices such as polygamy, virginity testing, and female circumcision. During the colonial era in South Africa circa 1652 and the subsequent years of colonisation, the colonialists attempted to abolish these cultural practices. However, this failed as these practices still exist.

Another sexual practice that the Christian religion frowned upon was same-sex practices. The on-going argument against homosexuality/same sexualities in some circles is that it is perceived as deviant sexual behaviour because it is not concerned with reproduction. The creation story of Adam and Eve lies at the heart of this argument (Russell, 2011:22). God created male and female for procreation and according to Christian beliefs, any sexual behaviour occurring outside biblically acceptable norms is deemed ungodly. Moreover, there are Biblical verses that condemned homosexuality, but the interpretation of these verses is not always accurate as the verses are interpreted at face value. White provides an alternative analysis of the verses assumed to be against homosexuality. He offers a few scenarios that could have led to the destruction of Sodom, but Christian preachers tend to illustrate homosexuality as the reason for the destruction. Whereas according to White the assumption above is incorrect, "what took place at the time was a form of gang rape. Genesis does not specify the sins, see Ezekiel 16:48-49" (White, 2010: 47). It seems that Christian believers do not hesitate to use the Word of God to reject 'deviant' sexual behaviour. This demonstrates how the Word of God is often used to discriminate against people born with different sexualities, such as homosexual or LGBTIQ+ individuals.

The use of the Bible to criticise homosexuality seems to be problematic because there are very few verses that specifically refer to homosexuality, implying that this aspect of human sexuality was not a primary issue for biblical people. Haffner states that the only Bible verses that contain references to homosexuality are Lev 18:22, Lev 20:13, and two in Rom 1:26–27. He argues that there are ten laws in Leviticus that prohibit sleeping with a menstruating woman, yet people focus on homosexuality. Churches view homosexuality as the worst transgression of all. All other transgressions commonly committed by the Clergy are mostly

ignored (Haffner, 2004: 4). He continues by saying that the Bible is often unjustly used to oppress others or to silence those labelled as sinners. Haffner refers to verses in the Bible that contain references to same-sex lovers, this demonstrates that there were other relationships besides heterosexual relationships, even in biblical times. He differentiates the two by providing examples from the biblical texts that demonstrate same-sex relationships, here referring to the relationship between Jonathan and David and Ruth and Naomi. Jonathan and David fall in love at first sight: "When David had finished speaking, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam 18:1), "Jonathan took great delight in David" (1 Sam 19:1), and David wrote, of Jonathan, "Greatly beloved were you to me, your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam 1:26). Other writers have suggested that the relationship between Ruth and Naomi was that of lovers, that Boaz may have been used only to impregnate Ruth. Ironically, the passage often recited at heterosexual weddings, "Where you go, I will go, where you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people" (Ruth 1:16–17) was first said by one woman to another.

Haffner also refers to other Scripture that recognises the existence of different sexualities that are not popular with nor explained clearly by preachers. The Bible also refers to eunuchs, males who had been castrated for whatever reason. In Western literature, these males are referred to as "intersex" while in isiZulu indigenous terms they would fall under *oNgqingili*, and *Izinkonkoni* (See 5.3 and 7.6 for definitions of these concepts).

Haffner states that eunuchs

Often held high positions in the court, and neither married nor raised children. According to the Book of Isaiah, eunuchs received special blessings from God: "do not let the eunuch say, I am just a dry tree... to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbath, who choose the things that please me, and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house, and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name" (Isaiah 65: 3 – 5). (2004: 5).

Many Scriptures refer to eunuchs, but the meaning of the word differs in each reference. However, although castrated, eunuchs were held in high regard because they were the advisors to royal families. Moreover, it appears that eunuchs were committed to the work of God since they had no wives or children to weaken their relationship with God (Haffner,

2004:5). They were able to focus on their calling and therefore were granted the wisdom they required to do their work, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians, celibacy is a gift from God. The Bible does not dwell on their physical appearance but their role in the community. The problem with the Church today is that SSI is not given relevancy, their sexuality defines their capabilities. Due to this attitude, some SSI has given up on life and have not pursued their goals. It seems that patriarchy and normative beliefs stand in the way of what the Church represents, that is, truth, love, and compassion. Furthermore, heteronormativity and the patriarchal approach to sexualities have made it difficult to analyse biblical texts in a way that accommodates the LGBTIQ community.

#### **2.4.1 Christian Attitude towards Same Sexualities**

Discourse on gender and sexualities is one of the biggest challenges for the contemporary Church, particularly the issue of same sexualities. However, things have changed lately, it has become a major issue in Africa. Van Klinken points out that

Apparently, in less than a decade, the situation has changed dramatically. This raises the question of how and why issues related to homosexuality recently have become so central in public and political debates in Africa and African Christianity (2016:2)

The western culture which allows freedom of expression could be one of the reasons why people have become more verbal about the subject. This comes back to the point emphasised in this study that, the West and the African differ in African worldview, issues of sexualities are not for public debate. The open discussion began during the democratic era when same-sex individuals were granted constitutional rights to openly express their sexual identities. Human rights values further challenge the Church who treats people of different sexualities as invisible and is in forcing change where religious freedom of the same sexualities should be recognised. The human right recognises the religious beliefs of everyone which means even Christians do not have a right to discriminate against each other based on sexuality, one has a right to both, sexuality and religion. This is well stated by An-Na'im who says "all human rights, including freedom of religion, are essential values" (An-Na'im, 2012: 203)

As highlighted above, in African communities and the historical Church, same sexualities were not an issue but for the contemporary Church, it is a burning issue. However, in a democratic South Africa, the Church is expected to accommodate different sexualities and this is a major transformation. The church needs to engage in same-sex discourse, regardless of whether Christian belief is against it or not. The challenge for the church is that they have principles that are man-made and imposed on the people as God's laws. Moreover, patriarchal leaders tend to select bible verses that promote male domination and male superiority (Genesis: 27 and Ephesians 5:22-24). In most cases, these verses are read out of context which allows the reader to put his interpretation. Van Klinken and Chitando, further point out that

Christian discourses and politics tend to reinforce patriarchal gender norms and notions of masculinity, and more recently also to an emerging concern with how patriarchy is related to heteronormativity and homophobia (2016:10)

Whereas, homophobic attitudes perpetuate violence in the society hence the Church is expected to demonstrate love and peace to the society. It is a known factor that colonial and postcolonial church has a long history of patriarchy while there is evidence that Ancient Africa was matriarchal. Male domination did not exist, women occupied an important position in society. The positions occupied by men today were led by a woman then, such as spiritual leaderships, women worked in both private and public sphere. Mutwa in Michael says "According to the culture of our people, a woman was regarded to be spiritual greater than a man" (Michael, 2017). This means the spiritual wellbeing of the society depended on women. There were greatly appreciated and respected for their godly given gift of being natures of humanity.

According to Christian teachings, the Bible is the way and the truth, and its teachings cannot be altered. But there is a thin line between the Word of God and what is conveyed by Church leaders to people. The fact that Biblical scriptures are not as simple to ordinary people leads to misinterpretation of certain texts of which is mostly done deliberately by Church authorities. Church leaders misused leadership powers by imposing their perceptions on the Bible and speak discriminatory against same sexualities as if God himself gave them authority. They use their position in the Church to deny SSI a space of worship, all this attitude is based

on patriarchal beliefs. Patriarchs use the Bible intentionally to intimidate people, making them believe that God is against certain sexual behaviour. Gunda argues against this notion, he says that the Bible

Is not always used because of its divinity and religious power but it is sometimes used as a kingmaker in power relations. This is made easier by the fact that in Zimbabwe, the Bible already has a large following of believers, whose faith can then be abused as power structures get rearranged in the society (2010:394).

This means Church leaders and political leaders can easily use the Bible to inflict fear on people and fear is a powerful tool that one can use to control people. Africans are known "Africans are a naturally religious people", to be God-fearing people and Church leaders, political leaders, and traditional leaders take advantage of that (Owujaiye, 2019:3) African traditional leaders are well aware that the Bible can be used as a tool to correct unacceptable behaviour. Chitando and van Klinken argue that "in different parts of the continent we have seen political leaders and statesmen using strongly Bible-based rhetoric and Christian-inspired imaginary to depict homosexuality and 'gay rights' as a moral threat to their nations" (Chitando and van Klinken, 2016: 2). These views seem to imply that same-sex people do not have a right to be Christians, their religious rights are violated, and the right to choose a religion is taken away from them. Manipulation of the Bible is a human tendency, and it is precisely this human tendency that they take it upon them to interpret certain behaviours as ungodly. Thus same sexualities will continue to be a controversial issue, even though ambiguous sexual identities existed even in the early Church

There is evidence that there are genuine instances where sexuality is not a matter of choice, morality, or immorality, as in the case of Caster Semenya and many other individuals who have been identified with a complex sexual identity (North, 2016). Cases such as these should change the historical approach of the Church to the same sexualities. The rejection of SSI is a hypocritical attitude because it is known that there are male religious leaders who took the vows of celibacy, yet sexually abuse young boys in the Church and some confessed to their homosexuality but had been afraid to admit it (Mc Ardle, 2019). White argues that "Same-sex sexuality is not a religious matter or an issue that should be discussed in favour of Christian

religion as it relates to human sexuality. The Bible which is regarded as the authoritative text for all Christians is a book about God -- not a book about human sexuality” (White, 2010: 46).

It is an unfortunate truth that many people choose not to accept new knowledge or inform themselves on the issue of same sexualities and refuse to re-examine or modify their beliefs. Research institutions refer to empirical evidence while religious institutions depend on beliefs and mysterious phenomena. Nonetheless, religious beliefs take precedence over-researched knowledge. Ancient texts and teachings are not altered to accommodate changes taking place in our contemporary society, but South Africa tends to initiate change to ensure that the democratic rights of others are respected, irrespective of religious beliefs.

#### **2.4.2 Ancestral Spirits as a Safe Space for Same-Sex Sexuality**

It is important to note that spirit possession is not the only reason for *izangoma* to engage in same-sex relationships. Same-sex individuals fall within various identities which determine the types of relationships one would prefer, for example, LGBTIQ+. Some do not want to identify with a homosexual community, they eschew all labelling but still practice same-sex relationships (Stouwe, 2019: 123). This is also common within the *izangoma* community, as they engage in same-sex relationships for various reasons, but not all are influenced by the ancestors.

Purity is expected when a *Sangoma* performs spiritual activities, hence *izangoma* are also required to refrain from sexual activities. Some have decided to remain single because the ancestors take control of their bodies in such a way that the marriage suffers. In the past, it was the norm to find *izangoma* who were virgins and people preferred to consult with such *izangoma* because performing ceremonies or rituals requires cleanliness and purity (Nkabinde, 2009: 110). The importance of purity during the performing of traditional rituals is emphasised in African tradition. There should be no sexual intercourse during the period of traditional ceremonies, as it is believed that cleanliness opens up lines of communication with the ancestors, even channelling is easy when one has abstained from sex. This is confirmed by Brindley who argues

*izangoma* should not have sexual intercourse. Even in former times when a married woman became an *isangoma*, if she was the only wife, she is said to have requested her

husband to take another wife because she (*isangoma*) may no longer have sexual contact with him (1982: 95).

The researcher is a *Sangoma* thus she agrees that abstinence is important to ensure that *izangoma* performs well. A female *Sangoma* in a heterosexual marriage experiences problems when the husband fails to understand the demands of the ancestors and he would often complain about the lack of intimacy. One of the *izangoma* who was a participant in the study suggested that polygamy is one option because she did not have to worry about her husband's sexual needs. In a marriage where the husband cannot tolerate this situation, the *Sangoma* may be forced into having sex. Thus, some of *izangoma* prefer same-sex relationships because it offers a better chance to be in control of their sexuality. Women have equal power in the same-sex relationship whereas in heterosexual relationships men dictate sexual activities. As much as a *Sangoma* has more power due to an ancestral calling, she is not supposed to use that power to demand sexual intercourse, those powers should be used strictly for the calling. Mkasi confirms this by arguing that at times sexual activities are automatically restricted, as there is no desire for sexual contact (2013: 26).

If a *Sangoma* has a partner who does not understand the ancestral calling, the relationship could easily break down. Amanda Gcabashe (2009: 1) explains on her website that

You also need to be in a relationship that is supportive and understands that there will be times when you work away from home with strangers of the opposite sex; (in heterosexual relationships) there will be times when you can't have sex because of ceremonies that require you to be ultra-cleansed; that you will go on trips out of town to perform ceremonies or healing. Now if you are with someone who is not tolerant and understanding of all these things, then it will be the end of your relationship.

The initiation period is tough on any kind of relationship, be it family or intimate relationships, thus many break down. Lately, some of *izangoma* prefer to have female partners because men demand sexual intercourse even when the *Sangoma* is fasting. It was further noted that some of *izangoma* were in same-sex relationships but had not disclosed this as their responses and comments demonstrated that they were involved in same-sex relationships. However, most were unsure of same-sex marriages. The late Zandile 'Nkunzi' Nkabinde (2009) is one of the *izangoma* who was married to a woman and practiced her healing work

without a problem. Amongst the narratives of this study, there is a factual account of two women who married in a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal. This took place when homosexuality was unheard of or was discussed. The narrator was a participant from the previous study and confirmed that the incident had taken place in her village. When this marriage took place in 1979, she was thirteen years of age. The area where she resided was one of the villages near the Mpumalanga Township. The short version of the story is as follows:

There was this female *Sangoma* who lived in the village all her life, but the community never understood her. She had male characteristics and was able to do everything that local boys would do. Even in stick fighting, no boy was her match. She never associated with other girls in the village, even when all the girls went to the river, she would hide in the bush and bath alone. In the beginning, when this behaviour began it seemed strange, her family thought she was possessed by ancestors and if she underwent initiation, she would be fine. She went through initiation and came back home, but her life never changed. Instead, she proposed to a girl in the village who agreed, and she eventually got married; her wife was impregnated by her brother. This was an agreement between her and her brother so that she could have children of her blood. The marriage was accepted by the villagers and her work of healing continued (Mkasi, 2013).

Unfortunately, during the time of this research, the *Sangoma* in the story had already passed on. According to *izangoma* who were part of the group, the reason for the silent acceptance of this marriage was because the *Sangoma* was possessed by an authoritative male spirit, thus the community understood that she could not have married a male person. Since she is no longer alive to answer for herself, one can assume that she was brave to decide to get married to another woman, or her ancestor protected her against any possible discrimination from the community. If more *izangoma* choose openly to marry other female *izangoma*, this could challenge traditional heterosexual marriages. Fortunately for traditionalists, same-sex relationships in rural communities are not disclosed, even though they are observable. Those who are married and open about their sexuality relocate to urban areas. According to Mkasi (2013), this was the first incident of an indigenous same sex marriage and the only one she has heard of in a Zulu ethnic group.

It is important to note that the same sexuality amongst *izangoma* is a safe space for *izangoma* only and does not include ordinary women. Even though same-sex relationships are denied by traditional leaders, Mkasi (2013) demonstrates that there is a safe space for SSI within African traditional religion (p2). This study could pave the way for an ordinary woman to enjoy their rights in a democratic society like everyone else. *Izangoma* are protected by ancestors, ordinary women are supposedly protected by the Constitution, however, the killing of LGBTIQ+ individuals continues.

## **2.5 Community Acceptance vs Legislation**

Many scholars have explored the field of African same sexualities which continue to be a challenge in South Africa, regardless of the constitutional rights of LGBTIQ persons. Conflict often arises between the custodians of culture and the rights activist. The field of same sexualities is well researched and documented but there has not been a break-through on how to accommodate LGBTIQ+ persons in heterosexual society. The legislation is supportive and recognises these individuals, however, their sense of belonging is vastly undermined by the attitudes of the heterosexual communities (van Zyl, 2011). Researching same-sex couples, married and unmarried, shows that "Black couples place more stress on acceptance in their kinships and are more concerned with fitting into normative gender roles to find communal acceptance" (van Zyl, 2011: 353). Belonging and acceptance seem to be equally important for African same-sex individuals and the legislation cannot guarantee them communal acceptance. More importantly, for Africans, the family is more important than constitutional law. Van Zyl did not interview families of the LGBTIQ+, thus he reports that "the connection between same-sex marriage and African kinship systems was not specifically explored, nor were participants asked about the consequences of marriage for the lineage of their children" (van Zyl, 2011: 354).

It is evident from the research that this is an area that requires more in-depth scrutiny as mentioned above. Van Zyl also recommends that future research should employ an indigenous approach to study this area. This research has looked at same-sex relationships through the lens of the indigenous communities. The research did not focus on LGBTIQ+ only, but also considers the voices of the previously silenced, such as the traditional leaders,

indigenous communities, families, parents, and friends of LGBTIQ+ people. This research responded to various questions about the attitudes of traditionalists towards the LGBTIQ+ community. It also responded to the call made by van Zyl when he proposes that

A theoretical framework should be developed to "(re)indigenize" same sexualities in Africa around principles of interdependence, participation, and sharing, and particularly to locate same-sex families within contemporary kinships systems. The tensions between legally bestowed rights and belonging in communities need to be addressed and resolved to ensure the full inclusion of lesbian, gay and same-sex individuals and same-sex couples in South African communal and national life (2011: 355).

This study attempted to minimise this lacuna by adopting the research methodologies used by Bagele Chalisa, who advocates for African indigenised research methodologies, as this approach locates the research within the indigenous communities (2012:19).

In conclusion, this chapter presents the literature review, focusing on African traditional religion and Christian religion, how they both view same sexualities. The chapter interrogates the impact of Christian Religion on African traditional culture and religion and how the negative perceptions of colonialist writing impacted African religious beliefs. It further explored the Christian teachings on African sexualities and how this religion affects African teachings on sexualities. It also demonstrates that African traditional religion offers a safe space for same sexualities.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **African Sexualities: A History**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The lack of authentic information on African sexualities affects how scholars interpret African sexualities. The background information is largely based on colonial writings whose agenda was more on African wealth than human behaviour. Historical documents do not contain reliable information to meaningfully debate African sexualities (Tamale, 2011: 15). Early anthropologists, researchers, travellers, and missionaries were not interested in African culture for its own sake but had to serve the master's interest. However, if they had been interested in African religion and cultural practice, they would have realised Africans were not strictly heterosexual. However, they knew what was important to them as they aimed to use missionaries to civilize Africa and to spread the Gospel (Smith, 1999: 81).

#### **3.2 African Sexualities during the Pre-colonial Period**

The early anthropologist and writers such as Westmarck, Frazer, and Crawley under the colonial administration researching on the indigenous population, concluded that Africans' nakedness was due to lack of civilization (Lyons & Lyons, 2011: 82). Africans were seen as sexual machines who carelessly indulged in sexual activities for both lust and reproduction. The absence of European rules in sexual behaviour meant that Africans were sexually uncontrollable and thus posed a challenge to European sexual norms, which were highly conservative (Tamale, 2011: 22). Women's dress code, which was often topless and proudly expressed feminine identity, was seen as a behaviour that promoted prostitution.

Tamale states that

The historical trajectory of research on African sexualities began from a place where colonial and imperial interests, bias, and agendas defined their parameters in damaging ways. Conceptualized within a tripartite framework of morals, reproduction, and dysfunction, the sexualities of Africans were largely constructed as immoral, lascivious, and primitive (2011: 22).

According to Lyons and Lyons, African males engaged in sexual acts instinctively, and their mating patterns were considered seasonal, meaning they were not considered as emotional beings and their behaviour was associated with that of animals (2011: 83). In support of this notion, Epprecht states that colonialists viewed Africans as 'barbaric people who lack control over heterosexual instincts – an excess of natural virility' (2010: 177). It seems that explorers and scientists of the time were fascinated by the physical features of the African people because their analyses were based on physique rather than character. Their discussion tended to describe African males in terms of animal stereotypes and the male genitals as being the centre of sexual attraction to African women. The assumption was that the exposed genitals would be the reason for excessive sexual intercourse (Sheafe, 2007)). Moreover, the rites of passage were studied concerning European standards without understanding the specific contexts and their value in the social construction of morality. Various sexual practices came under scrutiny to determine their social impact and value.

### **3.3 Colonial Discourse on African Sexualities**

Insider perspectives on African sexualities should be given prevalence over outsider perspectives because it draws on indigenous African ways of knowing, doing, and being. This approach would give Africans more space to discuss various sexual practices that have been misinterpreted and labelled as inappropriate. Some of these practices played a significant role in the cycle of African daily life. Initiation rites were not only performed for the wellbeing of the individual but also the whole community. However, Christian missionaries and colonial officials degraded these practices and described them as sinful. The European obsession with African sexual practices led to finding ways of correcting these practices which were seen as detrimental to the wellbeing of society (Epprecht, 2013: 59). They questioned and criticised sexual practices performed on women even though several sexual practices were performed by both men and women.

The notion of African culture as an oppressive culture became part of the gender-sensitive discourse which was not in keeping with the African context. These colonial – driven views which promoted a Western framed gender discourse that denigrated African gender roles persist to this day. Rituals, practices, and initiation rites were performed to control the sexual behaviour of both genders. Moreover, such practices were not only performed for the benefit of an individual but had a strong impact on the social order and the organisational structures of indigenous societies (Moseley, 2004:195). A few of these sexual practices are discussed hereunder to demonstrate their importance in African societies. The section below will explore whether African sexualities are indeed as problematic to society as they are perceived in Western discourses and analyses. Well-known African sexual practice which often raises concern in democratic countries, such as polygamy, female circumcision, and virginity testing will be discussed, as some of these practices are still widely practiced in Africa while some are practiced in particular societies or communities.

### **3.3.1 Means of Organisation**

#### **3.3.1.1 Polygamy**

Polygamy was and is still popular in indigenous societies and constitutes a prime feature of rural Africa, where men can have two or more wives (Therborn, 2006:13). Polygamous marriages in African societies were appreciated because they strengthened the family wealth and were a strategic way to ensure food security for the whole family. A man with many wives and children was compelled to produce more food for his family. Contrary to this view is the Western world view and its support for human rights discourse, which interprets polygamy as an oppressive practice that perpetuates heterosexuality for reproductive purposes. Women and children are seen as the source of labour to produce wealth for the men (Mougoue, 2013:61). Such interpretations skewed the African view on polygamy while the real purpose and the value of polygamy is family subsistence, at least in the past, this was the idea behind polygamy.

Since Europeans were not familiar with African ways of doing things, they urged Africans to adopt their lifestyle. This led to the western lifestyle being imposed on African culture. In

Western eyes Africans were deemed primitive until they learned how to live like a white man (Oduwole, 2013: 158). The Western notion of criticising African polygamous marriage was one way of interfering with African traditional practices, most of which were seen as having only sexual benefits. Many European travellers to Africa depended on their personal experiences to interpret African women's experiences. Their observation was the only source of knowledge since they had no research skills and could not speak the language of the indigenous people (Mougoue, 2013: 53). Their lack of knowledge on African cultural practices led to the assumption that polygamy was about woman and child labour, while the men lazed about. Ronnback (2014) further argues that the European view of African men who benefitted from polygamous marriages was a way of justifying African slavery. Since they were doing nothing during the day, they could be used for various forms of enforced labour. This notion about Africans is notes Ronnback who says, 'lazy African' came to be used as a justification for the transatlantic slave trade and, during the colonial period in African history (2015:212). Post-colonial discourses and contemporary discourses continue to criticise African polygamous practices as Westernised radical feminists and human rights activists see polygamy as a practice that perpetuates patriarchy. They argue that Third World women live oppressive lives, leaving men to dominate and enjoy cultural privileges while women suffer inequality because of their gender. In these arguments, the experiences of the Third World women are assimilated with those of white women (Mohanty, 1998:66).

Critiques by scholars such as Madipoane Masenya, Fulata Moyo, and Isabel Phiri on African culture is based on the issue of patriarchy. They maintain that the patriarchal system empowers men who use their power to oppress women, thus they fight for the protection of African women who suffer in silence under male domination. Polygamous marriages are assumed to promote violence amongst women who would fight for the men while at the same time they have no say in the matter, as the men may take as many wives as they wish. However, what has been overlooked in the practice of polygamy is that in the olden days, the first wife was usually consulted with regards to the taking of another wife; she would choose a suitable wife for her husband. The husband needed to obtain the blessings from the first wife to take a second wife because the process did not only involve two or three people but affected the entire family, including the ancestors (Ojua et al. 2014, 44).

The reality is that many wives are not the focus of the practice; reproduction and maintaining the family bloodline is the priority. Hayase and Liaw confirm this by stating that "Polygamy serves as a means to maintain the endless line of births and rebirths and to strengthen the power of the family as well as the status of the old patriarch through the growth in family size and the expansion of conjugal linkage to other clans" (1997:296). Polygamous marriages are often referred to as something of the past, but they are still very much practiced in rural communities, although the practice has changed somewhat.

This practice released women from their sexual obligation; even though African societies are known to have patriarchal communities, sexual matters are considered as important and treated with respect under African traditions. Certain activities were related to the time of the month which determined whether it was appropriate for sexual intercourse; traditional men would comply with these traditions and would respect them. For instance, from an African cultural perspective, men respect the menstruation period as this is a sacred period for a woman. Amongst the Zulu people and in some African countries, menstrual blood is known to make men weak and this is confirmed by Walker who explains the power of menstrual blood (2018). In a polygamous marriage, such beliefs allow a woman to withdraw from sexual intercourse without any dispute from her husband.

Polygamy also played an important role in procreation since children form the foundation of the family. Thus, if the first wife was barren, the second wife would be able to reproduce. Children were important as they were the bearers of the family name for the next generation. However, this view on polygamy differs from that held by feminist scholars. The critique of polygamy by feminist scholars is that it is part of the patriarchal project. The husband marries these women and the children take his name, not that of the mother. It is an unequal relationship because the man remains the head of the family. Taiwo (2010: 232) in her discussion of polygamy as a reality in African contexts, points out that "the man in precolonial Africa was still the head of the family as well as the leader of the society, which was purely patriarchal in nature. The man still played the controlling agent in the family; women played supporting roles to the men, and the roles of women were complementary to men". If African feminist scholars use African indigenous lenses to interrogate patriarchy, they would

have a different approach to polygamy. However, some scholars strongly disagree with this view and remain divided. Arnfred provides a few reasons why patriarchy has been presented as a negative system. According Arnfred

In matrilineal northern Mozambique, gender power dynamics work very differently compared to patrilineal areas and are much more in favour of women. Despite this, however, even here women, who participate in donor-sponsored NGO activities, learn to view themselves as oppressed under patriarchal power; they do not learn to appreciate and develop the specific gender dynamics of this society (2009:12).

Johnson further argues that patriarchy is a system, not an individual, however, there is a tendency to refer to a male and patriarchy as if these are the same thing. He states that "patriarchy is not simply another way of saying 'men'. Patriarchy is a kind of society, and society is more than a collection of people. As such, 'patriarchy' does not refer to me or any other man or collection of men, but to a kind of society in which men and women participate" (2005: 5). Nonetheless, what differentiates African-born feminists from Western feminists is that African-born feminists do not devalue African culture. They acknowledge that not all cultural practices are harmful to women and affirm those that support life but reject those that are abusive to women (Phiri & Nadar 2006: 11). As much as some sexual cultural practices may seem irrelevant today, they played an important role in the organisation of indigenous societies in the past considering issues of polygamy from a Western perspective would not be optimal.

Lately, there has been a revival in polygamy, as today there are more young people in polygamous marriages than before, especially in African communities. It appears, however, that some of these marriages are more about wealth and comfort than love (Lebitse, 2018).

### **3.3.1.2 Female Sexual Rituals**

Genital mutilation is one of several sexual practices on the African continent, others being circumcision, genital cutting, and so forth. Genital mutilation is not practiced in South Africa but popular in countries such as Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan. Various writers have discussed these practices and have formulated different theories on

these rituals. As highlighted above, people who theorise on these rituals are not Africans, hence they are unable to describe these rituals properly. The practitioners contest some of these concepts because they are not in indigenous languages but English or foreign languages. This further skews the description of the practices because language and culture are interrelated. This means Western language supports and expresses Western culture and many times African culture and Western culture differ and often clash. To indigenise these practices, indigenous concepts, used by the ethnic groups who participate in these practices should be used. The use of other languages to explain African practices may lead to African practices being misinterpreted or unjustly marginalised (Tamale, 2011: 39).

Practices such as female genital operations, genital cutting, and circumcision create the impression that violence and pain are inflicted on an individual portrayed as being an unwilling participant. Practitioners are assumed to be the victims of cultural practice, which is debatable because in recent years there has been renewed support for various traditional practices, one of which is practiced by the Zulu nation in South Africa called *ukusoma* (non-penetrative sex); this practice helps young girls to avoid early pregnancy. However, we cannot ignore the fact that some of these practices affect women's health, as the circumstances and the environment within which these practices take place can affect participants negatively. Furthermore, performing these rituals should be in keeping with the cultural standards of that society (Prazak & Coffman, 2007:21). There should be improved methods to carry out these rituals should the current practices pose a danger to women, rather than abolishing the practices altogether.

As noted above, the rituals are practiced in twenty-eight African countries except in South Africa. Moseley reports that genital cutting is practiced in most educational levels, in most social-religious groups, classes, Muslim, Christian, animists, and one Jewish sector (Moseley, 2004: 202). Genital cutting has not been discussed in an indigenous context by people who conduct the ritual. Even the interpretation of the ritual is not similar to that of the non-practitioners. While African people perceive the practice as a rite of passage, Western scholars discuss this as sexual violence and a painful process. Emphasis on pain and violence is understood concerning hurting the individual but the African understanding of the practice is that the ritual is performed to benefit the whole society. Thus, Boateng emphasises that

“all ceremonies were of communal interest and are mostly marked by tests of endurance that immediately pushed childhood behaviour and frivolities behind the new initiate” (Boateng, 1983:333).

This means discussions that position female initiations as violent without understanding their historical background, diminishes the value of the ritual. Nonetheless, this discussion is not intended to disregard the feminist’s concerns regarding the impact it has on childbirth, but to alert the protestors of the practice to find solutions within the rituals rather than abolishing it entirely by offering alternative ways to omit parts of the rituals that cause harm to women. The negativity attached to these rituals is that it is perceived as a practice that reinforces the sexual drive or deviance, which is why western literature presents the African male as hypersexual (Esho et. al, 2012: 128). Moreover, genital cutting was seen as a way to maintain self-control amongst girls approaching puberty, acknowledging the fact that the human body changes as the person grow and, in the process, sexual desire increases with age. Most African societies have practiced rituals such as genital cutting to deal with the challenges that come with adolescence and puberty. These practices existed long before Western health care systems, so Africans had their ways of dealing with issues relating to puberty, such as unwanted pregnancies and irresponsible behaviour.

### **3.3.1.3 Female Circumcision**

Missionaries in Kenya sought to abolish female circumcision because it caused unwarranted suffering and difficulties during childbirth. As a result, laws were implemented to arrest those who continued with the practice (Kiruthu, et al., 2013: 129). Global influence contributed to this call against the practice when the decision was taken in Geneva during the conference held in 1931 on African children supported by Save the Children Fund. At this conference, several European delegates urged that this 'barbaric custom' should be abolished, and like all other 'heathen customs, it should be abolished at once by law' (Moseley, 2004:195).

Corine Kratz in Moseley provides an insider perspective of Kenyan people, stating that, “Okiek women and men view genital modification and the bravery and self-control displayed during the operation as the constitutive experience of Okiek personhood”. Another comment is from Robert Edgerton who reported that ‘Kikuyu men and woman, like those of several African

societies that practice female circumcision, assured me in 1961-62 that circumcised women continue to be orgasmic' (Moseley.2004:195). However, this statement seems to be highlighting the fact that it is conducted for male sexual pleasure and holds no benefit for women. It is from this notion that women theologians argue against these practices.

#### **3.3.1.4 Virginitv Testing**

Virginitv testing is practiced in the wider African continent but is popular in South Africa amongst the Nguni cultural groups. Because South Africa is rich in cultural diversity, the practice differs in each society and each community as sexual attitudes differ from culture to culture (Phiri et al., 2003: 48). The practice was mostly known to be practiced by the Zulu people in KwaZulu-Natal and ceased during the colonial era, but it has recently been revived by Dr. Nomagugu Ngobese, who is a female traditional healer, a virginitv inspector, and the founder of the KZN NGO known as Nomkhubulwane Culture and Youth Development Organisation. Dr. Ngobese stated that the ancestors instructed her to revive this practice (IRIN News, 2005). The recent revival of the practice resulted in a robust debate against the practice, from women and children rights organisations to human rights activists. The issue is argued from a human rights perspective, where contesters argue that the practice is a violation of the girl's rights and constitute the invasion of privacy and abuse of one's body (Children's Bill, 2003: 4). The practice is viewed as exposing the girls' private parts; the unacceptable part of the practice is that a woman touches the girl's genitals, as this activity is associated with sexual harassment and abuse.

Looking at these arguments from an indigenous perspective it does not make sense because the purpose of 'touching' is to establish whether the hymen is intact, there is no pain or force used in this process. As a Zulu woman, growing up I observed the practice and I attended some of these virginitv testing events in Pietermaritzburg and KwaNongoma at the Royal house. In 2002 I had the opportunity of interviewing Dr. Ngobese when I was working for the Centre for Constructive Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Phiri, 2003: 63–78). Even though contemporary virginitv testing is not conducted the same way as before however, it does not inflict any pain on the initiate. In the past, this ritual was performed by

the parents and grandparents at the girl's home (Brindly, 1982: 92). Today parents who want their children to be tested to protect them, have to send their children to inspectors who are experts in the practice and know what to look for. Also, underage children join these initiations under parental supervision and when they reach the required level of maturity, they are free to choose whether they want to continue or not. The study conducted before 2000 shows that the testing was done differently from the way it is done today, Brindly (1982) reports that:

The inspection proceeds with each of the old women examining the girls in turn by lifting the labia (*izindebe*) with the first two fingers of each hand. The old women move from girl to girl conducting their examination and when they find a virgin, a married woman who is breastfeeding is asked to squeeze a few drops of her breastmilk into this girl's genitals to signify her virginity (p 92).

From the description above it is clear that virginity testing was not an abusive practice thus accusations against this practice are unfair and unjust. Moreover, the fact that the issue is not argued within an African framework but outside of the African context makes the discourse irrelevant to African indigenous discourse (Tong, 2010:161/80).

The denial of this ritual shows ignorance of the positive impact it has had on the lives of the practitioners and the initiates. Moreover, there is a tendency to ignore the fact that young girls submit to this practice voluntarily. The practice is valued by Zulu communities as it serves as a preventative strategy for unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Even in urban settings such as Kwa-Mashu and uMlazi, the practice is gaining popularity in surrounding townships in KwaZulu-Natal (Scorgie, 2002: 56). Parents see value in this practice because it is meeting contemporary sexual challenges such as HIV/Aids and other transmitted diseases. Virginity testing is more than an Aids intervention, it is a cultural initiative that has been greatly supported by older rural women who bear the brunt of having to care for the illegitimate children of their daughters and granddaughters. The HIV/Aids pandemic has forced parents and grandparents of young mothers to take the responsibility for the babies when these young parents are sick or when they die. (Phiri, 2003: 51). Weary of these possible responsibilities, these women have vested interest in preventing their daughters from becoming pregnant and hope that virginity testing will help to restore "lost cultural values of chastity before marriage, modesty, self-respect, and pride" (Leclere–Madlala, 1997: 535).

Emphasis on maintaining one's virginity is a common caution used by most African communities as controlling one's sexuality benefits the self. In African societies, women are free to choose sexual partners and they are allowed to have non-penetrative sex before marriage.

Communities such as the Zulu, Kikuyu, and Akamba allow premarital sexual activities but virginity must be maintained. Amongst the Kikuyu people, there is a sexual practice known as *ngwiko* which includes sexual play. Davis observes that "newly initiated youth of both sexes were allowed to sleep together and engage in sexual play and experimentation without intercourse under a strict code of behaviour in a common controlled environment designed to prohibit premarital pregnancy" (Wangila, 2013: 105). This practice is called *ukusoma* by the Zulus and it is encouraged because it instils self-control. It also trains one's mind to discipline the body. *Ukusoma* trains one to use one's mind before acting on feelings. Many pregnancies are often the result of emotional rather than rational responses to an action (Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui, 2016:13). Even though the human rights discourse portrays virginity testing as an abusive practice, it is important to note that both maidens and women who are part of the practice benefit from the practice. The initiates are allowed to learn African history, culture, and religion which includes demonstrated practices such as virginity testing.

