

Ubuntombi –
**a Zulu Religio-Cultural Heritage and Identity:
A Path to Adulthood and
Sex Education Practices**

by

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Declaration

As per University regulations and requirements, I hereby declare unequivocally that this dissertation has been solely produced as my original work unless otherwise indicated in the text. It has also never been presented to any other institute of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal, (Pietermaritzburg Campus).

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Abstract

In view of diminishing indigenous knowledge of most cultural practices this study sought to investigate the ways in which *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice can be emancipated and retrieved as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity and a path to adulthood and sex education practices. This qualitative empirical research study used interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. In addition, participant-observation was also used as the researcher observed and recorded cultural activities of *izintombi* (Zulu girls). The study worked with postcolonial theory, and African feminist cultural hermeneutics framework. This was to assess how *ubuntombi* has evolved and how colonialism and the patriarchal cultural context of the Zulu ethnic group contributed to the way in which the practice of *ubuntombi* was understood. Thus, the study required a critical lens of the oppressive and life denying issues to women. The study also encompassed indigenous knowledge systems as a perspective because *ubuntombi* is an indigenous cultural practice that like many others was despised and demonised by the colonial and western mindset.

Some of the significant findings of this study were that *ubuntombi* was one of the critical stages of development in the cycle of human development among the Zulus. While a girl child was welcomed as *intombi* from birth into the Zulu family, she only became fully recognised as *intombi* (young virgin) during puberty as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, this was a critical time for sex education, which was regarded as an essential part of her maturing process to adulthood. There were particular social structures (such as *amaqhikiza* and grandmothers) that provided sex education to the maturing young women and were dismantled by the invading colonists. Constructive aspects of *ubuntombi* as a traditional cultural practice (such as sex education) were eroded during the colonial invasion. This study found that it is no longer practical for young women to go back to the traditional practice of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice even though there are those who currently live as *izintombi* in a hostile environment and require social support. This study concluded that there are positive aspects of *ubuntombi* that can be retrieved that were summed up in the RCLC model which proposed *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool. If effectively used, this tool can provide sex education to the current group of *izintombi* and others. This might restore indigenous sex education that has been lost during colonialism and never replaced to date.

Key Concepts: *ubuntombi*, religio-cultural heritage, identity, sex education, indigenous cultural practices, path to adulthood, colonial invasion, postcolonialism

Acronyms

ACRC	African Charter on the Rights of the Child
AIR	African Indigenous Religion
AOUM	Abstinence Only Until Marriage
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGE	Commission of Gender and Equality
CSG	Child Support Grant
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GAD	Gender and Development
HIV and AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
MFG	Melmoth Focus Group
NFG	Nomkhubulwane Focus Group
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SAHO	South African History Online
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
STD	Sexually transmitted diseases
STI	Sexually transmitted infections
TFG	Threshing Floor Focus Group
TV	Television
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
VT	Virginity testing

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This is an introductory chapter delineating the study that explores *ubuntombi* as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity, a path to adulthood and sex education practices, both from a traditional and modern context. It first presents a general introduction of the study, which gives an overview of the pre-colonial and colonial set-up of the Zulu community and its social structures with a particular focus on social expectations of young people's behaviour and their sexual practices. The chapter mainly examines the modern comprehension of *ubuntombi*, how it has evolved since the colonial era, and why. Second, the chapter gives a contextual understanding of concepts such as *ubuntombi*, *intombi* or *izintombi* as the main characters in the Zulu cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. Additionally, the conceptual clarification of these terms assists the flow of this study since they are going to be referred to frequently throughout the thesis. Thirdly, the chapter demonstrates the impetus behind this research by looking at the personal and academic motivations behind the study. Fourthly, the chapter outlines the research problem, main research question, sub-questions and objectives of the study followed by an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 General introduction to the study

Like many other African ethnicities, the Zulu ethnic group had well organised communal structures during pre-colonial and colonial periods that distinguished Zulu people and their lifestyle in terms of cultural practices, social customs, values, norms and belief systems. These highly ordered structures were almost completely eradicated during colonialism, opening up a number of gaps and social modifications, as the need arose, for Zulu people to adapt to the colonial lifestyle. The pre-colonial traditional structures included *umuzi* (the Zulu homestead) with its religio-cultural observations such as ancestral veneration, beer brewing, traditional healing and other rituals¹ that kept the family intact. It was in this homestead that family members occupied certain positions with the father considered to be the head of the family, followed by the mother, the children and the members of the extended family. Due to the patriarchal order of the family that placed men on top of the family and social structures, the

¹Uli von Kapff, Natal for Tourists, "The Zulu People", in *Zulu-People of Heaven* <http://www.drakensberg-tourism.com/zulu-culture-traditions.html> Accessed 6/21/2014

Zulu homestead was not always an ideal place for women, even though nobody questioned this at that time because it was considered the societal norm or God-ordained order of life. Every member was expected to adhere to the family norms and customs in order to be accepted into a particular family and the society at large. These family norms and structures formed the backdrop against which every member was raised from birth to death. Msimang, in his book entitled *Kusadliwa Ngoludala* (1975) meaning “The good, olden times”, shared valuable information on the lifestyle of the Zulu people during pre-colonial and colonial times.

1.2.1 Socio-cultural expectations among the Zulu people

Among other things, Msimang (1975) drew on socio-cultural expectations such as *ukuhlonipha* (respect), moral values, religious observances, rites of passage and youth developmental stages, including sexual practices among young people. The examples of such stages and sexual practices were *ubunsizwa* (being a young man), *ubuntombi* (being a young woman), *ukweshela* (courting), *ukuqoma* (choosing a lover) and *ukusoma* (non-penetrative sex practice). He also demonstrated how young people had to live according to the Zulu religio-cultural and social expectations in terms of these sexual practices. The young people were socialised into the communal lifestyle at a very early stage, which, according to Nkumane (2001) was from childhood. This was done through determination of their dress code² at the age of twelve when the girls’ *qhumbuza* (ear-piercing) ritual took place. Ear-piercing was considered a significant ritual before young Zulu girls reached puberty and it was “the first of the number of rituals marking the transition from childhood to adulthood” (Nkumane, 2001:107). According to Nkumane, there was a parallel connection between the ear-piercing and the opening of the ears for the young women: that needed to hear with precision what they were being taught. From a gender perspective, it can be argued that this practice was not discriminatory because it was done to both girls and boys for the same reason: that they may hear, learn and understand the communal values very well (Msimang, 1975:213). The term that Msimang used for this ear-piercing practice was *ukuklekla*.

1.2.2 Early communal intervention in the lives of young Zulu people

In discussing early communal intervention in the lives of young Zulu people, Msimang (1975:210) described three fundamental Zulu idiomatic expressions. These are “*libunjwa liseva*”, “*ugotshwa usemanzi*” and “*zibanjwa zisemaphuhu*”. All these expressions refer more

² The dress code was normally nakedness for very young girls, and white beads around the waist known as *umutsha* for pre-pubescent girls, followed by *isigege*, a front covering for pubescent girls.

or less to the same thing, which is how early intervention and religio-cultural socialisation of the young people shape and mould them for better citizenship as future adults. Subsequently, this intervention was not individualistic but involved any other older member of the community who was capable of teaching girls or boys communal values. While the family played a primary role in these teachings, the boys could also be socialised at *ekwaluseni* (grazing fields) by *izingqwele* (elderly and heroic boys) through training on moral values of Zulu society and stick fighting. As for the girls, there were structures such as *amaqhikiza* (young women who had lovers and practised non-penetrative sex) that provided teaching and training to the younger virgin girls. Additionally, their mothers, who at times played a role in the virginity testing of their daughters, also ensured that girls were readily available to *amaqhikiza* for such instructions. In addition to the role of *amaqhikiza*, Brindley (1982: 79) also endorses the substantial role of *ogogo* (grandmothers) in the sex education and practices of the young girls. According to Msimang (1975:210-211), the community members involved in the process of bringing up the children included *izinduna* (local headmen), *inkosi* (the Chief or King) and all the other capable members of the community.

Communal involvement was also evident in the communal participation in rituals performed to mark the developmental stages of the growing girls and boys. These included *ukuthunyiselwa ngezinyamazane noma ukunikwa imbeleko* (slaughtering to accept the newborn into the family), *ukuqhumbuza noma ukuklekla* (ear-piercing), and *umhlonyane* for girls or *ukuwela izibuko* for boys (puberty rituals). As a communally oriented ethnic group, the Zulu people expected conformity to the social and cultural demands that created a sense of communal belonging. Everyone was expected to follow these requirements and nobody would deviate from the norm without serious repercussions. For instance, Mchunu (2005:4) observed that disregarding social and cultural expectations, especially by women, could have serious ramifications in a Zulu context. These included being detested by community members or being exposed to severe public disgrace and risking retributive actions by ancestors. While it could be true that repercussions could be worse for women because of the patriarchal structure of a Zulu community, these imperative cultural and communal allegiances affected both men and women.

The communal binding aspect of the socio and religio-cultural imperatives is seen in the way in which young men and women were expected to behave when it came to sexual practices and how *ubuntombi* (virginity) was communally respected. A Zulu girl child was expected to grow

up in a traditional way with emphasis on her identity as an *intombi* (virgin), respected, supported, admired and encouraged by the whole community to the extent that *izintombi* (virgins) were referred to as “the flowers of the nation” (Wickström, 2010:540). *Ukuthomba* (puberty) referring to the first menstruation, did not only involve the local girls who came to support her during her *umgonqo* (seclusion period), but ultimately the whole community. At the end of seclusion period, the father of the girl slaughtered two goats to mark her changed social status and for the celebration of her developmental stage, bringing the whole community together to celebrate with that particular family of both the living and the living dead (Msimang, 1975:216). The puberty period and its rituals are described in Chapter Four of this study, where I also demonstrate that the community involved the world of the ancestors, who are believed to be in continuous partnership with the living. The sense of being a community is deeply embedded in African cultures and is one of the core-fibres of Africanism. Kanu (2007:75) elucidated what communalism entails:

Communalism as a social philosophy was given institutional expression in the social structures of many rural African societies. Because it was participatory and characterised by social and ethical values such as solidarity, interdependence, cooperation, and reciprocal obligations, the material and other benefits of the communal social order were likely to be available to all members of the community. Furthermore, its intricate web of social relations would tend to ensure individual social worth, thus making it almost impossible for an individual to feel socially insignificant.

Even though Kanu wrote in a Mende community context, her understanding of communalism is relevant for Zulu communal and social relationships that characterised precolonial and colonial society. An individual’s existence would have been impossible without belonging to and living according to the communal and social values and norms with its attendant benefits of communal support. It is in this context that the identity and dignity of the young woman and her family would have been compromised if she fell pregnant before marriage. In communal functions, she would not be associated with *izintombi* or married women during *izithebe* (meal times), which were categorised according to the stage of each social group. She would be referred to as *ilulwane* (bat), an animal that is neither classified as a bird nor a mouse. The worth and value of virginity was thus strictly maintained in the Zulu culture. This was reinforced during *ukuthomba* (puberty) as one of those practices associated with sex education practices. Although this study does not advocate a return to all these practices, through a cultural analysis approach, the study proposes the need to maintain certain practices that may be beneficial to Zulu girls and can be used as tools for sex education.

1.2.3 General overview of puberty and sex education practices among Zulus

Ukuthomba (first menstruation or puberty), as a rite of passage or transformative rite for young girls from childhood to *ubuntombi* phase, was the best time for instilling moral values and socially acceptable sexual practices for young people, as described in Chapter Four. *Ogogo* (elderly Zulu women) and *amaqhikiza* (post-pubescent girls with lovers who were in charge of *amatshitshi* (younger virgins without lovers) provided sex education to the initiates so that they would know how to handle their bodies (Msimang, 1975:216; Brindley, 1982:84; Hunter 2005:14). Young women were encouraged to take pride in their bodies and identity of *ubuntombi* even after they had chosen young men as lovers. They were not allowed to practise penetrative sex, but were rather encouraged to do *ukusoma* (non-penetrative sex). This was affirmed by Krige (1968:174) who stated that “a virgin’s body was her pride and its exposure confirmed her innocence and purity” which would be seen in the firmness of her buttocks, thighs and breasts as physical features of her virginity. Sex education during puberty was not limited to girls only; both girls and boys were equipped with life orientation skills such as how to handle their sexuality, as pointed out by Brindley (1982:79).

Furthermore, Hunter (2005:6) noted that “men were fined for breaking an unmarried woman’s virginity and particularly for causing pregnancy”. This was because the traditional cultural norm was that an *intombi*’s virginity would be preserved until she got married. She might have already been practising *ukusoma* (non-penetrative thigh sex) with her chosen young man. If the two were found to have started practising penetrative sex and the young woman became pregnant, the young man could be accused of *ukuyona intombazane* (spoilt/degraded the girl). Apparently, pregnancy was the main determining factor that the girl had been practising penetrative sex; even though some elderly women were regarded as cultural experts able to recognise when the girl engaged in penetrative sex as indicated in subsequent chapters. The man was to pay three cows known as *inhlawulo*, ‘the damages’, because penetrative sex could have caused irreparable damage to the dignity and identity of the girl as an *intombi*, and her family’s social status would be relegated to the margins of the society. In this sense, the damage meant a loss, not only of the girl’s social status as a respectable young woman, but also of economic status of the father, the mother and the rest of the family who could have benefitted from the preservation of *ubuntombi*. The man did not only sin against the individual girl but her entire clan and the group of girls to whom she belonged. *Inhlawulo* was meant to atone for the wrong done. Consequently the young man who had been responsible was even called a dog

in the idiomatic expression “*inja idle amafutha*”, directly translated as “a dog has eaten fats”. This referred to the fact that the offending young man had partaken of the richness (fats) of the virginity of the young woman. This idiomatic expression was used when he was being reported to the violated girl’s family by the representatives from his family. His act would have resulted in disapproval by members of his family who would have reprimanded him for having committed *icala* (misconduct) by destroying the young woman’s dignity. The man would usually be compelled to marry the young woman.

Subsequently, even when the young people had fallen in love and visited each other, a visit privately arranged by *amaqhikiza*, it was strongly emphasised to both young people, that the young woman should not be sexually violated (Msimang, 1975:243). This would instil fear in the *intombi* and she would be very strict and not allow a young man to have penetrative sex. The young man was also aware of the repercussions. Thus both the young man and woman had to be equally responsible over their sexual behaviour; the traditional preservation of *ubuntombi* (virginity) can be considered a non-gendered cultural practice. Consequently, *ubuntombi* was proudly owned by *izintombi* and the community at large as a social phenomenon, and likewise young men had a social responsibility to respect *ubuntombi bezintombi* (virginity of the virgins). This cultural backdrop of the Zulu ethnic group and its social set-up during pre-colonial and colonial times serves as a general background to this study. It also serves as a foundation for what can be understood about *ubuntombi* in the modern world. However, the question remains as to whether it is still viewed as a path to adulthood and the space in which sex education practices are instilled in the lives of young people. Put differently, the study sought to enquire as to how and why *ubuntombi* has evolved from pre-colonial and colonial times to what it currently is and how this is beheld by *izintombi* and community members. Once this is understood, the question can be considered regarding how *ubuntombi* can be retrieved as a religio-cultural heritage and identity of the young Zulu women. However, to enable understanding of this cultural background, the contextual clarification of the concepts *ubuntombi*, *intombi* or *izintombi* becomes essential, as outlined below.

1.2.4 The contextual understanding of the terms ‘ubuntombi’ and ‘intombi’ or ‘izintombi’

The contextual understanding of the concepts *ubuntombi* and *intombi* or *izintombi* is crucial because they are used throughout this study. Without being properly understood in their own context, many misconceptions might take place. Thus each concept is clarified in its Zulu context in the sections which follow.

1.2.4.1 *Ubuntombi in the Zulu context*

It is worth noting that *ubuntombi* was not only a cultural practice as normally referred to in contemporary society but it was also a way of life for the Zulu people. Therefore, every young girl grew up as a virgin and was communally guarded and guided through the path to adulthood, particularly by *amaqhikiza* and grandmothers as the social structures responsible for playing this role. These social structures took over from the parents who were responsible for their children in their respective families, where they were brought up according to the expected social norms such as *ukuqhubuza* (ear-piercing) as indicated above and *ukusukula* (forceful removal of blood from private parts), according to Msimang (1975:214). *Ukusukula* was done to both boys and girls because Zulus believed that bad blood with the potential of causing sexual immorality had to be removed from the genitals of the growing child. Another very natural practice for the Zulu people was virginity testing of young girls, privately done at home by mothers or local women entrusted with this task. This was very important because when *intombazane isiyoniwe* (girl child had been spoilt/degraded), it became a family as well as a communal issue since she fully belonged to these structures. She never owned her body as an individual to decide what to do with it in her own individual capacity. Every step she took involved her parents, siblings and community members, and even the local leaders such as *inkosi* (chief) or *induna* (headman) because her identity depended on who she was in her own community. This is described in the Zulu idiomatic expression *umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu* which means “a human being is a being because of other human beings”. Put differently, an individual never exists in a vacuum and so is someone’s identity.

When these precautions had been taken concerning the proper upbringing of children until they approached puberty, a child was initiated into adulthood through particular puberty rituals. These will be fully discussed in Chapter Four of this study. For boys, this was known as *ubunsizwa*, while for girls it was *ubuntombi*. As indicated in the general introduction of the study above, *ubuntombi* can be directly translated as ‘virginity’ in English. While in the Zulu context *ubuntombi* means ‘virginity’, it also refers to the period in which young women had passed puberty and entered the stage of being young adults in the community. According to Msimang (1975: 215-249), this stage continued as the young woman matured into adulthood, fulfilling cultural expectations such as *ukuqoma* (choosing a boyfriend) or resisting the early choice of a boyfriend until she became a highly respected and admirable seasoned young woman. Social functions pertaining to *ubuntombi* included *umemulo* (being thanked for

preservation of *ubuntombi*), *ukubongwa* (being thanked for having made a choice of a boyfriend), *ukucelwa* (the potential in-laws ask the woman's hand in marriage), *ukulotsholwa* (fulfilment of bride-price negotiations), *ukukhehla* (slaughtering in preparation for a wedding), and when marriage occurred, then the *ubuntombi* stage ended. However there was another way in which *ubuntombi* (virginity) could end before marriage: when penetrative sex took place and the young woman got pregnant and gave birth to an illegitimate child. She still remained in the stage of *ubuntombi* though she neither associated herself with virgins nor mothers because premarital childbearing displaced her from the rightful people at her stage in life. This is because being a virgin was a social expectation of every girl and so it was not a matter of choice. Therefore *ubuntombi* in this study is mainly used to mean virginity (state of being chaste) and also refers to a particular stage of development that is entered into from puberty until marriage.

1.2.4.2 *Intombi or izintombi in the Zulu context*

Intombi is a young woman who has passed the pubescent stage and has, through communal recognition, officially entered a stage of *ubuntombi* as one of the developmental stages in a Zulu cultural context. However when a girl child is born into the family, the members of the family declare that *intombi* has been born because of her potential of becoming *intombi* when she finally reaches the stage of *ubuntombi*. She has a particular worth due to the expectation that she would be the source of the family's wealth through the bride-price to be paid when she gets married, a result of keeping her virginity. Once *izintombi* (a plural form of *intombi*) have reached the stage of *ubuntombi*, they are expected to remain *izintombi* until the day of marriage, whether they remain chaste or not. This is because even when a Zulu girl has given birth to a child, she is rarely referred to as a mother. She is known as *intombi* with a child due to the stage of *ubuntombi* where only marriage becomes a determining factor to motherhood. Traditionally, among the Zulus, if a girl child (*intombi*) got pregnant before marriage, she earned herself certain indecent names that ridiculed her behaviour.

This practice has evolved due to the increased number of pregnancies outside marriage that have also challenged the idea of girls getting married as virgins. Coupled with modernity and other social and economic factors, to a certain extent the practice has narrowed the understanding of the concept of *intombi* into thinking that only a young woman with an intact hymen qualifies to be called an *intombi*. To an extent, this has been exacerbated by the concept of virginity testing. All the young women in the proper conception of *ubuntombi* as a stage are

izintombi in the Zulu context. For this reason, *intombi* or *izintombi* in this study refers to those women who go for virginity testing or who maintain abstinence. The rest of the women who are still at the same stage of *ubuntombi* but have children are referred to as young or teenage mothers or non-*izintombi*. This makes it easy to understand the difference in the current practice of *ubuntombi* where it has been reduced to a cultural practice for virginity-tested girls only.

Traditionally, *ubuntombi* was a stage of development for every Zulu young woman whose identity was in the preservation of sexual purity without exception. While this might have evolved, since culture is not static, the cultural understanding of the stage of *ubuntombi* enables this study a wider exploration of *ubuntombi*. Therefore, *ubuntombi* is examined as virginity as well as a stage of development because it is this stage that becomes a path to adulthood with its culturally indispensable sexual practices. This is part of the indigenous knowledge that can only be reproduced through an indigenous perspective of the local people's cultural practices. It led to the empirical research that was conducted to retrieve this kind of knowledge and practice of *ubuntombi*. It is in this same context that indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) become relevant for this study because they enable the clarification of the concepts and restore an indigenous understanding of the cultural activities of the cultural group concerned (Hangartner-Everts, 2013).

1.3 The impetus behind this research study

The driving forces behind this study were social observations and experiences that took place at a personal and academic level. The personal inspiration for doing this kind of research emanated from my being a member of a religious community (convent) that has worked in children's ministry over the past two decades. Most of the children are girl children and some of them include children from very young mothers of school-going age. I have observed repeated incidents of child-bearing among these young mothers in spite of their educational opportunities. One particular instance is a story of a young woman in her early twenties who already had two children of her own. She claimed that she was desperate for help because she had an irresponsible father who did not care for her and her siblings. Her mother had died and she reported that the father spent all his pension money on drinking. Neither she nor her children had any birth certificates which meant she could not register her children for a social grant. Having appealed to the religious community for assistance, she was offered a job as a domestic worker. She worked well and was able to get support for herself and her two children.

The young woman continued to work for few years until the religious community leader took pity on her and suggested she go back to school in order to further her education. She gladly accepted the offer and went back to school while community members looked after her two children. She did well in two grades for two years but in grade 12 she became pregnant with a third child and she came back to look after this baby and her other children. All her dreams of a brighter future were shattered as she then had to raise these three children with different irresponsible fathers, on her own. With the help of the religious community members, she secured birth certificates and so she was able to register her children for social grants. Soon she had a fourth child, which made her situation hopeless in terms of her ever recovering and becoming who she dreamt to be. As an African woman, this story left me with many unanswered questions about the status and identity of African young women in South Africa. Will there ever come a time when black women in South Africa will be truly liberated in terms of their identity and self-worth? What could be done with such a high rate of teenage pregnancy? Is the social grant a solution for teenagers who fall pregnant or does it leave them with a dependency syndrome that will entrench women's denigration even further? What should be done to empower young women to safeguard a better future that will be life affirming to women? How did Zulu people in the pre-colonial past deal with such challenges? What has gone wrong that such challenges are so prevalent and continue to escalate in modern and postcolonial times among Zulu people?

With these questions in mind, I felt the need to do research on how young Zulu women survived such challenges in the past and what can be learned today from those practices. Hence the choice of exploring *ubuntombi* as a path to adulthood and sex education practices in an attempt to critically analyse the position of the girl child in the Zulu culture in relation to the concept of *ubuntombi*. I therefore entered the academic debate on *ubuntombi* with the postcolonial and feminist lenses to investigate whether there can be possible ways of underlining and calling attention to positive aspects of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity, with sex education. This is because the story of this young woman is not just her story but the story of many young black women in South Africa as captured by Lyn Snodgrass (2015)³ in her article 'South Africa: A dangerous place to be poor, black and a woman'. South Africa is now

³Lyn Snodgrass (2015) "South Africa: a dangerous place to be poor, black and a woman." <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2015/09/11/South-Africa-a-dangerous-place-to-be-poor-black-and-a-woman> Accessed 23/09/2015

two decades into freedom, yet it continues to be counted amongst the worst countries when it comes to the treatment of women, especially black African women.

This is further attested by Snodgrass who asserted that “the majority of the South African population who live under the poverty line is black and female”. This exacerbates factors that contribute to the high incidence of violence against women, which Snodgrass identifies as poverty, patriarchy, inequality, stagnant economic growth, high rates of unemployment and low levels of education. While these factors may not be applicable to all South African black women, many ordinary black women are in the worst humiliating social positions. It is for these reasons that this study seeks to find indigenous knowledge on how life-giving cultural aspects of *ubuntombi* can be retrieved and reclaimed as a religio-cultural heritage and identity. This is because *ubuntombi* was and still is a stage that deals with the life of a young black woman as a whole. While the focus of the study is on cultural aspects and sex education practices, the social, economic and political aspects of a Zulu girl child cannot be separated from the concept of *ubuntombi*, particularly in the modern context where the social position of women is critical.

1.3.1 Academic motivation

The fluidity of culture due to colonisation, Christian influence and modernisation has contributed to the erosion of some valuable cultural practices, such as rites of passage. The particular rite of passage that is significant for this study is puberty because among Zulu people, it is during this period that sex education emphasised. Young people lived a disciplined sexual life because social structures equipped them with social expectations and taught them how they had to take individual responsibility for their sexual behaviour (Brindley, 1982: 79-84). However, colonisation deconstructed such indigenous social structures due to the changes brought about by formal education that took young people to a schooling system, industrialisation and urbanisation. Hunter (2004:16) pointed out that some parents objected to the schooling of their girl children as they were labelled *izifebe* (‘loose’ women). Put differently, it was very hard for Zulu people to accept that girl children were no longer going to grow up in the traditional way, because they had to go to school. Labelling them as ‘loose’ women was a form of discouragement because being at school meant that they had to adopt the western or colonial masters’ lifestyle.

Consequently, they could no longer be trusted to still continue with *ukusoma* (non-penetrative thigh sex) or they considered it to be old-fashioned as they embraced penetrative sex as a

modernised practice. Hunter (2004:16) further maintained that a similar trend was followed in urban areas where watch dogs over younger *izintombi*, such as *amaqhikiza*, were no longer in existence; this resulted in cohabiting, out of wedlock childbearing and prostitution. These arguments by Hunter point to the void in Zulu culture that was created by the disappearance of *amaqhikiza* and the role of elderly women who conducted sex education practices with the young people during puberty. This was also observed by Ndinda *et al.* (2011:7) who argued that “the collapse of the traditional institutions that provided sex education to adolescents has left a vacuum that remains unfilled by the South African education system”. Colonialism had nothing to offer as a replacement for these essential cultural roles that were disrupted, and hence the void persists and haunts current generations, especially young people.

Therefore, this study highlights the challenges of this void or vacuum from the indigenous perspective by looking to the past to see if there is any positive aspect in the practice of *ubuntombi* that can be retrieved and used as a tool for sex education. This is not done with blind nostalgic hindsight that glorifies the past, bearing in mind that the past also had its own challenges. This is illustrated by Kanu (2007:68-69) with the introduction of the *Sankofa*, an idiomatic expression she borrows from the Akan people of Ghana, which means “retrieving the past is no taboo, thus say the ancestors”. This concept encourages looking into the past with the intention of getting some wisdom with which to move into the future. For instance, Kanu expatiates that “*Sankofa* teaches that we must go back to our roots in order to move forward – that is, we should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward”.

The implication of this concept is that there is something valuable that can be retrieved from the past. In her words, Kanu (2007: 69) upholds that “...to initiate a progressive civil social existence, one that preserves our humanity, we would have to reach back into the past for the wisdom of our ancestors, the best of our traditions, and renew and refine these traditions for the new meanings that are relevant for the present”. The *Sankofa* concept as expounded by this author serves as an inspiration for this study that also seeks retrieval of the past practices of *ubuntombi* in Zulu culture with the intention of finding positive aspects that can be forged into current solutions to Zulu societal challenges linked to the plight of the girl child. While the *Sankofa* concept might be critiqued as being primitive-minded, resistant to change and conservative from a western perspective, it demonstrates that not every change brings progress and grandeur, but that valuable lessons of life can also be retrieved from the past.

1.4 The research problem

Having been inspired by the *Sankofa* concept, the research study seeks to take a glimpse into the past to investigate how and why Zulu cultural practices such as *ubuntombi* have diminished together with moral values instilled through sex education when girls came of age. The intention is to recover positive aspects from the ways in which young women lived their lives in the past to see whether such positive aspects cannot influence the decision-making and choices of today's young women. Most of the current studies hardly pay attention to the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* per se; virginity testing, though considered intertwined with *ubuntombi* from the cultural perspective, receives a great deal of attention from the current discourses and debates as will be seen in subsequent chapters. In addition, some of the Westerners who came and still come to conduct research among the indigenous people usually provide conclusions on the findings of their studies using their own perspectives. This leaves inaccurate and one-sided if not misleading findings on indigenous knowledge that can hardly be considered as valid viewpoints. For instance, Wickström (2010:538) argued that the traditional Zulu notion of virginity contested a Western understanding of it. She upholds, "In contrast to the Victorian concept of chastity, virginity among the Zulus has not previously been associated with abstinence. The important thing was to avoid penetrative sex, defloration, and thus pregnancy. Thus, it was bad to destroy someone's virginity, but it was also bad not to 'play' at all." This argument by Wickström demonstrates a profound difference between Western and indigenous Zulu understandings of virginity. This needs serious attention or it may lead to a one-sided perception of *ubuntombi*.

This Western viewpoint has permeated most scholarly thinking, which is verified by contestation of virginity testing by some scholars such as Scorgie (2002) and Leak (2012) as well as gender activists. For instance, Scorgie's arguments suggest that *izintombi* are being indoctrinated with what they should believe about themselves and their sexuality because elderly women want to preserve culture and to exert parental control over young people's sexuality. Similarly, Leak (2012:90) argued that "virginity testing advocates assertions of the communal responsibility and obligation to regulate the sexuality of Zulu youth, especially women and girls..." These scholars' arguments clearly dismiss indigenous understanding of *ubuntombi*, which had nothing to do with parents wanting to exert their control over the girl's sexuality. This is because sex education and exerting that kind of control was the responsibility of *amaqhikiza*, as indicated earlier. While admittedly there could be some flaws in the way in

which virginity testing is currently conducted, most of the academic critiques of this practice have not gone deep enough to unearth the reasons behind the indigenous understanding of such practices. Such arguments have drawn *ubuntombi* into being viewed as a Zulu gendered identity instead of being regarded as an indigenous Zulu heritage and identity socially respected and collectively observed by the whole community as a growing phase of young women.

As has already been indicated in the preceding paragraph, *ubuntombi* has shifted from the way in which it was traditionally understood. This is probably due to external influences on the practice, which carry connotations, for example, that the practice is outdated and enforced by those who do not want to see change and freedom in the sexual life of the young people, as implied by virginity testing contenders. *Ubuntombi* has now been reduced to abstinence which also has a religious connotation particularly in Christianity where the emphasis is on the individual responsibility of self-control in terms of sexual purity, rather than a cultural social collective effort of helping young people delay their penetrative sexual activities (Wickström, 2010:538-539). According to this author, abstinence is hard to maintain as an individual responsibility and hence it took a collaborative effort of all Zulu community members to take care of *ubuntombi*, as seen later in the study. When neglected, it yielded regrettable and undesirable outcomes such as pregnancy before marriage, increased risk of HIV and AIDS infections, and loss of educational opportunities that affect women more than men, as seen in Chapter Five of this study. This is in spite of the fact that South African policy permits girl-children to continue with education while pregnant.

Furthermore, the communal and indigenous understanding of *ubuntombi* goes with a different understanding of other terms such as dignity and integrity than their meaning as understood in Western thinking. In indigenous thinking, the dignity and integrity of *intombi* is not preserved through corporeal privacy of the individual. For instance, challenging the statement by the Commission of Gender and Equality of describing virginity testing as “an invasion of bodily and physical integrity, and invasion of privacy”, Wickström (2010:542) asserted that “girls who voluntarily participate in virginity testing have a different understanding of the concept of integrity than that used by the Commission in their statement”. Traditionally in the Zulu culture, there was nothing private about *ubuntombi* and how it was maintained because the well-fare of every member was a communal responsibility.

Additionally, the dignity and integrity of *intombi* was determined by external exposure of the body that carried public visible features of her virginity (Krige, 1968:174). Hence it formed the

core part of her virginity, displayed by her fearless disposition and pride of being *intombi*. Therefore *ubuntombi* was a matter of public and communal concern instead of being an individualistic and private affair. For instance, Wickström (2010:535) contended that “by making virginity a matter of public concern, the thinking goes, people can help girls delay their sexual debut and encourage men to respect girls’ sexual integrity”. This further exhibits contestation between the indigenous and Western understanding of the virginity testing cultural practice, which is a form of preserving *ubuntombi*. Even though this study is not directly focussed on virginity testing as an academic debate, it remains indispensable when dealing with *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. This is because most literature that vilifies indigenous understanding of virginity testing indirectly maligns the indigenous understanding of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu cultural heritage and identity.

However, this does not entirely dismiss the gendered element in the current practice of virginity testing because unlike in the traditional practice of *ubuntombi* highlighted above in which men were communally compelled to respect young women, today men get away with sexual violation of women. This violation entails rape, incest, coercion and lust relationships⁴ that leave many young women pregnant with fatherless children because the culprits run away after they have satisfied their lust in sleeping with girls. It is therefore vital for researchers to have an indigenous knowledge of what *ubuntombi* entailed as well as the ways in which it was maintained in Zulu culture in order to make informed decisions as to whether they are life-denying or life-affirming cultural practices within *ubuntombi*. This is because uninformed arguments carry an element of the dominance of Western thinking and knowledge over the indigenous cultural understanding. This leads to resistance, as seen with the persistence of virginity testing. It is for this reason that this study seeks to answer the research question:-

In view of diminishing indigenous knowledge of most cultural practices, how can *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice be emancipated and retrieved as a Zulu religious-cultural heritage and identity and a path to adulthood and sex education practices?

Due to the patriarchal nature of the Zulu culture and a need to avoid cultural romanticism, this study is also undertaken from a critical feminist perspective. Therefore gender issues that arise in the retrieval of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous Zulu cultural heritage and identity are

⁴ This refers to non-committed relationships or to the blesser or sugar-daddy relationships.

challenged. This is because *ubuntombi* is about young Zulu women who are part of the historically debased and the downtrodden former colonised Zulu ethnic group.

1.5 Sub-questions

In answering the main research question, the study responds to the following sub-questions:

- What is *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice in the Zulu culture?
- What are some of the traditional cultural practices of *ubuntombi* that have been used to encourage *ubuntombi* as a Zulu heritage and identity?
- How could *ubuntombi* be emancipated and retrieved as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity in the context of human rights and Western thinking?
- How possible is it that *ubuntombi* could be retrieved and preserved as a tool for sex education among Zulu young people?

1.6 The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To describe *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice in the Zulu culture.
- To explore some of the traditional cultural practices of *ubuntombi* that have been used to encourage *ubuntombi* as a Zulu heritage and identity.
- To investigate the feasibility of retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity in the context of human rights and Western thinking.
- To examine the possibility of retrieval and preservation of *ubuntombi* as a tool for sex education among Zulu young people.

1.7 The structural outline of the chapters

The first chapter provides a general introductory background to the study where a pre-colonial as well as colonial glimpse of the Zulu people is presented, including cultural practices. Some frequently used concepts such *ubuntombi* and *intombi* or *izintombi* are clarified. The driving force behind the research study is presented in the form of personal and academic motivation behind the study. The chapter also outlines the research problem, main research question, objectives and sub-questions of the study. The chapter concludes with a structural outline of the chapters of the study.

The second chapter presents the theory and method of the study. The theoretical framework is identified as a postcolonial theoretical framework. However, the specific group under study

within the Zulu ethnic group are young women known as *izintombi* and for this reason a postcolonial feminist theory was chosen. This is because while postcolonial theory helps to address postcolonial issues, it does not accommodate women's issues within the former colonised African countries. Yet these women encountered twofold subjugation under colonial masters whose ways dehumanised all black Africans while women also suffered under traditional patriarchal structures of their own population group. In addition, the study looks at *ubuntombi* as a cultural heritage and identity, thus it also requires cultural hermeneutics since African culture is not always life-giving to women. Therefore, feminist cultural hermeneutics is another embedded theory used in the study. The methodology used for the study is then mapped out. The specific methods that were used in the collection of the data from different sites are highlighted. The identified methods were interviews and focus group discussions. Participant-observation was another strategy of data collection in the field. I physically participated in the field through my presence, observing and recording cultural activities of *izintombi*.

In the third chapter, I examine the existing literature on the subject of *ubuntombi* and demonstrate the limitations of the current studies in order to determine the gap for entering the academic debate. Due to the absence of literature that directly addresses *ubuntombi* as a Zulu heritage and indigenous practice, the chapter presents literature on virginity testing, which seems to be an inseparable cultural practice with *ubuntombi* as a practice. Since the study is conducted from a feminist perspective, literature on the social position of the Zulu girl-child is examined. Literature on indigenous knowledge systems is also explored in this chapter because the study is about the indigenous retrieval of *ubuntombi*. Other literature reviewed in this chapter concerns culture and religious aspects of *ubuntombi* since the study falls within theology as a discipline.

Chapter Four follows with a presentation of the research findings, data analysis and interpretation of the data collected. The chapter analyses and examines the identified themes on *ubuntombi* and its traditional practice in the Zulu culture, and it explores some of the traditional cultural practices that have been used to encourage *ubuntombi* as a Zulu religious-cultural heritage and identity and a path to adulthood and sex education practices. This is done by identifying those traditional cultural practices that encouraged and served as re-enforcement of *ubuntombi* as a practice. It also explores *ubuntombi* as an identity and Zulu heritage that

went together with sex education practices on the path to adulthood, particularly puberty rituals and their communicated meanings.

The fifth chapter further presents research findings on the feasibility of retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity in the context of human rights and Western thinking. In other words, it examines *ubuntombi* and how it is understood in its current practice and prevailing debates. The chapter critically provides a context of human rights and how these influence the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* as perceived from both an indigenous and a Western perspective. Voices of the participants appear in this chapter as evidence of indigenous views about the feasibility of the retrieval of *ubuntombi* in the context of human rights that are inherent in Western thinking.

Chapter Six presents contestations against *ubuntombi* and how in the midst of these, *ubuntombi* can be retrieved as a tool for sex education since it is part of an inevitable path to adulthood. Having examined the contesting voices and challenges that militate against *ubuntombi*, the chapter demonstrates how indigenous knowledge can be allowed to have a voice in terms of the retrieval of *ubuntombi* as an educational tool in sex education.

The seventh chapter gives an overall picture and sums up important research findings, pinpointing the critical themes of the collected data that disclose new knowledge. The chapter also concludes the study.

Chapter Two

Theoretical frameworks and methodology of the study

2.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, I introduced the study by providing the general background to the study, delineating the pre-colonial setup of the Zulu ethnic group and its cultural lifestyle, and giving a sense of how *ubuntombi* and sexual issues were handled among young people. I also outlined the research problem, which highlighted the importance of this study as demonstrated by the key research question and the objectives of the study. The current chapter presents a theoretical framework for the study, which is the lens used to analyse *ubuntombi* as a religio-cultural heritage and identity. The study is located within a postcolonial framework. This framework comprises of postcolonial theory, postcolonial feminist theory and African feminist cultural hermeneutics. The chapter further demonstrates the significance of these postcolonial theories and how they relate to each other for the purpose of guiding this study that explores *ubuntombi* as part of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity. Secondly, the chapter describes the methodology used in the collection of data for this study. Methods used, as well as the procedures followed in the data collection, are described. The chapter also briefly describes how various challenges and obstacles were addressed. Finally, the chapter also explains the process of data analysis and how different themes were identified.

2.2 Postcolonial theoretical framework

As already mentioned, this study is broadly framed within a postcolonial theoretical framework. In order to understand the origins of postcolonialism, it is essential to state briefly that there could have been no such theory without colonialism. Colonialism entailed dehumanising, oppressive attitudes and actions towards the subjects of the subjugated or colonised countries by Western empires. For instance, Mishra (2013:131) asserted that “the history of colonialism is largely the history of exploitation of non-white, non-Western others. The colonized countries have been deeply affected by the exploitative racist nature of colonialism.” This kind of racial exploitation resulted from the constructed ‘other’ by the colonial masters who conjectured the following about the colonised subjects:

The colonized are savages in need of education and rehabilitation. The culture of the colonized is not up to the standard of the colonizer, and it is the moral duty of the colonizer to do something about polishing it. The colonized nation is unable to manage and run itself properly, and thus it needs the wisdom and expertise of the colonizer. The colonized nation

embraces a set of religious beliefs incongruent and incompatible with those of the colonizer, and consequently, it is God's given duty of the colonizer to bring those stray people to the right path. The colonized people pose dangerous threat to themselves and to the civilized world if left alone; and thus it is in the interest of the civilized world to bring those people under control. As a result of this the white Europeans ventured adventurously into the so called underdeveloped countries in Africa and Asia and dominated a lot of geographical spaces there. They subjugated the natives, imposed their will at large on them. They eroded the natives' cultures and languages, plundered native's wealth and established their orders on settlers' supremacy.⁵

While lengthy, the above citation does not exhaust all the suppositions made by the colonialists and their effects on the colonised; nonetheless it sketches the unpleasant scenario of the systematic colonial invasion that left the colonised in need of liberation. Similarly, looking at Said's work, Hamadi (2014:40) ascertained that the advancement of the coloniser's language and culture was one of the powerful tools used against the colonised at the expense and neglect of their own languages and cultures. Hence Windsor Leroke,⁶ in his article 'Post-colonialism in South African social science', pointed out that "the historical emergence of postcolonialism is directly linked to the struggles against colonialism and oppression in most parts of the so-called Third World". Moreover, Nikita Dhawan,⁷ in her article 'Postcolonial Feminism and the politics of representation', asserted that colonialism was more than a forceful subjugation and occupation of the land of the colonised people by the West. It was also about treating them as marginalised objects or the 'Other', which necessitated postcolonialism as a critical theory to deconstruct otherness.

The rhetorical question that remains without easy answers is whether colonialism and its effects have ever come to an end. Leroke⁸ upholds that there were discourses that preceded postcolonialism, which he terms anti-colonial, conducted by activists whose writings expressed the repulsive experiences of the subjugated and were a direct critique of the colonisers. These anti-colonial discourses were already a starting point of postcolonialism since "postcolonialism

⁵Bachelorandmaster, *Colonial and Post Colonial Theory*

<http://www.bachelorandmaster.com/criticaltheories/about-colonial-postcolonial-theory.html#.WV0CNvmGPcc> Accessed 05/07/2017.

⁶ Windsor S. Leroke, *Post-colonialism in South African social science*

https://www.google.co.za/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=m_xcWcjpMuio8weQh7eICQ#q=Post-colonialism+in+South+African+social+science Accessed 05/07/2017.

⁷Nikita Dhawan, *Postcolonial Feminism and the politics of representation*

https://www.univie.ac.at/graduierntenkonferenzen-culturalstudies/4_konferenz/dhawan_abstract_engl.pdf Accessed 29/06/2017.

⁸Windsor S. Leroke, *Post-colonialism in South African social*

sciencehttps://www.google.co.za/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=m_xcWcjpMuio8weQh7eICQ#q=Post-colonialism+in+South+African+social+science Accessed 05/07/2017.

could only emerge and develop after the experience of colonialism”. These anti-colonial discourses emanated from the so-called Third World by authors such as Edward Said (1978:200), Homi Bhabha (1994:106), and Gayatri Spivak (1988:1442), who not only disparaged the ways in which the subjugated were treated by the colonisers but also the way in which indigenous knowledge was relegated in favour of the Eurocentric worldview. Therefore, Leroke maintained that postcolonialism deals with the internal situation or the aftermaths of the colonised countries after the experience of colonialism.

It has been highlighted by some scholars, such as Sugirtharajah (2012:12), that “any critical theory which has ‘post’ as its prefix is not easy to pin down and its definition remains unsettled”. Similarly, Childs and Williams (1997:1) demonstrated that defining post-colonial as the “period coming after the end of colonialism” is conceivable but not unproblematic. Their arguments are based on the fact that colonialism never took place in one period, space, time and context. Such arguments bring about considerable criticism, debates and different connotations of postcolonial theory. This was also observed by Rukundwa and Aarde (2007:1172) who contended that postcolonial theory was problematic for researchers because of its “lack of consensus and clarity” due to the vast fields in which the theory is applied. However, they further indicated that the prefix ‘post’ does not necessarily suggest that the former colonised world is now completely free from the grip and past influences of colonialism, which now manifest in the form of neo-colonialism. Hence they argued:

The philosophy underlying this theory is not one of declaring war on the past, but declaring war against the present realities which, implicitly or explicitly, are the consequences of that past. Therefore the attention of the struggle is concentrated on neo-colonialism and its agents (international and local) that are still enforced through political, economic and social exploitation in post-independent nations. (2007:1175)

A similar argument has been expressed by Edward Said who contended that many of the pervasive turbulent political, economic and social scenes of the former colonised countries are the direct dregs of colonialism (Hamadi, 2014: 40). The arguments of these scholars led to the choice of postcolonialism as the best theoretical frame to serve as the lens for this study which seeks to investigate *ubuntombi* as part of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity. The study’s context is a group of *izintombi* within the Zulu ethnic group, a former colonised and vilified cultural group like many others in South Africa. While ‘post’ might have a connotation of discourses that ‘came after’ the colonial system (Mishra, 2013:130), it is extremely difficult to disassociate its aftermaths and to consider colonialism to be a thing of the past. For instance,

South Africa is one of the African countries with a unique history of not only being a former colony of the Western empire, but which experienced decades of systematic structural subjugation, discrimination and dehumanisation of ethnic groups and indigenous people through apartheid policy.

In the process of being systematically treated as ‘other’, ethnic groups lost almost all their cultural identity. Schreier (1997:2) asserted that local identity gets repressed or stifled “in favour of an identity imposed by the colonizer”. The identity of the coloniser not only discarded the local and indigenous identity but it has also left inexpressible neo-colonial effects on social, political, economic and religio-cultural factors of the former colonised ethnic groups. For this reason, this study seeks to find ways in which *ubuntombi* as part of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity, which suffered this double oppression, can be retrieved. The neo-colonial effects are inevitably visible among the young black women, as observed by Lyn Snodgrass (2015),⁹ which need to be addressed if Zulu young women are to reclaim their rightful identity in every social sphere. As Rukundwa and Aarde (2007:1174) argued, this can be addressed through postcolonial theory that “allows people emerging from socio-political and economic domination to reclaim their sovereignty; it gives them a negotiating space for equity”.

Therefore reclaiming their religio-cultural heritage and identity has an influence on *izintombi*’s political and economic independence in the face of many factors that militate against young women of this day and age. This argument will be further pursued in Chapter Five of this study. For the purpose of this study, the broad postcolonial theoretical framework is broken down into postcolonial theory and postcolonial feminist theory. Furthermore, African feminist cultural hermeneutics has also been chosen because the study is about a cultural group of young women within the Zulu context. Like many other African ethnic groups, Zulu people are not spared from patriarchal issues that denigrate women. Therefore, to avoid unrealistic cultural romanticism, feminist cultural hermeneutics as espoused by African Women Theologians has been made an embedded theory for cultural critique from within. This is further pursued later in this chapter where more clarity is given on the use of cultural hermeneutics in this study.

⁹Lyn Snodgrass, “*South Africa: A dangerous place to be poor, black and a woman*”
<http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2015/09/11/South-Africa-a-dangerous-place-to-be-poor-black-and-a-woman> Accessed 23/09/2015.

2.2.1 Postcolonial theory

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, postcolonialism as a framework is broad. For instance, Leroke¹⁰ pointed out that postcolonialism “has brought to the foreground issues of identity, gender, race, ethnicity, writing, representation, orality, difference, marginality, multiplicity and heterogeneity.” In its broader sense it has applied postcolonial theory, which according to Tyagi (2014:45),

... focuses on subverting the colonizer’s discourse that attempts to distort the experience and realities, and inscribe inferiority on the colonized people in order to exercise total control. It is also concerned with the production of literature by colonized peoples that articulates their identity and reclaims their past in the face of that past’s inevitable otherness.

Some Western scholars and those who might have taken on “colonized garbs of identity” (Mishra, 2013:129) have criticised and militated against cultural activities such as virginity testing, which is a cultural way of maintaining *ubuntombi* in the Zulu culture. In these critical voices, *izintombi* themselves are hardly given any voice about their own cultural practice but are portrayed as primarily ignorant of their sexual rights or oppressed by traditionally binding stereotypes of the Zulu cultural lifestyle. This affirms the need for postcolonial theory since it argues “that academic systems of knowledge are rooted in a colonial mindset and that the voices of the colonized have been made invisible”.¹¹ In view of the fact that *izintombi* as a group under study are ignored or left voiceless in their own cultural practice, this study seeks to help them reclaim their identity from “otherness” through postcolonial theory.

According to Leckey,¹² postcolonial theory enables academics from different disciplines to diverge from hegemonic Western perspectives in their writings. As such, postcolonial theory enabled this study to look back critically at the effects of colonialism not only on indigenous knowledge systems, but also on cultural practices such as virginity testing and *ubuntombi* that were demonised and discarded as irrelevant. Sugirtharajah (2012:12-13) affirms that some of the functions of postcolonial theory, is to “interrogate the often one-sided history of nations, cultures and peoples and engage in a critical revision of how the ‘other’ is represented”. He

¹⁰Windsor S. Leroke, *Post-colonialism in South African social science* https://www.google.co.za/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=m_xcWcjpMui08weQh7eICQ#q=Post-colonialism+in+South+African+social+science Accessed 05/07/2017.

¹¹Research Starters eNotes.com, *Postcolonial Theory* <https://www.enotes.com/research-starters/postcolonial-theory> Accessed 07/07/2017.

¹² Connor F. J. Leckey *Postcolonialism and Development* <https://queenspoliticalreview.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/connor-leckey-article.pdf> Accessed 05/07/2017.

further pointed out that the underlying intention of postcolonial theory is to unearth “... the collusive nature of Western historiography and its hidden support for imperialism”. It thus calls for decolonisation of a collusive Western mindset against cultural activities such as *ubuntombi* and the way in which it is maintained so as to allow *izintombi* to reclaim their cultural heritage and identity without fear of being considered oppressed, as per the claim of its opponents. For instance, Rukundwa and Aarde (2007:1174) posited that “postcolonial critique can be defined as a dialectical discourse which broadly marks the historical facts of decolonization”.

Subsequently, decolonisation includes a number of activities promulgated by this theory in favour of the former colonised. These are, amongst others, identified by Tyagi (2014:45) who asserted that the “task of a postcolonial theorist is to insert the often ‘absent’ colonized subject into the dominant discourse in a way that resists/subverts the authority of the colonizer”. Furthermore, Sugirtharajah (2012:14) pointed out that postcolonial theory is engrossed with “recovering the resistance of the subjugated. This looks not only at the dynamics of colonial domination but also at the capacity of the colonized to resist, either openly or covertly”. *Ubuntombi* among the Zulu people is one of the cultural practices that has demonstrated considerable resilience despite pressure on it both internally and externally, which could be considered a covert form of resistance by indigenous people. Sugirtharajah (2012:14) further maintained that postcolonial theory “studies the process and effects of cultural displacement on individuals and communities and the ways in which the displaced have defined and defended themselves”.

While it is not everybody in the Zulu culture who has survived cultural displacement or who has been able to defend indigenous cultural practices, some of those cultural activities such as *ubuntombi* have stood the test of time to date. In this it has proven to be one of the cultural activities with which the indigenous peoples, such as Zulus, have defended their cultural stance. It is in this process of self-defence of the subjugated that decolonisation takes place. Mapara (2009:141) added that “the postcolonial theory is also about the formerly colonized announcing their presence and identity as well as reclaiming their past that was lost or distorted because of being ‘othered’ by colonialism”. While his argument makes it sound fairly easy to reclaim the mislaid and prejudiced past, it is appropriate to acknowledge the dynamism and non-static nature of culture. African culture has evolved and keeps evolving, which makes it less feasible to reclaim the past as it was. However, through indigenous knowledge systems, this study seeks to add to the decolonisation process of African cultural practices such as *ubuntombi* by

retrieving redemptive elements in the practice that can be used to address the challenges facing Zulu young people today, particularly young women.

2.2.1.1 Indigenous perspective and knowledge of the colonised

During the colonial era, regardless of their indigenous perspective and knowledge, the colonised or indigenous people had no control over what was being said about them and their cultural practices, traditions, values, customs and beliefs as they were relegated to the margins. This is affirmed by Mapara (2009:141) who argued that “the postcolonial theory is an area of cultural and critical theory that ... focuses on the way in which literature by the colonizers distorts the experience and realities of the colonized...” It is for this reason that this study seeks to give *izintombi* as a group under study a voice that has seemingly been distorted by the coloniser, as will be seen in the subsequent chapters, so that they might share their own experiences and personal accounts on the understanding of *ubuntombi* as their cultural heritage. This is because there are many critical voices that speak on this cultural practice, with very little voice from *izintombi* themselves as indigenous people directly involved with this cultural practice. Mishra (2013: 132) raised concern about the voice of the colonial subject when she pointed out that “the question of voice that is who speaks for whom and whose voices are being heard in discussions on postcolonial women’s issues is another moot point in postcolonial feminism”. Spivak also brought up a similar question in her article ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988:1427) in which she raised concerns about the silenced subaltern women whose voices are never heard. This is clearly depicted in Chapter Four of this study where women traditionally remained silent on the issue of *lobola* and its commercialisation, yet it has a direct influence on their lives.

Presumably the indigenous people’s perspectives in this study restored twisted indigenous knowledge on *ubuntombi* because “it is a fundamental aspect of the postcolonial theoretic project to destabilize the ‘truths’ born out of colonialism and to open a space in the academic world for alternative voices and perspectives to be heard”.¹³ This is also acknowledged by Sugirtharajah (2012:13) who upheld that postcolonial theory also deals with exploration of the frequently conspiring western scholarship that is full of prejudiced and manipulative attitudes. These scholarly arguments qualify postcolonial theory as the most relevant for this study

¹³Research Starters eNotes.com, *Postcolonial Theory*<https://www.enotes.com/research-starters/postcolonial-theory> Accessed 07/07/2017.

which, in the retrieval of the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* through indigenous knowledge systems, is critical of the colonial and Western knowledge that has distorted some of the presentations of this practice and its maintenance. For instance, Mapara further views indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and postcolonial theory as inseparable entities since he argued:

IKS are more than just a displaying of the knowledge and belief systems of the formerly colonized. They are one of the forms of responses to the myth of Western superiority. They are a way in which the formerly colonized are reclaiming their dignity and humanity that they had been robbed of by colonialism. (Mapara, 2009:143).

Hence, it is for the same reason that the study embraces the Afrocentric paradigm as advocated for by Mkabela (2005:179), who is one of the key thinkers of the African perspective in qualitative research. The author asserts that the “Afrocentric paradigm deals with the question of African identity from the perspective of African people as centred, located, oriented, and grounded”. *Izintombi* as the group under study are an African group of young women whose perspectives are to play a critical role in relation to their cultural heritage and identity in this study. Mkabela further argued that “Afrocentricity is therefore a philosophical and theoretical perspective and when applied to the research can form the essential core of the idea” of an African cultural standpoint. Therefore a postcolonial theoretical framework with an Afrocentric paradigm allows the study to explore the indigenous understanding of the identity of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu heritage from the African perspective as cultural standpoint. In addition, Kovach (2010:42) argued that “an indigenous paradigm welcomes a decolonizing perspective” which is of necessity in the indigenous research due to the marginalisation of the indigenous people’s experiences. According to Mkabela, Afrocentricity also calls for sensitivity to the specific socio-religio-cultural context and its dynamics as well as consideration of the indigenous perspectives of the participants in the study (2005:181). This research study about *ubuntombi* as a religio-cultural heritage and identity used indigenous participants for their aboriginal perspectives on *ubuntombi*.

2.3 Postcolonial feminist theory

Another theory that is critical for this study is feminist theory because *ubuntombi* is the cultural practice of *izintombi*, the young Zulu women from an African ethnic group whose culture is analogous to male-dominance. Hence the broad postcolonial framework also includes postcolonial feminist theory that brings in a feminist perspective to the study; it is essential to address those feminist issues that are often overlooked in male-dominated discourses. For

instance, Tyagi (2014: 46) maintained that most of the African writings are not only chiefly male-centred but also portray women as domesticated passive objects that are traditionally confined to motherhood. It is likely that this portrayal emanates from what Oduyoye (2007:4) perceived as the veneration of marriage in African cultures. She asserted that most married African women “lose their status as human beings with a will of their own. They live to do the will of their husbands.” In addition, Tyagi (2014:46) upheld that the African literature that began in the 60s glorified the past of the African cultures to the extent that everything appeared utopian on the surface, yet African women’s struggles under patriarchal structures were disregarded. She further contended that while the postcolonial theorist is concerned with being treated with contempt by the colonial powers, the postcolonial feminist theorist’s mission is to deal with the deconstruction of ‘double colonisation’, referring to the twofold repression of women under colonialism and patriarchy.

2.3.1 Patriarchal and gender issues

As has already been hinted, the main reason for the consideration of the feminist perspective in this study is that Zulu culture, like most African cultures, is permeated by patriarchal and gender issues. These are key concepts in any feminist discourse because they disclose the inequality with which male and female beings are perceived in terms of the power relationship in any given circumstance. As an example in the Zulu culture, the value of the girl child was mainly for the benefit of society especially male members as seen in Chapter Four of this study. For instance, Rakoczy (2004:11) indicated that patriarchy and androcentrism are false ideologies that elevate males over females and give them unwarranted superiority while females are attributed inferiority and deficiency at every level. In agreement, Clifford (2001:9-10) pointed out that even classical writers of Christian origin perceived women as incomplete beings by God’s default and therefore they could be associated with all sorts of wickedness, from being temptresses to the lack of sound mind.

Clifford further posed a question, “Was it not fitting, therefore, that men rule over women, the sex weaker in mind, body, and morality?” The answer becomes a resounding ‘No’ to some of the women such as Pizan whose experiences of being a woman did not correspond with such portrayals of women; she thus embarked on a rocky journey of raising awareness of who women really are from their own perspectives, giving rise to feminism (Clifford, 2001:10).

Therefore Tricia Ruiz¹⁴ rightfully defines patriarchy as “a system in which females are subordinate to men, in terms of power and status, and which is based on the belief that ‘it is right and proper for men to command and women to obey’”. Ruiz further observed that patriarchal foundations could be traced “as far back as Aristotle’s assertion that women’s biological inferiority is akin to her reasoning capabilities”. This is a view, which was later kept alive by many male-centred world religions such as Judaeo-Christian traditions.

Similarly, gender is neither the physical make-up nor biological features of males and females but rather can be understood as a social construct of which men and women are in terms of social behavioural patterns and roles towards each other, and it entails power dynamics (Ruiz).¹⁵ Ruiz further maintained that gender is used by feminists to “analyse relations of power involving men and women, how that power is exerted, and how that interaction has been habitually, historically, and socially implemented over time”. This is in accordance with what Gao (2013:928) upheld, that “feminist theory in the final analysis is to achieve gender equality in all humanity”. For the same reason, a need arose for women’s liberation movements. These arose in stages, with the first wave, mainly concerned with women’s civil and political rights. The second wave was more concerned with the eradication of gender disparity, and challenged the status quo of male-dominance as the common main stream (Gao, 2013:928). This gave rise to “feminism”, a word attributed to Hubertine Auclert, the first woman to use it in 1882, to describe women’s resistance for political rights in Europe and North America (Rakoczy, 2004:12).

Thereafter feminism developed as a discipline and a field of research, which Clifford (2001:10) defined as “a social vision, rooted in women’s experience of sexually based discrimination and oppression, a movement seeking liberation of women from all forms of sexism and an academic method of analysis being used in virtually every discipline”. While her definition is not exhaustive in terms of what feminism entails, it sketches the basic idea of every form of discrimination, denigration and subjugation of women simply because they are women. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, women’s experiences, perspectives and concerns are not overlooked so that any form of marginalisation and peripheral treatment of women is

¹⁴Tricia Ruiz, *Feminist Theory and International Relations: The Feminist Challenge to Realism and Liberalism*<https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/honors/documents/journals/soundings/Ruiz.pdf> Accessed 11/07/2017

¹⁵Tricia Ruiz, *Feminist Theory and International Relations: The Feminist Challenge to Realism and Liberalism*<https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/honors/documents/journals/soundings/Ruiz.pdf> Accessed 11/07/2017

deconstructed and eradicated. This is because gender constructs in African cultures are so pervasive that Dube (2007:353) asserted they have innately infused African people, such that they have almost become their second nature. However she contended that since gender is a mere social and cultural construct, it is therefore not indisputably God-given or natural, and can be deconstructed.

Nevertheless, Gao (2013:928) further pointed out that while feminism originated from the West and considered all women of the world to be under the yoke of gender and patriarchal oppression, it was dominated by white women who hardly understood experiences of women from the former colonised countries or the so-called Third World. Similarly, Rakoczy (2004:14) cited Delores Williams as one of the African Americans who ridiculed feminism for being concerned with white women's issues only, whose focus was on gender. It did not address black women's experiences of binary repression they received from males of all races and from white women themselves. This marked the third wave of feminism in which African-American women such as Alice Walker referred to themselves as "womanist" as a way of expressing how they perceived themselves and their experiences. According to Gao (2013:928), this awareness by the non-white feminists that their experiences were being disregarded became the key to the development of the postcolonial feminist theory.

Nonetheless, researchers on African feminism such as Goderema (2010) disputed the fact that this feminism is a direct outcome of third wave feminism since African feminism is not about the tension between culture and race as presumed by others. She contended that African historical epochs marked by pre-colonialism, colonialism and postcolonialism that took place at different intervals in the African continent, made the African context unique when it came to feminism adopted in each of its countries. For this reason, African feminism is to be perceived in terms of what makes it different from the Western feminism, which is "culture and tradition, socio-economic and political issues, the role of men, race and sex or sexuality" (2010:29). She further asserts that these factors are essential pillars that hold African feminism together and make it unique, due to similar experiences that African women have to deal with. This is also affirmed by Ampofo, Beoku-Betts and Osirim (2008:1) who observed that "over the past two decades, the discipline of feminist and gender studies has changed rapidly as issues of difference, power, knowledge production and representation are contested, negotiated, and analysed from multiple and shifting sites of feminist identities". It is this kind of change that this study intended to investigate in discussing the concept of *ubuntombi* as an empowerment

for women. Ampofo *et al.* (2008) further indicated that, as opposed to the Western feminists discourse, African feminists are mainly concerned with culture and identity. It is for the same reason that this study explores the retrieval of the positive aspects of *ubuntu* as a form of religio-cultural heritage and identity.

In addition, Sugirtharajah (2012:15) indicated that postcolonial theory is preoccupied with “placing women in patriarchal culture, and especially the ‘double colonization’ faced by women who were colonized by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies”. However, on the same issue, Tyagi (2014:45) argued that in terms of representation, postcolonial theory has failed women because they not only had to resist colonial control but also patriarchy in which the colonised male also became an accomplice to the oppressor. Tyagi thus concluded that the postcolonial theorist is therefore unable to properly represent women in the discourse of the struggle against colonisers hence the need for a postcolonial feminist theorist. She maintained that the postcolonial feminist theorist is not only capable of defending herself against the coloniser as a colonised subject but also as a female. Tyagi further highlighted the need for a postcolonial feminist theorist as she asserted that Western feminists from the colonial empires “misrepresent their colonized counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural, social, and political specificities and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their ‘sisters’”. Therefore, a postcolonial feminist theorist derives his/her identity from the resistance of colonial control combined with patriarchal denigration and hence is capable of representing women in the postcolonial discourse. According to Tyagi:

Postcolonial feminist theory exerts a pressure on mainstream postcolonial theory in its constant iteration of the necessity to consider gender issues. Postcolonialism and feminism have come to share a tense relationship as some feminist critics point out that postcolonial theory is a male-centred field that has not only excluded the concerns of women, but also exploited them. Postcolonial feminist theorists have accused postcolonial theorists not only of obliterating the role of women from the struggle of independence, but also of misrepresenting them in the nationalist discourses. (2014:46)

Subsequently, it became essential to consider the above cited argument by Tyagi and apply postcolonial feminist theory in this study because if the historical fact of double repression of women is overlooked, academic justice would not have been done. It is even more significant that this study is about a group of women from a Zulu ethnic group, who not only had to endure colonialism and its repercussions, but also had to contend with patriarchal structures and gender constructs within the Zulu culture and the wider South African society. Furthermore, as black women, they were only represented by the Western feminist ‘sisters’ who were part of the

Western worldview that colluded with colonialist regime and had no idea of the life experiences of African women.

In addition, Mishra (2013:130) asserted that “postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from postcolonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics”. She further indicated that postcolonial feminism concerns itself with women’s issues in different contexts, particularly those who have a history of being colonised subjects in terms of their “lives, work, identity, sexuality and rights”. Mohanty (1984: 335) also disparaged Western feminists’ tendency of constructing standardised, monumental women of the Third World whose lives and context are identical in all former colonised countries. Furthermore, Tyagi (2014:49) asserted that “economic, religious and familial structures are judged by Western standards; the ‘typical’ Third World woman is thus being defined as religious, family-oriented, legal minor, illiterate and domestic. Through this production of a Third World ‘Other’, White Western feminists are discursively representing themselves as being sexually liberated, free-minded, in control of their own lives”.

