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Give a Girl a *Job*.

Reflections on Ethnography, Money and Suffering among South African Women

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Give a Girl a *Job*.

Reflections on Ethnography, Money and Suffering among South African Women

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Abstract

The thesis examines the largest cash transfer program in South Africa, the child support grant (CSG), focusing mainly on the perspective of seven beneficiaries - all pregnant at an early age - and three of their children. A quarter century after its inception, the CSG's health, educational, social and economic outcomes have been demonstrated by abundant research. To a lesser extent, so has its insufficiency. This notwithstanding, influential scholars have proposed a new era of cash transfers as a substitute for labour-based patterns of livelihood and citizenship. Drawing on three periods of presential fieldwork and eight months of remote research, I argue that historical struggles for liberty and labour interwove, laid profound roots within Black commoners, and continue to inform their desiderata and standards of legitimacy. Like fertility, presence and sharing, liberty and labour remain paramount values in South Africa, part and parcel of its moral infrastructure. The ultimate grip these values have over concrete lives, including the pleasure and suffering they inspire, can only be grasped by a social anthropology attentive to what Marcel Mauss once called *disciplines nourricières* (law, morals, and political economy). In a more prospective vein, I also argue that psychoanalysis can help ethnographers deal with interlocutors affected by poverty and other forms of social violence - gender-based, above all.

Keywords: South Africa; women; child-support grant; freedom; suffering.

Dê a uma Garota um Trabalho.
Reflexões sobre Etnografia, Dinheiro e Sofrimento entre Mulheres Sul-Africanas

Resumo

A tese examina o maior programa de transferência de renda da África do Sul, as *child support grants* (CSG), mediante a perspective de sete beneficiárias, todas grávidas na adolescência, e três de suas crianças. Um quarto de século após a criação das *child support grants*, seus benefícios educacionais, econômicos e na saúde de mães e filhos foi demonstrado por pesquisa abundante. Em menor medida, também o foram os limites do programa. Apesar disso, acadêmicos influentes têm proposto uma nova era de transferência de renda como substituta de padrões de subsistência e cidadania centrados no trabalho. Fundamentado em três períodos de campo presencial e oito meses de pesquisa remota, afirmo que as lutas históricas por liberdade e trabalho se entrelaçaram, deitaram raízes profundas na população negra e continuam a informar-lhes os desejos e padrões de legitimidade. Como a fertilidade, a presença e a partilha, liberdade e trabalho permanecem valores supremos na África do Sul, núcleo da infraestrutura moral de sua população. O poder de última instância que esses valores têm em vidas concretas, incluindo o prazer e o sofrimento que inspiram, apenas pode ser captado por uma antropologia social atenta ao que Marcel Mauss chamou *disciplines nourricières* (direito, moral e economia política). Em tom mais prospectivo, também afirmo que a psicanálise pode ajudar etnógrafos a lidarem com interlocutores afetados por pobreza e outras formas de violência social – sobretudo a violência de gênero.

Palavras-chave: África do Sul; mulheres; Estado de bem-estar social; liberdade; sofrimento.

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Ẹ̀ṣù Ọnọn, Ẹ̀ṣù Ọnọn
Mo jí re lọde Elegbàra
Bárà mi rè
Ẹ̀ṣù Ọnọn ké wa o[1]

[1] Exu of the Ways, Exu of the Ways
I wake you outside, Lord of Power
My Lord of the Body, you can pass
Exu of the Ways, take good care of us.

This thesis is dedicated to Luthando (1986-2020), whom I thank on behalf of all South Africans for the inexhaustible gift of newfound liberty.

“Freedom through social
knowledge – this is the path”
(Polanyi, 2018, p.33)

Introduction

Section I – An Overview of the Child-Support Grant and Social Security in South Africa

What are rights for you?
Imani: My right is to have a job[2].

Are you happy about the money you are receiving from the government?
Ukhuna: Yes, I can say I'm happy because I didn't work for it. It's for free. Government is helping where she can[3]

You don't sound too happy...
Ukhuna: Yes, it's small, but I cannot say it's small.