Moreover, virginity testing is not all about the virgin girls but about the connectedness between nature and people. African people are connected to nature in many ways; amongst the Zulu people, this is well demonstrated with the Nomkhubulwane festival, the Zulu Goddess who is held in high reverence by the Zulu people. She is responsible for the rain and is seen as the symbol of fertility. Virgin girls form a big part of this festival, the purity and cleanliness of the girls relate to the fact that the goddess never married, thus she shows herself to the girls. She can be seen through the rainbow or manifest as a snake, thus water and snakes are important aspects of African traditional religion (Lombo, 2017: 55). The study conducted by Siwila demonstrates how Africans have always ensured that nature is treated to receive from it. In all African communities, there are practices, ceremonies, or rituals that demonstrate the interconnectedness between people and nature, this is confirmed by her statements when she says "In most African societies, nature and culture carry symbolic relationships with traditional religions that form the core of that particular culture of the local

people in their context" (Siwila, 2014. 137). Similar also touches on the fact that nature plays an important role in human reproduction. In the study, she conducted a study amongst Tonga people where women and girls had to conduct certain rituals for the trees and to perform ceremonies that related to producing food. Some similarities are evident between the Tonga ceremonies and the Zulu ceremonies performed to acknowledge the role of nature infertility, similar to the Nomkhubulwane festival (139). Similar further argues against African feminists who criticise some of the components of these ceremonies and rituals, as some of them are seen as oppressive but have ignored the benefit of the teachings that go with these ceremonies (2014:138). It is therefore important to note that African history is embedded in these traditional practices thus preserving these for future generations so that they can learn about their history and values and embrace their heritage (Scorgy 2002: 65).

Each society has different strategies of protection when it comes to children, and for Africans protection goes hand in hand with either initiation rites or ceremonies. Enforcing and imposing western values on African indigenous people by touting human rights is to undermine African culture and religion. Most African sexual practices are denounced based on being barbaric, heathen, or violating human rights but all these aspects are foreign to African culture as they fail to recognise the cultural values of African people. Often there is no solution to the challenges that come with the abandoning of inculcated cultural practices (Sanchez, 2013: 205). It is worth noting that the significance of these cultural practices is that they are directly linked to African religion, while these rites can be seen as cultural rites, they are also religious rites as they are framed in African beliefs. In the African way of life, everything is connected, African culture and religion are intertwined, and this is evident in the everyday life of African communities. This is emphasised by Beyers when he states "The reciprocal interaction between culture and religion must be recognised: religion is determined by culture, but religion also influences culture. The fate of religion and culture is, thus interwoven" (Beyers, 2010: 9).

### **3.4 Pre-Colonial Same Sexualities in African Societies**

The challenge of researching African same sexualities is that African frameworks are not yet fully developed into a recognised academic research framework. Therefore, the study will

rest on concepts and terms such as homosexuality and LGBTIQ+ from western theories. These concepts will be used interchangeably with the concept such as same sexuality or same-sex practice to clarify some points and to contextualise the argument. These concepts will be used even though they are foreign to African indigenous discourse; the use of these terms is an attempt to allow a reader (English reader) to understand the thesis. However, the researcher is aware that these terms may not be appropriate to the indigenous reader and at times they may impact the logic of the sentence. Whereas if the study was written in isiZulu and had only used isiZulu concepts and terms, the thesis would be in a better position to deeply reveal the complexity that comes with indigenous discourses of the same sexualities. This section will further discuss same-sex practices that have been identified in other African countries.

African narratives on the same sexualities exist but were not discussed concerning heterosexual relationships. This dualism originates from Western discourse (Collins, 2005: 37), as sexuality was not categorized as homosexual or heterosexual, nonetheless, procreation was and still is valued as the only way to ensure human existence. People practiced both to live normal lives in the community, therefore some say there is no 'gay' in Africa (Oduwole, 2013: 156). Societies depend on heterosexual relationships to reproduce, but this does not imply that other sexualities were not known. It was not important to recognize such sexualities as these were regarded as 'fruitless in the natural order' (Lopang, 2014:81). Moreover, they did not need to be recognised because often those who were in same-sex relationships were also in heterosexual relationships, they would practice both at the same time, probably because they wanted to maintain the reproduction culture.

Therefore, the denial of homosexuality that persists amongst traditionalists is contradictory. It seems that the negative perception that existed was the result of colonial rule which labelled the practice as deviant behaviour. African's resistance towards homosexuality is based on the outsider perspective while it existed within African indigenous discourse. The complexity of sexual discourses in African societies is that it is supposed to be discussed privately by the practitioners, however, when outsiders add their perceptions to it, it becomes "theirs" and Africans distance themselves and even denies ever knowing about such

practice (Breidlid, 2009, 146). Another reason for denying this practice is that it is associated with prostitution and the slave trade. Often young men in Johannesburg hostels would date older men, they would wash and clean for them and in the end, they would be paid for it (Burton 1885 in Marc Epprecht 2010). The prostitution of men with other men is common in South Africa today, and in the eyes of the general public, same-sex relationships either between males or females are regarded as homosexuals even if they are not (Ryan, 2009: 110).

It is further noted that the eschewing of the concept 'homosexuality' by Africans stems from earlier narratives, how the daily lives of the African natives and their European masters have been described. Long speaks of Armah (1973) who argues that some Europeans supported the barbaric practice of slavery and slave owners forcing themselves on their slaves. Sexual intercourse between master and slave was not uncommon thus missionaries decided to come to the rescue of the indigenous people of Africa. They saw the same-sex practice spreading in industrial compounds and gold mines and they insisted on the abolishment of same-sex practice (Lopang, 2014:81-82). However, this particular sexual practice had nothing to do with indigenous same-sex sexualities. These sexual relations were habitual, a person who had been a slave and had been treated as the master's sexual object was likely to do the same to others. The notion that same-sex practices could be an imitative lifestyle is noted in this research, as one of the participants argued that same-sex practice was a learned behaviour (T11). However, there is evidence that there are individuals who are born with different sexual orientations and are likely to be sexually attracted to a person of the same gender. One cannot deny the possibility of imitations, however, what happened between the slaves and their masters happened because it was another way of dominating the powerless and dehumanise their slaves. This means such practices cannot be related to relationships that occur out of choice or those that take place due to sexual orientation (Slavery and Justice report, 2007).

The section below gives a broader view of how same-sex practices came about in pre-colonial Africa. However, it remains a challenge to obtain documents on this subject since African societies used oral traditions hence most of the practices were not documented. Since the same-sex practice was secret, it was difficult to find details on the practice, and the lack of

factual narratives on the subject limits insight into those relationships. There are a few examples, but a number of those narratives refer to male same sexualities; very few discuss female same sexualities. Even the existing documentation on African same sexuality is based on colonial views, court cases, and administrative reports.

When prisoners or miners were caught engaging in 'same-sex intercourse' they were arrested. The arrest was based on immoral behaviour as the missionaries, who were part of the colonial structure, labelled the same sexualities as 'Immoral practices' (Achmat, 2015:99). Cases of immoral practices against prisoners were the beginning of formal documentation of African same sexualities but that did not mean that such practices began in those prisons or compounds. The fact that they were captured in the act shows that the practice existed even before colonialism. Nongoloza in Zackie Achmat (2015: 99), argue that:

As to the practice of *hlobonga* which you complain of as existing among the Ninevites in jail, in that the soldiers subject the piccanins to immoral practices that have always existed. Even when we were free on the hills south of Johannesburg, some of us had women and others had young men for sexual purposes.

Moreover, the lack of evidence on the practice was caused by the fact that information relating to sexualities was inaccessible to the outsiders (the colonialists) because African sexualities had always been a closed subject. At that time, no one would share this information voluntarily with a stranger.

Moreover, colonial writers were not interested in African sexualities thus narratives on African same-sex practices cannot be referenced properly, the context in which these sexualities took place is not always clear. One is therefore forced to refer to examples provided by Colonial writers, which were not detailed nor indigenous discourses but mostly prejudicial narratives. Nonetheless, existing narratives by Achmat provide evidence that same sexualities existed before colonialism thus confirming that "African homosexuality did not start in prison or was encouraged by the compound system as analysed by colonialists" (Achmat, 2015:100). Based on these narratives and the views of most participants, it can thus be assumed that within African indigenous culture, same-sex relationships existed and were tolerated but were practiced in secret. Hence, tolerance towards different sexualities was impossible under the colonial rule where western religions prevailed. Through the efforts of

Christian teachings, countries such as Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi criminalised homosexuality as it was described as "unnatural, bestial, satanic, and deviant" (O'Mara, 2013: 163). However, tolerance of homosexuality in indigenous African societies is revealed in historical documents which shows that people were not killed for same-sex relationships. Oduwole states "the persecution of homosexuals is contemporary and has some roots in the continent's colonial experience" (2013:156). There is further evidence in many discourses about ambiguous identities in African sexualities. Scholars such as Richard Burton, 1885; Kendall, 1996; Epprecht, 2008; Aldrich, 2003; Soyinka, 1965; Wangila, 2013 provide an overview of how African societies have always accommodated ambiguous identities like the following excerpt shows.

The *ebihindi* myth, which demonstrates that a human being can be presented in any form, not female or male, and can have four legs, not two. Wangila narrates that "*Ebihindi* are people who transition from one form of being to another, change from female to male, and one whole of four parts consisting of one-fourth of each. At dawn, *ebihindi* reverse their being and reintegrate themselves into the community" (Tushabe, 2013:152).

Sir Richard Burton refers to Portuguese documents from 1558 that claims 'unnatural damnation' (male-male sex) to be esteemed among the Kongo, as well as a 'prostitute corps' used by the male-identified female warriors of Dahomey, the Amazons (Epprecht, 2010: 246–247). Kendall provides an African perspective of intimate relationships among Basotho women, who were seen to have a strong affection and erotic ties with other women (1998:128).

- Epprecht's findings demonstrate same-sex practices among Africans from as early as the sixteenth century (2013:37)
- Stanley's novel narrates the adventures of two Africans, Selim and Kalulu, and describes how their friendship develops over time, depicting a love story between two African males (Epprecht, 2013:41).

Ambiguous identities exist in African societies regardless of whether such individuals practice the same sexualities or not. Evidence of the practice itself would have been very difficult to obtain since the subject was not usually open to discussion. Dunton concurs that

The practice of homosexuality within African society remains an area of experience that has not been granted a history by African writers but has been greeted, rather, with a sustained outburst of silence (Dunton, 1989:445)

Even after the twentieth century, the elders in the community do not want to talk about the same sexuality, and if they do, they would not call it by name but refer to it as 'THIS THING'.

### **3.4.1 Colonial Same Sexualities in South Africa**

As highlighted above, African sexualities have not been adequately documented, but information on the sexual behaviour of male prisoners in South Africa discovered in archives by Epprecht does shed some light on the topic. Some documents dating from the 1907 Commission of Inquiry included transcripts of criminal court cases dating from the first year of colonial jurisprudence. These reports included government inquiries, press reports, health documents, San cave paintings, private letters, and more (Epprecht, 2013: 59). From these narratives, it becomes evident that homosexuality was not an import from the West, but rumours created by white workers who were trying to drive out the Chinese who were posing a threat to employment opportunities, according to Epprecht. He further states that

In 1905, the Chinese widely practiced "unnatural vice" and that they were teaching Africans homosexual behaviour. One missionary claimed that the Chinese men's hostels were full of "catamites," or professional homosexual prostitutes and that they serviced clients in the open field, even in view of passing European women (Epprecht, 2001: 121, 127).

This report suggests that homosexual behaviour amongst Africans was due to the influence of Chinese presence, whereas this behaviour was common amongst male prisoners even before the arrival of the Chinese (Epprecht, 2001:122). 'Sokis' was one of the prisoners who practiced same-sex, known at the time as 'unnatural vice'. He introduced the idea of '*izinkotshane*' the term given to same-sex people at the Brakpan mines. Epprecht (2013) notes that the word *inkontshane* was first used a century ago, where African men discussed their love for each other. Since miners were forbidden to go home and would stay in the compounds for more than six months without going home to their wives, they would resort to *izinkotshane*. Such relationships were between older men and younger males, the newcomers would take on the role of a wife, doing all the woman's chores. The fact that they

could not go home encouraged same-sex practices amongst mine workers (Voss & Casella, 2012: 57). Males would form these relationships to avoid unsafe sex with female prostitutes and to protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases from prostitutes. These sexual practices only involved 'thigh sex', which differed from contemporary sexual intercourse in that it did not defy cultural norms as thigh sex is part of African cultural practice (Epprecht, 2013: 58). Moreover, young boys were expected to be future husbands and have children. When the older men returned to their homes, they resumed their heterosexual life in their communities (Voss & Casella, 2012:59). Both partners were always aware that these relationships were temporary.

Nongoloza's statement in the report expresses his thoughts on sexual freedom before imprisonment:

As to the practice of *hlobonga* which you complain of as existing among the Ninevites in jail, in that the soldiers subject the piccanins to immoral practices, that has always existed. Even when we were free on the hills south of Johannesburg some of us had women and others had young men for sexual purposes, "Director of Prisons Report" (Achmat, 2015: 99).

According to Epprecht, the Colonial government did not approve of the so-called 'unnatural vice' practice, and when the authorities detected this type of sexual behaviour amongst prisoners they resorted to various forms of punishment, including corporal punishment. He further reports that 'the advent of colonial rule made a deviation from the heterosexual norm explicit and criminal'. The Dutch and the British both implemented the death sentence for sodomy as early as 1871 and meted out punishments of up to 100 lashes or fifteen years imprisonment. During the apartheid era of the 1960s, the ruling National Party attempted to criminalise homosexuality as a 'condition' (Epprecht, 2001:122).

#### **3.4.2 Post -Colonial Discourses on Same-Sex Practices**

The above section provides a brief discussion on same-sex practices as having always been in existence. Nonetheless, the issue was not a public matter but a private affair, no one would keep track of that person's life as a result of the secrecy and the discrimination. Sexual identities were not the focus of education until the late 20th Century when different

sexualities began to emerge. They became more visible when South Africa became a democratic country and people were able to freely express their sexuality supported by the Constitution. Studies on gender and sexuality fuelled by the new democratic dispensation began to scrutinize the contradictions that came with understanding the people of different or ambiguous sexualities. When people with such sexualities began to reveal themselves, it became necessary for society to understand and acknowledge same-sex identities. Academic institutions, community centres, NPO, and other institutions of knowledge began to investigate and propose different theories on these identities. Western institutions were leading in this research area and many scholars attempted to contribute towards an understanding of sexual and gender identities.

To further insight into the subject, it became necessary to differentiate between gender and sexualities, as these notions were assumed to be the same. Well-known scholars, to name but a few, such as Weeks, 1989; Adrienne Rich, 1980; Amanda Gouws, 2014; Mikki van Zyl, 2011; Kendall, 1998; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005; Reddy, 2001; Epprecht, 2008; Segal, 1997 ;), Spargo, 2000; Sullivan, 2003; Jolly, 2000; Morgan Reid, Graeme, 2006; Butler, 1990; Nicolson, 2008; Parker and Aggleton, 1999. attempted to address African sexuality, however, they failed to fully identify with African culture as they used western lenses. However, these scholars contributed meaningfully to the field of gender and sexualities and theories that emerged from these discourses and thus enriching the field. Their work has been cited worldwide by writers and has been used in this study as well. Their writings also paved the way for African scholars to contribute to sexual issues which up to that time were rarely discoursed on due to cultural beliefs. Being brought up in a culture where issues of sexuality were not discussed in the open, left a large lacuna. Research on African issues that needed to be addressed by African scholars, has recently begun to materialise. The problem with theories developed by Western scholars lies in the misinterpretation of knowledge which requires to be re-written by those who own that knowledge. Concepts such as homosexuality, LGBTIQ+, and more only resonate with western societies and western experiences on these sexualities. Moreover, these concepts and the knowledge produced by these scholars were used to address issues in African societies. African communities view these sexualities differently and they have their way of defining and describing these, which tends to lead to discrepancies in the understanding of

perspectives and obfuscate perceptions when viewed through a western lens (refer to chapters five and six). The next section will attempt to give an overview of African indigenous same sexualities as understood by Africans in urban and rural contexts.

### **3.4.3 Same-Sex Identities in Indigenous Communities**

Apart from historical facts and the research done by Western scholars, such as Pointek 2006, Schippert 2005, Butler 1990, Foucault 1976, and many more, African scholars have also begun to contribute to this field of African indigenous sexual identities. However, African scholars presented a different view of what and how Africans understood African sexualities. The misconception created by western scholars on African sexualities prompted African scholars to undertake in-depth research on African sexualities and to investigate African same-sex relationships. Nevertheless, differing views and analyses have emerged, depending on the scholar's approach and school of thought. There are scholars from an Afrocentric approach who strongly oppose same sexuality in African communities while others confirm that homosexual identities existed before colonisation. Research has shown that same-sex sexual behaviour existed in Africa irrespective of external influences.

Scholars such as Collins, 2005; Morgan and Wieringa, 2005; Morgan, 1988; Murray and Roscoe, 1998; Nkabinde, 2009; Sullivan, 2003; Busangokwakhe Dlamini, 2011; Wazha Lopang, 2014; Thabo Msibi, 2011; Zethu Matebeni, 2011; Morgan and Reid, 2003; Van Klinken and Gunda, 2012; Lindiwe P Mkasi, 2013 contributed to this subject. The work of these scholars demonstrates that same sexualities have always existed and continue to exist in African societies today. The work of these scholars demonstrates that these relationships were intimate because some of the participants in this study were disclosed couples and were married. The couples were open about their intimacy which demonstrated that contemporary same sexualities differ from previous practices. Nonetheless, it should be noted that one cannot assume that same-sex relationships are always sexual because there were occurrences where women expressed their love to one another without sexual intimacy. One such case, according to Kendall, is that of Basotho women who enjoyed same-sex relationships but without sexual intimacies; "no koai" which means "no sex" (Kendall, 1998:233).

The evidence of same sexualities in indigenous African ethnic groups is the naming of the practice. Terms such as *uNgqingili*, *inkonkoni*, and *uncukumbili* were used by the Zulu people to refer to someone with questionable sexuality; these people were part of the community (Rudwick, 2011: 96). Evidence discovered in African traditional religion through research conducted amongst African traditional healers in South Africa reveals that both females and males practice same-sex relationships and these relationships are sexual. It seems that same sexualities amongst *izangoma* are preferred as a way to escape compulsory heterosexuality and heterosexual marriages (Rich, 1980: 694). Studies conducted by various researchers indicate that the ancestors have a huge influence on same-sex relationships amongst *izangoma* (Mkasi 2013 and Nkabinde 2009). Nevertheless, *izangoma* who confirmed their relationships with other female *izangoma* did not think of marriage in terms of their female partner and most are still secretive about their sexuality. As a result, their secrecy in society promotes their invisibility and continues to deny their existence. Epprecht warns that, “Denying their existence thus exposes the whole society to risk, not just minorities (2013: 56).

The research done on indigenous same sexualities does not show evidence that same-sex practice was a criminal offense but was considered private. As much as it was known to exist, it remained a private issue it was a taboo that could destabilise social order. Same-sex behaviour was considered to be an unnatural sexual behaviour thus “it is an injury or destruction to the accepted social order and peace” Mbiti (1969: 205). Nonetheless, African traditional religions, when looking at the *izangoma* context, tolerated different sexualities and they still do today, as ancestral spirits are known to encourage such behaviour in traditional healing. Therefore, the homophobic attitudes that persist in contemporary society are the result of publicised same-sex practice and its legalisation. Moreover, it threatens the domain of the patriarchy while it also affects the social order which is framed in heteronormativity. Marubeni emphasises this by stating that

It is important to articulate the challenge that lesbians pose to heteronormativity. The possibility of a sexual relationship between women is a serious challenge to patriarchy because it is an alternative to the patriarchal heterosexual couple, unlike what is offered by *mati-ism*, *supi*, *mummy-baby*, or *dirriankhe*. It also shows that women are not dependent on men for sexual or romantic pleasure and satisfaction (2011: 263).

In Conclusion, Chapter three presented the history of African sexualities in pre-colonial, colonial periods, and contemporary same sexualities in indigenous communities. It explored African sexual practices from an African indigenous perspective, looking at the positive impact of these practices concerning African religious beliefs. The chapter gave a brief overview of precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial same-sex practices in African indigenous communities.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter includes a detailed literature review of the theoretical frameworks, this section aims to show how academic studies in each theory has developed. Special attention is given to four theories that will be used to analyse data on indigenised same-sexualities amongst rural women. The study adopts a feminist approach juxtaposed against African Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics, Africana Womanism, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and a post-colonial indigenous research paradigm. Each framework is selected to provide a specific analysis of each section of the study. The African Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics framework will be discussed as it empowers the researcher with useful tools to analyse experiences of women and their cultural sensitivities. Africana Womanism, focusing exclusively on African women will also be included in the discussion as it is family centred rather than female centred. The indigenous knowledge framework provides the study with the knowledge that is familiar to local people while the post-colonial indigenous research paradigm provides the study with tools suited to research indigenous communities.

#### **4.2 African Cultural Feminist Hermeneutics**

The African feminist cultural hermeneutics framework is seen as an appropriate tool to deconstruct patriarchal structures that dehumanise women. This framework will be used to understand the experiences of African women in the context of African culture and religion without losing their African identity (Kanyoro, 2002:5). African cultural feminist hermeneutics was developed by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) and Musimbi Kanyoro (2002). Professor Oduyoye is one of the founders of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter referred to as the Circle). The Circle was formed by female scholars from various religious and faith traditions who advocated for women's liberation and fought against male domination in African traditional society. The Circle aimed to provide space for women in African communities to experience God in their terms, and not through the lens of a male

God presented to them by theological institutions. Phiri argues that the Church, seminaries, and universities have denied women space within which to grow and self-actualise, women were not permitted to hold leadership positions. These institutions are seen as male enclaves where superior positions are reserved for the males, resulting in the marginalisation of women. As a result, the theologies produced in these institutions are male centred and tend to exclude women (Phiri, 2009:111). In trying to understand the woman's place in a world dominated by men, the Circle used various theories that focused on women's experiences. Male domination in western religious institutions tends to be problematic when used to explain gender roles in African traditional religious institutions. Patriarchal systems vary in each society and African contexts specifically; within the Zulu context, women play an important role and participate in leadership positions, albeit not comparable to male roles. In African traditional religion, women can own religious spaces without male domination, even in religious institutions such as *izangoma* initiation schools.

Furthermore, the African feminist cultural hermeneutics framework changes the way the Bible is interpreted by males, as it is read inclusive of a female interpretation and perspective. Women theologians use this framework to discourse on their experiences with God, they adapt narrative methods to understand theology from a feminist perspective. This method assisted rural women in particular, to relate their life stories to those in the Bible. The narrative method was effective in workshops and Bible studies conducted by Sarojini Nadar at Inanda in 2008 amongst rural women. The women who attended this workshop were able to for the first time engage with Biblical content differently from the way they had been taught by their Church leaders (Phiri and Nadar, 2009: 5-22). The Bible was used as a resource to assist them in their daily challenges. This framework allowed women to “perceive God through their experiences in their daily activities” (Kanyoro, 2002: 3). Contextualisation of the Bible is relevant in contemporary South Africa where people of different cultures and beliefs coexist, as biblical hermeneutics encourages tolerance amongst people of different cultures. Adopting a female theologian approach in interpreting the Bible could bring healing to people of different sexual orientations and to those who have been criticised and variously labelled as worse sinners, by some, such as the late President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe (Dunton and Malberg, 1996: 18). The African feminist cultural hermeneutics framework is relevant in the analysis of how women relate to their Christian identity and how they interpret a biblical

text, a weapon often used by theologians to demonise same-sexualities. It will assist in understanding whether the Bible is the purported good news to them, or the means used to exclude them from the Christian community. SSI could use this framework to make sense of their identity, their spiritual life, and their experiences in the Church and other religious institutions.

Divisive gender classifications and division is another issue that African feminists are concerned about in African societies. Most African societies are patriarchal, therefore, a clear distinction is made between male and female gender. Patriarchal systems regard women as the property of men; LGBTI identities or SSI do not conform to this notion. Such heteronormativity idea results in homosexuality being perceived as an opposition to patriarchy which leads to incidents of women being killed by men and this confirms that men view women as their possessions (Abrahams et.al 2013, 2). Homosexuality is viewed as a perversion or behaviour that requires to be modified to fit the 'norm', as gender division must be maintained at all costs (Koraan and Geduld, 2015:2). Fausto-Sterling poses the question of why "we must control those bodies that are so unruly as to blur the borders. Since intersexual quite literally embody both sexes, they weaken claims about sexual difference" (2000: 8). This blurring brought about by sexual orientation may dismantle hierarchical structures of domination. The patriarchal system does not agree with gender fluidity thus cultural hermeneutics should be adopted to deconstruct such notions because sexual orientation and gender ambiguity exists and cannot be wished away.

Feminist cultural hermeneutics also focuses on liberating women from gender oppression, paving the way for recognition of ambiguous gender and gender questioning in African societies. Gender discrimination is not an ancient discourse, it hibernates and resurfaces periodically. Women are mostly affected and suffer the most when it comes to gender discrimination. This is demonstrated by the current violence occurring in South Africa against women and children; vulnerable identities are the preferred targets of gender violence. The perpetrators of this violence are often males, who use their power against the unfortunate women. Nonetheless, some men are being abused by women and it is difficult to identify those men as they are too ashamed to report these cases (Shange, 2019). Vulnerable groups

such as heterosexual women, children, and women in same-sexualities are often at risk in South Africa, however, this is not a local crisis but a global issue.

When one compares how homosexual males and females are treated by the community, it often reveals that the community is less tolerant towards lesbians than homosexual men. For instance, a celebrity employed by Ukhozi FM is known as *Selbyonce* but 'his' real name is Selby Mkhize. He is extremely popular with his listeners who affectionately refer to him as MaMkhize. In the Zulu context, *Ma* is associated with femaleness. The listeners are aware that he is a male but acknowledge his femaleness.

### **4.3 Africana Womanism**

In her work, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) introduces the concept of "Africana Womanism". This concept came after several public debates where she emphasised the importance of self-naming for African women. She states that Africana "identifies the ethnicity of the woman being considered, and this reference to her ethnicity, establishing her cultural identity, relates directly to her ancestry and land base — Africa". She defines the second part of the term 'Womanism' by referring to a speech by Sojourner Truth who was freed from slavery in 1827. Hudson-Weems uses words from this speech (*Sojourner Truth (c. 1797-1883)*) where she questioned her womanhood as she received no privileges in American society (Hudson-Weems, 1993, 22-23). Furthermore, Hudson-Weems defines Africana Womanism as follows,

Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana womanist. The conclusion is that Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both White feminism and Black feminism, and to the extent of naming in particular, Africana Womanism differs from African feminism (1993: 24).

Hudson-Weems seems convinced that the struggles of African women are not similar to those of a white woman, so women's challenges and experiences cannot be discussed from a

universal point of view. Although Hudson-Weems comes from a Western context she has been able to identify important elements in African culture and it is accurately reflected in the characteristics of Africana womanism. She believes that Africana womanism is different from feminist theories because it is family centred rather than female centred. She further provides eighteen characteristics of Africana womanism which are as follows: “self-naming, self-definition, role flexibility, family-centeredness, struggling with males against oppression, adaptability, Black female sisterhood, wholeness, authenticity, strength, male compatibility, respect, recognition, respect for elders, ambition, mothering, nurturing and spirituality (Hudson-Weems 2004: xix-xx).

The need to emphasise the uniqueness of African women's struggle is based on the characteristics highlighted above. White feminism views women as individuals where the family is secondary, which is unacceptable in African culture. The belief systems of African culture enforces the spirit of oneness, where members of the family should protect and be there for each other, as Hudson Weems states “I got your back boo” (Weems, 2015). The theory shows that it is grounded in African beliefs, the concept ‘family’ is significant in Africa. In the African context, the family takes priority over the individual, whereas in Western culture the emphasis is on individual needs and rights. Placing the family at the centre is important to this study as the aim of the study is to close the gap between SSI and their families. As African descendants, they also do not want to lose their African values and family membership. Considering the number of women in same-sex relationships who have opted to leave their families, it is clear that their decision is based on the lack of family support and acceptance. The theory offered by Hudson-Weems does not directly address the issues of same-sexualities but describes clearly why it is difficult for some African SSI to completely abandon their families. It also confirms that African descendants are family centred first before female centred. Therefore, African same-sex women should claim their life of being different within their family not outside of this nucleus.

Another important aspect of Africana womanism is the emphasis placed on family beliefs. It is a known fact that the beliefs of each family are influenced by the community, especially within African communities where the extended family plays a crucial role in a person’s life. The behaviour of each individual affects the family and the community as a whole.

Investigating SSI in rural communities has been a challenge because these relationships are mostly not socially recognised and are kept private. Homosexual individuals who were part of the study were challenged by the fact that they had to involve their families and this required sensitivity on the part of the researcher. Most of the participants had not disclosed their sexualities because they found it difficult to put their needs first before their families. Being part of the family and being respectful to their elders is part of their African identity, thus a sensitive approach was required when discussing their experiences in the family. In studies such as indigenised same-sexualities, ignorance of such differences could have a significant impact on the outcome of the study.

Furthermore, conducting same-sex research in indigenous communities requires the serious consideration of the views of the traditional leaders, who are elders. The elders of the community must not be excluded as was the case with the legalisation of same-sex marriages in South Africa. If the study intends to close the gap between SSI and their families, elders should become involved and be exposed to social transformation in the society. Elders often support homophobic attitudes in rural communities and coerce families to exclude SSI. Thus, the exclusion of the elders in decision making may invite problems between traditional leadership and the government of the day. When the Government legalised same-sex rights, many traditional leaders felt undermined and disrespected (SA Constitution, 1996: 2(9) (3). This Act made them feel excluded and unimportant because the legalisation of homosexual rights was viewed as an invasion of their indigenous beliefs on gender and sexualities. The government enforces laws, which dictate what is acceptable and what is not. Any discourse and action taken without consultation with the community elders are not regarded as a community decision.

Every decision must be negotiated and approved by the elders as they are the pillars of the community. When issues such as same-sexualities are imposed on people it often results in conflict and resistance, this is demonstrated when some SSI decide to leave their families and relocate to urban areas. If one considers indigenous same-sexual behaviour as referred to in Chapter 3, the SSI were known and were not deemed to be a problem, it only became a problem after the democratic discourses on this issue. Thus, the community views it as a government problem. Communities do not see it as their problem to resolve but it has

become an individual issue, as long as they do not have an SSI in the family, more so because the Government has imposed solutions that exclude the consent of the communities. Until communities are invited to participate in the decision making for their communities, they will not respect Constitutional law. Hudson-Weems (2001) *Africana womanism* excludes non-African women. However, this does not imply that the theory ignores the fact that women share common problems but provides African women with their own space.

Considering the way same-sexualities and gender issues have been analysed by white feminists, these writers have assumed that they understand the sexual ambiguity of African indigenous people. As a result, they have analysed, identified, and defined it in such a way that when one asks a rural girl who looks and dresses like a boy to identify herself within the LGBTIQ++ acronym, she does not know where she fits in. In many cases where participants were given a chance to introduce themselves in the group, even during the individual interviews, very few would associate themselves with these terms (Stouwe, 2019: 123). Often learning institutions, NPO's and learning centres, who mostly use western approaches to transmit knowledge, assumed that the inability to identify oneself within the developed labels or terms is a result of lack of knowledge. Thus, it is necessary to conduct homosexual awareness workshops in communities as in this way same-sex individuals would be able to classify themselves. When this learning approach is adopted, there are limited opportunities for these women, especially those in rural areas, to name themselves and are defined and described by others. Hudson-Weems emphasises this as follows: "We are self-namers because if you do not, somebody else will name you". She also quotes Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved*, "definitions belong to the definers, not the defined, the definers are whites who define us, we are the defined, not definers". Hudson- Weems continues quoting Morrison by concluding, "Thus you now see current discourses on feminism speak of reclaiming, redefining and so on" (Weems, 2015). African people in same-sexuality relationships were named and defined by feminists and gender scholars, even the language used to define sexualities is not their own. To make sense of one's world, one is required to define one's own experiences in one's language.

Constructed concepts should be grounded in one's cultural beliefs, that is, how African women can finally become 'self-definers' (Hudson-Weems, 2001:68). Without being

considerate of people's beliefs on sexuality, the indigenous community will not identify with terms such as LGBTIQ+ as the term does not define their realities. Women must be allowed to name themselves because women in same-sexuality relationships differ in terms of whom they are attracted to. For instance, some want to embrace their femininity and value their roles as women in society, while some see themselves as males. Since the study is about African women in rural communities, it is therefore important to highlight the value and the role of women in African societies. Women are not just women because of sex and gender but they are religiously connected with the universe. Zulu Sofolo in Hudson-Weems (2004) illustrates the connection of feminine gender and the universe when he states "The female gender is the centre of life, [the] magnet that holds the social cosmos intact and alive. Destroy her and you destroy life itself" (Hudson-Weems 2004:66). Therefore, even in homosexual life, women such as lesbians should not be prevented from enjoying and celebrating their womanhood. In other African countries, female goddesses play an important role compared to male gods. Amongst the Zulu-speaking people, the female deity known as Nomkhubulwane is regarded as a powerful female intercessor between the Creator and humanity. She is called upon to intercede during times of catastrophe, such as drought and famine. Her ability to bring rain enables the soil to become fertile again and produce enough food to sustain the community (Biyela, 2013:38). Nomkhubulwane's role cannot be given to someone else or argue whether it can be given to a male deity. Nomkhubulwane's role in Zulu society demonstrates the importance of the female gender in African culture and religion.

Lastly, Hudson-Weems refers to the male as the woman's counterpart, recognising the value of a man in a woman's life and African communities. The inclusion of males in female issues is important because in nature and their social role, male and female complete each other (Hudson-Weems, 2004, 66). The role of both genders is crucial and unique, that is why in the African worldview, male and female genders cannot be discussed in comparison or against the other, as discussed in western feminism. Patriarchal males who are against homosexual communities were once part of a woman's body. The woman's connectivity to their life gives them the authority to speak assertively for other people regardless of sex or gender because they are the bedrock that produces human beings. Therefore, males and females should work together because the struggles they go through are connected. There is no need to compare but rather ensure that each plays his or her role fairly and equally.

The section below provides a discussion on the work of Chalisa whose groundwork on indigenous communities underpins this study. This framework allows African researchers to understand the concept of family within the African indigenous community.

#### **4.4 Decolonization of Western Research Methodologies**

Chalisa, in her work, *Indigenous Research Methodologies* is deeply concerned with the exclusion of the traditional knowledge systems of the colonised other in institutions of higher learning or higher education. Predominant western academic approaches are silencing indigenous knowledge systems in the non-Western, third world, developing, underdeveloped, First Nations, indigenous people, third world women, African American women. Even South African indigenous women in same-sex relationships are not exempted from this (Chalisa, 2012:1). Thus, Chalisa calls for the decolonisation of western knowledge systems in research. To give voice to historically silenced indigenous perspectives, Chalisa proposes three approaches to decolonise western ways of conducting research: decolonisation and indigenisation of dominant research paradigms, research approaches informed by a postcolonial-indigenous research paradigm, and a third space methodology (Chalisa, 2012: 2). Decolonisation and indigenisation of Euro-Western research approaches would mean that:

- Deconstruction and reconstruction strategies of knowledge should be implemented. This refers to correct what has been incorrectly documented, for instance, interrogating the distortion of people's life experiences, negative labels, deficit theorizing, genetically deficient or culturally deficient models that pathologised the colonised Other, retelling the story of the past and envisioning the future. These strategies facilitate the process of recovering and discovery (2012:17).
- Research that targets local phenomena instead of using extant theory from the West to identify and define research issues. She proposes an approach that is context-sensitive which will create locally relevant constructs, methods, and theories derived from local experiences and indigenous knowledge. A paradigm that can be integrative, combining Western approaches in indigenous theories in its most advanced form. Its assumptions

about what counts as reality, knowledge, and values in research are informed by an indigenous paradigm (2012:13).

She also refers to the third space methodologies, as do other researchers besides Chalisa, who have identified the space between Euro-Western research paradigms and postcolonial or indigenous research paradigms. Scholars such as Moquin (2007) refer to "a third space", while Homi Bhabha (1994) calls it the "Space in-between". In this space, scholars intend to provide knowledge that is inclusive of indigenous perspectives, but they also suggest that it is not enough to include indigenous paradigms into research; indigenous paradigms should be interrogated to ensure that it includes subgroups within indigenous cultures. The reason for this is that within those indigenous cultures there may be groups that have already been excluded. Chalisa maintains that

In this space, Western research paradigm is contested and declared invalid because they are based on a culture that has been made static and essentialised views of indigenous cultures, inform indigenous research paradigm and methodologies, which must be interrogated and open up to include the voices and acknowledges system of the subgroups within the indigenous essentialised cultures potentially excluded within the already marginalised indigenous cultures and research paradigm (p 25).