Consequently, in this sense, Mohanty felt that this is another colonisation of the real situation that faces women of colour in their different contexts of formerly colonised countries. According to Mohanty, Western feminists cannot dominate scientific knowledge to the exclusion of the Third World women; this turns out to be oppression at its best because even the patriarchal issues are contextual. The present study therefore counteracts and resists this kind of scientific knowledge monopoly by giving indigenous perspectives of the Zulu young women on *ubuntombi*, as their own cultural practice in which they reclaim their identity. For instance, Tyagi (2014:49) contended that women from the former colonised countries do not totally discard Western feminism “but aspire to a representation that attempts to insert them back into their historical and cultural context”. While this may be the case, there is still a need to exercise extreme caution on cultural issues within the Zulu cultural context due to some patriarchal issues that may arise against a Zulu girl child.

2.4 African feminist cultural hermeneutics

Consequently, this study considered the choice of another theory, namely African feminist cultural hermeneutics to safeguard the study against cultural idealism, because culture in the African context has its own negative pressure on the treatment of women and their issues. This is affirmed by African Women Theologians such as Oduyoye (2001:12) who asserted that “African women have identified culture as a favourite tool for domination”. Although she

wrote from a Ghanaian context, Oduyoye also pointed out that some African idiomatic expressions used against women demonstrate how belittled women can be in the African culture. She argued:

There are many sayings about women the wisdom of which is questionable as they do not lead to harmonious living and development of an individual's potential. These sayings aimed at subduing or marginalizing women constitute verbal violence. They target the intelligence of women, spreading unexamined assumptions about women's capacity for cognition. If women show ignorance it is because they have been shielded from knowledge. The violence of exclusion over generations is what has put women on the margins of intellectually demanding professions and other activities. (Oduyoye, 2007:3)

In another work, as one of the leading thinkers, researchers and African women theologians, Oduyoye (2002:36) upheld that “gender ideology presupposes that the masculine encompasses the female, or takes priority in relation to the female and is entitled to expect subordination and submissiveness and self-abasement of the female”. With similar sentiments, Nyengele (2004:33) indicated that “African cultures, generally, operate to the advantage of men who are socialized to dominate family relations and structures”. These African scholarly arguments demonstrate that constructed male superiority and female inferiority is endemic in most African cultures. Therefore, to cater for this awareness and to avoid African cultural idealisation, the study applied feminist cultural hermeneutics. This theory espoused by Kanyoro (2002: 9), who also warned that “culture is a two-edged sword that gives women their identity, integrity, and way of life yet reinforces its patriarchal forms of domination on every woman and girl”, enables the study to engage with such cultural issues. Materu (2011:37) defined African feminist cultural hermeneutics as a theory “that asserts that we need to be critical of those aspects of African culture which are life-denying while reclaiming those aspects which are life-giving”. According to Russel (2004:27), African women's viewpoints necessitate life-giving interpretations for women and for African people with the intent of developing unique African theologies; and this can only happen through cultural hermeneutics.

Therefore, as a study that examines the position of a girl child within a Zulu religio-cultural context, which is akin to cultural inequalities and patriarchal issues, it is imperative to apply cultural hermeneutics. Cultural hermeneutics blends well with an Afrocentric perspective since it also “seeks a critique from within and not an imposition from without” (Oduyoye, 2001:12). Additionally, cultural hermeneutics allows the study to be critical about cultural issues that are life-denying and repressive to young women through cultural hermeneutics of suspicion so that they may be deconstructed and discarded. This is done by “appropriation of culture in devising

a hermeneutic of liberation to identify the positive aspects of culture and promote them” (Oduyoye, 2001:12). Therefore this study seeks to promote positive aspects of the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* without condoning repressive patriarchal attitudes dominant in Zulu culture. Any life-denying observations made about women in this study are uncovered, critiqued and rejected. Having considered the theoretical frameworks as well as precautionary theories in the presentation of the findings, it is now appropriate to turn to the research methodology used and followed in the collection of the data.

2.5 Research Methodology

The research was conducted as a qualitative empirical study located within an Afrocentric paradigm from a feminist perspective because the study is about young African women. The merging of qualitative and Afrocentric paradigms stems from the study by Mkabela (2005:188) who asserted that both qualitative and Afrocentric research share similar characteristics of being interpretive and communicate confined social settings. However, Ulin *et al.* (2005: 16) indicated that interpretivist is also a paradigm in its own right; nevertheless there is an overlap in the sense that Afrocentric as well as feminist paradigms can also be interpretive in nature, as Mkabela has pointed out. Ulin *et al.* further concluded that the interpretivist paradigm has a fundamental supposition that “the social world is constructed of symbolic meaning observable in human acts, interactions, and language. Reality is subjective and multiple as seen from different perspectives”. They further accentuated that the constructed worldview is understood through explanation of the familiarity and relations that people have with one another in that collective worldview. This means that the rationalisation of that worldview depends more on the personal or individual understanding, hence yields subjective outcomes rather than objective specifics.

The group under study, *izintombi*, together with all other participants in this study shared a similar collective worldview involving the Zulu cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. It is this communal standpoint that they explicated about *ubuntombi* as part of the religio-cultural heritage and identity of the Zulu young woman based on individual understandings of what *ubuntombi* is. Put differently, research participants described their social world according to their experiences of that world. This was also affirmed by Gerson and Horowitz in May (2002:199) who pointed out that:

Qualitative research always involves some kind of direct encounter with ‘the world’, whether it takes the form of ongoing daily life or interactions with the selected group. Qualitative researchers are also routinely concerned not only with objectively measurable

‘facts’ or ‘events’, but also with the ways that people construct, interpret and give meaning to these experiences.

Therefore, in this study *ubuntombi* is a Zulu cultural practice constructed, interpreted and given meaning by the indigenous participants in relation to their experiences. Flick (2002:6) also maintained that “qualitative methods take the researcher’s communication with the field and its members as an explicit part of knowledge production...The subjectivities of the researcher and of those being studied are part of the research process.” It is for this reason that the participants were given an assurance that knowledge production would rely heavily on their participation because the success of the research study also depended on their contribution.

2.5.1 Positionality and partiality

Positionality and partiality or the stance as a researcher is a key issue that needs to be carefully monitored during the research. For instance, Hoel (2013:30) warned about the critical role played by positioning in relation to the participants during research. As an example, the way a researcher approaches the field influences the way in which participants relate to the researcher or share their knowledge and experiences. Similarly, Davis (2014:122) also upheld the significance of positioning oneself in the research because it has an influence on the way in which one relates with the participants and the claims made there from. Davis identified three positioning stances that one may choose for a research study: being an outsider or insider; being an expert or a learner; and doing research on or with people. I positioned myself as an insider with *izintombi* as a group due to my position as a Zulu woman coming from a context where the practice is observed. Being an insider who was socialised under the same cultural context enabled me to observe *ubuntombi* through the eyes of *izintombi*. As Davis (2014:122) suggested, an insider observes the studied phenomenon through the eyes of the participants. Growing up in a Zulu cultural context, where I observed this cultural practice, partly influenced the motivation and choice of this study. I shared the same cultural milieu with *izintombi*, whether they were from the church or an African indigenous cultural context. Finlay (2009:11) posited that “phenomenologists all accept that researcher subjectivity is inevitably implicated in research – indeed, some would say it is precisely the realization of the intersubjective interconnectedness between researchers and researched that characterized phenomenology”. My position as a researcher could not be divorced from the group under study since I am one of them as a Zulu woman. Hence a feminist strategy was adopted in consideration of potential power imbalances between the researcher and the researched (Borbasi, Jackson and Wilkes, 2005:495).

At the same time, I also entered the field to some extent as an expert in the sense that I was an academic researcher with ideas on how the research was going to be conducted. The research question had already been formulated as well as the way I would have to go about seeking answers (Davis, 2014:123). However, to a large extent I was also a learner because there was much I did not know or understand about *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice—the kind of knowledge that is always owned by the group to be researched. It is this knowledge that demonstrates that participants have their own meaning and understanding of their social world in the way in which they experienced and construed it. In order to eliminate the element of domination and imposition (Mkabela, 2005:179), the study recognised participants as full subjects during the research; hence the research was done *with* people instead of *on* people (Davis, 2014:123). For that reason, the participants were assured that in the research process, the knowledge production would rely heavily on their active participation. As subjects in the study, they were therefore encouraged to respond with their honest perspectives on *ubuntombi* to enrich not only the study with the data collected but also the researcher as a learner. This enhanced their participation and eliminated my position of power as a researcher, hence all of them demonstrated a spontaneous participation irrespective of their age and social status.

On the similar issue of subjectivity, Ulin *et al.* (2005:18) maintained that the interpretivist framework consisted of “subjective perceptions and understandings, which arise from experience; objective actions or behaviours; and context”. This takes into consideration not only the group under study but also the cultural milieu of the location of the study, which in this case is within the Zulu ethnic cultural group. Like many African cultures, Zulu culture predominantly places males in an elevated position while women are at times treated as children, particularly in marital or sexual relationships (Haddad, 2009:10). For this reason, it became essential to engage in this qualitative research from a feminist point of view as well. A feminist approach has the distinguishing feature that its stance is a “preferential option for women” (Jones, 2000:5), highlighting partiality when it comes to women’s issues in the context of patriarchal structures and gender imbalances. Therefore, as a feminist researcher, my standpoint is the preferential option for young Zulu women participating in a cultural practice in a former colonised country and as part of a Zulu ethnic group characterised by patriarchal issues and gender imbalances.

2.5.2 Feminist approach in a qualitative research

Feminist theory, according to Ulin *et al.* (2005: 19) not only validates people's analysis of their experiences but such experiences are also at the heart of the research. Crucial focal points of feminist research include women's experiences that have been neglected in the research mainstream in the western context until the 1960s. This marked the first awareness of power dynamics not only between men and women but in every social sphere. Ulin *et al.* further pointed out that while a feminist perspective in qualitative research is primarily concerned with gender equality between men and women, it has also addressed other kinds of social injustices and inequalities. They argued that "the power relationships that maintain boundaries on people's lives often cast women in subordinate positions relative to men, but they also apply equally to other forms of power imbalance, for example, those defined by race, economic status and access to scarce resources" (2005:19).

For this reason, this study has applied a feminist perspective – because women, particularly in African cultures, as insinuated in the preceding paragraphs of this study, are not only denigrated in terms of their gender but are also socially, economically and politically sidelined. Hence, most of them remain voiceless in many decision-making processes that affect them personally and in issues that have direct impact on their lives as women. This is affirmed by the Circle of African Women Theologians: Oduyoye (2002:39) upheld that "in Africa gender became a theological issue when the Circle asserted that the gender parameter in African culture and religions has crucial effects on women's lives and on how womanhood is viewed by Africans". Ulin *et al.* (2005: 23) further pointed out the significance of reflexivity as the greatest input of feminist methodology. They defined reflexivity as the decisive positioning of the researcher in relation to the participants during the process of the research in which one works hand in hand with the participant to solicit research findings and conclusions, and hence becomes an active collaborator throughout the research process. In this way, I, as a researcher, chose to work with the participants as an equal partner throughout the research, particularly as an insider in this study that seeks to retrieve *ubuntombi* as an important part of religio-cultural heritage and identity. This is not only because I identify with them, since Zulu cultural practices are also my heritage, but also because I identify with the Zulu cultural milieu of gender imbalances that need to be addressed.

2.6 Research methods used for the study

Gill *et al.* (2008:1) pointed out that there are various methods used for data collection in qualitative research such as “observations, textual or visual analysis e.g. from books and videos) and interviews (individual or group)”. They further indicated that the most commonly used methods are interviews and focus groups– the methods selected for this study. Each method is now explored in more detail.

2.6.1 Qualitative research interviews as the first method of data collection

The first method used for this study was interviews as a form of data collection. Interviews were chosen because, according to Mason in May (2002:225), interviews have a conversational element that actively engages both the researcher and the participant with the intention of knowledge acquisition from the experiences and the social world of the participants. Dilshad and Latif (2013:191) maintained that the only way to reach the innermost feelings, such as “emotions, sensitive issues, insider experience, privileged insights and experiences” of the individuals, and exhume information, is through interviews. They were also of the opinion that “the technique of interview is of immense use and value in qualitative research studies since they emphasize the in-detail and holistic description of activity or situation”. In this study, through interviews, I was enabled to step into the inner world of the participants, learn to understand the world from their perspective, and discover the worth and meaning of their experiences.

Similarly, Turner (2010) asserted that interviews enable the researcher to unearth a profound and deep-seated inner reality from the participants’ life world and opinions about a specific subject. The data collected in the present study mainly depended on the viewpoints and personal experiences of *izintombi*, community leaders, religious leaders and those in charge of *izintombi* as they related their perspectives on *ubuntombi*. The participants provided their experiences and viewpoints about the indigenous retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a part of Zulu cultural heritage and identity, sexual practices, and a path to adulthood. There are three types of qualitative research interviews, namely, structured, semi-structured and unstructured, as identified by Gill *et al.* (2008:1); semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one with individual participants of *izintombi* and also with focus groups.

2.6.1.1 Reasons for using interviews

Mason in May (2002:225) stated that “in qualitative research, interviews are usually taken to involve some form of ‘conversation with purpose’”. Additionally, Gill *et al.* (2008:2) asserted

that “the purpose of the research interview is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters”. The specific matter to be dealt with in this study is *ubuntombi* as a Zulu cultural heritage and identity, sexual practices, and a path to adulthood. *Ubuntombi* is one of the practices that are rarely found in mainstream theological, sexual or cultural discourses, hence there is great deal that is not understood about it as a cultural practice. Thus interviews were necessary for this study. Mason in May (2002:225) maintained that “the job of the interview is to unearth the relevant information. Thus interviewing becomes the art of knowledge excavation and the task is to enable the interviewee to give the relevant information in as accurate and complete a manner as possible”. Nevertheless, Mason warned that it might not be possible to excavate the exact required data for the research. The interview is treated “as a site of knowledge construction, and the interviewee and interviewer as co-participants in the process” (2002:227). However, Gill *et al.* (2008:3) argued that asking relevant questions during an interview elicits the kinds of responses and information that will inform the study according to its objectives. To gain an understanding about *ubuntombi*, interviews qualify as one of the qualitative methods that “are believed to provide a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods” (Gill *et al.* 2008:2). They further maintained that interviews are “most appropriate where little is already known about the study phenomenon or where detailed insights are required from individual participants”.

Subsequently, with *ubuntombi*, even if it may be a well-known cultural practice among Zulu people, most of what was understood about it has been eroded during the colonial period and there is currently scant knowledge of its true nature. Some of the participants thought the title of this research study was sensitive and hence they were unwilling to be interviewed, a wish that was honoured and respected. Therefore for such a topic, interviews become even more appropriate because of the privacy they afford participants and lack of opportunity for intimidation. This was also affirmed by Gill *et al.* (2008:2) who maintained that interviews “are also particularly appropriate for exploring sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment”. For this reason, some interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants and some were conducted at a central and convenient place –but privacy was always guaranteed. The main reason for the privacy was not only to give necessary and undivided attention to the participants, but also to enrich the study with data that would otherwise have been impossible to acquire elsewhere.

2.6.1.2 Type of guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews

The kinds of guiding questions used for semi-structured interviews are the key to the successful and enriched data collection. For instance, Gill *et al.* (2008:3) suggested that “when designing an interview schedule it is imperative to ask questions that are likely to yield as much information about the study phenomenon as possible and also be able to address the aims and objectives of the research”. In this study, guiding questions were prepared in advance for the semi-structured interviews and took into consideration the objectives of the research study. Gill *et al.* (2008:2) further upheld that “semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail”. This kind of interview provides a guiding framework to the participants on the key issues that require responses and also provides opportunities for the generation of rich data through probing and follow-up questions.

Furthermore, the semi-structured interview stretches the boundaries for the researcher who can use probing questions to elucidate significant issues raised by the participants. In terms of questions prepared in advance, Jamshed (2014:2) noted that “semi-structured interviews are based on a semi-structured interview guide, which is a schematic presentation of questions or topics to be explored by the interviewer”. She highlighted the usefulness of these guiding questions in that they enable the researcher to conduct the interview not only more methodically and meticulously but also to maintain a clear focal point. The kinds of questions that were prepared for the study were open-ended to enable the participants to express themselves without being limited to one-word answers, as suggested by Gill *et al.* (2008:3). They also suggested that more manageable and less difficult questions should come first; more difficult ones can follow as the interview continues when it will be easier for participants to respond.

2.6.2 Focus groups as a second form of data collection

The second type of data collection chosen for this study was focus group discussions. According to Dilshad and Latif (2013:192), they are an ideal setting that creates a natural atmosphere for the participants, resembling everyday communication and openness to each other, rather than individual interviews. Therefore focus group discussions were a significant part of the data collection for this research. They contain an element of conversational dialogue with other participants, with the intention of generating data that might be difficult to retrieve during individual interviews. For instance, Kovach (2010:45) argued that “dialogue is an

effective method to co-create knowledge in a relational context of a conversation”. She further argued that in any indigenous research, the relational element is beneficiary in that more trust is created with increased likelihood of generating richer data collection due to enhanced group participation. According to Einstein (2013),¹⁶ focus groups are “effective in eliciting data on the cultural norms of a group and in generating a broad overview of issues of concern to the cultural groups or subgroups represented”.

Thus focus group discussions ensured that participants were free to express themselves in a cultural or common setting, to reduce feelings of intimidation. Participants were able to express themselves without any reservations that might have hindered or deprived the study of their rich experiences. As Liamputtong (2011:129) asserted, a focus group “has great potential for discovering the complex layers which shape the individual and collective lived experiences of the research participants”. The meanings behind those complex layers of shared views are disclosed by the participants in the sharing of their experiences and beliefs, and at the same time enrich the data collection (Gill *et al.* 2008:4). These authors also warned that focus groups should never be an option for data collection if the participants are not at ease with each other or are strangers to the extent that they are unable to open up about their experiences, feelings and beliefs. They also suggest it is fruitless for the researcher to have reluctant participants or to have an irrelevant research topic that does not arouse the interest of the participants. This was taken into consideration in this research and unwilling participants were allowed to decline the invitation to participate.

2.6.3 Language use in the research process

All the guiding questions for both interviews and focus group discussions were in Zulu and were later translated into English during the transcription of the verbal conversations into written transcripts. This allowed the participants to talk freely in the language they felt most comfortable with. The importance of language in the data collection was affirmed by Liamputtong (2011:131) who argued that it broadened the same level of perception of the environment and cultural milieu of the participants, particularly if the researcher knows and understands the language spoken by the participants. Interview sessions and focus group discussions were held in the language of their choice at each research site, namely Mthonjaneni

¹⁶ Albert Einstein, “*Qualitative Research Methodology*”, http://nursingplanet.com/research/qualitative_research Accessed 9/13/2014.

at Melmoth, Threshing Floor at Pietermaritzburg and Nomkhubulwane Institute at Thornville had.

2.7 Choice of the research sites

The three different research locations are found in different parts of KwaZulu-Natal province. The study was located in this province because it is where the Zulu religio-cultural practice of *ubuntombi* is still mainly observed and maintained in the form of virginity testing and the Reed Dance. Secondly, KwaZulu-Natal is one of the provinces characterised by gendered cultural practices that leave many women vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases and infections due to power imbalance and inequity between men and women, as demonstrated in research by Turshen (2000:) and Haddad (2009:10). The main reason for targeting and choosing these various settings was to get comprehensive data in terms of representation in KZN. The site chosen for the research determines the kind and amount of data collected and KZN was found to be ideal in this regard.

2.7.1 Rural representation

Mthonjaneni at Melmoth is a rural community context with many young women who, for religious, social or cultural reasons, maintain *ubuntombi* as an identity; and they are encouraged to preserve their virginal identity until marriage. The voices from the rural area were important for this study because, according to Hangartner-Everts (2013), “it is among these groups that a rich cultural heritage has been passed down from generation to generation with little influence from the outside world”. For instance, some of the young women from Mthonjaneni proudly preserve themselves as *izintombi* because they consider their preserved bodies to be priceless assets with which they are empowered for success. This will be further pursued in Chapter Five of this study. This setting also allowed for more voices to be heard, such as those of elderly people, male and female, because the community has a mixture of communal members who expressed their various opinions about *ubuntombi*. For instance, one of the main emphases found from the focus group discussion with these community members was that *ubuntombi* is a source of young women’s pride in their identity as *izintombi* and that it required social support for its sustenance. It became apparent that one of the serious concerns was the need *izintombi* had for financial support, due to the socio-economic conditions of the rural environment. They need to be economically stable for this cultural practice to flourish. It is important that participants are able to travel to the testing sites or for the Reed Dance or cultural competitions and they need to acquire traditional attire.

It is important to point out that Mthonjaneni has people at various socio-economic levels: poverty-stricken communities, middle income earners who work in cities and local farms, domestic workers, and professionals such as teachers and nurses. Nevertheless, it was noted during the interviews and focus group discussions that financial issues were problematic. While being inspired by the pride of *ubuntombi*, it became apparent that the socio-economic reality of the rural area affects the practice of *ubuntombi* as part of their religio-cultural heritage. For instance, some of *izintombi* who completed matric many years ago are still not able to go to any tertiary institution to further their studies due to financial constraints and this makes them feel neglected. Financial issues were also raised by some who maintained that there are young women who have truthfully preserved themselves as *izintombi* but are excluded from the celebration of *ubuntombi* at the Reed Dance due to financial constrictions.

2.7.2 Urban and semi-urban representation

Pietermaritzburg is an urban area where some Zulu women still observe *ubuntombi* as their identity regardless of whether they go for virginity testing or not. Two research settings were chosen in Pietermaritzburg: the inner city represented by Threshing Floor, the church that permitted the research to be conducted with its members, and Nomkhulwane Institute, a peri-urban cultural setting at Thornville. Threshing Floor presented *ubuntombi* from a Christian perspective, which is different from the traditional Zulu cultural setting because most of *izintombi* from this setting neither go for virginity testing nor participate in the Reed Dance. This is because abstinence is viewed as God's mandate and so they need not prove a point of being *izintombi* to anyone else other than God. On the other hand, Nomkhulwane Institute gave the study more indigenous perspectives on *ubuntombi* because it is a cultural setting that deals with the maintenance of *ubuntombi* through cultural activities, virginity testing and attendance at the Reed Dance. The socio-political and economic context of Pietermaritzburg is progressive due to urbanised life, with technological exposure and job opportunities for young women.

This increased variants for the study in terms of age, economic status, social status and educational level of *izintombi*. For instance, it was found that in terms of the economic status and educational level, *izintombi* at the Threshing Floor could be classified as an economically independent group – most had stable jobs and qualifications or were completing tertiary studies. Similarly, *izintombi* from Nomkhulwane Institute were all at higher education institutions and a few of them had become successful in the working world, such as the

journalist who was economically settled and participated in the virginity testing which I observed. The personal development of these women might have emanated from the vision of their leader and a testing mother who strongly believed that education and abstinence are two main things that enhance young women's self-esteem. Pietermaritzburg was thus significant for this study as a location because it ensured different voices of *izintombi* that came from better economic and social positions than those from the margins of society such as rural areas. The difference in economic and social status of the people between the rural and urban areas could be because of the educational level and success as represented in the following table.

Table 1: Summary of participants' situation in each research site

Research Site	Age Average	Number of Participants	Marital Status	Educational Level
Izintombi				
Melmoth	19	6	Singles	Matric and lower
Threshing Floor	25	6	Singles	Tertiary and higher
Nomkhulwane	23	8	Singles	Tertiary and higher
Non Izintombi				
Melmoth	23	3	unmarried	Matric and tertiary
Threshing Floor	28	3	1 married 2 unmarried	1 Diploma and 2 lower than matric
Nomkhulwane	23	5	1 married 4 unmarried	Tertiary and higher
Parents, Leaders and those in charge of izintombi				
Melmoth	48	7	5 married 2 unmarried	Matric and lower
Threshing Floor	54	8	4 married 4 unmarried	Tertiary and higher
Nomkhulwane	57	10	8 married 2 unmarried	Professionals, matric and lower

The main reason for focussing on the educational level, economic status and social status of *izintombi* is that *ubuntombi* is not only about the state of being chaste but it is about the life of a young woman as a whole. Therefore the exploration of *ubuntombi* as a religio-cultural heritage and identity deals with all issues facing young women in every sphere of life. There

was also a strong belief among *izintombi* who were interviewed that *ubuntombi* is what has enabled them to be where they are in terms of educational achievements they have made.

2.8 Procedures followed in developing and conducting the interviews

The common procedure that was followed during the interview sessions was to welcome and thank the interviewee for their participation. This was done with the intention of making them feel at ease and more comfortable. The introduction to each other followed with small ice-breaking questions such as what they do for a living, or about family, and where possible, cracking a joke in order to familiarise myself with the participants. Gill *et al.* (2008:3) suggested that “establishing rapport with participants prior to the interview is also important as this can also have a positive effect on the subsequent development of the interview”. A brief explanation of the study followed, including its title, purpose and procedure to be followed, for example the signing of the consent form, questions to be asked, their rights and freedom of participation, confidentiality, length of the sessions, language choice and clarity on voluntary participation. According to Gill *et al.* (2008:3), this kind of preparatory information gives participants “some idea of what to expect from the interview, increases the likelihood of honesty and is also a fundamental aspect of the informed consent process”.

When the participants had understood the procedure to the point of having no questions, they signed the consent form. This also permitted the responses to be recorded. Interviews and focus group discussions started with the audio-tape device on, in order to capture the conversations and dialogue processes. In this, the suggestion of Gill *et al.* (2008:5) was followed, that “all interviews should be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim afterwards, as this protects against bias and provides a permanent record of what was and was not said”. At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time, contribution and willingness shown to participate in the study and were given an opportunity to add anything (2008:5). A similar procedure was followed to capture the data from focus group discussions.

2.8.1 Interviews at Mthonjaneni, the rural research site

Mthonjaneni, Melmoth was the first site visited for the data collection between 13 and 18 July 2015, after several telephonic consultations with the gatekeeper, Mr Ngobeni as referred to by Linah Ngobese. Due to my needing to travel about 500 km from home, I had to organise a place to stay for data collection. The whole period was dedicated to the collection of the data. Interviews were held during the day or late in the evening depending on the availability of the participants. A convenient site for the interviews was a house of one of the residents of

Thubalethu, a township location about six kilometres from Melmoth. This was a venue organised and prepared by the gatekeeper as telephonically, before I arrived in Melmoth. Some of the participants were able to walk to the venue, while others had to travel. As Gill *et al.* (2008:3) suggested, “wherever possible, interviews should be conducted in areas free from distractions and at times and locations that are most suitable for participants”. Most interviews were conducted late in the evenings because most participants were working during the day. I conducted interviews during the day with some participants who were not working, particularly those of school-going age and those in tertiary institutions, because it was during winter vacation and they were at home. Each session took about an hour and never exceeded two hours.

The first session was conducted on 14 July 2015 with the focus group of non-*izintombi* who were available during the day. Some had little babies who could not be left unattended. We had three unmarried young women ranging from the age of 20 to 26 and all had completed matric; they were all young single mothers. While they were critical of *izintombi* for many reasons, they still felt that *ubuntombi* is a genuinely protective cultural practice against the challenges of early motherhood that come with huge responsibilities. On 15 July I had one-on-one interview sessions with two *izintombi* during the day. In the evening of the same day, we had the focus group discussion with community leaders, parents and those in charge of *izintombi*. Five community members participated whose ages ranged from 28 to 68. There were two males and three females; some worked for the municipality while others were prominent local community leaders. Some of the community members who intended to be with this group were not available so I met with them individually on other day. Evenings were convenient because some of them were working. Those in charge of *izintombi* were grateful for a platform for expressing their concerns about the challenges they face in society in relation to *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. These challenges included lack of social support, funding or financial support for the local activities of *izintombi*, and lack of parental support in some instances, that creates tensions for those in charge of *izintombi*. It was helpful that there were some community leaders who became aware of these concerns and recognised the need to support *izintombi* as a group of young people in society.

On 16 July one-on-one interviews were held with four *izintombi*. They had to travel from the *izintombi* camp venue at Melmoth to the interview venue. One of those in charge of *izintombi* selected suitable participants – everyone wanted to participate! The four selected were an

initially a bit reserved. Their ages ranged between 18 and 24 and most of them were still at school doing grades 10 to 12, and only one, who was 24 years old, had completed matric. In general they were enthusiastic about *ubuntombi* and their openness about their experiences as *izintombi* showed they were happy and did not feel compelled to participate. That evening, a focus group discussion was held with the same group of *izintombi* who were now very relaxed and confident about contributing. Some of the elderly participants who could not participate in the focus group discussion with the other community leaders were visited in Melmoth. Their participation was particularly valuable due to their ages (69 and 79 years old) and they had grown up in the deep rural area of Mahlabathini; thus their knowledge of *ubuntombi* stemmed from colonial times when the Zulu social structures were still in place. They helped with understanding why some things happen the way they do nowadays. They described some of the social moral values that were eroded with the colonial invasion of the Zulu cultural lifestyle.

2.8.2 Interviews at Pietermaritzburg, the urban research site

A similar pattern was followed with interviews conducted in other settings such as Pietermaritzburg and Nomkhubulwane Institute. However, most of these interviews were held in homes, either of participants or mine which was often most convenient in terms of privacy, less interference and locality. The specific research site for Pietermaritzburg was the Threshing Floor, the church that had permitted me to work with its church members. Between 10 and 12 August 2015, I had one-on-one interview sessions with five *izintombi* from the Threshing Floor that were willing to participate; some of the church members were unwilling. Therefore most of the individual *izintombi* that were eventually interviewed were students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, ranging from 20 to 32 years old with different denominational affiliations. It was observed that these young women willingly participated and were eager to share their experiences of being *izintombi* even as university students. It was noted that none went for virginity testing because they have preserved themselves as *izintombi* due to their religious beliefs, even though some of them did appear to recognise their Afrocentricity. One of them, a 30 year old, is already working and financially independent but is still an *intombi*. While they support *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice, they do not participate in virginity testing and live as *izintombi* without going to the Reed Dance. This indicates the difference between virginity and virginity testing – they can be two different ‘cultural aspects’ independent of each other. Due to the busy schedule of the students, the same *izintombi* could not be available for the focus group discussion that took place on 12 August 2015 as initially proposed. This compelled me to accommodate some new *izintombi* members who were willing to be

interviewed. They were introduced to me through the snowball sampling technique, through some of *izintombi* that had attended one-on-one interviews. We had four members in this focus group discussion whose ages ranged between 21 and 33. We met in the evening due to their work commitments.

The second focus group discussion was held on 13 August 2015 in Bisley, in the residential place of one participant who offered her house for the purpose. This group consisted of parents and religious leaders who have an interest in the life of the young people. Their ages ranged between 46 and 64, and some of them were professional people such as teachers while others were ordinary housewives. I made arrangements to meet others who could not make it to this meeting. While the research was generally about *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice, this focus group discussion revealed how *ubuntombi* is handled in the church context and it provided a detailed religious perspective of this practice. Another focus group discussion was held with non-*izintombi* on 18 August 2015. This group was the hardest to gather as *ubuntombi* is a sensitive issue to many. Ultimately there were three members with ages 19, 26 and 40 years. The 19 year old was a young single mother whose boyfriend was stabbed to death soon after she became pregnant and her educational standard was only grade 9. Another one was also a single mother of a fatherless child who managed to do matric even though she did not pass it due to her pregnancy. The middle-aged woman was married with one child, had a PA diploma, and had grown up as *intombi* until marriage. Diversity of participants was important to enrich data.

The final group of the Threshing Floor was that of the individual community and religious leaders. They were willing to be interviewed but were not available on the day of the focus group discussion. I therefore met them in their individual places of residence on different occasions. Their ages ranged from 31 to 67 and they were all interested in the lives of the young people having worked with them and were thus willing to participate. One was a nurse, one a youth pastor and the third, an unmarried *intombi* in her old age with matric who seemed to have lived and enjoyed her life as an *intombi*. The latter had both experiences of being an *intombi* in a cultural context and in a church context and so her contribution made the data collected deep and rich in a Zulu religio-cultural setting. The guiding questions used for the facilitation of the focus group discussion were the same questions used for these individual interviews and so their informative responses are categorised in the same way as those of the focus group discussion.

2.8.3 Nomkhubulwane Institute, the semi-urban research site

The gatekeeper of Nomkhubulwane Institute invited me to *umemulo* of one of her *izintombi* whose parents had organised a function for her. The purpose for this invitation was to meet and make acquaintance with potential participants for the study. I spent the whole day with *izintombi*, one freezing morning during the winter month of July when they were still at the river until they went home for the function late in the afternoon dressed in their traditional attire. I was able to connect with some of *izintombi*, as I was introduced by the gatekeeper who also explained my intentions. All those that were approached with the gatekeeper's help, were willing to be interviewed and we exchanged mobile numbers to make appointments for our interview sessions. These sessions with one-on-one *izintombi* eventually took place from 30 July 2015 to 15 August 2015 at different venues such as their homes or my place.

The *izintombi* were six young women with ages ranging between 20 and 24 and their educational level was all tertiary; some of them were already working professionals with financial independence. Two were university students, two were students at colleges, and one was a student nurse and another, a journalist. There was an overwhelming sense of love, freedom, joy and pride of being *izintombi* evident in all of them. This was also observed with some of *izintombi* at Melmoth, but it was even more evident here that they loved who they were as *izintombi* and they seemed very proud of their achievements and their educational progress due to preserving themselves as *izintombi*. As a pure cultural setting, it also became apparent that virginity testing was considered part of the package of *ubuntombi*; consequently all these young women were still being tested as part of being *izintombi* under the Nomkhubulwane Institute.

They seemed to enjoy their status of being tested virgins because even those who were already working still participated in virginity testing. It is probably for the same reason that when some of those who were to be interviewed in one-on-one sessions were no longer available, others availed themselves for the focus group discussions that took place on 15 of August 2015. The *izintombi* focus group comprised of four young women who came to my residential place for the group discussion. Their ages ranged between 19 and 24 and all of them were almost completing their tertiary studies. Their age and level of educational achievements indicated that they did not have many distractions that hindered their educational progress. Consequently, most of them regarded their educational progress a direct result of their preservation of themselves as *izintombi*. The same overwhelming sense of pride of *ubuntombi*, being tested

virgins, and belonging to Nomkhubulwane Institute, as well as being able to attend the Reed Dance, was observed.

Another focus group discussion with the community leaders, parents and those in charge of *izintombi* took place on 4 August 2015 in Willowton, a semi-urban area outside of Pietermaritzburg. This comprised six members whose ages ranged between 31 and 72. These participants came from the same local community, which made it convenient to meet in one of their residential houses as arranged with some of the leaders. Some were married. Their participation provided the study with rich data due to their diversity and inclusion of elderly women who provided information from the past on the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. Their level of education was not beyond matric, nevertheless some of them had experience of having worked with *izintombi* as testing mothers and parents and so they contributed significant information to the study. As in the other settings, four individuals whose ages ranged between 47 and 70, who were married and retired professional teachers and church leaders, were interviewed individually. Some were authors of Zulu literature books and so were particularly knowledgeable in terms of Zulu cultural practices and traditional lifestyle from pre-colonial times.

Another focus group discussion in Nomkhubulwane Institute setting involving non-*izintombi* took place on 29 July 2015. This group had six members, most of whom were unmarried single mothers that worked as domestic workers. Only one was married as a young mother, but she was a housewife who had not completed her matric. Only one, also a single mother, had completed matric and was supporting herself with transporting school children with her private car in order to earn a living. Their ages ranged from 27 to 38 and they did not seem to be eager to further their studies, except for the married one who was registered at an adult centre to complete her matric. While there was generally a sense of criticism of some of the cultural activities of *izintombi* such as virginity testing and the Reed Dance, most expressed the value of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice of Zulu people. Blame went to the parents who are alleged to have not taught them properly how to behave themselves as *izintombi*, hence they became mothers at a young age and lost their educational opportunities. Some spoke as mothers with the future of their own children in mind.

2.9 Participant-observation

When I attended *umemulo* as per invitation by the gatekeeper of Nomkhubulwane Institute, I had to make use of participant-observation more as a strategy than a method. Sánchez-

Jankowski in May (2002:145) pointed out that “participation-observation has the advantage of being able to directly observe the behaviour of those who the researcher is interested in studying”. I recorded all that I observed as I was participating in the process of what was happening on that cold morning of 17 July 2015. Secondly, Gerson and Horowitz in May (2002:200) argued that interviewing and observation are never opposed to each other, they rather “share a core of epistemological assumptions that make them complementary and interconnected...the relationship between [them] is intertwined and mutually supportive”. Observation was thus additional to the interviewing method for this study. In this way I also emerged as a learner through the observation and recording of what was taking place.

Participation refers to a particular time in the field work where observations were made and some of them are included in Appendix 1 of this study. Sánchez-Jankowski in May (2002:144) suggested that the participation-observation methodology was mainly used by sociologists and anthropologists in documenting “the everyday activities of the societies, or sub-societies, they were observing”. However, the participation in this study was done by an insider of a culture who, at the point of the research, also emerged as a learner, studying not only the sociological aspect of a society but also trying to understand a particular cultural practice and how it informs the identity of the people involved. Therefore participation became more of a benefit strategy that enabled the observation of participants directly involved in the practice under study while also enabling the setting up of individual interviews. As a researcher, I utilised the opportunity by recording as data what I observed.

2.10 Recruitment methods, sampling and sample sizes

As noted from the preceding paragraphs, data was collected from interview sessions and focus group discussions as well as individuals who were willing to be separately interviewed if they could not participate in the focus group discussions. The participation-observation strategy was also used to record some of the proceedings during the cultural activities of *umemulo*, which also provided a platform for the recruitment of the participants. Owing to the willingness and unwillingness of some of the participants, quick decisions had to be taken to handle the situation at hand. Consequently, sampling in this study differed according to the tool used for the data collection. In some instances, purposeful sampling (Marshall, 1996: 523) was applied as I worked closely with the gatekeepers who knew the participants well. This was particularly true for Melmoth and Nomkhubulwane Institute where, besides being introduced to the participants, the gatekeepers helped me to purposefully identify particular participants

according to their knowledge of the community members who willingly accepted the invitation to contribute to the research. At the Threshing Floor, however, I relied on snowball sampling, also known as chain referral sampling (Einstein, 2013).¹⁷ When some of the church members that I hoped would participate turned me down, I asked the key participants I knew to help me identify other potential participants known to them. Therefore, using snowball sampling, I was able to recruit *izintombi* to be interviewed one-on-one as well as for the focus group discussion. These two sampling methods were effectively used in all the interview sites to recruit participants.

In addition, in some instances, the sample sizes became bigger than I expected due to the willingness of the participants to contribute, while in other instances they became smaller due to unavailability. This was problematic; consequently, in Mthonjaneni, Melmoth, I had six young women who were interviewed one-on-one as *izintombi* and the same group contributed in a focus group discussion of *izintombi*. In Threshing Floor, five young women were interviewed one-on-one as *izintombi* and two of the same group participated in the focus group discussion, which had two more new additional members. At Nomkhubulwane Institute, six young women were interviewed one-on-one as *izintombi* and two of the same group became participants again in the focus group discussion that consisted of two new additional members since not all of them were available again. Therefore, there were 17 *izintombi* that were interviewed one-on-one in all research settings while 14 participated in focus group discussions, which gives a total of 31 young women that contributed in the study. There were 11 non-*izintombi* participants in the study. The focus group discussions of leaders, parents and those in charge of *izintombi* comprised 25 participants. Therefore the total number of all participants in the study was 67.

2.11 Challenges encountered during research

While the Mthonjaneni setting was well organised in terms of the venue and the locality of the participants, transport was challenging to come to the venue after hours as this could compromise their safety. As a result, I had to be flexible to accommodate each one at a convenient time, for example, community leaders who were not available for focus group discussions. In the Pietermaritzburg setting, particularly with the group of *izintombi* from the

¹⁷ Albert Einstein, "Qualitative Research Methodology"
http://nursingplanet.com/research/qualitative_research Accessed 9/13/2014.

church, there was unwillingness to participate in the study because *ubuntombi* and sexual issues are considered to be personal and sensitive matters. As a result, I resorted to snowball sampling and recruited *izintombi* from various local Christian denominations. Consequently, some of *izintombi* that participated in the interviews also participated in focus group discussions. Ultimately the data was enriched with perspectives of young women from various church denominations.

Similarly, with *izintombi* from Nomkhubulwane Institute, not all *izintombi* could be available for both one-on-one interviews and focus groups discussions due to work circumstances and class attendance for those in higher institutions of learning. This made it extremely difficult to find a time when the group were all available. I therefore resorted to finding different participants who could be available for focus group discussions even if they had not participated in one-on-one interviews. It was the same procedure for the elderly focus group discussions such as community and religious leaders and those in charge of *izintombi* and non-*izintombi* women. Due to the urban setting, various commitments and job situations, evening was the only time available for extra activities outside of working hours. I had to be flexible to accommodate everyone at appropriate times.

2.12 The handling of the data

The data was first transcribed from the audio-recording device into transcripts for each interview session and focus group discussion. At the same time, the data was translated from Zulu, the language with which participants felt most comfortable, into English, which at times was mixed with Zulu during the interviews and focus group discussions. The data was then analysed following the method espoused by Braun and Clarke (2006:6) who suggested the creation of a pool of patterns or categories and re-arrangement of data according to themes, known as thematic analysis. The data was read and re-read in order to become acquainted and immersed in it with the intention of coding and identifying themes to answer the research question, as suggested by Braun and Clark (2006:16). The reading and rereading of the data is also suggested by Ulin *et al.* (2005:145) as a method of developing familiarity with the data collected, also known as data immersion, in order to identify emerging patterns from the data, which formulate important themes. This was done by using highlighters to identify similar chunks of data from the transcripts. The highlighted paragraphs or sentences of the similar identified data were then separately recorded onto a different sheet of paper with abbreviated names of the research sites. This process was considered coding; according to Ulin *et al.*

(2005:147), “most qualitative researchers use some process of coding; there are no standard rules about how to do it”. They further suggested that researchers need to be directed by what they think is most helpful in the process of categorising and making sense of the transcribed data.

Subsequently, the similar chunks of data were further broken down into themes that emerged. The identified main themes were further recorded on another separate sheet with similar research site codes to enable locating these themes in the original transcripts. Sub-themes were also identified. This made it easier to categorize the basic and subsequent themes according to the objectives of the study so as to ensure that all the sub-questions eventually answered the research question without repetition. This research technique is known as pre-set categorisation (Chidindi, 2010: 44). She explained it as a strategy of identifying matters of importance in the field of study, discovered through the examination of the existing literature that determines what kind of data is required for the intended research study. There is inevitably a considerable amount of data generated by interviews and focus group discussions, which might not all be relevant for answering the research question. Therefore, this strategy assists in the categorisation of the data according to the objectives and key questions of the study so as to determine which data to use or discard. The pinpointed themes were then filed in a folder so as to be utilised in the critical interpretative analysis of indigenous retrieval of *ubuntombi* as part of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity, the path to adulthood and sex education practices from a feminist perspective.

2.13 Ethical considerations

Closely linked to data analysis was consideration of the ethical issues. When the data was being collected, a consent form was signed by each participant, as indicated earlier, which ensured that permission had been granted for the audio-recording of the data collected so it could be transcribed into written transcriptions. Participants also consented to the taking of the pictures and their use in the study, while others provided pictures they thought could contribute. However, the actual pictures of the participants were not ultimately used in the study in order to protect identities. Rather, similar examples that would give a picture of what is being illustrated were drawn from the Internet. These are attached as an Appendix 1 at the end of this study. Similarly, during the data handling process and analysis, pseudonyms were used in order to protect the true identity of the participants. This masking of the true identities and names of the participants ensures ethical considerations of the study because no information can be

traced back to any particular participant. Most of the other ethical issues were covered in the consent form such as their right to participate, to answer or not answer particular questions, to withdraw anytime and the declaration that participation was on a voluntary basis. As mentioned earlier in the development of the interviews, all this was done before the interviews were conducted so that participants would fully understand what was expected and would also feel secure that their true identity was fully protected.

2.14 Conclusion

In this chapter, the postcolonial theoretical framework identified as a broad framework for the study was described. It consists of postcolonial theory, which addresses issues of colonial repression of the colonial subjects or former colonised countries. Postcolonial theory however, according to feminist theorists, disregarded women issues. Women not only suffered at the hands of the colonial masters as former colonised subjects, but also at the hands of their own male counterparts who colluded with colonialists to oppress them. In this sense, women went through “double oppression” in their struggle against colonialism and patriarchal structures. While Western feminism had developed and catered for women issues, it only concentrated on gender issues for white women. The women of the so-called Third World felt betrayed by their white ‘sisters’ who, on racial issues, were ‘in cahoots’ with their oppressive colonial husbands. For this reason, there was a need for a theory that would consider the twofold repression of non-white women of the former colonised countries and cater for their needs; hence postcolonial feminist theory was identified. Since the study is about the young women of a former colonized country, this theory was also considered relevant and appropriate when addressing *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. Additionally, African cultural issues have a tendency of elevating men over women and thus perpetuate women denigration; therefore African feminist cultural hermeneutics theory was also chosen to engage cultural issues that are life-denying to women.

This chapter further described the methodology used for this study as empirical qualitative research under an Afrocentric paradigm and feminist perspective. It also indicated how a qualitative study relates to the interpretivist paradigm. The research methods used in this study were interviews and focus group discussions, which were identified as the most commonly used method for qualitative research. Each of these methods was described and details given on how they were used in different research sites. Participant-observation was a method adopted in the study that complemented the interviews and focus groups in that all the

observations made were also recorded as collected data. The chapter identified recruitment procedures and sampling methods – as purposeful and snowballing sampling – used to identify participants for the study. Similar recruitment methods were used for both focus groups and semi-structured interviews. There were some challenges and limitations encountered during the research process and so the chapter demonstrated how these obstacles were removed and challenges resolved. The chapter also described the handling of the data and ethical considerations in the study.

Chapter Three

Mapping out the Zulu cultural milieu of *ubuntombi* and virginity testing

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the theoretical framework of the study, which is postcolonial theory. I also explained why feminist postcolonial and feminist cultural hermeneutics became essential theories for the study. The previous chapter also indicated various methods used for data collection and clarified how these methods were used. The current chapter describes the rationale for this study by signifying the Zulu cultural milieu of *ubuntombi* through examining the existing literature on *ubuntombi*. I first locate *ubuntombi* within indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). Secondly, I examine the social position of the Zulu girl child, the significance of the retrieval of *ubuntombi*, as well as cultural and religious aspects of *ubuntombi*. Thirdly, I explore virginity testing as a cultural practice that is closely related to *ubuntombi*. Each of these literature categories is critically engaged with so as to demonstrate the limitations of current studies and to identify the academic gap which necessitates this study. This chapter also determines the point of entry into the debate on the practice of *ubuntombi* within the Zulu ethnic group.

3.2 Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Having indicated in the previous chapters that indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) is essential for this study in order to understand what is meant by an indigenous perspective, I now locate *ubuntombi* within indigenous knowledge systems. Hangartner-Everts (2013:4) defined indigenous knowledge as “the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms.” In light of this, postcolonial theory becomes very relevant in framing this study because, as Sugirtharajah (2012:13) argued, this theory arose in indigenous and diaspora contexts in an “attempt to explore the often one-sided, exploitative, and collusive nature of academic scholarship”. He also argued that postcolonial theory is about the power of Western colonisation that was exerted on individuals, communities and cultures and distorted their indigenous understanding of who they really were. In this regard, Sugirtharajah (2012) concurred with Hangartner-Everts (2013:4) who maintained that indigenous knowledge “has been shunned by research and practice in the industrialized parts of the world”, yet in these

local and rural communities, indigenous knowledge is produced and treasured as rich cultural assets. In the same way, *ubuntombi* is a treasured cultural practice and has become a rich cultural asset and heritage within the Zulu ethnic group. IKS thus becomes a vehicle with which the local knowledge about *ubuntombi* can be brought into the academic debates as indigenous knowledge.

Ryser (2011:1) pointed out that “the knowledge of indigenous peoples is little understood in universities and colleges, nor is it well understood in international and non-governmental organizations or governments”. In addition, Swartbooi-Xabadiya (2010:15) expressed it as a matter of concern that civil and non-governmental organisations as well as the international community are usually the ones who conduct research on cultural issues that require indigenous knowledge but neglect indigenous peoples’ perspectives. Hence this study on *ubuntombi* as part of a religio-cultural heritage and identity attempted to involve indigenous people’s voices in order to accommodate their perspectives. Ryser (2011:4) further pointed out that “indigenous knowledge identifies a specific body of knowledge associated with specific people and locality involving an understanding or possession of information, facts, ideas, truths, or principles...Some of this knowledge informs contemporary knowledge systems while much remains in the realm of ‘knowledge to be reclaimed’”. This is rightly demonstrated in this study as it seeks to retrieve *ubuntombi* and reclaim it as part of Zulu heritage and identity and as a tool for sex education.

Ryser (2011:1) further argued that “Western scholars view indigenous knowledge through intellectual lenses with frequently superficial interpretations of the actual content and meaning”. This is true of practices such as virginity testing and the discourses that many scholars write from the Western perspective giving little attention to the indigenous perspective or understanding of this cultural practice, even though the critique of virginity testing is done in the name of human rights. TallBear (2014:3) upholds the idea that feminists should “analyse and critique in the manner that ‘cares for the subject’.” Subsequently she argued that if a feminist scholar is to be an intellectual or moral agent, she needs to identify fully with the community being researched as its inhabitant, in the place of using it simply for fieldwork. For this reason, this study also adopted a feminist standpoint because over-emphasis of indigenous knowledge that emanates from cultural contexts is unjust to women who are usually subjects of cultural prejudice. Therefore, the intention is to draw positive aspects of the culture that promote women. As TallBear contended, if there is any critique to be made, it should be

towards the betterment of “indigenous lives and institutions” (2014:1). The approach suggested by TallBear demonstrates the positive attitude that needs to be adopted by scholars towards IKS which will be different from the colonisers’ attitude. For instance, Mapara (2009) describes IKS as knowledge that originated and sustained colonised communities prior to colonisation, during which it was sullied and vilified by the colonial masters as fallacies and insignificant. Therefore this study seeks to demonstrate that *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice is neither considered a delusion nor irrelevant for indigenous people that still practise it.

With related views, Muwanga-Zake (2010:70) pointed out that some scholars complain that “Western understandings and research falsify, frame and submerge most African IKS” as fairy-tale and promote Western knowledge systems as a universal viewpoint. Arguing in the same line, Mawere (2010) upheld that the West reflected Africa as a ‘dark continent’ and therefore derided cultural ways of life for indigenous people and their knowledge systems were considered evil, barbarous, and unbecoming. This could be why Lavallée (2009:23), considered indigenous research to encompass “rewriting and *rerighting* the indigenous position in history and society... as a process of decolonizing the academy by incorporating indigenous knowledge into the research rather than relying on Western theories”. Ngulube and Lwoga (2007) also posited that the colonial era created the impression that Western knowledge systems are more dominant and superior than indigenous knowledge systems, which were thus relegated to the margins. Ngulube and Lwoga (2007:118) further described IKS as “an inclusive repository or archive of the indigenous communities’ experiences and activities”. There is therefore a need to retrieve and reclaim the IKS in the archives in order to illuminate the indigenous perspective of the experiences and activities of the indigenous people. *Ubuntombi* as part of cultural heritage and identity in this study is one of the indigenous practices that needs attention if it is to be understood for what it is from the indigenous perspective in the academic world. Therefore IKS enables the study to unearth the indigenous understanding of this practice and how it informed sex education within the Zulu cultural context.

3.3 The social position of the Zulu girl child

It is of utmost importance for this study to consider the position of the Zulu girl child in her cultural context since the study is chiefly about Zulu young women in the Zulu cultural context. Krige and others who documented a record of the Zulu people and their lifestyle indicate that the Zulu girl child was traditionally recognized as a full member of the society, even though

there were some issues of concern that could be raised about her location from a feminist perspective. It is from scholars like Krige that some of the indigenous understanding of the lifestyle and cultural values of the Zulu community will be drawn, as well as some of the cultural prejudices and partialities against women.

3.3.1 Gender issues in the Zulu cultural context

When looked at from the indigenous perspective, Zulu culture was not discriminative of girls during the growing process of children. This is indicated by Krige (1950) in her book entitled *The Social Systems of the Zulus*, wherein she shows that most of the marked steps or rites of passage in the development processes of every Zulu child irrespective of whether male or female, were equally observed. As an example, when the girl had reached a stage of puberty, rituals and ceremonies were done for the girl child in the same way as they were done for the boy child of the same stage. While Krige does not indicate what was taught to the girls at this stage, Msimang (1975) and Brindley (1982) state that sex education became a primary focus during the puberty period for both teenage girls and boys. In these sexual injunctions, both girls and boys were instructed to behave responsibly towards members of the opposite sex if they did not want to bring embarrassment and relegate their families to the margins of society. According to Msimang, there were specific boys' habits that took place in the fields since young men's primary function was to look after the livestock of the family. The girls also had exclusive celebrations at this stage that barred boys, such as puberty songs, as will be seen in Chapter Four of this study.

When it came to the communal celebrations of their social acceptance as young adults, families, the father in particular, equally provided, for both girls and boys, a beast for the slaughter, as a way of offering homage to the ancestors. For instance, Krige pointed out that for the girl to eat *amasi* (curdled milk), which she had to avoid while in seclusion, the father provided a goat to be slaughtered. Additionally, the father also provided *inkomo yodwa* (puberty ox) with which the festivities of the girl's post-puberty status were observed (1950:102). In fact, there were more ceremonies for girls than boys, commendable from the gender and feminist perspective as girls received more attention and protection than boys in the Zulu culture. Krige (1950) observed that *ukwemula* (recognition of a marriageable state of a girl) required the father to provide another beast for slaughter as a public and official recognition of his daughter's maturity for marriage. This served as a license or permission to any young man who was interested in his daughter to take her as a wife. However, this did not only depend on the father's

decision for his daughter, it also depended on the daughter and mother who at times orchestrated the process by the girl's abstinence from *amasi* (1950:104). That kind of abstinence sent a message to the father that the girl felt that she was ready for marriage and so the father responded by providing the beast in acknowledgement of her marital readiness status. In this it can be deduced that a girl child enjoyed some power and actually had a voice to be heard in her family and community, even though it was mainly in the form of a symbolic silent language rather than actively voicing her opinion. This indicates that Zulu culture was not irredeemably patriarchal in relation to recognition and acknowledgement of women even though some patriarchal issues still lingered as will be indicated in the subsequent paragraphs.

Krige further indicated equal recognition for both boys and girls in terms of ceremonies as she recounted that every Zulu child that was about to reach puberty had to have his/her ears pierced (*qhumbuza, klekla* or *ukudabula izindlebe*) (1950:81). This was considered a suitable age for children to have their ears pierced because their ears were now ready to hear and comprehend the social accountability and cultural expectations, and this was a vital step for the enhanced social status of these children. The ceremony also displayed the communal character of the Zulu tribe at its best because all the children of the same age who were supposed to go through this ritual came together as directed by *induna yesigodi* (local headmen). It thus became a corporate celebration of all the community members, with the sharing of food, beer, dance and merry-making, as Krige observed. Msimang (1975:214), also related similar understanding of this ceremony as indicated in the general background of this study in Chapter One and demonstrated that it was also done for educational purposes. Thus the piercing of young peoples' ears meant that their ears were physically opened to be able to listen and assimilate the norms, values and customs of the society. Furthermore, Krige (1950:82) observed that such ceremonies would take place during *ukwethwasa kwenyanga* (when the new full moon appeared), which had a social significance for the children who were made new full members of their families and society. Krige further pointed out that this ritual was treated as sacred: 'unclean' people would not be permitted to take part because it was believed that the wounds or cuts of the children would develop complications, such as becoming septic, and delay healing.

3.3.2 Gender dimensions of qhumbuza cultural beliefs in terms of a Zulu girl child

For both girls and boys, *qhumbuza* (ear-piercing) marked the developmental position of children from the stage of childhood to becoming pre-pubescent. There were some gender

dimensions and subtle cultural prejudices against a girl child as can be detected from Krige's account of these rites. For instance, it is worth noting that among the 'unclean' people identified by Krige, women would be in the majority because menstruating women, pregnant women and nursing mothers were culturally considered 'unclean' in the Zulu culture. Men would only be considered 'unclean' when they had had an association with a dead body, attended a funeral, and had sexual intercourse with a woman. It is not clear though, whether it is sleeping with a woman that makes a man 'unclean' or the sexual intercourse itself. Krige noted that during the *qhumbuza* (ear-piercing) ceremony, the person responsible for the actual piercing, whom she called an officiator, was either an old woman in menopause or a man. Women in menopause were considered culturally clean due to their non-association with menstrual blood. For the man, there were strict observances to be adhered to such as not to spend much time in the company of women before the ceremony or even sleep in the hut utilised by women (1950:83). This raised suspicions that women in general were actually considered impure and association with them could make men 'unclean'.

Nevertheless such a consideration that women had a contaminating effect was gender insensitive because the children spent more time with their mothers. Undoubtedly, those children would eventually be taken care of by their own mothers until the complete healing of their piercing wounds. Nonetheless, everyone in the families where children had to undergo ear-piercing was expected and even reminded by the household leader to observe abstinence from any sexual interaction for a day or two for the sake of the children before the ceremony so as to remain clean. It is not clear why sex and menstruation were associated with contamination in the indigenous understanding of the Zulu people. In Zulu culture, most of the essential and core characteristics of being a woman were considered dirty. It is also worth noting that if a woman did not menstruate, she would be a cultural outcast because being a woman means menstruation at a particular period, otherwise childbearing would be impossible. Similarly, if a woman did not conceive within the first few months of marriage, this becomes a serious issue as a woman is never considered a real woman without children (Ntuli, 2013:60; Mwiti and Dueck, 2006:194; Nyengele, 2004:35; Kanyoro 2002:15-16). In Zulu culture, in particular, she even earns a label such as *inyumba* (barren woman). It is controversial then that the childbearing and infant nursing process also renders a woman 'unclean' in the same culture. Krige (1950:83) further observed that when it was the Chief's son or heir who was to go through the *Qhumbuza* ceremony, only the male animal would be slaughtered because a female

sacrifice would be considered demeaning. It can also be noted that boy children, who would be secluded from girls, were encouraged to be manly, courageous and stay away from women. They were also instructed to respect and obey elders and to become hard workers as men. They were encouraged to sit with their knees drawn up as men ready for quick response in emergency, unlike women who sat with their legs outstretched on the mat because they were considered as not being ready for any action. They were also taught not to allow women to pass over their legs if they are outstretched because they considered it to be the cause of bad luck. From what was observed by Krige, it is apparent that young Zulu boys were socialised and instilled with a sense of negative masculinity that denigrated women from a very early age. Much emphasis on keeping away from women indirectly indoctrinated Zulu boys with the basic understanding that there was something wrong with being a woman and everything was right about being a man. Therefore women vilification became a socially acceptable phenomenon, even to women themselves. However, it must be born in mind that Krige was also writing as an outsider of the culture; she did not provide a balanced view of what was taught to the girls at this stage, which renders her writing one-sided.

It is thus not surprising that a Zulu girl child in particular is always adversely affected by gender injustices, inequality, discrimination and subjugation that emanate from similar African patriarchal structures. This was demonstrated by Patricia Hari¹⁸ who argued that most parents and community members in African countries have been influenced by traditional gender roles and stereotypes—that women’s social positions are only determined by their marital status, childbearing and subjection to men. Closely related to this, Dube (2007:353) also contended that gender roles are social constructions that elevate men and depreciate women, which can hardly be denied considering the examples drawn from Krige in the preceding paragraph. Dube further asserted that these social constructions are embedded in every social structure and are so pervasive that people, women in particular, internalise them as natural or God-ordained. Mhlongo (2009:7) observed that “while the specific nature of gender relations varies among societies, the general pattern is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape societies and their own lives”. This is a world-wide challenge with particular persistence in sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, “in 2011, Plan International reported that 16 million girls in Africa are

¹⁸ Hari, Patricia, FEMSA project 1, “*Difficulties faced by Girls in the Study of Science, Mathematics and Technology Subjects*” <http://www.unesco.org/education/eduprog/ste/proj.../femsa/femsa6html> Accessed 6/21/2014.

denied access to education”.¹⁹ The main reasons are attributed to “child labour, poverty, lack of sponsorship, bereavement, truancy, early marriages, and some cultural beliefs and traditions”. These in turn subject them to the cycle of poverty, more social subordination, sexual and gender based violence, resulting in vulnerability to HIV and AIDS infections and morbidity that go with early pregnancies, hunger and exploitation, leading to dependency syndrome.

This is further demonstrated by United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) in its *Fact Sheet 2012*, in which it affirms that about 16 million girls younger than 20 years give birth annually, which “fuels an intergenerational cycle of poverty and ill health.”²⁰ According to South African History Online (SAHO)²¹ in the article *Contemporary issues: Women’s struggle*, socio-cultural patterns and economic factors, poverty, school drop-out due to teenage pregnancy that often go hand in hand with HIV and AIDS infections, sexual violence and lack of sex education are still leading factors that militate against the education of a girl child. They also pointed out that while the Commission for Gender and Equality is antagonistic about virginity testing that takes place in KwaZulu-Natal as a means of educating girls to behave responsibly in their sexual life; its proponents maintain that it contributes to the proper upbringing of girls. SAHO emphasises that the inability to help girls deal with their sexuality increases chances of persistent “unwanted teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions, STDs, HIV and AIDS and high rate of maternal and infant mortality”. Furthermore, Health Systems Trust²² upholds that “the latest national survey into HIV prevalence recorded that 16 percent of pregnant women under the age of 20 tested HIV positive”. Attempts by NGOs such as *Lovelife* and the government to curb these challenges are hardly successful.

Writing from the HIV and AIDS perspective, Haddad (2009:6) asserted that “theologians are being challenged to provide a contextual and relevant voice within this complex crisis facing the country”. I agree with Haddad because all these challenges contribute to making the future

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch (HRW), “*Child Marriage and Violations of Girls’ Rights*”

<http://africaisdonesuffering.com/2013.06/educating-the-girl-child/> Accessed 6/21/2014.

²⁰ UNFPA (2012), “*By Choice , Not By Chance: Family Planning, Human Rights and Development*”

<http://www.unfpa.org/weadv/site/global/shared/do> Accessed 6/21/2014.

²¹South African History Online (SAHO), “*Contemporary issues: Women’s struggle*”

<http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/girl-child> Accessed 6/21/2014.

²² Mkalipi, Musa 2013. The fight to stop teenage pregnancy”

<https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/governance/youth-and-education/the-fight-to-stop-teenage-pregnancy>. Accessed 6/21/2014.

of the young girls look bleaker every day, particularly those who are from the poverty stricken margins of society. This study therefore seeks to retrieve the indigenous religio-cultural understanding of *ubuntombi* as one of the alternative life choices that could be made by young people who might still find it educational in terms of their sexual behaviour. Hypothetically, retrieving indigenous knowledge about *ubuntombi* as part of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity, and encouraging girls to learn from it as a sexual tool and a path to adulthood might be emancipating in terms of the plight facing young people today. The above literature heightens how vitally important every effort is to help young people, particularly girls, to find ways to escape hindrances on their journey toward adulthood. Through *ubuntombi* as a sex educational tool, things that perpetuate young women's social insignificance and the poverty cycle that goes with dependency syndrome could be curtailed. From the perspective of some of the scholars (George, 2008:1473), *ubuntombi* could be seen as one of the obsolete cultural practices that restrain sexual autonomy of young women. However, from an indigenous knowledge perspective, *ubuntombi* could be reclaimed and preserved by young Zulu women as a part of their religio-cultural heritage and identity as upheld through IKS.

3.4 The significance of the retrieval of *ubuntombi*

The preceding paragraphs argue that *ubuntombi* is neither a fallacy nor an insignificant practice as it is highly valued by the indigenous people who practice it, therefore the significance of its retrieval cannot be over-emphasised. Having examined the social status of a Zulu girl child, the research evidence indicated that women are the worst sufferers, and are at the bottom of the ladder of our hierarchical and patriarchal societies. This is even worse with young women from ethnic groups of African origin such as black women and Zulu girl children. For instance, Lyn Snodgrass (2015)²³ argued that “women are particularly vulnerable because of their lower socio-economic status. They have fewer options and resources to escape domestic violence and seek justice.” She wrote with particular reference to black South African women who live under gross and undignified poverty conditions at the grassroots level, where masses of these women are at the margins of the society. Consequently, these women are vulnerable to HIV and AIDS conditions because poverty and gender disparity compel them to commit themselves to transactional sex, as observed by Leclerc-Madlala, Simbayi and Cloete (2009:7), Haddad (2009:10), and Turshen (2000:69-82). Snodgrass (2015) further recounted that “South

²³Lyn Snodgrass, “South Africa: a dangerous place to be poor, black and a woman” <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2015/09/11/South-Africa-a-dangerous-place-to-be-poor-black-and-a-woman> Accessed 23/09/2015.