Much has been written about the South African child support grant, and my challenge here is to offer a fair account of its impacts and limits. Cash transfer policies play an indispensable role in monetised economies (Ferguson, 2015) but neither exhaust a multidimensional conception of well-being nor the demands for public services, assistance, and care (Devereux and Macgregor, 2014; Patel and Ross, 2020). In a society historically fractured by violence and profound socioeconomic asymmetries, striking a balance between what has been achieved and what remains to be done is not an insignificant task (Lund, 2008; Seekings and Nattrass, 2015).

The child-support grant was created in 1999 as a means-tested social benefit in cash[4] aimed at the poorest mothers and children (Lund, 2008). It substituted for the State Maintenance Grants (SMG), a family allowance that reached only 400,000 South Africans – less than 1% of the country's population in 1999. The SMG derived from early 20th-century legislation on children's rights and was introduced in the 1930s to preserve a minimum standard of living for unmarried, widowed, or separated White and Coloured

[2] Excerpt of an interview conducted in 2016 with a 50-year-old female interlocutor in an informal settlement in Pretoria East (personal archive).
[3] Excerpt of an interview conducted with a 30-year-old woman in December 2019 – see Chapter III. Ukhuna and others in South Africa often refer to the child support grants as "a free money".
[4] Then worth ZAR 100 (U$ 16) per month.

mothers[5]. Later, it was extended to Africans and Indians, though not on a massive scale. During the country's transition to democracy, the SMG had become a "fiscal problem", leaving unprotected a vast number of destitute Black families (Lund, 2008, p.15-17)[6].

In 2007, eight years after its inception, the child-support grants benefited 8 million children below 14[7]. Given the "fluidity" of African households and the fact that children often circulate among different kin (Spiegel et al., 1996; Seekings and Moore, 2013), *primary caretakers* were eligible to become recipients. The Social Assistance Act (RSA, 2004) defined them as those adults responsible for "meeting the daily care needs of a child". In other words, the grants should "follow the child", irrespective of the parental status and gender of their primary caretaker (Lund, 2008, p.51). In 2002, mothers composed 87% of the beneficiaries, followed by grandmothers (10%), aunts (1%), and fathers (0,2%) (Lund, 2008).

In the Annual Report addressed to Parliament in 2023, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA, 2023) informed that almost 13.2 million child-support grants were paid among a total population of 60 million people. Impressive in themselves, these numbers must be considered within a broader social security system. Two other cash transfer modalities, old age and disability grants, reach 3.8 million and 1 million beneficiaries, respectively. Almost 19 million grants are currently disbursed by the national government[8]. It means that one in three South Africans receives social assistance in cash. The federal grant expenditure amounts to 3,5% of the GDP, a proportion unmatched by any other middle-income country (Button et al., 2018)[9].

Democratisation in South Africa has been coextensive with wide-range redistributive policies and the consolidation of a generous welfare state (Ferguson, 2015; Seekings and Nattrass, 2015). Tax-financed assistance in cash has reduced extreme poverty and, combined with free services such as water provision, health, and education,

---

[5] Coloureds, or those of mixed-raced ascendancy, received at a discriminatory rate. South African racial categories are laden with derogatory meanings and no such use is intended in this thesis. I use the term *native*, for instance, in the literal sense of aboriginal.

[6] Though eligibility, rates, and racial profile varied regionally, Coloureds and Indians made up 50% of the SMG beneficiaries.

[7] The current age limit is 18 years old.

[8] I excluded from the calculus almost 8.5 million COVID-19 SRD grant (ZAR 350), paid to another 8.5 million people. When these are included, more than 30 million, or 54% of South Africans received social assistance in cash between 2020 and 2022.