However, she acknowledges that indigenous cultures are not pure but argues that in the 'third space' indigenous aspects can be interrogated to accommodate the voices of those disadvantaged by "gender, race, ethnicity, ableness, health, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, and so on" (Chilisa, 2012:25). Chili's view on research concurs with Hodson-Weem's theory on African womanism when she questions the definition, description, and naming of African women by western feminists.

Chili's postcolonial-indigenous research paradigms create spaces to research that not only focuses on the indigenous (Otherwise) people, but are inclusive of indigenous life experiences, worldviews, and ways of knowing. In this way, Chalisa situates indigenous ways of knowing at the forefront along with Western knowledge systems, blending the past and the present across multiple ways of knowing, to shape a new future where social science research methods legitimise the experience, perspective, and wisdom of historically

oppressed people (2012: 19). She integrates “indigenous ways of knowing with aspects of Euro-Western research paradigms for the dual purposes of decolonizing social science research and legitimizing indigenous knowledge and value systems by constructing an indigenous research paradigm” (2012, 20-21).

The following are four useful dimensions in indigenous research as suggested by Chalisa:

- It targets local phenomena instead of using extant theory from the West to identify and define research issues.
- It is context-sensitive and creates locally relevant constructs, methods, and theories derived from local experiences and indigenous knowledge.
- It can be integrative, that is combining western and indigenous theories.
- In its advanced form, its assumptions about what counts as realities, knowledge, and values in research are informed by an indigenous paradigm guide and the research process (2012: 13).

The above suggests dimensions that agree with issues discussed in this section, but it requires a researcher to carefully select western paradigms that will not clash with indigenous paradigms. This holds particularly when one must consider those indigenous ways of knowing to include cultural beliefs, ancestral beliefs, dreams, and visions.

#### **4.5 Indigenous Knowledge Systems Framework**

Another scholar who is deeply concerned about the use of indigenous knowledge systems in research production is Smith. She highlights that Western ways of producing and acquiring knowledge are not free from colonised bias, even the term “research” is problematic for African research. She argues as follows:

The term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word “research” itself probably is one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up the silence, it conveys bad memories, and it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful (1999:1).

Smith views research as connected to colonialism and imperialism. This infers that the produced and the existing knowledge is biased, thus African indigenous researchers struggle with which terms and concepts would be appropriate to create discourses on African issues.

Smith further argues against imperialism which she describes as follows

...a series of developments leading to the economic expansion of Europe. Imperialism in this sense could be tied to a chronology of events related to discovery, conquest, exploitation, distribution, and appropriation. Imperialism was the system of control that secured the markets and capital investments (1999:21).

Smith argues that forms of imperialism that indigenous people face today arose from a period of European history known as the Enlightenment. This enlightenment provided the spirit, the motivation, the confidence, the political and economic structure that facilitated the quest for new knowledge. The enlightenment process was often referred to as "modernity" which resulted in the industrial revolution, the philosophy of liberalism, and the public education systems (Smith, 1999: 58). The development of scientific thought, the exploitation, and discovery by Europeans of other worlds, the expansion of trade, the establishment of colonies, and the colonisation of indigenous people resorted under the modernist project. This description of enlightenment holds that indigenous people perceived civilization as something that offered a positive change to their lives but indirectly also appropriating their resources. It encouraged one to neglect the past and focus on the unpredictable future, whereas the past contained the history and knowledge. The colonisation of Africa resulted in many negative consequences for the African indigenous people as it was not only material loss but also, as Smith points out, the colonisation of the mind (1999: 59). Imperialism and colonisation are the specific formations through which the West came to see, to "name" and to "know" indigenous communities (1999: 60). This colonisation of the mind has continued in the postcolonial era through leading academics in fields of research. Smith points out that western institutions of research convinced indigenous communities that indigenous knowledge had no value while using it to further western knowledge. Smith further emphasizes how the West has skewed and diminished indigenous knowledge while appropriating (referred to as 'collecting' in the West) from it (1999: 63).

The distortion and misinterpretation of indigenous knowledge must cease; thus, Smith asks that indigenous researchers use the 'respect and accountability' principle as the basic principle of conducting indigenous research. Smith further cautions indigenous researchers not to carelessly use colonised knowledge but should remember that "colonialism was not just about the collection. It was also about re-arrangement, re-presentation, and re-

distribution" (p 62). To neutralise dominating knowledge, Smith undertakes to work towards rediscovering and reclaiming indigenous knowledge. She speaks of re-writing indigenous people's history for the benefit of indigenous people. In this process, she notes that many indigenous academics attempt to write back to their history, but their literature is also influenced by Western pedagogies, they are writing for non-indigenous people. The history they are trying to rewrite is not reaching indigenous communities because the literature produced is in western codes. Smith (1999) further considers the issue of language as she believes language is the most important tool to reach the wider community. Narratives told in foreign languages do not accurately capture the meaning behind these stories, history, and knowledge of indigenous people embedded in their language. This means that, as long as the history of indigenous people is written in the language of the coloniser, it will not speak to indigenous people's experiences (Smith, 1999:36).

The other challenge with the production of knowledge is that producing knowledge in indigenous ways of knowing is not similar to the western way of producing knowledge. Reading, writing, and talking are fundamental to academic discourse in terms of science, theories, methods, and paradigm. She quotes Patricia Grace, a Maori writer, who states four reasons why books are not productive to indigenous readers:

- They do not reinforce our values, actions customs, cultures, and identity.
- When they tell us only about others, they are saying that we do not exist.
- They may be writing about us but saying negative and insensitive things that tell us that we are not good (Smith, 1999: 35).

In the struggle of restoring and rewriting this history, some writers refer to Postcolonial literature and theories. This creates the impression that colonialism is over while it is not, the structures that support colonialism still exists today (1999: 14). To emphasize this point she argues that "post-colonial discussions have also stirred some indigenous resistance, not so much to the literary reimagining of culture as being centred in what was once conceived of as the colonial margins, but to the idea that colonialism is over, finished business" (1999: 24). The truth of the matter is that colonialism is still in our universities and the structures of governments are built upon colonial structures. Smith maintains that colonisation destroyed

traditional structures and traditionalists who refused to give up on their culture were identified as problematic. Smith states:

Indigenous problems began to be a militaristic or policing concern. The problem was articulated in terms of 'Putting down rebellions' or 'getting rid of' recalcitrant rebels. Individual chiefs or leaders whom resistance various attempt to control them were labeled as rebels as 'the real problem', "The level of hatred legitimated attempt to 'hunt' them down or to protect the people from their leadership (Smith, 1999: 91).

This confirms that the system of undermining the legitimacy of indigenous leaders is part of the wider strategy for colonisation (1999: 91). Thus, other leaders gave up fighting and they lost their cultural identity, and elected to be part of the world they hardly understood. The 'Divide and rule' approach destroyed the communal spirit of the indigenous people (Smith, 1999: 99). This caused traditional leaders to neglect their own culture and hand their authority to government structures. Today in South Africa traditional leaders do not have much power as democracy over-rules them and makes significant decisions. The colonial rule rendered traditional leaders powerless and voiceless, traditional laws are no longer relevant but constitutional laws take precedence (SA Constitution). Nonetheless, constitutional laws have been a means of rescue for some rural communities where traditional leaders violate the rights of the poor. Hence the South African Constitution demonstrates that no one is above the law when the Xhosa King was arrested and found guilty of kidnapping, murder, and burning down the houses of the victims (BBC News, 2015).

Smith concludes by addressing technological advancement as being one of the successes of research in institutions. Although technology and science have contributed positively in controlling diseases, it has also disadvantaged indigenous people and other marginalised groups as expects of science, cultural arrogance and political power continues to present a serious threat to indigenous people. She further notes that "the persistence of Government to dominantly promote technology as a solution to people's lives is the same imperative which suppresses and destroys indigenous alternatives" (Smith, 199:99). In the South African context, the issues of surrogate mothers, male impregnation, and cloning raise questions for the traditionalist. The advancement of technology is touted as something positive because some homosexual men can now have children and infertile women can become pregnant, however, these scientific solutions are deemed as abnormal in the views of traditional

communities. African traditional beliefs do not condone such practices, as questions of identity in the lineage and legitimacy of a child arise (Jegade and Fayemiwo, 2010:121). This is one example, where science and technology cross traditional boundaries, especially when it comes to human reproduction.

Framing this study on Smith's theories is because Smith interrogates the injustices done by western knowledge to indigenous knowledge. This cautions indigenous researchers when employing western pedagogies in their production of African knowledge. She also prepares indigenous researchers on how they should conduct themselves in the field. Smith points out the issue of attitude, which is an important element in research because the attitude of the knower often positions the other as the not-knowing. The notion of the other is demonstrated in the western methodology of researching because the researcher drafts the interview questionnaires before the fieldwork, meaning that the researcher already knows what is required from the sample. This places the researchers in a leading position and the participants follow, therefore the researcher is at an advantage collecting the information that is specific to what is needed by the researcher. Therefore, the exchange of knowledge is not benefiting both, only the researcher. Moreover, the researcher comes to the community with a research problem accompanied by the assumption that there is a problem in that community. The research plan should be in line with what the researcher is going to produce, deviating from the research plan is interpreted as the inability to meet the research objectives. While western paradigms of conducting research require the researcher to use the university ethics guidelines, on the other hand, indigenous communities have their ethics when it comes to ways of acquiring and producing knowledge. The inability to note such discrepancies can create an unstable relationship between the researcher and the sample, which at a later stage may affect the results of the study. Smith's work, although not recent, is still relevant to prospective researchers who intend to decolonise western knowledge and engage in indigenous discourses. Even though there are African feminist scholars who currently write from indigenous perspectives, there are no known Zulu writers who have to date investigated same-sexualities and gender using an indigenous approach, hence this study is relevant.

Nonetheless, according to Chalisa, there is space for improvement in research, as postcolonial indigenous research paradigms create spaces to conduct research that not only focuses on the indigenous people, but is inclusive of indigenous life experiences, worldviews, and other ways of knowing.

#### **4.6 African Feminist Perspectives on African Sexualities**

The purpose of including a reference to *African Sexualities: A Reader* edited by Sylvia Tamale in 2011 is that the content locates the study in its African context. The relevance of her work to this study is that it offers a solid background on African same-sexualities. The work explores contemporary same-sexualities which is a key concern of this study. The reader contains a collection of work by different contributors who provide extensive knowledge on African sexualities. This pioneering work in the field of sexualities provides a critical mapping of African sexualities and at the same time poses gender-sensitive and political questions that challenge the reader to interrogate complexities, assumptions, and hegemonic sexuality discourses of African sexualities. The reader also uses popular culture to help address the 'what, why, when, how, and where' questions.

Tamale emphasises the absence of African scholars in the area of sexualities and voices her concerns that this field of sexualities is dominated by western scholars and theories founded on Western epistemologies. Her concern is the incapability of these theories to solve African issues as they are embedded in western ideologies. She argues that these theories are corrupted through colonialism and framed from the point of view of anthropologists, travelers, explorers, and missionaries of the colonial regime. The drawback of these writings is that whatever was written and documented on African sexualities during the colonial era may not have accurately reflected African sexualities. As a result, the misinterpretation of African sexualities and misrepresentation of the African culture as exotic and primitive still affects many African societies today, evident in the homophobic attitude amongst many Africans. Nevertheless, a few scholars have recently explored this field and they have carefully studied and critiqued historical documents and scholarships that are overtly damaging to African sexualities (Tamale, 2011:14).

Historical evidence demonstrates that most colonialists, travelers, explorers, and researchers, arrived in Africa during the colonial period, attracted by African resources more than anything. However, there were individuals amongst these colonialists who did not subscribe to colonial notions on Africa and who were sympathetic to the cause of the African people. Some missionaries and emissaries did not subscribe to the cruelties of the imperialist mindset. Egan refers to a theologian, James Cochrane in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century who referred to missionaries who did not submit to colonialism as “servants of power”. Egan argues that,

There were exceptions in almost every denomination – far-sighted missionaries who saw value in African culture and sought to translate Christianity into these cultures, missionaries who challenged the racist status quo, and even a smattering of far-sighted colonial laity who shared these values (2017).

When considering the works of Tamale and other scholars that frame this study, they all argue against western scholars who discourse on African gender. Tamale argues that western scholars who work in the area of gender and sexuality have analysed sexuality in terms of gender inequality. The application of the human rights approach and the comparison of African with Western sexualities is problematic as the approach challenges the hierarchical structures of African culture. For example, Sullivan argues that homosexual individuals should 'claim their sexuality by deconstructing and denaturalising hetero-normative understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality of patriarchal systems and gender norms on traditional societies' (2003:81). Whereas in an African context, when one adopts this approach, she or he is no longer part of that community but risks ex-communication and possible disownment by the family. Whereas in fact, the family plays a significant role in the African community. This is emphasised by Masenya in her concept of *bosadi*, [women] she argues that “A gender-sensitive perspective that undermines the family and de-oriens matters is not balanced” (Masenya, 2011:83).

Moreover, in western analysis, African women are presented as victims of cultural oppression in patriarchal systems. A well-known African cultural practice such as *ilobola* [bride price] is viewed as an oppressive action against women; many cultural practices that are valued in African societies are interpreted as oppressive by western standards. (Rakoczy, 2004:10). Furthermore, Rich (1982/1986) in Parker and Aggleton maintains that traditionally "males

controlled the female through patriarchal motherhood, economic exploitation, and the nuclear family" which she describes as "compulsory heterosexuality" (1999:228). This implies that African culture does not value women but only valued them as reproductive organs. Thus, Taiwo (2010) disagrees with analyses that are transferred and imposed on one culture by another. Taiwo states that in African societies "Each gender had its traditional role in the development of the society, the position of women was complementary to that of men. Each role, regardless of who performed it, was considered equally important because it contributed to the fundamental goal of community survival" (2010:230). Thus, the lens used to analyse African gender and sexuality is not contextualized, as an African gender analysis requires a cultural lens and cultural sensitivity. For instance, the issue of same-sexualities has attracted numerous scholars which have led to several theories, mostly from the West. Euro-Western concepts and labels are unjustly imposed on African indigenous same-sexualities which labels Africans as homophobic.

Tamale maintains that the current homophobia in African communities is the result of colonial influence. This attitude has caused problems for homosexual people and it has also perpetuated denial amongst traditional societies. Traditional leaders in African countries constantly argue against homosexuality referring to it as un-African even though research reveals that the denial of homosexuality is the African way. Homosexuality and African indigenous same-sexualities are two different phenomena. Homosexuality is often associated with human rights and demands full recognition from the society while African indigenous same-sexualities have been practiced privately and in conjunction with heterosexuality (Voss & Casella, 2012:59). Thus, African communities denounce the existence of homosexuality but when referring to same-sex relationships they know about such practices (Tamale, 2011:459). Same-sexualities existed long before colonialism; Mutua in Tamale reports that "Evidence suggests that in pre-colonial Africa, the matter of sexual orientation was not generally contentious. The level of homophobia evident today has virtually no basis in African culture. In Uganda, as in many other African states, homosexuality and related sexual practices were criminalised for the first time by the colonial state" (Tamale, 2011:459).

The last point that Tamale (2011) emphasises, which perhaps is the main reason for Western scholars to dominate the debates on homosexuality, is the fact that issues of sexuality amongst Africans are not public debates. She states, "the topic of sexuality is often wrapped in silence, taboo and privacies, researchers need to hone distinctive technics and method that unearth invisibly, silenced and repressed knowledge" (2011:12). For this reason, she cautions against the disregard of cultural tools as they could be useful in explaining the complexity of African sexualities, particularly as researchers inside and outside Africa tend to view culture negatively and incapable of contributing to contemporary society. However, "culture is a double-edged sword that can be wielded creatively and resourcefully to enhance women's access to sexual justice" (Tamale, 2011:20). Tamale encourages African feminists to acquire knowledge that directly affects them and which could destroy their culture as "it is important to use our homegrown theories of African sexualities, we should be keen and be aware of the danger of uncritical use of the Global North to explain African societies". (Tamale, 2011:25). Thus, this study is aligned with indigenous knowledge systems to do justice in acquiring knowledge and the way knowledge is disseminated.

Generally, the purpose of the research is to respond to social phenomena of same-sexualities but the problem facing indigenous researchers in this field is that they have to work backward. Since knowledge on African same-sexualities is westernised, the challenge is to reinvestigate and find decolonised facts on the phenomenon. As suggested by Hudson-Weems, Smith, and Chalisa, this study will attempt to rediscover historical knowledge on same-sexualities through African indigenous knowledge and integrate this knowledge into a contemporary understanding of homosexuality and same-sexualities from an African perspective.

In Conclusion, this chapter dealt with the theoretical frameworks which frame the study in indigenous knowledge systems and postcolonial indigenous research paradigm. It further discussed feminist cultural hermeneutic which was initiated by African women theologians. Africana Womanism was also part of the chapter as it elaborates family relationships, it demonstrated how African families are closely knitted. Each framework played its unique role as the study taps into the various fields, they are all relevant to enrich the discussion on African same-sexualities.

## CHAPTER 5

### Experiences of Rural Women in Same-sex Relationships

#### 5.1 Introduction

The data presented in this study has been collected from the Zulu community in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Interviews were conducted amongst people known to be in same-sex relationships or known as homosexual persons, (LGBTIQ+) by their parents, church leaders, traditional leaders, traditional healers, and LGBTIQ+ NPO's. Members from the Policing sector, Education, and the Department of Social Service were interviewed. The focus of the study was to explore the experiences of women in same-sex relationships. Same-sex relationships differ, depending on the categories of labeling within the homosexual community. This chapter explores how these individuals discover their identities, they are identified by the community, and how they identify themselves. There are various terms and concepts used to refer to SSI, depending on how they are defined in their society. The term 'homosexuality' is used as an inclusive term for people who are attracted to the same gender, sometimes referred to as the third gender. In African traditional religion, they are known as people with two Spirits or S2. Although these individuals are not interested in heterosexual relationships, their ambiguous sexuality does not imply that they practice homosexuality; some may decide to live a celibate life out of choice or because they do not want to deviate from cultural norms.

Initially, the study focused on transgender persons (male identifying persons born in the female bodies). The reason for not choosing a specific category was because rural women, being the focus of the study, do not identify with homosexuality as described in western literature. The concept of homosexuality, however broadly defined, mostly accommodates western perceptions. Nevertheless, to facilitate the discussion, western concepts will be applied. The study will also explore and include African Indigenous terms which will be defined and used to demonstrate how they relate to African indigenous same-sex experiences.

## 5.2 Indigenous concepts and sexual identities

Even though the Zulu people in urban communities have used African concepts such as *Ncukumbili*, *ngqingili*, and *inkonkoni* to refer to same-sexualities, these terms are not used in everyday conversation because this is not a public subject; the community still perceives same-sexualities as an immoral practice. Collected data demonstrate that, amongst the above-mentioned terms, there are terms used by the community to differentiate SSI from the heterosexual community. While there are terms used by SSI to refer to themselves, only a few will identify themselves as *izinkonkoni*, some call themselves *izitabane* (*isi-* singular and *izi-* plural) which is often used by the general public. The term *izitabane* is mostly used by the youth and is popular amongst the Zulu-speaking people. It is used several times in the thesis by parents of SSI and the community. Therefore, *this* term will be applied in this study.

## 5.3 Description and definition of terminology

### 5.3.1 Isitabane

The definition and origin of this term are not clear but are commonly used in urban and rural areas to refer to SSI. The term is not only used as a noun but also as a verb that describes the same-sex practice. Some participants used this term to explain same-sex practices as follows: *ubu-tabane* (*ubu-* as prefix and *tabana* as an action). This is demonstrated by T2G2P1 when she states

*'Ebutabaneni kugqama loko okufunwa uwena'*. [In homosexuality, what is reflected is what you want people to see]

The excerpt below shows that, if the community becomes aware that that you are unable to fulfil your gender roles as a male or female, they assume that you are *isitabane*, as T2G2P2 confirms:

*'People tease you because you cannot do things like other boys; you are soft like a gay'* [*sic*]

Even if a person remains unmarried, people immediately assume that he or she is a homosexual. One of the participants mentioned this when she referred to a woman who was one of the examiners of the virginity testing practice. She states:

That woman has never had a boyfriend and she has never slept with anyone which means she is *isitabane* (T7).

The term *isitabane* is a popular term and has been used in such a way that most have accepted it, as even SSI use it. T2G2P1 states:

We live with people, we must accept it, and there is nothing we can do so we must stop worrying about this.

The reasoning for accepting this term is because the SSI themselves are also not sure how they should be referred to by others, or where they should be placed in terms of gender.

T2G2P1 states:

'I am an *isitabane* and that is not a problem, I have to accept that, how long are you going to stay angry because wherever you go, they say here is *isitabane*. It is better to accept whatever label they give you. Even if they were to ask me, okay what do you want us to call you? I do not know because I am not a woman, I am not a man and I am not a lesbian, I do not care what you call me even if you can call me a Combo.

Seeing that she does not define herself as female or male, she has devised a new term, a "combo", which aptly describes the identity of the SSI.

### **5.3.1.1 *Izitabane* concept in the community**

The general community uses this term without much regard for sensitivity towards the SSI. Some may use this term to provoke while others use it to differentiate SSI from the heterosexual community. Some SSI take offense when people call them *isitabane* but T2G2P1 states that "Being angry at people would probably drive you crazy". Living in a heterosexual community SSI are often confronted with their sexuality, and for T2G2P1 this is a daily experience because she resides in the township with her family. She shares her story as follows:

I was in a taxi one day and a certain boy said. I saw you and your girlfriend jumping off the taxi, I said to him, who, me? I jumped off a taxi with my girlfriend that was not me, I use my car when I travel with her. He continued to say, what are you really, ohh! *isitabane*.... I said whatever, say whatever you like.

This was not a friendly conversation, and it is disappointing that *izitabane* who live in a democratic era are often expected to defend themselves. As much as this term is not always used positively, it is commonly used amongst the Zulu people.

Another less popular term for SSI is *inkonkoni* [a wild beast]. The Zulu community only uses it when referring to SSI, but not when addressing them directly. *Inkonkoni* and *ungqingili* are used interchangeably but most people prefer the term *inkonkoni* to *ungqingili*. *Inkonkoni* and *ubunkonkoni* are similar to *isitabane* and *ubutabane*, as stated earlier. This is not a new term but has been in existence for some time as it is present in the history of African homosexuality (Epprecht 2010). The older generations in the community are aware of this term and have their understanding of what *inkonkoni* means. A participant differentiated between *inkonkoni* and *isitabane*. This participant is one of the elders of the Traditional Council in rural Nkandla and once resided in one of the male hostels in Johannesburg. He explained this term as follows:

Some men are known as *Inkonkoni*, they sleep with *isitabane* (gays). You would hear people saying, there goes *Inkonkoni*, they are going to visit *izitabane*. *Izinkonkoni* are real men because they have wives and children at home, thus they are called *Inkonkoni* (T3G3P2).

This explanation implies that *izitabane* are homosexual males, assumed to be born like that, while *inkonkoni* are males who fulfil the sexual desires of other homosexual males but live a heterosexual life when with families. It is not only elderly people who have this understanding of this term, but T5 also referred to herself as *inkonkoni*, as she chose this term because it meant something to her and could identify with the meaning of this term. T5 states:

I prefer being called *inkonkoni* because a wildebeest looks like a cow to a person who cannot differentiate between a cow and a wildebeest, but when you bring a wildebeest home and mix it with other cows, that is when you can see that this is a wild animal. It is not a cow and you should not mix it with other cows. So, if you call me *inkonkoni* I respond better because that is how I understand myself that makes me happy. After all, the sexuality of the wildebeest is also not clear.

This description resonates with homosexual behaviour while at the same time reveals an understanding of ambiguous sexual identities. It suggests that sexual ambiguity does not only

exist amongst humans but also animals. T5 explains that her real identity becomes evident when she is with her gender. It shows how the community struggles to place her in her appropriate gender group. She states:

You can look at me in any way you want but it is the feeling that counts. You may look at me and associate me with girls, but the dog will show itself amongst the rabbits. You think you must classify me as a girl, but I will show my true colours when I am among girls. This means that I come out when I am with girls. That is where you will realise that this is not a real girl because she can do one and two when she is with other girls, so where am I supposed to put her? Not with girls.

The actual crisis lies with gender grouping and gender roles which are crucial to the development of the child, especially in African communities. The community understands that a girl should be grouped with other girls so that she can learn certain skills. A girl would never be put amongst boys because each group has its own rules and teachings which differ vastly. Both these groups have secret initiation rites and practices that are never revealed beyond gender boundaries. This participant may be comfortable when she is with boys but in her community, she is seen as a girl. T5 is in the process of transitioning into a male and is currently taking hormones as she does not like to be in a female body. This aspect will be more broadly addressed later in this chapter

### **5.3.2 Homosexuality as a Western concept**

The naming and labeling of same-sex persons are most often done by the 'other', not themselves. SSI are usually labeled by researchers or those external to the homosexual community. Some participants felt that Western terminologies did not reflect their lived experiences, and while there are similarities, these terms often cause confusion in African societies, especially terms such as bisexuality, which create the impression of promoting promiscuity. T5 stated:

All these names (LGBTIQ+), makes no sense to me, I do not fall under that umbrella. The problem is when we allow people to tell us who we are, we do not want to find ourselves, you need to listen to your body, be aware of what happens when you are in a certain place and with whom, and try to follow your life from there. When the Western people

realise that we take our lives seriously, that the owners of this life are trying to do something about their lives, they might stop giving us names because of our lifestyles.

According to T5, *izitabane* need to work out their own identities rather than be identified and be labeled by others. This means that people of different sexualities need to take charge of their lives and name themselves. Homosexuality is a sexual attraction to persons of the same gender, the concept invented in 1869 by Hungarian psychologist Karoly Maria Benkert (Tang, 2018). It was the first concept that gained popularity before the LGBTIQ+ acronym, and as the research continues, scholars discover new identities every day; emerging scholars will also develop their terms based on their studies. As the terms contained in the LGBTIQ+ acronym are familiar in society, people have an understanding of what they stand for. Usually, the *izitabane* would often choose to identify with one that seems to be closest to their own identity. As they discover themselves, they often use more than one term. T14 who identifies herself as transgender has tertiary education and specialises in the subject of homosexuality, thus she can describe herself based on her knowledge of same-sexualities. She states:

Trans-queer people represent male or female, both of whom are gender non-conforming. Those who say, I am neither nor and there is gender between the two binaries of male or female, like, if today I wake up and I feel like more of a man and masculine, I dress like a man and the next day if I feel like a woman, I would dress like a woman. This is gender non-conforming, trans-queer, transgender male and transgender female, and then transsexual and intersex (sic).

Often well-educated people like T14 would easily identify with these terms because they are modern in their thinking and have been absorbed into the Western world. Moreover, the knowledge she has on the subject has been derived from a Western perspective. For someone coming from an indigenous community, all these terms would be meaningless. Terminology which falls outside the scope of this study will not be considered.

#### **5.4 Discovering sexual identities**

Most participants have learned about these terms from awareness workshops or their friends, while others observe the behaviour of those who seem to behave like them and adopt

those identities. Copying identities is based on the fact that some of these individuals are still in search of their true identity. T14 states:

'When we grew up, transgender was not known, not talked about and we ended up identifying with lesbians because it was more popular and known. It was close to what we wanted but when you are inside lesbian identity, you see that, no, this is not it, and this is not me. You search for your identity but you cannot find it, you will end up resorting to lesbian, then people would accept you as a lesbian all to find that you were never a lesbian and you have never started to be one. When you are there, you are already out as a lesbian and then you find out that there is an identity called transgender. When you are already out as a lesbian, you find out that, you are actually a transgender and then you find out that there are hormones. So, when these hormones arrive, they speak to what you want and they speak to what you are feeling (being a man). When you get to know about hormones, the one thing you think about is, finally I found my peace. When you take hormones you can change your name at Home Affairs, 'menstruation periods come to an end, "thank you father", (As she said this she showed signs of relief, raising her hands as in praising God) I am so relieved, and I am so at peace'. You can have the body you want, as much as it starts like you are fat but as time goes, you get this masculine body, you always dreamed about. So, when all this happens, you see a chance of becoming yourself and you say come what may, you know. Yes, when you change your name, there are a lot of people that you need to consider, you have a girlfriend who knew you as a lesbian, you have been in a relationship for years, and all of a sudden you come back and say, you know what, I am trans I am a man. You will have to talk about how she feels, you have parents, who discovered their child is *isitabane*, we accepted that now you come and tell us that you are not *isitabane* and you are a man. This means the woman that we knew in our life, is dying, she does not exist and never existed, but we only knew a non-existing person. Mabongi is out, he is now becoming Bongani. Now, if she is Bongani, how do we relate to him, what do we talk about, how sensitive it is to talk to him now?'

This is a common problem within homosexual communities, in that most women who are attracted to other women, are assumed to be lesbians. But T14 clearly explains the journey that a homosexual person has to make to discover themselves. T14 and T5 are taking their gender identity seriously in that they are taking it to the next level, transitioning into a male.

However, for T2G2P2 who is from rural Nkandla and being the only girl amongst boys, transitioning is taking it too far. She states:

My family has gone through a lot because of my identity, they have accepted me for who I am, and I am not going to give them another shock by telling them that I am transitioning into a man. What if in years to come I discover that I do not like myself anymore, I am happy the way I am and my wife has accepted that she is married to a person like me.

Rural women like T15 (also identified as T2G2P2 in group interviews) had to hide their identity until they were old enough to be independent to make tough decisions about their lives. T15 underwent all the cultural practices, one of which was the virginity testing practice. She also participated in this practice as all local girls would normally do, she used to be active in traditional events and festivals, and she agreed that the virginity testing practice is a hide-out for many SSI. She states:

It is difficult to go straight to your parents about this issue, you wait for the right time to get the courage to come out and tell your parents. Virginity testing is a good practice that helps us to wait for the right time. I remember back at home, when I was growing up and not knowing who I was, there was a girl I knew. This girl was a known virgin in the whole village, she was respected for that. Even when we have cultural rituals, you would see her dancing with a stick and the way she would dance, even men were afraid of her. She would wear her regalia which shows that she is a virgin, people of the village would always ask as to why this girl wasn't choosing a marriage partner. There were rumours that she was dating other girls. At that time people did not know about same-sex relationships, so she was famous for being a virgin who was abstaining from sex. These days the Government protects us that is why people have come out about their sexuality.

The above demonstrates that women in traditional communities had their strategies to deal with issues of sexual identities in respectful ways that were not against cultural beliefs. However, they had to sacrifice their happiness to ensure that community solidarity was maintained.

#### **5.4.1 Sexual identities: dress code and gender roles**

As mentioned in previous chapters, the study is about women from rural communities but have moved to urban areas for different reasons. These women have adopted an urban lifestyle but remain connected to their families in rural settings, as they still participate in rural activities, as a result, they are experienced in both urban and rural life. These are individuals who are holding onto their traditions but do not fit into the traditional structure because of their sexual identity. Some participants in this study identify as transgender (female born individuals, socialised to be women, however they identify as man and some as gender-non conforming) who feel comfortable in male clothing. Hence the community that they find themselves in would not accept that because the dress code differentiates females from males. T9 states:

At home, in rural areas, girls are not allowed to wear pants, even today. The old men that you saw at home still believe in that restriction. A member of our family who loved wearing pants decided to spend most of her time in the city because of that. T2G2P1 knows about this law, whenever she would come home to visit, I would see children moving up and down with plastic bags. I would then know that she was coming home that day.

Traditional beliefs do not allow women to wear men's clothing and the family rules follow those beliefs which do not accommodate same-sexualities. During the interviews, transgender-men (male identifying person born in a female body) would often give a clear explanation of who they are as they do not want to be confused with other identities within the homosexual spectrum. Transgender men are often erroneously confused with butch lesbians because they both have the same dress code. Transgender-men do not want to be confused with butch lesbian because they do not and cannot have sexual relationships with men. T5 maintains that:

First of all, when I approach you (heterosexual girl), I come with something new in your life (homosexuality). When I get to the bedroom and behave like a woman, it means I am teaching you something you do not know, that when you know how to do this, then you go and do it to another girl. Thereafter you will dress up like me, and do what I did to you. This means that you are changing people to be something they are not. How will people get to understand us?

T5 is concerned that people who are not genuine SSI are confusing others, more people are copying same-sexuality, and this leads to a belief that this is merely a copied lifestyle and learned behaviour. The truth of this assumption is demonstrated in the statement below. A primary school teacher feels that homosexuality is a learned behaviour. This teacher is involved in the case of an eleven-year-old girl who was reportedly touching other girls inappropriately at school. The teachers (T10) states:

This thing has an impact on children who are living close to homosexual people, if you talk to them you will discover that there is a neighbour or a family member who is homosexual but only to find that they were not born that way but it was a learned habit. Now I do not know whether they do these things because they want to, or they are trying to fit in, because when you ask these children why you are doing this they say, Miss, I do not like girls.

Judging from the tone of the teacher's voice it was clear that she was concerned about this particular child and also about other children who might be influenced and adopt same-sexualities. This is also a concern for *izitabane* because this is making matters difficult for them in the community; they will be seen as bringing bad behaviour into the community. The *Izitabane* interviewed states that people become *izitabane* for different reasons. This brings more people into the homosexual space, even those who are not "born with it". T5 states:

Some people who have been labeled as SSI are not, but they chose this lifestyle because of the abuse or challenges they have encountered at the hands of men. Also, there is this thing called, bisexuality, how does it happen that a person could be both male and female. That means that they sleep with a man today and then sleep with a woman the next day which is why most people do not understand this confusion. Do you know why these people do this? It is because of promiscuity, no, no, it is just promiscuity. You are busy touching girls while you know very well that you are attracted to boys, what are you? This means, that person is going through a phase, they need help, they have bad blood running through their veins, the blood that needs to be taken out, and then they give it a label of bisexuality.

It seems that there are various reasons for the general public to think that SSI are not "born with it" but practice a learned behaviour. Moreover, the dress code adds confusion to the

issue of identity as others do not want to be tied down by a dress code and they also do not want to be restricted to one gender identity, as this is perceived as promiscuity.

#### **5.4.2 Fake and genuine same-sex identities**

The empirical reality of *ubutabane* or SS sexuality is clear only after experimenting and experiencing. One needs to go through some trials to prove that one is a true *isitabane*. *Izitabane* from rural communities experienced more difficulties compared to those in an urban environment, as they undergo all the cultural practices to showcase their femininity. Some communities demand that a female child should undergo rituals such as *ukuphehlwa*, *umhlonyana*, [virginity testing], and *umemulo* [rites of passage and ceremonies for girls]. The practice that tests one's femininity is *ukuqoma* (dating); this is important to shape the future of a female child. *Ukuqoma* is a long process that does not involve elderly people but is the responsibility of *amaqhikiza* [older girls]. Here older girls play an important role in the community as they are entrusted with the moral and ethical grooming of the younger girls. They follow an ethical protocol of respect, guided by traditional laws to guide young girls and prepare them for marriage (Scorgie, 2002:73). This ensures ethical behaviour on the side of *amaqhikiza* and the girls themselves. T9 states:

She (T2G2P1) once dated a boy, trying to find out what is wrong with her, but it did not work. *Lobola* negotiations started, they started with the minimum amount, they brought money and these people were from Empangeni. My husband (he suspected that something was wrong with the child) never accepted the money, he asked them to wait for him, and he did not take anything from them. He promised to get back to them, they had to wait. After some time, I heard that T2G2P1 had beaten up the boy because he wanted something more and their relationship ended.

After this incident, T2G2P1 relocated to the city in search of her identity. Her mother shared her story as follows:

I only heard about this from people, that she has a problem with her sexuality, but she did not say anything to us, we kept on hearing from other people. We heard from my sister's friend that she went to eBuhleni, one of the Shembe temples seeking help, she wanted a male sexual organ (penis). That is when we asked ourselves about what was bothering this child ..., what kind of a person this child is? We heard again that she went

back to the Shembe temple and Shembe said “*May the Lord-God bless you*”, that is when she came back saying that, the blessing does not mean anything, I should have had my blessing by now because I told them straight that I feel like a boy. You can imagine hearing these things from everybody other than her. In KwaMashu there are a lot of people who come from our village, they would see her going to the Shembe temple and then tell my sister.

T2G2P1’s narrative reveals the lengths a desperate person is prepared to go to in search of an identity, and this proves her to be a genuine SSI, as a Zulu child would not approach Shembe with such a request. T2G2P1 was not the only one to attempt heterosexual relationships. T15 also tried, she also had a boyfriend, but it did not last long. As a confirmed SSI she shares her story as follows:

I tried dating boys, but it did not work. I dumped my first boyfriend and tried another one, but I could not sleep with him. He went to my parents to pay *lobola* but even then, there was no change. Whenever he wanted to sleep with me, I would refuse, it was like he had a bad body odour. We would fight and push each other in the house, he would hit me and I would hit him back. After some time his parents went to see mine and demanded their *lobola* back, I did not care because I did not love him anyway but I was a disgrace to my family. My family thought my behaviour was a result of the Spirits (T15).