Africa's Gender Statistics Report revealed that South African women are more seriously disadvantaged than men. They are still less likely to be able to read. They are also less likely to have a tertiary education and they experience far higher unemployment." This suggests that women need help to release themselves from the shackles of poverty, illiteracy, lack of proper skills and training, and unemployment that seem to tie them down on a daily basis.

One of the ways they can liberate themselves is through self-empowerment, which can be attained through setting proper goals such as educational progress as indicated by *izintombi* in subsequent chapters. The South African Constitution, which promised advances in women's rights, has not been lived up to expectations. This was also observed by Snodgrass (2015)²⁴ who argued, "On paper, women in South Africa ought to enjoy the highest status globally. But this has not translated into fundamental freedoms of dignity, safety and security in practice." Furthermore, many scholars and researchers are in accord that women are the worst affected group and are at higher risk of HIV infection. For instance Leclerc-Madlala, Simbayi and Cloete (2009:7) have argued that "rates of HIV among young South African women in the 15- to 24-year age group is disproportionately high, approximately four times than that of young men, and in 2007 accounted for 90% of new infections in that age group". Similarly, George (2008), Swartbooi-Xabadiya (2010), Young People Today-Fact Sheet (2015)²⁵ and many others, indicate the same disproportionate infection of young women to men. Although there are many causal factors, women appear to be more adversely affected, especially amongst indigenous or black people.

This is unlikely to change soon given the current popularity of associating rights and freedom of women with a license to engage in unrestrained sexual pleasures, as captured by Hunter (2010:16). For instance, in Hunter's research in Sundumbili Township, Mandeni, he found that many young women have resorted to having multiple boyfriends who meet their different needs, such as fashion items, mobile phones, hair-styling, which encourages dependency on men. It thus becomes questionable if this is really what the South African Constitution means by a right to dignity, safety and security for women. On the other hand, young women cannot

²⁴Lyn Snodgrass, "South Africa: a dangerous place to be poor, black and a woman"

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2015/09/11/South-Africa-a-dangerous-place-to-be-poor-black-and-a-woman>
Accessed 23/09/2015.

²⁵Young People Today-Fact Sheet, (2015) "Why adolescents and young people need sexuality education, and sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) in Eastern and Southern Africa" http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FV_Fact%20Sheet_Young%20People%20Today_4Oct.pdf Accessed 25/11/2015.

be condemned for gender inequality, lack of employment, poverty and popularising sex, and the idea of seeing a woman's body as a commodity that can be easily satisfied with needs to meet men's sexual whims. Hunter also demonstrated that some South African women celebrities, such as promoters of 'It Girl',²⁶ present a different and enticing understanding of human rights and gender equality. Those celebrities encourage retaliation for cheating males – they are of the opinion that women should do the same so that men are beaten at their own game. With popular, glamorous and successful women publicly promoting such ideas, a disturbing message is indirectly sent to young women in terms of their sexual behavior and identity. Many young women still need to find their identity, dignity, integrity and maintain their future as women. It therefore becomes a huge question as to how young women can become liberated from these social constraints that lure them into risky sexual behaviors. With the apparent lack of solutions for young women, it is important to explore every avenue, including cultural aspects such as the redemptive retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a religio-cultural heritage and identity and sex educational tool. It could be a significant practice not only for the Zulu ethnic group but also for other indigenous groups. As part of religio-cultural heritage, *ubuntombi* also has a religious aspect, which is explored in the next section.

3.5 Cultural, religious and theological aspects of *ubuntombi*

Ubuntombi is a cultural practice that cannot be divorced from rituals and religious observances that come with culture. For instance, the religious aspect of culture is evident in the definition by Schalkwyk (2002:14) who wrote: "Culture is the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It also includes value systems, traditional beliefs and practices which are linked with tradition or religion". This definition of culture by Schalkwyk highlights that culture is inseparable from religious aspects of people, as it adds spirituality, value systems, traditional beliefs and tradition or religion. It is in this that Mbiti (1991:14) rightly asserts that African culture can never be properly understood without its religious aspect that influences almost every sphere of life of African people. According to Mugambi (1995:20) the religious aspect does not exclude theological aspect because theology is not exclusively associated with Christianity. He argues that "There are excellent theologians who belong to religious traditions other than Christianity.

²⁶ The critique of this is not meant to condone cheating by males while women are to remain "good girls", however, those who encourage it do not help the situation of disproportionate infection of young women as they engage themselves in risky sexual behaviours that leave them vulnerable to HIV and AIDS and early pregnancies.

We, Christians, must avoid the arrogance of thinking that only Christians can theologize.” *Ubuntombi* as a Zulu cultural practice includes both Christian as well as African religious aspects that emphasize culture. Mugambi (1995:20) further pointed out that “It is important to note that a theologian cannot theologize in a vacuum. Theology is always articulated in a particular cultural context, responding to questions which are always culturally conditioned.” Therefore all the indicators of religious aspects of *ubuntombi* form part of African traditional theological aspects. For instance, Mugambi (1995:25) suggested that cultural experience should be considered “as the starting point of theological quest” therefore if African theologians are to serve their communities meaningfully and effectively, they have to earnestly consider their cultural and religious heritage.

Therefore *ubuntombi* as a religious and cultural heritage is seen in the example of Nomagugu Ngobese, the reviver of the Zulu deity *Nomkhubulwane* and its rituals. She argued: “Traditionally in Zulu culture, when there was drought, virgin girls would go to the mountains with offerings to ask Princess *Nomkhubulwane* to send rain ... Girls go in procession to the mountains to talk with the ancestors and to make contact with mother earth, represented by Princess *Nomkhubulwane*”.²⁷ It is only virgins who could attend anything to do with *Nomkhubulwane* because she was believed to be a virgin deity herself, known as Princess of Heaven, who had power to bring rain (Krige, 1950:197). This was also a significant traditional role of *izintombi* because drought affected the whole community. Therefore, the community, including chiefs and headmen, depended on them to mediate with the Princess of Heaven for the rain, which was believed to be always successfully done by *izintombi*. According to Krige, there were other annual celebrations in honour of this deity known as *Unomdede* who, it was believed, visited the earth. Gifts and presents would be given by the community members for the deity, and virgins would always play a leading role in such functions and ceremonies as organisers, singers, dancers and hoeing her field. This is further pursued in the next chapter as one of the social benefits of *ubuntombi* in the Zulu community.

As implied in the preceding paragraph, it is worth noting that *ubuntombi* is a cultural concept that is inclusive of all young Zulu women irrespective of their faith. Therefore there are Christian *izintombi* and those that belong to Zulu traditional religion; hence the study incorporates both groups of young Zulu women. The study includes *izintombi* from church

²⁷Wanda Hennig, (2011) “*Even the Spirits Need a Menu as a Zulu Goddess*” <http://www.cuisinenoirmag.com/delicious-life/even-the-spirits-need-a-menu>. Accessed 7/05/2014.

settings and from cultural locations, which is inclusive of those who go for virginity testing and those who do not but who still maintain their Zulu identity as *izintombi*. For instance, Phiri (2003:68) recorded one of the virginity testing ceremonies in which the traditional healers conducted libations to the ancestral spirits on behalf of the girls as a religious act, to petition the spirits to protect the girls from social ills such as the AIDs pandemic, sexual violence and teenage pregnancy. She also observed that Christian parents shouted the name of Jesus and sang songs beseeching the power of God through the blood of Jesus for the protection of girls from Christian homes. Phiri (2003:69) further considered Nomagugu Ngobese, one of the staunch proponents of virginity testing as “a deeply religious woman who has empowered herself with knowledge of her culture and gender issues to transform society”. This, to Phiri, was a sign of camaraderie of religion and culture which demonstrates that most cultural events are also considered religious acts in Zulu culture.

Similarly, Thomas (2005) argued that African religion and culture are so interwoven that it is hard to speak of one without the other. According to Thomas, even if Africans convert to other religions such as Christianity or Islam, this does not take away their cultural customs and values. He further upheld that religion hardly remains unaffected or free of cultural influences. On the same vein, Lugira (1999:62) confirmed that “Religion is so deeply ingrained in the daily life of traditional Africa that it is all but impossible to separate it from other aspects of the culture.” For this reason, the study includes Christian *izintombi* because they are Zulu young women within the Zulu culture first before converting to Christianity, even though some of them may not observe or promote some of the cultural aspects of *ubuntombi* such as virginity testing. It could probably be one of the reasons that *ubuntombi* has persisted till today, because besides being a life developmental stage of young women within the Zulu culture, it is strongly associated with the religious belief system of the Zulu people. This was observed by Brindley (1982:85) who pointed out that during puberty, there are a number of rituals such as slaughtering and anointing the pubescent with the bile of that slaughtered animal as a sign of reporting to the ancestors as well as petitioning them to protect the girl. This is also further explored in the next chapter where the communicative aspect of puberty rituals is considered. In addition, *ubuntombi* and preservation of virginity till marriage is one of the Christian codes of holiness for young people which is still maintained and emphasised in some churches. To others, it is associated with cultural identity and some Christian *izintombi* go for virginity testing.

Mugambi (1988) similarly observed the religious connotation of cultural aspects as he argued for the proper relationship between Christian identity and the Christian's cultural identity. He asserted that conversion was not about outright refutation and condemnation of one's culture for Western culture, but it is about the ultimate transformation of approach towards God as a follower of Jesus Christ and what Christ stands for. Mugambi (1988) also espoused rites of passage as rituals which at times were treated as religious observances that instilled and affirmed positive communal values, customs and norms so that individuals would know about their social responsibilities. For instance, as one of the rites of passage, puberty was considered a religious event because a goat would be slaughtered in honour of the occasion and its bile was believed to make the ancestors aware of the change of the stage of girls and boys just as Brindley found it in the Zulu community. Lugira (1999:62) affirmed similar observation that "In an African community, religion is the strongest influence upon people's thoughts, acts, and lives. Rites of passage and other communal rites are the clearest examples of how religion permeates all aspects of African life."

Affirming Mugambi and Lugira's viewpoints, Mbiti (1991:20) argued that rituals, ceremonies and festivals in the African tradition "have a lot of religious meaning and through their observation religious ideas are perpetuated and passed on to the next generations". According to Mbiti, the African religious belief system is so deep-seated to its people that it becomes imperative to understand it well if African behaviour is to be understood. Similarly, Siwila (2012:108) argued that if African people's behaviour is to be grasped, it is imperative to examine the essence of what forms their culture. Siwila further called for "an in-depth understanding of peoples' embedded knowledge, values, and belief systems of the specific culture which informs their identity and that of the community in general". From the arguments of these scholars, it can be deduced that religiosity is a typical characteristic of African people, which is the reason that *ubuntombi* cannot be divorced from such religious connotations.

3.6 *Ubuntombi* and virginity testing

While this study is not about virginity testing per se, examining virginity testing is necessary because *ubuntombi*, which means virginity in its direct translation, is at times culturally inseparable from virginity testing. In the context of cultural practices, from the indigenous perspective, virginity testing, was meant to regulate the virginity of the virgins so as to suspend penetrative sexual induction of the young girls, as Wickström (2010:538-539) observed. It is worth noting that there is a vast amount of literature on virginity testing, which was impossible

for this study to cover. This study encapsulates some of the key thinkers on virginity testing, which can be classified into two contending categories. There are those who reject virginity testing as an obsolete practice that has nothing to offer in the challenges of the contemporary society, and those who embrace and affirm it as a virtuous cultural practice.

For example, Rumsey (2012:2) identified these opposing camps in scholarly discourses of “Universal human rights” versus “cultural values.” She suggested that “it is essential to International Development studies to find a way of eliminating human rights violations in the world without eliminating cultural differences and practices”. However, this can only be true if indigenous people are given a hearing as to who they are and why they do what they do? It is necessary to understand what their perceptions are of what they are doing before an entry point is established as to how they can be helped if the cultural practice they engage in is indeed a human rights violation. Imposed help will always be perceived as dominance through a postcolonial theory lens and from an indigenous perspective. According to Scott (1990:7), this is the cause of silent resistance that gives rise to a “hidden transcript”, which is equivalent to public mask wearing. These two opposing camps are separately reviewed so as to illustrate the viewpoints of each.

3.6.1 Researchers and thinkers that reject virginity testing.

As already indicated, there are researchers and thinkers that are totally opposed to virginity testing. Closely related to Rumsey’s argument in the preceding paragraph, George (2007:33) argued that “The virginity testing debate as it has been engaged in South Africa exposes the persistent theoretical and practical tensions between human rights universalism and cultural relativism” that goes with the discourse of eradication versus embrace of the practice. She also suggested that this debate needs to surpass arguments about eradication or accommodation of this cultural practice, and rather should be concentrating on all cultural customs that perpetuate gender disparity and hence HIV and AIDS infections. Therefore, for George, the issue should not be about virginity testing per se but it should be about the ways and means of eliminating gender inequality through the identification of its causes in society. However, firm opponents of this practice, such as McCaffrey (2012:2), contend that “virginity testing events go against South African constitutional rights to privacy and bodily integrity”. Furthermore, McCaffrey views “resurgence of traditional virginity testing of young girls” (2012:2-5) as an enforced practice by elderly women who are economically driven by their need to make a living.

As much as the economic role in the cultural practice of virginity testing cannot be entirely disclaimed, it should be born in mind that this practice is as old as the Zulu tribe itself since it was for them a traditional way of life. For instance, as early as pre-colonial and colonial times, “virginity testing ceremonies institutionalized the enormous value placed on pre-marital virginity for young women and chaste demeanor was essential if a woman was to be seen as marriageable. In certain respects, African society could be extremely sexually conservative” (Hunter, 2005:393). Even though Hunter writes from his own Western critical evaluation of this cultural practice, he nevertheless indicated that it was a common practice. Therefore, from an indigenous perspective, virginity testing was a customary practice that had nothing to do with money but it had much to do with the preservation of the girls’ virginity, as this brought social and communal pride and was a lifestyle of the Zulu people (Krige, 1968:174; Msimang, 1952:216; Brindley, 1982:84).

Similar to McCarffrey, other scholars such as Scorgie (2002) and Leak (2012) demonstrate strong negative sentiments on virginity testing in their critique of this cultural practice. Scorgie, for instance, argued that girls are burdened with the moral responsibility of making sure that AIDS does not spread. This argument may not be completely ruled out from the feminist perspective due to the fact that there is no male virginity testing, however, from the indigenous perspective, virginity of the young girls was a social responsibility for everyone in the community. Therefore, everyone, including males, carried the moral responsibility by supporting young women’s virginity through respect for their bodies. This is indicated by sex education practices that were not only exclusively taught to girls; the boys underwent similar sex education in order to take social moral responsibility (Brindley, 1982:84; Msimang, 1975:216). This is further attested to by Krige (1950:173) who upheld that “the Zulu people place a high value on virginity though theirs is a society in which there was a long delay between puberty and marriage”. If it were solely an individual girl’s responsibility to maintain virginity and there were no strict compliance expectations from the male side, surely the girls would not survive the wait for long periods before marriage. This is further attested to by the fact that the young men would be part of Zulu King’s legion for war and so would never get married before being granted the permission to do so by the king (Msimang, 1975).

However, Leak (2012:90) seemed to reject the very notion of communal responsibility exerting pressure on young people’s sexuality as she argued that “virginity testing advocates assertions of the communal responsibility and obligation to regulate the sexuality of Zulu youth,

especially women and girls...” If this argument is viewed from the indigenous perspective, it questions the very essence of the communal identity of the indigenous people whose lifestyle is based on communal interdependence (Kanu, 2007:175) rather than a Western individualistic lifestyle. Young people in the Zulu tribe did not live their lives independently of the community they resided in, because unlike the individualistic Western lifestyle, they were very much dependent on social norms and values of their community. Leak further demonstrates her discontent towards virginity testing as she argued that virginity testing is about the Zulu king wanting to exercise his dominance over the young women’s bodies. It is rather a strong opinion which opposes the indigenous understanding that the King only played a supportive role to the pride of *izintombi* derived from the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*.

In addition, Leak (2012:90) argued that the attempts to use the virginity testing cultural ceremony as a bio-medical intervention and for prevention of HIV and AIDS have been ineffective. However, it should be born in mind that virginity testing is a very old Zulu cultural practice, which was never used for the prevention of any diseases because it was part of the Zulu traditional lifestyle, even before HIV and AIDS came into existence. She also perceived individualistic choices and freedoms brought by constitutional rights as the stimulating factor behind the revitalisation of virginity testing, which is not convincing from the indigenous perspective of the longstanding cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. For instance, the Zulu king called for the resurgence of something that was still happening in some parts of the Zulu tribe even though it was not publicized. The rational behind the revival of virginity testing was rather a cultural intervention to ensure that prevention is better than cure as also observed by Wickström, (2010). Thus if young people could maintain their virginity, they would never be part of the increasing statistics of HIV and AIDS infections. It is also not convincing that the revitalisation of virginity testing was due to the South African Constitutional rights because, as argued earlier, this cultural practice has always been evident among the Zulu people, particularly in rural areas, even though it was not an issue of a public concern.

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) rightly observes that “there is much that is common cause between those who support and those who oppose the practice of virginity testing. What is at issue is the methodology that has been adopted to achieve these social ends” (2005:15). This can be affirmed in the sense that when this cultural practice was privately conducted in KwaZulu-Natal prior to the King’s intervention that brought it to the public eye, no one bothered about it. This is because from the indigenous perspective and

traditional cultural lifestyle, Zulu people never took pride in an *intombi* losing her status of being a virgin and becoming a mother before marriage, hence the existence of the watchdogs such as *amaqhikiza*. It only became a common practice due to circumstances beyond their control, when, during colonial and apartheid times, cultural practices that encouraged moral practices were demonised, dismissed and considered pagan and obsolete (Hunter (2005:16). Although the SAHRC is concerned about finding common understanding between the opponents and proponents of the virginity testing, their vehement rejection of this practice as a highly invasive practice to the young women's bodies and advocacy for its prohibition renders them very strong opponents. It is unlikely then that they could ever find a common understanding with the promoters of this practice, since they are watchdogs of the Constitutional rights as opposed to cultural rights.

The SAHRC's recognition of the constructive communal morals that proponents of the virginity testing seek to promote (2005:15) demonstrates their worthy efforts even though their methodology is disparaged. It is thus a challenge facing everyone in the country to find alternative methods to address the worthy cause that virginity testing proponents are fighting for, if this cultural practice is as harmful as portrayed by SAHRC, Commission for Gender and Equality (CGE) and many others who militate against it. For now, the disparaging voices of virginity testing do not come up with any alternative solutions, yet the very Zulu girl child that has become a bone of contention continues to suffer irreparable injustice in the face of ravaging sexual challenges rife in the country. If the indigenous methods such as virginity testing are considered to be too conventional to be of any help in the modern day, then it implies that "indigenous cultural practices that were so long marginalized and distorted" (SAHRC, 2005:5) during the colonial and apartheid times should be laid to rest.

However, if the modern era does not bring about any alternative to obsolete cultural practices in order to address the life threatening sexual issues of the young people, we shall always be compelled to practice *Sankofa*, as advocated for by Kanu (2007). Looking to our history with the intention of finding out what worked in the past and how it can be positively applied to meet our current needs is not supposed to be considered a taboo. Therefore, even though this study is not about defending virginity testing per se, it is concerned with *ubuntombi* as a Zulu cultural practice that can be retrieved as a positive cultural practice to those who still find succour in cultural practices. For the same reason, this research has been conducted among young Zulu women and elderly people to find out what their indigenous perspectives are

concerning redemptive retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu heritage and cultural identity. This does not exclude *izintombi* from the church, although not all of them go for virginity testing. Some churches practice it, as in the following case.

Dean Murphy²⁸ conducted research in 1999 in a place called Wesselton near Johannesburg, where an attempt was made by the church community leader to do virginity testing among both girls and boys. For boys, he explained that, “a piece of wire is extended three feet above the ground. They are instructed to pull down their trousers and, without using their hands, urinate above the marker.” On the other hand for the girls, “a straw mat is unraveled on the floor of a mud hut. They are required to undress, part their legs and submit to a vaginal exam by a female inspector.” The tests were conducted monthly for fear of the sexual intercourse that might happen in between. Murphy contends that this church leader was frantic to inhibit sexual activity among the young church people through virginity testing so as to remedy the social ills of the country, including the AIDS pandemic. He argued that sexually active teenagers were the target while infants were tested to guard against child abuse, and elderly women voluntarily became tested in order to “demonstrate the growing social prestige of virginity”.

While Dean Murphy’s critical views are respected, it may be contended that from the indigenous perspective, the intention of the virginity testing was not to prevent social ills or enhance the social prestige of virginity. Virginity was the way of life for all the young women, and was communally respected and socially accepted by males as well. Instead of being targets of rape, as has become a social norm in South Africa (Hunter, 2010:1), young women earned respect for their sexual integrity and nobody had the right to tamper with their sexuality because there were serious repercussions (Msimang, 1975). The outcry and the strongest objection raised by the Gender Commission activists, as stated by Murphy, is that children are told that they own their bodies and yet are sent to female testers who invade their privacy. However, it can be contended that the concern in this argument is about children that are being invaded by the testing mothers, which ultimately is for their own good, yet male invaders who rape them or engage with them in risky sexual behaviors in the name of love are exonerated.

Another strong opponent of the virginity testing is Maluleke (2012) who upheld that while this cultural practice might have good intentions, it perpetuates gender bias and inequality because it is only girls that are subjected to it and not boys. While Maluleke makes a genuine

²⁸ Dean E. Murphy (1999) “A Time of Testing for Virginity”, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/jul/15/news/mn-56221> Accessed 09/11/2015.

observation, in one of the speeches delivered by the Zulu king in the Reed Dance ceremony, he said “it must be noted that this ceremony is not only geared towards promoting virginity and abstinence amongst girls but also young men”.²⁹ Whether there are ways to test whether men are still virgins remain questionable. However, the understanding is that if girls are not sexually available, men might be forced to abstain as well, even though rape threats are disturbing the value of virginity testing. For instance, Wickström, (2010:535) suggested that “even if the individual girl is the focus of the testing, it is mainly about reinstating and reinforcing morality, not only in individual girls, but also in the community as a whole”.

The main intention is to “encourage men to respect girls’ sexual integrity” even though this may not be guaranteed due to ambivalence towards virginity testing coupled with negative sentiments towards those who support it. From the indigenous perspective, the body of *intombi* was proudly owned and esteemed by everyone in the community, thus no man could violate it. This is seen in the example given by Msimang (1975:225) in which it was very common and considered normal for any man or relatives of *intombi* to ask “*Ake ungambulele mntanethu*”, which means “please show me your body”. *Intombi*, full of confidence and cultural identity, would proudly and fearlessly show whoever wanted to see her body without any threat of being raped. This is further indicated by some of the participants from the fieldwork conducted in the subsequent chapters. It is probably for the same reason that *izintombi* did not consider visibility of their bodies, including their private part examination, as violation of their privacy and integrity since it is where their pride of *ubuntombi* is validated.

Similarly, Mubangizi (2012) and Mswela (2009) disparaged cultural practices that violate women’s rights. Mubangizi categorised such cultural practices as offensive, including FGM, Virginity Testing, and *Ukuthwala*, which means abduction to a forced marriage, *lobola*, which means payment of a bride price, Polygamy, and Primogeniture. Mswela (2009) also ridicules similar cultural practices with an addition of *ukungena* (levirate), early marriages, and dry sex practice for the pleasure of men. Mswela’s critique of virginity testing is about the additional cows that are paid for virgins because of their virginity. However, according to Msimang (1975:230) who gave an indigenous history of a Zulu tribe, *lobola* would only be decreased by one cow if *intombi* had become *igqabulambeleko* (an *intombi* who had a child before marriage). If she had two children, two cows were decreased from *lobola*. It is far from convincing that

²⁹ Eshowe, the Heart of Zululand, the website of Zulu Reed-Dance activities, “*The King’s Speech*”, <http://eshowe/zulu-reed-dance> Accessed 5/23/2014.

virgins were paid more *lobola* cows; rather it is the other way round – if the young woman had children, her *lobola* was reduced. This understanding is attested to by Hunter (2010:2) as he illustrated the importance of the Zulu woman's genitals, which were also known as "Father's kraal" because "a daughter's impregnation will reduce the *ilobolo* cattle a father receives". From an indigenous perspective, a woman's genitals can be equated to *isibaya somnumzane* (a Zulu noble man's kraal) and no one would break into that kraal without arousing that man's and his whole family's wrath. From the feminist perspective, it can be argued that this made young women property of their families, particularly, the father. However, from the indigenous perspective it was one of the reasons that virginity was preserved and only non-penetrative sex was practised among the young people. The young woman could not allow *umfokazi* (strange man) even if he might be her lover, to destroy the wealth of her family that she embodied in her virginity (Msimang, 1975).

Mswela (2009) further argued that virginity testing not only exposes the virgins to the dangers of rape; it also discriminates against those young women who might have been sexually abused. However, according to Phiri (2003:67), instead of discrimination, abused girls, are legally supported by the testers when such cases have been discovered. For instance, one of the pioneers of virginity testing, Nomagugu Ngobese, argued that the rape case is referred to the police to lay charges against the perpetrator and she becomes a court witness for the raped girl. In this way, Ngobese claims that virginity testing has contributed in the reduction of incest cases. When a girl is discovered to have been sexually abused by relatives, she discloses the culprit to the testers who then initiate legal action and allow the law to take its course. However, whether or not those cases are truly followed until justice is served is a different story because research³⁰ shows that many rape cases are either not properly followed or are withdrawn from South African courts for lack of evidence. This not only fails the rape survivors, but also exonerates perpetrators. Further, in response to Mswela and others whose opinion is that virgins are exposed to the danger of rape, it can be argued that rape in South Africa is so rife that even baby girls in their nappies are not spared, as attested to by Meier (2002).³¹ Similarly, elderly women in their eighties or older go through same ordeals. So it is not irrefutable that virgins

³⁰ Charlene Smith, (2004), "Rape has become a way of life in South Africa", <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/rape-has-become-a-way-of-life-in-south-africa-1.222663#.VknVHdk1Ll4> Accessed 14/11/2015.

³¹ Meier (2002) "Violence Against elderly women increase" <http://www.saopf.org.za/press-release/violence-against-elderly-women-increase> Accessed 14/11/2015.

are exposed to rape danger through virginity testing because every woman in South Africa is exposed and vulnerable to rape.

Among the long list of reasons that Gupta (2000: 3) tabulated for women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS infection, is "the traditional norm for the unmarried girls [virgins] that exists in many societies" as one of the risks for infection. She argued that virgins might be scared to ask for information about sexual matters because they might be accused of being sexually active because of the "culture of silence that surrounds sex". While it can be affirmed that sexual issues are taboo and are not discussed publicly in Zulu culture, from the indigenous perspective, Gupta's argument cannot be convincing because being a virgin does not imply ignorance of sexual issues. The virgins were informed, as indicated in the background of the study, and in some communities they are still made aware of sexual issues through sex education conducted by *amaqhikiza* and elderly women. For instance, in the next chapter it is indicated that during the Zulu girl's puberty rituals, very strong sexual language was used in the traditional Zulu context to communicate this to the pubescent as an indispensable path to adulthood. It is further indicated in subsequent chapters that some of the aunties that administer virginity testing have sessions with young maidens in which they play the same role that was traditionally played by *amaqhikiza*. These sessions aim at being brutally honest and open with virgins about sex education to equip them with information in terms of sexual advances that might be made, so that they would know what was at stake. Therefore it can only be an assumption that virgins are at a higher risk of being raped "because of the erotic imagery that surrounds the innocence and passivity associated with virginity" as Gupta posited. She further maintained a similar argument as the rest of the opponents of virginity testing—that virgins are at a higher risk of being raped for their virginity status.

It can be argued that rape is nothing but a systematic militancy against women and children in South Africa as described by Michelle Faul (2013)³² in her posted article entitled "*South Africa Violence Against Women Rated Highest In the World*". Faul further related that statistics in South Africa reveal that a woman gets raped every four minutes, which amounts to 200 000 reported incidents a year ranging from sexual violence to fatal attacks against women. She posited that it has been statistically discovered by some studies that one in three South African

³²Michelle, Faul (2013), "*South Africa Violence Against Women Rated Highest In the World*." http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/08/south-africa-violence-against-women_n_2837804.html accessed on 14/11/2015.

men, is a rapist. While this argument may be challenged in the sense that it is not all men that were interviewed led to this conclusion; nevertheless, it highlights that every woman is at risk of being raped in South Africa, whether a virgin or not. In addition, these statistics do not spare men such as police, who are supposed to be public protectors and law enforcement agents in society. It thus does not come as a surprise that initiatives like “Stop Rape” have been adopted in which the President, Jacob Zuma, who himself was acquitted of a rape charge in 2005, calls it a “scourge and sickness” in the country. As argued earlier, Faul (2013)³³ further gives a good example of a widespread manifestation of rape that is not limited to virgins as she recounts:

In the past month, among other cases in South Africa: a court charged a man accused of chopping up and beheading his wife with a machete; police arrested a 29-year-old accused of raping a 2-year-old toddler fighting for her life in the hospital; and police are investigating the rape of a 100-year-old great-great grandmother. Police still are hunting for two of 15 men accused of gang raping a 23-year-old woman. Her ordeal lasted hours.

In this example, rape ranges from a toddler to a hundred-year old woman. That is why it is not a completely convincing argument that it is virginity testing that puts young maidens at a higher risk of rape; it could only be rape justification. The fact of the matter is that every woman faces a higher risk of rape in South Africa and it may not be because “of the strong norms of virginity” as Gupta (2000:4) postulates. However, the major reason given by one of the South African citizens according to Faul (2013) was that the silent war waged against women in this country is because “...We live in a deeply patriarchal and injured society where the rights of women are not respected.” In addition, Oduyoye (2007:2) argued that it is “power over” women that serves as a primary and a foundational source of all violence against women. These may be considered sound reasons from the feminist perspective, because blaming virgins for their virginity –that it attracts rape– is no different from blaming the target in the place of the perpetrator. It implies that virgins invite rape on themselves due to their virginity, which is similar to accusing the rape survivor of having invited rape through clothing, exposure or any other reason that finds fault with the sufferer.

Like the rest of the opponents of virginity testing, Kathambi Kinoti (1999)³⁴ echoed similar concerns that this practice does not help in the prevention of HIV and AIDS infection; instead

³³ Michelle, Faul (2013), “*South Africa Violence Against Women Rated Highest In the World.*” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/08/south-africa-violence-against-women_n_2837804.html accessed on 14/11/2015.

³⁴Kathambi Kinoti (1999), “*Virginity Testing and the War Against AIDS: A look at the implications of adopting virginity testing as a tool in preventing HIV transmission*” http://www.sos-sexisme.org/English/news/Virginity_testing.htm Accessed 12/11/2015.

it becomes a source of discrimination for others. It is probably for the same reason that Behrens (2014) strongly contended for the complete obliteration of this practice because for him it can hardly be ethically warranted. Even as it was banned for minors and permissible to the young adults from eighteen years upwards, Behrens vehemently calls for the outright ban of this practice that he considers irredeemably unjust due to its discriminatory nature of being administered to women only. With similar sentiments, Kinoti (1999)³⁵ is of the view that virginity testing might only be a temporary measure to suspend infection before marriage because when the girl gets married, she might still be infected by her husband who has not been subjected to any test. For instance, she argued that “most cultures that venerate the girls' virginity do not similarly venerate boys' virginity.”

Subsequently, testing girls only is one of the strongest critiques of virginity testing and renders its proponents defenceless. It is one of the facts that is hard to contend with from the feminist's perspective. It defeats the whole purpose of the virginity testing to know that it is only girls who have to do it because virginity is not a permanent state of a woman. It only serves to delay the sexual debut from occurring at an early stage, as Wickström (2010:535) observed, otherwise the time comes for women to decide to get married or to choose a partner. Then the biggest question remains as to whom does she give her virginity and how safe is she from HIV and AIDS infection from that relationship, because, surely most of the men are not virgins? It is only safer for those who might be getting married as virgins in churches that observe the holiness code of sexual abstinence before marriage, which is applicable to both young men and women. Virginity testing is not part of the equation for most of the young women from such churches that still put emphasis on the holiness code, since they do not involve themselves with this cultural practice, which falls mainly under African traditional religion.

It can therefore be concluded that the critique of most cultural practices by these scholars are valid when observed from the feminist perspective. However, for the purposes of this study, virginity testing is not categorised with any of these cultural practices because of the worth given it by its proponents, which cannot be ignored, according to SAHRC (2005). While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine each of these cultural practices in order to demonstrate the reasons why virginity testing cannot be grouped with them, it is asserted that

³⁵Kathambi Kinoti (1999), “*Virginity Testing and the War Against AIDS: A look at the implications of adopting virginity testing as a tool in preventing HIV transmission*” http://www.sos-sexisme.org/English/news/Virginity_testing.htm Accessed 12/11/2015.

from the indigenous perspective, virginity testing was meant to benefit *izintombi* themselves rather than men. For instance, Msimang (1975:229-230) illustrates advantages for *intombi* because of virginity testing, such as protection from obscene language. If anyone would call *intombi*, *umfazi* (impolite Zulu word that refers to a married woman) or *isifebe* (loose woman or a prostitute), it was considered a very serious offense and the culprit would pay a cow to make amends for that character assassination or denigration of *intombi*. Thus because of virginity testing, *izintombi* were highly respected and anyone would have to think twice before giving any ill comment about them. It also protected them from penetrative sex, and hence children out of the wedlock, which was an offense to all *izintombi* in the locality even if she was not pregnant. Therefore for fear of bringing shame to the other *izintombi*, the young woman could never allow her lover to sexually penetrate her. Thus she maintained her identity as *intombi* until she got the right man to marry her. In other words, *ubuntombi* gave her the option to look for another man if the one she had did not show serious intentions or she did not love him anymore.

According to Msimang, if it would be discovered by *amaqhikiza* and verified by elderly women in the community through virginity testing that the young woman had indeed been sexually penetrated, she was severely punished. She would have to tell them who had violated her and all local *izintombi* would go to that young man's place naked in protest against the action of that man. If found at home, he would also be severely beaten and would have to give them a goat as a fine for the insult against them. Msimang also points out that before the reign of King Shaka, if the young woman was found to be pregnant, she would be speared to death together with her lover. Even though it can be considered a violent reaction by the community members, it indicates that it was a gender balanced practice because both had to face the consequences of their act. It is only after Shaka came to power, probably because he was also born out of wedlock, that he tolerated the culturally constructed offenders; however, it was considered the worst ignominy in the community and hence never became a common occurrence. The shame, disgrace and indignity that came with premarital pregnancy affected families of the young people involved, but to a greater extent the girl's family, which needed to be compensated for the damage done.

Consequently, the man had to pay cows for *inhlawulo* (fine), called damages, for violating *intombi*. She not only lost her identity as *intombi*, but also everything she could ever hope for. This is because after premarital child-bearing, she had to be stuck with the father of the child

since he was culturally compelled to marry her. If for some reason he was able to get away with it, which rarely occurred, she would then get either an old man or any man who might be interested in her even if she had a child, and would be willing to pay a reduced bride-price for her. It can thus be deduced that *ubuntombi* was indeed a highly regarded and respected cultural practice in the Zulu community. However, a coercive element cannot be ruled out as extreme measures were taken to maintain it, such as severe punishment of those who deviated from the norm, as portrayed by Msimang. It is likely that virginity testing was conducted by elderly women in different cultural communities to ensure that young people would not be subjected to such public communal shame and chastisement. In spite of the many critics of this practice, there are those who still see value in virginity testing nowadays and are determined to keep it alive. We now turn to those who affirm this cultural practice.

3.6.2 Researchers and thinkers that affirm virginity testing

There are those who consider the Reed Dance and virginity testing as a “significant part of Zulu heritage in reflecting diverse African customs. The ceremony is still close to the hearts of many traditional leaders and citizens. It portrays and instils a sense of pride, belonging and identity among youth” (Davis, 2011).³⁶ Closely related to this, Mbatha (2003:46) also views the Reed Ceremony among the Zulus, which goes hand in hand with virginity testing, as one of the rituals that still instil “pride, knowledge, belonging and identity” among the young Zulu maidens. He further expatiates how elderly Zulu women play the role in educating growing girls about the acceptable norms and social behaviour in Zulu culture, which is the same role that was mainly played by *amaqhikiza* in the traditional past. Additionally, in her article “*History Matters*”, Catherine Wijnberg (2012)³⁷ observed that the sense of belonging and the cultural beauty displayed by about 30 000 Zulu young women in the ceremony as they bring the reed before the king, alleviated the trepidations about this cultural practice being old fashioned and abusive. For her, revival of this culture is the best thing, a cultural practice that the historical reality of apartheid in South Africa had done away with. She sees a possibility of other developmental structures, such as NGOs or government agents, to make use of this opportunity to bring information to young people that can contribute to their personal development, more than just preserving virginity.

³⁶ Tasha Davis (2011), African Holocaust, “*African Cultural Initiation Rites*” http://www.africanholocaust.net/rites_of_passage.html Accessed 5/23/2014.

³⁷ Catherine Wijnberg (2012), “*History Matters*” <http://historymatters.co.za/cultural-heritage-alone-is-not-enough/> Accessed 5/30/2014,

Another scholar, Vincent (2006:19), questioned the logic behind the prohibition of virginity testing by the government in the Children's act while male circumcision that essentially kills male children every year, is spared. While human rights and gender activists might stress the protection of the girl children's rights by the prohibition of the virginity testing, they do not question the gendered aspect of male circumcision, which is not prohibited as Vincent observes. Male circumcision is a concerning and harmful cultural practice, which, every year, leads to loss of life or genitals of boys, compared to virginity testing which does not inflict any physical pain on its participants. For instance, Banwari (2015: 283) pointed out that "over the last two decades, following ritual male circumcision, thousands of youth have been admitted to hospitals, hundreds have undergone penile amputations and hundreds have died in Eastern Cape Province of South Africa." Additionally, in 2012, David Smith, "The Guardian" reporter in Johannesburg, reported that 42 boys died in three weeks from male circumcision in South Africa.³⁸ In the same article, human rights activists are heard raising their voice that silence needs to be broken around this practice, but still no drastic steps are taken to urge the government to ban the practice as with virginity testing.

Subsequently, it raises a huge question and concern as to why the government and human rights activists deem it fit to discriminate in terms of their approach when it comes to these cultural activities. Why would girls not also be given a right to choose whether to participate or not in cultural activities such as virginity testing instead of banning the practice, or why is male circumcision not banned because its participants also have a right to life? Is it because virginity testing's participants are women and male circumcision's participants are men? Is it not another gender inequality at play, yet some of the reasons behind the banning of the virginity testing is considered gender inequality in this practice? Just as Vincent raised these questions, it is indeed proper to reiterate her concerns as to "why the practice of virginity testing is regarded as so troubling to the new democratic order that the state has chosen to take the heavy-handed route of banning it" and why a different route to male circumcision. It can be asserted that the approach adopted by the government and human rights activists in this case is gender biased and can be regarded as hypocritical and unacceptable.

Nyawose (2013:8) still upholds that Zulu traditional sex education, including virginity testing, can be a solution to the spread of HIV infection, accelerated mortality rate and early pregnancy

³⁸ David Smith (2012), "The Guardian" <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/27/south-africa-circumcision-danger> accessed on 12/11/2015

among young Zulu people. As can be noted from the year of publication, Nyawose's work is one of the recent studies. He indicated that some of the reasons he promotes Zulu traditional sex education is, first, his personal experience of having lost his wife due to HIV and AIDS infection. Secondly, as a principal of a school in a deep rural area, he frequently witnesses early pregnancies and the demise of very young mothers and their newborns in his school and community. He also observed that it is frequently due to HIV and AIDS-related maladies that children are orphaned (2013:22). This is in spite of all the attempts by the government and media campaigns to curb new infections, such as *Thetha-Junction*, *Love-Life*, and *Soul City*, the free supply of condoms, and finally anti-retroviral medications. It is also worth noting that the SAHRC (2005:16) made a similar comment as it acknowledges that it is "the failure of government and society (particularly parents and care-givers) to raise adequate awareness on issues such as teenage pregnancy, child abuse and the increasing spread of HIV/AIDS amongst the youth" that has led to the popularity of virginity testing in some societies. This body further acknowledges that "virginity testing is a response to a dire situation which threatens the fabric of our society" even though they disparage the way in which it is conducted. However, it demonstrates that scholars such as Nyawose who still strongly suggest that parents should take pride in raising children according to the dictates of their traditional indigenous ways (2013:50), cannot be ignored. This is because the struggles with the life threatening sexual issues, among the youth in particular, are still persistent, as he observes them on daily basis in his immediate community.

Mhlongo (2009:3), whose study questioned if young people are forced to go for virginity testing, discovered that most of the young people are in full support of this practice and associate it "with self-respect and dignity and an important part of their culture". For instance, she indicated that there is research evidence demonstrating that virginity testing is not a coercive or forced practice among the Zulu young women, as is a common notion held by many scholars. For example, these young women consider virginity testing as an empowering practice because their refusal to engage early in an active sexual life enables them to be assertive, with self-respect and self-esteem. Hence they are sure that they will not lose their educational opportunities through early pregnancies coupled with the need for the social grants. It also serves as immunity from HIV and AIDS infection. Thus these young women are more than willing to be tested provided that virginity testing is conducted with the necessary hygienic precautions (2009:16-17). Mhlongo (2009:39) also found that her participants supported

virginity testing as a valuable custom of the Zulu culture that enhances a girl's identity, pride, self-respect and modesty, equally recognised by her family and immediate community.

Mhlongo's findings were also confirmed by Nkosi (2013:145) who, in her research on *uMkhosi Womhlanga* (Reed Dance), also discovered that most respondents strongly affirmed its necessity as a cultural tradition since it inculcates Zulu customs and values to the youth. For instance in her findings, she discovered that 89% of the respondents attended the Reed Dance on a voluntary basis, due to their support of it as a cultural practice that promotes the pride of young maidens to remain virgins. Only 4% attended because of peer and community pressure, and 7% attended because of parental pressure. Therefore the prohibition of virginity for girls under the age of 16 was not applauded by many parents and young maidens who support it. These findings oppose the argument that this practice is frequently involuntary and coercive to young girls, as held by some scholars such as George (2008:1461). Nkosi (2013:4) further maintains that "The invitation of young maidens to participate in the Reed Dance ceremony is accepted with pride and dignity by the family of the young maiden as it symbolizes that the maiden is still pure and is a virgin." It is thus not surprising that this ceremony attracts thousands of the young maidens every year (Vincent, 2006:18; Wijnberg, 2012³⁹). It is probably for the same reason that Nkosi (2013:4) asserted that the Reed Dance needs to be "promoted, planned and managed effectively and efficiently in order to enhance its success" since it has some economic implications – it attracts tourists, and local communities benefit economically. Nkosi also indicated that 94% of the respondents perceived the Reed Dance as contributing a great deal in curbing HIV and AIDS infections because it is supposed to be attended by virgins who are not sexually active and hence cannot spread the HI virus.

With similar affirmation in her research findings, even though she writes from the Eastern Cape context, Swartbooi-Xabadiya (2010) asserted that young women still consider virginity testing to be part of their cultural roots and heritage, and that it protects them from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. She verifies that virginity testing is considered a significant cultural practice that is threatened by the Eurocentric individualism of opponents of this practice. She accentuates that Western-socialized people with Western-aligned moral standards frequently dominate virginity testing debates as opponents, and make claims that are hardly supported by any research. This researcher further disparages the Children's Act that

³⁹ Catherine Wijnberg (2012), "History Matters" <http://historymatters.co.za/cultural-heritage-alone-is-not-enough/> Accessed 5/30/2014.

banned virginity testing up to age of 16 without the consideration of the research findings that indicated that sexual debut is rife between the ages of 13-16. She gives an example of the Eastern Cape. It is one of the provinces with the highest percentage of the young people who become sexually active at a very early age. While returning to virginity testing is viewed by local communities as a protective measure of the young girls' genitals in the Xhosa context, it proves fruitless when only commencing after they are over 16 because some of them had long been introduced to sexual activity.

Furthermore, in her work "*Virginity testing as a local public health initiative: a 'preventive ritual' more than a 'diagnostic measure'*", Anette Wickström suggested that "in the absence of effective measures against AIDS, inhabitants try to find alternative ways to protect young people." To this author, "virginity testing is a 'preventive ritual' more than a 'diagnostic measure'..." (2010:532). She further demonstrates how local people of Nkolokotho, KwaZulu-Natal, where her research was conducted, understand virginity testing, rather than demonstrating her judgmental attitude towards this cultural practice. In her inclination to understand these indigenous people, she delves into the historical perspective of this practice and makes profound discoveries about indigenous understanding versus Western understanding of this practice. Hence colliding and antagonistic arguments that characterise this practice and have permeated scholarly debates, coupled with constitutional individual rights, have come up against cultural identity that is communally and culturally based. For instance, she argued, "If we are to analyze why people find it appropriate to act in this particular way, we need to understand the specific meanings of sexuality, integrity, and personhood found in the local community" (2010:533). She added that even the local people attested to the fact that virginity testing is not a solution to the AIDS pandemic; however it is the only available alternative method with which they hope to influence young people's sexual behaviour under their circumstances. Nonetheless, while their attempts with virginity testing are genuinely considered as preventive measures, as Wickström suggests, it is a half solution because men's sexual behavior is left unrestrained (Ndinda et al, 2011:7). It also renders virginity testing a gendered cultural practice that inevitably attracts a great deal of criticism from a feminist perspective. Had it been revived for both young men and women, it would probably serve as an effective preventive measure.

Nevertheless, there are key scholars such as Leclerc-Madlala whose stance may neither be categorised as outright rejection nor affirmation of the virginity testing cultural practice. Her

work contributes to shedding some light into the understanding of this practice. For instance, in her journal article “*Virginity Testing: Managing Sexuality in a Maturing HIV/AIDS Epidemic*” (2001), she draws on the perspective of elderly women, such as mothers and grandmothers, who support virginity testing as the sole cultural solution. This is because of the young mothers who are dying with HIV and AIDS-related diseases, or who abandon their infants into the hands of those old women. Furthermore, she argues that “Many rural women, the most marginalised of South Africa’s population, see virginity testing as the only way to re-instil what they view as the lost cultural values of chastity before marriage, modesty, self-respect, and pride” (2001:535). She further delves into the controversial debates on virginity testing which, she asserted emanate from the tension between the traditional and modern paradigms. Another work she has contributed is “*Masculinity and AIDS in KwaZulu-Natal: A Treatise*” (2005) in which she argues that dangerous masculinities such as ‘*amasoka*’ (men with multiple partners because of popularity with women), which is an esteemed Masculinity among the Zulus, and domination of women because of *lobola* payment, need to be deconstructed as they expose both men and women to vulnerability to the HI virus. In another work, Leclerc-Madlala (2002) clarified the reasons behind the myth that when men have sex with virgins, they are cleansed and healed of the HI virus, which somehow helps to explain why *ubuntombi* could be challenged by this myth.

Another scholar who does not indicate outright rejection of virginity even though she expresses concerns about virginity testing is Bruce. In her article “*The Mother’s Cow’: A Study of Old Testament References to Virginity in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa*”, Bruce (2003) disparages virginity testing on the same grounds as its other opponents such as the Commission on Gender and Equality as well as the Human Rights Commission. She considers virginity testing to be intended to regulate women based on gender disparity. However, she does not seem to completely reject the consideration of virginity as she argues: “If the churches reiterate the importance of virginity, as I am sure they need to do, it must be done in such a way that it does not repeat, or lend itself to a repetition of such negative attitudes towards women” (2003:44). She further suggested that women need to be included in any deliberation about virginity since it directly affects them and warns that it should not be preserved through harmful practices.

With similar sentiments, Phiri (2003) warned that it is important to interrogate virginity testing through hermeneutics of suspicion in relation to who benefits from it. However, she allows

voices of the women such as Nomagugu Ngobese and others who are proponents of virginity testing as a cultural practice to express their viewpoints. Phiri viewed Ngobese's initiative with the revival of the virginity testing purely as an attempt to educate and encourage young women that they are capable of preserving themselves from HIV infection. As with other proponents of virginity testing, Ngobese is convinced that the only way to protect young Zulu girls from being infected is to appeal to positive aspect of their culture that instils in them self-esteem and pride in their identity as young women. Phiri further argued that it would be taking it too far to group FGM and virginity testing as equally violating women's rights if these two cultural rituals are truly understood for what they are. Conversely, Phiri modulates her response on behalf of African Women Theologians by pointing to different theologies that exist in the Circle and thus she may not directly respond on its behalf. However, she considered the initiative of virginity testing proponents as a transformation of the traditional cultural aspect into a positive response to the prevalent social dilemma of HIV and AIDS and teenage pregnancy. Having looked at the literature on the virginity testing, in conclusion, the focus now turns to the identified gap that is necessitated by this research study.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter opened by reviewing literature on IKS, with the intention of locating *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice within indigenous knowledge systems. Some of the literature depicts a historical perspective of the Zulu people with the traditional and religio-cultural background of their customs and values, but with limited portrayal of *ubuntombi* as a cultural heritage and identity. The literature on a Zulu girl child indicated much of the gendered aspects of the Zulu culture towards women; while other literature indicated that most of the cultural observations include the religious aspect of the Zulu culture. Most of the existing literature demonstrates that current debates have much to say about virginity testing and the arguments underlying the contention between its proponents and opponents, but no attention has been paid to *ubuntombi* itself. The literature and discourses on virginity testing overlook the significance of *ubuntombi* because *ubuntombi* includes but is not exclusively defined by virginity testing.

The current studies and literature have paid little if any attention to *ubuntombi* as a part of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity that serves as a path to adulthood with sex education of a young Zulu woman from the indigenous perspective. Subsequently, it could be misleading if not misinformed scholarly understanding of the value of this cultural practice among the Zulu people, particularly those who have been mainly influenced by Western thinking. This is the

gap that this study has sought to fill with the retrieval of *ubuntombi* through indigenous knowledge systems. Due to the patriarchal nature of Zulu culture and the new identities that emanate from constitutional rights in South Africa, this study entered the academic debate through a feminist perspective. Retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a part of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity in terms of gendered paths to adulthood and sex education practices is presented through indigenous knowledge systems using postcolonial theory as a lens with particular attention to *ubuntombi* itself.

In this chapter, the importance of indigenous knowledge systems was acknowledged as a way of conducting the study from an indigenous perspective, which fits in well with *ubuntombi* as a part of a religio-cultural heritage and identity since it is also indigenous knowledge. The chapter also demonstrated that while a Zulu girl child is perpetually challenged with many gender disparity issues and women discrimination due to the patriarchal nature of the Zulu culture, there are some positive traditional values that are associated with *ubuntombi*. The chapter indicated that this study cannot be disassociated from the discipline of Gender and Religion due to the religious aspect of *ubuntombi* that was pointed out by different scholars. It has also been noted that literature on virginity testing portrays a great deal of controversy between those who support it and those who oppose it. Both contending parties demonstrate equally valid viewpoints, however, most of the opponents write from a Western perspective which displays some misconceptions from indigenous understanding of this cultural practice. While there may be inadequacies in the way virginity testing is currently conducted, the arguments for its persistence by its proponents cannot be ignored. A gap was then identified for this study's justification and necessity.

Chapter Four

***Ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice in the Zulu ethnic group**

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the cultural milieu of *ubuntombi* in the Zulu context by considering various researches concerning this cultural practice. It was established that *ubuntombi* has been academically neglected, only briefly mentioned in relation to virginity testing as a cultural practice, to which it is closely linked. The gap identified was therefore that there is a need to retrieve *ubuntombi* as a religio-cultural heritage and identity, and as a tool for sex education, from the indigenous perspective through IKS. In this chapter, I examine *ubuntombi* as an indigenous cultural practice and consider how external influences have affected it as a path to adulthood. I respond to two objectives of this study: first, to describe *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice in the traditional Zulu context; second, to explore some of the traditional cultural practices that have been used to encourage *ubuntombi* as a part of Zulu heritage and identity. This is done, firstly, through a full description of what *ubuntombi* is as an indigenous practice in the traditional Zulu context, which includes a historical overview. The discussion follows, secondly, with how and why it was practised in relation to young women's identity; thirdly, who benefitted from it; and fourthly, with an exploration of some traditional cultural practices that were used to encourage *ubuntombi*. The research findings are presented thematically, with all themes arising from the data collected in semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

4.2 *Ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice in the traditional Zulu context

The following description of what *ubuntombi* entails as an indigenous practice focuses on the traditional aspect of *ubuntombi* within the Zulu context. Most participants indicated that *ubuntombi* can be described as a stage of developmental growth of a girl child from childhood to adulthood. This description is endorsed from the fact that during precolonial and colonial times, there were very clear stages of development for everyone in the community within the Zulu cultural context. These stages of human developmental growth were communally recognised and respected and included being a child, a girl, a pubescent, young woman or *intombi* after having been properly initiated to adulthood through the relevant rites of passage (Msimang, 1975:215). Thus, rites of passage from birth to death dominated Zulu culture and Krige (1950:100) referred to these as transition ceremonies. This formed a coherent order of

indigenous social groupings such as *izintombi*, *izinsizwa*, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, which were clearly comprehended and welcomed by everyone in the community. A number of the participants from non-*izintombi* and the elderly group of the Threshing floor Focus Group (TFG) affirmed these meticulously followed and well observed cultural stages of development. These neatly packaged stages involved observed social norms that required every social member to adhere to. For instance, a child was expected to play the role of being a child to the fullest until a particular stage and age when the elderly people decided that the child needed to be initiated to another stage or level of growth. Certain stages of growth often determined the particular rite of passage; for example, puberty demanded social acknowledgement of the young person as a young adult. Kamaara (2005:5) noted that bodily changes due to the young person's developmental growth bring about sexual curiosity, which necessitates adult guidance through sex education. For this reason *ubuntombi* was a significant stage for young women in terms of their identity and pride.

4.2.1 The significance of ubuntombi as a stage of development

Ubuntombi as a stage of development was considered very important for young women and it played a key role in their pride and their identity. While the girl child might have been considered to be an *intombi* from birth, at this stage she consciously became aware of her identity and her social worth as a young woman. This is because she was communally safeguarded in many ways because she was considered not only the flower of the nation (Wickström, 2010:540) but also the pride of the family. Almost all participants across the research sites agreed that *ubuntombi* is the source of young women's pride and identity from an indigenous perspective. This was a carefully instilled moral value and could be considered a social construct that shaped women into what society demanded. Kisitu and Siwila (2016: 189) posited that "a religio-cultural perspective shows that during [initiation] rituals, it is the body that has to conform with the dictates of culture and society, thus we see a scenario where a woman's body is regulated by cultural power systems". Instilling pride and identity of *ubuntombi* promoted moral values that emanated from a communal perspective. For instance, recognising the importance of the stage of being a young person, Kamaara (2005:5) upheld that "human dignity rests heavily on morality...wreckage in morality at this stage spells doom not just to the individual but also to the family and the society at large". Therefore young women never existed in a vacuum or lived as individuals but they belonged to the community and thus had to observe social norms and customs, which are culturally and socially regulated. This

cultural and social control involved both men and women who were expected to observe communally acceptable behaviours inculcated from childhood.

Consequently, as hinted in the previous chapter, if an *intombi* had ‘jumped’ a stage of development to motherhood, she would be branded with impolite names by community members (Msimang, 1975). This was also affirmed by *izintombi* participants from Melmoth who said that such an *intombi* would be referred to as *igqabulambeleko* or *igxumalisuze*. These names are not easy to translate but in the traditional Zulu context they are a form of chastising. This becomes a stigma and such women are not allowed to wear what *izintombi* wear or associate with them again. According to Mrs Zulu, a participant from TFG elderly group, this young woman might be called *umshiyazeqana* which means ‘the young woman that fell pregnant leaving other young women ‘young and energetic’ while she rushed into motherhood’. She would be recognised by everyone in the community as the one who left other young women and jumped to the stage of mothers. If she married, during her rite of passage to motherhood she would not be referred to as *inkehli* (premarital name of *intombi* about to get married). Instead she would be called *igqinkehli* (the opposite of *inkehli*) that indicated her status of being an unmarried mother with an illegitimate child.

Another disciplinary cultural procedure that discouraged young women from getting pregnant at the stage of *ubuntombi* was to reinforce those who bore children before marriage to marry old men (Rajuli, 2004:63) who would be willing to have them for a lower brideprice (Msimang, 1975). This practice and the shameful names made every young woman want to remain a virgin and maintain her full status of being an *intombi*. However, it can be validly contended from the liberal mind-set or western perspective that these practices and words were discriminatory and coerced young women into compliance with cultural expectations while young men were exonerated. Similarly, from the feminist perspective, it could be considered dehumanising and inequitable for women to be labelled with these names while the young men responsible for the pregnancies were neither branded with names nor required to marry old women. It thus became a gendered practice that a woman would have to bear the public exposure and the whole responsibility for becoming pregnant. From a cultural hermeneutical approach (Kanyoro, 2002:167), such engendered practices that did not uphold dignity and justice for women, need to be discarded. On the other hand, from the indigenous perspective the logic behind the communal recognition of the human stages of development and the corporate upbringing of children created a sense of belonging. It also instilled fear of

displacement once a young woman had jumped any stage of development. Thus a number of participants from TFG of *izintombi* and elderly people agreed that *ubuntombi* gives a sense of belonging to young women and encourages them not to become displaced by becoming young mothers beforehand. Being an unmarried mother would mean losing one's space among other young women who had preserved themselves; at the same time, one would not fit in well with married women. This must have created a very uncomfortable feeling for women who were almost socially ostracized because of the loss of the sense of cultural belonging. Hence the need for the protection of *ubuntombi*.

4.2.1.1 The need for the protection of ubuntombi

It is because of such reasons of social displacement that *ubuntombi* needed to be protected not only by *izintombi* themselves but also by collective responsibility of the community members starting with parents. For instance, Mrs Zulu pointed out that from a very young age, girls were taught by their parents how to behave, sit and sleep from childhood to the stage of *ubuntombi*. She further expressed “the girl never slept with raised knees because it would affect her virginity and so she was taught to always sleep on her side”. This demonstrates how highly virginity was prized and protected in the Zulu cultural context. This is also acknowledged by Stander (2016:432) who observed that “many African cultures have played a significant role in the upholding of the belief in the value of virginity.” Confirming this further, Mrs Zulu indicated that the girls were not allowed to associate freely with boys even if they were family members because they feared things like incest. It was also believed that it protected children from sexual activities among themselves that would have negative consequences on the community. Therefore, in Zulu culture a girl child needed protection even at the stage of *ubuntombi* and was treasured by every member of the society. Hence young women were inculcated with *ukuhlala ngentombi* from childhood as it is further described in the next section.

4.2.2 Ukuhlala ngentombi – the indigenous understanding of ubuntombi

Participants from various research sites concurred that young women were taught to sit with their legs closed, which was called *ukuhlala ngentombi*; they were never allowed to sit with open legs like boys. From an indigenous perspective, the phrase *ukuhlala ngentombi* meant preserving virginity and also literally meant hiding their genitals with their legs. It was not and is still not uncommon to hear elderly people reprimanding a girl child regarding how she sits and in Zulu the phrase “*Hlala ngentombi!*” is used. Such teachings may be disparaged from the feminist perspective for preparing girls to grow up being conscious of their gender roles. This

could be viewed as encouraging gender roles that confined women to the kitchen and domesticated them to private space while men were the only gender considered to have a social life. This is affirmed by Kisitu and Siwila (2016:188) who stated that “literature has also revealed that as women bodies were retained from public to private affairs they gradually became spoken for and acted upon by the active male patriarchy”. This is a genuine argument that needs African cultural hermeneutics as espoused by Kanyoro (2002) to determine what is life affirming or life denying for women. Nevertheless, in terms of preserving *ubuntombi*, *ukuhlala ngentombi* therefore had to do with the way in which *ubuntombi* was understood among indigenous people. How the private part⁴⁰ of a young woman was known has strong implications for the phrase *ukuhlala ngentombi*.

4.2.3 The significance of the young woman’s private part

The private part of a young woman was very important in Zulu culture and should not be exposed. The value of an *intombi* was largely dependent on it. Most participants from TFG, NFG and MFG (both elderly people and *izintombi*) unanimously maintained that it was the pride of every girl to grow up upholding the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* because anything contrary was considered socially unacceptable and degrading to all *izintombi*. These participants, particularly *izintombi*, further agreed that *ubuntombi* is who they really are and without this they could not be proud of anything. They also stated that *ubuntombi* in the Zulu culture is a very important and a valuable practice, in fact the core identity of being a Zulu young woman. It is interesting to note that these are the voices and opinions of the young women themselves since there is a scholarly concern that any discourse about virginity should not exclude women’s voices if the past mistakes are to be avoided (Bruce, 2003:44-45). The voices of *izintombi* are also proof that they are not being coerced into this practice which many opponents of this practice assume.

Additionally *izintombi* expressed that the preservation of *ubuntombi* went together with purity, sexual innocence, integrity, dignity and served as a tool for their pride. This fits in well with the understanding of what a virgin was in the Jewish understanding, which is given by Bruce (2003:54) who found that “a virgin was a girl presumed to be innocent of sexual activity”. However in the Zulu traditional context *ubuntombi* was basically divided into two groups: the first group was *amatshitshi*, young and chaste Zulu maidens who probably could be associated

⁴⁰‘Private parts’ is a polite phrase in Zulu that refers to genitals.

with sexual innocence and purity. Another group was *amaqhikiza*, older virgins with boyfriends who could not be purely sexually innocent because they enjoyed non-penetrative sexual activity known as *ukusoma* with their boyfriends. Therefore arguing that “virginity among the Zulus has not previously been associated with abstinence” (Wickström, 2010:538) is not entirely accurate. There was total chastity with younger virgins who had no sexual experience though this was for a cultural purpose rather than abstinence in the Christian connotation of self-denial. Therefore the young Zulu maidens that were interviewed were presumably *amatshitshi* as most of them expressed their pride regarding their own sexual purity. However with older virgins, Wickström got it right that “the important thing was to avoid penetrative sex, defloration, and thus pregnancy”. Keeping the legs tight (*ukuhlala ngentombi*) was not only concerned with preventing the indecent exposure of the girl’s private part but it also meant protecting it from being penetrated. It is for this reason that sex education emphasised the protection of *isibaya sikayise* (father’s kraal) or *inkomo kamama* or *yenquthu* (mother’s cow), which are the cultural names of the girls’ private part.

4.2.4 Isibaya sikayise (father’s kraal) / inkomo kamama or yenquthu (mother’s cow)

The significance of the girl’s private part was also demonstrated by the way in which it is culturally known: as *isibaya somnumzane* or *sikayise* (father’s kraal) *inkomo kamama* or *yenquthu*, (mother’s cow) which had familial economic implications in the Zulu context. This is because she was viewed as the embodiment of the father’s wealth through *lobola* that was to be paid for her when she got married. This was found in the words of Mr Mkhonto, an elderly participant from MFG who said:

I speak as a head of the family, when the girl grew up well and well behaved as intombi, she was highly appreciated in the community and as fathers we were expecting full lobolo (bride-price) for her. When lobolo was paid for her she was highly respected and honoured by everyone in the family including her brothers, she would be even called Nkosazane (big girl) ...it would only be bad if she failed along the way. For instance if she fell pregnant, she was summoned and spat upon with saliva being told how worthless she is for having disappointed her father. She would flee her home until later when the anger of the father had subsided and they would settle down and talk to receive her back home.

In this excerpt it becomes very clear that the worth of the woman was based on what the father could benefit from her and not on her as a person and it exhibits ownership of the female body by males in a patriarchal environment. It also demonstrates that the love and appreciation of the girl child by the fathers in the family solely depended on her being a potential contractor of the economic status of her father and the family. As soon as the expected benefit was threatened, the young woman became so insignificant to the point of being driven to the

margins of the society. The wrath and rejection that she suffered such as being spat upon and being told to her face how worthless she was if she had made a mistake proved that the only value she had before her father was the bride-price. It is in this that virginity was made a form of patriarchal property instead of being the girl's own body and her pride because its preservation meant the safeguarding of the father's cows. Bruce (2003:55) found similar understandings of virginity in the Jewish community where virginity was not viewed primarily in terms of purity but in terms of property. In the Zulu context, however, purity was also emphasised for other reasons such as religious purposes, but from the patriarchal perspective the preservation of virginity was more about the preservation of the father's wealth and honour. This was highlighted by Bruce (2003:56) who further argued that the father did not only collect the brideprice for the virgin girl given in marriage but also collected the compensation price if someone had tampered with her virginity in any way before marriage. This is also the same in the Zulu context where *inhlawulo* (fine) was paid to the family of the girl if defloration and pregnancy had taken place.

It is in this that Bruce like other feminists can be justified for concluding that the father 'owned the sexuality' of a young woman. It is a valid supposition considering the fact that the girl concerned did not get any personal compensation for having been sexually violated or if her virginity had been tampered with. The owning of the girl's sexuality was again affirmed by Mr Mkhonto in the Zulu context who further expressed that the girl was considered to carry the father's vessel, which was at times demonstrated in the girl's name such as *Ntombikayise* (father's girl). Due to its importance, it needed protection from every member of the society because fathers were obliged to protect their own property. That is why young men too were made aware of *ukuyona intombi* which meant violating the girl through penetrative sex. For instance Petros, one of the community leaders from Nomkhubulwane focus group (NFG) stated that "there used to be exclusive meetings for the boys on their own in which they were told that you can never touch *isibaya somnumzane* (girl's vagina) because if you do, the girl will become pregnant and you will be forced to marry her". Bruce (2003:57) indicated a similar observation in the Jewish context: "A man who had sex with a girl who was not yet betrothed was obliged to marry her and pay the usual brideprice. The father could refuse to hand over his daughter for marriage, but this did not exempt the man from the obligation to pay the brideprice." This demonstrates that, like in the Zulu context, the protection of girl's *isibaya somnumzane* (virginity) was in reality the protection of the father's property in the form of the cows embodied in her.