[9] Since the 2000s, scholars, authorities, and NGOs have also discussed the introduction of a basic income grant for incomeless adults (Seekings, 2007; Ferguson, 2015). In February 2023, following an Expert panel held by the BRICS Research Network Session, the national government newsroom published the finding that basic income support worth ZAR 350 is financially sustainable for another 13.1 million South Africans (Department of Employment and Labour, 2023).

improved millions of lives. The child support grants, in particular, have been studied by many scholars and institutions. The Department of Social Development, the South African Social Security Agency, and the United Nations Fund for Children (DSD et al., 2012), for instance, published a comprehensive assessment of the policy with recipients in five provinces (KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Limpopo, and Gauteng). The findings were compared with households without child support grant beneficiaries and summarised as follows.

> The results of this study identify the positive developmental impact of the Child Support Grant in promoting nutritional, educational and health outcomes. Early receipt significantly strengthens a number of these important impacts, providing an investment in people that reduces multiple dimension indicators of poverty, promotes better gender outcomes and reduces inequality (DSD et al., 2012)

In disaggregated terms, we can read nutritional and health outcomes as the lesser likelihood of experiencing illness, increased use of growth monitoring services and improvement in the relation between age and height, particularly among children whose mothers have achieved at least eight grades of schooling (DSD et al., 2012, p. III). As to the educational improvements, the authors highlighted earlier school attendance, higher grade attainment, and better arithmetic and reading scores. Such developments were more significant among girls, but it was noticed that the grant also "appears to play a compensatory role for children with less educated mothers" (2012, p. III). Finally, the study indicated that teenage beneficiaries tended less toward risky behaviour, such as early sex and pregnancy, alcohol and drug consumption, participation in gangs, and criminal activity (2012, p.91).

Remarkable achievements also among mothers have been highlighted in more recent and micro-level studies. In the suggestively titled "That Child Support Grant Gives Me Powers", Granlund and Hochfeld (2019) stated that social assistance in cash expanded women's sense of autonomy, dignity, and social recognition. Inside and outside the home, their interviewees feel more respected and with increased agency, as "previous more one-sided relations of income dependence has been transformed into more egalitarian forms of inter-dependence" (2019, p.9). One beneficiary depicted the grant as playing the father's role and entailing what the authors called "reversal dependency" (2019, p.6). Since the husband was unemployed, the grant had become the family's "breadwinner" and converted the former into his wife's dependent. Interestingly, one of the interviewees

believed her partner had even the "right" to request part of the money, provided he did it "nicely" (2019, p.9).

In "Social Assistance and Dignity: South African Women's Experience of the Child Support Grant", Wright et al. (2015) also explored the outcomes among female caretakers. They conducted 16 in-depth interviews and managed a sampling of almost 200 women distributed in 30 focal groups in the Western and Eastern Cape. The authors understand dignity as a relational concept in that the ideal of human worth and its expression in terms of autonomy, self-esteem, and self-respect can be promoted or undermined according to different material circumstances and patterns of social relations. Starting from the United Nations' premise that the incapacity to provide for oneself and others is a fundamental violation of dignity, Wright et al. (2015) noticed that, albeit valued at only U$30 per month, the child-support grants allowed very impoverished mothers to meet part of their aspirations as responsible caretakers. The authors also perceived strengthened agency in broader networks.

> Grant receipt was also experienced as positive in relation to dignity in slightly less direct ways, by strengthening practices of inter-dependency and mutuality between recipients and others in their kin and social networks. These practices of social reciprocity are often key to the lives of impoverished South Africans (2015, p.449)

Du Toit and Neves (2009) also emphasise how central reciprocity figures in the lives of South African women. As my theoretical point of departure, I comprehend that the Gift paradigm comprises both relations of balanced mutuality – or the trio of classical prestations – and more unilateral acts of giving. In other words, the seminal *Essai sur Le Don* (Mauss, 1923-1924) depicts humans as both *échangistes* and *donateurs*. Though less emphasised by Mauss's commenters, the latter capacity indicates humans enjoy and need sheer giving[10]. To ascend to personhood, we must be able to act and be recognised as giving persons – *sujets du don* (Caillé, 2019). Mothers, for instance, experience their worth or dignity inasmuch as they can provide for their children and help others[11]. Sometimes, they do it liberally, just for the pleasure of it. More often, though, social

[10] Human babies and the elder are the most evident example of vulnerable beings who need unilateral care and giving (Caillé, 2019, p.118).