The problem with these women seems to be compounded when they realise that they do not wish to engage in sexual relationships with males. T15 was expected to marry as she was the only girl at home, but it did not happen. She states:

I tried once again; I had just arrived here (Durban) from the rural area where I had two girlfriends. It dawned on me that as a girl I was expected to get married soon. I found a boy who was willing to introduce me to his parents. I was dating him and his sister at the same time. We kept that a secret and pretended to be heterosexual. When I went to visit him, we would have non-penetrative sex (*ukusoma*). That is what people did in those days because girls were expected to remain virgins until they were married. I would sleep with him because that is what culture dictated, not because I wanted to. I hated kissing him, if he kissed me, I would spit onto the blanket.

*Ukusoma* is still practiced today as it prevents unwanted pregnancies. This practice seems to have benefited transsexual women because they were saved from pregnancy but to conform

to cultural expectations, they were expected to have boyfriends. As a traditionalist who believes in keeping the tradition, T7 states:

If a man has not yet married you, you have to avoid penetrative sex, a girl cannot start dating a man this week and be pregnant the next, never. When young maidens go to the Reed dance ceremony and their reed breaks, that maiden is sent home and her superior is punished and forced to pay a cow as a penalty.

This is a good tradition because it protects girls from unwanted pregnancies, but for T15 it was not the case as she fell pregnant. She states:

As I have previously mentioned that I was practicing non-penetrative sex, it happened one day that I just missed my periods, I vividly remember that it was in August although I cannot remember the year. I missed my period in August, and it restarted in September. Then I thought it was just a coincidence or that I had an illness because there was no ejaculation inside the vagina, we had non-penetrative sex. Years later, things started to change in my life. I went to different traditional healers, they told me that I conceived once but had a miscarriage, they told me that my womb was not meant to carry a baby. It was not just one prophet who told me that but a lot of them, I was confused because I did not know what was happening. I tried to find out how it happened but I got more confused I had no idea how happened. I did not know that I was once pregnant, from that day I avoided boys altogether, I realized that sometimes men do evil things to impregnate a woman. I wouldn't allow myself to fall pregnant because I knew how I felt about men, I knew what I wanted. I knew that I did not want that, what I did was for my family especially because I come from a big family. I vowed never to get close to a man again.

The practice that was supposed to protect T15 did not work and she was impregnated against her will. She explains how she was tricked into becoming pregnant. Although she was not raped, she was not a willing participant. It seems there is a way to make a woman fall pregnant without penetration, T15 continues as follows:

There is something that African men do to trick women into pregnancy; it happened to one of my sisters, that is when I proved that this is real. My home is traditional, so *ukusoma* is our life, it the only way to protect ourselves from falling pregnant, especially when we are not yet married. So my sister used to walk around half-naked, she was not ashamed as she knew that she was a virgin. She heard one of our mothers, saying *hhawu!*, what's wrong with you? She saw the line that comes out when you are pregnant and her

breast was showing, she said no I am not pregnant. I cannot remember what mothers did to prove to her that she is pregnant. She denied it because she knew that she did not do anything wrong, in the end, my family went to the boy's family and the boy agreed that he did something to her, he said the girl was being difficult. The guy was a failure, like all men when they see that you are not interested in them they find other ways to get you. There is a herb that men take/eat, they call it *ikhambi*, when they sleep with you, even if there is no penetration, you will conceive (*kuthiwa ukudlela ikhambi, ukushaya ngesithunzi umithe, lesosithunzi isona esenza umithe*) They say if you got pregnant like that, the man should give you the same herb for a baby to leave otherwise the baby dies and when you are pregnant already there is no need to refuse to sleep with him. A baby that is born under such circumstances needs herbal treatment. My sister refused to take the medicine; she kept on asking how she got pregnant. The baby was born and after a month she passed away. So this thing is real when a man is failing to convince girls to sleep with them they come up with dirty tricks.

Obedience and respect came at a price for T15 as thirty years ago things were not as easy as they are today. NTP16 also did the same to conform to cultural norms. She got married and had two children, her husband passed away years ago. Having gone through marriage and having had children, she did what was expected of her, but when the husband passed on, she returned to her old ways. She is now dating women and even her dress code has changed completely. She is fifty-nine years of age, so she ensures that she respects the community, particularly as she is a principal in one of the rural schools in KZN. Some would interpret her life as living undisclosed. She states:

Even as a young girl I did not like men, my sister said I should have been stronger because my parents had already realized that I am different and had accepted who I was.

It was clear that everything in me is a man but everything happens for a reason.

NTP16 is the only transgender man seen working in rural areas and being brave enough to dress like a man. In the community that knew her as a woman, she changes in front of them and no one says a word. NTP16 has never experienced discrimination in her community, her children at school respect her as their principal, her Grade 12 learners succeed every year and her school is highly rated in KZN.

While others struggle with their families, T5 has been fortunate, she is well supported by her family, however, she had to work hard to be where she is today. She was brave enough to tell her parents about her sexuality from the start and shares as follows:

If you cannot stand up for the life you have chosen to live, you will get tired quickly, probably because of certain unforeseen circumstances. You may find yourself in a lot of trouble, fortunately, I never tried to be in a relationship with a boy, and I have never been touched by a man. One thing that happened is wearing a skirt because I did not have a choice but I kept telling my parents that once I find a job I will not live like this. Even though they made me wear skirts, I would wear pants underneath.

Many women are forced by tradition to participate in cultural practices, and it seems that one has to be very brave to stand up for the truth. Growing up in a rural environment forces every girl to follow the rules. On the other hand, the process of *ukusoma* was helpful to most girls but some of *izitabane* would have dated males only out of respect and to do what is expected of them. Some of the *izitabane* interviewed went through the process of *ukuqoma*, but some refused and avoided it before was too late.

## **5.5 Ancestors and sexual identity**

The journey to find *ubutabane* identity differs for everyone, T7 shares a different story on how she came to know about her identity through her ancestor (grandfather). She states:

My ancestral spirit told me to leave home, when I asked where I was supposed to go, they told me that they will guide me and show me the way. At that time I was still young, so much that I did not even understand the voice that was speaking to me and I couldn't ask many questions. I just heard a voice saying, it is now time for you to leave this household. When I spoke to my parents about this, they say do not listen to that. On the other hand, the ancestors say you must leave and the reason for leaving is that you are *isitabane* a homosexual, then I understood why I was different. The voice kept on, we said leave and stop asking a lot of questions. I took my bags and left, I arrived where they directed me, they said to me stay here, they brought everything I needed, life continued as usual.

T7's case is different as from a young age she was removed from her home guided by the spirit of her grandfather. In this journey to search for her gender identity, she had her ancestors as

a support system, which is unusual. There are different views on whether ancestors approve of *ubutabane*. This story shows that the ancestors knew T7 was going to grow up as *isitabane*. T7 insists that ancestors would do anything to protect you if they have a plan for you. She states:

After listening to what they were saying, I left home, a lot of amazing (bad) things happened after I left home. One day they came back they said now you understand why we asked you to leave, it was because of these things. Had you been part of these things, you would have been in trouble now.

T7 was removed from her family to learn about who she was and to be initiated into the secret knowledge as a healer. T7 states:

My grandfather was a Chief; I used to sit next to him when he was guiding boys on how to be men. I know all about those rituals also when they were talking to women I would sit and listen.

Being *isitabane* gave her access to privileged information reserved for a specific gender. She states:

*Izitabane* are blessed people, they have knowledge that is hidden from other people. There is a reason why *izitabane* exist, there was a reason for them to be there, because there has to be a place where knowledge is hidden, keepers of sacred knowledge are the few chosen people. It is not a mistake that I was born being both male and female. Had I been a heterosexual I wouldn't have been allowed to sit in and listen in on what is meant for boys.

T7 believes that *ubutabane* gave her a chance to access both male and female worlds and she possesses knowledge that an ordinary girl does not have. She also is convinced that her ancestors deliberately found a way to remove people like her from the community so that they could be allowed to find themselves. She suggests that the Catholic Church missionaries were a hiding place for *izitabane*. She states:

*Izimishini kwakuyindawo lapho kwakufihlwa khona izitabane, zazincama ukuya ebandleni lamaKatholika ngoba babazi ukuthi o Father bakhona abashadi. Imindeni yayibayisa kulezimishini, bafike ekhaya ngalesosikhathi, befika kuphela uma kunezinkinga ekhaya. Babezolungisa izinkinga amanye amalungu omndeni ayengakwazi ukuzilungisa, loku akumele*

*kube nje kumele kwenziwe kanje. Kwakuba nabantu abahlala kulezimishini ababaziwa njengama Sistela abanye kuthiwa o Brother kodwa kwakwaziwa ukuthi abahlangani ngokocansi, kwakwazi futhi ukuthi banje (bayitabane) zibuze ke ukuthi babefihlwe lani? Abantu abadala babazi ukuthi lenganezinje, ikhaya elinomntwana onje lalizo ceba.*

[Catholic missions were places where homosexuals would be hidden from society, they would go and join Catholic monasteries because they knew that monks do not get married. Their families would send them to these missions and would come home at certain times, especially when there were problems at home. There would solve problems that other family members could not, this should not be like this, it should be like that. Some people lived in this place who were known as nuns, others were monks, everybody knew that they never had sex, it was well known that they were like THIS (homosexuals) ask yourself as to why they were hidden? Older people knew that they were like THIS, it was known that given a chance to use their gift, their families would be rich].

T7 agrees with what has been said about the Catholic Church on social media regarding homosexuality amongst priests. There is another belief that *izitabane* are wealthy; such comments are common in the community, thus T12G4P1 thinks *izitabane* are rich and they are gifted. T12G4P2 shared a story regarding isitabane she heard from an elderly male a few years ago:

My children, in our time we used to look at the stars in the sky, if the stars surrounded the moon we then knew that there will be more boy children born, if they are like this there will be more girls born in that month if they are lining up in an unusual way (T12G4P2 explained that she could not remember what the old man said exactly) we knew that babies born in that month would be strange children, in his words he said "*izingane ezinomkhuba phakathi*"[strange babies]

According to T12G4P2, when he said, "strange babies", he was referring to their sexual identity, the issue of the moon and the stars was confirmed by T12G4P1 who shared her ancestral knowledge, as her grandfather was a chief and possessed a wealth of indigenous knowledge. She says this theory of the stars and the moon is the truth; T12G4P1 shares as follows:

*Lezizingane ziwumphumela wokulinda, imikhuleko, lowomuntu uyisibusiso esivela kuNkulunkulu, akafani nabanye abantwana, leyomikhuleko nokulinda okwenziwa befor kuzalwe lezingane iyazivikela, kube nezinto eziningi uNkulunkulu azibeke zona. Abantu ngeke baziqonde lezizinto ngathi. Uma utshela abantu ukuthi Unje, ngeke ba understand nomama wakho uzozibuza ukuthi kodwa ngenzeni ukuthi sengingathola ingane enje. Ngokungazi ukuthi isibusiso lesi, wanikwa isibusiso yena angasiboni kanjalo. Uyigolide lalelizwe, ingakho ngithi lababantu abaziqondi kwabona, bayicreation ehluke. Uma nje nike nakhala kuNkulunkulu, uNkulunkulu uyazwela aninike loko enikufunayo ngoba niseduze kenhliziyi yakhe. Uma ningaphathekile kahle namaZulu awanakuthula, uma nisezinhlungwini nawo awathokozi. Ukuba ngahlala ekhaya ngabe angizange ngiziqonde, uma nje izitabane zike zayi understander lento, zakuqonda ukuthi zingobani ngempela, ngeke uphinde ubone isitabane sidakwa utshwala emgwaqeni njengoba kwenzeka kulezizinsuku.*

[Yes there is something like that, a month for girls and a month for boys, that man was telling the truth. You see, before there is a full moon, there is a Muslim celebration, that is, when their king is born, a child with different features. The fasting results in their blessing, that is when a child with unique features is born, a child with a different identity. That child has an animal face and an animal body, during that month, when the king is born that is when people like homosexuals are born. At this time unusual children are born, it does not matter which race they come from, it happens in different nations. It could be Indians, Coloureds, White people, and Black people but at that time couples get different gifts (unusual children), the way the child looks differ from one family to another. [These children are a result of fasting prayer, that person is a blessing from God, he/she is different from other children, those prayers protect the child, then they have special gifts God gives them. People won't understand those things about us. When you tell people that you are like this, they will not understand, even your mother will ask herself why she was given a child like this. She is not aware that this is a blessing, she was given a blessing but she does not see it that way. You are the gold of this world, that is why I say these people do not know who they are, you are a unique creation. If you cry out to God, He feels pain and he gives you what you want because you are closer to his heart. If you are hurting the Heavens have no peace, when you are in pain they are not happy. Had I stayed at home I would have never known who I am, as soon as homosexual people know who they are, they will never go around drinking on the streets, which is what we see these days].

There is a sense of agreement that *izitabane* are special individuals, as the ancestors are seen as guiding and protecting them. Their special birth also comes with that element of protection from God but to find the real identity they need to be removed from the people who will confuse them, they need to search for their identity on their own without outside interference.

From the discussion above, some are 'born with it' but that requires experimenting and experiencing. In this section the following experiences were discussed:

- Those who obeyed their parents and conformed to the norms of traditional laws and ended up having children.
- Those who were involved in cultural practices and were saved from unwanted pregnancy.
- Those who resisted cultural norms and stood up for what they believed in and were brave enough to openly admit to their parents about their sexuality.

The stories shared by the participants are evidence that homosexual or same-sexualities are the results of any circumstances. Besides sexual orientation or feelings which could be perceived as the natural factor or not out of choice, it seems other factors lead to homosexuality. Ramachandran et al. focus on male homosexuality and labels SSI but prefer to call them MSM (men who have sex with men) because they do not want to assume sexual identities of these individuals, and for the same reasons the study adopts the use of SSI. Moreover, as highlighted above, the factors that lead to this life differ for each person. Ramachandran's study conducted in 2010 in Ukraine reveals that people indulge in homosexual behaviour for various reasons; the conclusion of the study shows that various circumstances may lead to homosexuality:

- Lack/fear of heterosexual contact
- Misconception regarding the risk of acquiring STIs
- Peer pressure
- Being under the influence of alcohol
- Inequalities of age, occupation, and financial power (Ramachandran, 2015,n.p)

These factors also apply to the South African context; thus it is important to give facts on homosexual behaviour rather than refer to it as a natural condition. Particularly because those who are 'born with it' have different needs from those who are victims of circumstances.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the experiences of izitabane, discussed the journey to identity discovery. The chapter demonstrates that *ubutabane* identity, is better known by the self, it is clear that people undertake different journeys to discover their identities. Most experience hardships to prove their identity to parents and the community. The challenges that what *izitabane* go through is not pleasant; this is a life that one would not choose to live if possible, but some of these *izitabane* have no choice. Unfortunately, the fight against their family and community expectations is a continuous struggle because in homosexual communities there are circumstantial homosexuals, such as victims of abuse, adolescent behaviour, and adherents of this way of life.

## CHAPTER 6

### Same-sex Individuals in Rural Communities

#### 6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six is a continuation of chapter Five in which the views and experiences of SSI are discussed. The previous chapter looked at the indigenous concepts used to refer to SSI while this chapter focuses on how these individuals deal with heterosexual communities, many of which continue to refuse to accept different sexualities and remain opposed to same-sex practices. The chapter reflects on views from various structures regarding SSI relationships obtained from traditional structures, government, and religious organisations. Individuals who hold important positions in the community such as chiefs, elders, and traditional healers provided reasons and discussed problems relating to SSI, a previously taboo subject, and have provided solutions to ongoing problems. Government structures such as schools, the police sector, and religious organisations share the challenges of dealing with same-sex issues in their daily working environments.

#### 6.2 Protective mechanism: Secrecy and denial

One of the traditional leaders (T4) from one of the rural areas in KZN, was asked about same-sex practices in his community. He states:

People you are talking about the unknown, I have never seen them, but I have heard about them from other people. This thing was hidden, to an extent that nobody knows about it, it was hidden from society. In the past, we did not have hospitals or clinics, so the midwives were just women from the village who were known for their job. If these midwives realised that there was something wrong with the sexuality of the child, they would keep quiet and hide that, which is why we do not know that such people exist. Another thing is that people used to respect other people's rights, people would not just talk about other people's issues, their secrets would remain confidential. Even if you were to talk about that, the elders would shout at you and ask where you got that from, and they would tell you never to mention that. That would mean they were hiding that matter (THIS THING) (T4).

Initially, this participant created the impression that SSI were unknown but later he revealed that it was a private matter between the birth tenders and the family of the new-born. It is

important to note that the general view of thinking about homosexuality in African communities is that homosexuals are assumed to be intersexed, which is something visible at birth. In the African world view, body parts are visible, and what is invisible is thought of as something spiritual. Thus, when the participant referred to birth tenders, he was not referring to LGBTIQ+ identities. T4 also speaks of rights within African indigenous ways of doing things, where secrets are hidden from the public and this is seen as the protection of individual rights. T4 continues:

Some people distance themselves from them (SSI), and they deny that they have such people in their households. They pretend not to know about this and that they hate it while they have it in their own homes. If you find a person denying this and confusing other people, why can't you just keep quiet?

It seems denial is used as a shield to protect the family; some individuals do not want to be associated with *ubutabane*, especially when they see it in the family. T4 who is also a traditional leader agreed that SS practice is not a public matter. He states:

Traditional life protected them, this would be a family matter, there was nothing that could happen to a person because the family was there. The problem started when they wanted to come out, then things got bad. This THING has been around for a while, it is just that it was kept a secret, you find it even in the church, infamous denominations, what's important is that they need to control THIS THING.

Most elderly participants who were part of the interviews seemed to be annoyed by the tendency of *izitabane* showing off their identity and aggressively imposing it on the community which was not the case before. It seems that the elders do not see the need for the youngsters to enforce their sexual identity onto others, they prefer that SSI be who they are, and the community will get used to them.

### **6.3 *Ubutabane* in Christian communities**

While traditional leadership acknowledged the existence of same-sex identities in African communities, most African Christian leaders deny it. They often refer to the same-sex practice as demon possession and something that is outside of God's creation. Besides LGBTIQ+ churches, some churches accept everyone regardless of gender, some are still negotiating

how to accommodate people of different sexualities (T5). Since there are churches in today's community that still discriminate against same-sexualities, one of the participants, T5, defended herself against Christian communities by saying,

They looked at me as the greatest sinner, worse than those found in the Bible, but I said to them both God and Satan decided to create man. God asks Satan which one is going to live between the two, Satan did not know what to say (she means she is not the creation of Satan but of God).

T5 argues that she is not different from other people and she is also a creation of God so she cannot be the Devil's creation. On the other hand, one of the male listeners of Ukhozi FM states:

This is Satan's work, it is because they have rights, that is why they are doing this. The Government permitted them, there is nothing I can say but if it is my child, I would tell him/her that what you are doing is your business alone (G1L2).

African Christian communities deny *ubutabane* based on the belief that homosexuality is a sin and an ungodly practice. However, the Churches differ on this issue, and others are more sympathetic such as the VMCI in Durban known as a homosexual-friendly church. Some are traditionalists and believe that sexual intercourse is only intended to reproduce while others believe it is about expressing love to one another (Nkosi and Masson, 2017:76). In African traditional communities, homosexuality is rejected because it is a threat to the future generation. Whoever is found participating in homosexuality is treated as a sinner and automatically treated as the enemy of the Christian Church. This view is common amongst Christian communities but T5 does not think this is the truth, she believes that God loves her. She attends a mainline Church but, in most cases, *izitabane* are rejected by these Churches, hence the establishment of churches known as 'gay' churches. T5 states:

People ask me, how do you go to a church like this? But it is not because they accept who I am, but everything is God's mercy, also humility does help, I tell you. Humility can take you places if you can withstand it. But in that humility, you must never forget who you are, even if people try to change your mind but they will eventually realise that this person will never change. I respectfully left the church I grew up in and I joined this one (Methodist). They said they will accept my situation but there are rules I must adhere to before I join the Young Men's Guild known as *Udodana*. They said they will attend to it in

their way, they allowed me to wear black pants, a black coat, and a white shirt. So, I am this way in the community in the church, and at home. Even on my last day on earth, I will be this way.

T5 believes that you can be whomever you are if you believe in yourself; she has deconstructed the perception that *izitabane* cannot worship alongside non-SSI.

### **6.3.1 Ubutabane in Schools**

During the interviews, the social worker (T11) who works with the school in Newlands introduced the researcher to a female teacher who is dealing with a case of a child who is assumed to be an *isitabane*. During the discussion, it was clear that the 11-year-old girl was becoming a problem for other girls at the school. The teacher shared the challenges they encounter in the school regarding the issue of homosexuality. She states:

I am worried about Nozi because she has the tendency of behaving like a boy, she sits with boys, laughs with boys. I spoke to the boys and said, you need to remember that this is a girl. I realise that she acts like a boy, but this is a girl. Stop treating her like a boy, stop talking to her as if you are talking to a boy. But I saw something in her when I asked her where she sleeps, whom she sleeps with, where does she stay? There are a lot of men where she lives, there is an old woman and an absent mother. Therefore, I realised that there was a lot that was happening in her house, then I asked if there was anything that ever happened to her, she broke down. I think that something has happened, anybody could try a defence mechanism so they could be safe. I do not know how far this thing has gone, how deep it is but it seems as if it is a defence mechanism (homosexuality), maybe it is better if I do this and that (T11).

Many teachers are often faced with difficult situations where they must deal with issues that are not within their area of expertise. The teacher related that a child who was raped also tends to behave like a boy. "Sandi was raped, that is why we need to get to the root of what happened, this may cause a change in the child's behaviour. I do not think that anybody was 'born with' this thing" (T11)

This demonstrates how abuse can change a person's life and the homosexual community is often seen as a shelter for abused individuals. This often holds for families where children are not well looked after and opt for the easy way out. Some children fall into the *ubutabane*

category because of bad experiences with men or their home background (Ramachandran, 2015, n.p). The social worker who works with this case agrees by saying "Some children have problems in their families, like child abuse, they use this thing as a way to defend themselves and I think that is what is happening to Nozi". Other than the case of Nozi, one of the participants was a victim of rape and she was raped repeatedly by her uncle who is still alive. Until today no one knows what happened to her and they are still acting normal when they meet as if nothing happened. This is a married man and has children and living a good life with his family.

Often current society associates homosexuality with a learned behaviour; even some of the traditional leaders who were part of this study have a similar view (T4). The teacher continues with Nozi's story by saying that:

I think that this is the manner and the strategy to protect themselves but what I do not like is when she makes other girls uncomfortable. Because when you make other girls uncomfortable that means they are also oppressed, and some may end up pretending to be homosexual and rape others to make sure they are totally off men (T11).

The teachers also revealed how children loosely talk about lesbianism and rape in the school. She states:

One of her friends said, "I'll rape you". A girl said that to another girl. I said to her, do you understand what you are saying? She said, no Miss, it is not something major, it is not something like a big thing, even my friends, we talk about this, my friends rape others and they want to rape this one. They are desensitized around this word such that it is thrown about loosely. I said to her, how would you rape another girl? She was chasing them in the school and instilling fear in other girls and in the younger ones who are not exposed to this, who have no idea, who are still ten years old. I said to her you cannot say something like that to another person because if you are saying that in the outside world, it is a serious thing, it is not a joke (T11).

In this school, the teachers have noted that same-sexualities exist although they do not have solid proof since children are playing around with same-sex terms. The teacher who is dealing with the case thinks they have a problem and she is addressing her concerns about the situation. It seems that the children do not have a full understanding of rape, they treat the

concept of rape lightly as they have no real understanding of the impact of this act. The teacher also believes that there are lesbians in the school. She states:

Others are indifferent levels (who are lesbians), they feel like they are unprotected, when you see where their belligerence come from, you can see that they badly behave. We need workshops where we can be taught about how we can face this thing, a workshop for girls only because even the young ones will face this when they go to grades 6 to 12. Even when you are not the one who is doing it, but there might be somebody who is asking you out, and you may try it out of curiosity or maybe you can refuse. The workshops could be empowering to all the girls, definitely, just to ground them on who they are, and make those who are not necessarily into that (lesbianism) aware of it, because you could have a friend who is like that and you do not know how to respond to it (T11).

### **6.3.2 The perception of *ubutabane* as a disease**

Homosexuality has been perceived as a disease by some religious leaders, for instance, Christian preachers constantly preach to SSI that they can be saved if they repent. To investigate whether this is curable or not, medical researchers such as Hu et al took a stand and researched this aspect of human sexuality. Western health care systems have shown that it is not a disease and it cannot be cured as such; they provide evidence that sexual orientation is not a choice but it is related to chromosomes in the body (Hu, et al. 1995: 248). Christians also have their theory that homosexuality can be cured through prayers and this study adds an indigenous perspective on this issue. A listener on Ukhozi FM states:

There is a boy in the family who has been like that, who grew up playing and doing things that are done by girls, but we saw that we will not cope with this lifestyle. We tried different things and we gave him some herbs. This thing is here, even before it existed, we would see that a boy is always with girls or with his mother- "*ewubafazini- umnqolo ogumba etshen*" [A boy who is always amongst women]. The older boys would take him to the river and look at his penis, they would see if his semen is weak (masturbate him so that the sperm may come out). If his semen is not sinking and it is floating, that means that boy needs to get an *imbiza* (*herb*) so that he would be able to heat the egg (impregnate a woman) when he is with a woman. *Ikhona imkhumiso yabafana abanikwa abalaphi bendabuko* [There are herbal medicines that traditional healers give to such a boy to reverse this behaviour] (G1L3).

This view was supported by Dr. Khoza (alias) who is a lecturer at Unisa who referred to the role played by traditional healers. He named the herb that is used when a child is not behaving in line with his or her gender. It seems there are different herbs used for girls and boys. These herbs are shaped like the sexual organ of each gender (Mthembu, 2019).

### **6.3.3 Ubutabane and safety**

The social worker (T10) who works at the police station states that the police do not know much about *ubutabane* and all rape cases are the same, it does not matter whether you are *isitabane* or straight. She states:

It is not easy to deal with sensitive cases like rape, we do not have enough knowledge. What I know as a police officer is to ask questions, like your location when the incident happened, when did it happen, why are you drunk, something like that, but the victims think that these questions are oppressive and discriminative. This is standard procedure applicable to everybody who finds themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time and that tells the police officer that you were the one who put your life in danger. Because of the knowledge we have, we work in a heterosexual society all our departments work from that premise, it is well known that a girl should not be out with the boys at night. Even when you see yourself as a lesbian you should not put your life at risk (T10).

A female police officer (T6) was also interviewed on this matter and agreed that all cases are treated the same. T6 states:

*Sake saba nalo icala lapho esinye isitabane sasimenywe omunye umngani waso owumfana, lomngani waphinde wamema omunye futhi umfana. Inhloso yabo kwakukuthi bazoqeda ngalento yobulesbian, and inkinga yabo babuye ba compete nabantu besilisa, I lesbian iyakwazi ukuthatha umfazi womuntu noma intombi yomfana. Amadoda ayayithukuthelisa leyonto, babuze ukuthi yini le onayo wena mina engingenayo. Bakhohlwa ukuthi owesifazane nowesifazane bayazwana ngoba ziningi izinto aba understandana kuzo. So ngiyaye ngibatshela ukuthi abayeke ukuzifaka kuma group lapho umuntu kuyena yedwa umuntu wesifazane. Bangaba abangani kodwa akubona bonke abakukhonzile, abafana basondela kuwe for into izinto ezingafani.*

[We once had a case where a certain homosexual person was invited by her male friend, this friend also invited other male friends. They intended to stop this lesbianism thing.

Another problem is that they sometimes compete with men, a lesbian can cheat with someone's wife or girlfriend. Men get angry over that; they ask what you have that we do not. They forget that women connect on many levels and they understand each other. So, I always tell them that they should not be in groups where they are the only woman there. They could be your friend, but some boys get closer to you for different purposes (T6)

This suggests that *izitabane* forgets that men will always look at a woman as a sexual partner. Many men believe that *ubutabane* is something that can be corrected with sex. When *izitabane* expose themselves to dangerous situations, they could become vulnerable to sexual abuse. The social worker who was part of the study and works with the police adds that the police usually refer rape cases to her to assess the incident. She states:

Recently some women reported a rape; one of them went out to drink with friends and later woke up lying on her back with her panties in her pocket. The people she had been drinking with were gone, the first thing she did was to come to the police station, but you could see that she was still drunk. She was incoherent in what she was saying (T10).

The problem is created when women are raped at places of entertainment such as parties and after-hours gatherings. It is not easy to determine the reason for the rape, whether it is out of hatred for the SSI or whether it is opportunistic. T5 states:

If I drink with Siphoh (a man) and I end up sleeping with him, Siphoh will say this is a game, he will go around talking about something he has proof of because he slept with me. We must be responsible for our behaviour. Whenever I walk at night with John, I never forget that he is a cat and I am a mouse, if he is the dog, I am a cat. Some of us when we are drunk, keep on saying my brother, my brother. They forget to draw the line, eventually, this man will come back to me and say he can do one and two to me because he does that to you. I do not have a problem with other people's business but be careful of where you do things and with whom. I am not sure whether now we are over-excited, and we forget that it is not everybody who approves of the life we live. In the end, people will say what's the point of fighting for lesbians because they sleep with men. People who sleep with you then come to me because they see that you enjoy this.

Listening to T5, it is clear that *izitabane* should look after themselves wherever they are because they will always find themselves at a sexual disadvantage. When the Station

Commander was interviewed regarding the rape of *izitabane* he did not refer to females but concentrated on males. He states:

When we talk of rape, we are not talking only about vaginal rape, but we also include anal rape. We do get such cases, but we have never had a case that is directly linked to these (homosexual) people. People open cases for normal rape, in the past we used to speak of vaginal rape but now things have changed.

The Police are aware that *izitabane* are being raped but mostly referred to as rape amongst heterosexuals. However, most *Izitabane* are aware that they are always in danger but are prepared to protect themselves against abuse. T5 states:

Even if we were the only ones left on earth, he may rape me but if he takes that decision, he will have to kill me first because that would mean my life is over anyway.

#### **6.4 Acceptance and settlement of *izitabane* in rural communities**

Homosexuals who want to live their lives openly and want recognition in rural communities must work harder to be accepted. T3G3P1, a traditional leader, states that:

They also need to accept that they are part of the community, they are the first ones to discriminate against themselves, they isolate themselves from society, they need to learn to interact with other people because they are a small group. Society must intervene in these things because the government simply gave them rights. If I have a child and I name her Zibuyile and she turns around and tells me that she is a boy, what will then happen? It is difficult to accept this thing (T3G3P1).

Naming a child is an important event in African communities because the meaning of a name has many implications such as predicting the future, a new life in the family, or communicating with the ancestors. In the above case, the father is naming the child Zibuyile with the hope that the cows he paid for his wife will come back when this daughter gets married. However, this may not happen if Zibuyile is a lesbian.

Nevertheless, there are a few SSI who are willing to face whatever comes their way for their identity. Some SSI take their lives seriously in such that they marry and want to build their homes in rural areas. Anyone is free to go to the Chief to ask for land, but often women would not go to the Chief on their own but had to be accompanied by a male. Married couples, a

brother or uncle would have to stand up for a woman looking for land but in this case, the SSI who wants land is a transman, this participant, T5 explains how she obtained land of her own from her Chief:

It is important that, when you approach someone about something, you know who you are, otherwise it becomes difficult for that person to believe you. He may refuse to give you land because he has the power to do so but that is not meant to make them think that they can change who you are. So, I think that I have a right to get a plot from the chief if I need it. It has already happened that the Mpumuza chief gave me a land. If he had thought that I need to be accompanied by a family member, I would have made it clear that I am the one who wants the land. Perhaps the chief would not have had a problem or maybe he was only respecting his council. One of the headsmen asked me whom I was going to stay with, so to avoid such questions I just start by describing myself. I do not like that when my visit is for another matter but then I must talk about my identity, a person might tell me that, he would have not taken up the matter if he knew it was me. So that's the first thing I do even when I go for a job interview wherever I go I must tell the truth.

T4 responds as a traditional leader on whether he would allow *izitabane* to reside in his village. He states:

On the issue of giving people land, circumstances are different, for people who grew up in this community, it is easy. The person who brought them will introduce them, this is so-and-so's child and quickly we realise who their parents are. The problem starts when people who are not from this village come here and show no respect. They are busy talking about who they are ( He is referring to the case where there was an SSI couple who came to his village and it turned out to be a big scandal) showing off, that's where the problem starts. Apart from that, I see no problem except that they are the ones who misbehave. I do not remember any girl from this village dating another one and then being abused (the few known cases of SS couples in his village). When they arrive here, they announce to everyone that we are like this. I do not know why they do that or if this life is like fashion, that is why people do not accept them. people are irritated by how they advertise themselves, they do not respect people, and you find that they are confusing the children now.

It appears that *izitabane* have an unacceptable way of presenting themselves to the community, however, T4 does not see this as a reason why they cannot own land in their rural communities.

#### **6.4.1 Disclosing to the family**

The life of *ubutabane* is difficult and lonely. Most *izitabane* find it difficult to discuss or disclose their identity to their parents. Sbongiseni, a facilitator on Ukhozi FM, works with the homosexual community in Durban and states:

Parents do not speak to their children and that is where we come in as an organisation. We allow them to talk about their sexuality, which does not happen at home.

The issue that Bongani is addressing is common, having no one to talk to is a problem among homosexuals. However, *ubutabane* is not an easy topic to discuss with one's parents and requires courage. T2G2P1 states:

There comes a time when you must tell your family. I waited until I finished Matric, then I sat them down and told them, I cannot speak freely with my mother, so I spoke to my father. He is the one who told my mother. I was still young, she cried.

It seems that SSI who are categorised as transmen in western terms disclose because they do not have a choice, as soon as the body matures it forces one to search for someone to love, and that when the secret comes out. Most of them are masculine compared to the women they date, which makes them easily identified as *izitabane*. T5 who is a transman says that their partners do not disclose to their parents what type of people they are dating. She states:

Parents need to know the truth, it is up to them to decide whether to tell the extended family and those closest to them, people who will form part of the *lobola* negotiations. If I send negotiators; they go there just for that, not to explain my sexuality.

T5 feels that in sensitive cases like this one needs to be humble; there is a way to approach your parents if you tell the truth, and that *izitabane* should respect themselves and everyone around them.

She states:

At home, when a child asks for something, he does so respectfully, that encourages the parents, they make sure that he gets what he wants. Why then that changes when it comes to us (homosexuals) we have to do the same, it happens naturally, anything you ask for from an older person who can give it to you, you must ask respectfully. Even when you are looking for a job, your humility makes a difference to the person who can hire you, humility is the key that opens many doors.

#### **6.4.2 Conforming to traditional practices**

Living as an SSI is an individual decision that does not affect one person but the whole family. When one decides to disclose, it exposes everyone close to them. T12G4P2 states:

I think this affects the parents a lot, even though being in the closet oppresses us, but coming out affects them negatively. I wish as African women we could find a way and do things the right way. We need to find out the things we pride ourselves on as Africans, what does it mean to be an African lesbian. Does it mean that I must wear trousers and walk like a man? Does it mean I have to smoke everywhere, what does this mean to me? We need to find out the meaning of being Zulu, before we move to the bedroom, because things we do, the way we dress, whom we love, whom we sleep with, all of that is my private life.

T12G4P2 is talking about how *izitabane* conduct themselves in the community, she is questioning whether being out in the open means one should lose respect. Many problems arise from disclosing one's sexuality. On the other hand, to find out who you are as an African woman would require one to conform to cultural practices and require one to be proud of one's femininity. One must participate in community ceremonies and a series of traditional rituals and rites of passage for girls. In the Zulu ethnic group, the important rite of passage for a girl is *umhlonyana* and *umemulo* [coming of age ceremonies conducted for girls.] Some of the *izitabane* went through these rites because they do not want to disrespect their parents. NTP18 has never had an opportunity to talk to her parents about her sexuality, so she is used to female clothes as she did not want her parents to suspect anything until they did an *umemulo* ceremony for her. She states:

My parents performed the coming of age ceremony, I kept my fingers crossed because I wanted to have that ritual before I could disclose my sexuality.

After the ceremony, NTP18 began to wear less feminine clothing but her parents did not question this change because she dressed in unisex clothing, but they are aware that she is an *isitabane*. She is open about the LGBTIQ+ Church she joined lately. Her parents are followers of the Shembe Church, and for families who are attached to traditional life, it is not easy to accept *ubutabane*. However, most of the participants agreed that good behaviour and being yourself is key to being accepted for who you are by the community. In the group discussion, T2G2P1 stated:

I am free to do what I want to do but when I am at home (village) I have to respect my family, I cannot behave like a man, I have nieces and nephews who call me aunt. I know that I am like this, but I have a family.