Therefore the girl's social respect when she had preserved herself also depended on her father because local young men knew that touching her virginity meant touching the cows of her father. It can thus be deduced that Zulu women were not respected for their humanity; it was more a collusion of men respecting one another. Put differently, a young woman was part of the property of her father and her life and protection depended on him so she was compelled to maintain her social status of being an *intombi* out of fear of disappointing the father and the family and consequently becoming a social outcast. It may have appeared that women were simply preserving themselves to protect *inkomo kayise* (vagina), but there were deep gender disparity implications that left women with no status without men. It is for this reason that feminist cultural hermeneutics as espoused by Kanyoro (2002: 92-94) are applied in this study; she recognised that not all African culture is life-giving to women especially in practices where women are considered as custodians of that culture. Therefore the glory of preserving *ubuntombi* in this case did not benefit *izintombi* themselves but the patriarchy in the family structure, something to be fought against via a feminist cultural hermeneutics lens.

Mothers were also entitled to benefit from the preservation of *ubuntombi*. The elderly participants from the NFG affirmed that a girl child was considered to be the bearer of the mother's cow because preserving herself as an *intombi* guaranteed that the mother was going to get her own cow as part of the brideprice. If the young woman had lost *ubuntombi*, she was responsible for losing that cow for her mother because it would have to be returned to the young man married to her and that is why it is called *inkomo yenquthu* (vulva's cow). This was also described by Bruce (2003:52): the eleventh cow of the brideprice was only paid if the young woman had preserved her virginity until marriage and was also known as *inkomo kamama* (mother's cow). This author further explained that the girl's genitalia was known by the same name because that cow served as the mother's reward for having done a commendable job in bringing up her daughter well. Rajuili (2004:101) criticised the idea of the mother's cow as oppressive to young women who are only ones expected to preserve their virginity while there were no similar social coercive measures for young men. Furthermore, when they got married, the young man could expose the young woman if he found she was no longer a virgin and reclaim that cow even if he was also not a virgin.

4.2.5 Parental roles and virginity testing in the traditional Zulu context

Parents did not play the equal roles in the upbringing of girl children in the Zulu traditional context. The mothers were closely associated with girls' upbringing yet the mother was entitled

to only one cow from the brideprice. Virginity testing was the sole responsibility of the local women (grandmothers and mothers) and became a key tool to check if the girl had not opened *isibaya sikayise* (father's kraal) to *umfokazi* (a stranger) and thus lost *inkomo yenquthu* (mother's cow). Virginity testing was viewed as a very natural part of bringing up girls and not as something part of an organised public event. Mamsele, another participant from the same group, also described being tested by their own mothers as they grew up almost on a daily basis such that it became a core part of her existence. Her mother would always check them when they came back from school. She recounted:

My mother used to say "open the legs I want to see my cow and nobody else has a right to touch it except me". To me it had become fun so much that when my sister had chosen a boyfriend, I always wondered if the mother's cow was still there. I did not even know that it was time for her to have a boyfriend officially because amaqhikiza had permitted her to do so since she was old enough. When I came back from school I would always remind my mother, "The cow, mother" until I became old enough myself to be able to get a boyfriend. I had my first born at the age of 25 but I was brought up by my mother as intombi.

Mothers were responsible for virginity testing not only to safeguard *isibaya sikayise* and *inkomo yenquthu* but also to avoid a situation where the bridegroom would have to show everyone in the community that the young woman he had married was no longer an *intombi*. This would prevent the young woman from becoming embarrassed because even though she might not be chased away by her bridegroom, she would suffer serious humiliation when she was exposed and the mother's cow had to be returned. For the same reason, a bride was tested even on her wedding day. Fathers traditionally never actively participated in the bringing up of girl children in the Zulu traditional context. This can be identified in the following table adapted and formulated by Ntuli (2013:78) from Sigaba, (2011, 61-66) to indicate gender disparity in the bringing up of children in the Zulu traditional context.

4.2.5.1 Schematic representation of gender imbalances in parenting roles and the benefits in the marriage of the girl child

Role of Father	Role of Mother
*To be respected and feared [patriarchy]. *Exercises polygamy in case the initial wife cannot conceive in order to retain a family name. *Protects, provides and sustains the family.	*Has to teach the children, particularly girls to respect their elders, not to answer back when scolded and that they are seen and not heard [submissiveness].
*To be dignified through his wealth or economic status measured through possessions such as livestock [and polygamy].	*Was never expected to work - has to be provided food by the father who owns property and is economically viable.
*Assigns relevant chores to male children such as milking the cows, tending the livestock and working in the fields.	*To prepare meals with her daughters and lend a hand to the neighbours where necessary.
*Leads and supports the extended family as well and provides a support system for the performance of family rituals.	*To teach girl children house-chores and how to behave as young women e.g. how to sit, to be honest, to avoid inappropriate friendships e.g. with boys.
*Has a responsibility to see to it that his sons get wives and assists them with the <i>lobola</i> payments. Also help sons to establish their own households	*Girls would be taught <i>ubuhlalu</i> (beadwork), <i>izitsha zobumba</i> (clay pots) as well as to thatch the roof. These would supplement the family income.
*Teaches young boys life skills so that they can protect themselves from enemies.	*To ensure that girls' virginity is regularly tested so as to prevent virginity loss as this is preserved for their husbands.
*Performs a ritual that would enable a boy to declare him an adult.	*Has to train the girls in all household chores in terms of cleanliness and hygiene.
*Has a responsibility of teaching the firstborn son all the rituals and family customs so that he could take over when he (father) becomes too old to fulfil such roles or when he dies.	*The education of girl children by their mothers is vital for the preparation of their own marriages when they come of age.

The above table indicates that mothers spent time with their girl children while fathers spent time with their boy children because of gender roles in the traditional upbringing of the children. It is for the same reason that the mother's cow was to be returned if the girl child was discovered to have lost her virginity before marriage because her failure to preserve it was considered to be the failure of the mother. Yet she only receives one cow and the rest go to the

father, a clear indication of gender disparity from the feminist perspective. African women theologians such as Oduyoye (2007:4) highlight that women have no identity without men in many African cultures. They are made to believe that they are permanently men's property: they are commodified through the payment of *lobola* and handed over from the father to another man, the husband, to become in effect, a perpetual minor. For the same reason Kanyoro (2002:9) viewed African culture as 'a double edged sword' that seems to be life-giving to women on the surface yet it is full of dehumanisation and life-denying implications for women.

Therefore the cultural practice of *lobola* needs revisiting and reviewing through African feminist cultural hermeneutics if it is to be a just practice to women in the Zulu cultural context. Mothers should get more *lobola* cows because of their bigger responsibility in the upbringing of the girl child. Rajuili (2004: 49) found that among the Batswana and the Lovedu, the whole *lobolo* belonged to the mother of the young woman due to her role in the bringing up of her daughter, which was only fair. Rajuili further noted that among the Abenguni from the Cape, the *lobolo* cattle (also known as *ikazi*) belonged to the woman that was getting married. He indicated that they would only be taken by her parents in the case of her death, otherwise *lobolo* were her own property, which seems fair as she was the one who had preserved herself as an *intombi*. In these cultural groups *lobola* practice was life affirming to women because it recognised them as humans who merited property ownership and could live life for themselves and not only for others. A girl never 'owned' her virginity in the Zulu culture; while she might have been proud to preserve herself as an *intombi*, other people became the main beneficiaries of her virginity, which is life-denying from the feminist perspective. According to some participants in this research, however, *lobola* is more complicated than first meets the eye. This complication can be traced back to colonial times that distorted the initial notion of *lobola* among the Zulus as explored below.

4.2.6 Lobola and its effects on the practice of ubuntu

As noted above, *lobola* and *ubuntu* are hardly separable in the Zulu context and this research has considered how *lobola* practice had an effect on *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* was a socially accepted tradition expected of every young woman until marriage and required *lobola*. Mswela (2009:185) claimed that *ubuntu* was a highly esteemed state because of its potential attraction of a higher amount of *lobola*. This might not be an accurate claim if the origins of *lobola* are closely examined although an in-depth academic debate on *lobola* is not within the scope of this study. Rajuili's (2004) comprehensive study on *lobola* has highlighted a number

of key issues that cannot be disregarded when dealing with *ubuntombi*, particularly from a postcolonial perspective and which acknowledge how controversial this practice has become in the modern world. He traced the origins of *lobola* back to ancient times, not only in the African context but also in other parts of the world, although his main focus was *lobola* among the Zulu people (2004:36-37). The prejudice of the colonial masters and missionaries is evident in their consideration of *lobola* as a strange practice by barbaric Africans who sell wives to each other like merchandise (Rajuili, 2004:77-78).

This view was refuted when Rajuili (2004:51; also Krige 1950:121 and Msimang 1975:265) indicated that in the pre-colonial context, the groom offered anything he could possibly afford to the in-laws to secure a wife. Msimang contended that this was a western interpretation and that it was an insult to the indigenous people that they could consider their own girl children merchandise for sale. He also indicated that among the Hottentots a young man would hunt a huge buck and offer it as *lobola* while among the Zulus, even pumpkins or any food item from the fields could be used. The purpose was to build a love relationship not only between the bride and the groom but also between the two families and the clans involved. Rajuili noted that among the Zulus and the Basotho when the groom had no livestock, he would count stones in the place of cattle and this was acceptable to the in-laws.

The participants in this study also indicated that *lobola* was intended for building up a relationship with the in-laws and should not be seen in terms of 'sale'. Therefore if the bridegroom could afford four basic cows of the *lobola*, he would be allowed to take his bride (each cow had a role to play in the relationship building between the two families). Considering this scenario, it can be deduced that in the pre-colonial setup of the Zulus, *ubuntombi* was not connected to the economic status of the father or the mother and the family. Therefore the young woman's virginity was not a property of the patriarchy in the family, but she was equally respected and cherished as the member of the family and the society at large. This was also affirmed by Msimang (1975:265) who contended that *lobola* was a form of appreciation of the groom and his family for the young woman who had been brought up well and able to build a household. When a girl got married, the family did not only lose the person in their daughter, but also a family asset due to her physical contributions to the household. *Lobola* was paid with a sense of gratitude. The controversy that surrounds *lobola* today and the patriarchal attitude of the traditional Zulu family of owning the young woman's virginity as an economic asset

explained earlier are the upshots of the colonial influence that began with the stipulation of the *lobola* cows.

4.2.6.1 Stipulation of the *lobola* cows, the debut of the *lobola* commercialisation

The specification of the number of the *lobola* cows can be traced back to the colonial masters. This was found among the Melmoth participants of this study who agreed that it is only after colonisation that Somtsewu [Sir Theophilus Shepstone], the white man introduced ‘commercialisation’ of young women by adding seven cows that had no names to the four basic cows that were traditionally given for the *lobola*. The participants further explained that the total *lobola* was then fixed at eleven cows, which did not contribute to building the relationship between the two families; instead the bridegroom was usually stripped of his means of economy whereas initially the bridegroom would give whatever he had for the brideprice. Eleven cows were now expected as a full *lobola* irrespective of whether an *intombi* was still intact or not, which devalued *ubuntombi*.

To address this, Somtsewu said that the vulva’s cow was to be suspended until it was proven that *intombi* was still intact. The white sheet from the first night after the wedding was evidence of this if blood from the first penetrative sexual encounter was present. Research participants confirmed that the father was now to receive ten cows from his daughter’s *lobola* and this was to be a standardised practice with the exception of chiefs whose daughters attracted a higher number of cattle. Rajuili (2004:66) and Posel and Rudwick (2011:1) also confirmed that Theophilus Shepstone, the Natal secretary for Native Affairs, fixed the number of *lobola* cows for Zulus and stipulated the number of cows that were required to be paid. Only the traditional *amakhosi* or chiefs were exempt from the stipulated number of cattle for their brides. Their daughters were to be given in marriage for 20 cows while brothers and sons of *amakhosi* gave 15 for their brides. The rest of the ordinary Zulu people were expected to give 10 cows for *lobola* payment. According to Rajuili, indigenous people unsuccessfully protested against the *lobola* distortion.

Participants have highlighted a number of important issues here. First the debut of the *lobola* commercialisation, secondly, the origins of *inkomo yenquthu* (the mother’s cow) and thirdly, the probability of the institution of virginity testing for the authentication of *ubuntombi* for the sake of the mother’s cow and the father’s kraal. For instance, Bruce (2003:51) also specified ten cows as a standardised *lobola* among the Zulus and the eleventh one that belongs to the mother. This author traces textual confirmation of virginity testing to the early twentieth

century in Natal and Zululand. This demonstrates that virginity testing was not an ancient custom of the Zulu people while virginity itself was part of the lifestyle of the Zulus from the time immemorial. Bruce also affirmed that there was no precise ethnographic indication for the existence of this cultural practice in a primitive Zulu cultural context, which supports her doubts about whether it is a genuine cultural practice. It can therefore be concluded that it only qualified as a cultural practice through social construction as a reaction to the colonial regulation of *lobola* that came with the need to authenticate the mother's cow.

The information given by these participants is further validated by Rajuili (2004:66) who provided the reason behind the specification of the number of the *lobola* cows. He found that Sir Theophilus Shepstone (known as *Somtsewu* among the Zulus), the colonial secretary, proposed an increase in *lobola* cows to cover the cost for a paid local chief or headman who would be delegated as a colonial government's official at Zulu weddings. Rajuili concluded that "the commodification of *ilobolo* is thus a recent phenomenon. It was never part of Zulu custom" (2004:66). He further indicated that "... colonialists and missionaries were strongly opposed to customary marriage and the passing of *ilobolo* on the grounds that such unions amounted to the purchase of women, encouraged polygamy and reduced women to slaves" (108). Ironically, it is the same colonialist government that endorsed the native marriage laws in 1869 and stipulated an increase in the number of cows to be paid for *lobola*. This was done to cover the wages of the native official to preside in those weddings on behalf of the colonialist government (106). This was the beginning of the legal regulation of the *lobola* payments that ruined the essence of the indigenous idea of *lobola*, where there were no intentions of buying and selling of women as the colonialists had inaccurately assumed.

While Rajuili (2004:58-64) noted that there are other factors that have altered *lobola* such as globalisation, deculturation, cash replacing cattle and the like, colonial influence seems to have played the most drastic role in distorting it. Arguably, even the patriarchal entrenchment of the Zulu traditional family was also the outcome of colonial influence. This is because it would have been hard for a father to resist the temptation of owning his daughter as his property if she was valued at ten cows and his patriarchal control would have been justifiably entrenched. This implies that there is a need for the decolonisation of the whole process of *lobola* because there are a number of ramifications for women that come with commercialisation of *lobola*. Such adverse effects of *lobola* commercialisation are evident in the dehumanisation of women in the modern world.

4.2.6.2 *Dehumanisation of women through lobola commercialisation*

The commodification of *lobola* can be said to have contributed to the dehumanisation of women. This was indicated by the *izintombi* participants from MFG who lamented that the white man's law of specifying 11 *lobola* cows effectively destroyed the link to the building of relationships. Participants felt that many men were unable to afford *lobola* and the disrespect of women was evident even after marriage because men felt like they owned women due to the huge price they had paid. Participants further highlighted that males insult and enslave women because of a sense of entitlement due to the large amount of *lobola* paid; some even killed women who they regarded almost as donkeys that they had paid for. They also estimated that nowadays the bridegroom can pay R10 000 and be expected to buy a stove, a bed and many other things that commercialise *lobola* even more; in the past he paid cows, a number that was regarded fair and the basis for building a relationship between the families involved.

The commercialisation of *lobola* has led to considerable criticism of this cultural practice because it gives the impression that the woman is being procured as a form of property, which reduces her personhood and objectifies her (Mangena and Ndlovu 2013:477). Ironically, colonialist masters wanted to abolish *lobola* since they considered it a form of human trade that debased women (Rajuili, 2004:66-77) but through its legal regulated increase that favoured colonial ideas, it became the main cause of women denigration. This was also observed by Masenya (2003:122) who maintained that "in the traditional Northern Sotho community, however, *lobola* was not regarded as a means of 'purchasing' a person, but, in reality, many women for whom *lobola* is given today come to understand that they have actually been bought! In this new setting, a woman is no longer her own but belongs to the man and his family." Masenya further considered *lobola* to be a 'double-edged sword to women' in the sense that it became an empowerment to women when she had been paid for because it elevated her social status. On the other hand, it could be the reason behind a woman being abused because a 'paid' for woman could be regarded by the in-laws as a man's object with which he could do as he pleased.

The abuse happens in the form of domestic and gender based violence that women have to face because men claim to have paid for them. This has been affirmed by Baloyi (2010:2) who indicated that abusive men think that *lobola* gives them a licence not only to batter women, but also to strangle and coerce them into sexual intercourse simply because they have paid for them. Similarly Mwuara (2010:111) asserted that many African patriarchal cultures consider

women to be men's property with which they can exercise their unrestrained rights even if it means hurting them. Likewise Nyengele (2004:33) upheld that in patriarchal families, males are the sole decision-makers because women and children are regarded as the husband's possessions that he can control as his own property. In the same vein, Ndlovu (2014)⁴¹ concluded that "high cases of domestic violence can be directly or indirectly linked to the commercialisation of *lobola*. As a result, men are using the payment as justification to oppress and abuse women who they view as bought property." From the feminist perspective, this is totally unacceptable because it makes women less human and it encourages violence against them. This is also affirmed by a number of scholars such as Phiri (2002:24), Maluleke and Nadar (2002:14) and Ntuli (2013:66) who viewed *lobola* as life denying to women and a gendered cultural practice that promotes women's objectification resulting in deliberate abuse and oppressive attitudes towards them.

From the indigenous perspective described above, however, *lobola* was never a commercial transaction; there was no place for domestic violence in the traditional lifestyle of the Zulu people. This was illustrated by Rev Mabatha, one of the elderly participants who maintained that when a man assaulted a woman in the Zulu culture, he would be accused of being a coward towards other men for overpowering a woman. This violent man would be required to tell where was he able to beat a woman because there was no space in the body of a woman that could be beaten without having an effect. If he beats a hand, how was she going to prepare food; if he beats a breast, how was she going to nurse the baby? Rev Mabatha also indicated that gender based violence was a foreign phenomenon and unheard of among the Zulus because a young man was criticised for bad behaviour when proposing a girl and was considered a worthless person. He would never stand in front of the girl or touch her because he would be accused of having smeared her with *muti* (traditional medicine) and he was considered *isishimane* or *isigwadi* (a failure to approach girls). He needed to show oratory skills and have beautiful words to win the girls' attention and heart because there were often a number of rivals after the same girl.

The respect of the body of a woman in the Zulu cultural lifestyle is a noticeable missing element in the current generation wherein domestic and gender based violence against women and

⁴¹Ndlovu, Nqobani 2014. "Lobola (bride price), a custom gone bad"
<https://thisisafrica.me/lobola-bride-price-custom-gone-bad/> Accessed 17/04/2018.

children has almost become the norm. This is confirmed by frequent gruesome media reports as well as a number of research studies on violence against women. Such research studies have confirmed the unacceptable pervasiveness of gender based violence nowadays irrespective of ethnic group, race, colour or class (Ntuli 2013; WHO 2010; Baloyi 2010; Maluleke and Nadar 2002; Phiri 2002; Partab 2011 and Mwaura 2010) to mention but a few. African women theologians have also written extensively on gender and domestic violence that normally emanates from a number of cultural factors as identified by Oduyoye (2007:2-8). It also makes the call by Kgalema Motlante⁴² most relevant: men should not hide behind culture to justify and perpetuate gender based violence against women.

Thus *lobola* has affected the cultural practice of *ubuntu* and largely because of the negative effects of colonialism. Today very few young men are able to get married due to their inability to raise enough money for the *lobola*. This is affirmed by Hunter (2005:391) who pointed out: "...most young men today are unable to marry because of the high cost of *ilobolo* (bridewealth) and find it difficult to establish an independent *umuzi* (homestead or home) and become *umnumzana* (homestead head)". Nonetheless, they remain in love relationships with *izintombi* and this diminishes *ubuntu* as a cultural practice, particularly because they become sexually active and very few decide to preserve themselves until marriage. As an example Phila, one of *izintombi* participants from Melmoth, pointed out that today when young men are queried as to why they do not get married, they respond: *who can buy milk from the shop when it can be milked freely in the street?*

The implication is that young men have no reason to bother about marriage or payment of the *lobola* because sex is readily available without any serious commitment such as marriage for which so much has to be paid. Inevitably this is inherently a western lifestyle which is captured by Shivanandan (2010:377) in her article "A civilization of vows and the dignity of women" where she writes about a contemporary culture and the 'hookup society'. In this kind of culture and society, a young man and woman do not need to know each other to engage in sexual relationship. They may occasionally come together to watch TV and "the occasion inevitably ends in sexual intercourse, since he subscribes to the popular adage, "Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?" In other words, why make an effort or incur expense when you can get your pleasure for nothing?" As a former western colonised country, it is not surprising that today in South Africa we find a similar situation where sex has become so readily available

⁴² Motlante, former SA president, who was addressing men on 24 August 2013.

that *ubuntombi* is seen as an irrelevant if not an old-fashioned practice. Like *lobola*, sex too has become commercialised in many ways as will be seen in subsequent chapters.

Participants from MFG further contended that it is the very same colonial ‘divide and rule’ law that devalued *ubuntombi* because the eleven cows could no longer be afforded by young men. They were of the opinion that *lobola* was one of the inspirations for a young woman to maintain *ubuntombi*. This is because the young woman knew that once she had allowed anyone to tamper with her virginity, it would mean the loss of the mother’s cow, her own chances of getting married and the loss of the *lobola* payment for her father. Thus *ubuntombi* was highly valued by all community members. If a girl lost her social status she was considered a loose woman and was isolated from her peers to the point of becoming a social outcast. Participants also indicated that by ‘jumping’ the stage of *ubuntombi* and partaking in sex, she would have indirectly declared herself to be like a married woman. Subsequently, people would refer to her as *umfazi* (married woman) even before marriage.

Critics of this cultural practice contend that “virginity in many contexts and societies linked with perceptions of purity, such that women are divided into two distinct categories: ‘good girls’ on the one hand and ‘bad girls’ on the other. Girls in these societies who choose not to remain virgins are often marginalized and stigmatized as impure” (Stander, 2016:435). However, from cultural and indigenous perspectives, isolation of the girls who had challenged the norms was a way of discouraging such acts with the intention of preserving the advantages of such norms. It is for the same reason that Thule, an *intombi* participant from MFG resentfully mourned that “even though we preserve our virginity today, others consider it useless because it does not make much difference since eleven cows are a *lobola* standard for everyone for as long as you do not have a child”. This suggests that even if *izintombi* preserve themselves, contraceptives can also ‘preserve’ other young women and it makes no difference in terms of the payment of the *lobola* when the marriage time comes. Hence *ubuntombi* is viewed by some as a futile exercise.

4.2.7 Marriage

As in many other African cultures, marriage in the Zulu cultural context was one of the most important rites of passage. In fact, according to Msimang (1975:249), marriage was the epitome of all the rites of passage because if any person was not married in the Zulu culture he/she was never considered a grown-up. An unmarried man would always be considered a boy even in his old age and he would never partake in the important deliberations and decision-making of

the elders. Similarly, an unmarried woman remains a girl until death and she would never be part of the elderly women of experience in society. Therefore it was instilled in young people as they grew up, that marriage was something to look forward to. Young women in particular were trained to become good and diligent wives that would be able to build families of their own. Therefore instructions on the general behaviour and work ethic of *intombi* were of the utmost importance for *ubuntombi* because a young woman was not only attractive due to her physical features but also due to her ability to work. It is for this reason that Mrs Mabatha, one of the elderly people from MFG, maintained that there were other elements that characterised *ubuntombi bentombi* even in the olden days. These characteristics included her personality, disposition, manners that went with sexual purity so as to ensure development of the best qualities for her future role of being a mother. A girl's virginity would be fruitless if she could not perform house-chores such as sweeping the floor, cultivating the fields, preparing traditional food and respecting everyone in society including strangers.

These traditional essentials of being a woman were linked to their roles in the private space that is home-bound. This attracts criticism from the feminist and western perspective that the young woman was prepared for the benefit of her future husband and in-laws. However, Rev Mabatha objected to the idea that women were trained for their husbands and in-laws alone as he said:

Another thing that today is wrongly viewed as the denigration of women was that a woman was properly moulded and trained for work but in actual fact she was considered inzalabantu (mother of humanity) therefore she needed the ability to know and do everything accordingly. It was not necessarily done for the sake of the man she was going to marry but it was about her own integrity as the mother to everyone including other community members. As a result nobody could touch her in terms of physical abuse; you would be condemned and socially treated with contempt for having physically assaulted a woman because she had no flesh to be assaulted.

There are two important things that can be detected from this participant's excerpt, the first one is that women were very important people in the Zulu indigenous cultural understanding because their role as a mother was not confined to one family but was socially recognised and respected. It was critical therefore, according to the social norms that she was made capable of playing that role of *inzalabantu*, which is a highly respected cultural concept of womanhood in the Zulu context. According to this participant, being *inzalabantu* entailed being a responsible woman of integrity, not only for building up a family but a home, and even the broader community.

The participant further argued that if that household did not have *inzalabantu*, one would never get even water when passing by as a stranger. Subsequently, efforts were put into moulding and shaping the future mother in a girl (*intombi*) otherwise there would be no homes because according to him there is a difference between the family and a home. He explained that a family is a number of related people staying together and a home is where everybody is received with warmth, hospitality and love, which could not be there without the presence of *inzalabantu* (a mother). Therefore from the indigenous perspective, the pride of being a woman rises when one understands that without women there could be no proper functioning of the family and the community at large. Despite certain patriarchal issues, Zulus seemed to have understood that women are not socially haphazard elements that are considered a divine mistake from androcentric perspective. This was affirmed by Rakoczy (2004:11) who asserted that “related to patriarchy is androcentrism, the equally false understanding that the male is the norm of human life. To be truly human is to be male and thus females are inferior and deficient type of beings, most probably a divine mistake.” Zulu women were viewed as essential elements of the family so that the house could become a home.

A girl was highly respected by everyone including the in-laws for the stage of *ubuntombi*. On the wedding day, the young woman would have to be told by local grandmothers that she was going to be *umfazi* (a married woman/wife) or she might even refuse to open her legs for her new husband. After the first night of her wedding day, *izintombi* would demand a goat known as *imbuzi kaMeke*, which was to be slaughtered as sign of permission to the bridegroom that he might now have an intercourse with his wife. If he found that she was no longer a virgin, he would open the base of a Zulu grass basin known as *iqoma* and push it down over his head to hang on his shoulders as an indication that he had been robbed; he was not the first one to touch the virgin. *Inkomo yenquthu* (vulva’s cow) was then to be returned to the bridegroom’s family. As mentioned already, this was a gendered practice and women are unable to check on the virginity of the men on the wedding day.

The young married woman’s body was now to be controlled by the man she had married. African women theologians have identified the marriage institution in the African context as one of the patriarchal centres. As an example, Phiri (2003:10) noted that “in Africa marriage is at the centre of the African community. Yet marriage is also the centre of patriarchy”. Masenya (2003:116) also affirmed this patriarchal orientation of African marriages, pointing out that a woman has no personality of her own in African culture as in other patriarchal cultures; she is

possessed by her husband who makes decisions for her. The patriarchal relationship in marriages subject women to subordination and dehumanisation while men are unjustifiably elevated to superiority. Subsequently, women are coerced to be sexually subservient irrespective of the circumstances. For instance, in her research on domestic violence in Durban, Phiri (2000:97) found that women were sexually controlled by their husbands: men demanded sex even if a woman was sick, had been battered or angered. There is no trace of a love relationship in this coercion.

According to Baloyi (2010:2), sexual coercion in marriage, which can be equated to marital rape, is exacerbated by the thinking that men own women as property due to having paid *lobola* for them. This must be a very testing situation for a young woman who has preserved herself as an *intombi* for a long time, exercising her agency without anyone controlling her. In addition, today HIV and AIDS are real threats even for married women. This is also affirmed by Phiri (2003:10) who asserted that patriarchy “does not work well in the era of HIV/AIDS, when research shows that there are more new infections of HIV among the married women than any other group”. It is important for young women to know the health status of the men they are to marry if they have preserved themselves as virgins. Kinoti⁴³ warned that virginity for the young women could mean only temporary prevention of HIV and AIDS because when they get married, they may be infected by their prospective husbands who have never been socially pressured to preserve their virginity. This may be exacerbated by the fact that the patriarchal marital relationship does not permit women agency in terms of using protective sexual measures such as condoms because women in marriages have no control over their sexuality. This was highlighted by Haddad (2009:10) who found that:

Conversations with married women also suggest that husbands expect sexual intercourse on demand and seldom allow the use of a condom. In fact requesting the use of a condom often evokes anger and suspicion, so women desist from insisting on its use during intercourse. Many are aware that their husbands engage in extra-marital relationships, but do not feel able to negotiate safe sexual practices and are sometimes obliged to engage in dangerous practices such as “dry sex”.

This citation indicates how unpredictable married life can be for the practice of *ubuntombi*. No matter how long the young virgin had faithfully preserved herself, when she gets married the

⁴³Kathambi Kinoti (1999), “*Virginity Testing and the War Against AIDS: A look at the implications of adopting virginity testing as a tool in preventing HIV transmission*” http://www.sos-sexisme.org/English/news/Virginity_testing.htm Accessed 12/11/2015.

control of her sexuality is transferred to her husband whose faithfulness, appreciation and love determines her safety from infection with HIV and AIDS. This calls for serious deconstruction of gender inequality, which has a detrimental effect on women's wellness, security and wholeness in marriage. It was probably much better in the traditional Zulu cultural context where the exercise of *ukusoma* guaranteed virginity preservation of both young men and women. The current dangers of sexually transmitted diseases were hardly a threat in marriages in the past.

4.2.8 Ukusoma

Ukusoma is one of the indigenous and ancient cultural practices of the Zulu people. Krige (1968:173) recognised that among the Zulus, there was a lengthy period between puberty and marriage. He presumed that this was because the Zulu regiments only got married according to the injunctions of the king and this was determined by the availability of the marriageable young women. However, not all Zulu young men were King's warriors. Ordinary social life was lived according to the cultural norms and values with which every social member had to conform; among such norms and values was the sexual custom of *ukusoma*, which regulated the sexual life of young people (Msimang, 1975:242-243). Haddad (2009:7) also confirmed that "courting was a long process during which the couple were allowed to practice *ukusoma* (non-penetrative [or] thigh sex)". This was also indicated by the majority of the participants of *izintombi* and elderly people in this research study who unanimously agreed that *ukusoma* was used among young men and women who had publicly declared their love relationship. According to Rajuili (2004:3), it is only those whose *lobola* had been given who could engage in *ukusoma*.

According to the participants the purpose of *ukusoma* was not only to safeguard against the loss of the mother's cow and the father's kraal as was indicated earlier, but it also served as a way of sexually satisfying each other as lovers. However, Msimang (1975:243) indicated that this was done secretly and under the sharp observation and strong instructions of *amaqhikiza* for fear of the young woman being deflowered or made pregnant. This kind of sexual experience did not give an *intombi* a licence to give away her virginity; neither did it give a young man access to her virginity. Hence Krige (1968:174) indicated that "the Zulu managed to combine delayed marriage with a strong emphasis on virginity before marriage by the institution of *ukusoma* – external intercourse with a single lover (as far as the girl is concerned)". Msimang (1975:243) agreed with Krige that the young woman could never have more than one lover at the same time. Only young men could practice *ukusoma* with different

girls and these young men were known as *amasoka* (Hunter, 2005:394). Women could never be referred to as *amasoka* in the Zulu context.

Other researchers have suggested that young women could also practise *ukusoma* with different young men (Haddad, 2009:7; Wickström, 2010:538). However, it was not feasible in the Zulu context where young women could quickly be labelled as *izifebe* (loose women). Hence Msimang (1975:244) is likely to be accurate when he noted that it was pleasurable for a young man to have multiple girls as *isoka* but it was never culturally permissible for a girl to have more than one boyfriend which he calls *ukubhanqa abafana*. *Ukusoma* served as a best cultural practice in that young people were not totally deprived of sexual experience, pleasure and satisfaction and also did not need to be concerned about defloration, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. This was affirmed by Chisale (2016:230-231) who recommended this practice as the best response to the current context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

4.2.9 Alleged female cultural offenders

It is for these reasons that sex education that emphasised *ukusoma* was one of the most important things for young Zulu women so as to avoid becoming female cultural offenders. This is because even if the young woman might have been exceptional in everything else, without preserving herself, *intombi* would have lost her identity, social respect and admiration from the community members and other *izintombi*. It was therefore important for the girl to understand the significance of preserving *inkomo kayise* and the mother's cow (girl's vagina). It is for this reason that when a young woman had allowed a man to penetrate and terminate her virginity and become pregnant, she was treated with hostility from everyone in society including the members of her own family. This is because the family was not only relegated to the margins of society through her actions but they also lost the brideprice. The local young women also took the offence personally because they felt betrayed by one of their own in terms of their identity. For instance, Mrs Zulu, a participant from TFG of elderly people recounted:

Izintombi used to cry and mourn if one of them was made pregnant and they would go naked to the house of the young man who had committed an offense and they destroyed everything they could find in his private hut. When asked by the mothers of that family as to what the matter is, they opened their private part and demanded the front covering of izintombi called umutsha because the one who has been made pregnant will never wear it again.

She further indicated that the pregnant young woman had to run for her life because she could be severely beaten by all of the local *izintombi* demanding their *umutsha* (front covering). The

family of the male offender would then give them a goat for ritual cleansing and they would kill it with their bare hands since it stood in the place of the male offender (this was also affirmed by Krige, 1968:175). They were later given money which was put into the water that they would drink and spit out symbolising the casting out of the evil spirit believed to have attacked them because of the pregnancy. The goat would be left where it was killed and it was not consumed by anybody else except for elderly women because it was considered to be ritually unclean and the cause of the bad luck. These were all cultural constructs that were meant to instil fear among the young women and the realisation of the significance of preserving themselves as virgins. It was not only the young women who were accused of being cultural offenders; males too felt the communal wrath for having sexually spoilt/degraded a young woman (*ukuyona intombazane*).

4.2.10 Alleged male cultural offenders

As for male offenders, the incident became a nightmare for his family because they had to go to the girl's family to announce at the gate that "*inja idle amafutha*" (the dog has eaten the fat). Everyone understood that the fat was *ubuntombi bentombi* (virginity of the virgin) and the male offender was called a dog. This was verified by Rev Mabatha who elaborated on this indigenous understanding:

The young man was considered isigilamkhuba (evildoer) if he had done anything sexually unacceptable to a girl. It was worse if he had made her pregnant, when his relatives went to the girl's family to report that offence, they would say "inja idle amafutha" (the dog has eaten the fat). This is because ubuntombi bentombi (virginity of a virgin) was likened to the fat and therefore the young man who would have impregnated a girl would have been a dog that had helped itself from the fat. There was nothing as important as the fat in the whole Zulu community and so if the boy had done such a thing to the girl, the girl was considered to have been violated by that young man. He thus became a dog because his disrespectful action towards the girl by taking away her virginity was as detested as the behaviour of the dog.

The significant thing to be noted in this excerpt was that young women were socially protected because young men knew that they could not engage with young women sexually as they pleased without serious communal repercussions. Rev Mabatha further stated that it was considered a detestation for a young man to touch *isibaya somnumzane* (the kraal of the head of the family), which referred to the girl's vagina. It was considered a really evil act among all the young men and that is why whoever had done such a thing would be despised as a worthless young man because women were highly respected.

In this, the Zulu culture traditionally demonstrated that the onus of moral responsibility did not rest with young women only as many of the critiques of virginity seem to believe (Naidu, 2008:86, Scorgie 2002:66). Some of the female Zulu students in Naidu's research expressed their dissatisfaction with the emphasis being placed on young women's virginity while young men do not receive similar social pressure (2008:87). This is accurately perceived in the current practice of *ubuntombi* where only young women are subjected to virginity testing. It could only be judicious if young men too were to receive similar social pressure of the need to remain chaste if young women were to safely practice *ubuntombi*. Traditionally, every young man was held equally responsible for sexual behaviour and men received equal social pressure and judgement when they had sexually violated a girl (with consent, not rape). Even if they were officially known to be in a love relationship, a young man had to equally abstain from penetrative sex due to the social expectations of both, in what can be considered a gender balanced cultural practice.

4.2.11 Rape

Participants from NFG and TFG of the elderly people unanimously highlighted that rape was a foreign concept in the Zulu culture because women were truly respected and protected. They asserted that rape never existed in the past; an *intombi* displayed her *ubuntombi* exposing her beautiful body without any fear of being raped. Even though it might be considered a romanticism of the past to acknowledge that rape never existed in the traditional practice of *ubuntombi* as per the claim of these participants; the social respect that women enjoyed in the Zulu cultural context cannot be disregarded. Many people who believe in *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice look back with a sense of nostalgia because of the sexual violence against women and children that pervades current South African society. To the question, 'where did it go wrong?', both young and elderly participants lamented colonisation and its huge contributions to the dismantling of Zulu social structures that cemented such cultural practices.

These social structures involved *amaqhikiza* and grandmothers that, due to colonial influences, had to disappear not only in the urban areas (Hunter, 2005:16), but also in the rural areas their effectiveness diminished (Brindley, 1982:84). Furthermore, the cultural practice of *ukusoma* was not only challenged by the Christian idea of total abstinence before marriage (Rajuili, 2004:3) but it was also abolished by the colonialists. This is indicated by Wickström (2010:538) who pointed out that "during the 1920s, missionaries tried to shift the responsibility for young girl's sexuality and courtship from older girls to mothers. Initiation rites and education on thigh

sex were forbidden.” It is further affirmed by Deborah Gaitskell that Christianization through the schooling system of missionaries played a leading role in the disappearance of the indigenous traditional customs, hence the building of boarding schools for girls. The main intention was to remove them from the traditional social influences that were seen to be distracting children from colonial intentions that “entailed cultural and ideological transformation.”⁴⁴ It is therefore not surprising that *ukusoma* ended up being a sporadic practice that was eventually forgotten. Therefore colonisation contributed to the destruction of cultural observances and structures that served as custodians of the sexual life of young people and impartially that protected both males and females from sexual exploitation. Such protection kept the identity of young women highly esteemed and socially valued, however both women and men were equally exposed to sex education that kept them morally cognisant of social expectations.

This disputes the argument by anthropologists that “virginity is usually highly valued in societies that seek to control women” (Bruce 2004:9). Instead, the collective upbringing of children in the Zulu community ensured that everybody played their roles effectively and responsibly for the smooth continuation of life. Nonetheless, this did not suggest that girl’s virginity would benefit males only, it also benefitted the whole society as it is illustrated in the subsequent paragraphs of this chapter. However, when the colonial influence turned everything upside down, Zulu people lost valuable cultural practices as well as respective social responsibilities. For instance, Wickström (2010:538) further expresses that “in a seeming paradox, measures that were intended to ‘civilize’ people caused the breakdown of existing institutions and people’s ‘moral’ culture”. Before the dismantling of such moral fibre, however, rites of passage played a vital role in the maintenance of cultural identity including that of young women.

4.3 How and why *ubuntombi* was practised in relation to young women’s identity?

As has already been indicated earlier in this study, *ubuntombi* was a source of young Zulu women’s social identity and pride. If you were no longer *intombi* according to the stages of development mentioned above, you were displaced even in social events that brought communities together which were mainly the celebration of the rites of passage such as *imbeleko* (receipt of the new-born), *ukuqhumbuza* (ear-piercing), *umhlonyane* or *ukuthomba*

⁴⁴ Gaitskell, Deborah “Race, Gender and Imperialism: A Century of Black Girls’ Education in South Africa” <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/39667632.pdf>. Accessed 29/08/2018.

(puberty), *umemulo* (honouring of the young woman for her behaviour), *umkhehlo* (premarital celebration of *intombi*), *udwendwe* (wedding) and the like. These were traditional practices and activities that pertained to the lifestyle and the development of *intombi* because all these social events had something to do with *intombi*. For instance, as indicated in the lifestyle of the Zulu people by Msimang (1975) from the opening chapter, *qhumbuza* had to do with the ear-piercing of the children, which marked their crossing over of the stage of childhood to the pre-puberty stage. Depending on different Zulu dialects, *umhlonyane* or *ukuthomba* referred to the stage of puberty.

4.3.1 *Ubuntombi as an initiation rite of passage*

When a young woman reached the stage of *ubuntombi*, it became an initiation rite of passage because it entailed *ukuthomba* (puberty), which was a critical period of public declaration of her becoming an adult. Particular cultural rituals were done to celebrate that period and a young woman had to receive sex education as will be discussed hereunder. The initiation to adulthood had begun that would take a young woman to *umemulo*, which depended on the way in which the girl had behaved herself in terms of her identity as *intombi*. The parents honoured the young woman for her impressive behaviour by doing *umemulo* for her, which is still a current practice in some places. This enabled a young woman to choose a life partner. Then *umkhehlo* would be another rite of passage to take place just before the wedding day, thereafter the wedding which was known as *udwendwe* in Zulu. While all the other cultural activities may be important in relation to *ubuntombi*, *ukuthomba* and *umemulo* were some of the most significant ones in the lives of the Zulu young women and hence they also became some of the themes that were identified. This is because they had a lot to do with the identity of young women and their public exposure as young adults. Now the focus turns to *ukuthomba* (puberty stage) in a more detailed manner as an activity that was practiced in relation to the young women's identity and a path to adulthood indicating sexual educational practices.

4.3.2 *Ukuthomba (puberty stage), as a rite of passage*

Ukuthomba was a determining stage for young people who were becoming adults; they were to be socially accepted and recognised as such and that is why it is also known as an initiation stage or a rite of passage. For instance, Annika Hipple⁴⁵ indicated that “unlike in many Western societies, where the boundary between childhood and adulthood is often blurred, traditional

⁴⁵ Hipple, Annika S. (Prudence International online Magazine) “Coming-of-Age Rituals in Africa: Tradition and change” <http://www.annikahipple.com/writing/coming-of-age-rituals-in-africa/> Accessed 17/04/2018.

African rites of passage mark an unambiguous transition with an associated change of status, roles and responsibilities”. Young people therefore needed some preparation for the adult life and consequently there was much ritual performance that carried particular meanings for all the people involved in the process, particularly, pubescents. Kamaara (2005:7) also upheld that puberty entails the ultimate breakage of childhood and transition of the adolescents to adulthood. It therefore consists of a formative and maturing process that fully familiarises a young person with adulthood. Similarly, Kasomo (2009:159) indicated the didactic nature of this rite as “having educational developmental purpose. It makes the start of acquiring knowledge which the children have no access to. It is a period of familiarization, socialization and many other issues of the society; it is obviously a period that puts an end to the life of infancy.” This was also affirmed by Davis (2011) ⁴⁶who pointed out that:

As children mature physically and therefore sexually, a special puberty rite of passage, initiation, is meant to help them move smoothly from childhood into adulthood. The purpose of initiation is, above all, educational. Through initiation, young adults further learn about the traditions and expectations of their community and will therefore be able to contribute to the maintenance of social order. They must die to their child self in order to be reborn into an adult self, one characterized by greater knowledge of the world, deeper consciousness, insight and wisdom.

While the above citations pertain to all young people in different cultural locations, particular attention is paid hereto the background of the Zulu girl’s puberty rituals and how they were performed. However, it is important to highlight that *ukuthomba* (puberty) as a rite of passage served as a transformative rite for young girls from childhood to *ubuntombi* stage. Kangethe (2013:110) also viewed the puberty rite as transformative with a significant role in society since it marks the beginning of responsible adulthood and a move away from childhood. This author further stated that for African girls it mainly means a gateway to the marriage. With similar connotations, Mbiti (1969:119) suggested that “initiation rites prepare young people in matters of sexual life, marriage, procreation and family responsibilities...Initiation rites have a great educational purpose. The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge, which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated.” It is during this phase of transformation that local grandmothers and *amaqhikiza* among the Zulus had to play their role in a more significant way as they intervened with sex education for the pubescent girl. This kind of education commenced during this phase because young women needed to know how

⁴⁶Tasha Davis (2011), African Holocaust, “*African Cultural Initiation Rites*”
<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm> Accessed 21/04/2015.

to behave themselves since they were no longer children. They needed knowledge in terms of handling their bodies and sexual behaviour as well as social expectations of the stage they had reached (Msimang, 1975:216, Brindley, 1982:84).

Young women were encouraged to take pride in their bodies and identity of *ubuntombi* even after they had chosen young men as lovers hence they could not practice penetrative sex, but were rather encouraged towards *ukusoma* (non-penetrative sex). This was also pointed out by the majority of participants from the research interviews and focus groups. They indicated that this was the beginning of the journey of the younger virgin with older and experienced virgins known as *amaqhikiza* who continued with the necessary sex education and guidance. The young virgin was accompanied by *amaqhikiza* until she was old enough to make her personal decisions in terms of the choice of a life partner. It is against this cultural milieu that sex education became a key factor and of typical significance during the girl's puberty. Mizii (1999)⁴⁷ affirmed that "an outstanding feature of rites at coming-of-age...is their emphasis upon instruction in behaviour appropriate to the status of adults. Instruction in dress, speech, deportment, and morality may be given a period of months."

Even though the dress code in the Zulu context was clearly defined (Nkumane 2001:107), moral instruction in the form of sex education took precedence. However, only ritual performance properly communicated sexual issues that were otherwise taboo to be openly discussed in Zulu culture (Ndinda *et al.* 2011:7). During the Zulu girl's period of puberty, such rituals mainly came from puberty songs as will be indicated below. These puberty ritual performances took place in three consecutive phases as identified by scholars such as Turner (1964 and 1974), French anthropologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) who coined the term 'rites of passage'⁴⁸ and Hipple⁴⁹. The identified phases are separation or seclusion from the community, a period of transition or liminal phase and aggregation or incorporation into society. These phases are further examined below in terms of how they fit in with the current Zulu indigenous set-up.

⁴⁷Mizii, 1999. "Religious rites"

<http://cyberspacei.com/jesusi/inlight/religion/rites/Passage.htm> Accessed 17/04/2018.

⁴⁸ Mizii, 1999. "Religious rites"

<http://cyberspacei.com/jesusi/inlight/religion/rites/Passage.htm> Accessed 17/04/2018.

⁴⁹Hipple, Annika S. (Prudence International online Magazine) "Coming-of-Age Rituals in Africa: Tradition and change" <http://www.annikahipple.com/writing/coming-of-age-rituals-in-africa/> Accessed 17/04/2018.

4.3.2.1 Separation/ Seclusion from the community

The puberty stage begins when a Zulu girl has experienced her first menstruation and undergoes what Turner identifies as 'separation'. She is taken into what is called *umgonqo* (seclusion). This was described by Mrs Zulu, a participant from TFG of elderly people: "*When the girl reached the stage of puberty she stayed indoors in seclusion for seven days in a reclining position while the neighbouring girls who had been made aware would spend every night with her in celebration of her puberty stage*". *Umgonqo* refers to the actual physical seclusion of the girl for some time to indicate her changing status from being a young girl to becoming an adult. The place of seclusion is usually *umsamo* (the innermost part of the house) in a grandmother's hut where it is believed that the initiate symbolically reclines in the presence of the ancestors (Brindley, 1982:83). In some families, the specified space inside the hut to be occupied by the pubescent girl is partitioned with a curtain. This is the first phase of the ritual process described by Turner, as derived from Van Gennep's three phases of rites of passage, as separation, margin (or *limen*), also called transition, and aggregation or incorporation (Turner, 1964:47; 1974:56). Turner described the phase of separation as "symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state')". He also explained separation as "the phase which clearly demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular space and time" (1974:56), which relates to the girl's temporary detachment from social structures and resting in the ancestors' sacred presence. *Umsamo* is considered a sacred place because, according to the Zulu cultural belief system, it is a specific space occupied by ancestral spirits.

4.3.2.2 Transition or liminal period/phase

According to Turner (1974:57), transition is the second phase in which the "ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states". The ambiguity can be seen in the consideration of the pubescent girl as a particularly vulnerable individual who needs strengthening medicine made from a local mixture of herbs (Brindley, 1982:83; Krige, 1968:173). Brindley further noted that the girl's belongings during this period such as clothes, soiled traditionally made pads, bones and chyme of the slaughtered goat need to be extra-carefully guarded against theft for fear of witchcraft. It is during this liminal period that the girl becomes a "structurally indefinable 'transitional-being' or 'liminal persona'" (Turner, 1964:47). In Zulu culture, however, the girl does not acquire any particular name though she is considered symbolically dirty due to her menstrual blood. For instance, according to Brindley

(1982:84), “the pubescent girl may not traverse the field lest the crops perish or eat *amasi* (curdled milk) lest the cattle [source of milk] might become thin and die”. This corresponds with some of Turner’s descriptions of liminal activities such as refraining from certain kinds of food (Turner 1974:59). The vulnerability of the pubescent girl is consistent with Turner’s theory of the ambiguity of the initiates during this phase.

From the feminist perspective, it is problematic that menstruation is considered dirty; a woman cannot be a woman without menstruation as was indicated in Chapter Three. This is what makes a woman capable of bearing children, a very essential part of a married woman whose fate is socially and culturally doomed if she cannot bear children in an African context (Nyengele, 2004:35, Mwititi, 2006:194, Kanyoro, 2002:15-16). Nevertheless, in most African cultures menstruation is considered as contaminating requiring ritual or ceremonial cleansing (Edet in Oduyoye and Kanyoro, 2006:27). In addition, the intermediary period (liminal) is also characterised by non-classification of the initiates. Turner further argued that “the structural ‘invisibility’ of liminal personae has a twofold character; they are at once no longer classified and not yet classified”. This concurs with the pubescent Zulu girl who, during that liminal period, may neither be classified as a young girl nor as mature adult until all the relevant transitional rituals have been conducted. Clothing for Zulu women could be classified according to their age (Nkumane 2001:107). Mrs Zulu, participant from the TFG of elderly people confirmed this as she explained “They wore uniquely according to their stages of *ubuntombi* because there were young virgins, the older ones and the seasoned ones known as *itshitshi elikhuzi impisi*. Those were highly respected in the local community for their elongated stay in *ubuntombi* stage.”

The young girl would wear a loindress known as *umutsha* till the age of 12. Teenage girls or virgins known as *amatshitshi* wore a white loindress (white representing virginity) with a frontal covering known as *isigege* to distinguish them from younger girls. At puberty they would now wear *isiheshe* or *udidla*, a short skirt made of bead strings. Puberty would also make her conscious of the significance of concealing and respecting her private part because menstruation is an important sign of womanhood (Nkumane, 2001:107). During the seclusion, the girl would symbolically never wear what she used to wear as a younger girl and thereafter, she also never wore what she has worn during seclusion (Brindley, 1982:85). According to Mrs Zulu one of the participants from TFG of elderly people, “the pubescent girl wore the red cloth decorated with white beads at the bottom known as *umbhelenja*, which identified her as a

pubescent and communicated the message to the community that she has reached the puberty stage.” When the seclusion is over, she would wear suitable attire appropriate to her new social status.

The liminal period also temporarily permits what is not permissible in day-to-day social interaction. Turner’s notion that “liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all...” can be detected in the singing of puberty songs during the seclusion period. For instance, Hipple⁵⁰ upheld that “ritual songs, dances and masks or other artwork feature prominently in many initiation rites”. These songs are sung by the local age mates of the pubescent girl who come to accompany and spend time with her during her seclusion. These are ritual songs that are not sung under normal circumstances since they are regarded as the most important aspect of the puberty process, causing the girl to mature successfully (Krige, 1968:175). Krige further explained that “the singing is called *ukubhina* which means to use abhorrent or obscene expressions which startle people...vulgar words are always used in preference to more polite words” (:176-177). It is worth noting that these songs cannot be sung out of context because they are anti-structural and a ‘Nay’ to positive normal social structures because of obscene expressions and vulgarity, but it is normal for them to be sung periodically as puberty songs only during that liminal period. In the meantime their intention is to instil positive values in the pubescent girl who must take heed of the message communicated by these songs for her to mature successfully. They are only anti-structural in the sense that they are not permissible in the regular structural life of the community. However, as a ritual activity of the liminal period, the very obscene language is encoded with messages to the pubescent girl that are meant to produce a successfully matured young woman in the subsequent structural status of adulthood. It thus fits well with Turner’s notion that the antistructure of the liminal period becomes a source of positive structural affirmation.

The example in the preceding paragraph might to a certain extent answer one of the principal questions raised by Driver who is critical of Turner’s theory when he asks: “What kind of relation does he see between social structure and ritual antistructure? (Driver, 1992:227). It can also be noted that Turner’s theory does not fit in well with all different cultural contexts. He

⁵⁰Hipple, Annika S. (Prudence International online Magazine) “Coming-of-Age Rituals in Africa: Tradition and change” <http://www.annikahipple.com/writing/coming-of-age-rituals-in-africa/> Accessed 17/04/2018.

might have come to other conclusions based on his findings among the Ndembu of Zambia, which are not completely the same in other African cultural contexts. For instance, the conclusion that neophytes (initiates) “may be symbolically assigned characteristics of both sexes, irrespective of their biological sex” (Turner, 1964:49) does not fit in the Zulu cultural context. During the liminal period, sex distinctions are acknowledged and observed even with greater intensity during the puberty period of a Zulu girl. This is not only because bisexuality is taboo in the Zulu culture, but also because it is part of the pubescent girl’s liminal state not to talk to males during puberty. For instance, according to Brindley (1982:83), the pubescent girl in seclusion is not supposed to be seen, touched or to converse with boys to avoid negative outcomes such as becoming an incessant chatterbox. In Zulu culture, a young woman needs to be modest, respectful, presentable and dignified to be marriageable; hence being a relentless talker is culturally unacceptable. Thus Turner’s theory of unidentifiable sex distinctions of the initiate in seclusion is not harmonious with the situation of the Zulu pubescent girl.

4.3.2.3 *Aggregation or incorporation*

Having completed the liminal phase, the pubescent girl is reincorporated into a new social role, identified by Turner as a third phase. He described this phase as the one that “includes symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society. For those undergoing life-cycle ritual this usually represents an enhanced status...” (1974:57). The aggregation phase is characterised by many ritual performances for the pubescent girl in the Zulu context. For instance, according to Brindley (1982:85), “to mark the end of seclusion a goat is slaughtered for the initiate”. The grandmother, who is considered to be close to the ancestors because of her age and being menopausal, cooks it. Some parts of the slaughtered goat such as bile and caecum are placed at the *umsamo* which is considered to be an altar of the ancestors. The pubescent girl is also smeared with the bile and the gall-bladder is inflated by the grandmother and placed on the girl’s head, which thereafter is taken to the *umsamo* of the grandmother’s hut. The grandmother then burns the inflated gall bladder with *impepho* (incense) at her fireplace as a feast to the ancestors. The meat of the sacrificed goat is also consumed in the same grandmother’s hut as a symbol of unity between the living and the living dead in the puberty ceremony of their daughter.

According to Krige (1968:173), the sacrificed goat is called *umhlonyane* and it commends the girl to the ancestors. Sometimes the puberty phase is known as *umhlonyane*. The whole

community also comes to celebrate the girl's successful maturity with feasting and dancing. This was also confirmed by Mrs Zulu from the TFG of elderly people: "there were different cultural activities such as Zulu dance, music and feasting for the rest of these days, food was brought by every girl to be eaten together". All these ritual activities endorse Turner's theory of incorporation very well since the pubescent girl is now incorporated into an enhanced new social position or status. Mrs Zulu also affirmed that all the cultural activities and rituals during girls 'puberty period were essential to the upbringing of the girl. These included the collection of wood, the slaughtering of the goat by the father of the girl who had also been made aware that his daughter had reached puberty and the neighbouring mothers brought food for feasting. Moreover *iqhikiza* admitted the pubescent girl to the group of *izintombi* and she was counselled as to how to behave herself as one of *izintombi* because she had now become one of them and suitors started to approach her.

4.3.3 Ubuntombi and religious implications of Zulu girls' puberty rituals

Puberty rituals have strong religious implications as they are connected to ancestral veneration in the Zulu cultural belief system. This relates to Turner's consideration of the 'ritual' as more befitting "to forms of religious behaviour associated with social transitions" (Turner, 1964:47). Puberty rituals are performed as part of African traditional religions, which are mainly relational and communal in nature. This was affirmed by Kasomo (2009:158) who maintained that "initiation is relational for it is established with the living and the dead. It is an experience of sharing life and sharing a vision for life with the entire community". The community members include the dead who are venerated and considered invisible living spirits. For instance, Ampim⁵¹ upheld that "there is virtually no African society that believes that when a person dies this ends all ties and communication with the living. Rather, African philosophy from one culture to another agrees that the spirit of the deceased is still with the living community..."

Even though the word African may be contended, every indigenous person in Africa understands that there are collective belief systems that characterise African people such as ancestral veneration. Kasomo (2009:157) also verified the religiosity of the initiation rites, upholding that these rites "are not merely secular rituals but religious ones interlaid with prayer, sacrifices, invocations and propitiation of the ancestral spirits..." It is therefore mainly through

⁵¹Tasha Davis (2011), African Holocaust, "African Cultural Initiation Rites"
<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm> Accessed 21/04/2015.

ritual performance that communication is kept alive between the living and the living dead of the community. As an affirmation to this, Chidester et al. (1997:214) upheld that “ongoing relations with ancestors or ancestral spirits depend upon keeping open the lines of communication. The principal medium of communication is animal sacrifice”. Similarly Mizii (1999) acknowledges that animal sacrifices are often essential elements of the rites of passage due to religious implications of such rites. Besides animal sacrifice, which is a ritual in itself during the Zulu girl’s puberty ceremony, there are lots of other rituals and gestures that go with it that serve as communicative means with the ancestors.

4.3.3.1 The living dead ‘ancestors’ as recipients of the ritual performance

It has been specified in the preceding paragraph that in the Zulu culture, the dead are not actually discarded from the living community as non-existent. Therefore, whatever is happening in the world of the living, ancestors need to be recognised as part of the living by being ritually invoked. Nwadiokwu *et al.* (2016:45) affirmed this: “making of offerings and libations to the living-dead emphasizes and renews the link between human beings and the departed”. In the Zulu context, Brindley (1982:85) indicated that “the bile is poured at the *umsamo* and reports to the ancestral shades (spirits) that the child has now matured”. The significance of the choice of the grandmother’s hut for the girl’s seclusion setting is for her to enjoy special protection by ancestors against witchcraft which is a constant threat to the pubescent girl (Brindley, 1982:82). All these rituals do not carry obvious meanings but only the performers of the rituals (the living) and the recipients (ancestors) of the communicated meaning understand the language behind the rituals and are believed to act accordingly. It is in this context that Kasomo (2009:158) upheld that rites and rituals are a religious experience that encompasses “the primary encounter between the divine and the individual”.

Krige (1968:176) also affirmed that the pubescent girl is presented to the ancestors for their blessings through the sacrifice of an ox or a goat. The best of the animals needs to be slaughtered for the occasion if the ancestors are to be pleased. Krige noted that considerable amount of symbolism used in the puberty rites. For instance, the animal needs to be slaughtered facing east which is a symbol of the beginning of a new life for the pubescent girl. Besides smearing the girl with the bile as indicated above, it is also poured around her as a circle to confine evil and bad luck and allow for the ancestors to confer their blessings upon her. It is believed that when she steps out of that encircling bile, she has received the approval and blessings of the ancestors. Again the underlying communication in this regard is between the

performers of the rituals and ancestors through symbolism. The ancestors seem to know that when the girl is smeared and surrounded with the bile, it is their time to bless her. This is communication through ritual performance and actions, which affirms Schieffelin's observation that:

Ritual language and ritual modes of communication are not effective mainly because they convey information, reveal important cultural truths, or transform anything on the semantic level. Rather, they are compelling because they establish an order of actions and relationships between the participants through restricting and prescribing the forms of speaking (and I would add, interaction) in which they can engage so that they have no alternative way to act. The situation itself is coercive. (Schieffelin, 1985:709)

In the above description of the ritual actions towards the pubescent girl, a prescribed and restricted form of communication between living participants and the dead involved in the ritual performance can be noted as per Schieffelin's observation. Besides these ritual actions, there could be no other alternative way to interact with the dead.

4.4 The power of ritual performance language in communication

As was indicated earlier, puberty ritual performance serves as communicative means within the Zulu communal setting. This also observed by Turner (1974:59) that surreptitious communication takes place during the liminal period. He argued that initiates "are confronted by the elders, in rite, myth, song, instruction in a secret language, and various non-verbal genres..." I would argue that the "secret language" would be the actual ritual performance itself that communicates meaning to the community members and to the individuals. However, it is not easy to recognise this as an outsider of the particular cultural context because even some of the insiders might not understand the hidden meanings in language, song or symbols. For instance, Friesen (1990:44) maintained that "rituals tend to combine both digital and analogic levels of information so that logical and verbal methods of communication are combined with nonverbal symbolic methods. Rituals thus hold a level of meaning and significance that words alone cannot capture." This argument fits in very well with the Zulu cultural context in which some things are hard to communicate due to being cultural taboos or relating to the living dead as pointed out in the preceding paragraphs. Friesen further argued that "rituals carry religious and cultural meaning which has been passed on through the generations" (1990:41). Therefore, it can be deduced that one of the primary functions of the rituals is communicating a meaning which I argue can only be properly understood by the members of the community in which the ritual is being performed. This is further demonstrated in the following paragraphs.

4.4.1 Communication with the pubescent girl

It has been suggested in the preceding paragraphs that in most African cultures anything pertaining to sexual matters is hard to communicate. However, puberty is considered to be a stage of maturity that compels sex education for the pubescent girl in the Zulu culture. According to Umeogu (2013:113), “the fact remains that that symbols in most occasions start where words have stopped. They are used to delve and signify meanings that defy the constructive use of words”. OFUAFO (2013:393) defined symbols as “objects, acts, relationship or linguistic formations that stand for a multiplicity of meaning”. Therefore when communication fails for the lack of words or courage to utter the words, symbols can become human behaviour or actions [...] powerful for communication. This is further highlighted by Umeogu (2013:114) who asserted that “the power of symbols is gotten from its ability to represent something that can effectively communicate its meaning to the receiver”. It is for this reason that besides the private instruction on sex education that the girl receives from grandmothers and *amaqhikiza* (post pubescent girls who have lovers); ritual songs are sung for communication purposes.

These puberty ritual songs are full of very strong sexual language accompanied by gestures as a way of communicating sexual information to the pubescent girl who is maturing and who will soon be courted (Krige, 1968:176). The observation by Mizii (1999)⁵² is confirmed that says “Rites of passage...commonly incorporate statements or dramatizations of moral values, and rites at coming-of-age often give moral instruction in highly explicit terms”. Therefore the girl had to know what to expect and how she was expected to behave. Ritual songs communicated graphic sexual images that were otherwise hard to communicate. For example, Krige (1968:177) pointed out that “in the songs the sex act is likened to milking; the vagina is a ‘milkpail’; the penis is said to be ‘skipping’ during the sex act; a man is said to ‘eat’ with his penis; the vagina is a thief – it ‘steals’ a man’s semen.” Krige also maintains that these songs “are accompanied by dancing or gestures in imitation of the sex act.” They somehow find it easy to sing and dance about the sexual intercourse, but hard to discuss it with the pubescent girl because it is socially forbidden as a taboo. The intention was to convey a message to the pubescent girl of what the meaning of menstruation was and to warn the girl about penetrative

⁵²Mizii, 1999. “Religious rites”

<http://cyberspacei.com/jesusi/inlight/religion/rites/Passage.htm> Accessed 17/04/2018.

intercourse that could take away her virginity and make her pregnant, the worst scenario for any young virgin.

It is also believed that the openness about the sexual act with the pubescent girl helps in the maturing process, hence many of the songs “simply call on the penis to come and take note of the maturity of the vagina” (Krige (1968:177-178). Krige also affirms that these puberty songs were part of sex education as they revealed everything about sexual intercourse and procreation. Puberty was a relevant context for such a disclosure and it was considered the proper occasion for sexual matters, otherwise out of that context it became a taboo, insult or swearing to use sexual language. The most important message communicated to the maturing girl was moral behaviour even when she started a love relationship. Krige (1968:179) observed that some of the songs were concerned with premarital sexual morality. She pointed out that such songs called for a girl to “avoid defloration in external intercourse. Song no. 10 depicts the hardship to both boys and girls in having to control their natural impulses – they will get used to it, they are told.” He further pointed out that Song no. 2 and no. 3 (shut out the penis) also refer to the rules of *ukusoma* (non-penetrative traditional sex act). These songs are attached as Appendix 2 to this study as recorded by Krige (1968:187, 193). It was believed that the messages of the songs helped the maturing process of the pubescent girl. The explicit and open sexual language in the songs was going to become part of adult life.