[11] One interlocutor of Granland and Hochfeld (2019, p.7) refer to this dimension of respect and self-respect as follows: 'most people respect me as I have this child grant. They will come to borrow money, they will come to ask for food'.

relations imply expectations of reciprocity or the norm of *rien sans rien* (Chanial, 2008). One wonders how destitute populations would do otherwise.

The value of the Gift paradigm to the ethnographic understanding of social life in Southern Africa has been recently called into question. Widlok (2016) and James Ferguson (2021) criticise the notions of reciprocity and generosity. In broader terms, they contend that moral and economic Anthropology practised in the Durkheimian-Maussian tradition cannot account for *demand sharing*, a long-lasting form of regional livelihood. They consider that proximate sociality or the pressures deriving from lives thrown in adjacency are the reasons why Southern Africans have shared since pre-colonial times. Ferguson's (2019, 2021) perspective also involves a more Hobbesian than Rousseauian comprehension of the human species, in that fear rather than contract ultimately underpins sociality.

I started this digression because, in addition to the child-support grant's health, nutritional, and educational benefits, it also fosters mother's capacity to act as *échangistes* and *donatrices* within and outside their households. Ultimately, the grants have strengthened their "lived experience of dignity" (Wright et al., 2015). However, the authors portray not only instantiations of increased human worth but also what Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2013, 2022b) calls insulting violations of it. Indeed, Wright et al. (2015) investigated their interlocutors' feelings of indignity, or what, in negating their parameters of respect and self-respect, caused them to feel "moral indignation" (Thévenot, 2022). For instance, one interviewee claimed that the meagre value of the grants offended her sense of personal worthiness.

> When you sit down and consider dignity and social grants – well, the money is too little to, it does not meet the needs of our children. It's like government is looking down on our sense of dignity as poor people. It's our government, we voted them into power. We suffered under the apartheid government, now we continue to suffer because government is not looking after us as citizens well. That's all I want to say (Nyanga) (Wright et al., 2015, p.450)

None of my interviewees used so harsh language to criticise the government of their election. I think it is fair to say that my interlocutors consider the child-support grant both "right" (or morally correct) and "not right" (or morally flawed because insufficient). The concept of "free money", or cash given in exchange for nothing[12], in case no labour

[12] "Something against nothing" is the expression Allain Caillé (2019) uses to define unilateral gift-giving.

other than social reproduction, conveys both the recognition of its vital "relevance" - or "value" (Graeber, 2001) - and the conscience that a gratuity cannot be simultaneously free and copious. That, incidentally, intersects with the critiques Thomas Widlok (2016) and James Ferguson (2021) have made about the Durkheimian-Maussian tradition of social thought, particularly its emphasis on morality as key to understanding social action and, more generally, social affairs.

The above-quoted interlocutor of Wright et al. (2015) resorted to morally laden terms and the notion of citizenship to assess her relations with the state. I take it as an index to the fact that not only are grant recipients submitted to permanent "moral scrutiny" (Seekings and Moore, 2019), but also its paying source – the government and its bureaucrats. According to Thomas Widlok (2016), Marcel Mauss introduced a legal bias in the social sciences, as though subjects always reasoned in legal and moral terms. In a more sarcastic vein, Ferguson (2021) argued that Southern Africans are not "Kantian subjects". He suggests that pragmatic accommodation to local realities, not morals, consists of a more actual pattern of social action and thought. I contend South Africans remain permanently aware of their existence's moral and legal aspects. It is a language they master and employ to criticise violations of their sense of dignity.