Disclosing identities cannot change cultural norms and community expectations, and gender roles remain unchanged as children would still address these women as *Anti* [aunt]. The problem is that even if these women marry, their marriages are not taken seriously by the families, as when an *isitabane* dies, the wife faces many challenges. T2G2P1 states:

It is fine, they know that I am like this but what will happen when I die, it is important to think about that, there is a big problem in this matter, I saw a lot of people suffering after their partners die. I went home and told my brothers that I do not want anybody troubling MaMnguni (wife) when I am dead, trying to take away my body, MaMnguni is the one who lives with me. She knows me better than them, they do not know what is happening with me. It is better to set the record straight now, it is painful for your wife to suffer insults, instead of mourning your death she is crying because of your family. How do we fix this, I gave her the right to keep (the right to bury the body wherever she wants) my body?

It seems that disclosing and acceptance is not the only aspect to worry about, as when death comes, the family returns to the traditional ways. When one is not married, the family claims the body and takes it home. However, if the family does not recognise the marriage, that could spell trouble.

#### **6.4.3 Parents and acceptance of SSI**

Ukhozi FM broadcasted the issue of *ubutabane* and called for listeners to comment on whether parents should accept *izitabane*. A listener responded as follows

As a parent, I do not think that I can accept it (homosexuality) because if I have sons, I expect them to take brides so I can have grandchildren, where am I going to get grandchildren? (G1L1).

*Izitabane* are aware that acceptance is a challenge so they should not demand acceptance.

T12G4P2 states:

This situation could be looked at in two ways, we think we have rights and we forget that our parents have rights too, in fact, we are infringing on their rights, and they did not want to come out. You take away their rights and put yours first. What is more painful is that there is nothing our parents can do because we are already here, they cannot throw us away. They do not freely accept us, but they are pressurised because we have rights. Firstly, people gossip about them saying, your child is a homosexual. Also, when they chase you away from home it is not easy, so they end tolerating your situation.

T13 (the mother of T2G2P3) has lived in KwaMashu all her life. As a mother, she is familiar with *ubutabane* and her daughter has never dated boys, her comments on acceptance was, as follows:

It is better to accept this sooner because there is nothing you can do; it is their life. We (she and her husband) are not stressed anymore, we have accepted but in the beginning, we were worried. We thought that it was just a phase, it would pass but it did not. It has been a while since this thing started, we realised that we cannot stand in their way, and they are free so we cannot stand in their way.

While P13 accepted her daughter's identity (T2G2P1), her husband struggled for quite some time with this issue as she is from the rural areas and holds a leadership position in the African Independent Church. When she was asked about how she came to accept her daughter's identity, she stated:

I used to hit her because of this, she would then cry and run around the house then she would run out of the gate and she sent between 30 and 50 messages, she would not care whether we responded to them or not. She would say, I know why you are doing this, it is because you do not understand this. Dad, I love you; you are my father; I do not have another. After some time, we heard that she went to the Shembe temple to ask for male genitalia, that's when we realise that this is serious. That's when her father told me that he had a brother who did this, after that incident we accepted and the whole family

accepted her. She ended up getting married, something that is not easy to understand, I have no idea what the other girl thought she was marrying?

It seems that parents accept their children's sexuality because they do not have a choice and they cannot stop them from living their lives. T5 emphasised that humility is the key. She also highlights the fact that tolerance on the side of *izitabane* is crucial for them to be accepted. She says

They (*izitabane*) need to know that it is not that easy, they must be patient, you should not force me to accept you. If this thing is in you, even if it can take up to 10 years for me to accept you should be patient. But if you think ten years is a long time and this thing would be gone by then, you demand immediate acceptance which means you are not sure about this thing. It is the same as the girls we want to marry, if we are serious about marrying them, they must be strong to stand up for what they believe in.

According to T5, tolerance leads to acceptance; she does not agree with the way *izitabane* use their rights to demand that their parents and the rest of the community accept them. She states:

I will keep on repeating this, I should not use my rights to force people to accept me. People should take their time, they must watch me, as well as my parents. I asked them to take their time. I do not know perhaps the government needs to call them (homosexuals) and ask them about the way they feel because in my opinion the government only gave homosexuals rights. This is like saying, you want to marry each other, go ahead and do it. Another thing is that homosexual people do not want to talk to people, if they are asked about their sexuality they respond in anger. You can ask me today, come back with a different question tomorrow, I will not get angry because I am the one who better understands what is happening in my life. You know when you listen to these people from LGBTIQ+ organisations talking about the way they live their lives and their rights; they get angry and I do not know why. In fact, why do you get angry when you talk about what affects you? Do not scare me, make me feel free to ask about anything that I want to know about you because I do not know, and I want to know. They make their own lives difficult, that's why people (parents) end up saying they must do what they want to do, that is not what we want, we don't want our parents to give up on us. When I get married, I would need my parent's blessing and the blessing of the parents

of the girl I am marrying. But when parents say do as you please, that's a problem, I do not need that in my life.

Wherever I go I have learned to introduce myself as I am PP KK. I am female by gender, but I feel like a man. I can say my body looks like a woman's body because of breasts but I am a man fully, nothing is missing. Even when I speak to a girl, and she falls in love with me I tell her that she must tell her parents that the person who wants to spend her life with you is like you. Most girls say that they do not come out we decide not to tell our parents. It is painful when our parents find out the truth because one neighbour will decide to show that they have information on you. 'I know this one girl, she grew up in front of me', and then parents start asking questions, 'what are you talking about?' I avoid such people.

According to T5, disclosing one's sexuality from the start has many benefits, as it avoids embarrassment when disclosed at a later stage.

## **6.5 Same-sex individuals and their families**

### **6.5.1 Transitioning into a male**

Although rural *izitabane* do not categorise themselves as the urban ones do, some women interviewed fall under transgendered identities. What is noted is that most transgender men are not happy with their bodies, so they are turning to medical intervention. T5 says she is a male and that how she feels, and she prefers to be addressed as a man. She is soon to take hormones that will give her the body she wants. She states:

There is a programme that I am going to start shortly, to use products that will develop my body into what I feel inside, my mother wants to be part of it. My aunt and brothers support me.

Even though there are ways of transitioning into a male, one of the participants who is also in the process of transitioning, highlighted the difficulties and the challenges of this process.

T14 states:

It is a complicated process; it is not easy. This is how it starts; you begin by accepting who you are (you are different), you then come out as a lesbian but still, there is that hole inside you, that says no, something is missing. What is difficult with trans is that this feeling goes together with depression and it goes with suicide because there is a battle

inside you. The battle that one ends up keeping inside because when you share it with your friend who is a lesbian, she will tell you that you are sick, there is no such thing. The thing that makes transgender identity difficult is that you come out every day in your life, how? Because when we were growing up, transgender was not known, not talked about and we ended up having to identify with lesbians because it was more popular and known. It was something close to what we wanted but when you are inside it, you see that, no this is not me. You search for your identity, you will end up resorting to lesbian, then people would accept you as a lesbian only to find that you were never a lesbian. You are already out as a lesbian and then you find out that there is transgender and then you find out that there are hormones. When these hormones come, they speak to what you want, and they speak to what you are feeling. When you get to know about hormones, the one thing you think about is, finally have I found my peace.

This is a direction that some transmen take to make themselves feel complete and being visible. T14 explains many issues that come with transitioning and they are most risky; she continues by saying:

You must sign a consent form, there are more side effects when you take hormones. Every month you must take a blood test to ensure that everything is still okay, they must regularly check whether the body is functioning well. There is a possibility that your liver might be malfunctioning, or you might end up with cancer. So, you are told all these things as you start hormonal therapy, and as your body is developing, you become sexually active.

It does not end with the individual, but it also affects those around her, and one must go through a verification process. She also will have to go to Home Affairs to change her gender identity as she is no longer a female. T14 states:

When you take hormones you can change your name at Home Affairs, you no longer receive your menstruation -Thank you, Father, I am so relieved, I am so at peace, you can have the body you want, the male body but at the beginning, you look fat but as the time goes on you get trimmed and get this masculine body you always dream about.

It seems having the right body is the main priority and everything else follows, however, the issue of whether the ancestors or God approves of this is not clear. T14 states:

God wanted me to be who I am, no matter what happens in my body, the only thing that contained me was God, was my encounter with God. I am a child of God, who has accepted that God is love.

Growing up in a traditional community one would know that changing your body would not be accepted, for religious reasons. The critical question is whether one will be accepted in the spiritual world when one passes on. T14 states:

I am one of those people who likes tradition, I thought about all of that. If I die now what will happen to me? Will people dress me in.... (the participants did not utter the words but referred to women's clothing). I am wearing pants now, but my parents will probably dress me otherwise. I do not know how the ancestors operate, I do not know how they will accept me, but what comforts me is that my father knew me, and he used to call me his boy, so he knows my story. My family knows I do not know what will happen in the ancestral world. I am now happy after having the body I want, I have never understood what peace is, seeing people greeting me "hey brother", makes me feel good.

Transitioning of people from one gender to the other raises lots of questions because the decision taken by an individual affects those close to them. A question was posed to one participant in the group who is well known, an LGBTIQ+ Church pastor, and a teacher at a lower Primary School. The objective was to establish what others think about the children who knew her as a woman. Most of the participants were more concerned about the children, one of them said "I feel sorry for the kids and I wonder whether they did address the issue properly with the children because this is not a minor issue" (T14).

The groups agreed that transitioning may confuse the children and the parents have no idea of what happens at school. T14 agrees that when they make decisions that make them happy, they do not think about other people but themselves, this what she had to say about the children:

The concept of children is a very complex one and it is a very sensitive issue, it is one issue which I think the LGBTIQ+ community has never sat down and thought through, and how sensitive it is.

As much as this transitioning is purely for their wellbeing on the part of *izitabane*, this may negatively impact the people around them, the family members, and especially on the

children, as some of them work with children. On the other hand, the Government departments are expected to adhere to the Constitution on issues of LGBTIQ+, and the transitioning issue is something new that comes with its challenges. The Department of Home Affairs must deal with aspects of crime that comes with the changing of gender identity.

A participant who is a Director at Home Affairs (T8) states:

My challenge is that other countries think South Africa is a free country where it is easy to reside and do your criminal acts. (An example of transitioning) The authorities from other countries would go around looking for a man from Australia, only to find that he is not a man, but he is a woman and they even change their surnames. It happens that at times it is a person who burnt down buildings in his home country, but now he is a woman. That is the problem with this, but on our side, there is nothing we can do with those who want to change their sex or gender identity, what we can do, is to enter an ID number and attach the doctor's report and send it to the relevant office so they can continue with the process.

The Director referred to the disadvantages that could emanate from changing one's identity. However, those who have a genuine need for this process do not think that far, what matters is to feel good about themselves. They want to have bodies that respond to how they feel about themselves.

### **6.5.2 Challenges of sharing women with men**

Transgender men are often faced with challenges in finding partners because they are competing with men. Even if they do not intend to provoke men, it is sometimes unavoidable.

T2G2P2 states:

When you love a woman, you do not ask her if she has a boyfriend or not, if you love her you just tell her. It could be someone with two children, if you love them you love them. It becomes a challenge because sometimes you will meet people who do not have the same feelings of homosexuality, but they just want some fresh air (a break from heterosexuality). As time goes by you realise that this person is not fully into this, but she is still interested in men, perhaps she met you after being hurt. Then you later find out that she is cheating on you with men. That is a huge risk because when her man finds out that she is also involved with you he will say that my girlfriend cannot be stolen by a lesbian, when that happens you know that you are not safe. That is one of the problems,

can you imagine if she were to fall pregnant and then you wonder where the baby came from. It once happened to me, sometimes they do not say, you hear from other people when they ask you, do you see that she is pregnant. My girlfriend lied, when I asked her, she said it only happened once. Then you find out that she was sleeping with men the whole time. There is a perception that we have a lot of money, we treat people well and you do find people who get into these relationships just for that. Men have no time for anyone, they only believe in their thing (penis), they have no love. We take care of our people; these things happen but other people end up accepting the child and saying this is going to be our child. These are the challenges we encounter in this life; I went through that so I know how it feels for your girlfriend to fall pregnant when you know that you cannot impregnate anyone.

It seems that cheating in these relationships could result in pregnancy and a partner lost to a male contender. The issue of having children out of wedlock is common amongst these women. There are a few women who are known to have cheated and had children, one such is participant NTP17, who has been dating transmen for the past eight years. Her SS relationship ended recently, and she decided to return to her previous boyfriend and now has a baby. She reflects on her experience as follows:

My problem is I get discouraged easily if I am hurt, I just give up, that's how I came to date *amaqenge*. I thought if I change and date *izitabane*, things will change. I got here, and it was nice, and I was excited and very happy, people are caring and loving but my partner cheated on me not once but several times, and when I came in, I was too excited. I opened LGBTIQ+ groups, organized parties and I was active in most homosexual events but after I was cheated on, I was disappointed, and I went back to my boyfriend who had paid *lobola* for me. At home, they are happy because I have a baby with someone they know, and they do not know that I have been dating *isitabane*. The life of *ubutabane* is nice, I would go back if I can, those people know how to treat a woman. However, I did not tell Lindo (the partner) the truth about the baby because we are no longer together anyway so I said it is an in-vitro child. I did not say I went back to my husband.

The statement above suggests that, for heterosexual women, it is not a problem to move in between identifies, transmen who often prefer straight women will have to deal with this problem.

## **6.6 Marriage and children in SSI relationships**

Some of these transmen have stable relationships and families of their own, both those who are transitioning and those who are not. Others have children from a heterosexual relationship, they have children born before they discovered their identity. Some SSI were raped as a result decided to leave heterosexual relationships and decided to date or marry izitabane.

### **6.6.1 Children from Heterosexual Relations**

Many times, SSI, especially transmen end up taking care of their partners 'children, the children who are born from heterosexual marriages or relationships. The so-called 'born like that' cannot have children so if people see a couple with children, the assumption is that the one holding a female role came with the children which is mostly the truth. People often conclude that such families are the result of broken heterosexual relationships. They think that a woman in the relationship is tired of heterosexual relationships and has decided to live a homosexual lifestyle and in the end, they are identified as bisexuals. However, the consensus is that *isitabane* should not have children. I T4 states:

They realised after they have had children and they say they are bisexual; this is confusing, I do not understand how a person can date both men and women, they have children and they go back to women. We are also human beings, we think differently, we must face issues directly and understand, this is confusing to them.

Bisexuality is one category that confuses both heterosexual and homosexual communities, nevertheless, some people identify themselves as bisexual and are born that way. There is a notion that bisexuality is a phase towards gay or lesbian identity (San Francisco Human Right Commission, 2011). However, this is not easily understood in rural communities because existing terms to refer to SSI are confusing for people who are still at an introductory level of understanding same-sexual identities.

### **6.6.2 Adopted children**

Transgender men often want to have children in their relationships, but if one has a child already, they raise that child together as theirs. However, there are other options such as adoption and in-vitro fertilisation.

African communities are skeptical of adoption, and as much as they are beginning to accept it, still, traditionalists do not agree with the idea. One of the traditional leaders, T3G3P2 states:

I think it is a big danger because none of them gave birth to this child. The child is lost, they will grow up not knowing who are their parents? The surname will be a problem. Something may happen (a situation that will reveal the truth) that may cause a child to feel incomplete as if something is missing (not real family) as these are not their biological parents so they are not part of the family. This might be a problem in the future, you may find that the child consults a prophet who then tells them that they are not from that family. Each time they try to build their own life, things do not work out for them because they are using the wrong surname.

Traditional beliefs are the main reasons for the barriers against adoption, as it is very important for Africans that a child uses their family name. Elderly people often worry that the ancestors would not recognise the child and therefore would not protect the child. T2G2P1's daughter who adopted a baby with her wife, comments on this as follows:

They will find children who are like Malema, who will ask you straight, why did you adopt me, it may take you to Khumbulekhaya (a TV programme which unites long lost relatives) looking for his father. This might be a child that you did everything for, he may be driving a car that you bought for him, has a good education from white schools. Why, because he did not choose to be a part of this family. You may find that the child you adopted does not approve of this lifestyle, naturally, he does not like it. The child will grow up hating it but growing up in that family. He may not fully notice it when he is still young, but when he grows up, he will see this. Then the child will begin to ask himself, is this my father, what kind of a father is this, what kind of a mother is this. Black children talk a lot, some will be rude, they will tease him, you have two mothers, or you have two fathers, and that will be confusing to the child.

Some of izitabane are also aware of the dangers that come with adoption; T5 does not like the idea of adoption but insists that children should be told the truth regarding their origins. She states:

This is a good thing (telling a child the truth) because even when other children tease the child, he can tell you. You need to give your child something to protect her /himself with. I think that children will suffer a lot especially the adopted ones. I am not sure whether I

want children if the person I marry has children and they are happy to live with us that would be good. There are children in my family, and I know how to take care of them.

Adoption is a choice, but African families usually do not make it their first option if there are other possibilities available.

### **6.6.3 Children born through in-vitro fertilisation**

Some transgender men resort to in-vitro fertilisation, but this depends on whether the partner is willing to go undergo the process. T5 states:

I know that there are things I can choose from if I want a baby of my own, firstly I do not like adopting. Another thing, I can ask my brother or my wife's brother to be a sperm donor so that we can conceive, we can use my blood so that the child could be our own, but I also do not like that. My brother or my wife's brother will give us problems in the future, I may take the third option when we can go for sperm donation from somebody we do not know. If I want our child to have our blood, I must use my eggs before they die because of taking hormones. I can keep one or two eggs depending on how many children we want.

Family genes are important for African families; the couple may have an adopted child but having a biological child is important. There are parents like T9 who decided to support their SS children, like T2G2P1 who has her first child by adoption, but her parents seem to want something back. T9 is now hoping to have a biological grandchild, a child that carries the family bloodline. She states:

I think it is better to have a child with the blood of family members. After all, if we ask (daughter in law) and-so (her son) to do this (to have sex) that might come back to haunt them in the future because they will become close. It is better if they organise with the doctor. When the child is adopted, they can tell the child what is going on, even when the child misbehaves, they can tell him that they do not like you because you are not of this family. Whereas in the case they can tell the child that you were not adopted and there is nowhere you can go. Even if you can go for a DNA test, the results will tell you who your father is. Nowadays children are very rude, and they want proof of who is the real father. I asked them whether my daughter in law could conceive her child. You know feeling the pain of childbirth.

As much as T9 likes her adopted granddaughter, she emphasizes that she is not a biological child. She states:

T2G2P1 said to me that she wanted to have a boy child (to adopt again) I did not respond. You are in a better position to talk to these children because everything is going well for now but later talk to them about this. She (T2G2P3/ bride) needs her child. They do not realise that they are lucky. When Jesus was born there was no sexual encounter between a man and a woman. They will not conceive via the Holy Spirit if they do not want to take an opportunity to use in vitro fertilization. They still need to go home and perform a proper wedding ritual (traditional wedding), in the village. Her older uncle says "if T2G2P1 gets married, I will go to see the Chief because if I send the headman, he will just be belligerent. I will ask my brother to accompany me". I believe that this will happen before he dies because we are not here forever, he is the eldest in the family.

#### **6.6.4 Parenting skills**

When working within the SSI community, it becomes evident that the identity and self-image of SSI is a priority. They base all their decisions on what suits them as couples. When they were questioned about the future of the children that they adopt, they had various feelings on the issue. T12G4P2 states:

We do not think about other people who are on the outside, we only think of ourselves. It is always about me and my partner, we think about this and that, not beyond that, only what makes us happy, if not, it may be because you do not like us. I have faced a situation whereby the child's parents are homosexuals. They called parents meeting at school, children were asked to draw their family tree. The child drew two mothers and then his siblings. The teacher called the child and asked him why he drew two mothers, the child responded by saying because my parents are like this. The teacher told the child that a family is made up of a man and a woman, so you are supposed to draw a man and a woman, the child broke down crying and went outside. They called parents in to explain the next step. These are challenges the children are faced with, the children create these, how do we socialise children who are results of in-vitro fertilisation.

It seems that the issue about the inclusion of children is not a well thought out topic by some SSI, as they tend to focus on their rights and they often forget about the rights of those they are responsible for.

#### **6.6.5 *Izitabane* are not meant to have children**

When an SSI insists that they identify as transgender that implies, they cannot have children because they need the opposite sex to conceive. T12G4P1 believes these individuals should understand that they do not have the benefits enjoyed by heterosexual people, and they cannot have children. T12G4P1 (who is a male in a female body or transman) states.

There is something that people do not understand, why are we like this. When you look at us, this is who we are we should not have children. Had the white people not came with in-vitro fertilization we would not have children. Our children are those born by those close to us, those are the children we need to take care of, we are not meant to have children. The love you have for the children can be given to your nephews and nieces; those are your children. Why, because you are unique, you are a blessing. People usually say that people from the rural areas are too rigid, if you are a transman you need to be like that. You are a special human being, given the power to solve problems in the family and society. You are not supposed to be weak, once you conceive you become weak, you have post-natal pains. You are created to be strong, intervene on problems with no solution, and solve problems that can only be solved by a person who looks like you (transman).

I will explain what I mean, if you have a child as a homosexual, you will never have an open mind as you would have before giving birth. The pains of child labour stay with you for life, they make you weak. The child you bear will take away your intelligence that was given to you as a blessing. Families with these kinds of individuals will tell you that these people are special, they are gifted. So, this means that people who date trans-women need to know that trans-women are not meant to have children, you are not a man, you are not a woman. You can fit everywhere, in male space and female space. If you give birth you will lose your intelligence that was given to you to be able to solve complicated issues, this unique sexuality that was given to you could be transferred to the child because you could not stand up for yourself. When transwomen and other non-heterosexual people find out who they are, their lives will change forever.

To conclude this chapter, the chapter discussed the experiences of SSI families whereby children seem to be caught in between the heterosexual and homosexual relationship. The choices made by SSI parents greatly impact children and the identity of children is neglected. It seems that when it comes to the issue of children, the happiness of SSI comes before the wellbeing of the children as they are saying says a child cannot choose the family. In the end, the children do not have their own identity but being labels through their parents' identity.

## CHAPTER 7

### Exploring African indigenous same-sex relationships

#### 7.1 Introduction

Researchers who are investigating indigenous issues come across many challenges when they present their work because the research methodologies are western in nature, and this applies to this study. This study is about indigenous same-sex practices and relationships in rural communities, thus research from an indigenous perspective should be presented in a manner that demonstrates the context of the research. The terms and relevant concepts should be adopted instead of using foreign perceptions of same-sex practices, hereafter referred to as SSP. Concepts such as homosexuality and terms such as LGBTIQ+ do not make sense to communities in rural areas. Their experiential knowledge does not connect them to the concept of homosexuality. The importance of using a phenomenological approach to explore human research is stressed by Byrne because it is important that "the truth and the understanding of life can emerge from people's life experience" (2001: 4) This explains why the elderly participants do not agree that homosexuality exists in African communities, they only know ambiguous sexual identities and SSP as the English terms do not aid indigenous discourse on SSP. Nevertheless, to accommodate various readers and their understanding, this study includes western concepts. However, there are African indigenous terms for SSP and SSI such as *uncukumbili*, *ungqingili*, *inkonkoni*, and *isitabane* (Rudwick, 2011: 96). These terms cannot be translated into English, but they are explained and used in the discussion to describe the phenomenon to maintain the richness of the study. Before looking at isiZulu concepts it is important to briefly discuss Western concepts.

#### 7.2 Western concepts for same-sex practices

The study focuses on rural women whose lifestyle is grounded in the traditions and customs of the Zulu people. Many of these women do not spend much time in the rural areas because of their work and education demands but travel to and from the two settings. Nonetheless, most of their lives are spent in the rural settings where most of the extended families are located. Urban life is temporary, as it is a life filled with friends and people with whom they identify in terms of their sexuality. This is where they learn about different sexualities and try to find their own identities. NPO's such as the Gay and Lesbian Network Centre provides

awareness programmes and basic information on same-sexualities and gender diversity, as this is not something that they can learn at home. In urban settings, they adopt western terms and concepts; these terms used in SS discourses are often facilitated by western entities such as the Pietermaritzburg Gay Centre. As mentioned above, the umbrella terms LGBTIQ+, homosexuality, and other terms are often used to enable individuals to find identities that suit their lifestyles. These terms are commonly used in urban settings and to a lesser extent in rural settings because this is a different context and such discourses have not gained popularity amongst the rural population. Western concepts are useful because they are well defined and provide distinct categories of same-sex behaviour. Thus, it is necessary not to completely reject western concepts as they are commonly used in contemporary society; also, the noted same-sex identities found in the community are influenced by western culture. Thus, Chilisa refers to a third space where western and indigenous knowledge meet. By blending the past and the present allows SSI in the indigenous community to benefit from western knowledge and *vice versa* (2012: 19). The third space means that we cannot disregard the work of Western scholars as it joins contemporary and indigenous societies. Many of the participants in this study have a secondary education and are familiar with the meanings of western terms. However, it does not mean that they fully identify with these terms regarding what they are and what they feel. Some are still in the process of discovering their identities and use these to identify with the group.

The shortage of African indigenous scholars in this field is a problem because western scholars currently dominate African same-sex discourse. This has resulted in insufficient indigenous African content in the field of SSI constructions (Sandfort et al. 2013: 105). Due to the paucity of indigenous discourses in this field, the existing African terms have been labeled as derogatory or discriminatory (Van der Walt et al. 2019:10). Nonetheless, studies by Sigamoney and Epprecht demonstrate that indigenous terms should be adopted as the only way to differentiate these individuals from heterosexual individuals. They maintain that “the terms are nonetheless necessary since they allow what exists to be identified and made recognizable” (Sigamoney and Epprecht, 2013: 93).

### 7.3 The role of language in self-naming and same-sex identification

Participants did not use indigenous terms to refer to SSI when discussing their sexuality but used English terminology since discourses on sex and sexuality began in western institutions where English was the preferred language of communication. As English is the dominant language in academic discourse, it is difficult to write in indigenous languages unless one is in an indigenous language discipline. When one decides to write in indigenous languages, the challenge of this attempt would be a shortage of academics, examiners, or peer viewers who are willing to look at this work; this leaves English as the most used language of knowledge production.

Similar to this study, the discussion on the same sexualities depends on English as new terms and concepts are established in English which later are translated into other languages and this interferes with indigenous language development (Mkhize and Balfour, 2017:134). There is a need to develop new African indigenous concepts and terminologies for African language speakers because using borrowed concepts marginalises indigenous languages. The existing indigenous concepts are not often used, and English terms have no value in indigenous discourses. Smith argues that narratives told in foreign languages do not accurately capture the meaning behind the history and knowledge of indigenous people (Smith, 1999:36).

Participants such as the traditional leaders often referred to indigenous concepts such as *ungqingili*, *inkonkoni*, or *uncukumbili*. In their discussion of SSI, these are not always used in scholarly discourse. There are few scholars, both Western and African, who include indigenous terms in their work, but do not always fully analyse or understand these terms. Writers such as Veronica Sigamoney, Epprecht (2013), Morgan and Reid (2010), and others are examples of this misinterpretation of terms. They are found in the work of Van Huyssteen who draws them from the dictionary written by Nyembezi in 1992 (2003: 201). The African history of SSI is contained in these indigenous terms which have been replaced by English terms. The exclusion of indigenous terms in same-sex discourse means that same-sex practices in African communities are misconstrued. Nemecek highlights the role of language, stating that "The language is an important part of one's identity, and while taking over the language of another culture, one takes over part of the identity of that culture. To speak means to accept the tradition and manners of the culture the language comes from"

(2010:28). Thus, Africans today can label African indigenous terms as discriminative because they do not identify with their own culture and they don't understand the meaning of these terms.

The labeling of African concepts as negative terms perpetuates negative ideas, that what is African is not good enough even discussions on SS issues seem to carry this view (Van der Walt et, al. 2019:10). Since Western educational institutions drive education and have the right to produce knowledge, they are in a better position to name and label concepts as recommended by a researcher. The denunciation of African terms is done without considering the history and the originality of these terms (Sigamoney and Epprecht, 2013: 88). Whereas as they have not been properly described, there is no interrogation of their meaning, and the history behind them is not considered. The problem is that when the word or the term does not make any sense in English, it is left out or translated into English. This is evidence in knowledge production that is taking place in educational institutions, even when the indigenous term is used, it must be translated which decreases the value and the depth of the argument. While, if indigenous terms were to be translated into other languages such as English, the value of the meaning would be lost in the translation. Vetri (2015: 1) raises a very important point about the use of language as follows:

We are confronted with different cultures, where individuals perceive the same "words" in very different ways, and, more importantly, attribute to them a very different effective value. The challenge, then, consists in making the art of communication work. However, this is something that, as any one of us has learned, it is often independent of the language used. We may run into a lot of trouble with miscommunication even when we speak the same language. This brings us to talk about empathy.

She emphasises that understanding is vital in any communication process, in this case, the same sexualities require more than translation, the context is also important. If some words are reduced or romanticised, they may lose their meaning and the interpretation of indigenous words deteriorates the discourses, as language is the vehicle for history and cultural facts. Ntuli in Hoppers argues that "A language represents a specific worldview and ontology. There are words and concepts that elude translation" (Hoppers, 2002: 55-66). Certain isiZulu words are often misinterpreted as vulgar words because some words must be

used as they are. However, to identify whether what is communicated is vulgar or not requires one to know the culture and understand the language of those people.

The domination of the English language has resulted in most people adopting the use of English terms. Same-sex individuals, especially the youth identify themselves as LGBTIQ+ without fully understanding the meanings of these terms because they are ashamed to say who or what they are in IsiZulu. Participants did agree that Western concepts used to refer to SSI do not resonate with their lived experience. Some of them have come out on how they feel about Western labelling. T5 states:

All these names (LGBTIQ+), makes no sense to me, I do not fall under that umbrella. The problem is, we allow people to tell us who we are, we do not want to find ourselves, you need to listen to your body.

This participant raised an important point that these Western concepts should not be treated as universal concepts. There is a need for individuals in rural communities to engage in same-sex discourses, and to understand the historical background of existing indigenous terms then decide whether they need to find new terms or use the existing ones. Thus Hudson-Weems emphasises that concepts should be grounded in one's cultural beliefs and that how African women can finally become 'self-definers' (Hudson-Weems 2001:68). Even if they decide to use western terms, they should do that with a full understanding of how they speak to their indigenous context in the current contemporary indigenous life. This will provide an opportunity for SSI to name themselves properly. This also concurs with the following statement, "In African culture, self-naming or "*nommo*" is important because it is in "the correct naming of a thing that it comes into existence" (Alexander-Floyd and Simien, 2006: 70).

#### **7.4 Examining the origins of the isiZulu concept of same-sex persons**

As mentioned above there are four known indigenous concepts used in the Zulu community to refer to SSI. This section will scrutinise these concepts, their formation, and originality and how they are used in the Zulu community. The above section demonstrates that indigenous people would rather not use Western labels.

The first term is *inkonkoni*, two participants gave a brief but important description of the concept. The two participants spoke from different perspectives, that of a heterosexual and that of a homosexual. T5 (SSI) takes the opportunity to explain why she decided to call herself *inkonkoni* and provides a context for the term, states:

I prefer being called *inkonkoni* because a wildebeest looks like a cow to a person who cannot differentiate between a cow and a wildebeest but when you bring a wildebeest home and mix it with other cows, that's when you see that this is a wild animal, it is not a cow and you should not mix it with other cows. So, if you call me *inkonkoni* I respond better because that is how I understand myself. That makes me happy because the sexuality of wildebeests is ambiguous.

Amongst the Zulu people, *inkonkoni* is an animal known as a wild cow and at times referred to as the "blue wildebeest". However, T5 uses this analogy to demonstrate that she can relate to this in terms of her identity. The sexual behaviour of the animal is questionable, as is her sexuality, thus she calls herself *inkonkoni*. Her explanation is confirmed in the work of Sigamoney and Epprecht (2013:91) that "*Inkonkoni* in IsiZulu means "blue wildebeest," a species traditionally known for occasional male on male sexual behaviour". The participant does not use English terms but chooses to use the term known in her community, by naming herself with an indigenous term she positions herself within her community. Self-naming is one of the eighteen characteristics of Africana womanism, this framework rejects the idea of accepting names from foreign cultures (Hudson-Weems 2004: xix-xx).

From an African indigenous perspective, the naming of either a person, animal, or non-living objects is important because the name reflects historical events, circumstances, or the background of that society. All names are drawn from a particular event. The names may predict the future or describe the current situation in that household. The families that happened to have children with ambiguous sexual identities should know where such children fit into their history. If the community uses indigenous concepts and preserve them, they can look back in history and find traces of similar identities. Hence, if they are not used, they will be forgotten, people will deny their history and say it does not exist, as happens with same-sex practices. It is thus important that SSI themselves keep these terms alive to preserve their originality and their historical background. Olatunji et al. (2015) state "Sometimes, the conditions or circumstances of birth determine the name of an infant. This is a common

criterion for giving a name in many African societies” (p 83). There should be no attempt to delete the birth identity of these individuals, they have a name, terms, or concept that developed because of their birth. All names have significance and sometimes the name may be used to rebuke an evil spirit or preventing something bad from reoccurring.

This naming is further emphasised by Arthur who points out that "Names can be influenced by positive or negative circumstances the family finds themselves in around the time a child is born" (Arthur, 2016: 30) A positive example of naming with good intentions is demonstrated by T4 when he argues against same-sex relationships. He expresses his concerns about how same-sex relationships may affect gender roles and identities in traditional communities. T4 states:

If I have a child and I name her Zibuyile and she turns around and tells me that she is a boy, what will then happen?

Zibuyile is a girl's name that predicts the future, Zibuyile means "bring back or returned"; in this case, the father names a child in the hope that the cows that he paid for his wife's *ilobolo*, will be returned when the girl finds a husband. The participant expects to gain something when his daughter grows up. From an African point of view, the father hopes that his daughter will find a husband which is a positive outlook in African communities. However, due to different views on gender and cultural issues from a non-African feminist perspective, this would probably be interpreted as selling off the daughter for wealth or putting pressure on children to get married (Chisale,2017: 8). Nonetheless, this addresses the future of the child as the meaning of the name impacts the future of the child. Thus Olatunji et al. point out that “a good name should be given to a child because the name assigned will determine a lot about the present and future of the child” (Olatunji et al., 2014:72).

Thus, SSI must adopt a self-naming tendency. As in the case of T5, it does not matter whether the term *inkonkoni* is seen as a derogatory term by others but for her, it has a meaning that makes sense to her. Often when same-sex discourse takes place, the people who come up with terms and labels are those who are from the same-sex group.

#### **7.4.1 Inkonkoni (izi) nkonkoni**

The term *inkonkoni* is used to refer to both males and females in same-sex relationships, however, the term is often used to refer to males. In this study, very few women would talk

about *inkonkoni* to refer to other women. Male participants confirmed that *inkonkoni* is the term used for gay men. A septuagenarian and a member of the Chief's counsel explained how same-sex relationships took place in male hostels in Durban and Johannesburg (Epprecht, 2001:128). He described *izinkonkoni* as real men; his explanation seems to differentiate heterosexual males from homosexuals. He states:

*Izinkonkoni* are real men because they have wives and children at home, thus they are called *Inkonkoni* (T4)

According to T4 *inkonkoni* is a 'straight' man, because he lives a heterosexual life whereas gay men only sleep with men and they do not have families. This is a different perspective which is based on his knowledge and his observation of SSI. However, some gay men have children but do not live a heterosexual life (Newlands group discussion in 2012). To differentiate between the two groups of men calls for closer observation but the public does not see the difference. When two men are romantically involved, they are all called *izinkonkoni*. However, the term is known, and the community is aware of this practice.

Epprecht confirms that African men are aware of men who prefer male partners. He states:

'men taking boys as "wives" in the compounds would enable them to graduate from the mines with relatively good health and savings, thence to establish themselves back home as husbands and fathers in idealized customary terms" (Epprecht, 2001:128).

These are private conversations that are known to happen in urban or in city settings when men are away from their wives (Voss & Casella, 2012: 57). The two said participants define the term *inkonkoni* differently, based on their experiences, hence this is an indigenous perspective of the same sexualities. Experiences are more important in this study because they offer new knowledge on what is known. As much as this is a male perspective in women's studies, it contributes to the validation of the indigenous concept. Revising and reproducing African knowledge is part of the study. This is the process of recovering and discovery that Chilisa calls for when she talks of a research approach informed by a postcolonial indigenous research paradigm (2012:17).