4.4.2 Communication with other community members

The very act of seclusion conveys a message to the rest of the community members that this particular girl has come of age. It is for this reason that African writers such as Nwadiokwu *et al.* (2016:45) maintained that “the youth are ritually introduced to the art of communal living...in the community they are allowed to share in the full privileges and duties.” On the day of the reincorporation, the girl’s father slaughters an ox for the members of the community to celebrate her successful maturing. The girl wears *umhlwehlwe*, the caul from the ox in a traditional dance and the community welcomes her with monetary gifts into her new status. This feasting is a sign that the girl is a young matured adult now and it becomes a signal to the young local men that are interested in her to start wooing. Her traditional attire also changes to include grass-green beads to indicate her availability to the local young men. As an example, Ampim⁵³ indicated that after the feasting on the day of “reincorporation”, the girl may now be

⁵³Tasha Davis (2011), African Holocaust, “African Cultural Initiation Rites”
<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm> Accessed 21/04/2015.

wooed and she herself may indicate this in the form of “love letters” written in the form of beads of different colours to a young man that appeals to her. He also observes that “different colours have different meanings, and certain combinations carry particular messages”. This is further affirmed by Magwaza (2001:29) who indicated that beads were used as part of the resilient Zulu norm of pictorial communication. She explicated that “symbolism is encoded in their colour, colour combination, size, shape and the area of the body on which they are worn”.

Puberty is classified by Edet in Oduyoye and Kanyoro (2006:26) as one of the most elaborate rituals. She added “though some aspects of these rituals offend the sensibilities of Western observers and some educated African women, traditionally the purpose of the ceremonies is to instil a more general set of values regarding the rights and duties of adulthood.” Somehow such knowledge needed to be imparted to the younger ones who were being initiated to adulthood and hence utilisation of the rituals to communicate it. The lengthy and detailed discussion here of this cultural practice and the rituals involved is to demonstrate the importance of these puberty rituals. The communicative aspect of these ritual performances in the Zulu cultural context also validates how the ritual performance simplified communication with the dead and about sexual matters. As noted above, the communicative aspect can be identified in the ritual performance done by the living that sends messages to the ancestors in connection with the pubescent girl. Ritual performance such as singing of puberty ritual songs communicates messages of sex education to the pubescent girl.

Similarly, when the father of the pubescent girl ritually slaughters an ox for feasting and drinking in celebration of the girl’s incorporation, he communicates that his girl is now ready for wooing. However, only the immediate members and individuals of the community may understand and fully comprehend the messages conveyed by different ritual performances. In addition, the discussion has demonstrated that a Zulu girl was not treated as an accidental member of the community as portrayed in many patriarchal cultures though there are some problematic patriarchal elements that will be further discussed. Otherwise a young woman was a much respected integral part of the community and she was adored for who she was for as long as she respected social norms and expectations as well as cultural values and customs.

4.5 Newly initiated young women’s identity in the Zulu context

A newly initiated young woman in the Zulu cultural context was highly respected for her new adult identity. Her position in the family changed from being a girl to an *intombi* that can be courted. According to Kamaara (2005:7), “initiation is therefore a key moment in an

individual's life in traditional African societies as it is accompanied by formation that introduces youth to adulthood". It has been shown how an individual young woman becomes well recognised as an integral part of the community of the living and the dead through ritual performances during puberty. She becomes a well-established young adult in the community. This is confirmed by Davis (2011)⁵⁴ who asserted that "African initiation rites link the individual to the community and the community to the broader and more potent spirit world". She further asserted that these rites serve as the basis for an African human existence because in them the identity is treasured and protected. This newly acquired state of being a young woman needed to be preserved in accordance with social expectations; no one wanted to deviate from the norm and they were given serious instruction on how to preserve their identities as young women. The instructions they received were all meant for the preservation of their identity as *izintombi* because there was much at stake including her *umemulo*, which was normally an honourable gesture from the parents for their daughter's good behaviour. This raises the question as to what kind of instructions the girls receive at this stage of becoming *izintombi*.

4.5.1 Examination of the instructions received by izintombi

The instructions that the young women receive mainly prepare them for marriage, the next rite of passage. For instance, Davis (2011)⁵⁵ pointed out that

One of the responsibilities and prerogatives associated with the completion of initiation is marriage. Initiation, in fact, prepares the young adults for marriage. Indeed, in most African societies, one can get married only after having been initiated. This is often the time that young people receive information and instruction regarding marriage, sex, family life, and procreation.

This kind of expectation can be criticised from the feminist perspective: women were prepared for marriage alone as if this is the highest achievement in life. However, traditionally marriage was undoubtedly the ultimate goal of every young person and deviation from this was unthinkable. Affirming this, Nwadiokwu *et al.* (2016: 46) pointed out that "for African people, marriage is the focus of existence. Marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society. Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person has rejected society and the society rejects him in return." Msimang (1975:249) pointed out that those who

⁵⁴Tasha Davis (2011), African Holocaust, "African Cultural Initiation Rites"
<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm> Accessed 21/04/2015.

⁵⁵Tasha Davis (2011), African Holocaust, "African Cultural Initiation Rites"
<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm> Accessed 21/04/2015.

remained unmarried were never considered full humans. A man would be considered a ‘boy’ for life and a woman, a ‘girl’, no matter their age. A man would never be invited to the important deliberations of the community by local men; similarly a woman would never be part of the mothers during *izithebe* (traditional food servings).

Unmarried people were ostracised and discriminated against from communal positions and social activities of importance on the grounds that they were unmarried. This was exacerbated by the fact that they did not have children, who are supposed to be procreated in marriage for them to be recognised for full womanhood and manhood. This is also suggested by Davis (2011)⁵⁶ who indicated the importance of marriage and procreation in African culture: “Getting married and having children is a social, moral, and ultimately spiritual obligation and privilege. Likewise, one’s refusal or failure to get married and have children is largely incomprehensible and certainly quite reprehensible as far as the African community is concerned.” Nwadiokwu *et al.* (2016:46) also highlighted the importance of marriage and procreation in African culture.

The veneration of marriage is, however, disparaged by African women theologians such as Oduyoye (2007:3-4) who contended that in the African context, marriage is idolised as the only thing that women could do and become experts of child bearing and rearing to the point of having no other effective contribution in social matters. She viewed this as life-denying and dehumanising to women because their existence with all their God-given talents and potential becomes confined to motherhood where only their husbands control, direct, lead and make decisions on their behalf. In her own words:

The result of the idolization of the married state for women is that they lose their status as human beings with a will of their own. They live to do the will of their husbands. In patriarchal families in Africa a wife is absorbed into her husband’s family as a means of production and reproduction...The idolization of marriage results in early marriage that deprives women of education and training for economic skills. (Oduyoye, 2007:4)

This was also highlighted by some of the young women from the Threshing Floor who felt that it was not so good that in the past, girl children were raised with the understanding that marriage was the only important thing. Consequently they were taught to preserve themselves as *izintombi* so as to be marriageable. These young women felt that these were wrong reasons for the preservation of *ubuntombi* because a girl was made to understand that the only goal she

⁵⁶Tasha Davis (2011), African Holocaust, “*African Cultural Initiation Rites*”
<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm> Accessed 21/04/2015.

lived for was to become suitable for marriage. For this reason, a girl child was excluded from important aspects such as being educated because it was considered a waste to educate a girl who was going to get married to a man who was going to take responsibility for her.

If this is examined in its precolonial context and indigenous perspective, there was no need for formal schooling for young people. Young people grew up having nothing else to look forward to except becoming a mother or a father and so the sex education and every other instruction they received was about eventually playing these roles as well informed and responsible adults. During the missionary era of formal schooling, the status quo was maintained because education for young women was focused on training them to becoming marriageable to the Christian male converts. Writing from the Zambian context, Siwila highlighted this:

Some of the activities that these girls were involved in at the school included: extra-curricular instruction in hygiene, nursing, and ‘native’ cooking, sewing, and child care. This was done in order to make the students “fit to be the wives of Christian men’. Therefore, the main focus for the girls to be in that school was to be prepared for marriage apart from the little formal education they received. (Siwila, 2011:34)

This extract shows how missionary education and westernisation colluded with the patriarchal African culture in controlling the life of women from an early age into domesticated individuals who would never contribute to the economic mainstream through their education and talent. Instead, they were shaped for life denying gender roles, which is the reason the postcolonial feminist theorist speaks of the ‘double colonization’ that women suffered during colonialism (Tyagi, 2014:46; Sugirtharajah, 2012:15). This study focuses on retrieving the positive aspects of *ubuntombi*, which are certainly not simply to train women for being marriageable as if marriage is an end in itself and there is no life besides marriage.

4.6 The benefits of *ubuntombi* in a traditional context

There are a number of people who benefitted from the traditional practice of *ubuntombi*. These were firstly parents, secondly young men or husbands, thirdly society at large. However, it was also found that *izintombi* were beneficiaries too because *ubuntombi* became their springboard to success in terms of social recognition and admiration as good and responsible young women. Each group of beneficiaries will be considered in terms of how they benefitted from the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*.

4.6.1 Benefits of parents

Parents benefitted considerably from *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice because they were primary members of the family, which was the nucleus of the traditional Zulu context, and

were rewarded by their girl's *lobola* payment. A family had to have children and child bearing was almost a primary reason for marriage in African context. This is also highlighted by Davis (2011)⁵⁷ who indicated that "in most African societies, marriage is not deemed complete until a child has been born. Likewise, a man is not a full man or a woman a full woman until they have given birth to a child." This meant that parents proved their manhood and womanhood through child-bearing. This attracts criticism from African women theologians such as Oduyoye (2007:7) because women are culturally considered as child-breeders above anything else. Childlessness in a marriage can lead to women being so despised and relegated that they become social outcasts labelled with offensive names if they are not battered (Kanyoro, (2002:15-16; Mwititi and Dueck, 2006:196 and Nyengele 2004:35). It is a tough cultural expectation that women alone are blamed for not being able to conceive and bear children. In most African cultures males are never implicated.

In addition, boys in the Zulu traditional context were the most important children in the family because the progeny of the family and the name thereof depended on them (Msimang, 1975:249). This is a gender issue from the feminist perspective because this is where it all begins: boys receive better attention and treatment than girls from parents, which forms the basis for the patriarchal set-up of the community that elevated men more than women. Yet a girl was considered *izinkomo zikayise* (father's cows) and she grew up with that expectation that she would not have done well if she deprived her father of *amabheka* (traditional name of the bride-prize cows) (Msimang, 1975:249). This also attracts criticism from gender and feminist perspectives that a girl child's value was reduced to the economic aspect of the family within the Zulu cultural context.

Mangena and Ndlovu (2013:477) believed that the bride-prize compromises women's social positions into commodities of purchase because it is only property or commodity that can be purchased. They also question the traditional elevated status of the woman due to this payment; instead they view it as a disempowering tool for women that denies them their rights. Similarly, Ndlovu (2014)⁵⁸ viewed such payments as a scramble for enrichment in the context of poverty, not only by the parents but also family members who demand a share from this women

⁵⁷Tasha Davis (2011), African Holocaust, "African Cultural Initiation Rites"<http://www.manuampim.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm> Accessed 21/04/2015.

⁵⁸ Ndlovu, Nqobani 2014. "Lobola (bride price), a custom gone bad" <https://thisisafrica.me/lobola-bride-price-custom-gone-bad/> Accessed 17/04/2018.

procurement. Nevertheless from an indigenous perspective, the economic aspect of a young woman did not make her less important as a member of the family and the society at large. Instead it had a very strong bearing to her *ubuntombi* preservation from every male person in the community since the respect of her virginity was in fact the respect of *isibaya somnumzane* and hence her vagina became known by the same name in society. In this way she was an asset to the family and hence enjoyed communal as well as familial respect and admiration because anyone who touched her would have offended not only her father but also the rest of the family.

4.6.2 Benefits of young men/husband

Preceding paragraphs have described how much young women were prepared for the marriage. In this sense they were being prepared to become wives to the young men and so they would be purchased through *lobola* and become almost servants in their husband's family. Msimang (1975:249) noted that traditionally when a boy child was born, he would be fully aware that he would need to get *umalokazana* (young woman) to cook for his mother. If he seemed disinterested he would be reminded by elderly women that his parents were old and now he had to find a young woman to cook for him. From the feminist perspective, this confined women to the kitchen and servanthood to men for life and for this role they were prepared, shaped and moulded.

In addition, as has already been indicated, the woman would not be considered a proper woman if she had not given birth to a child. Young women were thus prepared for servanthood in the husband's family and to become child-breeders or they would become social outcasts. They were also expected to generate wealth for their fathers through the preservation of *ubuntombi*. Therefore it can be construed that *ubuntombi* was traditionally mainly preserved more for the benefit of males than females. It is for this reason that scholars like Phiri (2003:66), Scorgie (2002:58) and Leclerc-Madlala (2010:418) are justified in concluding that virginity was preserved mainly for the father, the mother and the husband rather than the young woman herself. However, in this study it was found that *ubuntombi* benefitted the whole society as well. There were even some benefits for the young women which will be described below.

4.6.3 Ubuntombi and the way it benefitted society

There was a strong traditional belief among the Zulus that *ubuntombi* is one of the purest states in human developmental stages. As a result, virgins were believed to be connected to Nomkhubulwane, a Zulu virgin deity that could only be approached by virgins (briefly described in Chapter Three of this study). In this research, this deity was found to be very

influential in the lives of *izintombi*, thus there is a cultural institute that promotes virginity and its testing called the Nomkhubulwane Institute. The leader of this institute, Nomagugu Ngobese, takes the role of Nomkhubulwane very seriously in the lives of the virgins because they are believed to be following in this deity's footsteps. She expressed their belief in the purity of the virgins that could only be proven through inspection of the girl's virginity before petitions could be sent to Nomkhubulwane in the mountains on behalf of the whole society. In this way Ngobese revitalized Nomkhubulwane veneration and then included virginity testing as part of her effort.

The purity of the virgins was believed to enable them to associate with Nomkhubulwane because she was believed to be a virgin herself known as Inkosazana yeZulu (heaven's virgin) that originated from the Reed after Umvelinqangi (the one who came first) (Msimang, 1975:351). It is for this reason that everyone in the community depended upon *izintombi* when there were issues that required her attention and it was therefore essential that *ubuntombi* be preserved at all costs. Virginity testing was also considered crucial to ensure that girls were ready to take social troubles to Nomkhubulwane. This was also attested to by Phila, one of the *izintombi* from Melmoth who stated that it is in honour of Nomkhubulwane, the Zulu virgin deity that they go for virginity testing because her field was traditionally cultivated by pure virgins only. In this we find a religious reason for *izintombi* to go for virginity testing, which has not received much attention from the opponents of virginity testing whose focus is on its prevention of HIV and AIDS.

Msimang (1975:352) further affirmed that Nomkhubulwane was believed to be responsible for rainfall and fertility of the fields and so she had a special field that was supposed to be cultivated by virgins only. Even though writing from the Shona context, Mukonyora (1999:280) highlighted the important role of women in the worship of Mwari, fertility god of the earth, by bringing proper understanding of this belief to the Shona people. Mukonyora explained that women worked very closely with nature in tilling and cultivating the land for the growing of the crops, fetching firewood and water and searching for wild fruit, which ensured their continuous association with the environment and nature and hence they invoked the god of fertility of the earth. She further indicated that women thus developed an intimate relationship with nature, ensuring ecological association instead of controlling the environment, which men could hardly do even if they also associated with it through hunting.

It is in this that women won the favour of the fertility god of the earth and from the margins brought up this belief in Shona society. Women in the Zulu context seem to have had similar experience and understanding of Nomkhubulwane, also believed to be a fertility goddess in control of everything to do with the earth, environment and nature including crop provision to the whole community. Therefore, to win her favour and support for the abundance of the crops, her field was the first to be cultivated. If this was not properly done, Nomkhubulwane was believed to have powers to withhold rain and send plagues on the local people's fields to destroy their crops. They would then die of starvation. According to Msimang, these plagues were known as Nomkhubulwane's declaration of war and the only people who could appease her were *izintombi nto* (pure virgins) on behalf of the whole community.

When Nomkhubulwane had decided to withhold rain and there was a serious drought in the land, the only people to take action were *izintombi* by going to the mountains to pray and ask for the rain through performance of particular rituals that were believed to appease her. When drought became severe, all the local *izintombi* would come together on a particular morning wearing special attire, having smeared their faces with a red substance known as *ibomvu*. No man was supposed to talk to them and if he happened to meet them, he had to close his ears in order to avoid hearing *ukubhina* (obscene and vulgar language) that they uttered till they reached the mountain where they were going to approach Nomkhubulwane. It was believed that if *izintombi* had done everything well during their rain request, they would not reach their homes before it started pouring. Their victory would depend on their virginity. When the fields had yielded good crops, a huge feast was held at *koMkhulu* (local chief or headmen) for *izintombi* and Nomkhubulwane in thanksgiving for abundance of rain and crops. It is in this manner that the whole community benefitted from the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* and could thus be qualified as a religio-cultural practice.

Ubuntombi as a cultural practice invoked ecofeminism, particularly ecofeminist images of relationships. For instance, Rakoczy (2004:313) upheld that "creation as a *web of life* is a beautiful heuristic image. It describes the reality of the relationships of all creation, including human beings. This image affirms that all of nature is interdependent and interconnected an interlocking and delicate web of diversity". In the above exposition of how *izintombi* used to be celebrated for having successfully appeased Nomkhubulwane, there was also a celebration of natural elements such as sufficient rain that yielded abundant crops by everyone in the community including men. Rakoczy (2004:306) asserted that "men in all cultures, including

African cultures, have been socialised into patterns of domination which seem ‘natural’ to them and to some women.” However, this symbiotic cultural celebration to honour women and the goddess Nomkhubulwane challenged Zulu men’s patriarchal positions of dominance. This is because women had to be fully credited for this kind of achievement that benefitted everyone in society at the same time demonstrating ecological interdependence with nature. It also revealed what Ruether (1996:30) identified as “some deep positive connection between women and nature”. This deep connectedness is mainly identified in rural settings where women still cultivate the land, fetch water from the rivers; refresh themselves with wild fruit from the forests while collecting wood and some of *izintombi* still engage in such activities.

Furthermore, Nomagugu added another dimension to the cultural beliefs held about the goddess Nomkhubulwane as she explained how Nomkhubulwane was understood from the traditional and indigenous perspective:

Nomkhubulwane is the Nkosane of Umvelinqangi that was given the power of fertility, to conduct puberty among the people, both male and female. For instance if the boy is reaching manhood, he dreams having an intercourse with a very old woman because Nomkhubulwane changes herself and that is how she conducts puberty to all people and it is a spiritual journey.

There are positive elements that are worth noting from this part of the religio-cultural practice of *ubuntombi* from the feminist perspective and one is gender equity. The deity revered through the practice of *ubuntombi* was female, which made the whole community rely on women, particularly *izintombi* for Nomkhubulwane’s continuous favours. From the above excerpt by the participant it was also believed that this deity went beyond patriarchal structures of the Zulu community as she facilitated puberty of both male and female pubescents. Therefore it could be deduced that Zulu communal structures were not irredeemably patriarchal when it came to the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* hence there was a necessity for other female structures such as *amaqhikiza* and grannies to facilitate, enhance and preserve this practice because it benefitted everyone in the community.

4.6.4 Benefits of *izintombi* from the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*

While it has been pointed out in the previous paragraphs that *ubuntombi* mainly benefitted men in the Zulu cultural lifestyle because of the bride price and the preparation of young women for marriage, *izintombi* also benefitted to a certain extent. They were protected from sexual and physical abuse because of social expectations and communal protection that went hand in hand with non-discriminatory and collective upbringing of children. The stage of *ubuntombi* could

also be elongated so much that *itshitshi* or the young virgin would come to the point where she would be known as *itshitshi elikhuza impisi* which meant that she had lived long enough as a young woman to earn social admiration. The longer she resisted with her affection to be won by any of her suitors, the more she earned communal respect and dignity to the extent that she was highly valued and brought much respect even to her own family. To this, some of the participants from Melmoth Focus group (MFG) pointed out that it would take years for a young woman to admit a suitor, unlike today where it takes only an exchange of glances or taking each other's mobile phone numbers and everything falls into place.

Participants indicated that young men started approaching an *intombi* in her teenage years but her resistance would be a proof of her integrity and pride as well as the essence of being *intombi*. Her ability to resist to her suitors rendered her free from any coercion and she exercised her agency in the choice that she finally made. This became a form of empowerment because suitors kept coming; hoping for a positive answer and her resistance gave her control over men because she alone carried the final word. Traditionally *ubuntombi* empowered the woman not only to earn social respect but also respect of the in-laws and her husband even in marriage because the man will have worked hard to win her affection. Chisale (2016: 226) affirmed this: "virginity is symbolic of female sexuality; ...women's jealous protection of virginity proves that they use virginity to control and detect their destinies in the patriarchal order". This might still have a similar impact nowadays considering the resilience, popularity and growing attendance and support of virginity testing in spite of the criticism and disparagement it receives (Stander, 2016:437).

Additionally, the logic behind the redemptive retrieval of *ubuntombi* is that it empowered them with self-assurance and confidence. For instance, the very young men who were socialised into the denigration of women, worked very hard to win the affection of *izintombi* when the time had come for them to have lovers in order get married. Despite the custom of *ukujutshwa* (to be officially permitted to choose a lover) by *amaqhikiza*, *izintombi* enjoyed having many suitors and felt a certain sense of pride and power in saying "no" to them. The final successful suitor will have worked really hard to win the affection of *intombi* together with many other young men who were interested in the same young woman, and this could last six months to a year according to Krige (1950:104). He further stated that at times *intombi* would resist saying "yes" even if she was interested because she would want to see him working hard to win her and her pride of being *intombi* empowered her.

Msimang (1975:222) gave similar evidence as Krige in his recount of the hardships of wooing *izintombi* faced by young men. They had to wake up as early as three o'clock in the morning in order to cleanse themselves with *ubulawu* (Zulu herbs believed to assist men in courting) and before dawn they needed to be in the hiding place near the river where *izintombi* would come to fetch water, in order to talk to them. Msimang further pointed out that “*intombi yayinganaki noma kukhuluma umuntu yini noma kukhuluma isilwanyana, yayivele idlubulundele iqhubeke nekwenzayo*”. This means *intombi* never cared whether the young man courting her was a human being or an animal, she would just continue with what she was doing. If a young man had no patience or was scared of courting, he would never win the affection of a woman and would be labeled *isishimane* meaning a failure to win women’s affection, which led to him being a laughing stock amongst his peers. This huge struggle of winning *intombi* demonstrates the tremendous power that a young woman had in the context of a patriarchal society whose women hardly had any voice (Magwaza, 2001:1). It contributed to that young woman’s winning social respect and admiration, not only from all the local young men who wooed her, but also for the one who eventually won her affection. While others were happy for the winner, the rivals would continue to seek her attention until that young man married her. Therefore he would be compelled to demonstrate that he needed her as his wife, otherwise the chances of losing her to other suitors were plenty, particularly because non-penetrative sex preserved her virginity, and her pride in this gave her further options.

It is from this understanding that there is a Zulu saying, “*oseyishayile akakayosi, oseyosile akakayidli kanti oseyidlile udle icala, zala abantu ziye ebantwini*”. This means that anyone who had won *intombi*’s affection has no monopoly over her because she could make a different choice due to the fact that it was well known that her virginity was still intact even if she had chosen a lover. However, according to Msimang, (1975:232), *amatshitshi* (younger virgins) would receive specific instructions from *amaqhikiza* (older virgins with lovers) that they needed to avoid hasty decisions in choosing lovers because they had to maintain their integrity of *ubuntombi*. The integrity was demonstrated by remaining with one lover of their choice for a long time and failure to do so was considered to be a weakness of character on the part of that young woman. Msimang further related how thankful the young man would be on winning *intombi*’s affection, particularly if she had many suitors and had resisted falling for any of them over time. *Intombi* would have made him a very proud young man and because he would have worked really hard to win her, it would be less likely that he would play around with her, which safeguarded their future together. From this, it can be inferred that it is the only time,

opportunity and stage for a woman to dictate terms for a relationship and *ubuntombi* empowered her to take full control of the situation and men followed after her. This is a great achievement in a context where women were normally subordinated and silenced and hardly had any personal preference (Magwaza, 2001). It is probably for the same reason that some of *izintombi* in the Zulu culture would opt to remain *izintombi* for the rest of their lives such as Mkabayi and Princess Magogo.

Similarly *amaqhikiza* and *izinkehli* who were supposed to lead, guard, direct the younger virgins because of their experience of having lived as *izintombi*, also continued to preserve themselves because having chosen boyfriends did not give them the licence to open *isibaya sikayise* (girl's vagina) for *umfokazi* (stranger). According to the majority of participants from the NFG, TFG of non-*izintombi* girls also used to take pride in the fact that they did not succumb to sexual whims of young men and young men knew that they could not do as they pleased with the bodies of young women. This was because of the social expectations of the sexual behaviour for young people including males. *Izintombi* had the opportunity and power to choose another man if they were unsure because they had preserved themselves and so they still had all the reasons to maintain their pride of *ubuntombi*. Put differently, the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* gave *izintombi* a sense of belonging as they formed part of that developmental social group.

4.6.5 Umemulo as a social reward for izintombi

Besides the communal admiration for and appreciation of an *intombi* who had preserved herself in spite of being approached by suitors, parents took pride in their daughter who was usually adored by all the members of her family. One of the most important social rewards enjoyed by such a Zulu young woman was a thank you gesture from the parents which was called *umemulo*. According to Msimang (1975:245), *umemulo* was not done for anyone but for those young and beautiful women who had demonstrated resilience when it came to the preservation of themselves as *izintombi*. This is because when a girl became well-known in the society as a woman of great integrity, dignity and prestige, she elevated the name of the whole family, particularly the father who would proudly wait for someone to ask for her hand in marriage. There were many other reasons for the girl to receive *umemulo* from her father such as if she was the first born, the only child or when she had resisted choosing a boyfriend and had become known as a strong-willed young woman with a great social and moral reputation. The father and mother would prepare for her *umemulo* and it was an honour for the girl to receive this

from her parents. It was found that *umemulo* is still practised in different parts of KwaZulu-Natal where *ubuntombi* is still observed as a cultural practice even though its practice has taken different turns in some places. It is for this reason that it is further pursued in the next chapter where *umemulo* is viewed in the modern context of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. Therefore *izintombi* also had a number of benefits from preserving themselves as *izintombi* including *umemulo*, which is probably the reason *ubuntombi*, has survived as a cultural practice.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice in the Zulu culture and indicated that it is part of the developmental stages and a path to adulthood that young women needed to preserve and take pride in. The chapter also explored some cultural activities such as *lobola*, marriage, *ukusoma*, rape and *ubuntombi* as a rite of passage. It was found that *lobola* has been distorted through colonial influence and the introduction of its commercial aspects, which was originally never the purpose of the *lobola*. Marriage was also found to be not only a diminishing practice but also unpredictable for the safety and security of the virgins in their marriage life due to commercialised *lobola*. Colonial effects have rendered *lobola* a gendered cultural practice due to its commercialisation and hence it has lost its value of uniting two families and instead is often seen as a purchase price for women. This in turn objectified women and placed them in oppressive marital relationships where men treated them as their own property, which is dehumanizing and life denying to women. Therefore, if *lobola* is to be maintained as an African culture it needs to be revisited and revised so that the commercialisation aspect could be deconstructed and discarded.

The most important phase of *ubuntombi* was puberty which has been described in this chapter as were the rituals used to speak the unspoken in the Zulu language in terms of communicating with the dead as well as imparting sex education to pubescent girls. Puberty rituals were loaded with sexual information and messages to the pubescent girl, seen as essential part of her maturing process. Local grandmothers and *amaqhikiza* were the social structures responsible for sex education. During puberty, girls become young adults that officially join other local young women and the process of wooing begins. It was also explained how and why *ubuntombi* was critical in relation to their identity. The chapter further demonstrated how important this stage of *ubuntombi* was to the whole Zulu community. *Izintombi* grew up respecting social structures, cultural norms, values and customs and thus everyone in the community benefitted including *izintombi* themselves.

Chapter Five

Changing landscape of *ubuntombi* as an identity and part of religio-cultural heritage

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has presented *ubuntombi* in its traditional understanding from an indigenous perspective. The chapter demonstrated ways in which *ubuntombi* was understood, preserved, encouraged and maintained within the Zulu culture. There are three significant things that stood out as worth noting from the previous chapter. Firstly, *ubuntombi* was one of the developmental stages in the Zulu cultural lifestyle and upbringing and therefore it was not considered optional for any girl to participate. Secondly, the practice prepared girl children mainly for marriage and motherhood, and thirdly, *ubuntombi* was communally admired and protected by the rest of the community due to its benefits to everyone. In this chapter, I explore *ubuntombi* as an identity and religio-cultural heritage in the modern context. I also demonstrate different ways in which *ubuntombi* has evolved. This is done by examining the modern contextual existence of this cultural practice as follows; firstly, I explore the changing landscape of the current practice of *ubuntombi*. Secondly, I examine current perceptions of this practice in the modern context and how this is evolving. Thirdly, I look at the current debates on *ubuntombi* and its maintenance from the perspective of the participants. The current debates that have been identified for examination are child support grant and virginity testing.

5.2 The changing landscape of the current practice of *ubuntombi*

The changing landscape of the current practice of *ubuntombi* became evident in this study as participants shared their views on this cultural practice. In the modern Zulu cultural context, *ubuntombi* is no longer as admirable as it used to be in the traditional context where everyone in the community cared about its preservation, maintenance and protection. Its common value diminished in the Zulu community due to modernisation, colonial influence and its aftermath such as the dismantling of the Zulu social structures that played a leading role in safeguarding and maintaining of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. This is because the modern world of urbanisation and industrialisation demanded resettlement of the people into different locations where men had to find jobs while women had to remain in homelands where they tried to continue with traditional lifestyles. The traditional lifestyle waned with more movement of people to urban areas including women. Cultural sexual practices that maintained *ubuntombi*

such as *ukusoma* (non-penetrative sex) disappeared into the past as penetrative sex took over. In most cases, this led to premarital pregnancies and increasing number of *imilanjwana* (out of the wedlock children) as pointed out by Hunter (2005:16).

Hunter (2005:393) further indicated that “especially for urban men, penetrative sex (as opposed to *ukusoma*) had become a mark of manliness...” and today some young people are hardly aware that thigh sex ever existed and it is hopeless that it could ever be embraced again. The regulators of *ubuntombi* and other cultural activities such as *amaqhikiza*, remained mainly in the rural areas where it is still widely encompassed as a cultural practice while in some urban areas it has diminished to the point of being considered an archaic practice. According to Hunter, the dismantling of such cultural structures and lack of sex education that took place through them resulted in demoralisation of many young people who eventually never saw anything erroneous with cohabiting, premarital child-bearing and prostitution (2005:16). Such outcomes have become a norm of our society today where they have become justifiable practices under the auspices of the western concept of individual rights. It is in this context that *ubuntombi* has become a provocative practice, ridiculed and criticized by many as something that belongs to the past if not an ‘othering’ process of young women. This ‘othering’ or stigmatization was verified by most of the participants from MFG and NFG of *izintombi* and many of the individual *izintombi*.

5.2.1 ‘Othering’ or stigmatisation of izintombi

Due to this kind of ‘othering’ or stigmatisation, *ubuntombi* is no longer considered a natural stage of development of a young woman from childhood to adulthood that necessitated rites of passage such as puberty which included sex education. Instead those who practice it are stigmatised as the “other” or strangers by their peers. For instance to the question “*How they feel about ubuntombi and its current practice and why?*” the majority of *izintombi* from Melmoth responded that they would be lying to say that it is easy to remain chaste nowadays. Remaining an *intombi* attracts much reproach, being ostracised and labelled by classmates, age-mates and peers which renders *ubuntombi* an ‘othering’ practice resulting in the stigmatisation of young women. A similar kind of attitude is demonstrated by some of the western scholars who portray these young women as imprudent beings driven and controlled by elderly people for the preservation of culture and control of their sexuality (Scorgie, 2002 and Leak, 2012). For instance, Scorgie (2002:64) gives the impression that young women’s attention is refracted away from making friendships with boys as if they are being brainwashed

with something from outside of their culture. This contributes to the “othering” process of *izintombi* because it does not only render them unwise but also incapable of taking decisions for themselves.

Thule, one of MFG of *izintombi* also indicated that she was labelled ‘Virgin Mary’ of the school in her early years of declaring herself as *intombi* because of being treated as the other. She further indicated that at some stage she was also called a lesbian for her choice to remain chaste. This became so serious that a meeting was held in her class to discuss her personality and disposition of not having any relationship with the boys. This indicates that some of the community members lack education when it comes to human sexualities. Therefore *izintombi* find themselves being associated with lesbians because the practice is viewed as not being normal. Besides being stigmatized *izintombi* also run the risk of being sexually abused like the way in which lesbians are being raped as a form of punishment (Rudwick, 2011:91). Rudwick further concurs that it is actually the lack of knowledge and education about same sex orientation that is the driving force behind homophobic violence and treating gay people as the ‘other’ instead of claiming it to be a cultural issue.

However, the participants unanimously indicated that this does not deter *izintombi* from their determination of remaining *izintombi*. This was noted from a number of them who highlighted that in spite of receiving a lot of maltreatment for preserving themselves as *izintombi*, they are determined to lose it only after marriage when they will be proud that they lived their lives as *izintombi* with no regrets. They are well aware that one day they will lose their virginity but it is within their power to decide when this will happen without being pressured or coerced by anybody. Therefore even in the process of being ‘othered’, they are determined to preserve themselves and maintain their identity as Zulu young women. However, the marriage in which they hope to lose their virginity is no longer easily attainable due to the changing paradigm of *lobola*, which is now discussed.

5.2.2 The changing paradigm of the lobola

The changing paradigm of the *lobola* from the way in which it was traditionally practised also demonstrates the changing landscape of *ubuntombi* in its current and modern practice. For instance some of the benefits that used to be there in the traditional practice as articulated in the previous chapter have diminished. As an example, there are not many benefits of *ubuntombi* today as it used to happen in the traditional preservation of *ubuntombi*, particularly for the parents. As indicated in the previous chapter, *lobola* mainly benefitted the parents because

intombi embodied the family's wealth through the maintaining of her virginity. Now with the diminishing marriages such practices are no longer feasible or have taken a descending turn since many of *izintombi* today get married having already given birth to children. In the Zulu culture when a girl had given birth before marriage⁵⁹, it meant that the bride-price also decreased according to the number of children she had (Msimang, 1975:265). It is for this reason that some of the scholars such as Mswela (2009:185) criticised virginity as a tool that serves patriarchal interest in that young women preserve themselves for more cows of the bride price. However, this is a narrow view of *ubuntombi* because *lobola* is not the primary reason for its preservation from the standpoint of *izintombi* as it was found in this research. It is for the same reason that some of *izintombi* from TFG and NFG viewed the *lobola* giving as an added benefit for the parents if it happens.

Therefore the interest in *lobola* and marriage has decreased which indirectly affects *ubuntombi* since *izintombi*'s interest as found in this study is no longer mainly in the full bride-price and marriage as it used to be traditionally. In addition, some of the parents end up making *lobola* expensive by trying to recover the cost for their girl's educational expenses. This adds to the commercialisation of *lobola* for young women who intend to get married. From the feminist perspective, this is not life-giving for young women because an expensive bride-price results in the thinking that the girls are being purchased. Consequently, men are entitled to treat them as objects that they purchased for their pleasure which normally have derogatory results. Therefore, unlike in the traditional context where parents and the society at large benefitted from *ubuntombi*, today *izintombi* remain key beneficiaries of this practice due to the way in which it has evolved.

5.2.3 Umemulo in the modern context

Umemulo in the modern context is one of the cultural activities that are still highly regarded as a proof of identity and religio-cultural heritage of *ubuntombi*. It is for this reason that many of the young women who grow up as *izintombi* look forward to it though it has evolved somehow due to financial implications involved. For instance, young women from MFG non-*izintombi* contended that *umemulo* is done for *intombi* as a thanksgiving by the parents that she has preserved herself until the opportune time but it is costly and some parents cannot afford it

⁵⁹If she lost her virginity before marriage without getting pregnant, she was embarrassed on the first day after the wedding when the prospective husband discovered that she was no longer a virgin. After disclosing it in a traditional way, the eleventh cow known as the mother's cow was returned to the husband's family.

even if their children deserve it. On the other hand there are those who do not qualify for it but affording parents do it for them even if they are no longer *izintombi* and this is a discouragement to those who have truly preserved themselves. In addition there are young women who deserve to be applauded for their virginity but because of financial reasons they cannot celebrate their virginity. These financial implications are condemned by Goldstone (2015)⁶⁰ who contends that doing *umemulo* for people who do not deserve it, just because people can afford it sends a wrong message to the poor and the orphans who cannot afford it even if they deserve it. However it is worth noting that these financial concerns about *umemulo* were not evident in every research site. They were only raised by the participants from Melmoth where the socio-economic situation could have a strong influence on the practice of *ubuntombi* because it is also evaluated from the economic perspective. Hence these participants felt that *ubuntombi* is not something to boast about but a cultural observance that needs to be an internal individual's decision instead of being done for parents or family's sake.

These young women raised a very important observation because in the traditional practice *umemulo* was a parental initiative (Msimang, 1975:245) that served as a token of appreciation for a girl who had behaved herself very well as *intombi* until the marriageable age as it was seen in the previous chapter. However that understanding has evolved to the point where some think that *umemulo* is just *isiko* (cultural observance) that has to do with the ancestors but has lost its meaning in terms of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. It is not uncommon nowadays to hear that an elderly woman who has long been married has *umemulo* because someone suggested that she is experiencing particular problems because the ancestors are angry with her since *umemulo* was never done for her. However Goldstone (2011)⁶¹ denies this practice of doing *umemulo* as an ancestral ritual to appease their anger because of particular personal problems the woman might be experiencing. She indicated that many people have spent a lot of money in vain trying to solve personal problems with *umemulo*. Nevertheless, nowadays *umemulo* is done for everyone in the community whether they have children, married or not, irrespective of age for as long as they can afford it, as the preceding paragraphs indicated. Hence Goldstone further warned that before doing *umemulo*, parents should count the financial

⁶⁰Goldstone, Nonto Toba. 2011. "Problems in our lives – *Umlando wabantu bendabuko*." <http://edlozini.over-blog.com/article-amasiko-ukwelapha-emlandweni-73194429.html> Accessed 18/04/2018.

⁶¹ Goldstone, Nonto Toba. 2011. "Problems in our lives – *Umlando wabantu bendabuko*." <http://edlozini.over-blog.com/article-amasiko-ukwelapha-emlandweni-73194429.html> Accessed 18/04/2018.

cost and avoid spending money for the wrong reasons because it was never done for every girl to avoid marital problems, sickness or bad luck.

Makamba (2015)⁶² also attested that the modern world has developed deviations in the way in which *umemulo* was traditionally done and it seems to have lost its original purpose of showing appreciation to the young girl for having preserved herself until she had come of age. However, Nomkhubulwane group of *izintombi* and their leaders and testing mothers have attempted to preserve it in its original understanding that it was done for *izintombi* only. During the field work I was invited by one of the gatekeepers to attend *umemulo* ceremony for one of their young women so that I could meet and make acquaintances with potential participants who were willing to take part in the interviews. In this ceremony, a number of observations were made that contributed to the understanding of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice especially in the modern context.

5.2.3.1 Misconceptions about *ubuntombi*

The observations made during that *umemulo* ceremony cleared some of the misconceptions about *ubuntombi* in the modern context in which they are alleged to be sexually controlled by their parents (Lerclec-Madlala 2010:420; George, 2008:1461; Scorgie, 2002:65). Due to this literature studied, the idea of young women who are miserable, feeble, inferior and beleaguered by the parents and testers who exert their control over these young women's sexuality could not be suspended. On the contrary *izintombi* in their Zulu attire seemed to have been the happiest women in the world in spite of the freezing winter morning weather conditions. Their happiness was evident when they burst into song and dance after all the activities of the day's preparation were done and they all stood together on the bank of the river in white beads. It was also intriguing to note that some of them were already professionals that came driving their own cars for the virginity testing that took place before *umemulo*. These were young women that had come of age and had no parental control in their lives. Therefore there was a great likelihood that the driving force behind this commitment to virginity testing was just mere love of *ubuntombi* as their identity and cultural heritage. They sang more cultural songs and did Zulu dance just as they were going to do later in *umemulo*. The joy and the enthusiasm for the

⁶² Makamba online "Coming of age, *umemulo* and the Zulu girl." <http://makambaonline.com/index.php/2015/09/22/coming-of-age-umemulo-and-the-zulu-girl/#.WtoAUflubcc> Accessed 18/04/2018.

day's celebration could be noticed; see Figures A, B, C and D⁶³ of Appendix 1 of this study for the examples of that joyous celebration.

5.2.3.2 *The supportive role of the parents*

It was found during the research that most of the young women had made the choice of *ubuntombi* on their own and parents only played a supportive role. Therefore, *umemulo* is now considered as a parental supportive role of their girls who have made them proud at this age and generation where sexual life has become a matter of a laissez-fair among the youth (Bruce, 2003:45; Kamaara, 2005:75). Besides being a parental supportive role *umemulo* also serves an incentive for the young woman for having preserved herself well. That is why Ntombi, an *intombi* from Nomkhubulwane, was given a car by her parents on the day of her *umemulo* as a token of pride and support for this cultural practice. Leclerc-Madlala (2003:17) seemed to suggest that such incentives imply that young women can no longer keep themselves chaste before marriage without material possessions to enhance their morality. However, this is far from the truth from the indigenous perspective where, during *umemulo*, cows and goats were slaughtered in honour of the young women and as a parental token of expressing their gratitude (Msimang, 1975:247). Put differently a young woman will have preserved herself first before being honoured and surely material possessions were not their primary goal other than doing their valued cultural practice.

Nevertheless presents gave a lot of encouragement to the younger ones to see that a girl can be highly appreciated for preserving herself as *intombi*. Ntombi, who received a car token from her parents, was also not simply an *intombi* but a university student. She asserted that *ubuntombi* is what made her to make it up to university level and has taken her through the years as a university student. In spite of having a boyfriend, she was determined to lose her virginity in marriage only and she used her sexuality to take control of their love relationship and sexual debut. In support of this, Chisale (2016:226) argued: “that women feel so possessive of their virginity confirms that they use this to control male sexuality as well, they do this by managing the timeframes for sex.” This young woman exercised that control and power through her virginity. This is just one example of all the young women who demonstrated the same zeal and fortitude during the interviews that they were not doing this for anyone but

⁶³Google, “*Images for Nomkhubulwane Institute cultural activities*”
https://www.google.co.za/search?q=Nomkhubulwane+Institute+cultural+activities+and+pictures&rlz=1C1VFKB_enZA598ZA598&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwje_uCxrDVA Accessed 17/07/2017.

themselves and because they believe this is their own cultural practice that was meant to benefit them. Some stated that if parents benefit from their behaviour and preservation of themselves as *izintombi*, it will be a bonus for them but they are doing this because they are proud of their identity and cultural heritage. This takes us to the changing perceptions of *ubuntombi* in the modern Zulu cultural context.

5.3 Current perceptions of *ubuntombi*

There are a number of current perceptions of *ubuntombi* that were identified in the contributions of the participants. Most of these perceptions were from *izintombi* themselves, expressing the way in which they view *ubuntombi* in the modern context. While there may be some similarities of the cultural ways in which *izintombi* lived, behaved and handled themselves in terms of their sexuality, it was evident that the perceptions about *ubuntombi* were changing. Some of them are positive perceptions emulated from its traditional practice while others are negative perceptions as influenced by the modern world. These are expounded as follows:

5.3.1 *Ubuntombi as an identity and religio-cultural heritage in the modern context*

Ubuntombi as an identity and religio-cultural heritage in the modern context has proven to be one of the most resilient cultural practices, considering the way in which cultural activities have evolved and diminished. From the preceding paragraphs it has been indicated that *ubuntombi* has become an optional practice and is a very difficult choice to make in the modern Zulu cultural context. This is because cultural hybridity of the South African society is promoted as a national identity other than cultural identity for the fear that it encourages ethnical nationalism. For instance, (Baines, 1998:2-3) viewed South Africa as a rainbow nation that promotes multiculturalism. He argued that this is problematic because it creates a dichotomy between national identity and ethnic nationalism. Baines further contended that multiculturalism perpetuates apartheid ideology because its very nature makes it exclusive due to the language and culture. While his arguments might be valid when considering that South Africa is a conglomeration of many different cultures, the South African Constitution protects the right to culture which justifies cultural groups who might want to pursue their own cultural practices.

Ubuntombi is one of the cultural practices in which a number of young Zulu women still find succour and identity. This emerged during the fieldwork for this research where many of the young women interviewed demonstrated how much they loved the choice they had made of

remaining *izintombi* regardless of the challenges they encountered in the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. It is for this reason that many had taken advantage of the retrieval and resurgence of this practice by the King of the Zulus over the last two decades, which increasingly attracts up to 30 0000 maidens every year.⁶⁴ This was to ensure that the practice is observed and maintained through the Reed dance and virginity testing. Despite the fact that it has become a source of disparagement from virginity testing opponents, *izintombi* themselves show tremendous interest and enthusiasm in this cultural practice, which also emerged during the fieldwork. Therefore, *ubuntombi* as a form of identity and cultural heritage of the Zulu young woman in the modern context is mainly informed by the traditional ways in which it was practised as was indicated in the previous chapter. Consequently, the current practice of *ubuntombi* emulates what existed in the past though it has evolved in some ways. One of the traditional ways in which an *intombi* was perceived was the worth of her body as explored below.

5.3.1.1 *The value of an intombi's body*

Many *izintombi* that were interviewed placed an indisputable value on their bodies as *izintombi*. This is because their worth is seen in their sexual purity and an intact hymen which, according to them, are the essence of being an *intombi*. Some maintained that even if they might not be educated or rich in monetary terms, they consider themselves as having something unique and better which cannot be for sale or purchased and that is an intact hymen. This kind of pride and worth placed on the intact hymen by this young woman disputes the suggestion by Scorgie (2002:58) that through virginity testing "...virgins are made, not born". These young women asserted that their virginity is neither for sale nor can be purchased; it seems impractical then to consider that an intact hymen could be made. Young women are only assisted to maintain what they were born with through virginity testing but they are never made virgins by being checked or tested. *Izintombi* participants further stated that even if they happen to pass by a group of young men who look at them with contempt, they are not ashamed or scared of anything because nobody knows their bodies sexually except when they are seen in their traditional attire. The priceless worth and the value these young women placed on their bodies was illustrated by Phila:

⁶⁴Catherine Wijnberg (2012), "History Matters" <http://historymatters.co.za/cultural-heritage-alone-is-not-enough/> Accessed 5/30/2014.

When I am in my traditional attire, my pride as a young woman surges within me and I feel that here comes a Mageba and Ndabezitha (praise names of her family). I even praise my body when I am taking a bath and say “bath Nomathiya, Fakazi, bath daughter of MaZulu”. I also do the same for inkomo (Zulu word for genitals) because it is better to appreciate myself before other people come and tell me what I know. I do not need anybody’s opinion about my body because I know myself.

While it may sound unusual to take such pride in one’s body, to some extent these words demonstrate that some of the Zulu young women still take serious interest in sexual purity and preservation of their bodies. It also disputes the Western notion that “to advocate virginity or abstinence is ‘to go against the flow’ of current attitudes that enshrine the freedom of the individual and the privatization of sex” (Bruce, 2003:49). The participants further contended that engaging in sexual activity has its own pressure because a girl no longer owns her body but shares it with somebody else. They considered their bodies to be very valuable possessions with which they can generate their success in life depending on the choices they make. These young women express pride in exposing their bodies as *izintombi*, but there is a great deal of politics concerning the exposure of the body of *intombi* in the modern context illustrated in the interviews and described below.

5.3.1.2 The politics of the exposure of the body of an intombi

As indicated earlier in this study, one of the most important visible signs with which it is determined that an *intombi* is still intact as an *intombi* in the Zulu culture is the taut muscles of her body such as the breasts, thighs and buttocks that can only be seen if her body is exposed (Msimang, 1975; Krige, 1968; Hunter, 2005). This was unanimously affirmed by most of the elderly groups of the participants during focus group discussions who contended that the concerns about the rights and privacy of the body of *intombi* are all western ideas. This is because the indigenous *intombi*’s body was her pride with her taut muscles that attested to her preservation of *ubuntombi* (Krige, 1968:174; Hunter, 2005:6). The participants further stated that *izintombi* shamelessly wore *isigege* (small front covering) only and the whole body was exposed without fear of anything since their bodies were a form of beauty and displayed *ubuntombi*. Even when they were found bathing at the river, they did not care because they had nothing to hide, they were very proud of their bodies.

The same group also contended that the body of a young girl is spoiled when she frequently has sex with a man despite claiming protection by a condom and she will never taste what *ubuntombi* is and the body muscles such as buttocks become flaccid. They also maintained that the body of a young woman was precious, beautiful and the pride of a community including

males. This is why they could ask a girl to show her back (*ukushikila*) and she would do it with great confidence because her body's natural beauty was adored for its purity. While this might be taken as an old fashioned school of thought especially as these opinions were mainly from elderly people who used to live like this in the past, some *izintombi* from modern times indicated similar feelings. For instance, young women indicated that being an *intombi* is special to a Zulu girl because *ubuntombi* becomes almost everything to the young woman and her identity. Her traditional attire displays her dignified exposed body as she moves about in the local community and is experienced as a sense of pride of being an *intombi*.

In addition, they expressed that a Zulu maiden can never be considered an *intombi* if she has something to hide about her body. Young virgins' attire would never hide their breasts because they are part of what identifies them as *izintombi* as well as the back of their legs and knees. The whole body of an *intombi* speaks for itself including the stomach, thighs and the back of the arms. They indicated that these body parts were never covered because they made it easy for *intombi* to be identified. The pride in their bodies makes them not mind wearing traditional attire as young women because they know that their bodies are beautiful but as soon as anything happens to them, they would begin to be ashamed. The shame emanates from the fact that in the Zulu culture it was believed that if an *intombi* hid some parts of her body, she could be hiding pregnancy (Msimang, 1975:177). *Izintombi* further asserted that the pride in their bodies was their dignity that ensued from the fact that there are many people who long to have such a bodies but they cannot because it is a privilege of being an *intombi*. In this the indigenous understanding of dignity from the perspective of *izintombi* can be seen; which is in direct opposition with the western understanding that is reflected in the contention of the gender activists and Human Rights Commissions (Stander, 2016:434; Lerclec-Madlala, 2010:412).

According to *izintombi*, the dignity of a girl is only lost when she exposes her body to the boys to do as they please with it, otherwise its exposure is the pride of an *intombi*. In other words, sexual purity displayed through corporeal disposition went hand in hand with the dignity and integrity of a young woman (Wickström, 2010:542). Hence participants further indicated that the exposure of the body is never considered nakedness; only when the young woman exposes her genitals to males is she considered naked. In addition, *izintombi* further upheld that the body of *intombi* is very important in the Zulu culture because it tells the whole story of how a young woman behaves herself as an *intombi*. There are women who are experts in seeing whether a girl is an *intombi* or not by just looking at her body. They also stated that as young

Zulu women, they feel so proud of their bodies and they can unashamedly take off their clothes in the presence of anybody since they have nothing to hide.

These young women highlight the vitality of the young woman's body and its exposure in the Zulu culture and how much it brings confidence to the young woman because of her sexual innocence and purity. This also demonstrates that the traditional western perception of African women was erroneous in thinking that they were impure sexual perverts. This is indicated by Schiebinger in Price and Shildrick (1999:27) who pointed out that "African women were seen as wanton perversions of sexuality, not paragons of piety and purity. They served as foils to the Victorian ideal of the passionless woman...the central icon for sexuality in the nineteenth century." Participants also indicated that it is culturally believed that if a young woman has anything to hide or ashamed of with her body; it is because she has lost her sexual purity, which was an ideal cultural norm of a young woman. They further stated that it is a deep-rooted cultural belief that is still very much recognised among the Zulu maidens and indigenous people that an *intombi* has nothing to hide with her body.

Arguably it is a colonial mind-set that some of the concerns raised by the firm opponents of *ubuntombi* and its testing such as Scorgie (2002), Leak (2012) and gender activists seem to discourage *ubuntombi* as a cultural preservation of young women's body. While they may seem to be concerned about bodily integrity and privacy, their western mind-set does not seem to be concerned about undesirable outcomes that come with an early sexual debut or sexual liberalism of a young woman. Hence I totally agree with Kisitu and Siwila (2016:198) who argued that "In as much as certain forms of epistemologies attempt to forward good intentions for the female body, the failure to engage women experiences and actively provoke their voices...poses a great challenge to the current call for women emancipation that leads to women's realisation of their identity".

It emerged from the voices of the young women in this study that they are not coerced, compelled or controlled to do this by the elderly people who want to preserve culture through controlling their sexuality as Scorgie (2002:65-66) inaccurately suggested. These young women find solace in the indigenous preservation and pride of their bodies, which needs to be supported and promoted because they find it life-giving. For instance, Chisale (2016:225) considered virginity to be "a hidden feminine tool used by women to claim authority to their sexual bodies". From the cultural hermeneutical perspective, this qualifies *ubuntombi* as one of the cultural practices that can be reclaimed because it is "deemed worthy in terms of

promoting justice and support for life and dignity of women” (Haddad, 2009:13). The above explication of what dignity and integrity means from the indigenous perspective, renders the concern about dignity of women from the western mind-set of some of the scholars and gender activists inappropriate in their situation.

5.3.1.3 Antagonists of bodily exposure

While many *izintombi* consider it an indigenous way of life to expose their bodies without shame and this is something they can still emulate as today’s generation of *izintombi*, some participants contested that it is an outdated practice that is no longer applicable. As an example, the MFG of non-*izintombi* unanimously agreed that it is not necessary for *izintombi* to expose their bodies because it makes *ubuntombi* a discriminatory practice in that those who have fallen on the way side will become easily detectable as they are no longer part of *izintombi*. They considered it unwise that a virgin has to expose her body and is seen by everybody and when she makes a mistake of losing her virginity; she is easily depicted. It thus becomes very obvious that she no longer qualifies to be one of them and is presumed to be sleeping around. This was also supported by Scorgie (2002:64) who disparaged the marking of those who have passed virginity tests while those who are not marked are inevitably exposed that they are no longer *izintombi*. Stander (2016:435) clearly put it in this way: “while the mark of purity is physically inscribed on the bodies of those who pass the test, shame and stigmatization often seem to become symbolic writings onto the bodies of those who fail”. However, the concern seems to be more about those who fail the test yet they voluntarily joined the testing. For instance, some of the young women explained that by joining *izintombi*, a young woman declares herself an *intombi*. Therefore if for some reason she has lost her virginity, testing results should not come as an unexpected surprise or something to be contended. Secondly, the very stigmatisation that is negatively viewed from the human rights and gender activists perspectives serves as a chastisement from the indigenous perspectives so that other girls would not want to experience it but rather keep preserving themselves.

While MFG participants of non-*izintombi* rejected the exposure of the body as an ideal thing, the *izintombi* group were proud to expose it. Furthermore, the same group of non-*izintombi* comprising of young mothers, felt that the exposure of the body in this cultural practice is tantamount to the violation of the rights of the young women because bodies are not the same; there are those who might not feel comfortable to expose their bodies in public just as it is a requirement to those who attend the Reed Dance. Their opinion is that it needs to be stopped

because of those young women who are ashamed of exposing their bodies due to the discomfort of their natural body make up. They further contended that sometimes *ubuntombi* interferes with the rights of the girls because their bodies are created differently; some of them have bodies that they would not want to expose to other people. Just because of this cultural practice, all the bodies need to be exposed and it violates the right to privacy.

They felt that the body is not supposed to be exposed in just any way, but the Reed Dance compels girls to expose their bodies even when they do not expose them at home. Once the girl refuses, she is ostracised at home and so it needs to emanate from the girl's heart to follow this cultural practice because she can still be an *intombi nto* (real virgin) on her own. It has already been pointed out in the preceding paragraphs that in the Zulu cultural setup, the exposure of *intombi*'s body is not an option because hiding it silently sends a wrong message to the community members (Msimang, 1975:177). It also seems to be the joy of *izintombi* as it displays their pride and essence of being *izintombi* instead of being the violation of rights. However, the question remains whether the pride of being *intombi* can only be determined by the exposure of the body or whether it becomes cultural and acceptable only if the body of *intombi* is exposed. The MFG of non-*izintombi* maintained the importance of the girls' own choice to do this cultural practice without any coercion. It thus becomes important to leave the onus with those who have made that choice whether they want their bodies exposed or not. It could be oppressive to those who have chosen it to be told how to practice it by the outsiders. This is affirmed by Phiri (2003:75-76) who observed that most of the contenders of the virginity testing are the western minded outsiders who are full of judgemental attitudes towards this cultural practice. She further suggested that personal experiences of those involved in the cultural practice should be taken into consideration.

These different perspectives indicate that there are differing opinions concerning the traditional practice of the exposure of the body of Zulu young women and it is controversial. There seemed to have been a very strong critical attitude of the MFG non-*izintombi* towards the exposure of the body of *intombi* such that the whole practice is seen as a show off, which could also be easily interpreted as such by other societal members. This was stipulated by Thembi, one of the participants in the group who stated:

The show off is particularly with us as Zulus because there are other races such as Shangaans, Vendas, Whites and Indian girls who are virgins but they do not do it and there is nothing wrong with their cultures. We usually see Indians doing their dance to demonstrate their culture without exposing their bodies or telling everyone that they are

virgins. We do not see other races doing such things yet they do have ways of celebrating their cultures, it is as if it is a black cultural thing and we do a show of it.

While this may be a genuine critique on her part, it is not without problems because she mentioned other African tribes such as Shangaans and Vendas whose young women could also be observing *ubuntombi* in the same way in their own contexts. Secondly, *ubuntombi* has always been there as a cultural practice and so can never become a show off today but *intombi* preserved her virginity just because it was her cultural practice, heritage, pride and identity. Whites are surely western minded and can never understand the importance of the tribal cultures that were demonized from the colonial times. Therefore they can never be associated with any of the African cultural celebrations or observations. Similarly, Indians are also foreigners when it comes to African cultures and they are incomparable to African cultural practices. They may have their own cultural practices from their original countries but certainly, they cannot be compared or contrasted with African cultural practices. To those who are in love with their African cultural practices such a statement could be considered offensive, full of ignorance and western mind-set.

5.3.2 Freedom, agency and empowerment

From the indigenous perspective, *ubuntombi* was the only stage in the Zulu culture that gave freedom, agency, self-empowerment and pride of being a woman. It was the only affirmative stage that brought much cultural positive recognition of a woman as a full human with something to be pursued and it gave her assertiveness and a voice that emanated from self-esteem, pride and identity as indicated in the previous chapters. *Izintombi* today still emulate the same stance of resisting with their bodies to those who might want to have love relationship with them with the intention of preserving their freedom and agency as *izintombi*. Nevertheless, it was not established that thigh sex is still a well-known phenomenon among the Zulu young women that were interviewed; it was only mentioned in the context of the traditional practice of *ubuntombi* where young men were also expected to remain *izinsizwa* (young male virgins). Nonetheless research has indicated that in some parts of KwaZulu-Natal, *ukusoma* (non-penetrative thigh sex) is still in use (Chisale, 2016; Mchunu, 2005). Chisale (2016:230) further affirmed that *ukusoma* is used by young people to gratify their sexual necessities without interfering with the virginity of a young woman. The author described *ukusoma* as “non-penetrative sexual practice during which both a woman and a man enjoy a sexual encounter without any penetration”. Hence it averts sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDs and unwanted pregnancies.

Remaining sexually chaste, however, does not seem to be burdensome in any way for these young women, whether they practice *ukusoma* or not. This is highlighted by Ntombi, a young woman from Nomkhubulwane who felt that *ubuntombi* is something that they treasure because its worth, preservation and appreciation is only valued by those who realise its fragility and priceless nature. She claimed that *ubuntombi* empowers her to be in control of her sexuality because it enables her to say 'No' with her body and nobody can push the restrictions she has put in place. This is also acknowledged by Tamale (2008:226) who maintained that "virginity is symbolic of female sexuality; therefore virginity testing makes young women and men aware of women's control over their sexuality". Hence *ubuntombi* empowers *izintombi* to resist negative masculinities of young men who, according to Stander (2016:436), "measure their masculinity according to sexual activity, such that boys put pressure on girls to engage in pre-marital sex as a means to prove their own 'manliness'." This is also affirmed by Carpenter, (2002:346) in her research on the loss of virginity that most young men in American context "continued to express disdain for virginity, engage in sexual activity primarily out of curiosity and for physical pleasure...and the achievement of manhood." This is what is considered gender inequality and women exploitation at its best because some engage in such sexual activities in romanticism and flattery of love.

Subsequently, in the Zulu context, some of *izintombi*, particularly from the NFG, confirmed that they still dictate terms of the love relationship with males, which is an exercise of agency, freedom and assertiveness. This is in accordance with the argument by Tamale (2008:52) who contended that women in the former colonised countries are not miserable objects of culture that are devoid of agency as sometimes portrayed in the colonial mind-set. In a patriarchal society such as the Zulu, it was culturally significant for the women to have control of their sexuality. It also disputes the colonial portrayal of African sexualities as something adversative, undesirable and uncontrolled. This is indicated by Tamale (2011:22) who observed that "Not only were African sexualities depicted as primitive... but it was also perceived as immoral, bestial and lascivious. Africans were caricatured as having lustful dispositions." On the contrary, in the Zulu cultural context, young women's sexuality was not only her tool of agency, but also exhibited her strong moral character as opposed to being lascivious. The resilience of *ubuntombi* even in the modern context of unbridled sexual permissiveness proves the western mind inaccurate about African sexualities.

The exercise of agency when it came to the sexuality of *izintombi* helped them to make proper choices when they finally came to the point of choosing life partners. The agency to do this choice remained with *intombi* because according to the majority of *izintombi* from the TFG and NFG, an *intombi* was admired so much that every other male wanted to have her as a wife and so there was a fierce competition to win the *intombi*'s affection among the suitors. Therefore, in the opinion of *izintombi*, the final determination of when they want to lose their virginity remains with them. Consequently, some of them are resolved to lose their virginity within the confines of marriage because they are resolute to spend a lifetime with someone who earned to be part of their lives and so they refuse to be blinded by love at first sight. Therefore, a young man who deserves a virgin, needs to work hard to have her. This shows tremendous exercise of power, agency and freedom by the young women due to the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*, particularly in the modern context where freedom and agency is mostly viewed only in terms of sexual freedom that has almost become the norm of the society.

Such empowerment and exercise of agency is critical for women emancipation in a context where women live in constant fear of sexual and gender based violence. It proves that *izintombi* are in full control of their bodies, unlike the claim by other scholars such as Hoosen and Collins (2004:500) who are of the opinion that virginity and its testing re-enforces "gender inequity since it undermines women's struggle to take control over their bodies". *Ubuntombi* empowers them to take the final authority in the decision-making in terms of when and how to exercise their sexuality and hence full control of their bodies. However, women are deprived of such control of their bodies when they are raped and in the patriarchal contexts where *ukuthwala* (marital abductions) take place and young women are forced into marriages (Mubangizi, 2012:39). This is followed by rape, which is a gross violation of the young woman's rights, bodily integrity and dignity that she deserves. Thus Mubangizi rightly contest that *ukuthwala* (marital abductions) cannot be just wished away but it calls for serious legal action to be put in place by the government and legal bodies in order to protect the violation of young women's rights.

5.3.3 Shifting mind-set on ubuntombi

It also emerged in this study that there is a shifting mind-set on *ubuntombi* in terms of its goals and primary intentions in the modern context. Unlike in the past where *ubuntombi* prepared *izintombi* for marriage, in the exercise of freedom and agency in the modern context as elucidated above, there is a shift in the marriage mind-set to the achievement of educational

goals as was reviewed in the research field. *Izintombi* participants from almost all research sites unanimously agreed that *ubuntombi* enables them to achieve their goals in life without any interference. Furthermore the shifting mind-set from marriage to educational success was dictated in the perception of other elderly participants from MFG who maintained that young women used to stay as *izintombi* for a very long time before marriage. According to these participants, *izintombi* enjoyed this stage to the fullest even though they were only waiting to get married since there was no formal or schooling education then. They therefore consider it an added advantage in today's generation of *izintombi* that they have formal education to be busy with as they maintain their virginity. Therefore, in their opinion no matter how long it takes, even if it is a lifetime thing, this period of *ubuntombi* allows them to further their studies until they finish and even be able to work and become independent.

In addition, Nomagugu Ngobese, the leader of Nomkhubulwane Institute maintained that *ubuntombi* is not upheld because of full *lobola* but it is all about the self-esteem of the woman, which cannot be purchased. She further stated that it is for the same reason that girls in the Nomkhubulwane culture and youth development organization are educated because it is encouraging abstinence to the fullest and then education, which goes in parallel. In her words she stated: “*I make it loud and clear that every woman must be educated for her life time and abstain for her self-esteem and no one will take that away from her*”. Furthermore, other participants from NFG indicated that they encourage their young women to continue preserving themselves as *izintombi*. This is because they will attain true freedom of being educated, get better jobs and earn their own money, without having to depend on anyone for their survival, and they will be safe from deadly infections of our time.