Wright et al. (2015, p.448) present another significant case of disrespect: government officials who accuse mothers of having children to receive the grant. Such is a thorny topic of dissent in South Africa (Button et al., 2018). Another interlocutor of Wright et al. (2015, p.450) argues that her own kin convey a similar indictment – "Please stop saying people fall pregnant for the grant. Even at home, they say that". In 2015, President Zuma criticised teenage pregnancy and blamed young mothers for misusing the grant and cheating the system. Button et al. (2018, p.611) observe there is "little evidence for such assertions" and attribute it to a conservative, even reactionary understanding of welfare. According to them, the South African collective mindset remains haunted by a spectre: the so-called dependency culture. Seekings (2019) states that South Africans share a hierarchy of deserving and undeserving poor, in which young mothers rank low. Dubbeld (2021, p.8) compares their debased status and the "welfare-queen" stigma hinging upon impoverished Black mothers in the United States.

Any attempt to comprehend the grant system and social assistance in South Africa and elsewhere must envisage such moralistic discourses, for they recur in different societies and times. Three crucial interlocutors in this thesis, all of them pregnant between 14 and 18, believe that some young girls in the country get pregnant to obtain social

benefits. They even singled out two women I was acquainted with. The Habermasian premise I take in this thesis is that my interlocutors are sincere (Stahl, 2013). More importantly, their rationale is premised on the notion of "free money". My interlocutors believe that younger girls might willingly take a public gratuity as a source of livelihood, reasoning on the following grounds – "Eish, it's better to have a child because I'm going to receive free money from the government". Though such is a contentious claim, I think it is worth discussing for another reason.

Between March and July 2016, I rented a room in an informal settlement in Pretoria-East, where I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews and recorded seven life stories. My assistant's best friend at the time, a 19-year-old mother of two, collaborated in both endeavours. I was then inquiring about the meaning of *freedom* among South African commoners. Here follows an excerpt of my conversation with my assistant's best pal.

> **What is freedom for you?**
> **Vicky:** The freedom... Because I got school for free, I had a feeding scheme at school, I have child grant for free. I go wherever I like to go. I'm dating everywhere I want to date. I can talk any language I want to talk. I can choose any President I want[13]

As I argued in Lage da Cruz (2017), the democratic dispensation in South Africa, the outcome of a decades-long struggle for liberty, is understood by many interlocutors as a historical era in which elementary civil (e.g., freedom of movement), political (e.g., right to vote) and social rights are guaranteed. Most women I interviewed between November 2019 and May 2020 avoid depicting the grants as a right. Still, the interlocutor above explicitly identified them as a critical index of the political transformations produced in the 1990s. A "child grant for free" expresses precisely the same meaning as "free money", or money not reciprocated by labour outside the household. My young interlocutor in 2016 was also perfectly aware that she would be entitled to a pension at an older age. Let me quote excerpts from the in-depth conversation we had.

> **Do you consider having more children?**
> **Vicky:** Yes.
>
> **How many more?**

[13] Interview conducted in July 2016. All ethnographic material gathered between March and mid-July 2016 is hereafter identified as personal archive.

Vicky: Maybe five, six.

And can you get the grant for all of them?
Yes!

Isn't there a limit?
No! Even me, when I'm having 60 years, they will give me a grant!

So, you count on this money to survive?
Yes.

Do you want to work one day?
Yes, I want to work, but in summer.

Not in winter?
Nooo.

But sometimes you can't choose, right?
If they hire me now in winter, I must wake up around 5. No, I don't want![14]

I take rights seriously and think humans in South Africa and elsewhere shall benefit from a state-guaranteed "modicum of economic welfare" (Marshall & Bottomore, 1950, p.11). I do not regard the so-called entitlement culture or attitude (Barchiesi, 2011; Seekings and Nattrass, 2015) as a predicament but rather as an instantiation that South Africans have been educated in the virtues of liberty. Neither do I think that many young women get pregnant to receive free money. If some do, it is a right they have. Whatever the case, almost all women I have spoken with since 2016, including the above quoted, did not know how to prevent pregnancy when they conceived for the first time. Finally, I deem it a sociologically relevant fact that Vicky counts on grants to survive. It means, according to Button et al. (2018), that public welfare provision in South Africa has developed, inter alia[15], on social democratic lines and that democracy has been accompanied by popular consciousness on freedom and citizenship (Lodge, 2011; Seekings and Nattrass, 2015).