Another perspective of the term *inkonkoni* appeared on Facebook in 2014. The discussion was about *ishoba lenkonkoni* which is the tail of the wildebeest; the tail of this animal is used by *izangoma* to make *ishoba*. *Ishoba* is a traditional divination tool, it is often referred to as

*ishoba lenkonkoni*. During the Facebook discussion, Ntuli explained the use and importance of *ishoba lenkonkoni*. In the explanation, Ntuli pointed out that the wildebeest uses its tail to sense the presence of prey. He states:

*Libalulekile kakhulu kwinkonkoni ishoba ngona ngisho ungaqhamuka ziphuza kodwa wena uzibona ukude, ngiyakutshela izolishaya kube Kanye ishoba iphenduke ibheke ngqo lapho uqube ngakhona kube sengathi ikubonile. Iyisilwane esithembele kakhulu eshobeni ukuzwa isitha sayo.*

[The tail is very important to *Inkonkoni*, even if you show up while it is drinking, you may think you are far enough for it not to see you. But I am telling you, it will move it once and then it will look right in the direction where you are, you may think it saw you. It is an animal that relies heavily on the tail to sense its enemy].

This means *ishoba* has divining powers because it has sensing abilities and it assists the *izangoma* to find or reveal hidden things. Ntuli continues:

*Ubozibuka uma ziseqeleni uma nike nakhuluma ngazo uzibona zihlangana zihlukana zishaluzisa wona amashoba. Zizothi zisuka ziphenduke zibheke ngqo lapho ningakhona*

[You should watch them, if you make a sound, you will see them coming together, split, move around, and suddenly they turn in your direction] (2014 Ntuli).

For *AmaZulu* the tail of the *inkonkoni* is believed to have divining powers and that is the reason for its use by diviners. The Facebook discussion indicates that the behaviour of the animal relates to the behaviour of SSI. Some of the contributors asked why the SSI is called *inkonkoni*, and Ndwandwe responded as follows:

*Ukuze kuthiwe izitabane ziyinkonkoni, yingoba zivamise ukuhamba umhlambi wamaduna odwa amasikazi ziwabona uma sekuyisikhathi sokukhwela*

[*Izitabane* are called *inkonkoni* because among the wildebeest the male herd separates itself from the female herd and the two only come together during the mating season].

This explanation was supported by Mhlanga who was part of the discussion but because the topic is taboo. the discussion did not go any further. Moreover, the people who were part of the discussion were Zulu males, so it is expected that they would not entertain the topic (Facebook discussion, 2014).

**7.4.2 The summary of the above discussion: The following observations are offered:**

- Inkonkoni is a heterosexual male who engages in same-sex for convenience, being away from his wife as a migrant worker.
- Inkonkoni is a homosexual male even though under some circumstances this name is used to refer to females.
- Some of the informants took pride in applying the term to themselves.
- The Zulu people believe that the tail of the inkonkoni has divinatory powers.
- The observed behaviour of this animal led to males involved in same-sex relations being called *inkonkoni*.

**7.4.3 Uncukumbili (Intersex)**

*Inkonkoni* and *uncukumbili* are sometimes used interchangeably. *Uncukumbili* (intersexed) is a person who has two sexual organs. The meaning of *uncukumbili*, literally means that a person has two sexual organs, that of a male and female. *Uncukumbili* is a combination of two words, *isicubu* (a piece of flesh), or *izicubu* (pieces of flesh), and *ezi- mbili* (two), often a person has two genitals (Ramsay et al, 1998: 4). These people are often grouped with same-sex persons, whether they practice or not. However, this perception is only found in contemporary society. In the past, these individuals were not associated with same-sex practices but were different and born that way (Kalven and Buckley (1984: 246). Their sexuality was not a problem as such, but their identity remained hidden. Their existence was also ignored since their sexual role could not benefit society.

They were concealed from society because they were perceived to be abnormal; this kind of abnormality is associated with the inability to procreate, which is crucial in African societies. A normal woman is the one who can have a sexual relationship with a man to reproduce; this is a natural and accepted way of having children. Moreover, "African conception of sex was geared towards procreation" therefore nothing will take the place of heterosexuality in African societies (Asu et al. 2014: 49). On the other hand, the general understanding is that *uncukumbili* cannot conceive because of their sexual ambiguity. Although there are different African terms with different meanings to refer to same-sex persons, people used them as if they mean the same thing. There is no clear distinction whether the discussion is about

*uncukumbili*, *inkonkoni*, or *ungqingili*, they are all discussed as SSI. T4 expands on this issue as follows:

People you are talking about are unknown, I have never seen them, but I have heard about them from other people. This thing was hidden, to an extent that nobody knows about it. In the past, we did not have hospitals or clinics, so the midwives were just women from the village who were known for their job. If these midwives realised that there was something wrong with the sexuality of the child, they would keep quiet and hide that.

Initially, this participant was skeptical regarding the existence of SSI but later acknowledged that there were children born with different sexualities. The participant's response was influenced by how the question was phrased because the research intended to find out whether the participant was aware of same-sex practices in African communities and the indigenous terms used in these communities. However, the response took another direction where the participant referred to individual sexual identity and not sexual behaviour *per se*. Furthermore, he did not indicate that he was referring to *uncukumbili* (a hermaphrodite) in particular, but it was obvious that he was referring to a child with two sex organs.

He was not comfortable with the word *uncukumbili* because he is not used to discussing such things. Secretively hiding these people meant that they would remain hidden in the community and be treated as heterosexual individuals if no one knew their status. On the other hand, the moment one opens it becomes a problem for people around him or her. Meet Kenya's Intersex preacher making waves in his conservative community, (YouTube 2018). Nonetheless, the truth is revealed when that individual reaches adolescence and the body changes. In the past secrets were kept for life and such individuals were able to suppress their identity out of respect for the family, but today everything is transparent. The case of Caster Semenya is one such example that is hotly debated in South Africa, even the traditional leaders are beginning to accept that there are people born with ambiguous sexualities. Several tests to prove her femininity was solid proof for those who doubted the existence of ambiguous sexualities (North, 2016).

Another participant from rural Inkandla who is a member of the Chief's council confirmed that there are people who used to be known as *oncukumbili*. T3G3P2 stated:

There were people here in KwaZulu-Natal who never had wives, we heard about *uncukumbili*, but we did not know what kind of a person is *uncukumbili*. We know that that person had to choose whether he had to be a male or a female. I have never seen a person, but I have seen a cow. We were herding the cows and we saw a male cow, *Inkunzi*, when we look at it, had testicles but when we looked closely it had a vagina and was mounting female cows. We were shocked. We said, today we have seen it all, we have never seen something like this.

This shows that sexuality is not fixed, thus there must be indigenous discourses and African theories that allow for the fluidity of sexualities. It is also clear that indigenous concepts do exist but are forgotten as they are not used often because of the taboo nature of the subject. There are various cases where the private lives of SS individuals are exposed because of human rights, even though society prefers to keep them private, for either causing shame or protecting them from social discrimination. Some parents choose to medically change their children's sexuality although they are not sure of the outcome of such surgery. One such case is a woman from Limpopo who wants her sexuality back after one of her sexual organs were removed at a young age (North, 2016). Sometimes parents do make crucial decisions for their children because they are afraid for their children or themselves, but in the end, they are blamed.

#### **7.4.5 Ungqingili**

Most participants could not explain what is inferred by the term *ungqingili*. T15 provided her description:

What I think is, the term *ngqingili* developed during the delivery of the two-sexed baby. When they saw the sex of the baby, they were shocked to see this rare condition, something they had never seen before. They did not know what to say to the family. The child is "neither a girl nor a boy, what should we say, what is this. They could not explain the complexity of the baby's sexuality. They could not think of a better way to say the issue is at a dead end, which in isiZulu is 'ngqi' we do not know what this is it is '*ingini*'

This is a complex and unique description for someone who does not speak the language. This explanation also describes *uncukumbili* or a person with two sex organs. To understand what *ingini* is, one would have stayed with elderly people who use words that are created to

suit a situation, in this case, *ingini* is a pot that has no handles. This would be an old non-functional pot which even if it is used, would not cook properly. As much as it is not used anymore, it is not thrown away but kept in the house with other broken household items. The first part of the term is '*ngqi*', the second part is '*ngili*'. The birth of an *ungqingili* baby adequately justifies this term. In a rural setup where there are no clinics, the local midwife is invited to assist. In the household, everyone is anxiously waiting but the first thing they want to hear is the first cry, and secondly to discover the gender of the child. The earlier response by T4 about the naming of the girl child, uZibuyile, which meant 'my parent's cow will be returned' applies here. In the case of the birthing of *ungqingili*, women are confused when they witness something like this and they do not know how to react as they are expected to shout, "*sithole intombi noma sithole umfana* (it is a girl or it is a boy) When the child is neither male nor female, it is referred to as a '*u-ngini*' (a broken pot)". In isiZulu when the issue is beyond explanation, the response is, '*ifike kwa Ngqingetshe*'. This means that there is no point for any further discussions, close it and cover it with a large stone, to make sure that it is properly closed. Since the sexual identity of a child is not what is expected, it is compared to a pot without handles, the gender of a child is ambiguous and is referred to as '*ungini*' and *Ngqi*' (closed properly). Therefore, the two words create the term '*ngqingini*' which, in the end, becomes a '*Ngqingili*'.

The section above explains how naming occurs in an African context; naming depends on the circumstances. This term was developed to tell the story but at the same time to ensure silence regarding the event. This story also would make sense to the person who understands how people play with words in that specific language in that they have a meaning (Smith, 1999:36). Sadly, concealing this story means the life of such a child is concealed from the day she or he is born, their story can never be told as it will remain a secret for life. This is currently still happening in communities, where intersexed children are born, although such cases are very rare, it is difficult to obtain any information on them. However, the stories posted on social media demonstrate that these people exist. (Meet Kenya's Intersex preacher making waves in his conservative community, YouTube, 2018).

The above also demonstrates the situation of the SSI, and how they fit into a traditional society that subscribes to heteronormativity and procreation. In this society, an intersexed person (*ungini*) is deemed to be dysfunctional because they cannot have children. The owner

of the pot can choose to throw it away or bear the pain of being burnt every time. This is what some of the SSI parents do; they disown these children and they are left to roam the streets. In the Zulu context, having a child is the joy of every parent but more importantly, knowing that you have a boy or girl fills the parents with the hope that they will one day celebrate the marriage of the child with his/her relatives and family. Moreover, in a traditional setting, the most popular topic would be discussing an *ilobolo* and marriage. Parents pride themselves in having daughters and sons; parents with an intersexed child have nothing but shame and do not join in the communal discussions on marriage.

#### **7.4.6 *Isitabane***

The term *isitabane* is more popular in SS and heterosexual communities. SSI use it when they refer to themselves, but they do not want others to call them *izitabane*, because it is often used by heterosexual people as a discriminatory term. However, this is the term used in SS discourses to differentiate them from the heterosexual community. (Sigamoney and Epprecht, 2013: 90). It is used as an inclusive term for people in same-sex relationships, whether one identifies as gay, lesbian, or any other LGBTIQ+ term. When the term *isitabane* is mentioned, everyone knows which group is being referred to. According to T5:

I am *isitabane* and that is not a problem, I must accept that, how long are you going to stay angry because wherever you go, they say here is *isitabane*. Even if they were to ask me, 'okay what do you want us to call you'? I do not know because I am not a woman, I am not a man and I am not a lesbian, I do not care what you call me even if you can call me a 'Combo'.

It seems naming and labelling is a challenge, there is no acceptable term to refer to SSI. If they also do not have an appropriate term for themselves, what about the people who are not part of that community? This means this community will have to find suitable terms that could be used by both communities and terms that are comfortable to them. The term is used in most African communities, whether it is accepted or not (Sigamoney and Epprecht, 2013: 89).

The origin of this slang term is not clear but is often used in the townships. The meaning of the term is also not defined clearly as even the participants could not provide a clear definition. However, Ran-khothain in Swarr (2009) attempted to explain how the term came about. It appears that the term was invented from the question “*Usistela bani*” [you are sister

who?] (p532). There is no further evidence of this description, but it makes sense because whoever was asking the question was confused with regards to the person's gender. This confirms what is said above about how naming takes place in African society.

#### **7.4.7. Conclusion**

The section above is an attempt to demonstrate how indigenous terminologies came about and an in-depth analysis shows no intention to insult, but they differentiate SSI from heterosexual individuals. As highlighted above, African terms are not accepted because they are *discriminative* (Van der Walt et al. 2019:10). The challenge is that African communities are not discussing SSI issues in their languages; discussions are dominated by the youth who often use western languages such as English (Sandfort, 2013: 105). Unfortunately, the use of English automatically excludes elders, who have wisdom and insight from an indigenous perspective on the subject. Thus, the development of the indigenous concept is difficult, and the existing ones are ignored.

From what has been discussed above, it is clear why African communities have denied homosexuality, as it is not explained or defined in their terms. They confirm the existence of ambiguous sexualities in the community but do not associate it with homosexuality. The possible way forward to this problem is to use indigenous concepts in same-sex discourses. It is noted that the language has a great impact on naming and labeling as it allows local historical events to be part of the term. It has been demonstrated how terms such as *uncukumbili*, *ungqingili*, *inkonkoni*, and *isitabane* came to existence, as it is shown in Chapter 5.3.2 how 'homosexuality' came to be. However, we cannot do away with Western definitions and concepts as they clearly describe the complexity of human sexuality and provide advanced knowledge of different sexualities and sexual orientations.

## **7.5 Dress Code: Crossdressing as a tool to break the silence in African communities**

Living in a democratic society makes matters easy for SSI to express themselves, as people wear what they like, regardless of gender. The dress code speaks for them before anyone else says anything. Clothing plays an important role because they dress as they feel, this works for transmen. Dressing in male clothing makes them feel complete and that is how they want to

present themselves in public (Sutherland, Robert & Gabriel, 2016:11). These women are accused by other SSI to imitate a heterosexual lifestyle, their male dress code is interpreted as they want to imitate and be heterosexual males. Since within the SSI community there are different categories, they do not have the same outlook, which leads to discrimination within the SSI. The challenges faced by transmen are that they want to be recognised as males rather than females, Whereas in indigenous settings transmen find it hard to live their truth as they are often addressed according to the sex assigned to them at birth that is female.

Nonetheless, not all crossdressers are SSI, some straight people prefer crossdressing, others prefer male clothing, but they are heterosexuals. This is a problem for a heterosexual community that is still trying to understand that there are female born persons who see themselves as men, so they dress like men. The problem is that, if there is another group that dresses like men among SSI but do not share the same identity, that will confuse society even further. However, each category within SSI wants to express who they are, and they are free to do so according to the Bill of Rights. Therefore, those who see themselves as free from any gender are free to move between genders, they also wear what they like, female clothes today, male clothes tomorrow (Holland-Muter, 2012: 171). This means it would be difficult to differentiate SSI from heterosexuals because people have freedom of choice. Those who use clothes to define their identity will be assumed to be in the group that relies on Human Rights to do what they like with their bodies. Their struggle will be in vain because the community will not differentiate them from those who take advantage of sexual freedom. This implies that when threatened, these SSI can always return to their heterosexual lifestyle because there is nothing that compels them to live as SSI. T14 confirms this when she states, "I see that we are not the same, we are living in two different worlds, maybe our dress code is the same, but we are different" (T14).

Unfortunately, transmen do not feel comfortable in woman's clothing, even if the family is against the way they dress, so they communicate their lives through the way they dress. In traditional communities, there are strict male and female dress codes. Even today some families do not allow girls to wear trousers:

At home, in rural areas, girls are not allowed to wear pants even today. The old men that you saw at home still believe in that rule (T9).

This is a mother who is totally against girls who wear trousers, but her daughter happens to be a transman and the only one wearing trousers in the family. In rural communities, a woman who wears trousers is still frowned upon and not treated with respect, as she is assumed to be a loose woman.

In traditional societies, the dress code plays an important role as it differentiates between male and female. In the past, it played a crucial role in times of war, women were easily identifiable and rescued, and taken into hiding. Even today in some areas when a woman is in trouble, men would come to her rescue, and she would receive immediate attention. However, in the case where a transman wears men's clothing, she would not be easily identified and men would not rush to her rescue because she sees herself as a male, so she can take care of herself. The dress code makes them visible, but it also makes them vulnerable and draws unwanted attention (Daly, King, and Yeadon-Lee, 2018:270). Due to this reality, some transmen still dress in women's clothing and some still wear women's clothing because they are not independent and still live a closeted life with their parents. The advantage of invisibility is that they are not in obvious danger as those who are visible and are targeted and become victims of violence.

### **7.6 Discovering your sexual identity, challenges, and experiences.**

The study reveals that the SS community has more challenges as they must discover their identities within various identities in this community, unlike the heterosexual community where there are two genders. Through the journey of discovery, they are on their own with no family support. They are unable to share their challenges, pain, and confusion with their parents, and it is a lonely journey. In search of their identity, they are compelled to listen to their bodies and go through dangerous and terrible experiences that may scar them for life (Daly, King, and Yeadon-Lee, 2018: 262). The journey also means one must try various identities to find a suitable identity, one must experiment with one's body. Sometimes they must live as heterosexuals to prove that what they feel is not just a phase or a stage.

As SSI, especially transmen must fight for their existence and recognition in society, while others who have no sexual orientation problems are merely experimenting. This group also has many reasons why they want to live an SS life, others are victims of male abuse and for others, it is out of choice. As said above, this will mean SSI have to face challenges to convince

the community that they deserve a place in society. Living in a country where rights to same-sex sexuality are legalised makes this issue a Human Rights issue rather than a cultural belief on gender or sexual identity. This is also going to be a challenge for those who study in this field since gender has always been categorised as female or male with nothing in between, such as a third gender. Nonetheless, SSI wants to be recognised by society but need a proper identity; the question from the heterosexual community would be, who are these people if they are not like us, what should we call them, and where do we locate them in the society?

As highlighted before, same-sex discussions in African communities is something that does not exist, so labeling and naming of SSI are mostly found in Western discourses. The workshops and centres established by the NPO all use the Western framework to teach and to discuss SS issues, which has resulted in some SSI moving from one identity to the other. Moreover, the most crucial stage of life is the adolescent stage where one tries to understand one's identity. At this stage, it may start as a game to date people of the same gender. In this case, one would probably go from being a bisexual to a lesbian or a transman and maybe end up transitioning into a male, as explained by T14 in 5.4. Some go through various identities because they feel they are in the wrong body (Luvuno, Ncama, and Mchunu, 2019: 4). This means one would have been identified according to all the LGBTIQ+ labels but mature SSI tend to be very careful what they called themselves, compared to the younger generation. They believe that changing identities confuses the community, as it is still difficult for them to accept that there is a third gender.

Identities such as bisexual are problematic for both communities because one has no sexual boundaries and can have sexual relationships across the sexual spectrum. This is the most misunderstood identity in traditional communities, and it will probably impact the acceptance of the SS community. One of the participants who is a Chief in rural communities of KwaZulu-Natal expresses his views on bisexual identities:

This is confusing, I do not understand how a person can date both men and women, they have children and they go back to women. We are also human beings, we think in a certain way, we must face issues directly and understand, this is confusing to them (T4).

Elderly people mostly see things as black and white, wrong, or right and bad or good; there is nothing in-between. T4 emphasizes that as elderly people, they have a certain way of thinking

about issues. He says they do not have a problem with SSI, but they need to understand what they are dealing with as traditional leaders. The problem is that with this community, it is difficult to understand what one is dealing with because some of these individuals go through several sexual identities to find out who they are. The adolescent stage is a stage where they discover their identity and thus some of them are involved in sex early in life. At times, the bisexual identity is labeled or associated with promiscuity, participants from SSC and heterosexual communities do not view bisexuality as a valid sexual identity, as seen below:

They realised after they have had children and they say they are bisexual; this is confusing, I do not understand how a person can date both men and women (T4).

Another participant from the SS community states:

This thing, bisexuality, how does it happen that a person could be both male and female. That means that they sleep with a man today and then sleep with a woman the next day that is why most people do not understand us; this is confusion. You know why these people do this, it is because of promiscuity, no, no it is just promiscuity (T7).

This means both communities do not view this identity as an acceptable sexual identity, they both seem to disagree with the idea that one should not move between two identities; one needs to choose. However, bisexuality can start as something which is not intended and they might not call themselves bisexuals, but people who merely live a bisexual life. Some women and men are known to be heterosexual and have children and families, but have same-sex partners (Daly, King, and Yeadon-Lee, 2018:262). Even if the community disapproves of these identities, there are many hidden relationships documented since the 1800s, where heterosexual males preferred male partners. They did not have to identify themselves as bisexual thus theorists in the field of gender and sexuality came up with another identity known as WSW [women who have sex with women] and MSM [Men who have sex with men] (Ryan, 2009: 110). For some, this is a temporary lifestyle and does not require labeling. On the other hand, some begin as heterosexuals but are afraid to come out about their feelings and so they end up in both communities. Either way, most SSI start with a bisexual identity and eventually find their identity after some experience. To decide to finally choose and confirm one's identity comes with maturity, experience, and challenges were noted when participants shared their experiences of how they came to know about themselves and how

they confirmed their real identity. It also proved that one cannot choose to go through such painful experiences just to prove people wrong and it seems that their lives are a continuous struggle.

## **Conclusion**

Nonetheless, the dress code plays an important role in the lives of SSI who are transmen. As a result of the dress code, the recognition of SSI has indeed begun. Whether it is a nonverbal or a verbal conversation, people are talking about SSP. When a trans-woman passes through the crowd, people gossip and talk amongst themselves, others turn their heads in confusion trying to figure out whether this is a male or female. SSI are aware that their dress code makes people talk and they call themselves “celebrities”. In other words, we can say that the dress code is breaking the silence on SSI in indigenous communities.

It seems the process of self-discovery in the same sex is a long and challenging journey. Trying to understand different sexualities is a complex issue, what seems to be a solution for some cannot be used as a universal solution. There are many crises these individuals are confronted with, although scholars have explored most of them, they have not concluded.

The women in the interviews are mostly transmen but their lives and decisions are vastly different. They want to be recognised as males but to what extent also differs. The fact that they feel like men does not mean that they are men, some acknowledge this, but some do not, and they would do whatever it takes to be recognised as males. Whereas in indigenous communities there is no space to explore or to find themselves. There are strict rules on sexuality, and this is carefully monitored by cultural traditions. Compromising their sexuality and placing their families first is onerous, as their parents would never understand since sexuality is a personal matter and experience.

## CHAPTER 8

### *Ubutabane* in rural communities

#### 8.1 Introduction

The titular term *Ubutabane* refers to the life or lifestyle of SSI indicating a life that is different from that of a heterosexual. Part of this study attempted to demonstrate the logic behind the denial of same-sex practices in African communities, especially in rural settings. Firstly, the fact that the debate originated in Western institutions led to the notion that it could not be Africanised. However, many researchers, including African researchers, have proved that same-sex sexuality does exist in African communities (O'Mara, 2013: 163). The study by Mkasi (2013) reveals that the practice itself is African but the SS discourses in its current state are not African. Furthermore, language impacts how existing concepts have been developed; ongoing discourses are not in African indigenous languages but foreign languages. Secondly, this study shows that denial or silence is a strategy to protect society from spreading knowledge on abnormal behaviour because behaviour deemed as unknown or antisocial often becomes the norm. To prevent this situation from spreading, the community keeps individuals who are known to have ambiguous gender or sexualities, a secret. These individuals are hidden from society, which implies they are known but rendered invisible (Tamale, 2011:12). In Chapter 6, a participant argues that the secrecy about ambiguous sexualities was not seen as something negative but was a way of protecting the individual and their family, by keeping it a private matter.

This suggests that traditional communities preferred to be silent on matters that are not known or show signs of abnormalities. However, in the African context when discussing ambiguous sexualities, the first thought that comes to mind is hermaphrodite or *Uncukumbili* (Reisenberger, 1993 451). Therefore, if researchers intend to learn from the elders about SSI, one must adopt this line of thought, that a hermaphrodite is part of the SS community. This approach works in favour of a researcher, who is not perceived as someone who comes into the community with new ideas. Even if the community is aware of other ambiguous sexualities in the community, they do not talk about it. As the researchers are empowered to analyse the data, they should explain to the community that it is not their intention to disrespect African institutions but to develop knowledge in that area. Thus Chilisa (2012: 1)

reminds Africans who work within indigenous communities to adopt an indigenous framework methodology in their research.

The researcher understands that Western discourses on the same-sexualities do not include hermaphrodites, as they are not classified under the LGBTIQ+ group, but in African indigenous discourses, they are assumed to be part of that group. From an African perspective, when a person has different sex organs, it means that the individual has a sexuality problem. Moreover, one's sexuality is determined according to one's biological attributes rather than one's gender. Contemporary discourse on sexuality is complex and requires formal education as it is conceptualised in such knowledge. Developing discourses from the grassroots level will provide an opportunity to initiate indigenous same-sex discourses in rural communities. From an African understanding of SSI, there is the assumption that hermaphrodites fall into the SSI category, particularly the transman group as revealed by T4 in Chapters 6 and 7. The participant referred to SSI and *oncukumbili* as if they were the same people.

## **8.2 The invisible SSI**

The argument of whether a same-sex individual exists in the African community is not new, there is enough literature, as mentioned in the previous chapters. Authors such as Ruth Morgan, Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, Amanda Gause, Gunkel, Henriette, Thabo Msibi, and others have shown that same-sex practices are indigenous in African societies. The work of Nkabinde and Morgan demonstrates that the African traditional religion recognises ambiguous sexual identities through spirit possession. Mkasi (2013) also reveals reasons why SS practice is denied in African communities even though traditional healers confirm that it exists. Since this study is based on the results of a previous study by Mkasi (see Problem statement in 1.2) it continued to seek reasons for the denial of SSP from the public in the rural areas. This study reveals that there are several reasons why people in indigenous communities deny different sexualities. The social structure of indigenous communities excludes SSI since they have nothing to contribute to society, and their lifestyle undermines the cultural beliefs on gender and sexuality. This is perceived to violate the 'norms' of society which are based on sexual relationships that promote the continuity of life.

The rationale for same-sex denial is based on the fact that such relationships are sterile as these do not support reproduction, vital to the survival of humanity. The continuation of human existence is connected to nature so it should be an ongoing process and anything that threatens this process is not acceptable. Moreover, human reproduction is not only physical but also spiritual because it is associated with the Holy Trinity as espoused by Dr. N. Mthembu who is an African indigenous scholar at the University of South Africa. He maintains that the notion of a Holy Trinity did not originate in the Christian religion but from ancient Egyptian teachings (Mthembu, 2018:5). Mthembu states "*Lamandla empilo aziqu zintathu achazwa njengobaba, umama kanye nengane*" [this power is explained as the father, the mother, and a child]. According to Mthembu, this means intimacy between male and female is about the creation of human beings, thus if Africans promote the same-sexuality, the procreation process will become irrelevant.

The same point was further made by participant T4 who explained why he would name a girl child, uZibuyile. The name pre-empts the future of the child as this name is meant to fulfil the desires of her father (Chapter 6). If Zibuyile marries she will be able to bring back the cows that were paid for her mother, at the same time she will be contributing to the circle of life by having children. This continuation of life stops within the same-sexualities because there is no procreation. Although there are other methods of having children, these are unnatural and they do not follow the Trinity, therefore they are impure. The trinity that Mthembu is referring to is different from the Christian Trinity; it is an Egyptian indigenous trinity showing how African indigenous people of ancient Egypt viewed procreation and issues of spirituality (Mthembu, 2018: 5). Secondly, maintaining secrecy in traditional communities was a strategy used to avoid addressing complex issues such as SSP. Although secrecy was a way of protecting SSI from discrimination and protecting the family from the shame of having a child with this so-called abnormality, it seems that maintaining order and stability was and still is more important than an individual's identity. However, that does not mean that the individual's needs are not recognised in traditional societies, but they should be following the communal wellbeing (Magubane, 2016).

Thirdly, the study reveals that indigenous communities deny SS practice because it is discussed out of context. When participants discuss homosexuality or LGBTIQ+ issues, they do not focus on people's sexual identity but on the challenges that it presents. SS identity

goes hand in hand with sexual rights, freedom, and the imposition of Western sexual practice on Africans. This is how western literature has framed the discourse and elders view it as such, as every debate on this issue begins with rights rather than the individual. Even though sexual orientation forms part of identity, this part of the issue is not the focus in indigenous discourses because the proclaimers of rights want to demonstrate that SSI are oppressed. This approach leads to elders refusing to entertain anything that has to do with the rights of these individuals because they feel that it often undermines the principle of respect. The challenge of African adherents to western laws is that it conflicts with traditional laws; what is deemed as injustice in the West is deemed a way of life in Africa. Cobbah (1987: 328) argues that 'Even if there are injustices of many types in traditional societies, it is not necessary to turn all people into westerners.

Post democratic public discourses on SS practice pose a threat to the traditionalists who believe that sexual issues belong in the private space. After centuries of heterosexuality, they are confronted with a complex debate of homosexuality. Government structures recognise homosexual life which calls for every community leader to rethink issues of gender and sexuality. To worsen the situation, the discourse is presented in Western language and framed in Western culture. Without an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the issue, they are labelled as being homophobic and accused of being gender discriminative. Traditionalists have been accused by LGBTIQ+ activists and Human Rights supporters that they were being oppressive and wanted to control women's sexuality. Having no chance of defending their worldview, they have been silenced by those who speak for SSIs. Unfortunately, this approach has created animosity between the heterosexual and homosexual community because it appears to be an attack on culture (Abelove, Barale, and Halperin, 1993: 228).

To African leaders and traditionalists in general, homosexual discourses are perpetuated by the Western approach to gender, sex, and sexualities, which contradict the African worldview. After many years of SS discourse the country is expected to have come to terms with the issue, thus the discourses have moved on to issues of acceptance. It is unrealistic to expect people to discuss acceptance when the issue is approached from a non- African context. Imposing acceptance in an unstable situation is inviting trouble and resistance.

Western discourses have advanced on the issues of homosexuality and have even gone as far as influencing policies. The level on which the West has progressed on SS discourse surpasses that of the African community; whereas, matters should start with the community and should progress gradually to Universities or Parliament. Firstly, traditional leaders would have to acknowledge the existence of SSI in their communities and then begin to discuss their position in the community, rather than being recognised at a government level first. While South African Constitutional laws protect SSI, they cannot force the community to accept them and make them part of the community. People may tolerate them, pretend to be accommodative because they are forced to live with them, but the outcome of the enforced law is demonstrated in reports of sexual violence in the media.

The murder of Lerato Moloi is a case in point. Moloi was raped and killed by her friends in Naledi in 2017. Mafokwane writes that “LGBTIQ+ rights activities Zandile Motsoeneng said she believed Lerato’s murder was a hate crime” (Mafokwane, 2017). The victims have become statistics because of the killings that often occur in South African townships. Women and men are being killed because of their sexual identity despite many years of democracy and numerous debates, seminars, and workshops on same-sex relationships. This shows that these discourses are taking place at levels not accessible to the communities. The fact that there are born with a third gender has not sunk into the minds of the people. Even if they know of ambiguous sexualities, the way it is introduced is seen as undermining African beliefs on sex and sexualities, what is private and what is public. Therefore, this means there is a missing link in these discourses which is exactly the reason for this research.

Moreover, it is not only the public that is affected by the imposition of SS-related policies (SA Constitution, 1996: 2(9) (3) but State institutions such as schools, the Police, and the Churches are also affected. Government policies on same-sex rights are imposed on these sectors without a proper introduction to the subject. The Police Service is also struggling to deal with SS rape cases because they are not equipped to deal with such cases. They need to differentiate between rape and the so-called corrective rape, as there are times where they need professionals in the field of the same-sexuality to assist. It seems that protecting the rights of SS individuals is adding more work to the policing of communities as they do not have qualified staff to deal with SS matters. Nevertheless, everyone is expected to respect and

implement the law and should protect and acknowledge the existence of SSI. The section below will explore whether religious institutions such as the Church has accepted SSI.

### **8.3 Spirituality and *ubutabane***

Amongst the numerous religious beliefs in South Africa, Christianity still has many followers amongst Africans. The next popular religions which were assumed to be non-existent is the African indigenous religion(s), which differ in beliefs from that of the Christian religion. These two religions also differ on the issue of SS practice, although initially, they both shared a common approach on the matter of homosexuality in Africa. While the condemnation of SS practices is based on the notion that the practice is demonic and sinful, African traditionalists argue that it is un-African and unnatural (Mkasi 2013, 41). The denial of same-sex practices by traditional leaders is based on Christian beliefs and not on issues of sex and sexualities. When the debate on homosexuality intensified between 2000 and 2005, debates against same-sex sexuality were led by Christian faith-based organisations, and the denial of such practice was influenced by Christian teachings. However, later it was revealed that African traditional religion accommodated ambiguous genders and sexualities and related it to spirit possession (Nkabinde 2009 and Mkasi 2013). While traditionalists begin to agree that same-sex practice was indigenous in Africa, Christians still denounce it, but some Churches accommodated SSI, as long as they did not openly discuss it. This is noted by Collins when he states “it is all right for you to be here, just do not say anything, just play your little role. You can be in the choir; you can sit on the piano bench, but do not say you are gay” (Collins, 2005: 206). The section below will briefly discuss the position of same-sex individuals in African Christian communities today, and whether they still have to be secretive about their sexual status.

#### **8.3.1 The position of the Church on *ubutabane***

In South Africa, the Church has held many debates on homosexuality with very little progress, until recently. The Church has in the past been divided on the matter, even in churches where there was the acceptance of homosexuality, there are those who reject it, and many Churches do not seem to agree on how to address the issue. On the one hand, the Church must comply with the South African Constitution which explicitly states no one should be discriminated against based on their sexuality. However, the prejudice is supported using Scripture quoted from the Bible and this practice promotes homophobic attitudes.

Furthermore, the Church does not function independently, as it is also part of the community, so the people who are denying the existence of same-sex sexuality in the Church are part of the larger community, both rural and urban. The Church and the community in general strongly believe in procreation and patriarchy. The story used to support SSI discrimination is the creation story, found in Genesis, in which the first two people, Adam and Eve, are created in the image of God. On the other hand, some traditionalists believe that children form the foundation of African families. According to Mkasi (2012: 16)

Same-sexualities denunciation is related to the challenge it presents to patriarchal power and the inability to procreate to continue the family name, it challenges the traditional African-cultural order of patriarchy, power, and procreation.

Both communities share common values when it comes to the continuation of life, and if SSI cannot produce offspring, they are not fulfilling the will of God, which requires man to be 'fruitful and multiply' (Kügler et al., 2010: 182).

Most SSI who took part in this study grew up in Christian homes and they are aware of the Christian teaching on same-sex practice. Thus, some have chosen to leave their family Church and join the so-called LGBTIQ+ friendly Churches. These individuals are being ousted by the Church because they are engaging in sinful acts; they are being judged by members of the Church, not God. The Scripture that is used as the ultimate truth about love and peace is also used to exclude and discriminate against people, even though the same Scripture says, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1-5). To avoid discrimination and name-calling, most SSI leave their home Churches. Only one participant, T5 resisted prejudice and decided to stay and fight within the so-called 'straight' Church. She remained in the Methodist Church, although it is not easy for a transman to commit to fellowship in a heterosexual community.

She is aware that to remain in the Church will be a continuous struggle because she will always be treated as the 'Other' even if she is accepted as one of them (Rothmann and Simmonds, 2015: 120). As a member of the Church, the Board is still negotiating her identity and what she is supposed to wear when she comes to Church. She wants to be part of the Young Men's Guild known as *udodana* which is a Methodist men's group. This is not decided yet but even if the Church agrees that she becomes part of *udodana*, the question is, will she ever be

accepted by the other men. She may well have to deal with abuse from the members of the Church because she is different. What will determine her acceptance is how much she is willing to give up on her identity to be fully accepted. Wood and Conley (2014: 97) argue that LGBTIQ+ individuals deny their sexual identity to perform effectively in and feel accepted by their religion.

In African communities, the issue of acceptance is still being questioned because SS practice is not accepted even if the acknowledgment of questionable sexual identities exists. It is further noted that identities such as gay as in male to male relationships and lesbian female to female relationships are treated differently from transmen. Transmen are seen as taking the men's positions or roles. Gays and lesbians are tolerated in their home Churches compared to transmen, at least they are not completely rejected; even if they are constantly mocked by their friends and other church members, they can at least continue to be part of the Church. There are a few local Churches where SSI and LGBTIQ+ people are free to join fellowships, such as the Zion Church. The reason why the above-mentioned SSIs are accommodated is probably because of the dress code; their dress code does not challenge patriarchy in the Church. Gay men would not wear woman's clothing and a lesbian would not wear men's clothing. Whereas, transmen want to come to Church dressed like men, as has been highlighted above by T5. The Church has become dependent on the dress code to differentiate men from women, gender roles are marked in association with the dress code so anything that brings confusion to this organised structure is rejected. Transmen are therefore seen to pose a serious challenge to the Church. It seems that the contemporary Church tends to be more patriarchal than the early Church because even the Scriptures that refer to ambiguous identities are not mentioned. Irrespective of the Church's stance towards homosexuality, there is evidence that same-sex identities existed and were recognised in early Christianity.