5.3.3.1 Financial independence

Izintombi seemed to have bought into the idea of educational success because they unanimously agreed that their focus as *izintombi* needs to be on education so that they might attain financial independence as young women. They felt that this would alleviate dependence on boys or sugardaddies (known today as “blessers”) for their needs. In this *ubuntombi* becomes a real tool of defence, emancipation and a sign of true freedom, agency and empowerment to the young women who have decided to preserve themselves. This is because at times the socio-economic situation dictates terms for their essential needs to be met. Affirming this, Haddad (2009:10-11) explained that the socio-economic context of the lives of women who engage in commercial sex normally dictates their involvement in such activities. This is further confirmed

by Kamaara (2005:12) who upheld that, “in most cases young ladies or young men are sexually exploited by older married men or women respectively, in exchange for material favours”. It is therefore essential that young women are fully supported in their commitment and focus on educational success, which in turn guarantees their self-reliance and economic independence.

Izintombi receive support from their testers who encourage them to cut the pattern from Nomkhubulwane young women who are now working and are driving their own cars but are still maintaining themselves as *izintombi*. As a proof of the kind of financial independence that comes with *ubuntombi*, Ngcebo⁶⁵, an *intombi* from Nomkhubulwane expressed her tremendous pride in her success as an *intombi* due to her educational achievements. She asserted that it is not easy for her to become a prey of sexual predators who sexually exploit young women because of depending on them for financial support. However, it should be clarified that sexual exploitation does take place in some patriarchal communities without any financial support given as in the case of incest. Nonetheless most of NFG of *izintombi* felt that *ubuntombi* has kept them focussed and their priority remains educational progress and success because nothing stands between them and their studies. They further maintained that in the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* they are taken back to the basics on how young women were traditionally brought up. The only difference is that it is now done in their own modern context in which the main emphasis is on education, which guarantees financial independence.

The fundamental belief in educational success through *ubuntombi* is that it leads to self-sufficiency and self-containment, which is an empowerment for these Zulu young women to be able to stand on their own as they face life, whether they get married or not. This confirms what Chisale (2016:226) asserted that “women’s jealous protection of virginity proves that they use their virginity to control and direct their destinies in the patriarchal order”. Their destiny in this case will be educational success, financial independence and the achievement of their goals in terms of careers. The central belief is that through the practice of *ubuntombi*, they are enabled to keep themselves focussed, though it does not suggest that those who are not for the practice of *ubuntombi* may not keep themselves focussed. According to this basic belief, *ubuntombi* brings about better social status as it secures the future of *intombi* as a free woman with agency to make better and more informative choices in life. In this, *izintombi* do not speak for other

⁶⁵ Ngcebo, a pseudonym is referred to as one of the successful *izintombi* from Nomkhubulwane Institute. She is working as a journalist. She owns a car and other valuables that show her financial independence but still maintains *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice and still goes for virginity testing.

young women who in spite of being sexually active might also achieve educational success, but the focus in this study is on *ubuntombi* as a religio-cultural heritage and identity of a Zulu young woman. Therefore, the voices of these young women demonstrate that the focus of *ubuntombi* as a religio-cultural heritage and identity has shifted from what was traditionally understood, namely to be preserved for being marriageable. While they enjoy *ubuntombi* as their cultural heritage and take pride in it as their identity, it has become more of an instrument of their educational success and autonomy as women. Put differently, they have developed an educational success model through *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice, which serves as emancipation for these young women.

5.3.3.2 Economic implications

There are some economic implications, however, for an educational success model to become a reality. This is because it can be directly challenged by the economic situation of *izintombi* since educational achievements cannot only be made possible by preserving themselves as virgins but financial means become critical to achieve such goals. For instance, some of the same young women completed their matric some years ago but because of financial constraints they could not go to tertiary level. It is in this that the maiden bursaries that were offered to Zulu virgins endorsed and commended by ANC's Mayor, Dudu Mazibuko, as motivations to curb transactional sex for young women become critical (Chisale, 2016:227). This is because *izintombi* are in fact part of South African youth that deserve financial support and a decent lifestyle. There was an unreasonable outrageous reaction towards these bursaries from gender activists and human rights watchdogs, which became a pointlessly politicized issue (Chisale, 2016:227). It is in fact a matter worth considering in the South African context where being a black African woman at times means living below economic baseline as observed by Lyn Snodgrass (2015).⁶⁶ Stander (2016:439) further pointed out that "black female students in South Africa still do not enjoy equal opportunities relative to white students at tertiary level, with female black students being affected the worst because they are both black and female". The author asserted that it was only fair that "the maiden bursary awards were granted to black, underprivileged female students".

⁶⁶Lyn Snodgrass, "South Africa: a dangerous place to be poor, black and a woman" <http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2015/09/11/South-Africa-a-dangerous-place-to-be-poor-black-and-a-woman> Accessed 23/09/2015.

In addition, it was found during this study that these young women hardly get any support anywhere directed to them in acknowledgement of what they do or who they are. While it might be questionable as to why the government should be obliged to financially support a culturally determined practice, it should be clarified that cultural practices are fully protected by the South African Bill of rights. Moreover, according to the South Africa Yearbook (2012/13:84) “the department of Arts and Culture is the custodian of South Africa’s diverse cultural, artistic and linguistic heritage”. This department is also responsible for funding wherever there are cultural endeavours to restore and preserve cultural heritage. The idea that *izintombi* need financial support for their studies is verified by their perception of educational success through *ubuntombi* as articulated in their voices. For instance, the awarding of these bursaries was an answer to the outcry from many of *izintombi*, particularly in Melmoth who felt that they were being side-lined as *izintombi* when it comes to financial assistance. They argued that it is not only their local municipality that fails to finance their local activities from the youth budget, which they are entitled to as part of the youth, but also the national government that supports only those who have become mothers. In this they feel that the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* seems to have made them ostracized and discriminated against when it comes to receiving financial support that they need without being prejudiced for who they are.

Therefore, as indicated, without financial support for their studies *izintombi* may not be able to achieve their educational dreams as a new outlook and purpose in terms of preserving themselves. This newly founded determination for the preservation of *ubuntombi* is innovative and refreshing because it alters the perception of virginity and its testing as an oppressive practice to women who mainly preserved themselves for marriage traditionally. Instead, *ubuntombi* becomes a patriarchal bargaining approach identified by Mahmood (2005:6). In this approach, “women are not merely the receptors of patriarchal rules and customs, but also often use their gender positions and sexuality – even those that might be perceived as oppressive – to gain certain positions and benefits in society, such as security, financial benefits, social status and...education” (Stander, 2016:440). In this case, *izintombi* are using their own sexuality to seek their educational success.

5.3.3.3 Educational opportunities versus love of *ubuntombi*

It is thought-provoking to note that *izintombi* might be using their sexuality for their own benefit in terms of educational opportunities; however most of them unanimously expressed

their love for *ubuntombi* as the driving force behind preserving themselves. This is also observed by Stander who contended that women engaged in virginity and its testing are in actual fact exercising their agency. In her own words, she argued:

Such women in fact, show agency by deploying their gender relations, virginity and practices, that some regard as oppressive, to gain certain benefits: security, social status and basic human rights, like education. These women are therefore using the practice of virginity testing to resist the effects that a racialized and unequal society has established around them to gain opportunities that would otherwise not be possible...In a country where specifically black and female students do not enjoy the same privileges as their white and male counterparts, the female students who receive the maiden bursary awards have few opportunities to obtain a quality education and ensure a better future. They choose to use their virginity as a means to obtain this human need (Stander, 2016:442).

While to some extent, Stander may be accurate, this author's opinion could be contended that the primary intention of the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* was not to receive any maiden bursary award; it found them practising it as their own culture. Hence this author also points out that one of the recipients of such a bursary award was quoted saying that "she never thought remaining a virgin would open so many doors for her". It is for this reason that the same author's idea that "for students who can otherwise not afford tertiary education, remaining a virgin therefore seems like a small price to pay to ensure a brighter future with more educational opportunities" can be offensive if not disdainful of their culture. While it might be true that *izintombi* are in need of financial support to achieve their educational goals, it was never their primary purpose to preserve themselves to pay the price for educational opportunities. In this study it was found that most of them preserve themselves for the love of it as their cultural practice. Educational progress is an invented benefit while bursary awards may be considered an added and even unexpected benefit, which are necessary to support and promote these young women's emancipation.

Therefore, it is the modern context in which *izintombi* find themselves that has informed the evolution of *ubuntombi* into a vehicle of educational success. From the indigenous perspective *ubuntombi* was meant to encourage social moral fibre of *Ubuntu* and cultural values that cemented the Zulu community together. However *izintombi* have discovered that in the place of waiting for marriage during the period of *ubuntombi*, they rather use it as their own sexuality for self-development and educational enrichment. In this, they overturn the pessimism with which virginity and its testing as a cultural practice is viewed by some scholars. For instance, Tamale (2011:31) asserted that "mainstream feminist scholarship within and outside Africa, for example, largely tends to view culture in negative terms...such beliefs have an effect of

obscuring the potential that culture may hold as a tool for emancipation”. In this innovative understanding *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice is therefore seen as an emancipatory practice for young women who have chosen to preserve themselves.

Hence Tamale (2011:31) rightfully affirms that “in fact, culture is a double-edged sword that can be wielded creatively and resourcefully to enhance women’s success...” Therefore *izintombi* use their culture, particularly *ubuntombi* as their sexuality with which they productively and ingeniously generate their educational success. However, it cannot be over-emphasized how essential it is that they are given the necessary financial support without being prejudiced for being virgins. Therefore Chisale (2016:227) correctly contends that “the awarding of bursaries, which has caused so much commotion among the human rights activists and some gender scholars, is not a human rights issue at all ... Human rights movements want to dictate to African women what is right or wrong for them without consulting them.” For this reason, the voices of *izintombi* and their opinions need to be respected when it comes to the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. This is because they are role players directly involved with this practice rather than outsiders who impose their views and thoughts about this cultural practice. It is in the same vein that *izintombi* view *ubuntombi* as a preventive measure against other threats that intimidate their educational success.

5.3.3.4 Preventive measure

Having seen how *ubuntombi* has taken the turn to be perceived as a model for educational success, it is not surprising that the theme of *ubuntombi* as a preventive measure against teenage pregnancy and HIV and AIDS was identified in almost all the research sites. Research has proven these to be the worst social ills that plague South African society these days especially black young women and school children, which seem to be increasingly escalating with no effective curbing mechanisms (Nyawose, 2013; SAHRC, 2005; Sibeko, 2012; Panday *et al* 2009; Chigona and Chetty, 2007). It was also highlighted by some of *izintombi* in this research that the main stumbling block between *intombi* and her freedom, agency, independence and educational success is unsolicited child-bearing. A number of *izintombi* felt that early pregnancies that produce unplanned children also exposing young women to sexually transmitted diseases and infections such as HIV and AIDS, have become very common and are on the rise due to the diminishing cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. It is for this reason that *izintombi* see themselves as being protected by this cultural practice. They feel that this is the way in which they take social responsibility for themselves. In this they are supported by

Haddad (2009:13) who maintained that “cultural hermeneutics seeks to find ways to raise questions of accountability of the society and the church to women, and the accountability of women in taking responsibility for their lives”. Therefore it is not about being burdened with the moral responsibility for the whole community as opponents of this cultural practice seem to suggest.

According to the majority of the participants from TFG, MFG of *izintombi* and non-*izintombi*, it is the right thing for the parents to encourage their children to preserve themselves in this cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. This is because it is the only safest way in which they can be protected from the prevalent deadly STIs and early unplanned pregnancies. They consider *ubuntombi* to be a Zulu cultural practice that encourages young women to abstain and be safe from diseases as they see them in their own lives. Some of them felt that if it were not for *ubuntombi* and virginity testing, they could not have made it through to the completion of their matric because most of their classmates dropped out in lower grades due to early pregnancy. They argued that those classmates could no longer go back to school because getting a child becomes an extra responsibility and life comes to a standstill as they have to concentrate on the bringing up of their children.

As exhibited from these voices, it was the perspective of quite a number of young women that bearing children as young women is the worst threat to their educational success, yet it has become pervasive in society today. This is affirmed by Chignon and Chetty (2008:1) who upheld that “as in many developing countries, teenage pregnancy is one of the major impediments to the educational success of girls in sub-Saharan Africa”. They further asserted that “pregnancy is among the most serious causes of school disruption, particularly at secondary-school level. That is, in many cases the birth of a baby marks the end of schooling for the teen mothers”. Participants also confirmed that many such young mothers have unwelcome babies that are burdensome to them. This is because their educational chances are jeopardised as well as their freedom of going wherever they want since they are tied down by the presence of babies. From the voices of these young women, it can be detected that the basic conviction is that *ubuntombi* is a preventive measure against early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases or prevalent infections such as HIV and AIDS. Once again *ubuntombi* is no longer simply one of the cultural practices but it has taken a form of a precautionary measure to them. The underlying message is that it is about them in the place of being about other people.

From the feminist cultural hermeneutics perspective this practice is life-giving to the young women whose lives are spared from the increasing statistics of those who fall pregnant at an early age and who are infected with HIV and AIDS. In this way they fulfil the view that “women do not make sacrifices as they are in fact acting in self-interest, they are protecting their own survival, saving their own faces and avoiding the taunt, blame and ridicule of the society” (Stander, 2016:441). Therefore *ubuntombi* and its preservation is not oppressive to young women as most of the western minded scholars such as (McCaffrey 2012; Scorgie 2002; Leak 2012; Naidu 2008; Gupta 2000; Kinoti 1999; Behrens 2014) perceive it. All these opponents of virginity and its testing hold strong views against this practice yet the owners or partakers of the practice consider it life-giving to them. Even though *izintombi* emphasise that the original intention of *ubuntombi* was to live out their own culture, they have found that it is a rewarding cultural practice because it precludes them from the increasing statistics of early pregnancies and HIV and AIDS infections. Anyone who recognises the plight of the African young women could not blame them; considering staggering statistics of the young women who are going through a lot of inconvenience through early pregnancies and morbidity due to HIV and AIDS related diseases as research indicates (Sibeko, 2012:1).

Contrariwise, it is worth mentioning that losing virginity is not equal to giving birth, which seems to be what is portrayed by some of the arguments of these young women. It is not every sexual act that results in pregnancy. It is also the constitutional rights of the young people to use contraceptives to prevent early pregnancies or even terminate pregnancy as it was also noted by some of the participants. However research also shows that in spite of those rights and elementary awareness about the contraceptives, the erratic use or lack of access to them does not help in curbing early pregnancies and spread of the STIs (Willan, 2013:4). Furthermore Willan observes that even if the hormonal injections could be accessed and used as prevention of early pregnancies, they are regrettably not able to prevent sexually transmitted diseases or HIV and AIDS infections. Nevertheless from the indigenous perspective, contraceptives and other means of preventing or terminating early pregnancies are viewed indifferently. For instance Mamkwena, one of the elderly people from NFG contended that contraceptives are cheating methods in *ubuntombi* because people see a young woman as *intombi* just because she does not have a child but she knows deep down in her heart that she no longer has what it takes. Mamkwena felt that contraceptives and other measures of preventing pregnancy encourage girls to grow up without conscience. Her argument may seem unfavourable to those young women who use contraceptives as means of preventing early

pregnancies and in that sense still practice their freedom and agency. Nonetheless, Mamkwena's opinion was expressed in the context of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice; it was not directed to every young woman who has made a choice to live without this practice.

It is in this that Mamkwena mentioned that it was the best thing they could ever do – to go back to the basic culture of preserving *ubuntombi* without artificial means except abstinence in its true sense of the word. By artificial means she referred to the modern activities of maintaining *ubuntombi* such as taking prevention tablets and injections which actually do not protect *ubuntombi* because traditionally young women were required to be faithful in being chaste. She felt that through these other means of preserving themselves from getting pregnant, assuming that they are maintaining *ubuntombi*, it is all in vain because morality is never preserved since the girl loses the gist of what *ubuntombi* is. However, Mamkwena ignored the fact that even though *izintombi* were to remain chaste, *ukusoma* (non-penetrative sex) was a socially accepted method of sexual pleasure among young people that prevented loss of virginity, STIs and early pregnancies. This is also observed by Chisale (2016:230) who advocates for *ukusoma* (non-penetrative sex) as an indigenous preventative measure among the youth.

Similarly, Wickström (2010:538) observed that *ukusoma* among the Zulu youth made the difference from the western understanding that promoted total abstinence. However, as mentioned earlier, it was not established in this study if *ukusoma* is still a common practice due to the colonial influence that alienated it as Zulu people embraced penetrative sex that came with urban and industrialised life (Hunter, 2005:16). Moreover, as it can be noted from the previous chapter, Wickström (2010:538) indicated that *ukusoma* was prohibited by the colonial masters. Conversely, in the era of penetrative sex and lack of sexual education, a lot is at stake for the practice of *ubuntombi* such as early sexual debuts that come with early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases as indicated above. Nevertheless Kinoti (1999)⁶⁷ cannot be ignored when she argues that *ubuntombi* and virginity testing can only be a transitory solution for the prevention of the STDs and HIV and AIDS infection. This is because the young women can be infected by their prospective husbands when they get married because there is no virginity or testing for males. However, early pregnancy can surely be prevented through *ukusoma* (non-penetrative sex) and preservation of *ubuntombi*. Early pregnancy does not only

⁶⁷ Kathambi Kinoti (1999), "Virginity Testing and the War Against AIDS: A look at the implications of adopting virginity testing as a tool in preventing HIV transmission" http://www.sos-sexisme.org/English/news/Virginity_testing.htm Accessed 12/11/2015.

hinder educational progress of young women but also exposes them to single parenting that they are not ready to face. For this reason *ubuntombi* is also seen as a preventive measure not only from childbearing but also from the gendered aspect of premature parenthood, which is usually taken by young women as single parents.

5.3.3.5 Gendered aspect of early pregnancy

Early pregnancies become a gendered aspect in that they usually affect young women more than young men. This was indicated by the majority of *izintombi* participants who also felt that *ubuntombi* has helped them to avoid the challenges of premature and single parenthood. The gendered aspect of early pregnancy is usually seen in single parenting that normally falls on young women's shoulders since some fathers of the children disappear after the pregnancy has taken place. This is affirmed by Kamaara (2005:12) who observes that single parenting often falls on the mother who "may end up shouldering the entire responsibility of bringing up this child". This could be exacerbated by the fact that early pregnancy is normally viewed as the young women's fault. This was affirmed by Thobeka, one of the participants who in her own words stated:

There are many challenges that we are facing nowadays in society such as diseases that are normally blamed on women. Even with pregnancy, only women carry the blame while males are exonerated and so for me the solution is to preserve myself as intombi to avoid pregnancy and diseases and concentrate on my success.

Thobeka's words indicate that she is determined to escape the blame that often comes with the penalty of remaining a single parent through the preservation of herself as *intombi*, which seems to work for her because she was already a university student during the interviews. The MFG of *izintombi* also argued that they have emulated the example of the traditional practice of *ubuntombi* where premarital child-bearing was forbidden and treated as a serious social offense by all community members. It helped that the children were born in families where they had balanced parental upbringing from both the father and the mother together. One of the participants who was a young mother herself from TFG of non-*izintombi* also added that there are many challenges that a young mother faces if she has a child as a teenager because that child is normally disowned by the father and she becomes a single mother. Then as a young girl she is forced to depend on the parents to raise that child because she cannot do it on her own. Things are exacerbated by the absence of parents just as in her case she neither had a mother nor a father due to the fatal diseases nowadays and so she had to be raised by a grandmother. This young woman did not even complete her high school education because of

early pregnancy and she works for other people for her survival because the grant she gets for the child is too small to cover the needs of her child and herself. It was noted that she is now full of regrets as she retorted:

Personally I would choose ubuntombi if I were given a second chance to start anew because right now I do not have parents. I live with my granny and having a child has made me to lose almost everything I could be because I rushed elderly people's things. Surely if I had preserved myself as intombi I would be somewhere now in life but because of my bad choices, here I am with no achievement of anything in life.

Another young single mother from the same focus group discussion also that she would choose to be an *intombi* if she were given a second chance because she had a sick baby boy at the time of the discussion. She remarked that he was problematic to her because he was sickly and without a father and she did not know what to do with him since she was not working and thus could not support him. She became pregnant at the age of 15 in Grade 9 and she was no longer at school because she had to look after her son and when she thinks deeply about her future everything looks bleak. In this case it is unlikely that without the means to support her child, she could afford her child's education later. She does not even see the use of the child support grant, which she considered too small to make any difference.

Kamaara (2005:13) affirmed this as she stated that "in terms of formal education though not always the case, a single mother may lack stable income to educate her child(ren). As a result, such a child(ren) may end up with scanty education or illiterate altogether". This creates and entrenches the poverty cycle with a detrimental effect on women who are often on the receiving end of such outcomes. These are very revealing realities and emotional situations in which young women find themselves after early pregnancies and some of them are trapped for life in such circumstances because they have no one to help them like this young single mother. It is true that South African school policy permits girl children to further their studies in spite of early pregnancies but not all of them can afford to go back to school after maternity leave or absence. This is because there are so many factors that have to be considered after young mothers have given birth such as reliability on the parents for their emotional and physical support with the newborn as well as affordability of their educational needs. This was also observed by Willan⁶⁸ who pointed out that:

⁶⁸ Willan, Samantha 2013. "A Review of Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa – Experiences of Schooling, and Knowledge and Access to Sexual & Reproductive Health Services." <http://www.hst.org.za/publications/NonHST%20Publications/Teenage%20Pregnancy%20in%20South%20Africa%20Final%2010%20May%202013.pdf>. Accessed 21/10/2017.

The critical barriers to pregnant girls remaining in school and returning following pregnancy again relate to childcare, whether they have financial means to pay for childcare or someone, usually the maternal grandmother, who can care for the baby during school hours. Where girls do not have childcare support from their family and in particular her mother, many have no choice but to stay home and care for the baby. (Willan, 2013:5)

Therefore if parents are not there or if she comes from a poverty stricken family that cannot afford her needs and that of a child, she loses her educational opportunity. It is for this reason that Sibeko (2012:2) warned that “a pregnant schoolgirl needs to calculate the risks involved and determine whether she can take proper care of a baby and complete her education”. Besides the loss of identity as an *intombi* she has to assume a huge parental responsibility, which at times becomes too much for young women to bear and they abandon or neglect their children. She has to find a job in order to raise her child single-handedly. For instance a number of participants from *izintombi* groups vowed not to go through the experience of their own mothers who had to work very hard to bring them up as single parents. Sonto, another young single mother from MFG of non-*izintombi*, also pointed out the difficulties of childbearing as a single unmarried young woman. She felt that the childbearing was burdensome and problematic when she has to remain at home taking care of the child while other young people are going to school and time is lost. She further added that a child is very expensive to sustain because she has to bear the expense alone as a single mother with little assistance from the child support grant or parents if they are willing to help her. Hence she also saw the preservation of *ubuntombi* as a preventive measure against the responsibility and challenges of being a young single mother.

The openness of these young women about their life experiences and situations of being single young mothers and the difficulties of childbearing at a young age does not only disclose the circumstances faced by some teenage mothers today but also indicates how bleak their future is. It can thus be concluded that the high rate of teenage pregnancy remains a matter of grave concern in South Africa. It is for this reason that every attempt needs to be made to ensure that solutions of every kind are found to curb this pandemic. This was also suggested by Willan (2013:4)⁶⁹ who declared that “it is imperative that South Africa addresses unplanned teenage

⁶⁹ Willan, Samantha 2013. “A Review of Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa – Experiences of Schooling, and Knowledge and Access to Sexual & Reproductive Health Services.” <http://www.hst.org.za/publications/NonHST%20Publications/Teenage%20Pregnancy%20in%20South%20Africa%20Final%2010%20May%202013.pdf>. Accessed 21/10/2017.

pregnancy at both an individual and structural level”. The retrieval of some of the positive aspects of *ubuntombi* is certainly one such attempt of preventing this scourge even if it is at an individual level that *izintombi* take a decision of preserving themselves. Therefore young women who have taken this decision need to be supported at all costs because it safeguards them from adding to an already existing problematic situation. It is for the same reason that from an indigenous perspective; *ubuntombi* is not only seen as a preventive measure for *izintombi* alone, but also other social structures from the undesirable outcomes that accompany its neglect. Put differently, *ubuntombi* also becomes significant in a wider parenting and family structure, without which social undesirable outcomes are inevitable.

5.3.3.6 *Ubuntombi and family structure*

The majority of the elderly participants continued to portray *ubuntombi* as the only precautionary measure against disrupted parenting and family structure. They asserted that the neglect of *ubuntombi* does not only expose young women to early sexual debuts that often come with unintended pregnancies but also generational oppression due to the children born out of the wedlock. They argued that such children are mainly oppressed by the way in which they were born. They further expressed their belief that this is because, according to God’s will, children need to be born within the institution of marriage and family. Therefore the existence of this Zulu cultural practice of *ubuntombi* is in accordance with God’s will that every human is supposed to be within the family institution until death. This highlights the critical role of the family in the life of a child and how the sense of belonging is affected when the child is born out of the wedlock and it marks the beginning of disrupted family relationships that come with a number of challenges for the child involved. For instance, it is unlikely that this child could ever enjoy a stable parental upbringing that involves both the mother and the father. Concurring with this, Kamaara (2005:12-13) maintained that lack of balanced parental upbringing “cannot provide all the role models that children require for integral growth into social responsible adults”. This author further argued that this has a number of deeper implications for such a child; if it is a girl child she might be unreceptive of male figures or she might engage herself in promiscuous relationships in search of a father figure and paternal love that she missed as a child.

On the same issue, Rev Mabatha, one of the participants, further stated that it is even worse these days when girls seem to give birth ‘on the run’ because they have to go to school and the child, without a father or a mother, becomes a total responsibility of the grandparents. This child becomes a hurting human being from early childhood with so many unanswered questions such as “why do my mom and my dad never buy me shoes?” At school the same child meets other children who wear things bought by their parents. He further indicated that all these unanswered questions might end up creating hurtful feelings such as anger, resentment and dissatisfaction, which was avoided in the traditional Zulu way of life because they could foresee such problems for the child born out of the wedlock. Most of these children end up on the wrong side of the law with wounded feelings that are never easy to address because the child needs an identity. As an example, Holborn (2011)⁷⁰ indicated that most of the criminal offenders come from the broken families with absent parents or where parents hardly spend time with their children. The author further maintained that “while not all these problems can be explained by family breakdown, both local and international research provides evidence that growing up in stable families with both parents present can make a significant difference to the future outcomes of the young people”.

It is even worse under the circumstances where children have become heads of the family and look after themselves due to having been bereaved by the AIDS pandemic. Moyo (2011:5-6) pointed out that there are increasing numbers of child or youth-headed households in sub-Saharan Africa because of the parental demise caused by AIDS-related diseases. This is worse in sub-Saharan Africa where many children also experience parental desertion and neglect for different reasons as it was indicated by some of the participants. Manciba, for instance, one of the participants who works as a nurse in a hospital confirmed that in her experience, teenage mothers abandon their children almost daily at the hospital. This is due to morbidity, inability to accept the unplanned child or not being ready for parenting. The TFG of elderly people further agreed that it deeply hurts when any of the parents are never there for the child whether it is through death or neglect. They further pointed out that some children never forget that they

⁷⁰ Lucy Holborn, South African Institute of Race Relations. (2011) “SA youth are sexually active at a very young age: The impact of family breakdown on education, unemployment, teenage pregnancy and Crime.” <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/archive/sa-youth-are-sexually-active-at-a-very-young-age/> Accessed 20/10/2017.

lost educational opportunities and were without even clothing as they were staying with poor grandparents due to having been abandoned by parents at an early age.

These participants also felt that such children grow up knowing that nobody cares about them, which steals their joy, self-confidence and ability to face life as they should. They further stated that some grow up with uncles in the place of fathers or sometimes with no father figure at all, only with the mother or grandmother. Consequently, this deprives them of fatherly role models and there are important things in life they will never know. Every child needs parental collaboration in its upbringing so that it may know what is important in life from both parents. Hence Holborn (2011)⁷¹ further warned that “when only 35% of children grow up living with both of their biological parents, we should be alert to the risk that dysfunctional families are damaging the prospects of our young people”. Even if the needs such as shelter, clothes and education are provided by grandparents, the absence of the parents goes a long way deep into the feelings of the child. Consequently, these distressing feelings and emotions are neither easy to detect nor to be dealt with because they are the childhood entrenched bitterness that become almost a core part of that hurting individual.

That is why, according to the same participants, such feelings can even be a destructive force in prospective marital relationships of those hurting individuals later in life. This was also affirmed by Holborn (2011)⁷² who upheld that “there is evidence that people from broken families are more likely to go on to have relationship problems and create fractured families themselves. This is a cycle that needs to be broken.” The retrieval and preservation of positive aspects of *ubuntu* is indeed the ideal place to start for such a cycle to be broken. Otherwise the trouble with children born out of the wedlock keeps taking new forms of complications. For instance, according to the participants, these children’s hurtful feelings can be transferred into their marriage life as well. One of them gave an example of a girl that never knew her father and when she gets married, her husband is likely to be treated with a lot of disrespect.

⁷¹ Lucy Holborn, South African Institute of Race Relations. (2011) “SA youth are sexually active at a very young age: The impact of family breakdown on education, unemployment, teenage pregnancy and Crime.” <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/archive/sa-youth-are-sexually-active-at-a-very-young-age/> Accessed 20/10/2017.

⁷² Lucy Holborn, South African Institute of Race Relations. (2011) “SA youth are sexually active at a very young age: The impact of family breakdown on education, unemployment, teenage pregnancy and Crime.” <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/archive/sa-youth-are-sexually-active-at-a-very-young-age/> Accessed 20/10/2017.

This is because of hatred towards the absent father in her childhood and the belief that all males are like her father who was never there for her. The participant further indicated that the same thing applies to a boy who grows up without a mother; when he gets married one day, that woman will not be very different from the absent mother who abandoned him in his childhood and she might end up suffering for that reason. Subsequently, the marriage relationship begins to show problems because of deep-seated lack of parental relationships that was never addressed.

The participants also agreed that even those whose parents eventually get married to different partners, often become part if not the cause of the marital problems of those marriages. For instance, Rev Mabatha, one of them further indicated that some couples get married when they have had children with different mothers if it is a male or different boyfriends if it is a female. He related a good example of what he came across as a marriage counsellor as follows:

This reminds me another couple that I had to counsel for marriage, they had a draw because the woman had two children of the same father and the man also had two from different mothers and now they had two together and in all they had six children before marriage. Can you imagine that marriage? Children connect parents so the man is connected to two different women if he is to be a responsible father he has to give money and the connection will be kept alive. Same thing applies to the woman who has to keep receiving money from the father of her children when she is already married to another man and this makes life complicated from the start for that married couple.

This scenario is a perfect example of the early sexual debut that produces children who indirectly and unknowingly become a source of many troubles for marriages. Even if their parents leave them in their respective families in order to go and start their own families, those children live like orphans in spite of their parents being alive. According to the same participant, even if the couple brings those children into their marriage, the couple is already divided: her child, his child and their child in the same marriage. One will always have an eye on how his or her child is treated comparing the three children from different premarital relationships now brought together in the same marriage. Moreover, it will be very difficult for the man in this family to keep receiving financial support and visits from the ex-boyfriend of his wife because he needs access to see his child. Similarly, the wife would not want her husband to keep visiting his ex-girlfriend because of the child they had together so it can be seen that their sexual rights have tainted their prospective marriages. Besides the already troubled marriage between the married couple, the presence of the children with different surnames under the same shelter might lead to incest practices, which in turn affect the growing

up of a girl child and subsequently *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. For instance Mrs Mabatha, one of the participants asked:

How are these children going to be taught respect, moral behaviour and to stay intact as izintombi? There is a possibility that they might sexually turn against each other and commit incest because they are relatives that do not belong together because of different mothers and fathers.

Incest may not occur between the children only; the father who is not a real father to the girl child that came with the wife might also commit incest. Women participants in the group agreed that it also happens that if a wife comes with a girl child, her own husband might end up falling in love with the girl or begin to sexually abuse her and the mother might keep quiet for fear of losing bread and lodging. Sometimes the girl might be bold enough to tell her mother but she might be silenced and be told that this father feeds them and then the girl lives in that abuse and her rights are grossly violated. One of them narrated that she worked in the office for attorneys for seven years and she learnt that out of 55 incest cases, only three mothers spoke out about their girl children who had been sexually abused. The last case she learnt about was when the father had sexually abused his daughter so much that the girl had 6 children from her own father. However the mother finally took courage and brought the perpetrator to justice.

The girl child who has had such an experience is destroyed from childhood as she is deprived of her sexual purity and the right to be brought up as *intombi* from infancy. It can thus be inferred that the observation of *ubuntombi* and its preservation as a cultural practice was not only a pride and identity of *izintombi* but also served as a solution to many unforeseen circumstances that resulted from its disregard. Therefore from the indigenous perspective *ubuntombi* served as a pillar of the community in many ways and without its observation, the whole community would have been predestined to unabated social ills that could be hardly tackled as is happening in most social spheres today. *Ubuntombi* also saved the nation from unplanned-for children, children with absent fathers, and unnecessarily single-parented children, neglected and abandoned children as well as aborted children because they are often a by-product of early sexual experiences.

It is probably for these reasons that in the traditional Zulu cultural lifestyle *ubuntombi* was a way of life for every young woman and premarital penetrative sex was discouraged at all costs. Kamaara (2005:85) also points out that “common to the majority of African societies is the abhorrence of premarital sex, especially for young unmarried girls. Virginity for girls before marriage is encouraged, upheld, praised and rewarded. On the contrary, sexual fidelity or

virginity is not a requirement for young unmarried men in traditional Africa.” In this citation, the former is very true of the Zulu cultural context but the latter is contextually not true for the Zulu people who equally encouraged good sexual behaviour among the young men as well. That is why there was an emphasis on *insizwa nsi* (pure virgin young man) as there was on *intombi nto* (pure virgin young woman) in the Zulu culture even though *ubunsizwa* (being a young virgin man) has diminished to almost extinction. This is because of the colonial and modern influence that young men seem to have a sexual laissez-faire attitude when *izintombi* have to be tested for their virginity, which has justifiably attracted criticism from feminist perspectives.

It is for the same reason that a group of scholars (Maluleke, 2012; Mubangizi, 2012; Mswela, 2009; Kinoti, 1999 and Naidu, 2008) rightly perceive it as a gendered practice when only young women are being tested. However, it does not also make sense to encourage young women to pursue an early sexual debut in the name of rights and sexual pleasure that will also turn to be the source of their trouble and social pandemics. It may be sensible that young women need not become social saviours through carrying moral responsibility for everyone as if they are the carriers of the HIV and AIDS (Scorgie, 2002:67). However, they also need not be utterly discredited for preserving themselves because in that process they remain safe from similar pandemics; moreover they positively contribute to society through decreasing statistics for such epidemics. Therefore, Kamaara (2005:11) rightly perceives marriage as the only safest place for sexual pleasure and enjoyment where there are no apprehensions of adding to the teenage pregnancy endemic. Nevertheless, with the prevalence of HIV and AIDS infections fuelled by unrestrained premarital sexual risky behaviour, sex in prospective marriages might also be contagious and hence defeat sexual gratification even within its rightful context.

5.3.3.7 Social role and sex education

Most of *izintombi* participants recognise the need for social role and responsibility in terms of sex education as it used to happen in the olden days. This was identified and highlighted by a group of scholars who have conducted research on Zulu cultural activities (Hunter, 2005; Brindley, 1982 and Krige, 1968) on the role of *amaqhikiza* and grandmothers in the sex education. These traditionally recognised social structures used to be responsible for the upbringing of young people into sexually responsible adults as indicated in earlier chapters. These formed part of Zulu social and cultural systems during pre-colonial and even during colonial times that carried out the function of imparting knowledge to the younger generation

of how to behave themselves according to the acceptable norms of society. However, this was dismantled by the missionaries who tried to force mothers to play that role to no avail because culturally, young women could not be open to their own mothers about their sexual lives (Wickström, 2010:538). For this reason, sex education remained a need for young people, which might be the cause of early sexual debut by young people due to the lack of knowledge on how to handle themselves sexually as they grow up.

Participants from both elderly and young people's groups unanimously acknowledged a lack of proper knowledge when it came to sexual issues. They upheld that the place of *amaqhikiza* and grandmothers in facilitating sex education for the growing girls and what is socially expected of them was never filled by anyone after having been done away with during the colonial period. Some of the participants felt that this role has now been taken by media such as television in its own way, which inappropriately perpetuates the portrayal of women as sexual objects. Ps Biyela, one of them said: "unfortunately television has played a great role on how men need to seduce and make women objects of pleasure". With no sex education that shapes people's mind-set in terms of how men and women need to behave themselves, everyone does as they please to the detrimental effect of women. In addition, the erosion of the structural developmental stages that were scrupulously observed in the Zulu cultural lifestyle resulted in the treatment of *ubuntombi* as an individual choice. Consequently, the collective social responsibility of the girl child within the Zulu culture got lost. These stages formed part of knowledge transmission to the younger ones and determined every social move and action as it was indicated in the previous chapter.

With the colonial structures that took over the regulation of indigenous people's lifestyle, every Zulu traditional life and cultural activity was challenged to the core because the gap in knowledge transmission was never filled. The participants further indicated that there is a need for young women to be educated about the importance of preserving themselves as *izintombi*. They believe that this will help them to make informed decisions in terms of being tested or not because even traditionally sex education helped *izintombi*. They further added that the beauty of it was that there were hardly any children born out of the wedlock unlike today where young women have up to four children yet they are not married. They felt that it is because everyone is like a baby snake that does not want or need to be guarded by anyone in terms of sex education.

Even though some participants did not approve of the virginity testing per se, they believed that the onus rests with young women themselves whether to be tested or not for as long as they have been given enough information or knowledge concerning sex education, which is hardly received nowadays. This was affirmed by some of the participants who maintained that there is a generational gap between the parents and their children, which makes it impossible for them to give young women sex education and how they have to behave themselves. They indicated that some parents confess that they do not know how to speak to their children about sexual matters; they feel like conversation about sexual issues might encourage their children to go and experiment. They felt that the emphasis should be on being informed about the benefits and the beauty of remaining an *intombi* in the modern times because with lack of such knowledge, many of them make wrong choices. Unlike in the past where it was the pride of every girl to grow up upholding the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* because anything contrary was considered socially unacceptable and degrading to all *izintombi*. They further indicated that traditionally, boys and girls were both receiving teachings as they grew up in the community, which was taken away by destabilisation of the community due to colonialism that came with western culture and Christianity. While Christianity may have been brought together with colonial oppression, some of the Zulu people found it parallel to their traditional lifestyle such as virginity practice, which serves as a Christian virtue. The main inspiration comes from the Virgin Mary, whose virginity serves as an encouragement to *izintombi* who have embraced Christianity.

5.3.3.8 *Ubuntombi and Mariology*

Some of *izintombi* drew a great deal of inspiration in terms of their identity and religio-cultural heritage from the Virgin Mary, known as Mariology in the Catholic faith (Stander, 2016:432) who is their biblical inspiration, particularly from Christian perspective of *ubuntombi*. Mary, the young Jewish woman who became the Mother of Jesus while still a virgin, seems to be their role model and a source of encouragement. For instance, a number of young women from different research sites agreed that they consider virgins as blessed people on earth because of all women in the world, God chose a virgin to give birth to the King of the universe. They therefore believe that keeping their purity as virgins attracts a special blessing upon their lives and they do not see contradiction at all with the traditional kind of virginity that encouraged purity before God in the Zulu nation. This helps them to stand their ground even in the midst of criticism that they have to face the choice they have made to preserve themselves as virgins. In this they fulfil what Haddad (2006:136) observed as she maintained that “faith is central to

the lives of African Christian women, many of whom endure immense daily suffering”. Their belief that connects to Mary, the Virgin enables them to stand their ground for the virginity they believe in.

In addition, young women who were also participants in the study from the Catholic Church whose inspiration for virginity is a direct influence from the Virgin Mary shared their perspective that they did not see any contradiction between the cultural observation of *ubuntombi* and Christianity. They upheld that besides being Zulu young women, they are members of the church that has *Umhlangano kaMariya* (Mary’s guild), which also encourages *ubuntombi*. Therefore as members of Mary’s guild and belonging to their Zulu culture, they follow a similar principle that if they are young women, they need to abstain or preserve themselves as *izintombi* until they get married and if they do not get married until they die. They maintain that if they respect and appreciate their culture, they are in the right place in Mary’s guild because the same principle of *intombi* preserving herself until marriage is being followed in religion and culture. This affirms Stander (2016:432) who observed that “the church and many African cultures have played a significant role in the upholding of the belief in the value of virginity”. It is in this that these young women were of the opinion that they did not see any conflict in the bringing up of *intombi* in the Zulu cultural way and in the church.

Additionally, they maintained that it is not simply a matter of preserving *ubuntombi* but it is also about the identity of being *intombi* and in the church, there is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who serves as an example to the church virgins. Most *izintombi* become members of Mary’s guild because of their identity as *izintombi* since they cannot become members of that guild if they are no longer *izintombi*. It is for this reason that some scholars assume that Nomagugu Ngobese, one of the women behind the revival of the virginity testing was influenced by her faith in Catholic Mariology, found it easy to associate it with Zulu cultural activities such as Reed Dance (Phiri, 2003:65; Stander, 2016:432). It may not be concluded that all young women who are also inspired by Mary’s virginity are influenced by the same Mariology theology of the Catholic faith because Zulu culture has always encouraged virginity as a cultural lifestyle. Yet Christian influence is undeniable as some of these young women felt that it is pleasing to God and their ancestors that they have preserved themselves as *izintombi*. For instance, some of them expressed that they felt blessed and happy to be God Almighty’s favourites as *izintombi*. These few examples serve as indicators that some Zulu young women draw strength and motivation from Mary, the virgin in terms of their identity as *izintombi* and their religio-

cultural heritage from both cultural context as well as the biblically inspired context such as the church.

On the contrary, from the feminist perspective, Mary, the Virgin and the mother of Christ is not considered a perfect example for women. One of the feminist critique of Mary is captured by Rakoczy (2004:342) who indicated that Mary and her virginity is not helpful to women because of the way in which she is idolised for it in the Catholic church. This created dichotomy in the treatment of women by the church recognising those who choose virginity as elevated than those who exercise their sexuality in the other forms of Christian living like marriage. Rakoczy also contended that Mary's motherhood is equally unhelpful to other women because of the way it has been overrated as if motherhood is the only thing that women should live for. Her elevation in both as a virgin and a mother makes her aloof from the reality and ordeals that women keep facing in their daily encounters with challenging situations as women. Likewise Michael Lapierre (2018)⁷³ upheld that feminist perspectives have moved from the concern about Mary as such but is now about all the women and their place in the ecclesiastic practices within the Catholic Church. In addition, Mary's domesticated position as a mother is challenged by the modern world that demands women to take part in the economic mainstream through offered positions that they occupy in the social, political, economic and educational domains. However, in this, *izintombi* display wisdom to emulate Mary's virginity as an inspiration for them to preserve themselves so that they can enhance their educational opportunities that will take them to financial independence. It was indicated in the preceding paragraph that some of them see the preservation of their virginity as the opportunity to focus on their educational success.

5.4 Current debates on *ubuntombi* and its maintenance

There are a number of current debates on *ubuntombi* and its maintenance that cannot be exhausted in this study. However, few that can hardly be ignored when dealing with this cultural practice are going to be closely examined. One of the current debates was raised on the same day of *umemulo* that I attended. It emanated from the provocative song that was sung by *izintombi* while they were standing in the cold, waiting to go to the testing mothers in turns. The song was about the child social grant and teenage pregnancy and how this is viewed by

⁷³Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J. 2018. "Mariology Today".
<http://catholic-church.org/grace/marian/lapierre2.htm> accessed 17/04/2018

izintombi. Another closely related debate is about virginity testing from *izintombi* perspective in the modern context.

5.4.1 Child support grant (CSG) and teenage pregnancy from izintombi perspective in song

One of the songs that caught my attention became controversial because some disputed its singing and argued that it had been abolished by the government but some (including the testing mother and their leader) were adamant that there was nothing wrong with singing it. The song ridiculed the government for playing around with the lives of *izintombi* by permitting or authorising them to sleep (that is to have sex) with boys and get the child support grant. It had the following lyrics:

Hulumen' uyadlala ngathi x2

Hulumen' uyadlala ngathi x2

Uth' asilale x2

Uth' asilale sithol' imali yeqolo, hulumen' uyadlala ngathi x2

When directly translated these lyrics mean:

The government plays around with us x2

The government plays around with us x2

It says we should sleep (have sex) and get child support grant, the government plays around with us x2

According to some research studies it is not true that the government contributes to the teenage pregnancy rate through the provision of the child support grant, but this song suggests the opposite. The child support grant (CSG) is perceived as a mandate by the government for *izintombi* to have sex and get pregnant because the government will support their children. This is also affirmed by Hunter and Adato (2007:15) whose research findings indicated concern by the participants that CSG access has increased teenage pregnancies and has created “ungovernable and independent” youth. The participants were also concerned that the government only wants to increase the pool of its voters through the provision of CSG. Makiwane, Desmond, Richter and Udjo (2006:5) further acknowledged that there is a common school of thought in South Africa that considers CSG to be one of the primary causes of teenage

pregnancies since it entices teenagers. This is affirmed by high statistics of young people who indulge in sexual activities at the tender age of 15 and get pregnant before 20 years of age.

This was also raised by most of *izintombi* from Melmoth as they expressed their concern about the fact that they do not receive any financial support from the government as *izintombi* to show support of what they are doing while young mothers receive child support grant. Phila, one of them, claimed that they are being ridiculed by the young mothers who get money for the support of their children while they get nothing as *izintombi* in spite of preserving themselves and attending the Reed dance. She considered this as a disadvantage that discourages the promotion and maintenance of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. Nevertheless this does not seem to dishearten or discourage them from preserving themselves as *izintombi* as she further expressed: “I may not be educated or have money but I have something unique and better with which other people say that it cannot be for sale or purchased even in big supermarkets because they cannot sell the intact hymen.” Makiwane, Desmond, Richter and Udjo (2006: 14) further observed that:

There is a widespread public perception, arising largely from moral and cultural concerns, that the increase in youthful fertility is a result of the provision of the CSG. Young women are thought to have children in order to access the CSG, presumably preferring short-term gains to long term costs, and also because they don't comprehend the size of the grant in comparison to the cost of raising the a child.

However, according to these researchers, within the eight years of the CSG introduction most of the teenage mothers were still not beneficiaries of the CSG, which meant that they never took advantage of its existence. Secondly, the teenage pregnancy rate increased across the spectrum even among the other national groups such Whites and Indians who are unlikely to have got pregnant due to the introduction of the CSG. Therefore they concluded that there is no connection between the increased teenage pregnancy and the CSG. Nevertheless from this song and from the cultural perspective as observed from the other research sites of this study, the notion of CSG as a perverse incentive that lures young women into pregnancy still permeates many people's mind-sets. For example, Phila, one of *izintombi* at Mthonjaneni explicitly asserted that “*the government promotes pregnancy through provision of the child support grants. We who behave ourselves and maintain our virginity get no incentive while those who have boyfriends and babies get child support grant.*” She feels that this contributes to the destruction of the nation in that young women are attracted by the very small amount of the money they get through CSG and they lose their heritage and identity as *izintombi*.

5.4.2 Virginitly testing (VT) in the modern context

Virginitly testing was another cultural practice closely associated with *ubuntombi* such that it became inseparable because virginitly testing became a traditional way of maintaining *ubuntombi* as was indicated in the previous chapter. Whenever we spoke of *ubuntombi*, virginitly testing automatically came up, so much that it ended up sounding as if the research was about virginitly testing. This was observed from the responses of most participants from one-on-one semi structured interviews with *izintombi* and in focus group discussions. It was also found that while virginitly testing is indivisible with the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*, it currently remains one of the most controversial cultural practices as could be seen from Chapter Three that there are proponents and opponents of this practice. However, the research revealed that there are some issues that make it even more controversial than simply being promoted or disapproved. Nevertheless, one of the most important parts of the research findings are voices of the young women involved with virginitly testing as the maintenance of *ubuntombi*.

5.4.2.1 Virginitly testing (VT) as a modern controversial practice

As could be seen in Chapter Three of this study, virginitly testing is one of the most controversial practices in the modern practice of *ubuntombi*. There are so many scholars, particularly westerners and those who sympathise with the western mind-set, who have developed a very strong sense of negativity towards VT practice. Hence we have a number of antagonists that propagate negative publicity of VT as a cultural practice because of individual rights. It is mainly considered as an oppressive practice due to the elderly people such as parents and the community members who exert control over the sexual lives of the young people and it violates their individual rights (George, 2008; McCaffrey, 2012; Scorgie, 2002 and Leak 2012). On the other hand, there are proponents of this practice who feel that it is a core part of being an *intombi* and therefore *ubuntombi* can never be properly maintained without it (Mbatha, 2003; Vincent 2006; Nyawose, 2013; Mhlongo, 2009; Nkosi, 2013). During the research, it was also discovered that undeniably VT is a very controversial practice because of different viewpoints that people hold about it. There are those who hold a traditional standpoint that it is an essential practice without which *ubuntombi* cannot survive, yet it has now become a bone of contention because of the way it is conducted. There are also those who feel that *ubuntombi* is an independent practice from VT and so it can survive without it.

5.4.2.2 VT as an essential part of *ubuntombi* versus individual rights

The majority of *izintombi* from almost all research sites were convinced that *ubuntombi* cannot be a cultural practice on its own without VT, yet it is the source of criticism from the individual rights perspective. They upheld that the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* demands virginity testing of those who attend the Reed Dance to ensure that they are still intact and it also encourages young women to be confident as *izintombi*. This emanates from the traditional point of view that an *intombi* could only be proven that she is still intact as *intombi* because of the VT. Ironically this was more of a colonial imposition than an original Zulu cultural practice due to the stipulation of the *lobola* cows by colonial masters and for the verification of *inkomo yenquthu* (mother's cow) as could be seen in the previous chapter. Otherwise it would be hard to prove to anyone that the young woman's hymen was still intact if they were not tested by the cultural experts. For many of the young women, virginity testing is the door to *ubuntombi*. They strongly feel that they cannot claim to be *izintombi* that attend the Reed Dance without virginity testing.

While *izintombi* may be aware that the testing mothers are frequently criticised for violating the rights of the girls who are being tested, they do not feel that girls are being violated because they come for testing of their own accord. Nevertheless, they feel that it is not something that parents should force young women to do because they themselves do not like any coercion when it comes to this practice. They appreciate being reminded but being pushed will make them resist and resent it and therefore they prefer to be intrinsically rather than externally motivated. Furthermore, they feel that those who have been compelled to do VT live miserable lives because they only do it to please their parents; hence those parents serve as hindrances to their wishes and that is why some mothers hear these words from their daughters: "*I was not there in your young age*". They believe that one cannot live one's life to please somebody else because that is like imprisonment; it is better to do it from the heart, otherwise it does not work.

They gave an example that most of those known to them who were forced by parents to come for VT are no longer part of *izintombi* or Reed Dance. As soon as they are away from their parents, they apply their sexual freedom unlike an *intombi* who has made a personal commitment to *ubuntombi* as her own choice. They also felt that sending a girl child to the Reed Dance can bring shame to the parents because that girl will be like a person in chains; as soon as she is unchained she will disappoint them badly. These are voices of young women who have personally chosen to be tested and they keep it as their personal obligation and

therefore do not expect any pushing around about it. They thus dispute the western notion that VT is an enforced practice by the parents because they want to control sexuality of the youth (Leak, 2012). They also felt that they may have rights but it is not the observation of all their rights that is helpful to them. They felt that *ubuntombi* is their preference and so they cannot lose it because of their rights. Therefore they avowed that even in the presence of individual rights, they do not see this cultural practice disappearing because it is the deep-seated core part of what they know as their culture, unlike the rights that have been imposed upon them. They added that this cultural practice is an entrenched and integral part of who they are as Zulus from the beginning and not the rights that seem to have no value in the upholding of their cultural practice of *ubuntombi*.

Besides demonstrating that *ubuntombi* for them takes precedence over everything, their words also indicate the tension between the Zulu cultural practice and the observation of the rights. This is observed by Chisale and Byrne (2018:2) who asserted that “virginity testing in South Africa has caused visible tensions between human rights movements and African traditionalists”. Apparently *izintombi* in this regard have taken a traditional stance of protecting their cultural heritage of *ubuntombi*. While some of the western scholars such as McCaffrey (2012) and others feel that the right to privacy is grossly violated by this practice, these young women perceive the individual rights as an imposition against this cultural practice. Therefore they felt that VT just like *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice needs to be revitalised because it is their Zulu heritage. They further indicated that even though there have been some attempts to do away with it [an incident also recorded by scholars such Scorgie (2002:55) and Wickström (2010:533)], *izintombi* stood their ground and marched in protest demonstrating that they are not forced to do it in spite of individual rights. They uphold that nobody can enforce an *intombi* to maintain her virginity unless she goes with *izintombi*, which is her own choice. They gave an example that their tester reminded them that neither she nor their parents can force them to remain chaste as *izintombi*; it is up to them to do the right thing with their bodies. They therefore do not see any violation of individual rights in that.

Some *izintombi* however, feel strongly that rights are not helpful to the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. They feel the rights destroy them, which could be even worse with the next generation because the rights allow them to have sex, get pregnant and abort at the age of 12. Some of the elderly people also felt the same about the rights because in a number of focus group discussions, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the way in which individual rights

are promoted against communal life and cultural activities. As an example, some of them see human rights as something that has come to destroy *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice because it is losing its value because of the rights. They feel that the pride and identity of being *intombi* has diminished by the fact that many have jumped the stage of being *intombi* to motherhood because the rights have given them the liberty to do so. Therefore they think that *izintombi* have lost the knowledge of who they are as Zulu young women due to the western influence that has oppressed their culture and so their pride and identity in the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* is diminished. This will be further pursued in the next chapter on the human rights as one of the current debates that affect *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice.

5.4.2.3 *Virginity Testing and its internal controversy*

While there may be external forces against virginity testing such as those whose perspective is that it is a degrading cultural practice that violates young women's rights to privacy, the practice has its own internal controversial issues that emerged during the research. One of the things that emerged from a number of young women participants was that the VT process is not trustworthy. They maintained that it becomes problematic when young women who have failed the test respond with bitter protest against the testing mother. There is no protective mechanism for the testing mothers, which puts their lives at risk. At the same time, their testing procedures are not scientifically proven to justify disqualification results to the young women who are presumed to be no longer *izintombi*. Young women further stated such protesters who at times collude with their parents have nothing positive to say about the whole group of *izintombi* in return.

Furthermore, *izintombi* also alleged that there is cheating and dishonesty on the side of some of the young women who go for virginity testing. This leaves the whole process vulnerable because the testing mothers might end up having to compromise their testing results and it serves no purpose thereafter. According to these young women such things are so discouraging that it makes them ask themselves the purpose of preserving themselves when it looks like it is a fruitless exercise yet they desire the integrity of *intombi*. They feel this cheating and inability to accept testing results by other young women and their parents, contribute to the destruction of this cultural practice. The young women further indicated that the whole group of *izintombi* who are still determined to continue have an increasing number of critics from those who did not make it to the end. They added that most critics come from those who were initially with them and then dropped out and then began to bad-mouth them. This make things worse for

those who want to continue; hence some now prefer to remain anonymous that they are still virgins instead of attending virginity testing. *Izintombi* further elaborated that there are inexplicable stories that hurtful things such as water and teaspoons are used to conduct virginity testing and this spreads weird publicity about this cultural practice, which scares others away. Nevertheless they felt that when it is properly explained some join *izintombi* and remain tested virgins while others claim fear and prefer to remain unspecified.

5.4.2.4 Integrity of the testing mothers

It was also discovered that the testing mothers are not the same in the way in which they display their integrity when they conduct VT. There are faithful ones who do it with veracity but there are those who become involved in corruption when it comes to the declaring of the results of some of the young women. This is because of bribery that at times takes place. For instance *izintombi* recounted that they can testify that there are testing mothers who are very strict but some are tempted to entertain illicit gains from the practice. This issue of honesty seems to be threatening the existence of this cultural practice to the core. Some of them indicated that if they hear the corruption that is happening right now, they do not think the next generation of *izintombi* will still be tested in the true sense of the word. They felt that virginity testing is losing its essential purpose because there is no truth anymore; yet it helps them as young women to come together and declare publicly that *ubuntombi* still exists. They understood that even if they may insist their testing mothers are honest, they do not know if they will comply when they themselves are sometimes dishonest. These words indicate a bleak future for virginity testing as a cultural practice. The VT's unpromising future is also affirmed by the way in which it is viewed from Christian perspective.

5.4.2.5 VT and ubuntombi from the Christian perspective

Those who observe *ubuntombi* from a Christian perspective have a different viewpoint about the VT. Contrary to the outcry of many participants about the destructive rights, some Christian participants believe that rights are non-existent in the church. Put differently, they are of the opinion that even if the rights and freedom might exist but Christians are sometimes not controlled or do not entertain such rights because their priority is God and God's will for their lives. They felt that they professed their freedom in Christ because they were freed from the world now that they are in Christ. They confirmed this with the scriptural reference in Romans 12:1, which says: "conform ye not to the patterns of this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may know what is pleasing and is a perfect will of God for

your life.” They felt that the constitutional rights of the land are sometimes not applicable to a believer because human rights permit premarital sexual activity but with Christ it is not permitted until marriage. They also felt that the Scripture strictly emphasizes that if one cannot control oneself sexually, one must get married so as not to die in sin.

This argument could be totally rejected or challenged by the liberals and sexual freedom proponents that it prohibits the sexual expression that people deserve but it is the perspective of some of the Christian believers and they take it very seriously with their youth. As an example, these participants believe that within the context of Christian faith everything taught is either received or rejected and therefore does not infringe on anyone’s rights but instils the character that is required in the person that professes Christ. They also thought that the observation of *ubuntombi* plays a vital role in making the church what it is supposed to be. They believed that *ubuntombi* is one of the pillars of the existence of the church especially because they thought 75% of all churches are comprised of the youth. They felt that the sense of responsibility that comes with how young people preserve their lives forms a vital part of being a church. They believed that if they can get that right, their churches will earn respect, but if they lose it, they lose the sense of being church, so it is one of the things that they need to uphold.

While their opinions may be contended, their traditional stance indicates how some Christian circles still put emphasis on virginity as the way of life for the young people who attend churches. Some of them stated that in the churches *ubuntombi* preservation makes religion remain what it originally was as it traditionally emphasised abstinence until marriage. Some took it to the spiritual level as they asserted that it is more of the requirement of self-control which is a fruit of the Spirit that in all things they need to prove to God that they are able to have the final word concerning their own bodies. They believe that they have a God-given power to say ‘No’ to the worldly desires but not necessarily *izintombi* only but every person. It is interesting to note that the responsibility falls on everyone within the church context because some scholars contend that virginity maintenance is a burdensome moral responsibility that has to be carried by young women only, which renders it gender biased (Maluleke, 2012). The participants indicated that the emphasis has always been on abstinence in the Christian tradition for both young men and women. This is one of the noticeable demarcations between the church-going *izintombi* and those who have culturally preserved themselves. Unlike in the Zulu traditional practice in which young men were also required to preserve themselves,

nowadays only young women are culturally preserving themselves as *izintombi*. It is this very difference that has attracted considerable criticism from the feminist perspective: only women are supposed to preserve themselves while young men do as they please with their own bodies. This is not only problematic in the sense of placing moral responsibility onto young women but also when it comes to the choice of the life partners because they still have to get married and end the journey of *ubuntombi* in marriage as some of them indicated.

Within the church context abstinence is for both young men and women as some participants mentioned that the children of God abstain not only because of culture but also because of the fear of God who considers sex before marriage a sin. Even if a young couple may be on their journey to marriage they still have to preserve themselves so as to remain pleasing to God. While it may not be a standardised practice, most of *izintombi* from the cultural perspective go to the Reed Dance, emphasise virginity testing as the maintenance of *ubuntombi* and they wear traditional attire that exposes their bodies as in the olden days. On the other hand, some of those who are professing Christians hold on to abstinence only without the Reed Dance or virginity testing. This is because of the basic belief that they are preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit as pointed out by most of the participants from the TFG. Furthermore, there is another belief that some of the young people could be coerced into these cultural practices such as VT due to communal pressure to attend the Reed Dance or to please parents. For this reason, some view VT as a problematic cultural practice that will soon disappear due to its human rights violation.

Therefore some Christian *izintombi* believe that *ubuntombi* will never lose its value because of the rights but what can become history is virginity testing because there is no need for it. In other participants' opinions, rights can do away with virginity testing but not *ubuntombi* because it is an individual decision, personal belief and a choice that can never be stopped by anything from outside if it works for that particular individual. These participants further disparaged those who have chosen the way of virginity testing to preserve themselves as they asserted that it is as if they do not trust themselves that they can remain *izintombi* without being tested. They argued that it is as if they need to have this policing mechanism to check whether they are truly preserving themselves or not. These opinions indicate that *ubuntombi* can and in actual fact does exist independently of virginity testing from the Christian perspective. Some of them indicated that they had never had sex with anyone in their lives but they would not be happy for anyone to keep looking at their private parts to see if the hymen is still intact; to them

this is unethical. They also objected to virginity testing only taking place with young women and males not being tested and with this view, affirming feminist critique of this practice. These participants' personal opinions dispute the cultural belief that *ubuntombi* and virginity testing are inseparable practices because they themselves are living examples of those who have preserved themselves as *izintombi* without VT. Nevertheless, most of the voices from those *izintombi* who support it have indicated that they do not go for VT because of communal pressure or coercion but out of love and pride for it, even though protection from sexually transmitted diseases come as an extra benefit. Therefore while the spread of STIs could take place, those who have made *ubuntombi* their personal choice will remain safe from such infections unless exposed to unfortunate and unforeseen circumstances such as the intermingling of the blood during car accidents.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the modern Zulu cultural context and understanding of *ubuntombi* as an identity and religio-cultural heritage and the ways in which it has evolved. It was found that *ubuntombi* in today's Zulu cultural context is not an easy choice or option. Nevertheless there are still strong voices of young women who see it as treasured practice of our time because it preserves their bodies as valuable possessions, something they emulate from the traditional understanding of *ubuntombi*. The preservation of their bodies makes them primary beneficiaries of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice because it shields them from high rate of teenage pregnancy, unwanted children with absent fathers and sexually transmitted diseases. At the same time it equips them for self-reliance and guarantees their progressive and brighter future through educational development, which has become their primary goal instead of being marriageable. However, economic hindrances can stifle such educational progress because they need financial support to achieve their educational goals, hence the need for the positive consideration of the Zulu maiden bursary grant. It also demonstrated that *ubuntombi* is a cultural practice that still empowers young women in the modern Zulu patriarchal context to dictate terms when it comes to love relationships.

The chapter looked at current debates on the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*, which were identified as child support grant and virginity testing. Child support grant was briefly explored from *izintombi* perspective and it was found that *izintombi* felt betrayed by the child support grant which appears to support those who have become teenage mothers. Virginity testing was also closely examined in terms of how it is understood by the participants in the current practice

of *ubuntombi* where it receives a great deal of criticism due to its potential right violation tendency. Most of *izintombi* were adamant that it cannot be any individual right violation because it is a voluntary practice done out of personal choice and individual's will. A number of internal flaws were also identified with the current practice of virginity testing such corruption practices that threaten its existence. However, to *izintombi* who attend VT it was found that it creates uncertainty when it comes to the choice of the life partners because they still have to choose from among the young men who do as they please with their bodies while they have been preserving themselves. Some of the participants such as Christian *izintombi* are ambivalent towards virginity testing with similar opinions as gender activists, human rights proponents and those who oppose it. From the cultural setting, *izintombi* view it as an essential practice at the heart of the maintenance of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice even though they admit that its future is shaky due to its external and internal controversies.

Chapter Six

Towards a redemptive model of *ubuntombi*

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the changing landscape of *ubuntombi* in a modern context and how it is viewed from an indigenous perspective. One of the significant findings of this study was that the practice of *ubuntombi* is diminishing; it is no longer a popular cultural practice, especially in the modern context. The practice has evolved from being a religio-cultural training platform of the Zulu girl child for marriage into a contemporary practice that has attracted comment and criticism from both local and international voices of activists and feminist scholars. Despite the fact that the practice seems to have lost its essence, there are Zulu people who are still upholding the practice and value it as part of their religio-cultural heritage and identity. This chapter aims at presenting a redemptive model for practising *ubuntombi* amidst contesting voices and challenges that militate against the practice. In doing so, the chapter will be responding to the final objective of the study, which is to examine the possibility of retrieval and preservation of *ubuntombi* as a tool for sex education among Zulu young people. This will be done by: first, looking at the different contesting voices on *ubuntombi*; second, I will investigate challenges that militate against *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice and present the need for the emancipation of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice that affects young women, and; third, I propose *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool for Zulu girls.