A century-long "struggle" developed around such terms (Seekings, 2000, p.386) and the rights associated with the welfare state[16]. The latter, incidentally, predates

[14] Personal archive.
[15] Inter alia because it has also *conservative* and *liberal* features; respectively, a traditionalist reliance on unpaid care labour by kin, and market supply of care services for the well-off (Button et. al, 2018).
[16] Direct action in townships for better provision of public services has often been articulated in terms of rights. It is also worth mentioning that some South Africans think the unemployed should have the right to social assistance (Seekings and Nattrass, 2015).

democratic dispensation by decades in South Africa (Button et al., 2018; Moore and Seekings, 2019). As of the mid-1920s, the country's White and, to a lesser extent, Coloured populations increasingly benefited from public policies in education, health care - including mental health care -and housing (Seekings and Moore, 2013, p.3-4). Financial provisions for unemployment, sickness, and a system of means-tested, non-contributory social pensions targeting children and the elderly were already established by 1937. Within the British zone of intellectual and political influence, part of the South African elites adopted and adapted the late 19th-century thought of New Liberalism and its move from laissez-faire to social reform (Seekings, 2000, p.388).

Collective welfare, or the enjoyment of a decent standard of living, remained the preserve of White South Africans between the 1920s and the beginning of the 1940s (2000, p.391). With the publishing of the Atlantic Charter, a more generous agenda gained momentum. A Social Security Committee was appointed in 1943, and the following year, old-age pensions were extended to Africans and Indians. In 1946, unemployment and insurance benefited some sectors of these populations. Tactful notwithstanding, rights parlance and a somewhat universalistic purview of social security had currency in public debates (Seekings, 2000, p.399). Charterism, or bill of rights rhetoric (Dubow, 2011), also underpinned the claims set forth by the African elite and its mass-based institutions.

> We, the African people in the Union of South Africa, urgently demand the granting of full citizenship rights such as are enjoyed by all Europeans in South Africa (ANC, 1943).

What shall we understand by the ANC's demands for citizenship? The international struggle against fascism spoke the language of freedom[17] and democratic rights. Black South Africans demanded nothing less than liberty within their *nation* – another crucial term among them (Dubow, 2011). Freedom and citizenship meant classical or *civil* rights, such as liberty of movement, property, and equality before the law. It also comprised the so-called *political* franchises (e.g., the right to vote). Yet the Atlantic Charter (CA., 1943) and the welfarist zeitgeist (Dubow, 2011) also meant "freedom from want" or the recognition that liberty remains contingent on economic prerequisites (Seekings, 2000). In a word, Black South Africans, too, spoke the language of social citizenship, as Marshall (1950) summarised the right to live a civilised life.

[17] I take the notions of freedom and citizenship as historical synonyms (or quasi-synonyms) in Europe and South Africa (Marshall, 1950; Pocock, 1995; Lage da Cruz, 2017).

> We demand for the Africans-
> 1. equal opportunity to engage in any occupation, trade or industry in order that this objective might be realised to the fullest extent, facilities must be provided for technical and university education of Africans so as to enable them to enter skilled, semi-skilled occupations, professions, government serve and other sphere of employment [...]
>
> 5. that the African worker shall be insured against sickness, unemployment, accidents, old age and for all other physical disabilities arising from the nature of their work (ANC, 1943)

In minimalist and more to-date language, the ANC, already a mass-based political organisation, longed for civil equality, education, better jobs, and grants. My main contention in this thesis is that then, as now, many South Africans claimed for jobs over grants. It does not mean they desire any job in exchange for whatever remuneration, nor that all go for labour over leisure when confronted with the classical trade-off. Some choose not to work, particularly where menial jobs are concerned (Atkins, 1994; Seekings and Moore, 2013, p.5; Seekings and Nattrass, 2015, p.75). Fortunately, that also obtains elsewhere. Rego e Pinzani (2013), interviewed Brazilians who prefer receiving a family allowance – the *Bolsa Família* - to working as domestic helpers. To resume the ANC's response to the Atlantic Charter, its rhetoric and cardinal enumeration, Africans longed first for skilled and semi-skilled jobs and fifth for insurance against the harm and termination thereof.