### **8.3.2 The position of African traditional religion**

While contemporary African Churches in African communities often denounce the same-sexualities, African traditional religion is more tolerant. Various scholars have researched African homosexuality, same-sex practice, or *ubutabane* and the results of these studies prove that the practice is known (Nkabinde, 2009; Mkasi, 2013; Morgan, 2005). The difference with traditional religion is that same-sex practice is ignored rather than discussed because it is a

taboo subject. However, in the study by Mkasi (2013: 17), it seems the issue is more acceptable in the traditional healing context, known as *ubungoma* or traditional healing practice. In this space, people of ambiguous sexual identities are visible and open about it. Even though the rest of the community is not part of this space, this space belongs to traditional healers. Often, *izangoma* understand that there is an ambiguous gender identity within *ubungoma*, there are those who practice SS and those who do not. However, those who practice can talk about it in these spaces without shame and those who do not practice do not take it seriously and they do not discuss matters related to *ubungoma* outside the *izangoma* space (Mkasi 2013). Mkasi and Nkabinde confirm that the lack of interest in a heterosexual relationship may be due to opposite spirits but that does not imply that all those who are possessed by the opposite spirit will be involved in SS practice.

In other cases, a female *Sangoma* with a male spirit would be requested to take a wife and the *isangoma* will have to marry that woman on behalf of the male ancestor (Mkasi, 2013: 12). This is common in African communities and is not an issue as the sexual life of the two women is not important. The relationship may or may not include sexual aspects but what is important is that the wife becomes part of the family (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2006: 67). It is not easy to understand the ways of the ancestors, they often have their agenda as to why a particular woman came to be part of the family. The question of whether the two women would be sexually involved or not depends on the reason behind the marriage, but there are two possibilities. The first reason may be that the *isangoma* has questionable sexuality and she finds herself in a context where it is possible to be with another woman and she would pretend as if the ancestors are responsible for her behaviour. In this case, these two women could be sexually involved. The relationship will focus on the physical rather than the spiritual needs. Whereas, the second reason is when a woman is compelled by the ancestors to take a wife; what is important in this relationship, is the spiritual needs where the wife will be of assistance to the *sangoma's* healing practice. Over the past ten years, there has been a rise in same-sex practices amongst *izangoma*, prompted by the Human Rights approach to the issue. Often, *izangoma* who openly talk about the same-sexuality are the young male *izangoma*. In 2003, a lesbian identifying *Sangoma*, the late Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, (who later came out as a transgender man) was invited to a TV talk show (<https://youtube.be/CUBEq1c4sjc>, 03 March 2003). The fact that traditional healers

understand that serious reasons exist why one would be involved in same-sex practices gives a different perspective on same-sex practice.

Besides the view of *izangoma* on this issue, chiefs and traditional communities share their knowledge on same-sex identities. Using an African indigenous approach in researching sexual issues could broaden the field of African indigenous religions, particularly if elderly people in the community begin to engage in these issues. African rituals had an important role to play in the lives of African people, such as shaping the behaviour of an individual, others were specifically for sexual behaviour. This is noted in chapter 6 where two participants mentioned that in African indigenous communities, same-sex behaviour was detected at an early age and there were rituals conducted for such behaviour. Nonetheless, as studies proved that some of these individuals were born with this identity, after democracy we witnessed an increase in the number of people who identified with the same-sexuality. The numbers increased because more SSI decided to come out and there was more visibility than before. The other reason could be related to sexual freedom and sexual preferences. Rejection of indigenous teachings and ways of child upbringing has left Africans to depend on western ways of bringing up a child. African people follow an independent lifestyle and are gradually moving away from traditional ways of living.

The difference between the views held by the Church and African traditional religions on same-sex practices are that the church structure has the power to control what is happening in the organisation. They have the power to control the structures where the members of the Church meet, so they have a right to dictate who may or who may not come to the Church, whereas in traditional healing spaces there are no organised structures. Each *Sangoma* does the healing practice in their own space, participates in ceremonies willingly and people often do not become involved in the personal life of the *Sangoma* but focus on aspects of the healing practice.

## **8.4 Learning institutions and *ubutabane***

### **8.4.1 *Ubutabane* in schools**

Schools serve as the most important social structures of society and play a significant role in shaping the future of every individual in a democratic South Africa. The school plays a major role in helping one decide and plan one's future to make informed decisions in life. After the

democratisation of South Africa, new policies were implemented which brought tremendous change to the running of the schools. The co-operative model was introduced in schools after centuries of Christian education, to accommodate children from various religious backgrounds. This was to correct the erstwhile Apartheid government's policies. Mason, (2017: 7) states that "During the apartheid era, Christian education had been interpreted along lines that entrenched white rule. The religious model used by Christian National Education was theocratic because Christian theology was imposed on government policy and institutions". This was to ensure that all government structures supported colonial objectives (2019: 8). Mosweunyane (2013: 54) states "The superimposition of colonial values on the African continent changed the lifestyle of Africans in many ways, which meant changes also in those things that Africans had to learn". To reverse this process, the South African Constitution needed to entail sections such as the Bill of Rights to allow for the inclusivity of others, especially those who have been previously disadvantaged by the Colonial government.

The Bill of Rights also added another challenge for schools and teachers; they were introduced to a new homosexual identity. This meant that they had to acknowledge that there were other genders to consider apart from the male and female genders. This came as a huge challenge for previously Christianised schools because the Church was traditionally strictly heterosexual, and many South African teachers were from a Christian background, and schools were expected to respect same-sex rights. Even though schools are mainly for teaching and learning they cannot ignore issues of identity, especially now that there is a law that protects this.

Today, many teachers are still not well informed on gender issues in the teaching space and they must learn to deal with them as they deal with children's attitudes daily. Already, children come to school with different challenges from home and teachers must find a way to assist and give learners emotional support. Dealing with a child with a sexual identity crisis is another responsibility; such children often have poor self-esteem and experience victimisation. Research carried out in 2003 (Truman, Langton & Planty, 2012 2) on the finding of hate crimes, highlight the type of victimisation that occurs in schools as follows:

- The main source of victimisation was the pupils.

- Victimization by teachers was more prevalent among black pupils.
- Victimization by principals was low except in the case of black females.

These individuals are aware that they might be victims of abuse and where they may find themselves is not safe, as revealed by the results. They are not receiving the support they need from people who are close to them, except the Government. Thus, it is a problem to expect teachers to react differently from the rest of the community.

#### **8.4.2 Struggles of teachers regarding same-sexualities in schools**

This research shows that teachers do not know how to deal with the issue of the same-sexualities. They find themselves caught in-between two responsibilities, that of being both a teacher and counsellor, as they must deal with children who often do not even understand themselves. The stress encountered by both the teachers and the pupils can sometimes destabilise the learning environment. On the one hand, there is the Bill of Rights that teachers need to adhere to and on the other hand, they have their own cultural beliefs on sex and sexualities which are framed by heteronormativity.

Secondary school teachers are the ones who should be skilled to deal with various sexual identities and behaviour because they are often faced with the problems of teenagers. This is the age where children start to explore and experiment with their bodies. Parents cannot closely observe their children because they spend most of their time at work and teachers spend more time with the children. They are the first to identify and witness behavioural changes in children. The issue of same-sexualities is still a taboo subject that needs some sensitivity, but many still regard homosexuality as an abomination and something outside the norm, also known as the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Kehinde, 2013: 80). Often, SSIs are easily identified because their behaviour is different from other children and they tend to be overly sensitive because they think the world is against them. Remarks, direct or indirect are quickly interpreted as an insult. Often the teachers are faced with a challenge that is beyond their capabilities because the parents of these children do not talk to their children about their sexual identity, so they are angry at the world because they perceive that they are not accepted. This means teachers are faced with angry individuals, just because they are not treated well at home. They come to school with a negative attitude, taking their frustrations out on other children, and ultimately requiring adult and professional intervention. Instead of focusing on teaching and learning, teachers may find themselves spending time dealing

with mischievous children in the roles of social workers, nurses, and so forth. Regardless, the issue of gender and same-sexuality is a reality and it is spreading in schools, thus teachers must acquire knowledge on the subject to deal with the issues with confidence. While they are forced to comply with the laws that govern the schools, they should at least be prepared and be provided with information.

Even if some teachers are willing to assist SS children, the problem is compounded by the skepticism regarding the notion of homosexuality, because one is never sure whether the problem arises from sexual orientation or sexual freedom. It is not easy for them to differentiate between myth and reality, which begs the question of whether these people merely find same-sex practice stylish enough to want to try it. This is where teachers feel that it is their responsibility to protect other children who are not into SSP. In the end, there is the fear that other children may copy this behaviour. Participant (T11) who was attending to a case of a 12-year-old girl who was accused of touching other girls sexually, expresses her view on this issue:

This thing has an impact on children who are living close to homosexual people, if you talk to them you will discover that there is a neighbour or a family member who is homosexual but only to find that they were not born that way but it was a learned habit.

The teacher (T11) highlights an important point that is often denied by the proponents of Human Rights and LGBTIQ+ organisations. They refute the notion that SS practices are learned behaviour, as the emphasis is placed on the natural aspect, whereas it may be a learned behaviour; some SSI saw this copied it. It is easy for the children to copy tendencies from other children as they always want to try new trends.

Furthermore, the home environment could be another contributory factor, when female children are left unattended in the care of men, they tend to have boyish tendencies. They may end up thinking that dating women is the right thing to do because it is what they see every day. Moreover, in this environment, a child is more likely to be a victim of rape or sexual harassment (Harris, 2010: 152). Often children who grow up in these circumstances tend to seek ways of protecting themselves, empowering themselves would mean being male. Since men are perceived to be strong and powerful, a girl child who feels vulnerable around men would want to identify with males. This is also confirmed by Ryan who states “gender is seen

as “fake” or as derivative (Ryan, 2009: 28). When amongst other children, SS children tend to be withdrawn and distance themselves from others. Their gender ambiguity makes them feel different and therefore they end up being excluded and isolated. However, discrimination of SSI is not always based on how others perceive them, but sometimes it is how they feel about themselves; they feel ashamed and assume that they do not fit into the community. As a result, they often spend more time in their groups and not socialising.

There has been a recent attempt to introduce books on homosexuality to secondary schools, one being *Bengithi Lizokuna* by G.N Sibiya. However, the information provided in the school curriculum is insufficient to give a broad picture of sexual orientation or homosexuality, as literature used for teaching and learning is still at an introductory level. At the secondary level learners should have a good understanding of gender, sexualities, and homosexuality because when they attend university, which is a more liberated space; they are free to do what they want without being monitored. The high school curriculum should entail content that prepares them for the future. Participant NTP19 MT, a Church leader of the LGBTIQ+ Church who is also a high school teacher, shared her views on the issue of educating learners on gender issues in that, very little has been done regarding homosexuality:

I think there is a great gap present in the curriculum on homosexuality and there is a lot of children who are ignorant of homosexuality and that is why there is a lot of them at the University. For instance, there was a child I have taught at high school and I saw the signs that she is a lesbian, but it was hidden. It could not be discussed because they are not taught about it at school. She started showing at a University, she is not a complete butch. That means our curriculum does not cover it at all, there is too little information but also during LO periods and in other literature. There is one piece of literature called "*Bengithi lizokuna*" a boy who changed his sexuality. That's the only book where children started to know about this, and it is at a matric level. This information has been taught for the past 6, 7 years but it is very little. In the curriculum, maybe it is 5%, we do need to be taught about this life. We cannot talk about it because it is not part of the curriculum. There is a need to add more information in the curriculum, children need to know about this. I think if this information starts from school it will be easy to educate the whole community. We do see that it is there on the TV, but we need it to come to schools as well and there should be more books that talk about homosexual life. I think that will help us a lot (NTP19).

This discussion shows what needs to be done in schools to create awareness on this topic. Homophobia is very real, and children may copy homosexual behaviour without understanding the impact it will have on their lives. Silence is not a solution and it is dangerous for children to learn by experimenting.

The experiences of teachers have been highlighted above and unfortunately, some high schools are in the same position, they also have limited knowledge on the issue. High school teachers have more to deal with when it comes to children with an identity crisis but if the subject becomes part of the school curriculum it will ease the burden on the teachers. On the one hand, the Government is imposing policies of the same-sexualities on teachers while they do not have a curriculum in place that exposes children to such information.

The complexity of the same-sexuality in a democratic society is that the society consists of two generations who are at opposite ends when it comes to this issue. The youth is more excited about the rights that give them opportunities to same-sex relationships while the older generation does not want to see the same-sexualities practiced publicly. There is work done on LGBTIQ+ in schools, but in most cases, the focus is on the rights of the SSI and not the school community. Some teachers are from the older generation and without proper information, their views may infringe on the rights of scholars who may want to freely exercise their sexual rights. Francis confirms this by stating that some of the teachers find it difficult to talk about homosexuality, but they refer to it as 'it', which belittles homosexuality into an object. Francis reports that most teachers struggle to articulate the terms 'gay,' 'lesbian', 'bisexual' or 'homosexual', preferring to use the neutral term 'it' to refer to homosexuality and bisexuality (Francis, 2012:7). This is a tendency in most African communities as shown also in this study.

Since the study looks at democratic society and the rural women in rural communities, two different perspectives arise. The experiences of contemporary SSI who are mostly the youth between the ages of twenty-five to thirty-five, while on the other hand there are SSI who live in a democratic society but prefer to live a traditional lifestyle. These individuals often range from the age of thirty-six to sixty years of age, and these two groups do not share the same views. As much as they appreciate same-sex rights, they do not want to disrespect their African traditions; these SSI find themselves trapped between traditions and democracy.

## 8.5 Locating SSI in rural communities

Rural lifestyle has its demands, as people who settle in these areas are expected to respect traditional laws that are entrenched in patriarchy. The type of patriarchy that supports and respects people's rights is described by western scholars. African SSIs are aware that whatever they claim to be or want to be called, should be within the frame of the indigenous way of doing things. Mbiti (1969: 205) also emphasises that in traditional communities there are

Many laws, customs, set forms of behaviour, regulations, rules, observances, and taboos constituting the moral code and ethics of a given community or society. Any breach of this code of behaviour is considered evil, wrong, or bad, for it is an injury or destruction to the accepted social order and peace.

Mbiti illustrates how African culture interprets the norms and values of society; one must live according to regulations as highlighted above. In this society, gender distinction is clearly defined as male and female. These roles are allocated through traditional gender ceremonies and rites of passage to ensure that everyone understands which gender one belongs to. Community gatherings such as celebrations and festivals are also designed to accommodate heterosexual relationships. Thus some SSIs give up their sexual identity to conform to traditional life, the life that is acceptable instead of living an isolated life.

After 1994 some SSI took the opportunity to make themselves known and visible, now they can live their lives openly. With the help from organisations such as gender commission and Human Rights activists, more African SSIs are coming out. Nonetheless, that does not change the views of the community about same-sex relationships, as the traditional society still believes in heterosexual relationships. Shortly after the legalisation of same-sex marriages (SA Constitution, 1996: 2(9)), young people started coming out and demanding to be accepted, but they did not understand how these demands would impact their relationships with their families, and due to this attitude some of them lost their homes and families. Today there are many homeless SSI, who have become involved in drug abuse, prostitution, and other criminal activities. The majority in this crisis is the youth who approached democratic homosexuality with excitement, influenced by those who transferred LGBTIQ+ knowledge

without examining the local context. They have imposed rights on other people's homes and have not thought of the consequences (Abramovich, 2016:90).

Most middle-aged SSIs have been sensitive about living an open life but have tried to demonstrate to society that they are different. They use respectful ways to address their identity, they resort to clues such as the dress code, as indicated in Chapter 5. African communities do not support the culture of openly discussing sex and sexuality, and the SS community thus uses the dress code to communicate their status. They choose to use a respectful approach of being non-verbal but at the same time, they are not silent about their sexuality. Rather than getting into an argument with elders, they choose to demonstrate who they are. Their actions speak louder than words, as they say, "Due to respect I am not going to argue but I will show you who I am". The action may be interpreted as being rude but this is normal within traditional families; parents do not permit everything but when there is persistence, then they work around it to find a solution.

This middle-aged group chooses to use a different approach to address the same-sexualities with parents while the youth tends to be aggressive. This is due to the youth belonging to the new generation, they live a liberal life compared to the older SSI who seem to identify with the position of the parents. Parents belong to an earlier generation that is more conservative and want things to be done in a way, which contradicts democratic popular culture, and this leads to the polarisation of the two generations, yet they both need each other. In the case where the youth decides not to conform to the expectations of their parents, that is perceived as being disrespectful. On the other hand, democracy is in favour of the youth more than it is for the older generation or the parents. The democratic society has a tendency to publicise issues of sexualities which is taboo to the old generation, and the situation worsens when the taboo becomes the norm and parents lose authority on what is right or wrong. To make things even more complicated for the parents is that sexual identity is self-identified sexuality and even the SSIs go through a process of finding the self (Rosario et al. 2006:2). It is even worse for parents who are never sure of whether their child is under the influence of peer pressure or not. The only thing that is clear to them is the biological sex of the child, that which is visible in the body, that is natural and it's God's creation. Parents have no way of understanding the bodies of their children thus they reject homosexual identities.

However, the rejection of same-sex identities is not much framed in African traditional religion but in Christian religion. The problem with the two religions is that they differ vastly; what is perceived as wrong in one religion, is not in the other. While most Africans are trapped in between religions it is difficult to convince the youth of today why same-sex is wrong when it is practiced in traditional religion. The problem with religious beliefs is that some can be toxic and have destroyed many families. Sakuba refers to fundamentalist tendencies and fundamentalism, he explains fundamentalist tendencies where parents go out of their way to make sure that their children do not deviate from the truth of what is wrong or right. Sakuba maintains that these parents believe in their views to the extent that they would rather lose their children; he states "here you are looking at people who have gone to the extremes of disowning their children and their families on the basis that they have gone against the truth. You are also looking at people who in some cases have gone as far as to repeatedly abuse their children and spouses for the sake of the truth" (Sakuba, 2008: 392). This is exactly what happens to SSI families of origin. It is noted that most SSIs are renting in town or in the township, very few stay with their parents because they are constantly reminded about how wrong it is to be who they are.

Sakuba stresses family feuds as follows:

In a worse scenario, families break. Brothers become worse enemies. Remember there will always be more liberals who are seen as embodiments of evil. This is a group that includes those who are seen to have brought shame and disgrace to their clans and their communities. Have you ever wondered why youngsters exile themselves in big cities and only return home after certain people have died? Now you know (2008:392).

The reason why SSIs in rural communities do not want to ruin their relationships with their families is that they do not want to permanently live in urban areas. They want to return to their homelands in the future, they want to get married, have children and settle down in rural communities. To obtain the views of traditional leaders on the issues of whether SSI could be given land to stay with their families in rural communities, two participants agreed that they could. However, one of them expressed the view about how they behave in the community; he complained that SSIs return to the community to show off their sexuality, rather than being part of the community, as stated in Chapter 6. This statement implies that the traditional leader is concern about their children, that should the children be exposed to

this kind of life, they would copy it and practice it. Another interpretation is that SSIs do not behave in a manner that would make them acceptable; there is no need to tell the world who they are and should live their life with respect knowing that they live with other people who live a different life.

It seems that traditional leaders do not have a problem with SS identity as such but find their behaviour problematic. T4 mentions that most problems start when they allow outsiders to stay in the village. Strangers in the community often tend to be a problem. This makes sense because an SSI who resides in her village is known by the local people and the traditional leaders know her family. The members of the community know that she is different from other girls, therefore her identity is not new to the community. This is demonstrated in the case of T5 in Chapter 6, who did not have a problem when seeking land from her Chief. Her community understands that she is not a "normal girl". The study reveals that those individuals who did not attempt to conceal their identity from the beginning have been able to fight from within as opposed to those who leave their communities and seek refuge in other villages. On many occasions, those who relocate often experience discrimination as they are not known by the locals. When one relocates to another township one can experience difficulties of being treated as an outsider. The relocation is assumed to be an attempt to start a new life, away from the known. This is also confirmed by Ngumi et al who states, "queer people have to move out of their heteronormative family homes to find safety and the comfort of home" (2015: 27).

Being away from home, away from the family and the people you know would mean that you are on your own. In this situation, one would need to find ways to survive and due to the demands of life, some of these individuals engage in criminal activities. It seems many transgender people find it difficult to live a normal life, have basic needs such as employment or housing. They are trapped in poverty, are homeless, and end up doing criminal activities (Harris, 2010: 154). Transmen are seen as disabled beings, the reason being that their chances of living a normal life are limited because of their gender identity. If they cannot work like other people, they need to find ways to survive and this means resorting to a government grant. Nonetheless, the South African Government is still not sure how to deal with this issue so this is a topic for another research (2010:179).

The fact that the leaders are being considerate is a good sign but what is unknown is how the community will react when more SSI enter rural communities. Only time will tell whether the community is ready to accommodate SSI and their problems. The problems will include a different culture, lifestyle, and a different kind of family, a family without a male figure, and families with children born from two women. The next section will discuss how these types of families fit into the structure of the traditional community.

### **8.6 Same-sex individuals and their own families**

Relocating to urban areas is what works for SSI who have revealed their status, especially those identifying as transmen. As explained above, they want to live in rural communities but their position in the traditional structures is not clear. The study indicates that SSI who are transmen would prefer to be recognised as males, some of them have opted to transition into complete males. The problem regarding this step is not knowing where these males should be placed in the traditional structures. They have been known to be women throughout their lives and now have developed male features due to hormonal treatment.

Some have developed beards, muscles and their voices have deepened (Harris, 2010: 160). Another problem is the reaction of heterosexual males towards these males. In traditional gatherings or meetings, it would pose problems in terms of where to be seated, their participation in the meeting, and would their participation be seen as meaningful. Participant T14 who is undergoing the process of transitioning mentioned that she is in the process of taking hormones that will help her to become a male. T14 maintains that this process is going to help her feel good about herself (Chapter 5 p 5).

In the African worldview, these women or men will never be accepted as real men, African males are very possessive of their space. They would not want to share that space with a 'woman' who has changed her sexuality into a male. In the eyes of these men, they will always be women despite their masculine bodies. After the surgery, they should be able to find their place in the community but it will not be easy if one goes through the process and remains in the same community, from a traditional community's view, they cannot be placed with women or with men because they do not fit either role. Accepting that they are different is probably the best way than trying to fit into the heterosexual community. Revealing the inner person would probably confuse people even more because they are no longer whom they use to be. One could probably agree with T5 in chapter 5, who explains that these individuals are

different, they are chosen people who were meant to live a different life. Wanting to live like heterosexual people is demanding much from the heterosexual community and themselves because they have to go through various medical procedures.

## **8.7 Transitioning into a male**

Deciding to transition into a male is a major step and a serious life-changing decision. Those who decide to take this step feel they are doing the right thing. What others think of their decision is less important than being in the right body. Participant T14 who is transitioning maintains that she has never been happy in her body, so the only option for her was to go through the medical treatment of taking hormones to be whom she wants to be. She believes that the transitioning is going to make her happy and she is going to be what she feels inside (T14). This is real for her but for the next person, it would seem like a selfish decision because she may be happy in the end, but the people around her will be affected. In the African worldview, changing your natural sex is viewed as a self-centred decision, which the rest of the community thinks is not important. While Africans believe in other people's opinions "the community is more important than is the individual who makes it" (Chuwa, 2014: 34).

Transitioning into a male means that one must undergo several medical procedures and it is not cheap (Harris, 2010: 160). Hormone therapy changes the individual completely in such that it increases their facial and body hair. The procedure is not reversible and is very painful (161). The family, parents, and other people who are close to these individuals go through the trauma of watching the person they knew disappear slowly in front of their eyes. This is perceived as a cure for confused bodies, but it is a western way of solving a problem that is more like a cut and paste process. Often such a solutions do not last and creates more problems in the long run. The problem is that the process is irreversible and some regret having gone through the process and want to reverse it (<https://youtu.be/OsPsKt-zW2U>, 16 2019 ( Accessed 17 January 2021) this video provides evidence where anonymous individuals regret having gone through the process.

### **8.7.1 Families of origins: Transitioning and acceptance**

SSI encounter many challenges in their journey of finding themselves, but they are not alone in their families of origin (parents of SSI). T 14 says they discover themselves every day, the

coming out is an ongoing process because they always come out about the new identities (T14). The process of transitioning is a life-changing experience. Firstly, the family assumes they have a girl child, who grows up and discovers that she is different. Later she informs the parents that she is a boy. The parents have no idea how to deal with such news. Often the new information is not in line with family rules but in line with Government policies which often negate family laws. Thus, even if parents are against transitioning, the laws of the country deem it acceptable (Act No 49 of 2003). In other words, this person has a right to be whom she wants to be, irrespective of what the parents think.

While parents struggle to deal with the news that their child is transitioning, they have no one to turn to. Firstly, discussing sex issues with a child is very difficult for parents, particularly same-sexuality. In many cases, family members would not be willing to discuss a taboo subject, and parents are left suffering alone in silence (Ndinda, et al., 2011: 4). In this case, everyone suffers because the changes would become obvious and the parents would be compelled to explain this to other members of the family. Although the Government has provided the Bill of Rights for SSI, there are no organised platforms on the subject for parents and families. Even if there are organisations that invite parents for discussions, they are situated in urban areas and individuals who work in these organisations discuss the issues from a western perspective. Discovering that a child is about to change her sexuality is very traumatic for the parents, as such news bring mixed feelings, confusion, anger and shame, and community perceptions being the ultimate problem (Rudwick, 2011: 103).

The parent's attitude towards a child who is transitioning would probably change. There is the possibility of a breakdown in communication because the child they knew no longer exists. Participant T14 said she will change her name and her ID. This means a child they used to know would disappear and someone else would be introduced to the family. In traditional families, this would mean, the ancestors would need to be told of what is happening, and they would need to perform a ritual. In the Zulu family, any life-changing development in one's life must be reported to the ancestors. This is demonstrated in the transition from childhood to adulthood, whereby the family ensures that they accommodate a change in the child's functional position and status (Nel, 2007: 147). In this context, parents must consider many options because this matter involves the elders, thus many parents find it difficult to easily accept their children's identity. However, some believe that they have been accepted, but the

transitioning individuals do not give parents much choice because being out in the open means that your parents are also out. Coming out is difficult for SSI but for the parents, it is even more difficult (Nell and Shapiro, 2011: 13).

Secondly, there are few challenges with the issue of coming out. Participant T14 is in a long-term relationship. Her girlfriend started dating her while she thought she was a lesbian. When she started dating her, she was fully aware that she was dating a woman and later she ends up with a transman who is now in the process of transitioning into a male. T14 has gone through several identities to discover her true identity, now that she is in the process of becoming a male. Throughout the journey of searching for her real identity, her girlfriend indirectly participates in this process. The parents had been part of the continuous search because they probably visit their parents during this period. As highlighted above, the challenge of SSI is that they come out several times because it takes a while for one to connect with whom one feels inside. Zimman states "coming out does not mean revealing a gender identity, but rather a particular kind of gender history characterised by the movement from one gender category to another" (2009: 54). This view provides a better understanding of coming out because when one claims to be a lesbian, people do not expect that they will change to other identities. In this case, the process of transitioning will show that T14 is no longer a lesbian, her physical appearance will change slowly until she looks like a man.

## **8.8 Children in SS Families**

### **8.8.1 Introduction**

In traditional African communities, children are the foundation of marriage. This also applies to African SS individuals. Most transmen want to have children, some have opted for adoption while others are opting for in-vitro fertilisation. The issue of children is very sensitive but SSIs do not consider their identity within same-sex families, the moment they are placed within these families, their identity is affected. Very few studies would reveal the status of children born to SSI, the study done by sociology Professor Paul Sullins was heavily criticised by the people. The title of the article is *Expression of Concern on "Invisible Victims: Delayed Onset of Depression among Adults with Same-sex Parents"*. The study revealed that at the age twenty-eight, the adults raised by same-sex parents were at over twice the risk of depression as persons raised by man-woman parents" (2016: 8). To prove Sullins wrong requires more

studies on this subject. It is not fair that the rights of adults are more important than children's rights. Often married couples think of themselves first and children come as an afterthought that completes the marriage.

### **8.8.2 Adoption of Children**

Adoption is the most preferred way of having children amongst the SSI. As much as adoption is another way of giving back to the community, for married couples it is more about fulfilling their marriage. Adoption comes with many responsibilities beside providing a home to someone in need (Nell and Shapiro, 2011: 46). When SS couples decide to have children, they should go through counselling that focuses on how the couple's identity will affect the child's identity. However, the counselling focuses on whether the couple would be able to provide for the child. Participant T2G2P1 has a daughter and she shared the process of adoption with the group. She mentioned that they do not discuss matters of sexuality but whether the couple will be able to take care of the child. However, there are SSI who think that having children would be a challenge. Participant T14 was asked for her opinion on SSI and adoption and having children and she responded as follows, "The concept of children is a very complex one and it is a very sensitive issue, it is one issue which I think the LGBTIQ+ community has never sat down and thought through, and how sensitive it is" (T14).

This is a sad truth; the only thing that SSIs think about is getting married and having children as in heterosexual communities; there seems to be a tendency to emulate the life of heterosexuals. It seems that, with regards to this issue, SS couples put themselves first, their needs, and what would make them happy. They build their world based on the principles of heterosexual culture; this is as if they want to normalise their lives. Some scholars present transmen as copies of heterosexual life. Ryan states that transmen "are cast as fakers who wish to further patriarchy by using their male privilege to take over women's spaces and identities" (2009:22).

SS marriages in South Africa are still a very new concept and the children brought up in these marriages are still young. This means these children are not old enough to see that their families are different from other families. There is a possibility that when these children grow up they may not be happy about the choices made for them, to be brought up by SSIs. While the glorified part of adoption is to give these children a better life, the children may have a

different view and this may result in resentment towards one's family, refer to Chapter Six in 6.6.2)

Many factors would reinforce this attitude such as peer pressure and members of the families who are against the relationship or adoption. The problem of SSI children has been highlighted above by Sullins. Besides experiences of being brought up by an SS parent, the view of what is family in African culture is another issue; adoption is the last resort when the couple cannot have children. The family will rather advise the couple to take one child from family members who have many children. T9 who happened to have an adopted granddaughter mentioned that she wants another granddaughter who has family blood. She is willing to seek medical help for her daughter-in-law to have a child of her own, she even considers in vitro-fertilisation (Chapter 6). T2G2P1's brother could be a sperm donor for her daughter-in-law. T9 is willing to turn to western methods just for her to have a biological granddaughter; a rural woman is prepared to settle for western help to have a granddaughter just because she wants a child that belongs to the family. T3G3P2 who is in a traditional council, refer to Chapter 6 in 6.6.2.

The issue does not end with issues of sanguinity, but it goes further to traditional values and beliefs, where ancestors play an important role in the life of a new member of the family. Africans strongly believe that the surname plays an important role in the lives of people, and the well-being of an individual depends on it. More importantly, it plays a crucial role in connecting a person with his or her ancestors so the surname of the adopted child should be known, to protect the future of the child (Nel, 2009: 147). However, the participant (T3G3P2) above seems to disagree with the adoption as he was speaking from experience. He shared with the group that one of his daughter's sons discovered that he did not belong to the surname he grew up with but belonged to another family. He discovered the truth from the dream, and he was forced to find his family as shown in the dream.

### **8.8.3 In-vitro children**

Another option recently introduced is in-vitro fertilisation. Although these children are closer to the family, the reality is that the Zulu people are not ready to accept these children. If the child is conceived unnaturally, there is a greater chance that the child or the mother will be stigmatised. The stigma attached to in vitro-fertilisation was demonstrated when one of the

women opened to the group that her child was born through the in-vitro process. A few months after the workshop, one of the participants who was part of the group called the child 'in-vitro'. The woman who labelled the child 'in-vitro' is an adult so this is an indication of what may happen in the lives of these children in the future. They may be discriminated against and be labelled based on how they were conceived. Nevertheless, some SSI are aware that having children comes with many challenges especially because their lives are not accepted by the community so bringing children into a hostile environment will not be easy as stated by T5, see Chapter 6 in 6.6.2

The matter of having children is not well thought out by the SSI community and no one is taking this issue seriously. T5 thinks that taking her partner's children is an easy way out but some of the informal discussions that took place with T15 point to the fact that looking after your partner's children is difficult. She said she has suffered in her marriage, as her partner has two children and she has tried everything to be part of the children's lives, but they do not want to accept her. The resistance of the children emanates from the fact that they do not want to be associated with their mother's life, because they will be mocked by their peers, they will be known as children of *izitabane* (Sullins, 2016:8). Considering the challenges that SSIs have regarding the inclusion of children, such families would not easily fit into African families. When these families are integrated into heterosexual communities, children born into SS families may be discriminated against because of their parent's sexual identity. Many questions require answers regarding the issue of children.

It is further noted that transmen prefer in-vitro children because they want to play the role of a father and be a father figure in the family. While transmen live like heterosexual couples, the reality is that they are not males and they will always be looked upon as women in the eyes of the community. The way forward is accepting that they are different as this was also mentioned by one of the participants, who stated that *izitabane* are not meant to have children.

There is something that people do not understand, why are we created like this. When you look at us, how we are created, looking at our origins, in real fact we should not have children. Had the white people not come with in-vitro fertilization we would not have children. Our children are those closest to us, those are the children we need to take care of, we are not meant to have children ( T5).

This statement lends another perspective to the matter of children. Perhaps SSIs are trying too hard to live like heterosexual people (Ryan, 2009: 22).

#### **8.8.4 Religious perspectives on in-vitro fertility**

It is important to present a religious perspective on this issue because the common belief about conception and childbearing is that all Eastern, Western and African religions view children as a gift from God (Schenker, 2005:311). Thus, it is important to highlight the role of natural creation, which is God's creation. The work of Jegede and Fayemiwo (2010) emphasises this when they state "Religious obligation forbids people to have children through an artificial process. For a Christian leader "childbearing is the work of God and it is not proper for a man to take up this responsibility" (121).

According to Schenker, natural conception has more religious significance because the creation of a human being in a woman's womb is a sacred process; the external influence weakens the spiritual influence on the creation. Schenker further emphasises that "procreation may not be performed by a physician: the physician may be in the position to help the parents achieve conception yet is not the actual 'baby maker'" (2005:311). The biblical scripts that demonstrate that children are a gift from God, means that at times patience and acceptance are required (Francis, 2000: 7) as God's plan may require one to wait. Paul advises those who want to serve the Lord without any destruction in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 32-35:

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs — how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world — how he can please his wife and his interest are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world — how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in the right way in undivided devotion to the Lord (<https://www.biblestudytools.com> Accessed 15 March 2020).

There are those called to do the work of God and marriage and children may interfere with God's plan. T5 talks about the purpose of ambiguous sexual identities, which could be the

group that was meant to serve God with no distraction. This is a century of rights and people have rights, but whether they are used responsibly is another issue. Bringing children into a complex same-sex life and having no recourse for assistance with negative emotional and psychological effects that could arise, is problematic.

#### **8.8.5 Self-centeredness**

It is noted that SSI does not pay much attention to the fact that they are different. They should start by accepting that certain privileges are for heterosexual couples more than homosexual SS couples, and having children is one such privilege. It is well known that having children is very important in African families but if SSIs do not make wise decisions, they will be copies of heterosexual living. In African societies childless and unmarried women are not treated with respect, thus SS couples take their relationships to the next level. The general idea behind getting married and having children is more about assimilating heterosexuality and that this will make people accept them. There are women in heterosexual relationships who are barren and are not married; they are treated better than SSI. Same-sex individuals, especially transmen cannot have children, but they date heterosexual women who could have children. In most cases, the women they marry already have children from their previous marriage, and some couples are satisfied with that because they have accepted that there is no natural reproduction in a same-sex relationship. Whereas in heterosexual relationships barrenness is an issue, such that barren women are called names. Chitando states "Women must bear with negative labels when they find themselves unmarried or childless" (Chitando, 2011: 168). Nonetheless, the African belief that marriage is incomplete without children and the idea of having children, dominates these relationships. However, some homosexual couples understand that having children comes with challenges, so they are happy with children that were born from previous heterosexual relationships.

### **8.9 Children in the school environment**

The school environment tends to be unfriendly at times, and children of SSI are often faced with many challenges. The school environment is different from the home environment as children are often bullied and abnormality is easily picked on by other children. Refer to the story narrated by T12G4P2 in Chapter 6, 6.6.4. The story demonstrates the challenges that SSI children in African communities encounter in schools.