6.2 Different contesting voices⁷⁴ on *ubuntombi*

Throughout this study, I have tried to demonstrate that the practice of *ubuntombi* has faced a number of challenges. Voices contest on the practice: while there are those who are in support of *ubuntombi*, there are also those who strongly oppose *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. Through the findings of the study, it was evident that those who are in support of this cultural practice mainly come from an indigenous Zulu context and are insiders of the cultural practice and those who contest it are mainly outsiders.

⁷⁴ Voices refer to different opinions, perspectives and assumptions that people such as scholars, gender activists and human rights activists as well as indigenous people have to say about the practice.

6.2.1 *Ubuntombi as an essence for a Zulu girl's identity*

Findings from this study revealed that *ubuntombi* can be viewed as the essence of a young Zulu girl child's identity. The participants also indicated that while the current debate rages about what they termed as 'indecent and undignified virginity testing', findings showed that there is something more about the practice than simply checking the hymen. It is for this reason that even when an *intombi* has lost her virginity through sexual abuse or rape, she is still accepted and welcomed among *izintombi* because it is believed that *ubuntombi* is more than simply being a virgin but is also about an identity. This was affirmed by a number of participants who felt that *intombi* could not be excluded from being part of *izintombi* if unfortunate circumstances such as rape had caused her to lose her virginity. The emphasis on being an *intombi* was more around identity. Loss of virginity voluntarily, however, was punishable.

Furthermore, arguing from a postcolonial and African feminist perspective, this cultural practice can be considered outweighed by the contesting voices but the silenced knowledge that is found in *ubuntombi* cannot be ignored. Despite the many debates that dispute the worth of this cultural practice in addressing social ills that plague South African society today such as teenage pregnancies and HIV and AIDS (Nsibande, 2006:3)⁷⁵, *ubuntombi* is still of value in society. The voices of the community members that participated in this study also affirmed their support of *ubuntombi* as a valuable cultural practice in the Zulu tradition that keeps young women focussed on preservation of their cultural heritage. Additionally, as indicated in Chapter Three many researchers consider this cultural practice a form of pride and an identity for young Zulu women.

In this research participants generally had positive attributes about *ubuntombi* but there are many contrasting voices on the practice especially in relation to virginity testing. For instance, Mojapelo (2016)⁷⁶ is of the opinion that virginity testing is an unreliable practice because testing methods are not scientifically proven. She further argued that it cannot be trusted because the hymen might not be there when a girl is born or it might have been torn through physical activities such as sport or use of tampons. These arguments may be valid from a western perspective that demands everything to be scientifically proven before it can be trusted.

⁷⁵Nondumiso Nsibande, "Submission by People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) to the CEDAW Commission on Virginity Testing as a Harmful Traditional Practice"
<https://www.ohchr.org/.../CEDAW/HarmfulPractices/PeopleOpposingWomenAbuse.pdf>. Accessed 09/11/201.

⁷⁶Lebohang Mojapelo (2016) "Virginity testing 'sacred' but not a science"
<https://africacheck.org/reports/virginity-testing-sacred-but-not-a-science/> Accessed 18/12/2017.

However, it should be born in mind that virginity testing methods have been viable for centuries for African people including the Zulus though it might not have been without challenges, particularly if the girl might have lost her virginity through other ways without sexual penetration. While Chisale (2016:232) concluded that “those who criticise these practices are influenced by the Western world view that perceives Africa as a ‘dark continent’ that needs to be put under constant surveillance”, such challenges cannot be completely ignored. In addition, it was also found in this study that virginity testing is full of its own internal disagreements; however these controversies do not deter young women from going for testing because of the need to uphold their cultural practice. It was also discovered that girls are not doing this only in order to be marriageable as was expected but to maintain *ubuntombi* as part of their own cultural heritage and identity. The study also found that there are voices from the church context that encourage abstinence, without virginity testing. The group from the church context argued that virginity testing on its own is a possible practice that may not need to be monitored or regulated by virginity testers. Therefore as church-going young women, they maintained their virginity as individuals on a personal basis as a choice and maintained that they found fulfilment in doing this.

6.2.2 Human rights and virginity testing

In responding to this theme, it is probably important to start with brief examination of human rights. UNHR described human rights as “rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status”.⁷⁷ While this sounds well expressed in terms of what is understood from a global perspective, it is not without problems, particularly in a South African context where there is a history of apartheid and colonialism. Colonialism, for example, affected the principle of interdependence and indivisibility of human rights as internationally understood in these terms:

All human rights are indivisible, whether they are civil and political rights, such as the right to life, equality before the law and freedom of expression, economic, social and cultural rights, such as the rights to work, social security and education, or collective rights, such as the rights to development and self-determination, are divisible, interrelated and interdependent. The improvement of one right facilitates advancement of the others. Likewise, the deprivation of one right adversely affects the others.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ United Nations Human Rights, “What Are Human Rights”
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhareHumanRights.aspx> Accessed 02/10/2017.

⁷⁸ United Nations Human Rights, “What Are Human Rights”
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhareHumanRights.aspx> Accessed 02/10/2017.

While the South African Constitution might have recognised and taken this principle seriously during democracy through the provision of the Bill of Rights for all its citizens, there was a setback in the reconciliation of global and local perspectives of the human rights. The South African Constitutional Bill of Rights upholds freedom and equality for all, which seems to remain government's lip service to some citizens of the country. This is with particular reference to black women who have endured centuries of denigration, discrimination and debasement under colonialism, sexism and racism under the apartheid system in South Africa as well as patriarchal social structures.⁷⁹ The question is whether human rights really guarantee women empowerment in making responsible decisions that will surely liberate them from social, economic, political and poverty constraints that seem to have a life-long grip on many African women.

As indicated earlier in this study, there are many opposing voices that are against *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. This has been highlighted in the voices of the scholars such as (George, 2008; McCaffrey, 2012; Scorgie, 2002; Leak, 2012; Maluleke, 2012; Gupta 2000) and many others as described in previous chapters of this study. To these voices, virginity testing is viewed as a human rights issue, which raises the need to engage in the discourse between human rights versus gender activists in addressing *ubuntombi*. The researchers above are in agreement with the voices of gender activists such as Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) and South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). In unison, they disparage virginity testing for its tendency to discriminate against young women who no longer qualify to be virgins. Virginity testing is also criticised for being a cultural practice that infringes on the human rights of the young women.

In addition, Le Roux (2006:2) asserted that "the CGE and SAHRC are particularly concerned about the potential for human rights violation of virginity testing". These voices are always reinforced by international conventions who serve as watchdogs for human rights violation such as the African Charter on the Rights of the Child (ACRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Nsibande, 2006:3).⁸⁰ These are further supported by the South African Constitution that promotes individual human

⁷⁹Lyn Snodgrass (2015) "South Africa: a dangerous place to be poor, black and a woman."

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/2015/09/11/South-Africa-a-dangerous-place-to-be-poor-black-and-a-woman>
Accessed 23/09/2015.

⁸⁰Nondumiso Nsibande, "Submission by People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) to the CEDAW Commission on Virginity Testing as a Harmful Traditional Practice"

<https://www.ohchr.org/.../CEDAW/HarmfulPractice/PeopleOpposingWomenAbuse.pdf>. Accessed 09/11/2015.

rights to the extent that cultural rights may be limited if they seem to violate individual rights. All these voices speak out about virginity testing and virginity as cultural traditional practices that are outdated and belong to the past while individual rights are seen as part of the modern world and are promoted. This kind of approach highlights the importance of the theme that closely examines human rights as opposed to cultural practices, such as *ubuntombi*.

6.3 Human rights versus cultural practices

It is worth noting that human rights versus cultural practices is a huge debate that cannot be covered in this study and thus it will only be examined in the context of *ubuntombi*. Chisale and Byrne (2018:4) observed that “it is a commonly held belief among human rights scholars, activists and practitioners that some African cultural practices violate human rights”. As briefly alluded to in the discussion of virginity testing in the previous chapter, indigenous people who are participants in this study have their own way in which they view *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice in the context of human rights. Their perspectives view human rights as imposed and destructive to their own practice of *ubuntombi* as Zulu people. This is because there is enormous distinction in the way in which human rights can be perceived globally and locally. This is affirmed by Evans (1983:8-12) who demonstrated that human rights can be understood differently in the First, Second and the Third world. He contended that this is because the needs of human beings that reside in these different worlds vary.

Therefore, the question: ‘whose rights and whose agenda?’ seems to be at the centre of the discourse on practices such as *ubuntombi*. Should it be global human rights and freedom as opposed to local cultural ways of life promoted through indigenous knowledge? For instance Chisale and Byrne (2018:4) rightly acknowledge decolonial theorists who observe that “the ‘humans’ in ‘human rights’ are implicitly European”. Furthermore, Evans (1983:9) recognised that the differences on the perception of human rights is fully portrayed by highlighting the individual human rights from the First World countries in which the civic and political rights become the principles of freedom. The emphasis is solely on the individual freedom to the point of exclusion of everybody else as if that individual exists in a vacuum. This was also observed by Chisale and Byrne (2018:4) who argued that “the human rights approach focuses on an individualistic understanding of rights, based on the belief that each human being has sovereign rights to his own or her own body”. With similar sentiments, in agreement with Hollenbach (1979:14), Evans objected to this kind of egocentric individualism that seems to

immunise or shield individuals and their rights not only from other human beings but also from the interference of the state.

This kind of focus on individual rights does not seem to resonate with most of the so-called Third World countries. It is also contrary to the African epistemology that promotes communalism that places an individual in the centre of the community with the spirit of *ubuntu* as observed by Kevin Chaplin (2006).⁸¹ According to Chaplin, “*Ubuntu* is the potential for being human; to value the good of the community above self-interest...It is about ‘we’ – not ‘me’”. He further maintained that *Ubuntu* “acknowledges both the right and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being”. Nevertheless it does not mean that an individual is less significant within the community but the worth of the individual is equally weighed against the significance of the community. From an indigenous cultural perspective, practices such as virginity testing, which is embedded in *ubuntombi*, were viewed as communal cultural observances. This is why *intombi* was a very significant figure in the community whose life was upheld by the entire community. Her virginity belonged to both the living and the dead. Hence all the rituals that were performed for and with the girl children. Issues of individual human rights did not easily fit in with cultural practices such as *ubuntombi*. This, however, does not mean that *intombi* had no rights over their bodies; rather they preferred cultural rights to individual rights that they consider foreign and imposed on them.

This is clearly displayed by the misunderstanding or lack of acceptance of some of the human rights by indigenous people as reflected in the findings of this study. Some of the participants viewed human rights as unhelpful and disingenuous when it comes to the cultural activities they value and consider to be their indigenous way of life demonised by the West. It is probably for the same reason that the SAHRC (2003:2) recognised that in spite of the efforts to equally accommodate every post-colonial South African citizen’s rights and legal protection, there is still a challenge when it comes to indigenous cultural practices. This can be summed up as follows:

The challenge to our young democracy in the context of our history wherein indigenous cultural practices were for so long marginalized and distorted is to seek the appropriate balance between recognizing our wonderfully diverse cultural practices and respecting the constitutional framework which promotes the values of “...human dignity, the

⁸¹ Chaplin, Kevin 2006. “ The Ubuntu Spirit in African Communities” available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Publication/BookCoE20-Chaplin.pdf>. Accessed 14/06/2014.

achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms...” and of “...non racialism and non-sexism”. (SAHRC, 2003:2)

It is unlikely that such a challenge has been eradicated because in this research it was found that many participants felt that democracy and South African Constitutional rights have come to erode and obliterate indigenous cultural practices. For instance, the majority felt that the negative attitude towards the preservation of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice from some of the community members emanates from the human rights that people claim to uphold. In addition, Mr Mkhonto, one of the elderly participants, articulated that while freedom came with good things, when it comes to *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice, it contributed negatively because some people no longer want to participate in the practice. Tamale (2011:31) contended that “the tendency is to commence from the premise that views culture as being hostile to women, an antithesis to their rights. Researchers and theorists speak of rights as if they are culture-less at best or, at worst, born of a superior culture.” Hence many participants in this study felt that human rights are destructive towards cultural practices of the indigenous people.

Some of the participants are of the opinion that it is not the rights per se that are problematic but the lack of responsibility that come with the rights. For instance, Mr Ngobeni from the MFG of the elderly people argued that many people make a mistake of replacing the responsibility with rights. While rights may be good, they can never replace the responsibility that is socially expected of everyone. Mr Ngobeni gave the example that if someone crosses a road at a traffic light, the green light gives that individual a right of way but that does not mean that that person does not have to take the responsibility of watching out for danger. Similarly with human rights, people may have a right to do anything they want with their bodies but without taking responsibility for their actions, they are prone to destroying themselves and their future. This may sound as if a Zulu girl child is being blamed for losing her virginity because she exercises her rights without taking responsibility; however, the majority of participants felt that rights were not well explained to formerly oppressed people. Therefore, some tend to abuse their rights and destroy themselves.

While South Africa enjoys constitutional freedom and exercise of individual rights, this comes at a cost, as some of these rights contradict with traditional beliefs of indigenous people. Hence there is resistance when it comes to ending certain cultural practices that are seemingly viewed as being against human rights policies. This was also acknowledged by Tamale (2008:50) who stated that:

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (U.D.H.R.) was drafted, debated and adopted in the aftermath of World War II, only a handful of women and no sub-Saharan African sat on the floor of the U.N. General Assembly. Even the broad character of the rights articulated in the U.D.H.R. frame reflects normative values, inspirations and interest of Western culture of a specific stage of historical evolution. Hence it is clear that the 'human rights' discourse emanates from a specific historical context. It has a culture. Like all other cultures, that culture cannot lay claim to common values nor to universalism.

From this excerpt, it is evident that there is a lack of representation of sub-Saharan African cultural practices in the UDHR. Hence there seems to be a disconnection when it comes to the comprehension of universal rights for everyone because nobody understood local African aspirations, desires and experiences, particularly cultural practices. It is for this reason that Chisale (2016:232) can be understood when she argued that "Those who criticise African sexual practices are protecting the colonial legacies in Africa. The debate of sexuality as a human rights issue is pivotal; however justice will only prevail if human rights are defined and owned by Africans." Similarly, Mohanty (1984:335) proposed that it is another colonisation at its best when freedom and human rights are defined from the Westerners' worldview. It is also probably for the same reasons that most of the participants in this research study associated the South African Constitutional Bill of rights with the imposed destructive rights they saw as foreign and depriving them of their own cultural rights as Africans. Chisale and Byrne (2018:5) are of the opinion that "human rights proponents often claim that they have universal values on their side, but 'universal' usually means European...it is used by Westerners to denigrate indigenous African cultures." This explains how indigenous people may view human rights as a civilised erosion of indigenous cultural way of life if not another colonisation in disguise.

6.3.1 *Virginity testing and ubuntu as cultural rights*

The majority of *izintombi* participants felt that virginity testing and *ubuntu* are cultural rights they have chosen to observe without any coercion. Some of them, together with the testing mothers, took to the streets in 2000 to deny being coerced in any way to participate in virginity and its testing (Scorgie, 2002:55). Some organisations, gender activists and individual scholars have voiced strong opinions on the invasion and infringement of the young women's rights without affording them the opportunity to voice their own perception of this practice. Yet these women are old enough to have their voices heard. This is also affirmed by Chisale (2016:226) who was of the opinion that researchers and human rights activists that seem to be antagonised by virginity and its testing need to adjust their perspectives in order to appreciate and understand from the standpoint of the women involved. As much as the genesis of basic human rights was a worthwhile endeavour for the globe, cultural practices are accommodated

in the recognition of the same rights and so the young maidens are entitled to choose what they consider to be their cultural identity.

According to Chisale and Byrne (2018: 9), it could only be a colonial understanding of virginity testing that considers it to be contravention of human rights regardless of its value to the young women who concede it as their own identity. However, the same authors indicate polarity caused by the traditional stance that supports cultural identity as opposed to a human rights approach that highlights physical and sexual liberation (2018:8). Nevertheless traditional stance is also protected in Chapter 2 (30) of the South African Constitution, which declares that “Everyone has the right ... to participate in the cultural life of their choice”. Similarly 2 (31) stipulates that “Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community - (a) to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and use their language; and (b) to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.” These people are constitutionally unrestricted to maintain cultural practices and lifestyle of their own choice in the same way as the young Zulu maidens have made the choice of preserving themselves.

According to Tamale (2008: 55), “even with their diverse backgrounds and experiences, the majority of African women (and men) easily relate to cultural systems better than the ‘laundry list’ of rights set out in the various bills of rights.” It is probably for this reason that many of the indigenous people as found in this study have unconstructive perceptions of human rights when it comes to cultural practices because they consider them to be imposed Eurocentric individual rights. It is also from the same western worldview that Chisale and Byrne (2018:5) argued that “individual women’s sexuality is their own business”. A totally different cultural scenario is evident herein which people might have their own particular cultural values that are not the same in the African context. Context here plays a critical role but is clouded by elements of the world becoming a global village where traditional views and the existence of local cultures are challenged to the core (Schreiter (1997:2-3). In the Zulu cultural context, for instance, *ubuntombi* still forms part of valuable social norms and cultural values that also promote morality. This was observed by Wickström (2010:535) who noted “even if the individual girl is the focus of the testing, it is mainly about reinstating and reinforcing morality, not only in individual girls, but also in the community as a whole.” The whole community gets involved as in the olden days when a young woman’s integrity played a decisive role for her to be collectively admired, respected and protected.

Chaplin (2006)⁸² suggested that “*Ubuntu* calls for unity and mutual co-operation among people who live in a particular area with honesty and reliability being important.” This is more of a contextual and cultural belief that underscores communal values that require individual collaboration. This was also noted by Chisale and Byrne (2018:8): “communities develop an unconscious, practical sense of what actions and behaviour are valued and can be capitalized on”. It does not resonate, however, with the human rights notion of putting individual rights first. Put differently, the Zulu cultural emphasis is on communal interdependence and so when an individual grows up in a community, he/she is recognised as a human being among other human beings and cannot behave like a baby snake that has to find its own way of living in life. This is also applicable to other African contexts; Kasomo (2009:158), for example, noted that in African societies, life is shared from birth to death. Kasomo further argued that even pregnancy is considered to be an issue of communal accountability because a foetus in its mother’s womb is a forthcoming member of the community. He also maintained that when children are born they become cherished members of the community such that their lives are collectively recognized, guided, nurtured and instructed as full members of the community. It is for the same reason that the upbringing of young women as virgins in a Zulu context was an issue for the whole community and hence they deserved protection from every communal member. They were referred to as the flowers of the nation (Wickström 2010:540; Ntshingila, 2013⁸³) because they were adored, cherished and admired by all members of the community, which guaranteed their security.

This research has revealed how much opposition *izintombi* face in South African society, which makes it unlikely that diversity is actually constitutionally recognised and protected. SAHRC (2003:6) rightly acknowledged that: “Our society is diverse. It is comprised of men and women of different cultural, social, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Our Constitution recognizes this diversity...The protection of diversity is the hallmark of a free and open society.” This excerpt highlights that the key to the maintenance and sustenance of the needs of the diversified society is indiscriminate safeguarding of the rights of each cultural group and individuals

⁸² Chaplin, Kevin 2006. “The Ubuntu Spirit in African Communities” available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Publication/BookCoE20-Chaplin.pdf>. Accessed 14/06/2014.

⁸³ Ntshingila, Nosipho 2013. “Imbali Yesizwe Indeed”, Youth Village – South Africa’s Youth Portal <http://www.youthvillage.co.za/2013/09/imbali-yesizwe-indeed-nosipho-ntshingila/> Accessed 17/04/2018.

encompassed in such groups. The need for the protection of the diversified cultural practices is further acknowledged by SAHRC, which upholds that:

Given our past in South Africa, it is important that we strive to protect our indigenous cultural practices. These were the subject of domination and subjugation during the colonial and Apartheid years. In our new constitutional dispensation we need to strive to seek to give recognition to cultural practices within our constitutional parameters. Culture however is not static, but dynamic. We therefore need to question many of our cultural practices and interrogate in a constructive manner the extent to which they conform with the constitution (SAHRC, 2003:6).

This citation recognizes the need for the protection of cultural practices and also calls for the need to re-examine them in terms of the constitution, which according to the indigenous people is formulated and based on western standards that disregard cultural practices. While this does not suggest an uncritical reception of cultural practices, unyielding conformity to the constitution without checking how much indigenous people understand it, might be erroneous. From the postcolonial perspective, indigenous people have a right to retrieve their lost and distorted cultural values, norms and customs. It thus becomes questionable whether there will ever be any genuine attempt to strive for the protection of indigenous cultural practices that were demonised, distorted and discarded by the colonial masters and apartheid regime. If any attempt is made to retrieve and redeem cultural practices from the past domination and subjugation, this is often viewed as an unnecessary reminiscence that idealises the past. For instance, Chisale and Byrne (2018:4) observed that “traditional African culture is frequently seen as primitive and therefore irrelevant in today’s diverse, modernised Africa”. This was also further affirmed by SAHRC (2003:4): “some opponents of this practice see it as an unnecessary throwback to a past better forgotten”. Similarly, Leclerc-Madlala argued:

This is where we need to locate our understanding of popular discourses and movements that seek to bring back traditions perceived as ‘lost’ or ‘waning’, as is the case with the current promotion of virginity testing and the growing popularity of public displays and celebrations of chastity. By calling for a ‘return to culture’ as a way to address the HIV/AIDS crisis, some African communities are turning to the past in the name of culture and tradition in an effort to make sense of and find local solutions to modernity and its related challenges. HIV/AIDS, a disease that threatens the basic fabric of society through the progressive enfeeblement and death of its members, presents a major challenge. (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003:16)

When considering the concept of *Sankofa* that was mentioned earlier in the study, there is absolutely no reason why it is not permissible to revisit the past in order to find solutions of the contemporary predicaments when modernity does not seem to provide solutions. Arguably, it is justifiable to seek answers from past life experiences that contributed positively to

communities because it might be where solutions could be retrieved. Hence the need for the retrieval of the positive aspects of *ubuntombi* in this study.

6.3.2 Lobola, a burden to virgins

The SAHRC (2003:2) has described how the payment of *lobola* culturally places a heavy burden on the girls because it is only virgins that are paid for with a full bride-price. While a feminist perspective of this argument sounds legitimate, it has been pointed out in Chapter Four of this study that the increased *lobola* payment and dictates that commercialised it were largely due to colonial influence. Thus colonialism can also be blamed for virgins having to carry the burden of the increased *lobola*. In its original and traditional understanding, *lobola* was only for the building of a good relationship between the two families of a bride and a bridegroom. This is also affirmed by Kirwen (2005:116) whose research found that the bride wealth did not only solidify the unification of the two families involved but also legitimised the bride into the groom's family in terms of the privileges of heritage. This author also found that the bride received full recognition by the living dead of her new family which also legitimised her children. Therefore it can be deduced that *lobola* in the traditional sense was certainly not intended as a form of human purchase that turned a woman into a man's property. This calls for ways of decolonizing *lobola* as a dehumanizing practice to women, which requires a continuous research that will include women's input since it has a direct effect on them as a life-denying practice.

6.3.3 Virginit testing as a way of preserving ubuntombi

Another concern raised by the SAHRC (2003:3) is the resurgence of the virginity testing in the last two decades, which is one of the ways in which *ubuntombi* is maintained, particularly among the Zulu people. This cultural practice is condemned by organisations such as the Commission for Gender Equality and the South African Human Rights Commission for its "potential invasion and violation of guaranteed constitutional rights of the young women who are tested." This is one of the arguments that led to my entering the field with a skewed perception that young women are miserable pitied girls whose rights are violated by potential intruders (testers) who invade their privacy and degrade their dignity. However in this research study, it was found that many young women voiced their genuine support of this practice as it verified and contributed to their very own identity and cultural practice of their personal choice. Most of them avowed that they gave their consent to being tested for the love of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice.

In addition to the findings of this study, research as identified by Chisale and Byrne (2018:6) has proven that most of the young women who go for virginity testing do it out of their own accord. These authors also added that "... girls or women who subject themselves to virginity testing do so of their own free will, demonstrating freedom of choice concerning their bodies." Likewise Chisale (2016:225-226) upheld that "from a feminine perspective there are critical and hidden pedagogies that underlie virginity testing. Adult women, who are the primary guardians of virginity testing, use this tool to raise awareness among young women about how to use their virginity to exercise their sexual power." In addition most of the tested young women are actually the initiators of this practice in their families. In almost all the research sites, it was found that mostly the girls are the ones who introduced virginity testing and expressed their desire to attend it to their parents who gave their support and saw its benefits evident in their own daughters.

6.3.4 HIV and AIDS and teenage pregnancy

As Leclerc-Madlala has pointed out in the above citation, HIV and AIDS is indisputably still one of the social ailments that threaten the South African community, though the availability of antiretroviral treatment has helped. However, besides STDs, as has been found in this research, there are other realities that are facing young women of our time such as growing rates of teenage pregnancy that disproportionately affect them. This was affirmed by Chigona and Chetty (2008:1) who view teenage pregnancy as one of the worst hindrances to young women's educational progress. Young women are adversely and disproportionately affected because young men either disown their babies or continue with their schooling uninterrupted while some girls find themselves in situations where they have to discontinue their education. This is despite government's policy for the girl child to continue with her education in her pregnant state. Teenage pregnancy has become so prevalent in South Africa that in 2014 that of the 20 000 learners that got pregnant, 223 came from the primary schools.⁸⁴ The spokesperson from Gauteng education department also "added that statistics indicated that sexual debut happened even earlier than previously thought among young people...even at primary school level, learners are falling pregnant."⁸⁵ Yet virginity testing to maintain

⁸⁴SABC News, "Teenage Pregnancy"

<http://www.sabc.co.za/wps/portal/news/main/tag?tag=Teenage%20pregnancy> accessed 21/10/2017

⁸⁵ Siphso Masondo, City Press, "Teen pregnancies hit 99 000 a year"

<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Teen-pregnancies-hit-99-000-a-year-20150905> Accessed 20/10/2017

ubuntombi that ensures delayed sexual debut has been criminalised by the South African law for girls below the age of eighteen (Vincent, 2006:19).

Teenage pregnancy continues to increase and educational officials are left dumbfounded and helpless. For instance, the Minister of Basic Education, Motshekga bemoaned how teenage pregnancy demoralises hard work by the Department of Education, “to ensure girl children remain in school in order to contribute towards a quality life for all, free of poverty” (Panday, Makiwane, Ranchod and Letsoalo, 2009:4). She also indicated that the escalating proportion of unwanted teenage pregnancies in South Africa is of grave concern and requires serious attention from every stakeholder in society. In 2015, Motshekga further reiterated that “the rate of pregnancies at schools has become a major social challenge not only for the education sector, but also more importantly for national development.” This was after the annual school survey had disclosed that over 15 000 pupils fell pregnant during that academic year.⁸⁶

The challenge worsened so much that in the same year, Gauteng’s Education MEC, Panyaza Lesufi indicated that “his department has run out of ideas on how to deal with the problem of teenage pregnancy.”⁸⁷ It is a situation that he labelled “a crisis” and “unheard of” state of affairs that requires serious attention and drastic measures when it comes to sex education. Hence the proposed call for *ubuntombi* as an alternative tool for sex education cannot be overemphasised. In addition, Siphon Masondo, reporter of from the *Eye Witness News 24* demonstrated that the provincial breakdown of teenage pregnancies indicated KwaZulu-Natal as the leading province with teenage pregnancies in 2013.⁸⁸ Figure F⁸⁹ that shows statistics broken down as retrieved from the News 24 website can be found in Appendix 1 of this study. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy has become of so much concern to certain communities that people are given opportunities to talk about on community radio stations. One such community radio station is

⁸⁶ Thando Kubheka, Eyewitness News (2015) “SA Teen Pregnancy Rate Raises Alarm”
<http://ewn.co.za/2017/03/13/sa-teen-pregnancy-rate-raises-alarm> Accessed 21/10/2017.

⁸⁷ SABC News, (2015) “Education undefined summit to fight teenage pregnancy in schools”
<http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/34ea840049fd55e5bd6effa53d9712f0/EducationundefinedSummitundefinedtoundefinedfightundefinedteenageundefinedpregnancyundefinedinundefinedschools-20152609> Accessed 21/10/2017.

⁸⁸ Siphon Masondo, City Press, “Teen pregnancies hit 99 000 a year”
<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Teen-pregnancies-hit-99-000-a-year-20150905> Accessed 20/10/2017.

⁸⁹ Siphon Masondo, City Press, “Teen pregnancies hit 99 000 a year”
<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Teen-pregnancies-hit-99-000-a-year-20150905> Accessed 20/10/2017.

iKhwezi where it was addressed in the programme called Ikhwezi Drive by Saziso Dlamini that takes place from 4-5 pm where people were given an opportunity on 23 May 2017 to express their views on this matter. During one of the sessions, speakers were of the opinion that the decline of *Ubuntu* and the lack of social structures that used to be vehicles of sex education for the younger generation are the main causes of escalating teenage pregnancy. It is for these reasons that this study proposes the need to revisit practices such as *ubuntombi*. Calling for the retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a form of religio-cultural heritage and a tool for sex education cannot be overemphasised especially in a context with such high levels of teenage pregnancy.

Even if South African school policy allows girls to continue with schooling in spite of early pregnancies, it has been heard from the voices of young Zulu women in the previous chapter that early pregnancy carries a number of challenges and responsibilities. In some cases, teenage mothers are not able to pick themselves up and go back to school due to financial and environmental circumstances. This guarantees their lack of self-reliance as adults and perpetual dependence on males for the provision of their needs. There is great probability that others might end up in the street as sex workers because they have to find easy ways of making money for survival. This propels such young women into an unhealthy dependency syndrome that leaves them enslaved for life. Consequently if one considers circumstances of the majority of black South African women as related in the motivation of this study, the question arises as to whether the concern is truly about their welfare, success, socio-economical liberation and progress; or is it just about a hollow and immaterial freedom that leaves them perpetually bound by the chains of poverty cycle.

6.3.5 Ubuntombi as a form of cultural heritage antidote

While it is virginity testing that is considered “a back-to-basics remedy for some of the country’s worst ills” by its proponents (SAHRC, 2003:3), this study considers *ubuntombi* as that form of cultural heritage antidote. It is not all *izintombi* who have preserved themselves for the sake of testing but they have privately made being a virgin personal choice even without being publicly declared a tested virgin. In fact, some do not understand the need for the virginity testing such as Nomthi, an *intombi* from Threshing Floor who strongly believed that *ubuntombi* would endure as a cultural practice even if virginity testing is eliminated due to its infringement on human rights. This study is not about re-enforcement of past practices, however it raises the need for the retrieval of the positive aspects of *ubuntombi* as something valuable and worthy

of practice for the good of the whole community. Hence it must be mentioned that there are young women who have not made a cultural practice of *ubuntombi* their personal choice, yet they are still in the stage of *ubuntombi*. These young women have a right to choose safe ways of sexual practices such as contraceptives as preventive measures though these are not commendable from the perspective of an indigenous cultural way of life. This is because if they do not take the precautionary measures that are in accordance with the choice of being sexually active at the young age, they certainly suffer the consequences of the increased early and unwanted pregnancies as indicated above. With such interventions showing minimal results, it is commendable that *ubuntombi* and other indigenous forms of sex education be included as part of the pool of resources and indigenous interventions. However, it was also found that there are many challenges that militate against *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice as will be indicated hereunder.

6.4 Challenges that militate against *ubuntombi*

Ubuntombi has been found to be facing many challenges that militate against it in its current practice. It was indicated in the previous chapter it is no longer considered a necessity for young women to remain chaste as it was a social expectation in the traditional practice of *ubuntombi*. *Ubuntombi* is considered an obsolete practice that is only preserved by cultural custodians who do not want to see change in terms of young people's sexuality from the perspective of the opponents of virginity testing. Therefore *ubuntombi* has become an optional cultural practice instead of being every young woman's responsibility and a social requirement. This has had a negative influence on the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* because it has been reduced to being a cultural practice of particular individuals who have made a choice to preserve their sexual purity as *izintombi*. Consequently the young women who still pursue *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice do not find it easy to remain *izintombi* as verified in different research sites. They pointed out different kinds of challenges they face as follows.

6.4.1 Collective upbringing of children

Unlike in the olden days, it was found that there is a lack of collective upbringing of children in the current cultural practice of *ubuntombi* because some parents fear that their girls might not be able to preserve their virginity throughout the stage of *ubuntombi*. This will also affect the reputation of the girl's parents and so they refuse to allow their girls to join the group of *izintombi* from the start. These young women felt that this is similar to oppression because they also have a right to choose who they want to be or what they want to do with their lives. These

young women also felt that they do not feel appreciated or valued for who they are as *izintombi*, yet *ubuntombi* used to be a communal responsibility. Even though they do not participate for other people's opinions, they felt that as young people they need to be commended for the things they do well and be mildly chastised for the things they do wrong. They felt that it is a good thing when parents show approval and encourage their children who still preserve themselves as *izintombi* and attend the Reed Dance by telling them how proud they are of their daughters. They felt that with such approval and encouragement, girls can attend for up to 10 years if this was their passion.

In addition, the loss of collective upbringing of the girl-children and the social protection of *ubuntombi* left a gap that has never been closed. *Ubuntombi* has now turned out to be the individual responsibility of those who have made it their choice, which is very difficult to maintain. *Izintombi* participants affirmed that the communal aspect of taking collective responsibility of raising children aided the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. This is because nobody was against the bringing up of a girl as an *intombi* and telling her to be free. Moreover, *intombi* was proud of her identity and the younger ones were inspired to become like her. They felt that social confrontations and accusations of not being authentic as *izintombi* they come across in society, lowers their self-esteem and the pride of *ubuntombi*. *Izintombi* also indicated that other reasons for the dislike of *ubuntombi* by some community members include that *ubuntombi* interferes with the sexual rights of young people. However, *izintombi* contend that it is for their own benefit that they preserve themselves and so if there is any violation of rights, it is their own human rights that they have given up for the choice of *ubuntombi* as their own cultural right. While it might be a challenge that *izintombi* do not get the necessary parental or communal support, this does not deter them from being courageous in what they believe themselves to be as *izintombi*.

6.4.2 Virginitly testing as a challenge to the practice of ubuntombi

While virginitly testing is considered inseparable from the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* from the indigenous cultural perspective, there are a number of challenges posed by virginitly testing to *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. *Izintombi* indicated that they are strongly criticised by those who are considered to have fallen away from *ubuntombi* and their parents who have become bitter that their daughters no longer qualify to remain in the group of *izintombi*. This polarises *ubuntombi* as a stage into two groups, namely, those who remain *izintombi* because they are believed to have passed virginitly testing and those who are still *izintombi* but do not qualify

having failed virginity testing. This was affirmed by Stander (2016:435) who noted that in the societies where virginity is observed, young women are divided into “good girls” and “bad girls” with the former being highly esteemed while the latter are pushed to the margins of society. This exonerates the critiques of the virginity testing on the ground of the criteria used for the passing of the virginity testing. Nevertheless most *izintombi* indicated that the cultural experts who are trained over the years for the testing activity are unlikely to be misguided when it comes to the examination of the girl’s genitals especially if more than one tester’s opinion is taken into account.

As indicated in the internal controversies of the virginity testing in the previous chapter, some *izintombi* felt that the corruption in this cultural practice threatens the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* to the core. This was outlined by a number of *izintombi* who stated that they personally would love *ubuntombi* to be maintained and they think it can be done through exposing any corruption that takes place in virginity testing sites. They confirmed that corruption is perpetuated by the testers when they continue to test and approve someone of being an *intombi* simply because she is capable of singing, dancing and speaking well in *izintombi* competitions. They further related that in some instances there are girls who are always approved as virgins by the testing mother until they give birth questioning the authenticity of virginity testing. This distresses them as *izintombi* because everybody ends up thinking that there are no virgins anymore. They felt that this does not contribute to any success of these cultural practices and it is oppressive to the maintenance of *ubuntombi*.

The unfaithfulness of those who are conducting virginity testing is the cause of *ubuntombi* being discredited as a cultural practice yet it has been the only guarantee that *ubuntombi* is still intact in the young women. The claim that some of the testing mothers now accept bribery suggests that this practice has now also become commercialised. For instance, young women explained that this at times takes place between testing mothers and parents when the mother of the girl bribes the testing mother to declare her girl as *intombi* and not so long after virginity testing, it is discovered that the same girl has become pregnant. Sometimes the girl might not become pregnant but when she gets married after having been a tested a virgin for years, the man discovers that she is not an *intombi* while the testing mother always affirmed her as an *intombi*. This affirms the critique of Chisale and Byrne (2018:7) that “virginity testing commodifies the vagina rather than morality of the behaviour”. It also defeats the whole purpose of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice because such acts render it futile.

Some participants noted that marriages can break up when the man discovers that he has been deceived. It also fulfils the critique that “virginity testing cannot be linked to the morality and purity of the virgin girl since being a virgin does not guarantee ethical behaviour” (Chisale and Byrne, 2018:7). Therefore, besides external criticism, virginity testing seems to be regarded with cynicism by those who participate in it. The future survival of virginity testing is threatened if corruption continues with testing mother having favourites that are always approved as *izintombi*. They also claimed nepotism is evident when the testing mother’s own child is made a leader of *izintombi*. All these aspects jeopardise the future of this cultural practice.

Some young women participants disapprove of virginity testing when it is coerced. It was found that some young women are often forced by their parents to go for virginity testing and preserve themselves as *izintombi*. Coercion also takes place when they are being threatened by community members who are on the lookout as to who went for virginity testing and who brought back a certificate. Consequently those who do not go are assumed to no longer be *izintombi*. Participants felt nobody should be forced or coerced to participate in this cultural practice since girls are not advertising themselves to anyone by preserving themselves as *izintombi*, rather it is their own personal thing. This is one of the critiques mentioned by a number of opponents of the virginity testing. Traditionally this was largely a private practice treated as a very natural family norm. Rev Mabatha described how virginity testing was done within the family or by local women entrusted with the task.

Some participants also felt that the publicity of the virginity testing means that the tested girls become targets of abductions into forced marriages because young men become aware that they are still intact as *izintombi* if they go for virginity testing. This concurs with the critiques of this practice by researchers such as Mubangizi (2012) and Mswela (2009) who noted that the tested young women become objects of abductions. They also mentioned that virginity testing exposes young women who can find themselves getting married sooner than they had anticipated or intended. This is because of being chosen by the local chiefs or being taken quickly by any of the suitors who happen to win their affection. All these criticisms seem to defeat the purpose of testing in order to maintain *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. Regrettably for those whose only hope of maintaining *ubuntombi* is virginity testing, they are running a risk of going down with it when it diminishes. Only those who are determined to preserve *ubuntombi* regardless of the virginity testing can possibly quietly glide through life unnoticed

until they achieve their goals in life. Nevertheless there are other threats that remain an undeniable reality even to those that do not approve or go for virginity testing such as sexual violence against women and children.

6.4.3 Sexual violence against women and children

Sexual violence against women and children is one of the gendered forms of violence that disproportionately affect more women than men (Cooper-White, 2008:27). This kind of violence that includes rape, incest and sexual abuse is common in South African society as was indicated earlier in this study. Every South African woman is at risk of being raped because it has turned out to be a scourge in the country where even infants and the oldest grandmothers are not spared (Faul, 2013).⁹⁰ This was also attested by some of the participants who expressed their constant anxiety about being raped. To them it is the main concern that someone might decide to take away what they value most in their lives, their virginity. They argued that it is not necessarily virginity that exposes them to rape risks but in South Africa every woman is at a risk of being raped and that is what makes them to live in fear. They described how there was once a belief that when a HIV positive man sleeps with a virgin, he would be cured of the virus. However, this belief seems to have diminished as people have been educated. The very high statistics of rape incidents in South Africa indicates that no woman is safe from rape; it is a matter of trusting God wherever they are – on their own, they feel they cannot make it.

Researchers such as Leclerc-Madlala (2002:2) affirm that the rape crisis in South Africa is escalating. This author pointed out that “according to nationwide study by the University of South Africa, one million women and children are raped annually, and this probably reflects a fraction of the total rape problem, as most of rape survivors never report to authorities”. Likewise Haddad (2003:150) confirmed that South African rape statistics makes South Africa one of the leading countries in sexual violence against women and children. She indicated that a particular non-governmental organisation (NGO) concerned with rape crisis “suggested that one woman is raped every 23 seconds in South Africa. There has been a sharp increase in child rapes in recent years...Clearly South African society is facing an enormous crisis regarding the prevalence of sexual violence.” Haddad, like many other researchers such as African Women Theologians identify gender imbalance and power dynamics between men and women that

⁹⁰Michelle, Faul (2013), “*South Africa Violence Against Women Rated Highest In the World.*” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/08/south-africa-violence-against-women_n_2837804.html Accessed 14/11/2015.

render women vulnerable to suffer sexual violence because of their social constructed inferiority.

Therefore young women too are the targets of rape and sexual violence against women, not because they are virgins as suggested by some scholars such as Gupta (2000), but simply because they are women. It cannot be disputed that at some stage (especially from the 1990s to early 2000s) that the rape situation was exacerbated by the myth that sex with a virgin cures HIV and AIDS (Bruce, 2003:45 and Leclerc-Madlala, 2002:3). However, nowadays rape perpetrators target any woman including toddlers and the oldest women in society. It is always the girl-children who are the worst sufferers of such violence. An example of incest was given by one participant. Such incidents have become so common that the media covers similar stories almost every day. For instance, Mthokozisi Myeni⁹¹ broadcasted news that a 43 year old man was sentenced to life imprisonment at Empangeni for having raped his own daughter since she was eight years old until she became pregnant at the age of eleven. Two days later another news broadcast⁹² stated that a 42 year old man from Ndwedwe was convicted with a life time sentence in Verulem court for having repeatedly raped his 13 year old daughter from 2013 until 2017.

6.4.3.1 Communal reaction to rape survivors

It is a regrettable reality that some young girl-children grow up robbed of their virginity by their own parents or relatives, which requires a positive communal reaction to rape survivors. These young girls come to the stage of *ubuntombi* but nobody will ever come to know their story until they decide to break the silence, which makes it very hard for them to reclaim their identity as *izintombi*. They can only be able to deal with their circumstance when they are positively accepted as full members of the society without the stigma of what had happened to them. Some participants felt that rape survivors need to remain positive in life and not hold onto such experiences. They also advised that they need to tell themselves that life goes on and their dreams can still be realised while the community also needs to show them love and acceptance. It is for this reason that this study seeks to retrieve positive aspects of *ubuntombi* to become a sex educational tool that could accommodate all Zulu young women even those deprived of their identity as *izintombi* from childhood by being raped. These are just few

⁹¹ The News broadcaster of Ikhwezi Community Radio station, 5 pm news on the 05/06/2017.

⁹² The News broadcast of Ikhwezi Community Radio station, 1 pm news on 07/06/2017

examples of the plight of the girl-children and women in the South African context that need to be exposed, condemned, and discarded with no stone left unturned if the true solution is to be found.

Rape is one of the worst increasing threats to the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. Some participants raised their concern that tested girls have to walk in groups and avoid isolated places especially at night so that they are safe from being raped. The group of *izintombi* from Melmoth raised similar concerns about remaining with exposed bodies after their traditional ceremonies that require traditional attire because of rape threats. Participants discussed the issue of dressing fully following events which require traditional attire but ultimately argued that the problem is not with the exposure of their bodies but with the sick moral fibre of society with lowered moral responsibility. The rape situation and the concerns raised by the participants in this study point to the lack or diminished practice of *Ubuntu* and communal cooperation in the upbringing of the children. This is another indication of how hard it is for these young women who are determined to maintain *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice to do this on their own without the collective effort of the society to support them.

6.4.4 Popular culture, peer pressure and its effects on ubuntombi

The popular culture that dominates among young people today is sexual freedom and liberalism. This is affirmed by Bruce (2003:45) who from the South African context asserted that “there is a high incidence of sexually active teenagers and unmarried adults. Some of this sexual activity is by choice and many today consider mutual consent as the only norm by which to evaluate whether such activity is acceptable.” Similarly, even though writing from an American context, Shivanandan (2010:376-377) explained the current popular culture as one of the most liberal cultures when it comes to sexual relationships. This author pointed out that young people do not have to bother about knowing each other before they engage in sexual intercourse. While they yearn for something deep and worthy of commitment such as serious love relationships, they do not rethink their sexual actions; they just live life as it presents itself at that particular moment. She further noted that the twentieth century came with a drastic sexual revolution among the youth. Shivanandan traced it back to the 60s as she maintained that “both in terms of sexual beliefs and behaviour, a new situation arose in the 1960s. Up to the 1960s, an equilibrium or balance, at least publicly, between sex for pleasure (sexual liberalism) and traditional Judeo-Christian condemnation of premarital and extramarital sex (fornication and adultery) and homosexuality prevailed. This equilibrium collapsed in the

1960s.” Thereafter contraceptives and alternative sexual lifestyles have become normative in the popular culture where sexual activities are almost fashionable and those who do not conform to this norm are considered antiquated.

Furthermore, the high rate of teenage pregnancy indicates that risky sexual behaviours are more prevalent in spite of the precautionary measures at their disposal such as contraceptives and condoms. It is in this popular culture that some young Zulu women and others in South African context are daring to remain chaste and maintain their sexual purity through the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. It is one of the worst challenges for such young women because they are regularly exposed to sexual images in society. This is affirmed by Finlo Rohrer⁹³ who maintains that “in the 21st century...sexual imagery can be found in many places, and many young people expect to have a number of sexual partners before eventually settling down.” Therefore if these young women do not conform, it feels like they are going against the social norm for young people today. This popular culture is exacerbated by the media, particularly TV popular drama series that display sexual life as the epitome of entertainment. This was also affirmed by some of the participants who upheld that there are very few programmes that encourage virginity of the girls and even in TV dramas; there are hardly any characters that promote virginity of the girls. They felt that they are always portrayed as girls in relationship with boys and eventually are pressurised to have sex with their boyfriends. Therefore there are no lessons to be learnt from boyfriends and girlfriends who wait for each other because of love; instead it is more about the sexual activities in which young people engage.

In addition, things that were considered disgraceful in the traditional lifestyle of the Zulu people have become popular such as child-bearing of young women before marriage. This was affirmed by the majority of the participants who indicated that traditionally it was a shameful thing to give birth at home as a young woman before getting married. That is why the young man was compelled to marry the girl that he had made pregnant. However, participants further indicated that today it has become fashionable to have a baby as a young woman. If a girl does not have a child these days, she is considered as an outdated person – there are even often baby shower parties for the girls who are becoming mothers. Participants felt that this encourages every young woman to have a baby because without one they may be considered barren.

⁹³ Rohrer, Finlo “BBC News Magazine”

http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8644120.stm?ad=1 Accessed 15/09/2015.

Participants further indicated that nowadays they are expected to have babies before they turn 20 years old. At the age of 25 they are 'late'; at the age of 30, they are presumably barren.

Izintombi unanimously agreed that while traditionally it was marriage that determined the bearing of children, these days it feels like a young woman is an alien if she maintains that language. Some claimed they have been confronted by local people who say they are now the only ones who do not have children in their local area and they need to have a baby. Closely related to this peer pressure, it appears that young men are also coerced to make the girls pregnant so that mothers can become grandmothers at an early age. This was disclosed by Mandisa, one of the participants from TFG of non-*izintombi* who felt that parents contribute to the perpetuation of teenage pregnancy because it has become fashionable among the mothers to have grandchildren while they are still young. She felt that boys need to be given workshops about these issues to learn how to withstand this pressure from their parents.

This indicates that the pressure for the girl child to be a target of pregnancy is increasing instead of diminishing due to weird things becoming fashionable. It demonstrates how challenging it is for the young women who have chosen to remain as *izintombi* to stay focussed on their dream because it seems to be a lonely and an unpopular route that goes against the common popular culture. Some maintained that *ubuntombi* defines the kind of friends they have since there are social expectations and constraints that if they are still virgins, their friends need to be virgins also. All of them will be loved and appreciated by their parents because their friends define the people they are. Families and society at large also believe that they learn good things from good friends and virginity is socially considered as a good thing because of the preservation of purity. However such friends are rare nowadays and so it ends up being an isolated route and a serious challenge when they are not together as *izintombi* in order to support each another.

6.4.5 Poverty

Poverty can drive women into doing things that they never imagined themselves doing. In her research in KZN, Turshen (2000:69-82) found that besides the gender imbalance between men and women, poverty is one of the contributing factors that compels women to engage themselves in risky sexual behaviours. This is because when they are poor they are easily attracted to transactional sex for the sake of being able to get something to eat. Similarly Haddad (2009:10) pointed out that transactional sex is one of the best tools used by the elderly men to lure young women of school-going age, particularly if such girls are from poverty-stricken areas. This was affirmed by some of the young women in this study: because of poverty

some parents expect their growing girls to participate in transactional sex for the sake of a plastic bag of groceries for an amount as small as R50. They also felt that fathers have lost their prestige of fatherhood, when they see a neighbour's girl growing up; they no longer see a child but *intombi* because they seem to have forgotten the roots of Zulu cultural lifestyle. They further pointed out that nowadays it is very rare to hear a father praising and blessing a well growing girl, instead he entices her with material possessions such as airtime or taking her for fast food. If fast food costs only R30 it means the value of the girls' body is only R30. They felt that this targeting of young women devalues *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice because poverty is used to lure young girls into temporary luxuries that leave them with multiple problems such as early pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases.

This is a serious challenge for the young women who grow up in poor families where there is hardly any income and the girl is seen as a commodity that can be sold for sex in order to put food onto the table. This does not only put the lives of such young women at risk but it also jeopardises their future because they might not see the need to further their studies or pursue higher goals in life since transactional sex might become an easier way to earn money. Moreover it dehumanises them as young women and leaves them dependent on men and inferior on a perpetual basis. Hence there is a need for the emancipation of women who strive to preserve themselves for the sake of betterment of their lives and building up brighter future that will restore them to full humanity. Leclerc-Madlala (2004:2) has suggested that some young women, particularly in urban areas, do not engage themselves in sexual transactions because of poverty; rather they do it for luxurious benefits such as jewellery, mobile phones and trendy fashion items. Sex education becomes critical because it is probably ignorance that puts these young women at such risk. It is in this that the proposal of *ubuntombi* as a sex educational tool becomes necessary if young women are to be empowered with sexual information and knowledge that will enable them to make informed decisions before sexual engagements.

6.5 *Ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool for young people

There is a dire need for indigenous sex educational tools among the young people in the Zulu cultural context because the erosion of the cultural ways of life that came with colonialism left a perceptible gap in the sexual guidance of the youth. While the modern era of rights, freedom and liberalism is appreciated for political liberation, it also came with a number of challenges that were not so common in the past, according to authors that kept a record of the lifestyle of

the Zulu people since precolonial times such as Msimang (1975). Among such challenges are irresponsible sexual behaviours that leave many young lives at risk in many visible ways as indicated throughout this study. While the intention is not to call young people to go back to the past and live life as in the olden days, *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice has a number of things that can be emulated and even used to devise ways of life that can benefit young people in the current era.

Having identified some challenges that militate against a Zulu girl child and the way in which *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice has been relegated to the margins of society; there is a need for the emancipation of young Zulu women who find consolation in this cultural practice. Their voices have been heard that they are not preserving themselves as *izintombi* to satisfy anyone else. However, in *ubuntombi* they do not only find a cultural practice that gives them an identity as young Zulu women but also a cultural heritage in which they become primary beneficiaries in the current context. It has also been indicated that these young women engage themselves in this cultural practice out of their own free will and they do not approve of any coercion towards participation in *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. It is therefore only reasonable to give them support in their endeavour to remain who they want to be and the choice they have made in life so that they may also enjoy their full humanity. It is for this reason that this study proposes a model that can be used for the emancipation of these young women through the recognition of *ubuntombi*, which is the cultural practice of their choice as an indigenous sex educational tool for young people.

6.5.1 The model proposal of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool

Having heard many voices that contest *ubuntombi* as an indigenous cultural practice in the preceding paragraphs, this study raises an indigenous voice from the IKS perspective that proposes a model of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool. This model intends to address some of the concerns found in the study such as the relegation of this practice and the loss of sex education for young people in the Zulu context. While *ubuntombi* may not be the only sex educational tool to be utilised, the main concern is that it should not be precluded as an obsolete practice that needs to be laid to rest when some young people can still find a useful indigenous sexual practice in it. Arguably it may be critiqued, like the American “Abstinence Only Until Marriage (AOUM)” sex educational model for the lack of efficacy in delaying sexual debuts, reducing sexual risk behaviours or improving reproductive health outcomes

(Hall *et al.* (2016)⁹⁴. Another critique pointed out by these authors is that AOUM, which is similar to *ubuntombi* “withholds information about condoms and contraception, promotes religious ideologies and gender stereotypes, and stigmatizes adolescents with non-heteronormative sexual identities.”

From the indigenous perspective, however, *ubuntombi* is the only efficient lifestyle that guarantees the young girl’s security from early sexual debut, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases if honestly practised. While the use of condoms and contraceptives are not encouraged from the cultural perspective as indicated in previous chapters of this study, their usage by those who choose to do so is not without problems in the African context. For instance, research has proven that African women have very slim chances if any of exercising their assertiveness and initiative in negotiating safer sex practices such as the use of the condoms and contraceptives (Ngubane, 2010:3; Haddad, 2009:10). These researchers indicate that the cause of this is gender imbalances in love relationships between males and females. Hence the need for an indigenous sex educational tool that will assist young women to use their sexuality for their security even though it may not be guaranteed in marriage but the critical stage of being young will have been covered. Chike Eze (2016:268-283) seems to have realised the same need of the proposal of sex education model in the context of HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. However, this author pays full attention to childhood sex education because she believes early childhood sexual awareness will curb early sexual debuts that come with undesirable outcomes in the lives of young people and the community at large. While the work by Chike Eze is valid and very relevant, this study’s focus is on the proposal of a model that takes into consideration *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool. In this way, the positive aspects of *ubuntombi* will be retrieved and become relevant in the modern era where every possible solution is required to address social ailments that plague current society.

Furthermore it has been found in this study that sex education that came with this cultural practice of *ubuntombi* during puberty got lost due to colonial influences and modernity. While it might be impractical to recover social structures such as *amaqhikiza* and grandmothers that ensured sex educational re-enforcement in the traditional practice of *ubuntombi*, a model that

⁹⁴ Hall, K.S.; Sales, J.M.; Komro, Kelli A. and Santelli, John 2016. “The State of Sex Education in the United States”, *J Adolesc Health*, 2016 June, 58(6), pp. 595-597.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5426905/> Accessed 26/04/2018.

takes into consideration positive aspects of *ubuntombi* can be developed. It is for this reason that this study proposes a model of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool. This proposed model can simply be known as RCLC. R stands for the Respect of virginity by everyone, C stands for Charity begins at home, L stands for Language in sex education, and the final C stands for Cover everything and everybody. These simplified phrases from which the acronym RCLC is derived, have been identified, formulated and compiled from the expressed opinions of different participants in this study. These phrases are also the abbreviated form of the subject content of the model of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool.

Like Kanyoro (2002), this study has lamented the effects of encounter of African cultures with other cultures. The key question that arises in this encounter, as understood by Kanyoro (2002:58), is the moral dilemma of choices to be made and the dilemma of addressing the impact of individual's rights in a society that has preferred community over individual rights as is the case with the practice of *ubuntombi* and virginity testing. Using a feminist cultural hermeneutics framework, this study proposes that *ubuntombi* can also be used as an indigenous sex education model. Kanyoro (2002) has noted that not all that is in a culture is necessarily oppressive to women. She further pointed out that there are a number of cultural practices that are redemptive to women that need to be upheld and celebrated. Therefore the model proposed in this study intends to retrieve positive aspects of *ubuntombi* in order to make them relevant for use in addressing sex education among the youth. It also intends to revisit the lost sex education models such as non-penetrative sex that were associated with *ubuntombi* during the period of courtship among young Zulu people.

While proposing such models, this study also acknowledges the sex fatigue that the young generation is facing on teachings of abstinence, and that the young generation is becoming more and more sexually active and most of the African societies especially those that practised abstinence are now experiencing moral dilemmas. As stated earlier in this study, the age at which young people begin to engage in sex activities is getting younger and younger. Kanyoro (2002) observed that contemporary African society is lamenting a moral world fallen apart. Africans are unable to return to the past yet are afraid of the future. In the past, sexual behaviour was not reckless pleasure but a controlled and disciplined affair. Therefore the kind of sex practised by young people then (non-penetrative sex) was controlled and monitored by the community. Although this study may not call for a monitored form of sex education, the main aim is to allow young people to make informed decisions when it comes to sexual behaviour.

This is because, as identified in the study, there is also lack of knowledge that emerges from indigenous people in terms of sex education. Therefore as suggested earlier in this chapter *ubuntombi* as an indigenous form of sex education can be included and absorbed in the school curriculum as part of the indigenous resources for young people. This can be with particular emphasis on cultural heritage month such as September in which cultural activities are promoted and celebrated in schools.

When a model of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool is espoused and utilised, it is assumed that it will make a difference in the way in which many young people engage in sexual behaviours. The kind of sexual behaviours that some of the young people engage in, does not only jeopardise their health but also their future, especially young girls who end up becoming mothers. Rafudeen and Mkasi-Khuzwayo (2016:2) have noted that there has been a realization that too many young girls' educational opportunities are shattered by early pregnancies while chances of HIV infections increase through risky sexual behaviours. *Ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool model, proposed by this study, will also emancipate young Zulu women and other ethnic groups to appreciate the fact that not all that is in the past, as far as African culture is concerned, is primitive and unworthy. In addition, the model intends to encourage the lost collective responsibility of the bringing up of children that used to be very effective in the traditional practice of *ubuntombi* due to communal collaboration. As Kanyoro (2001) suggested, commitment to the changing of oppressive systems has to be done within the community otherwise its validity will be questionable.

6.5.2 The scope and subject content of the model of ubuntombi as an indigenous sex educational tool

As indicated above, RCLC is the proposed name of the model of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool. Each letter of the acronym stands for the phrase that has subject content that needs to be taught as sex education using *ubuntombi* as a tool in the model. It is further illustrated as follows:

R = Respect of virginity by everyone

C = Charity begins at home

L = Language in sex education

C = Cover everything and everybody

At the heart of each of these phrases *ubuntombi* is the core part of the teachings from an indigenous perspective. The purpose is to retrieve and demonstrate utility of those positive aspects of *ubuntombi* in the modern context that were identified from the contribution of the participants. The subject content of each phrase is further explicated below.

6.5.2.1 *Respect of virginity by everyone*

As pointed out earlier in this study, some of the participants indicated that in the traditional lifestyle of the Zulu people, *ubuntombi* was a highly regarded cultural practice and therefore virginity was collectively respected by every member of the community. Losing *ubuntombi* to the young women was losing everything they could ever have or be and this was seriously acknowledged by all the members of the community. Hence, males as well as females of every age equally respected virginity of the growing virgins and nobody interfered with the Zulu girl child even if she had made a choice among her suitors. The chosen boyfriend was addressed by *amaqhikiza* on how to behave himself when visiting the young woman and he understood the social repercussions of violating the girl. As indicated earlier, *ukuyona intombi* (violating the young woman) did not mean rape or sexual violence but penetrative sex was considered the worst form of behaviour. This is because it did not only lower the girl's dignity as an *intombi* but it also deprived her of her status among other *izintombi*, particularly if the defloration resulted in pregnancy. She prematurely became a mother which left her in-between the stage of *ubuntombi* and the motherhood hence she was labelled *ilulwane* (bat) because it is neither a bird nor a rat. Furthermore, the whole family of *intombi* was relegated to the outskirts of society if she had failed them through defloration because she was an economic asset of the whole family, particularly the father whose kraal was closely linked to her virginity.

Even though today *izintombi* do not preserve themselves because of the *lobola* to be paid to their families as it was found in this study, they still deserve respect for the preservation of their virginity as human beings. It is one of the positive aspects of *ubuntombi* that a young woman was highly respected for who she was as a virgin and nobody in the community would treat her disrespectfully, including suitors. Young women were not sexual objects or targets of rape as has almost become the norm nowadays. This model therefore proposes that respect for virginity needs to be adopted and reclaimed as one of the most positive aspects of *ubuntombi* as a form of emancipation for young women who have made a choice of preserving themselves. This is by no means a suggestion that those who are no longer *izintombi* should be disrespected because every woman deserves to be treated well. When respect of young women is promoted

and exercised everywhere in society, the South African constitutional right to safety and security could become a reality for young women in South Africa.

6.5.2.2 *Charity begins at home*

Some of the participants were asked how feasible it is for *ubuntombi* to be retrieved, reclaimed and promoted as a Zulu heritage and identity in times of human and sexual rights. They responded that they felt *ubuntombi* could be revived and reclaimed because it still exists. However, they thought that it must not start with the testing mothers; it should start with the parents – as the English saying goes ‘charity begins at home’. They believed that there should be sex education between the child and the parent at home whereby the mother explains everything to the child before telling her what she as a mother prefers, though she may not enforce it to her child. Many of *izintombi* as well as non-*izintombi* said they never received any sex education or guidance from their parents at home. For this reason, they had to blindly find their way in life and this left the blame with parents who had kept quiet to their girl children who needed parental guidance as they grew up. The participants articulated that the role of the parents is very important in raising up children and telling them the truth. They felt that this is because almost all of them in their age group grew up in the situation where their parents never told them anything about behaving themselves as young women.

Chike Eze (2016:270) made a similar observation asserting that “globally, parents tend to shy away from childhood sex education on the basis that children are young, and as such are not able to deal with the complications associated with sexual activity.” This is because in the African context anything to do with sexual discussion is considered a taboo, particularly among ethnic groups (Ndinda *et al.* 2011:7; Bastien, Kajula & Mushwezi, 2011:1; Chike Eze, 2016:275; Dimbuene & Defo, 2011:129). Similarly, in the Zulu context, parents mainly avoid sex education due to fear of an open conversation about sexual matters, especially with the children, which at times is perceived as an exposure of the children to what they are too innocent to know. This was affirmed by Ngubane (2010:2) who claimed that “adults often assume that young people are too young to discuss and be concerned about sex. However these assumptions are often based on their own embarrassment about the subject and prevent young people from having access to the information they need for healthy relationships.” Yet sexual debuts today commence at a very early age and even primary school children become pregnant as indicated in the preceding paragraphs.

Therefore the call made by Chike Eze for parental in-depth involvement with the sex education of their children is at the heart of the need identified among *izintombi*. In this study the same call is being made to parents to not abdicate this core responsibility of giving parental guidance to their children if they are to contribute positively in their informed decision making concerning sexual activities. Consequently this author's opinion cannot be overemphasised when she maintains that "parents are the first source of information about life. Therefore, their ability to inculcate the right information about sex helps children avert making risky mistakes as they grow up" (Chike Eze, 2016:269). This highlights the importance of sex education to be initiated from home. Consequently, the parental role is inevitable and crucial in the bringing up of the child with responsible attitudes when it comes to sexual matters. This need was confirmed by a number of young women that while nowadays children are exposed to a lot of information about being responsible for their sexual behaviours in schools, the primary educators should be at home where the child receives initial formation. They also felt that even children may be exposed to sex education in society, in the media and at school; it is not sufficient if parents do not play their role as primary sex educators. They will have themselves to blame when their children fail to uphold positive sexual values of society.

6.5.2.2.1 Media and sex education

While some participants felt that the media played a role in providing sex education, others felt that the media and other sources of information such as peers, TV programmes and computers are unsuitable educators of our time for young people. Hence they mourned that the silence of the parents as probably the worst contributing factor to the detriment of young women's lives because keeping sex education a secret by not opening up to the young ones leaves them in the dark. As a result they do everything according to what they learn from their peers and friends because at home they have never been counselled or advised on how to behave themselves in a responsible way. Chike Eze (2016:269) agreed that the silence of the parents does not mean that children will remain ignorant about sexual activities; instead they may learn it even at a far earlier age than what parents anticipate. This author further warns that other sources of sex information, which could be peers and the media such as TV and internet, can provide inappropriate information that will arouse sexual curiosity among the young people and they might desire to experience it unquestioningly. It thus boils down again to the saying that charity begins at home because girl-children cannot learn to behave themselves from the information they acquire from outside of their homes when their parents are quiet.

It is for these reasons that this proposed model recognises the need for the parents to retrieve and reclaim the role of *amaqhikiza* and grandmothers as primary educators of their children as they grow up at home. Chike Eze (2016:268) maintained that the appropriate knowledge to be imparted to the young ones about sex education comprises of knowledgeable cultural norms and values socially permissible within the cultural milieu of the children. This author further suggested that parents may be afforded with an opportunity to instil moral values and upright upbringing to their children if they get involved in their sex education. If not, parents will always regret the actions of their children who, without guidance, try to find ways to survive on their own in life. This was also confirmed by Masemola-Yende & Mataboge (2015:1) who concluded that “female teenagers should use their families as primary sources of information for reproductive health promotion and educational institutions should build on this to aid the prevention of teenage pregnancy.” Even in first world countries such as America, research indicates that young people still receive stable sex education from their parents, though it may not replace or make up for formal instruction on sex education (Hall *et al.* 2016).⁹⁵

This goes together with parental love, which the participants felt cannot be received anywhere else but at home. Children need to know that nobody can give them parental love more than parents themselves. This demonstrates that the role of parental guidance is an essential and a core part of empowering a child. This was also affirmed by Chike Eze (2016:273) who claimed that “knowledge is power which parents cannot withhold from their children, thus there is need to start empowering children with early sex education in order to sustain their human rights and dignity.” Therefore parents should not abdicate this key role because they are the first ones to be blamed when their child has made poor choices. It may not be guaranteed that those who have received proper parental guidance are immune to external influences that can cause them to make unwise decisions; nevertheless parents will have played their part. Hence this model promotes basic parental guidance that would ensure that their young ones are properly led in terms of sex education in the path to adulthood.

6.5.2.3 *Language in sex education*

There is a need to tell young people the exact information with precision of what they need to know in terms of the language used in sex education. For instance Heather MacDonald (1998)⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Hall, K.S.; Sales, J.M.; Komro, Kelli A. and Santelli, John 2016. “The State of Sex Education in the United States”, *J Adolesc Health*, 2016 June, 58(6), pp. 595-597.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5426905/> Accessed 26/04/2018.

⁹⁶ Mac Donald, Heather. 1998. “The Real Welfare Problem is Illegitimacy – The Social Order, Politics and Law”

suggests that sex education should include warnings that sex is for people that are mature enough to take responsibility for anything that might happen after sexual intercourse, such as reproduction that comes with enormous liability. Even if parents could be there to play their role, it remains insufficient to tell their children half-truths or speak in implicit language for fear of discussing sexual matters. This was one of the main concerns of young women that were interviewed: most parents speak but only in riddles or hidden language that can be easily misunderstood by growing children who have never been exposed to anything to do with sexual matters. This was also highlighted by Thobeka:

I think it is pointless to use a hidden language when you speak to the children about sex so that they may understand what is at stake. Sometimes they say do not sleep with a boy because he has a sausage but now to you as a child a sausage is a nice thing to eat and you wonder what is wrong with it. Thus the language used about sex related issues needs to be explicit such as “do not allow the boy to insert his penis on your vagina” if we really mean business about helping the growing children to understand and be scared for their lives.

Thobeka’s response seemed to have been a suggestion of a number of participants from different research sites who felt that whenever parents address sexual issues in Zulu, they use a language that is not easy for their young ones to understand. For instance, at puberty if they give any advice it will be a warning that girls should not play with boys because they will become pregnant. Some *izintombi* indicated that they grew up playing with boys and it brings confusion when at puberty they are told that playing with boys will make them pregnant. It therefore becomes critical for them to know exactly how the boys can make them pregnant in order to understand what kind of play they are talking about.

In this model parents should become primary sex educators at home and therefore they need to develop openness and trust with their children so as to close the generational gap that might make it very difficult to discuss sexual matters. Chike Eze (2016:270) suggested that “children’s sex education ought to follow the procedure of open and truthful conversation which must be ongoing.” Some of *izintombi* also recommended that parents and their children need a grounded relationship first wherein the child is not afraid to share with her mother about her personal life. Some girls are so scared of their parents that it is difficult even to share that she has been raped because she might be scared that she has lost her virginity through it and everybody might assume that it is because of her immorality. However, if the relationship of

the mother and the daughter is characterised by openness and trust to the extent that they discuss anything to do with personal life of the daughter, the foundation could have been laid for proper sex education. Therefore trust and openness become key issues because without it there could no proper relationship between parents and children to enable them personal discussions that might include sexual issues.

Izintombi further suggested that it is essential for the parents to know how to talk to their children particularly to raise teenagers because at school the children are taught but they are not able to share with their parents what they learn from school. Likewise, educators at school can also take the life orientation subject beyond the classroom to the parents during school parental meetings so as to assist the parents who might not be able to journey with their teenagers at home. From an American context, Hall *et al.* (2016)⁹⁷ observed that a time for class formal instruction is too limited to prioritise sex education only because there are other youth behavioural concerns that the school has to deal with such as substance abuse, bullying and the like. Hence the significance of the cohesive and consistent collaboration of social structures such as educators and parents to avoid a “patchwork” of sex educational practices. Thus information from the educators should equip the parents to play this essential role effectively and close the gap that was caused by the lack of the role of *amaqhikiza* that has led the children to find the information anywhere else. Similarly Chika Eze (2016:269) suggested that parents need to display interest in what their children learn from school in terms of the content of sex education so as to avoid any misrepresentation in what they learn from school.

Some of the young women also felt that testing mothers can play this role very well because they must have friendly relationships with the girls they deal with to be able to be open about personal and sexual issues. They can also involve the parents to let them know what their expected role is towards their children since these mothers know and discuss sex related issues with the girls. This was further affirmed by almost all *izintombi* from Nomkhubulwane who expressed that their testing mothers are very open with them about sexual issues and they hide nothing in terms of what they need to hear as young women. This helps them to know exactly what is at stake when they can be permissive with their bodies to anything that might take away

⁹⁷ Hall, K.S.; Sales, J.M.; Komro, Kelli A. and Santelli, John 2016. “The State of Sex Education in the United States”, *J Adolesc Health*, 2016 June, 58(6), pp. 595-597.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5426905/> Accessed 26/04/2018.

their virginity before the intended time. With this kind of necessary openness and trust it might not be very difficult to tell the children with precision what they need to hear instead of using implicit language that does not help them to understand what is at stake. Therefore in this model parents and other prospective users become sex educators that have mutual relationship with their intended learners in order to ensure reciprocal partnership as they lead them through the sexual path to adulthood.

6.5.2.4 *Cover everything and everybody*

This part of the model promotes that sex education needs to cover everything that young people need to know about preservation of *ubuntombi* and helpful traditional ways of practising safe sex. Such traditional ways include non-penetrative sex known as *ukusoma* (Chisale, 2016:230), even though it seems to have disappeared into the past. However, the knowledge of how it was done and how *ubuntombi* was preserved through it while enjoying sexual relationships with their boyfriends might arouse interest for the young people to preserve themselves. It might also become an awareness campaign that there are still young women who have taken personal decisions to preserve themselves even in the current practice of *ubuntombi* and it still works for them. Put differently, *ubuntombi* as a tool for sex education from the indigenous perspective will enable those who teach the youth to give this as an alternative option to the current generation of the young people. Unlike currently where only contraceptives and sexual liberalism is being preached and there is nothing acknowledged from the indigenous perspective. In this way, sex education will have adopted a holistic approach that leaves young people with a wider choice in life. There is also a need for them to be taught everything about *ubuntombi* including its advantages benefits and challenges so that the youth will know that it is a harder choice but worth choosing. It also does not mean that they will remain chaste for life. The time will come for them to lose it but this must be when they are ready for it and in the right context in order to avoid difficulties that come with its early loss. They need to know the disadvantages of an early sexual debut that come with many regrets later in life.

Similarly, sex education is a need for every young person in the community. This model promotes that sex education should be inclusive of every young person, boys, girls and those who are considered to have lost *ubuntombi* in whatever way. This will help to ensure that *ubuntombi* is respected by everyone in society as it used to be in the past. The preceding paragraphs have demonstrated that many young women try to find their own way in life because nobody takes responsibility of giving them sexual guidance towards adulthood as it

used to happen in the past. This does not apply to young women alone, even young men have to find their way when it comes to sexual behaviour because the loss of indigenous sex education through the loss of the role of *amaqhikiza* and grandmothers left a vacuum that has never been filled to date. Consequently, they have to find sexual information from inappropriate sources such as media, peers and friends that normally give the positive side of sexual life but never disclose what happens behind the scenes after sexual intercourse. It is for this reason that *ubuntombi* as a tool for sex education should leave no stone unturned in terms of disclosing the beauty of sex at the right time and the regrets that it can cause at other times.

Likewise, those who are considered to have lost *ubuntombi* whether they have babies or not, deserve exposure to sex education because their mistakes may have been due to a lack of knowledge. This was affirmed by Masemola-Yende and Mataboge (2015:1) who suggested that it is essential for growing teenagers to be equipped with proper knowledge on how their bodies function when it comes to sexual relationships in order to avoid early sexual inception. They therefore need empowerment because knowledge is always power since it equips the individual with better and informed decision-making. Their exposure might help them to use a second chance profitably for their own benefit instead of remaining in the domain of the unsuccessful in life forever. For instance, it was found that attempts have been made from the indigenous perspective to give *izintombi* who have made mistakes, a second chance. This was indicated by Phila, an *intombi* from Melmoth who explained that there are now two forms of Reed dance, there is one for *izintombi* and there is another for non-*izintombi*, those who have become young mothers. The intention for the second one is to help the non-*izintombi* to avoid repeating the same mistakes and have even more children. It encourages them not to follow the fathers of their children who have dumped them after pregnancy because if they do they may return with more children. They are also encouraged not to depend on males for their survival; they need to be independent and continue with life. Some young women indicated that it does not matter that the hymen may never be intact again; they can still abstain from giving birth to second and third children until they are ready.

A number of young women further suggested that those who have made mistakes should rather wait for the right person who could be prepared to love and marry them in spite of having given birth before marriage. *Izintombi* were of the opinion that if they are not careful, they can be deceived into getting children from different fathers since males can be very flattering. They suggested that if a girl has a child, she needs to learn from her mistakes and close her legs

thereafter and if she does not yet have a baby, she needs to keep preserving herself and avoid sexual relationships that could result in a baby. Such forms of assistance to young people need to be encouraged and more sex education needs to be given to these young people to be enabled to reclaim their identity, heritage and pride as successful Zulu young people. Leaving them to continue with bad choices they initially made, might hinder their success and propel them to low social status, poor self-esteem, poverty and perpetual dependency. This was acknowledged by MacDonald (1998)⁹⁸ who claimed that childbearing before marriage is normally the cause of long life suffering and perpetual poverty, not only for the teenage mothers who forfeit their educational opportunities but also the children born to them. MacDonald further indicated that due to early childbearing, young mothers are usually restricted to being low-income earners for the rest of their lives with little supplementary assistance from the state. Sex education could therefore equip them with knowledge and skills to preserve themselves even after they have made initial mistakes in order to avoid perpetual poverty that will leave them with low self-esteem for life.

This model also includes those who have suffered from rape. They will be encouraged and still considered *izintombi* because what happened to them was not their fault. The intact hymen does not become an issue anymore but the choice they make thereafter is what matters most. Many participants explained that if a girl had been raped she is more than welcome in their midst as tested virgins because it was not her choice and consent to lose her intact hymen. However, to avoid fraudulent rape claims, when the rape survivor becomes part of virginity testing she has to produce a case number if she opened the case, if not parents are brought on board to verify her claim. Everyone in *izintombi* camp accepts and loves her as one of them without any discrimination because it happened against her will and she thereafter enjoys the beauty of being an *intombi* just like other young women. However, it is not feasible that young women who have wilfully made a choice to become sexually active could want to become tested *izintombi* again though sex education should equally include them. In this way *ubuntombi* as a sex educational tool becomes inclusive in all aspects. Even those who are *izintombi* in the church context, who might have made mistakes, are told that there is always a second chance with God who never gives up on God's creation. This model thus equally caters for all *izintombi* in the developmental stage of *ubuntombi* to reclaim their identity and heritage

⁹⁸ Mac Donald, Heather. 1998. "The Real Welfare Problem is Illegitimacy – The Social Order, Politics and Law" <https://www.city-journal.org/html/real-welfare-problem-illegitimacy-12161.html> Accessed 17/04/2018.

while *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool becomes their vehicle to a responsible, fulfilling and successful adulthood.

6.6 Some anticipated limitations

While RCLC model could be effective in bringing about change in the way in which *ubuntombi* is perceived due to its positive aspects for the emancipation of women and restoration of collective ways of young people's upbringing, there are some identified anticipated limitations. *Ubuntombi* is no longer a popular practice for many reasons disclosed in this study, nevertheless those who desire to see indigenous knowledge and perspectives restored, could give this model a chance and utilise it. The country is desperate for solutions to some of the social ailments mentioned in the study; therefore any feasible solution deserves a chance unless proven inaccurate or irrelevant. Some of the parents or primary caregivers have never been exposed to the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* due to colonial influence, modernity and western worldviews coupled with lack of knowledge and information about how *ubuntombi* was maintained. However, there are people such as *Indoni yamanzi*, a TV programme that advocates for *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice and testing mothers who can be consulted for more information on this practice. In addition, there is a need for a change in the African mind-set of viewing open discussion on sexual issues as a taboo because it might hinder information transmission to the young ones who desperately need sex education. Similarly, faith-based communities need to change the mind-set of perceiving sex education and frankness about sexual issues a taboo or means of encouraging depravity (Ankomah, 2010:200; Athar, 1996:2; Chike Eze, 2016:271). In the place of endorsing decadence among the youth of such communities, sex education and openness about sexual issues might come to their rescue because they are not spared from social ills that are challenging every young person in any walk of life.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has described contesting voices about the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* and found that many participants feel that it can be retrieved and reclaimed though virginity testing causes ambivalent attitudes towards *ubuntombi*. This is because according to a number of voices, particularly scholars, human rights and gender activists, it has the potential of infringing on the individual rights of young women. For this reason, human rights versus cultural practices were also examined and it was found that many indigenous people do not understand individual human rights that came with a democratic government because of their Western orientation.

While human rights are important for the liberation of the country from the oppressive colonial and past apartheid policies, they are perceived to be destructive of cultural practices such as *ubuntombi*. The chapter also demonstrated that there are some internal controversies within virginity testing that render it one of the challenges that militate against *ubuntombi*. The chapter further demonstrated that there are many other challenges that militate against *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice and some of them are threatening it to the core. However, the proposed RCLC model of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool could bring about hope that *ubuntombi* can actually be retrieved and reclaimed as an identity, religio-cultural heritage and a sex educational path to adulthood. The model has also become an indigenous voice that upholds *ubuntombi* as an indigenous educational tool to be used with all young people inclusively and holistically if it is to make a difference.

Chapter Seven

Key themes, findings and conclusions of the study

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the contesting voices on *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice and how this connects to the debate on the human rights versus cultural practices as well as examining challenges that militate against *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice. The chapter also proposed the RCLC model as an IKS contributing voice on how *ubuntombi* can become an indigenous sex educational tool. It was found that it is only through the retrieval of positive aspects of *ubuntombi* such as the ones identified in the proposed model that *ubuntombi* can be retrieved as a form of Zulu religio-cultural heritage, identity and a sex educational tool that serves as a path to adulthood. This chapter concludes the study by presenting *ubuntombi* as an alternative option for the young people today if it can be adopted and utilised in the form of RCLC model. This is done through the identification and summing up of the themes that emerged as significant highlights of the research findings.

7.2 Key themes that emerged from the research findings

There are a number of key themes that emerged as the study unfolded such as the crucial need for sex education. In the previous chapter, the RCLC model was proposed that promotes *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool that can be used in the modern world as an alternative lifestyle. This is because it is not feasible to call for every young woman to go back to the practice of *ubuntombi* in the traditional sense because of the freedom of choice and individual rights that are upheld in the country. This study has discovered that there are a number of positive aspects of *ubuntombi* that can be adopted and be utilised for sex education practices for young people within the Zulu ethnic group. Bruce (2003:66) asserted that “there is no doubt that private decisions have public consequences with far-reaching and unanticipated effects”. Such effects were identified in the prevalent sexual ills that plague our current society that come with disastrous outcomes because of irresponsible and risky sexual behaviours as indicated in the previous chapters. With the lack of proper means to fight social ills such as teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, Wickström (2010:532) contends that Zulu rural inhabitants “try to find alternative ways to protect young people” through the encouragement of *ubuntombi*. Bearing in mind, however, that it is not every sexual act that is a result of being sexually irresponsible, there are others who find themselves targets of sexual acts by

perpetrators of rape, incest, sexual abuse and violence against women and children as seen in the previous chapter. Therefore as a way forward, certain critical themes that are drawn out below that undergird the significance of the proposed RCLC model.

7.2.1 A need to revisit the collective upbringing of a girl child for social responsibility

There is a critical need to revisit the collective upbringing of a Zulu girl child as it used to happen in the past. In the general introduction of the study in Chapter One it was found that during the precolonial era, Zulu people lived a well-organised lifestyle with necessary structures in place that ensured that developmental stages of all societal members took place appropriately. Such cultural human developmental stages were however alien to British colonial rule in South Africa (Wickström, 2010:538). Wickström further indicated that cultural organisation of the Zulu community and its structures were eroded by colonial rule by abolishing initiation rites and education on thigh sex. Yet these were done with particular care by indigenous people when it came to the lives of young people in the form of early intervention with sex education by the local structures that were set aside for that task, particularly in puberty. These structures served as support system for the girl child in that they were socially respected by everyone in the community including men, family members and the society at large.

Wickström (2010:536) observed this collective effort at Nkolokotho where all community members cooperatively organised virginity testing to encourage *ubuntombi* with the hope that “boys, fathers, and uncles will be pressed to respect girls’ integrity and protect them from sexual abuse”. In this, the communal determination was to improve everyone’s behaviour so that girl children could be protected not only from unintended pregnancies and STIs but also from sexual violence. In the absence of these traditional social structures in the current context, homes, churches, testing sites, cultural institutions, youth camps and schools can take collective responsibility and become effective sex educational structures with the application of the RCLC model. These should not be exclusive centres that cater for *izintombi* only but for everyone, as the last C (Cover everyone) of the RCLC model indicates. This helps to address the current concerns raised by some of the participants that there are many governmental supported sex education teachings that are received by tested virgins only. This is considered unfair to those who are not able to attend virginity testing for different reasons because they miss out on valuable teachings that they also deserve to know.

In addition, Bruce (2003:65) observed that “in our context perhaps too little parental control is exercised; parents are often absent or take little responsibility for supervising their children”. While the western worldview considers parental control oppressive to the sexuality of the youth, this study found that there is a very earnest outcry about the absence of the parents in the lives of girl children. Hence, they find themselves having to make uninformed decisions and poor choices when it comes to sex related matters. It is for this reason that RCLC model recommends that basic sex education should begin with the parental initiative at home and should emanate from the grounded relationship between parents and their children and then it can spread to the external social structures. In addition, from the way in which virginity was handled among the Israelites, Bruce further commends that:

From the Old Testament we can recover the importance attached to safeguarding our children, girls and boys, not for honour of the parents or for reasons of power, but for the safety and well-being of our children. Our culture no longer attaches sufficient value to virginity nor does it offer adequate support to children who might prefer abstinence.

I cannot agree more with Bruce on this because, as has been noted in Chapter Six, many of the challenges that militate against *ubuntombi* are the outcome of the neglect of the collective social responsibility for the children, especially the girl-child. The puberty period that determined that *intombi* was now to be socially recognised as an adult and serious sex education provided, has become a private and personal matter. Due to the colonial invasion, such cultural practices faded away together with regulators that provided sex education to young people. There has never been any cultural replacement of such sex educational practices and social structures that re-enforced sexual behavioural guidance among the youth. Even those young people in the Christian context undergo similar lack of guidance in some instances due to the belief that sex education might encourage decadence (Chika Eze 2016:271; Ankomah 2010:200). As a result, young people have to find their own way of survival in the modern world where they face hostility even amongst those who claim to love them. Consequently, South Africa is among the leading countries when it comes to gender based and sexual violence against women and children.

Furthermore, this study has also found that sexual issues are treated as taboo among the Zulu people; as a result any discussion around them is avoided, which needs to change. Bruce (2003:64) also indicated a similar situation in faith-based communities and this leaves many young people vulnerable to high risk of teenage pregnancy and HIV and AIDS infections. Consequently *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice has diminished to the point of obliteration and

only survived because of those who still adhere to the traditional lifestyle of the Zulu people especially in rural areas. Hence the resurgence of virginity testing with the Reed Dance, to encourage *ubuntombi*, in the hope that it might assist young people to delay sexual relationships (Wickström, 2010:540). This in turn would help them avoid unnecessary regrets such as early and unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, loss of educational opportunities, morbidity and even demise. However, virginity testing has been met with vehement opposition from some scholars, gender and human rights activists. Therefore the prevalent discord in sexual discourses exacerbates sexual risks that young people face, hence the crucial need for finding harmony in the ways of curbing such risks. *Ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool as per the RCLC model could be one of the ways that might curb sexual risks among the youth if all the community members and social structures could take collective responsibility in teaching the youth.

7.2.2 Virginity testing as a source of criticism

As already indicated in preceding paragraphs and previous chapters, virginity testing has become a source of criticism and is currently devalued as a way in which parents can exert control over young people's sexual life. This was affirmed by Bruce (2003:52) who observed that "the revival of virginity testing has provoked considerable debate". Such debates have inappropriately left out significant voices of the young women such as *izintombi* who are full participants of this practice, which is another gap that is filled by this study as they have been given a platform to air their views. It has therefore been found that many young women who have made a choice to remain *izintombi* or who accepted the call of virginity testing from the king of the Zulus consider this cultural practice as part of their cultural heritage and identity. Therefore, these young women in almost all the research sites unanimously and vehemently upheld that they have neither been coerced nor controlled to make the choice of preserving themselves as *izintombi*. It is in this, that this study applied the expression *Sankofa* (Kanu, 2007:68-69) and looked back to the past to *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice to unearth and retrieve positive and creditable traditional aspects of this practice. According to Kanu, useful past traditions can be improved and refined in order to develop new meanings that are appropriate for contemporary society. Hence the proposal of the RCLC model which brings up positive and valuable aspects of *ubuntombi* from the past to serve as a sex educational tool for young people today.

In addition to being externally criticised, virginity testing was found to have many internal controversial issues such as corruption and being commercialised that discredit its worth and potential future survival. In addition, this study found that virginity testing might not be an ancient Zulu cultural practice, but only came into being because of colonial influence when Shepstone increased *lobola* payment to eleven cows (Rajuili, 2004:66 and Posel and Rudwick, 2011:1). As discussed in Chapter Four, the increased *lobola* specified by the colonial masters commercialised *lobola*, which led to many repercussions not only for women whose status was reduced to owned property, but also led to sexual policing of the virgins through virginity testing. From a feminist perspective, it is unacceptable that women's sexuality should be owned as property by men.

Yet this is what the increased *lobola* encouraged because men needed a mechanism to control the preservation of virginity due to the vested interest in it because of the *lobola* cows. Virginity testing provided that mechanism because after the father knew the value of *intombi* in terms of the number of cows he would benefit from her, it became essential for the virgins to be tested to ensure that the hymen remained intact until marriage. This entrenched patriarchal control of women whose bodies were subjected to examination as they carried the potential wealth of the family, particularly fathers. Bruce (2003:63) observed same thing in the Old Testament that "virginity was highly valued but it was an issue of sexual property; the loss of that virginity impacted primarily on the honour of the father and the male members of the family". It may therefore be concluded that virginity testing was a direct by-product of colonialism instead of being an ancient Zulu cultural practice. It is for this reason that this study has sought retrieval of positive aspects of *ubuntombi* itself rather than virginity testing, which is a form of its maintenance in the cultural context.

7.2.3 Ubuntombi as a positive tool for girl child empowerment

With the intention of demonstrating the changing landscape of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice, the study also found out that *ubuntombi* can be used as a tool for the girl child empowerment. For instance, it was found that *ubuntombi* gave *izintombi* a great deal of power in the traditional context because by preserving themselves, they earned honour, social status, respect and admiration. They could even physically fight for themselves by attacking the culprit that had made one of them pregnant and nobody retaliated because they were fighting for their identity and cultural heritage. The whole family and the community members jointly stood behind them because penetrative sex was not permitted and the girl child was admired as the flower of the

nation and the pride of the community. When *ubuntombi* was neglected or violated, a number of social disorders affected the whole community such as the unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Put differently, the social responsibility taken by all the community members to respect and protect the cultural practice of *ubuntombi* was in actual fact protecting social justice and prosperity. Bruce (2003: 63) asserted that “it is naïve to think that society is not adversely affected when it fails to protect the rights of those who rely on it for justice”. Therefore young women were highly respected and protected by all members of the society, and justice was done in terms of the protection of their cultural and human rights, unlike today where women grow up in such an unfriendly environment.

In addition, the whole society had to depend on *izintombi* for the appeasement of *Nomkhubulwane*, the fertility goddess, who was believed to be a virgin and in control of the provision of rain and crops. Therefore only virgins could cultivate her field and appeal to her on behalf of the tribe when there was drought and famine. The girl child also had a final word when it came to her suitors who had to plead for years for her affection without any coercion, rape threat or violence, which was socially condemned. Any young man who ill-treated or mishandled a young woman was despised for being *isishimane* or *isigwadi* (a bad name for a failure to win *izintombi*). In this, a girl exercised a lot of power and agency over her sexuality by controlling the timeframe of her sexual debut that hardly existed in any other stage of development. The girl child was also an economic asset to the family when it came to *lobola* cows to be paid for her when she got married. Even though this elicits criticism from a feminist perspective, as indicated earlier, it is one of the factors that contributed towards the communal protection of a girl child because it enhanced her value and worth in the family. These demonstrate tremendous empowerment and significance that the girl child enjoyed in the traditional Zulu context.

However, all these were mainly done with the goal of being marriageable for which young women were prepared and trained by their own mothers. This was also observed by Oduyoye:

A well-studied instrument of socialization in Africa is the preparation for marriage...the result of this socialization, is that African women are programmed to live for others. They live for children, family and community as these constitute the locus of one's worthiness. This in some cases has come to mean that women live to please men and pride themselves with being the providers of continuity and the carriers of tradition (Oduyoye2001:30-31).

While this might have been the case for Zulu people in the past, what was found in this study is that nowadays, very few mothers if any prepare their children for marriage. Many young

girls have to attend formal schooling from a very early age. The most important goal for every young woman nowadays is educational success and self-reliance in terms of financial independence, which is the theme that stood out strongly for many young women in Chapter Five of this study. It was found that for most of them marriage is not a critical part of their agenda as they insisted that if it happens that they get married, they will accept it but it is not their primary intention.

In this, young women intend to become contributors in the economic mainstream and do not want to fulfil women's inferiority which is normally exacerbated by hastening into marriage. This was observed by Oduyoye (2007:4) who upheld that "the idolization of marriage results in early marriage that deprives women of education and training for economic skills". However, in the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*, the issue is not about marriage per se but it is about avoiding sex idolisation that would end up depriving them of their educational opportunities and subsequently self-reliance and financial autonomy. For instance Bradshaw *et al.* (2013:2) discovered that development can be detrimental to women because of being excluded and discriminated against due to their gender. These authors identify women's educational progress and employment as the only route to uproot women inferiority, exclusion and discrimination from the marketplace domain and control of the social resources. This will enable women to fight some of the injustices that come with economic deprivation of women which leave them dependent on men. This was also observed by Oduyoye who pointed out that:

The most effective cultural injustice is in the operation of national economies. In many African countries the economic hold that men have over women is often a source of injustice. Life is structured in such a way that women are rendered economically dependent on men. Some men ensure this by insisting that their wives take no part in gainful employment. Women are oriented into low paid jobs and those who make it into the system soon hit a glass ceiling (Oduyoye 2007: 5).

This may become history if women are determined to keep their educational goals a priority, as was found to be the primary motivation of young women who preserve themselves as *izintombi* indicated in Chapter Five of this study. While it might be viewed differently from the outsiders, *izintombi* felt that *ubuntombi* is the practice that keeps them focussed on the future of their dreams. This is similar to Bruce's observation when she maintained that "virginity was of vital importance to Tamar since her hopes for the future and her future security depended on it" (Bruce, 2003:61). Even though *ubuntombi* is no longer about being marriageable according to what was found among the young women who have preserved their virginity in this study,

it still remains important to them. This is because they believe that it is through this cultural practice that they are able to become assertive in reclaiming their cultural heritage and identity with which they are able to face the future. It is in this that cultural hermeneutics become effective that “boldly criticizes what is oppressive while advocating for the enhancement of what is liberative not only for women but for the whole community” (Oduyoye, 2001:17). It is true that when women play their role as educationally and economically worthwhile participants in society, this results in significant empowerment and the whole community benefits. This is in spite of challenges that militate against women as it has historically been the case in every part of the world. For instance, Kundsinn (1974:9) writing from the American context argued:

Occasionally, however, a few women can be seen pursuing professions and reaching remarkable degrees of success despite the obvious obstacles. This fact raises a number of questions. What is the source of their motivation? What factors influence their performance? How do these women look at themselves with regard to the traditional female roles of wife and mother? How are they able to achieve – and how do they feel about their achievements – in the context of an ambivalent, and often hostile, environment?

It is an undeniable fact that many young Zulu women are still struggling to climb up the ladder of success, and as it was pointed out in Chapter Six of this study, there are so many obstacles that make their social world hostile to them and very few make a success. For instance, Bradshaw *et al.* (2013:3) rightly acknowledged the approach of Gender and Development (GAD), which does not only recognise the importance of adding women in developmental processes but also problematises the root causes of their exclusion. It is for this reason that if there are young women who have made a choice of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice and they view it as a springboard to success, they need to be respected and socially supported as advocated by the RCLC model. In other words they weigh their life choices from the perspective of how their choices will give them a richer life or a wider set of options (Epstein, 1974:13). The fact that they perceive this cultural practice as their primary source of motivation for modern success, despising the traditional role that confined young women to the traditional roles of being marriageable, led to the invention of the RCLC model. Put differently *ubuntombi* can be retrieved and be revitalised not only to attend the Reed Dance and be advertised for men to choose marriageable ones but to empower them with ‘No’ to every obstacle that stands against their educational success and financial independence. It is in this that Oduyoye rightly asserted:

Instead of economic viability becoming a source of violence against women, it could be the space for the cooperation of women and men. The criteria should be ability, not gender. Women could be empowered to resist men's assumption of superiority and its resultant impunities that violate women. Instead of men using coercive power to keep women economically non-viable they could empower women to be productive and educate girls to be assertive and enterprising. Instead of grooming daughters to exchange them as commodities upon maturity, girls could be brought up to understand that marriage is not an institution by which they could exchange domestic, sexual and reproductive services for financial support by a man. Men could be socialized from an early age to understand [that] marriage is much more than acquiring a domestic servant and a breeder (Oduyoye, 2007:6).

Hearing the arguments by Oduyoye, *ubuntombi* could thus become a tool of liberation for young women from cultural constraints that hinder women's success and confine them into cultural limitations that perpetually keep women at the margins of society. Hence the proposed RCLC model that promotes *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool to assist not only *izintombi* but also every other young person who could be inspired through its teachings to meet their goals of success in life. In this way *ubuntombi* will have turned the tide to take women from the margins back to the economic mainstream which is not a reserve for a particular gender but everyone in society.

7.2.4 Risky sexual behaviours and the poverty cycle

As much as young women have goals of being educationally empowered as indicated in the preceding paragraphs; due to risky sexual behaviours, many young people end up facing poor health conditions. This is because of the prevalence of HIV and AIDS infections, other STIs and unintended pregnancies that might lead to morbidity encompassed with failure to be productive and even fatalities. For instance Cooper *et al.* (2015:60)⁹⁹ pointed out that "currently, the burden of disease among youth is high, with tuberculosis (TB) and HIV emerging as leading causes of death among all youth in the country..." These researchers further view health condition and development of young people as intertwined entities because economic production depends not only on educational progress but also mainly on sound health. Similarly, Masemola-Yende & Mataboge (2015:1) asserted that "Teenage pregnancy is a global reproductive health promotion problem that affects female teenagers...both in developed and developing countries, as children aged 10 to 19 years, unmarried and still at

⁹⁹ Cooper, Diane; De Lannoy, Ariane and Rule, Candice 2015. "Youth health and well-being: Why it matters", South African Child Gauge, 2015.
http://www.ci.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/367/Child_Gauge/South_African_Child_Gauge_2015/Child_Gauge_2015-Health.pdf. Accessed 29/04/2018.

school become pregnant”. Therefore sex education helps the youth to make informed sexual choices that will guarantee their sound health and in turn ensure economic vibrancy through educational success and employment opportunities.

When educational progress is jeopardised and compromised by ill-health, particularly among the teenage mothers, they will continue to be “viewed as a vulnerable group, with limited future educational opportunities often leading to poverty and economic dependency” (Nkani & Bhana, 2016:1). It can therefore be concluded that some of the key elements that lead to the poverty cycle that is hard to curb are sometimes poor sexual choices that cause poor health conditions and lead to non-productivity. This is also affirmed by Cooper *et al.* (2015:60)¹⁰⁰ who uphold that “health – like education – is a key factor in the intergenerational transmission of poverty.” These authors also maintain that young women are excessively affected by morbidity due to engaging in unprotected risky sexual behaviours not only because of the receptiveness of their bodily disposition but also because they are unable to negotiate safe sexual practices. They further indicate that besides TB, which is a HIV related disease identified as the leading cause of demise among young women, “socio-cultural and economic factors rooted in gender power inequities further exacerbate women’s vulnerability to infection”.

It is for these reasons that in this study the retrieval of positive aspects of *ubuntombi* are encouraged as part of an endeavour to curb early sexual inception that often come with health issues that compromise young people’s future in terms of educational success and employment. It is also observed by Beksinska, *et al.* (2014:1) that “unplanned pregnancies can affect the health and well-being of adolescents, placing them at risk for morbidity and mortality related to unsafe abortion and childbirth, as well as limiting their educational and employment opportunities”. In the same vein Cooper *et al.* (2015:61)¹⁰¹ maintained that “teen mothers have poorer educational outcomes than non-teen mothers, which has negative implications for the

¹⁰⁰Cooper, Diane; De Lannoy, Ariane and Rule, Candice 2015. “Youth health and well-being: Why it matters”, South African Child Gauge, 2015.
http://www.ci.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/367/Child_Gauge/South_African_Child_Gauge_2015/Child_Gauge_2015-Health.pdf. Accessed 29/04/2018.

¹⁰¹Cooper, Diane; De Lannoy, Ariane and Rule, Candice 2015. “Youth health and well-being: Why it matters”, South African Child Gauge, 2015.
http://www.ci.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/367/Child_Gauge/South_African_Child_Gauge_2015/Child_Gauge_2015-Health.pdf. Accessed 29/04/2018.

future chances economically”. This study found that in spite of disparagement of virginity testing, *ubuntombi* and its positive aspects from the indigenous perspective can to a large extent contribute towards preservation of young people’s lives and ensure security of their educational success and employment. In addition, the vacuum left by the erosion of social structures that provided sex education to young people during puberty still exists. This has left young people without any tangible guidance when it comes to proper sex education that they deserve to receive in order to make informed decisions. As a result they mainly rely on media and informal resources such as friends, peers and magazines for sexual guidance, which often leave them poorly informed.

This study has indicated that there are positive and life giving elements of *ubuntombi* as a cultural practice that can be retrieved and be utilised for the continuation of this practice. These elements derived from the opinions and informative data from the participants in this study have been indicated in the RCLC model. This model that has been elaborated in the previous chapter promotes *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sexual tool that can be used not only with *izintombi* who have made a choice of preserving their virginity but also every young person who deserves sex educational knowledge. For instance, Masemola-Yende & Mataboge (2015:2) recommend that “society in general...should contribute to the prevention of teenage pregnancy, by providing females with information and decision-making skills, whether they are sexually active or not”. Since knowledge is power, indigenous sex education will equip them with the necessary information that will enable them to make life choices with grounded knowledge rather than making poor decisions because they were not informed. For this reason the RCLC model is highly recommended for the use in every social structure such as home as primary centres where sex education has to begin and the community centres such as schools, churches and the like as indicated above.

7.2.5 The concept of Ubuntu, valuing the valueless in the retrieval of ubuntombi

Ubuntombi is one of the cultural practices that have become valueless to many people in the modern world with the loss of the concept of *Ubuntu* among the Zulus, in particular. There are many reasons that have diminished the value of *ubuntombi* so much that those who still practice it are criticised and discouraged in many belittling ways as it was found in this study. Some of those reasons could emanate from the western influence of the way in which sex is handled and perceived in this era. Bruce (2003:48) identifies and mentions this western growing perception of sex as follows:

- Sexual transactions are going from being governed by objective rules to being grounded within the subjective experience of ‘relationships’;
- Such relationships have at their centre the single individual rather than the family;
- They are essentially concerned with the appetitive ambitions of adults rather than the interests and protection of children.
- The overwhelming legitimacy of the new sexual world is the urge to sexual freedom and happiness, and concomitant denial of any validity in the necessity of self-denial, let alone ‘repression.’
- An open sexual market has replaced the licence-issuing, licence-denying monopolistic ‘command economy’ of the traditional repressive sexual culture.

She further indicates that “For many, sexuality has become a fundamentally individualistic notion involving the pleasure of the individual. It has been privatised and removed from a context involving the state, the community, friends or the church” (2003:49). It may not be problematic in western countries whose cultural lifestyle is individually based and they have no economic challenges to meet their social needs because of being developed. It is however, worth noting that in most African countries, the repercussions of such exclusive individual pleasure involves everyone in the society including the government. This is because it has a responsibility to see to it that children who are by-products of such pleasure get child support grants for survival. Similarly community members have to take responsibility for the abandoned, neglected and orphaned children that are born under similar circumstances of the individual pleasure. Of course, there are western precautionary measures that are being promulgated as solutions to pregnancy risks such as contraceptives and abortions as well as condoms for infection risks.

On the contrary, research has indicated that gender inequality that elevates men over women gives men authority to dictate terms when it comes to sexual intercourse and the use of contraceptives; thus women have to conform to their sexual whims (Haddad 2009, Ngubane 2010 and Turshen 2000). These western perceptions of sexual life are accompanied by the individualistic human rights that encourage self-centredness in the place of communalism that was mainly promoted by the African cultures. Many Africans including Zulus whose cultures were eroded by the colonial influence are today lamentably fast embracing such individualistic and egocentric kind of sexuality that devalues collective responsibility that *Ubuntu* promoted. It has been found in this study that as a cultural practice *ubuntombi* carries the values of *Ubuntu*, a Zulu cultural concept that encourages communal aspect of society rather than individual interest that promotes self-centredness. As indicated earlier in this study, recognizing that there is no human that exists in a vacuum and that human beings need each other for co-existence is the main aspect of *Ubuntu*. It thus demonstrates the importance of relationships and that does

not exclude sexual relationships. It is in this that sex education becomes an essential need in society, which is the reason for the retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a sex educational tool that needs to bring back the value to what has become valueless in society.

There are many other factors that have contributed in people having different views today concerning sexuality and the concept of virginity in particular. With similar influence mentioned above, *ubuntombi* has lost its original power of making young women distinguishable and respected people in society. This was indicated in chapter five that *ubuntombi* has become one of the hardest choices in the modern world. Very few communities still value *ubuntombi* to the extent of honouring young women who maintain it. This is also affirmed by Bruce (2003:56) who stated that “Not all societies value virginity. In some cultures it is more important that a woman proves her fertility before marriage”. This has had an influence in the Zulu culture as well because it is no longer uncommon to hear young men claiming that they cannot buy a “pig in a sack” meaning they need to have sex with a woman before marriage. This is contrary to what was believed about *ubuntombi* in the traditional Zulu lifestyle where the spirit of *Ubuntu* would never permit penetrative premarital sex without punitive actions even before Christianity came with the concept of abstinence.

As indicated in the study losing *ubuntombi* was losing everything as a young woman but today this has evolved. Bruce (2003:62) acknowledges this as she points out “Many sectors of society no longer value virginity and there is no shame attached to the loss of virginity.” It was also confirmed by a number of young women in this study that *ubuntombi* has diminished so much that young men no longer value getting married to virgins as they used to do in the past. Similarly sexual liberalism elucidated in Chapter Six has also contributed to the insignificance of *ubuntombi* because shame is no longer attached to sexual acts of any kind even if there could be no love relationship. *Izintombi* further indicated that many young people do not seem to take life seriously and they no longer know a shame, they can meet at the shopping Mall and have sex soon thereafter without any love relationship. Lamentably, these are risky sexual behaviours that lead to many regrettable outcomes. These may not be exhaustive reasons for the loss of the value of *ubuntombi*; there could be many others as different people perceive it. However, having observed how *izintombi* view it in its current practice, it is only rational to give it the value that it deserves through its retrieval as an indigenous sex educational tool.

7.3 Concluding reflections

Concluding reflections take us back to the beginning of the study where a research question was raised to which the study has responded. Other concerns were also raised in the motivation of the study. In an endeavour to answer the research question, some of such concerns raised in the motivation of the study were also addressed.

7.3.1 *The evaluation of the research question*

The study's research question was: In view of diminishing indigenous knowledge of most cultural practices, how can *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice be emancipated and retrieved as a form of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity and a path to adulthood and sex education practices?

In an undertaking to respond to this research question, this study has examined *ubuntombi*, as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity, a path to adulthood and sex education practices with the intention of retrieving the positive aspects of this cultural practice. It was found that before the colonial influence and invasion, Zulu people had scrupulous systematic developmental stages that were meticulously followed by everyone in the community. Even as they seemed coercive in the sense that they did not accommodate individual interests but every communal member understood the concept and the spirit of *Ubuntu*. Consequently nobody questioned or raised concerns with the social values and norms that were driving forces behind the community's sense of belonging and communalism. Therefore *ubuntombi* which was a very critical stage to young people of the time and the community members remained one of the most valuable and well respected stages of development. Hence in spite of the patriarchal issues that were raised in this study that existed among the Zulu people as a tribe, *izintombi* received respect, which is extremely hard to find in our contemporary society. For instance, it was found that rape and sexual abuse were foreign concepts in the Zulu community. Any man who used violence of any kind towards women, even mistreating a young woman during courting or wooing, was considered worthless and a failure. These are the things that make one to look into the past with nostalgia when considering the violence that prevails against women and children today.

It was also shown that *ubuntombi* was traditionally a short-lived joy by *izintombi* because they were being prepared for marriage; however, some of them kept it longer by not choosing anyone among their suitors. This earned them a lot of social respect and honour such that they were eventually known as *amatshitshi akhuza impisi*, meaning 'seasoned young women of

integrity'. When they eventually got married, they would continue to enjoy the social respect of having shown resilience in their virginity stage and the prospective husband would have been honoured among the suitors to win the affection of such an *intombi*. This man would also have been privileged to pay full *lobola* for his virgin bride. *Lobola* was given a thorough examination in the previous chapters as a gendered practice, particularly the colonial stipulation of the *lobola* cows that commenced its commercialisation. This has escalated in the modern world, distorting *lobola*'s original purpose and creating more uncertainty of the married women in terms of safety due to being treated as purchased property. However, in the current practice of *ubuntombi*, the study showed that the main focus of *izintombi* is no longer in marriage but as young people they look forward to entering economic mainstream through educational progress and success. Being marriageable is no longer young women's sole desire and primary intention though they are willing to accept marriage. Nevertheless they remain uncertain about whom to marry because men are not encouraged to remain virgins. As a result they may preserve themselves and be safe temporarily before marriage but as soon as they get married, they are at risk of HIV and AIDS infections. It is for this reason that most of them felt that they need to be educationally empowered as young women to avoid dependency on men.

The study further showed that the practice of *ubuntombi* is viewed by the current *izintombi* as a vehicle that takes them to the world of success and economic independence. Their belief is that it shields them from unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases that make them school dropouts and destroy their future. However, the economic constraints also serve as a hindrance to this goal, which made them welcome virgin bursaries. The study also demonstrated the tension between cultural rights of *izintombi* and human rights that were viewed as imposed western destructive forces on their cultural practices. This was with particular reference to the child support grants that were viewed as the South African government's support of teenage pregnancy. Looking at how Zulu people maintained *ubuntombi* in the past, this study showed that there were a number of positive aspects that can be retrieved from the cultural practice of *ubuntombi*. These were espoused in the RCLC model that proposes *ubuntombi* as an indigenous sex educational tool to assist them to hold on to their dreams and also to be available for any other young persons who long for sexual guidance. Therefore this study concludes that *ubuntombi* can be retrieved through the use of this model in order to make up for the lost sex education for young people, not only in the Zulu cultural lifestyle, but also for all those who are in need of sexual guidance. In this way *ubuntombi* will have become a sex educational tool as another alternative way of life in the modern world in

which only western oriented ways are used and encouraged. However, these western oriented ways do not seem to demonstrate any comprehensive efficacy (Beksinska *et al.* 2014) in curbing prevalent high teenage pregnancy as well as HIV and AIDS infection among today's youth.

7.3.2 Motivation of the study revisited

The concerns raised in the motivation of this study seem to be too complicated to be easily addressed in the South African context where there are many challenges that face young people today, particularly women. This study demonstrated that there are a number of challenges that militate against the girl child, not only within the Zulu cultural milieu but also in South African context. This makes it extremely difficult to ascertain that black women in South Africa will be truly liberated in terms of their identity and self-worth, particularly those who are in the margins of society in terms of poverty. While everything else from the western worldview has been tried in terms of curbing risky sexual behaviours amongst young people, this study has contributed another alternative potential solution in the form of the RCLC model that can curb unintended pregnancies and STDs. The study demonstrated that while a child social grant is essential for young mothers to take care of their babies, it is not enough to meet their needs and leaves them depended on men for survival. Therefore if the RCLC model could be recognised, taught and practised, it will serve as a form of empowerment for young people to make informed sexual choices that will safeguard their future. If *ubuntombi* could strengthen the position of a Zulu girl child so much that she enjoyed social support, respect and admiration from all social structures of the Zulu community, its positive aspects can still do the same for the girl child today. It only requires social commitment of all the stakeholders indicated in the study to uplift the indigenous sex educational tool – *Ubuntombi*, a form of Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity and a path to adulthood as indicated in the RCLC model.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Figures A-E

Figure A



Figure



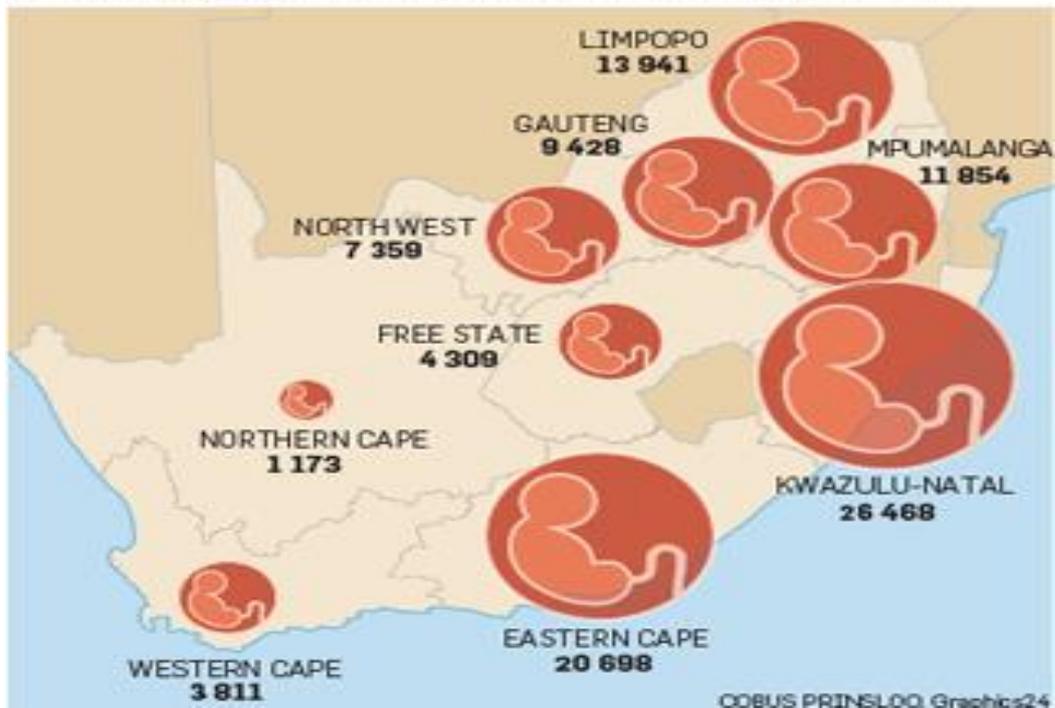
B

Figure C**Figure D**

Figure E

SA's teen-pregnancy crisis

Stats SA's General Household Survey focusing on schools, which was released this week, revealed that 99 000 teenagers fell pregnant in 2013. Here is the provincial breakdown:



Appendix 2**Zulu Girls' Puberty Songs as recorded by Krige (1968:187,193)****Song No. 2**

Zulu version *English version*

Wangibhebha enzansi.....He mounted me on the mons veneris
Ngoba uyazazela.....Because he knows very well {knows what the rules are, is implied}

1. Enzansi means 'below' and is a term that is said to denote the mons veneris which, when a girl is lying on her side, is on the side opposite or 'below' the vagina.
2. *U-ya-(zi)-azi-ela* reflexive > uyazazela. (He knows very well for himself – i.e. the rules of external intercourse, without having to be told.) [Explanatory notes by Krige]

Song No. 3

Zulu version *English version*

Valela wovalela ubolo.....Shut it out – you should shut out the penis
Isingcingingci.....In a succession of tight closings
Lwabhebha, luvalele ubolo....It copulates, shut it out,the penis.

Song No. 10

Zulu version *English translation*

Ayi wegolo lavelelwa.....Hey! The vagina had it hard
Ayi wemthondo wavelelwa.....Hey! The penis had it hard
Ayi wegolo wakubona.....Hey! The vagina saw it {the hardship}
Ayi wemthondo wakubona.....Hey! The penis saw it {the hardship}
Ayi wegolo lajwayela.....Hey! The vagina got used to it.
Ayi wemthondo wajwayela.....Hey! The penis got used to it.

This song refers to *ukusoma* – external sex intercourse. It was explained to us thus: both penis and vagina (boy and girl) want full penetration but must control themselves as they cannot do as they wish before marriage. This is hard for them. But they will get used to it, even grow to like it i.e. external intercourse is hard for both boy and girl but is a rule of society which must be obeyed. [Explanatory notes by Krige]

Appendix 3

An example of the Informed consent form used for all the research participants

Informed Consent document for in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews with *izintombi*.

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:...../...../2015

Dear community member of *izintombi*

My name is Goodness Thandi Ntuli, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, College of Humanities, School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, P/Bag X01, Scottsville, 3209, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Contact No. 0731008451, Email address: Thandicot@hotmail.com

Purpose

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on “A Feminist Indigenous Retrieval of *Ubuntombi* as a Zulu Religio-Cultural Heritage and Identity, a Path to Adulthood and Sex Education Practices.” The aim and the purpose of this research is to retrieve *Ubuntombi* as an indigenous cultural practice among the Zulu people which served not only as a cultural heritage and identity, but also as a stage and a path to adulthood of young Zulu women from feminist Afrocentric or indigenous perspective. The study is expected to enrol forty participants, twelve of *izintombi* (four in each setting) to participate in focus group discussions will come from each of an urban area, Pietermaritzburg city – church setting, Thornville, semi-urban cultural setting and Mthonjaneni, rural community setting. Same groups of *izintombi* will be interviewed one-on-one in each of the three settings. Focus groups of sixteen (eight in each setting) of the selected non *izintombi* women in each of urban and rural settings which is Pietermaritzburg and Mthonjaneni will also be formed. Twelve more members of community leaders and those in charge of *izintombi* will also form focus groups (four from each setting) while same participants will be interviewed one-on-one in each of the settings.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews to be conducted by the above named researcher. During these interviews you will be asked to provide answers to the questions on the enquiry about the indigenous retrieval of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity and a path to adulthood and sex education practices. Some of the questions could be on your perception of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity and its feasibility in being retrieved and reclaimed as an indigenous practice. The answers you will provide will be available to you in case you may wish to make any clarification before the notes are taken by the researcher. You will be free to use the language you are most comfortable with, that is either English or isiZulu. The duration of your anticipated participation if you choose to enrol and remain in the study is expected to be not more than two hours per session.

Risks and benefits

This study may involve risks such as feelings of discomfort with some of the questions asked. In that case you are at liberty not to respond, reserve your comment or express your discomfort with certain questions. The study is also likely to take some of your time off your daily routine. However; I will make sure that the agreed time is strictly followed. If participating in this research causes you distress or harm in any way, please report to the researcher so that you may be released or referred to the local social welfare department for help or further referral in case it may be necessary.

By participating in this study and sharing your experience, you will not only add to the body of knowledge on the indigenous practice of *ubuntombi* as a Zulu religio-cultural heritage and identity but you will also help add to indigenous knowledge systems which was relegated during colonial period and still is hardly recognized in most academic fields. At the end of the research process, you will receive feedback on the research findings if you so desire from your local leaders in charge of *izintombi*. Those in charge of *izintombi* and gatekeepers will continue to serve as liaison persons even after the study has been successfully completed and so the feedback will be given through them.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to keep your responses confidential; therefore, no names or addresses will appear on any research forms. When the results of the research are published no information will be included that would reveal your identity unless your specific consent for this activity is obtained.

As you participate in this research, you will be expected to maintain strict confidentiality about the information you encounter during the discussions. Under no circumstances are you to reveal to others the opinions, situations, or circumstances of particular people who are participating in this research, either by associating their specific names with such information implicitly indicating their identity to others in any way. When the data has been collected it will be the responsibility of the researcher to keep it safe and secured until the data has been transcribed and analysed and when it is no longer required it will be incinerated and disposed of.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no financial reimbursements, incentives or benefits for participation. However, due to medical reasons such as diabetic conditions and others, some participants might not stay longer without anything to eat, light refreshments will be served after the sessions. For these or for participation as such participants will not incur any cost. You are free to decline to participate, to withdraw from participation at any time for any reason. Such withdrawal or refusal to participate will not incur penalty or loss of treatment or other benefits that all the participants might be entitled to. It would be highly appreciated if the researcher is informed either in writing or verbally in case you decide to withdraw so that it becomes an orderly withdrawal.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The approval number is

In the event of any problems, concerns or questions you may contact the researcher at the School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal – Pietermaritzburg Campus, Private Bag X01, Scottsville, KwaZulu-Natal, 3209, South Africa, Mobile number: 0731008451, Email address: thandicot@hotmail.com

CONSENT

I ...(name)... have been informed about the study entitled “A Feminist Indigenous Retrieval of *Ubuntombi* as a Zulu Cultural Heritage and Identity, a Path to Adulthood and Sex Education Practices” by Goodness Thandi Ntuli, a researcher.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study. 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.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher, Rev Sr Goodness Thandi Ntuli at:

School of Religion and Theology

University of KwaZulu-Natal – Pietermaritzburg Campus

Private Bag X01

Scottsville

KwaZulu-Natal

3209

South Africa

Mobile number: 0731008451

Email address: thandicot@hotmail.com

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

Additional Consent

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Video-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

Appreciation

Thank you very much for the time you have taken in reading and responding to this informed consent form whether you decline or consent to participation in this research. In case you give your consent, your participation and contribution through all the information you will share will be highly appreciated.

Appendix 4 Guiding Questions

Imibuzoluphenyo engumhlahlandlela kumaqoqwana abantu abayingxenye yocwaningo kunye nemibuzo engahleliwe ngokupheleleyo. (An interview guide for focus groups and semi-structured interviews)

Imibuzo engumhlahlandlela yalabo abangamaqoqwana abayingxenye yocwaningo (Guiding questions for the focus groups)

1. Uqondani ngobuntombi njengosikompilo neqhayiya lesiZulu?

What do you understand about *ubuntombi* as a Zulu cultural heritage and identity?

2. Ucabanga ukuthi kwakungani babugcinwa ubuntombi phakathi kwesizwe samaZulu?

Why do you think *ubuntombi* was practiced among the Zulu people?

3. Kuyinto esasabalele kangakanani ukuzigcina kwezintombi phakathi kwamaZulu namuhla?

How common is the practice of *ubuntombi* among the Zulu people today?

4. Uma kungukuthi liyangokwehla izinga lokuzidla ngobuntombi kwaZulu, kungaba yini imbangela yalokhu ngokombono wakho futhi kungenziwanjani ngakho?

If *ubuntombi* as a cultural heritage and identity is diminishing among the Zulu people, what would be the cause of this in your opinion and what could be done about it?

5. Njengomsinsi wokuzimilela kwaZulu, ngokolwazi lwakho yini eyayifundiswa izintombi ezisencane ukuzezibeneqhayiya ngalesisigaba sobuntombi zingakafiki ezingeni lobudala?

As indigenous people, in your knowledge how was the pride and identity of *ubuntombi* instilled in young Zulu women before reaching adulthood?

6. Ngombono wakho, usiko-nkolo lwesiZulu luthintana kanjani nokuziphatha kwezintombi kanye nokukhuliswa kwazo ngokomdabu phakathi kwesizwe samaZulu?

In your opinion, how is *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice among the Zulu people influenced by their religio-cultural background?

7. Ngokwemicabango yaseNtshonalanga nenkululeko yamalungelo esintu, abazali basebenzisa lelisiko ukwelusa abasha kwezocansi, uthini umbono wakho ngalokhu?

In the Western thinking and freedom of human rights, the parents use this cultural practice to exert control over young women's sexuality, what is your opinion in this?

8. Bangakhuthazwa kanjani abesifazane abasha abazithola behlukumezekile ngokoncansi njengokudlwengulwa, ukunukubezwa izihlobo ngokocansi kanye nabayizisulu zodlame lwezocansi ukuba bazibone beseyizintombi?

How can young women who have lost their identity as *izintombi* due to challenges such as rape, incest and sexual violence be encouraged to see themselves as *izintombi*?

Imibuzo luphenyo enzulu engumhlahlandlela ebhekiswe kubaholi bezenkolo nabomphakathi kanye nalabo abangabaphathi bezintombi. (Questions for in-depth semi-structured interviews for religious and community leaders or those in charge of *izintombi*?)

1. Uthini umbono wakho ngokukhuliswa kwezintombi ngosiko lokuzigcina ngesiZulu?

What is your view on *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice within the Zulu cultural upbringing?

2. Kwakuyini ubuhle nobubi bokukhuliswa kwezintombi ngaphansi kosikompilo lwesiZulu?

What were the advantages and disadvantages of *ubuntombi* in its traditional indigenous practice?

3. Esikhathini samalungelo, ukuzimela kanye nenkululeko egcizelelwa umthethosisekelo waseMzansi ikakhulukazi ingxenywe yamalungelo, uthini umbono wakho ngobuntombi njengesikolo kuzigqaja ngobuyena kowesifazane wanamuhla osemncane?

In the context of human rights, agency and freedom endorsed by the Bill of rights, how do you perceive *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice, heritage and identity of young Zulu women nowadays?

4. Ngokombono wakho, kusekhona yini izintombi zanamuhla ezingakukha kusikompilo lwezintombi zakudala kube kusaba usizo namuhla? Uma uthi yebo, ake uthi ukwenaba ngakho?

In your opinion, are there any elements of traditional indigenous practice of *ubuntombi* that could still be retrieved as relevant for the current generation of *izintombi*? If so, could you elaborate on them?

5. Njengabaholi bezenkolo nomphakathi kanye nabaphathi bezintombi ningabukhuthaza kanjani ubuntombi ngaphandle kokugxambukela kumalungelo abasha kwezoncansi?

As elders of the community, religious leaders and people in charge of *izintombi* how do you encourage *ubuntombi* without infringing on the sexual rights of the girls?

6. Uthini umbono wakho ngokulinga ukuvuselela nokukhuthaza usikompilo lokugcinwa kobuntombi njengesiko lomdabu?

What is your opinion on the feasibility of retrieval, revitalization and promotion of *ubuntombi* as an indigenous practice?

7. Okuvelele okwenza ukuba ligxijazwe isikolokugcinwa kobuntombi, ukuhlolwa kwezintombi njengento eyehlisa isithunzi somuntu wesifazane, ngokombono wakho lingagcinwa kanjani isiko lobuntombi ngaphandle kokuncasha amalungelo ezintombi ngokobuntu nangakwezoncansi?

One of the strong critics against the preservation of *ubuntombi* is virginity testing as a dehumanizing practice, in your opinion, how can *ubuntombi* be upheld without infringing on the girls' human and sexual rights?

8. Njengabantu esebemkantsha ubomvu nabaholi, ningabukhuthaza kanjani ubuntombi phakathi kwabesifazane abasha abehlelwe umshophi wokulahlekelwa ukuzigqaja kwabo ngalelisikongenxa yokuhlukunyezwa ngokocansi okufana nokudlwengulwa, ukunukubezwa izihlobo kanye nodlame lwezocansi olubhekiswe kubantu besifazane?

As elderly people and leaders, how would you encourage *ubuntombi* among young women who have lost their identity as *izintombi* due to incidents such as rape, incest and other forms of sexual violence?

Imibuzoluphenyo enzulu engumhlahlandlela ebhekiswe kumuntu ngamunye ezintombini. (In-depth one-on-one interview questions with *izintombi*)

1. Njengentombi, uqondani ngobuntombi neqhayiya lokugcinwa kwabo ngokomdabu nangokosiko lwesiZulu?

As *intombi* what do you understand about *ubuntombi* as a Zulu cultural indigenous practice, heritage and identity?

2. Uzizwa kanjani ngobuntombi nokuzigcina njengentombi kulemihla, futhi kungani?

How do you feel about *ubuntombi* and its current practice and why?

3. Ngokombono wakho, buyini ubuhle nobubi bokuzigcina uyintombi?

In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of being *intombi*?

4. Ngokombono wakho njengentombi, lisangavuselelwa futhi likhuthazwe yini isikompilo lokugcinwa kobuntombi ezikhathini zamalungelo kwezocansi?

In your experience as *intombi*, how feasible is it for *ubuntombi* to be retrieved, reclaimed and promoted as a Zulu heritage and identity in times of human and sexual rights?

5. Ngokombono wakho, lingacina kanjani isiko lobuntombi ngaphandle kokuncasha amalungelo obuntu nawezocansi ezintombi?

In your opinion, how can *ubuntombi* be maintained without violation of human and sexual rights?

6. Uwuzwa kanjani umbono wokuthi ukugcinwa kwesiko lobuntombi ukuzama kwabazali ukulawula ukuziphatha kwabesifazane abasebasha kwezocansi?

How do you feel about the viewpoint that *ubuntombi* is one of the mechanisms with which parents exert control over young women's sexuality?

7. Kukhona yini okukodwa nje okubaluleke kakhulu futhi okukuthokozisayo noma okukuphatha kabi empilweni yakho yokuzigcina njengentombi? Uma kukhona ungake uthi ukwenaba ngakho?

Is there any one special thing in your experience of being *intombi* that you enjoy most or that concerns you most? If so, can you elaborate on it?

8. Ungabakhuthaza kanjani abanye besifazane abangangawe abehlelwa umshophi wokulahlekelwa ukuzigqaja kwabo ngobuntombi babo ngenxa yezinselelo

ezinjengokudlwengulwa, ukunukubezwa izihlobo ngokoncansi kanye nodlame olubhekiswe kwabesifazane ngokocansi ukubanabo bazizwele beseyizintombi?

How can you encourage other young women who might have lost their identity of *ubuntombi* due to challenges such as rape, incest and sexual violence against women so that they may still consider themselves as *izintombi*?

Appendix 5

Letters from the Gatekeepers

THUBALETHU LOCATION

P.O. Box 456

Melmoth

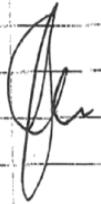
3835

Dear Sir/Madam

I'm Unah Ngobese the leader of Umthos, Womhlanga at Thubalethu township in Ward one and two under Nthangweni Municipality. Miss Thandi Goodness Ntuli I give you the Authority to do a Research the way you like about the studies that you're doing. For more information contact 076 575 7194

2BALE2
VIRGINITY BRANCH
P.O. BOX 456, MELMOTH, 3835
CELL: 076 575 7194

Yours Faithfully
Unah Ngobese



NOMKHUBULWANE CULTURE AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
NOMKHUBULWANE INSTITUTE — — —



Email : nomagugungobese@yahoo.com

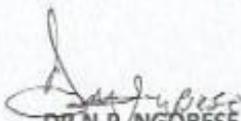
REF No: 029-648 N.P.O
No: 15, Shepstone House
225 Longmarkert Street
Pietermaritzburg 3201
Contact 082 512 8003

Date : 23 July 2014

DR NOMAGUGU NGOBESE THE CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF
NOMKHUBULWANE CULTURE AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION

We are willing to do the research with SR. THANDI NTULI, with all the theory and practicalities of her research.

Yours faithfully


DR N.P. NGOBESE

082 512 8003



Reg. no. 2012/045320/08

**THE THRESHING FLOOR
BIBLE CHURCH**
 Shop 9 Oasis Centre, 40 Union Str. Empangeni, 3880
 P.O. Box 21635, Richards Bay, 3900
 Tel: +27 35 772 1556, Fax: +27 35 772 1556
 E-mail: tfbc@mweb.co.za

That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it. **Isa 41:20**

**Ref: Research on UBUNTOMBI
Date: 05 July 2014**

**SR. THANDI
P. O. BOX
NEW HANOVER
3230**

Dear Sr. Thandi

RE: REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON "UBUNTOMBI"

The letter of request as per the subject matter refers.

We are pleased to receive you to conduct your study for as long as you need.

Kindly advise us timeously so that the church can be promptly informed of your study and further encourage participation.

I hope the above finds you in order.

May God bless you.

THE THRESHING FLOOR
 BIBLE CHURCH
 PO BOX 21635 R/BAY 3900
 TEL/FAX: 0357721556
 email:tfbc@mweb.co.za
 DATE: 2014 July 07

**MR. SIMO GASA
RESIDENT PASTOR
THE TFBC - PIETERMARITZBURG**

VISION

We desire to reach as many people for Christ as possible and desire to help them become as spiritually mature as possible without compromising the word of God and our mission.