The last group of children that end up in SS relationships is those who come from broken heterosexual marriages. Usually, when relationships break down, the children are the ultimate victims and the parents make decisions for them. The children have no say as the mother takes a child into her new relationship. All the problems discussed in the earlier response to the work of Sullins (2016) and this area requires ongoing research. The question is whom do these children turn to in their journey of discovery, and how do they arrive at an understanding of themselves; some may pursue SS relationships because they grew up in that environment. When they grow up and they want a different life from what they have known, they may need counselling. These issues may require closer scrutiny as they interrogate the realities of SS children.

To conclude this issue about children in SS relationships, it seems that the children usually remain voiceless. The rights of those who cannot speak for themselves should be questioned from an ethical point of view. Indeed, one cannot choose a family but in African societies, heterosexuality and natural conception is part of the African culture and religious belief system. The problem is that contemporary society is a sexual world and most relationships are more sexual than spiritual. When a person does not have a partner, they see themselves as incomplete whereas there were times where people were born to do spiritual work and not to be involved in sexual relationships. It has been highlighted that SSIs are often identified amongst traditional healers known as *izangoma*. In the Zulu tradition, Brindly (1982:194) confirms this by stating that:

Barren women are thought to make suitable *izangoma*, they do not bear children since the shades are sitting on their womb. Thus, the *amadlozi* are said to regard this profession as a gift to a 'clean' person, and the elderly woman is clean because she is past childbearing. Divining is less suitable for an elderly man because men marry and have children until they die, a man's fertility is infinite. Because the old woman no longer menstruates and no longer has sexual intercourse and children, she is regarded as pure. Other *izangoma* affirm that in the past elderly women were the main *izangoma* on account of their purity.

To understand SS individuals, some find themselves having to identify with SSI, whereas, some are not born like that but have chosen to be SSI because of their circumstances. Since the elders and wise men and women who were given the gift understand the mysteries of nature are not part of the SS discourse, the underlying cause of the origins of true SSI is not clear. Probably these are lost souls in a sexual world with no direction. Mthembu, an African indigenous scholar, speaks of the third eye which enables a person to see what is invisible to others. However, to be able to reach that level one should be clean and abstain from sex (Mthembu, 2019).

### **8.10 Same-sexuality as a challenge to heterosexuality**

Since there are more options regarding marriages today, some divorcees in heterosexual marriages have opted for same-sex marriages. The law supports women to take the children with them and when they marry again, they bring these children into same-sex marriages and the ex-husband's family does not approve of this. An African father would not take it lightly that he would lose his family to *isitabane*, as his image is undermined, and his manhood is challenged. Men find themselves having to compete with other women for women. If they fail to take care of their responsibilities as head of families, they now have people who are ready to take over and this weakens their male ego.

#### **8.10.1 Transmen as a threat to manhood**

Most transmen are heading families that were started by heterosexual males but failed to carry out their responsibilities as men. This threatens the patriarchal system as men are not used to women taking charge of their life and with the increasing number of SS marriages, there are more and more homes being headed by transmen. Amongst the Zulu people, whoever can do something well is referred to as a man irrespective of gender. Taking a leadership position and responsibilities at home is more important than gender identity. A saying used by elders to refer to a woman who shows male strength is "*unamasende esiswini*", which means she has invisible testicles. This statement does not go down well with the male because it positions the female above them and usurps their dominance. This means if men lose their power over women, SS relationships would not be accepted because these

relationships threaten the male's manhood, and SSR is seen to replace heterosexual relationships (Mkasi 2016: 2).

Thus there seems to be enmity between men and transmen, even the general comments towards transmen are aggressive. Quoting the words of a man who is a neighbour of a SS couple, in KwaMashu, participant T2G2P1 and T2G2P3 shared their challenges in their communities. The couple was planning to renovate their house and they were supposed to destroy the old building to put up a new one and T2G2P3 physically demolished the house and the neighbour said to her “who do you think you are to demolish the house”. These words question the woman’s right to do a man’s job, just because the woman was able and had the physical strength to do what a man can do, local men see her as a threat. The fact that this man said these words, indicates that he was unhappy and this shows there will always be some form of competition between men and transman. It seems that other sexual identities are less of a threat to heterosexual males than transman.

While men struggle with the existence of SS relationships, SSIs are also not safe, sharing women with men seems to be a huge challenge for them. They often face the problem that their women cheat with men. Thus, they are always on the alert and fear that they might lose their partners to men. Sometimes their partners move in between two relationships and they end up being pregnant often.

#### **8.10.2 Abusive heterosexual relationship resulting in Same-sex practice**

It has been mentioned before that SS relationships are not only based on sexual orientation as various reasons lead to SS relationships. There are three groups within the heterosexual relationship that end up identifying with the same-sexuality, in most cases such individuals would fall within the bisexual identity. Amongst these are the victims of sexual violence, victims of rape, and those who have escaped from gender violence. The fact that there are various reasons leading to people identifying with the bisexual identity questions this identity, in that does a true bisexual identity exist or does it have to do with freedom of choice? In most cases, they are discriminated against by other SSI because they are regarded as people who are confusing the community (Holland-Muter, 2012: 171). In the African worldview, this could be seen as sexuality with no boundaries and this is un-African. In Chapter 5 participant T5 argues against this identity and she refers to it as “*ubufebe/ promiscuity*”.

Another problem with bisexual identity is that there is a heterosexual perception that SSIs are more loving and caring compared to heterosexual partners. The general view is that there is a sense of safety and security in SS relationships, the level of gender violence is low compared to heterosexual relationships. One may presume that this assumption is shared because of the lack of research on LGBTIQ+ and domestic violence. Some people enter SS relationships to explore and experiment and they end up in serious relationships because of the warmth, love, and care offered in SS relationships. However, in this group, some return to the heterosexual relationship, while others move back and forth. Even after committing to heterosexual marriage, some tend to indicate that they would go back to SSR if the marriage does not work. Participant NTP17 confirms that she would go back to SSR if her marriage does not work. She has been in an SSI relationship for years and she decided to go back to her husband. She became pregnant and now has a baby, but she still says she was happy in her SS relationship and she would go back to SSR because she has experienced passionate love. However, this tendency of moving back and forth is not acceptable and it confuses the issue of sexual identities.

Regardless of all the problems that SSI face in heterosexual society, those who do not have a choice try to live their lives to the fullest. Some families have accepted their children in such that they have gone through *ilobolo* negotiation and later accepted the new member into the family. Lately, SSI individuals have begun to include African traditions in their marriage by involving the elders of the families. It also seems that transmen are more stable and committed in their relationships, as seen above where some have children. The idea of paying *ilobolo* is based on the fact that the other partner is male so men must take responsibility for paying *ilobolo*. This means the other partner will be submissive and take care of children while the male figure takes the leadership position. Lately, there have been a few stable homes of SSI in the community although they spend time in urban areas and go to rural areas for important ceremonies.

### **8.11 Traditional ceremonies for same-sex relationships**

Three transmen have paid *ilobolo* and continue with several other traditional rituals that are required for one to reach the final stages of marriage. During the discussion, it was clear that taking a wife is more challenging because one must face the elders and other family members. The first challenge they must overcome is to convince their own family about their sexuality

and identity, it is even harder to come to a man's house and ask for a hand in marriage if one is an SSI. Often, the girl's family would not expect a woman for a son-in-law so when the *abakhongi* [the groom's messengers] approach the girl's family they are also not sure what is going to happen. The following took place at one of the traditional ceremonies in rural Inkandla. The family had accepted that they have a transman in the family, as the couple had been together for many years and it had been a long journey to get where they are today. They started dating at the age of fifteen and are now thirty-five years of age. The elders decided to accept their relationship three years ago. The researcher was invited by T2G2P1 and her mother to attend the ceremony.

#### **8.11.1 Umembeso ceremony in rural Inkandla**

*Umembeso* is a very important ritual and one of the crucial stages in the isiZulu wedding. Once *ilobolo* has been paid, *izibizo* follows, in this ceremony the groom gives gifts to the bride's family and the bride responds by bringing *umembeso* or *umbondo*. This is a ceremony whereby the bride responds by buying groceries and other gifts for the groom's family, thereafter the wedding takes place. Gifts requested would generally include blankets, pinafores, headscarves, clothes, food, straw mats and sometimes a live goat usually slaughtered on the same day of the ceremonies. However, the couple may choose not to do this, particularly if they do not believe in ancestors (such as born-again Christians). Participating in such traditional ceremonies indicates that the couple respects and recognises their ancestors. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the significance of such ceremonies is not always well understood by young couples. They participate because they want their relationship to be acceptable and to be recognised by all family members, both Christians, and non-Christians. Most couples in the Zulu community understand that marriage is incomplete without all the required traditional ceremonies; such ceremonies qualify the couple to be recognised as husband and wife. In the past three years, several homosexual couples, especially those from rural communities, have participated in the required ceremonies.

*Ilobolo* is 'conditionally' acceptable to transmen; the acceptance is conditional since parents have no choice. The researcher attended an *umembeso* in the Inkandla rural area; this was

part of the study as observation is also important. Rural communities are aware of ambiguous gender identity, however, here they do not openly express their sexuality, but one can discern their sexuality by their dress code. In Chapter 5 T2G2P1 is described as a transman, therefore, she is the groom (*umkhwenyana*) and her partner is the bride (T2G2P3), the bride is completely feminine, and she is the wife in the relationship. The categorisation of the couple is based on their dress code, the way they behave at home, in the Church, and the community. In the Zulu context, a woman should not call her husband by his first name but rather by his last name. Thus, rural transmen prefer to be called by their last names. This is a sign of respect from the wife and other members of the SS community.

This was the first same-sex traditional ceremony in this particular village. This couple has achieved much together, they were married at Home Affairs, adopted a child, and own a house in Newlands West. They have been able to rise above family crises, survived community discrimination, and did not allow stigma to prevent them from achieving their goals. T2G2P1 has worked hard to pull her life together and has been reunited with her family. The *umembeso* ceremony is the last stage that prepares them to enter into a traditional wedding. Since this was the first ceremony of its kind in this community, it brought together all the members of the family and the community.

### **8.11.2 Analysis of the ceremony**

This couple has taken a brave decision to take their relationship seriously and where they have disclosed their relations to the community. Their decision to participate in the ceremony at the home village where the ancestors are, is a sign of respect and a request to the ancestors to recognise their relationship. This ceremony brought together family members who had differing views about the relationship, those who approved and those who disapproved. It must be noted that when a member of the family does a traditional ceremony at home in the village, all the family members are expected to attend. There is the belief that if one chooses not to attend without a valid reason, something bad might happen to them. Thus, family members should always live in peace, if there is a misunderstanding, the family should sit together and forgive each other, and this is sealed with a cleansing ceremony.

Based on the above, an incident occurred during this ceremony which supports this belief. One of T2G2P1's aunts decided to leave home the day before the ceremony because she did

not agree with the relationship. Towards the end of the ceremony, the taxi that had transported the bride's family, inexplicably moved from its position without the driver being present and crashed into the aunt's toilet. Before this accident, the driver had been sitting in the taxi the whole day. When he left the taxi to go for a quick walk, the incident took place. The way it swung from its original position in the direction of the toilet puzzled everyone. Logically explained, the taxi was set in motion because the handbrake had not been applied. The counter-argument was that it could have done the same whilst the driver had been present. It also crashed into a building that belonged to a person who did not come to the ceremony. The incident strongly confirms the beliefs concerning the ancestors' demands, that family needs to stand together irrespective of issues, and everyone should be present during traditional ceremonies regardless of their differences. It confirms again that the ancestors do accept cross gender boundaries and that they had accepted the ceremony but had to show that they were unhappy about the aunt's decision.

Thus family members who had attended this ceremony were divided, the parents of T2G2P1 who did not have a choice, those who wanted to witness the reality of SS relationships, and lastly, the members of the community who came to witness the taboo. Both members of the community and the family members were amazed, one could see this from their facial expressions, and instead of ululating, they were staring and were not sure whether to ululate or not. They were not sure what to do because ululating implied that they supported the behaviour or the practice. Some were quiet, which was not usual for such ceremonies because these are happy occasions. When it was time to hand out the gifts to the rightful owners, they came one by one to collect their gifts but no one showed an excitement. The people who were expected to express their appreciation for their gifts, the elderly people who would ululate, were quiet, the youth was more excited than them. The mood had changed to one of awkwardness; there was a mixture of feelings, sadness, shame, and happiness.

### **8.11.3 Difficult decision for parents**

For this ceremony to take place, it must have taken T2G2P1, her parents, and other members of the family several meetings to finally decide to hold this ceremony in the village. What truly demonstrated the mood of the ceremony is when T9 (T2G2P1's mother) came to collect her

gifts. Refer to chapter 5—when T9 states "She is mine, there is nothing I can do", "*Awukho umgqomo wokulahla umuntu*". These words were enacted on this day, it was one of the most difficult days of her life. It was on this day where she had to publicly admit that she had given birth to an *isitabane*. She had to do this in the presence of the family, the community, and the members of her Church. As highlighted before, she was a leader in the Church and this was the family Church. She knew that they would talk behind her back, judging her, accusing her of bringing shame to the family. When it was time for her to collect her gifts, she decided to let them out there, by singing. The song she sang sent a clear message to everyone present, about how she felt about the matter. It was a sad and touching moment for everyone present. This is a family of singers, everyone sings very well, T2G2P1's aunt is a professional Gospel singer as well and she was present. She is a born-again Christian who disapproves of T2G2P1's relationship. Therefore, as T9 sang, her voice was breaking up because she was in tears. Under such circumstances, the aunt was supposed to assist immediately but she did not until one of the girls took the song. She sang the song of the late Gospel singer Sifiso Ncwane, the lyrics of the songs meant that she is accepting the situation; she is not accepting her daughter's sexuality but everything because today the whole community knows that her daughter is "*isitabane*" in such that she had to publicly accept a daughter-in-law. She kept on repeating the following lyrics.

*Kulungile Baba* (All is well Lord)

*Uma kuvume wena* (If you agree)

*Kulungile Baba* (It is well Lord)

This was a sad moment which was supposed to be a moment of celebration, one could tell that people came to witness the unusual event rather than to celebrate with the couple. Family members who came to the function seemed happier to see each other after a long time, more than enjoying the ceremony. T2G2P1 wanted to conform to tradition as this was her home too, and her bride deserved to be properly introduced to the family and the ancestors.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter gave an overview of how the same-sexualities are viewed in rural communities and how the community struggles to deal with these identities. A clear distinction is made between African worldviews and western worldviews on same-sex sexualities and how the western description of same-sex identities has misinterpreted the practice of the same-sexualities in African communities. The language issue is also said to impact existing concepts on African same-sexualities, to a certain extent, African languages are marginalised which gives prevalence to western languages. It is further argued that Human right approach imposes western description of same-sexualities to rural communities which complicate the issue even further. The human rights approach seems to be a challenge as it enforces law upon those who discriminate against the same-sexualities. This is not a challenge to rural communities only but various institutions and departments who struggle to comply with this law due to lack of knowledge on the subject of the same-sexualities.

The chapter further discusses the position of rural leaders who are constantly labelled as being discriminative and intolerant towards same-sex individuals. It brings forth serious issues that need to be considered when engaging in discourses of accommodating SSI since traditional structures are not designed to accommodate such individuals. In this chapter, the lifestyle of SSI is examined and many times it seems contradictory to that of traditional people in rural communities. Nonetheless, the chapter highlights the main issues that need attention in accommodating SSI in rural communities. The issue of transitioning and families of transmen in rural communities is the most complicated issue that requires both the same-sex and heterosexual community to be open-minded.

The chapter further shows that, same-sexualities pose a threat to the heterosexual community in many ways. Firstly, there is an assumption that children may want to experiment same-sexuality. Second, if the same-sex relationship is supported family names will disappear because there is no reproduction in these relationships. It also a threat in such that the same-sexualities tend to be a safe space for the abused heterosexual woman, this means the woman will leave heterosexual relationships to find safety in the same-sexualities. Lastly, this chapter gives evidence that some SSI still want to leave in rural communities. Some have decided to take their relationship to the next level where they marry and conduct

traditional ceremonies that relate to the marriage. We also see few traditional leaders take this change with an open mind, willing to give same-sex individuals a chance to be part of the heterosexual community provided they respect each other.

## Chapter 9

### Summary and concluding remarks

#### 9.1 Introduction

This study aimed to provide insight into the existing research carried out by African writers and researchers on African same sexualities, particularly Indigenous same-sex practices. The research was conducted in rural communities of Kwa-Zulu Natal because rural people still keep their traditions compared to urban people. The study has been able to demonstrate variations between Western same sexualities and African same sexualities. It also shows how Western description and analysis of African same sexualities has impacted African indigenous same sexualities.

Nonetheless, since the project began in 2015 there has been some changes. Several African scholars have been exploring the field and have contributed to the subject, which is a great improvement for African knowledge. This will enable African researchers who are interested in the subject to use the indigenous knowledge framework when dealing with these issues. They can employ common knowledge and be considerate of the cultural beliefs of traditional communities, instead of coming in as the knower. This approach will give them full access to their community. Even though Western writers have written what they perceive to be accurate regarding African sexualities, African researchers have an opportunity to rewrite what seems to be inaccurate. They as Africans can tell the stories of their people instead of taking African history from white literature. The Zulu saying *ungangikhulumeli angilona idlozi*, which is translated as, “don’t speak for me, I am not an ancestor, or don’t speak for me as I can speak for myself”. This has been happening for a long time in the field of sexual education and it is time to stand firm and defend African traditional knowledge.

#### 9.2 Findings of the study

Some important issues revealed by this study are as follows:

African researchers in all fields of studies have identified the existence of the same sexualities in African communities but the arguments are continuing. One cannot research this subject without touching on the issue of existence, because the evidence

that proves same-sex existence is framed in western knowledge production which impacts the language and culture of the African people. With these problems inherent in produced knowledge, it is expected that different societies will not associate themselves with such information. They would see the issues raised in this knowledge as "their" problem, not that of the Africans, and if they were talking to them, they would have considered the African ways of doing, knowing, and being as it is based on African language and culture. It has been noted that western knowledge in this field emphasises human rights and has neglected African cultural beliefs that guide African societies. Values that African families used to raise their children have been replaced with the Bill of Rights and the two approaches contradict each other. As a result, the human rights approach to the subject created divisions in the families of SSI. When this happened many young women lost their families, lost the opportunity to go to school, and are now roaming the streets doing manual work or caught up in criminal activities.

In an attempt to use a different approach to understand the resistance against the same sexuality, the African indigenous approach was employed to explore the issue. The purpose was to engage the elders, traditional leaders, and the public in rural communities. This would bring enrichment and traditional knowledge that would guide the research in understanding the subject viewed through the lens of the African indigenous people. As a result, the produced knowledge would provide local knowledge that would develop local concepts, descriptions, and definitions of this phenomenon.

Indeed, this approach has enabled the researcher to bring people into the discussion on issues of language and labelling. As much as most western framed discourses downplay indigenous concepts the older generation preferred to use these rather than the western concepts. The reason being, the data that has been used to analyse the same sexualities in most studies has been collected from urbanised, westernised, Christianised young people. Therefore it is expected that young people would prefer western concepts. Whereas with the older rural generation, this is different; they do not use western concepts because these do not contribute meaning to their lives and these do not address their experiences of the same sexualities. Similar to the elderly people who are traditional

leaders, they do not talk about homosexuality but about *inkonkoni* and *Uncukumbili* because it is familiar to them.

The study also reveals that African communities do not think about the same sexuality and sexual orientation which would give them a different perspective about people of different sexualities. All they know is that they exist but such people do not play a significant role in society because they cannot reproduce. Thus, in the past, they were not considered as productive and their issue was not entertained, but they were also not abused. Whereas the government of the day has created a problem by giving them the right to marry each other, which is against the African belief system. If the government respects the religious and cultural beliefs of African people, they would have involved them in such a decision. As the law now exists, the government has not, but should, inform people on this subject since there is evidence that it exists and there is medical proof that it is not a choice for some individuals.

It is noted that SSI also wants to have their own families and have children and more couples marry today. As in other relationships, they see the need to have children, some have opted for adoption, and some turn to in-vitro fertilisation. Since SSI still struggle with their own identities, bringing children into their environment is questionable. Somehow the identity of the parents seems to impact the identity of a child, in the community and at school. Some SSIs have decided to transition into complete males. Most of them do this without their family's consent and there are concerns from the older generation with regards to the new identity, and whether this would impact the health of the individual and on issues of spirituality. The transitioning process of females into males begs the question of community perceptions of that individual and her family of origin and own family. This is viewed as a self-centred decision that could affect all the members of the family. While this seems to be the solution for those who feel that they are in the wrong body, some elderly people in other countries have gone through the process and regret it today, hence this is a problematic issue.

Another problem with SSI is the issue of fake sexual identities, whereby people choose whether they want to live as a homosexual or a heterosexual. This questions the morality of contemporary society; there are no boundaries because people have rights on how to

live their lives. The fear that homosexuality is a contagious disease or evil behaviour that could be copied is becoming a reality because young people are free to explore and experiment with sexuality without accountability. They have no fear and no respect for family values or traditions, which have been the guidelines for ethical behaviour. As much as supporters of human rights say it is not a contagious disease, it is, however, a behaviour that is easily copied and is spreading. If there are ways to avoid the spread of this behaviour, as suggested by traditional healers, they should be considered because the study also shows that there were SSI who tried to seek help to cure this behaviour.

However, those who are naturally born like that should be treated with respect because they deserve to live their lives to the fullest, and traditional leaders are willing to accommodate them in their communities. As much as these individuals want to live in rural areas, the challenges are that they do not want to compromise their identity. Some want to be addressed as male and others are in the process of transitioning, which may be a challenge for both communities because of the gender roles structured by the patriarchal system. Traditional festivals, ceremonies, and other community activities may be a challenge for these individuals and their children. Lastly, the kind of families these individuals bring into the community will be a threat to the traditional families and males may feel threatened. This could lead to abuse and more victimisation. Nevertheless, some SSIs have taken a considerable risk by showing the rural communities that they exist and have conducted their wedding ceremonies in deep rural communities such as Inkandla

As has been highlighted above, the study has raised more issues than solutions. It has revealed problems that need attention, some having been because of the western approach to this issue. This includes all the conflicting ideas brought by the human right approach to African traditions, it seems that what is perceived as a solution from a western perspective is problematic to African culture. Existing knowledge needs to be reworked to reproduce knowledge that will assist African communities to face the challenge of SSI.

### **9.3 Recommendations**

It is recommended that, now that there is evidence that SSIs exist, and there is medical proof that the same sexuality is not a choice for some individuals. The government should inform

people, share medical evidence on sexual orientation, not keep such information for statistics and benefit Western health care. People have a right to know, more so because issues of gender and different sexualities leads to cultural and religious conflict. Whereas, if people are informed on the changes made on governments policies, and the relevance of same-sex rights, are properly explained, violation of same-sex rights will be minimised. To correct the ugly situations of murder, hate, and rape of same-sex individuals, workshops on these identities should be conducted to provide awareness and knowledge on the subjects.

It is further recommended that this subject should become part of the Life Orientation subjects in school curricula and the Government should provide ongoing workshops in rural communities to promote this knowledge. The law on same sexualities has already been executed but there is still a lack of indigenous knowledge on how this same-sex right fits into heterosexual communities of South Africa. Studies such as indigenous framed research should offer awareness programs that would provide new knowledge. The knowledge that will interrogate same sexualities in African indigenous context, particularly concerning the private and public space. Contemporary same sexualities tend to be more public than private which requires further investigation on what this means for rural communities whose socio-political and religious-cultural organisation is framed in the hetero-patriarchal system. These programmes should reach a wider community, as far as in deep rural communities. More importantly, such programmes should include a culture of respect in young people of the same sexualities to live in peace with those who do not share the same biological and mental traits, such as same sexualities.

South Africa is a democratic country, a Western-oriented democracy, it is said to be a government of the people by the people of which is not accurate. It is entrenched in Western culture and often carries the laws that enforce compliance. If it is deeply scrutinised, there is evidence of elements of colonization. In the end, there are two societies, South Africans that are more traditional oriented and those that are Western orientated. However, the South African government has not worked hard enough to find common ground between the two, thus there are always disagreements between the traditionalist and the government. Thus, there is a need to embark on research that will scrutinise the governing strategies about

African cultural beliefs, to find common ground or the third space between indigenous people and the modern people of South Africa.

The last recommendation is the issue of transgender people, in this case, we talk about individuals who were born female, however, they identify as men. Some of the transmen in this study have opted for hormone treatment prescribed by the doctors to change their bodies, to be in line with the inner sense of being a man. The treatment helps them to develop male physical traits such as hair on the face, this means a transman will develop a beard like a man. This is very common amongst contemporary same-sex identities, due to same-sex rights but the problem is that these rights only work for SSI but not for their children. Firstly, when a parent decides to transition into a man, a child's identity is impacted, a child born in an SS family loses their own identity which somehow is entangled in their parent's identity. In the end, the child is labelled, a child of *izitabane* "ingane yezitabane". For instance, a female primary teacher who goes through the process is no longer called Miss, but she is called Mr. Secondly, This does not only affect SS families but also the community as a whole. The question is, how the transitioning of this teacher has impacted the school children who knew her as Miss now that she is Mr? Has the school prepared or provided some counselling for the children who suddenly see such dramatic change to their teacher? Lastly, has anyone tried to find out how the transitioning of these individuals affected their children? While these individuals go for therapy who then ensures that those close to them receive such help? This is a crucial issue that needs to be investigated, it is therefore recommended that further research is done to investigate this.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Questionnaires Group 1 Interviews**

##### **Individuals in same sex relations**

1. What do you understand about homosexuality?
2. Is homosexuality found in African religion?
3. How can you explain your sexual behaviour?
4. How would you identify yourself?
5. Are you living in a close or out of the closet
6. How do your family, community and friends address you (boy/girl)?
7. How do you express your homosexuality, dress code?
8. Does your community treat you different because of your sexuality?
9. How is your relationship with your parents?
10. Do you talk to your parents about your sexuality?
11. Do you have plans to get married?
12. Do you have someone, a social group or an organisation to talk to about your sexual identity?
13. What is the appropriate way of addressing same sexualities in rural communities?

14. Comparing rural and urban communities which one is more violence toward homosexual people?
15. What would you like to see change regarding the issue of homosexuality
16. Is there a place of same sex practice in traditional communities?
17. Do you think SA constitution protect you against hate crime?
18. What is your worse fear about your sexual identity?

## **Group 2 Interviews**

### **Parents or family members**

1. What do you understand about same sexualities/ homosexuality?
2. Do you think same sexualities are related to ancestral spirit or African religion?
3. What do you understand about the following terms *ongqingili*, *uncukumbili* or *izitabane*?
4. What is the difference between homosexuality and same sex relationships?
5. Have you ever seen or heard of same sex behaviour before you saw your child's behaviour?
6. What was your reaction when you first found out about your child's sexuality?
7. What is the attitude of the family and the community towards you or your child?
8. Do you talk to your child about her sexuality?
9. Do you understand anything about legalization of same sex marriages?
10. What you think about conflict that is taking place about same sexualities?
11. How can people of same sexualities be accommodated in traditional communities?
12. What do you think of female *izangoma* possessed by male spirits?
13. What should people with ambiguous sexualities do about their sexual feelings if refused to express it?
14. What should be the way forward now that SA constitution allows same sexualities?
15. What is the impact of same sex right in indigenous communities
16. What do you think of killing and abuse directed to homosexual people?

### **Traditional leader's interviews**

1. What do you know about *ongqingili noncukumbili*

2. Do you think ancestral spirits are gendered?
3. What do you understand about same sexualities?
4. What is the different between homosexuality and same sex relationships?
5. Do you know anyone in your community who is in same sex relationships or who has ambiguous identity?
6. Where do same sex people fit in social structure of traditional communities?
7. Do ancestral spirits play any role in same sexualities?
8. What do traditional communities think of people of same sexualities?
9. What should be the approach of traditional leadership regarding homosexuality in a contemporary South Africa?
10. Does contestation of same sexualities have a positively or negatively impact in the society?
11. What do you think of killing and abuse directed to homosexual people?
12. As traditional leaders and role model what is your opinion on same sexual relationship and marriages?
13. What do you think about *izangoma* with crossed gendered spirits?
14. Do you think violence against homosexual occurs more in rural community or in urban communities
15. Do have any knowledge of what is sexual orientation
16. Have indigenous leaders contributed in legalization of same sex marriages?
17. What is the appropriate approach to address the issue of same sexualities in traditional communities?
18. Is there a chance that you as traditional leader could be involved in debates regarding same sexual people?
19. What is the impact of same sex right in indigenous community?
20. What can be done to protect homosexual people against hate crime?

#### **Relevant Department and organisations interviews**

1. What kind of assistance do you offer to homosexual individuals in traditional communities?
2. Do you think traditional leaders should be involved in ongoing debates about same sexualities?
3. Do you think traditional leaders were well informed about sexual orientation?

4. Have you conducted awareness workshops in rural communities about Constitutional rights, sexual orientation and marriage?
5. What approach do you use to address same sexualities to indigenous communities?
6. Why traditional societies seem to be threatened by contemporary same sexualities?
7. What was the input of indigenous leaders in legalization of same sex marriages?
8. Do you think there was enough consultation with people before the insertion of same sex clause in the Bill of right?
9. Is the constitution able to protect homosexual individuals against hate crime?
10. Comparing rural and urban communities which one is more violence toward homosexual people?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Contact details of LGBTIQ organisations**

#### **Durban**

42McKenzieRoad,Morningside,Durban,4001

T:0313127402

F:0313128838

E:admin@gaycentre.org.za

Whatsapp:0837489565

Facebook: Durban Lesbian and Gay Centre // Durban Pride

Tel:

0313127402/42

Fax:0313128838

Email: [info@gaycentre.org.za](mailto:info@gaycentre.org.za)

Centre Manager: Nonhlanhla Mkhize ([mc@gaycentre.org.za](mailto:mc@gaycentre.org.za))

#### **Pietermaritzburg**

187A Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa, 3201

**Telephone:** +2733 342 6165 / +2733 342 6500

**Email:** [info@gaylesbian.org.za](mailto:info@gaylesbian.org.za)

Director: Anthony Waldhausen [director@gaylesbian.org.za](mailto:director@gaylesbian.org.za)

## Appendix 3

### Ethical clearance



18 July 2017

Ms LP Mkasi (9701364)  
School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics  
Howard College Campus

Dear Ms Mkasi,

**Protocol reference number: HSS/0260/0170**

**Project title: African Indigenous same sexualities in a democratic society: A Case study of rural women in KwaZulu-Natal**

#### Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

With regards to your response received on 27 June 2017 to our letter of 15 June 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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 discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Dr Sibusiso Masandane  
cc Academic Leader Research: Prof Rodewick Hewitt  
cc School Administrator: Mrs Catherine Murugan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X34331, Durban 4003

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3547/8350/455/ Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4009 Email: [shenuka@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:shenuka@ukzn.ac.za) / [murugan@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:murugan@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



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## Appendix 4

### INFORMED CONSENT TEMPLATE UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC) INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE: English version

Note to researchers: Notwithstanding the need for scientific and legal accuracy, every effort should be made to produce a consent document that is as linguistically clear and simple as possible, without omitting important details as outlined below. Certified translated versions will be required once the original version is approved.

There are specific circumstances where witnessed verbal consent might be acceptable, and circumstances where individual informed consent may be waived by HSSREC. **Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research**

Date:.....

Greeting: Greetings

My name is Lindiwe P Mkasi (Khuzwayo) from the School of Religion Philosophy and Classics (UKZN). My contact and my supervisors are as follows:

Lindiwe Mkasi 0730617196

Email address: [mkasip34@gmail.com](mailto:mkasip34@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Dr S. Masondo 0312607290

Email address [masondosi@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:masondosi@ukzn.ac.za)

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research people of same gender or in same sex relationships. The aim and purpose of this research is to talk about daily experiences of people in same sexualities in rural communities. The study expects to enroll 48 people. 15 people in same sex relationships, 15 members of their families, 3 Zulu traditional leaders (Chiefs), 3 African Independent Church leaders (Zion), 3 Traditional healers, 3 LGBTIQ Church leaders, 2 LGBTIQ Organizations and 4 people from different departments as follows, Gender justice, Human Right, Education and Health.

#### **The Procedure**

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be interviewed by myself as a researcher. I will be asking you questions and writing and recording the answers you will give. I will read let you listen to the recording and read the answers you gave me for any clarification before I go and type the notes. I will arrange with you the suitable time and place for the interviews, which may take about one hour. If you choose to be part of the focus group, you will be notified

in advance about the time and the venue of meeting. The focus group discussion may take 2 to 3 hours depending on the flow on the discussion.

The questions will be about your views on same sex relationships, practice and marriages in traditional communities. What is your understanding on sexual orientation and the Bill of rights. Moreover, the absence of indigenous voice and input on this matter.

### **Risk**

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts talking about your unpleasant experiences if the participants wish to share such information. If the participant wish to disclosed her sexual identity, that may results in social stigmatization. If the research retrieve traumatic memories and you require counselling, the researcher will refer you to the counsellor or therapist.

### **Benefits**

Your participation in this study will also be a learning process for you. You will be sensitized to how issues of our culture impact people's attitudes towards women who are in same sex relationships. Your contributions will assist you to voice out your opinions about same sex relationships within the Zulu culture. We hope that the study will create the following benefits, will enable unheard voices and ideas to contribute to the knowledge that would be used to establish a new programme for rural communities. The programme will bring awareness on sexual orientation, same gender and same sexualities while giving you a broad picture how these issues relate to the South African constitution's Bill of Right in Chapter 2.9:3. The information obtained in this programme should decrease the distance between people of nonconforming gender and the families, enable both parties to start over and reconcile.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSS/0260/017D).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (provide contact details) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

Lindiwe Mkasi 0730617196

Supervisor: Dr S. Masondo 0312607290

UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

## **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

PrivateBagX54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

**Voluntary participation**

Please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are therefore free to decline to participate, or to withdraw your participation any time for any reason without feeling bad, and that our relationship will continue to be friendly.

**Confidentiality**

Since the study involves giving information same sex relationships, and this may pose a threat to your safety. I will make every effort to keep your responses confidential. No name will appear on the forms, unless if you give permission for me to do so. You will also be expected to keep strict confidentiality about any information you share or come across during the focus group discussions.

-----

**CONSENT**

I .....have been informed about the study entitled  
“African Indigenous same sexualities in a democratic society: A Case study of rural women in KwaZulu Natal” by Lindiwe P Mkasi (Khuzwayo)

I understand the purpose and procedures and I agree to do the following: (Tick one or more)

- a) Interviewed, b) participate in the focus group, c) voice recorded, video recorded

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher Lindiwe Mkasi (Khuzwayo)

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable I  
hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Video-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Witness**  
**(Where applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Translator**  
**(Where applicable)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**Appendix 5**

**Participants background Information**

T - Transcript,  
Transcript conversation

G - Groups

L – Listeners P - Participants NTC - No

Identification	Age. Estimation	Place of Origin	Community Identity	Education
G1L ( 1,2,3)	30-50	N/A Ukhozi FM-Broadcast	Heterosexual Com	Professionals and semi skills
T2G2 (P1,2,3,4,5,	18-55	Inkandla, Kwa-Mashu, Rural Eastern Cape	Homosexual Com	Professional, semi skills and unskilled
T3G3P (P1,2,3)	35-60	Inkandla	Heterosexual Com	Professionals and semi skills
T 4	60-65	Ngcolosi	Heterosexual male	Professional
T 5	35-40	Mpumu PMB		semi skills
T 6	40-50	Workplace police station	Heterosexual Com	Professional
T 7	35-40	PM Maqondo		semi skills
T 8	45-50	Work place Durban	Heterosexual Com	Professional
T 9	55-60	Nkandla	Heterosexual Com	semi skills
T 10	25-30	Workplace - Newlands	Heterosexual Com	Professional
T 11	25-30	Workplace - Newlands	Heterosexual Com	Professional
T12G4P (P1,2)	30 -40	Pietermaritzburg	Homosexual Com	Professionals and semi skills
T 13	50-60	Kwa Mashu	Heterosexual Com	semi skills
T 14	35-40	Mnambithi	Homosexual Com	Professional
T 15	50-55	Nkandla	Homosexual Com	Semi skills
NTP 16	60-61	Nkandla/ Inanda	Homosexual Com	Professional
NTP 17	30-35	Inanda	Homosexual Com	Semi-skilled
NTP 18	25-30	Mbumbulu/Newlandwest	Homosexual Com	Semi-skilled
NTP 19	40-45	Harding	Homosexual Com	Professional