It might be otiose to remember that, through work, humans "bring forth" the very world of their dwelling (Ingold, 1992; 2016). In this sense, production and producers were not invented by industrial capitalism but rather made an obsession duly deplored by some (Lafargue, 2022). No less indolent might be to remember that many of us enjoy the exercise of our "creative energies" (Graeber, 2001) and to remark that, unfortunately, not all trades channel this puissance with equal pleasure. We may call some "bereka" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1987), "undesirable" (Coser, 1970), and even "bullshit" (Graeber, 2013), provided we respect the local diversity of an unfortunate reality. Whatever the language we deploy, such truisms have not been quite so in colonial and post-colonial parlance (Fanon, 2002). In South Africa, the idea that some would have to be converted to a "useful existence" constitutes a recalcitrant topos, one defying a well-documented history of indigenous work ethics and the historical relevance of labour-based struggle and proselytism (Atkins, 1994; Ashforth, 1994; Dubow, 2011; Lodge, 2011, Seekings and Nattras, 2015).

Black South Africans have long claimed the right to work, or, as the Freedom Charter puts it, "the right and duty to work" (Blackpast, 2009). The African Native National Congress itself was born to "educate Bantu people on their rights", "defend their freedom", and "propagate the gospel of the dignity of labour" (ANC, 1919). A century later, these goals seem to have been achieved. The historical struggle for rights and liberty intermingled with a labour struggle and constituted a work-and-freedom-oriented collectivity[18] (Dubow, 2011; Lodge, 2011; Barchiesi, 2011; Thompson, 1966, 1978[19]). Of course, exceptions remain, but, as Fouksman (2020) puts it, many South Africans share in a "moral economy" of work. They regard it as an ultimate source of "material and moral value" (Dubbeld, 2021, p.12). I argue here that labour figures among their numerous normative commitments.

By the 1930s, the so-called "poor white problem" in the country was tackled by a combination of educational and health measures, social insurance, pro-work legislation, and a segregated labour market (or the Colour Bar). A compound of policies, not grants, kept Europeans at the apex of social hierarchies (Seekings and Moore, 2013). It would be otherwise had the demand for labour remained as scarce as in the previous decade. Then, structurally jobless and unskilled Europeans were rescued from poverty through a buoyant labour market. Jobs and decent salaries entailed welfare; grants remained "residual", that is, a protection of last resort. Such was an understanding shared by many South Africans: "the importance of full employment for welfare was recognised also by capital, labour, and the representatives of the African population" (Seekings, 2000, p.397).

Though labour has been the focus, grants have played their part. Interestingly, the National Party voted against extending old-age pensions to Africans in 1943 but did not revoke the right after ascending to power in 1949. Instead, the apartheid regime left the already discriminatory value of the benefits paid to Africans to dwindle seven times in comparison to what Whites received (Seekings, 2000). Between the 1970s and the 1990s, old-age pensions were gradually deracialised, and public expenditure on social services for Africans increased. Unfortunately, on the eve of democratic dispensation, twenty years of an erratic and jobless pattern of economic growth lifted the unemployment rate to around 40%. By then, the old-age pension was the welfare system's "mainstay"

[18] And even a "proletarian-based nationalist consciousness" (Dubow, 2011, p.482).

[19] I owe to João Antônio de Paula (in personal communication), both the reference to E. P. Thompson's works and the idea that historical struggles constitute conscious collectivities.

(Seekings, 2000). As the reader will see, pensioned *magogos* (grannies) have been vital for my closest interlocutors.

The African National Congress vied for office at a juncture made of unemployment, fiscal crisis, and with an electoral manifesto promising a "better life for all". What could it mean? A new era, a novel life based on a far-reaching sense of "hope" and "freedom", though with some priorities neatly distinguished.

> The millions of people without jobs will be at the top of the ANC government`s agenda. In establishing a dynamic and growing economy, we will employ various means to create more jobs and opportunities (ANC, 1994)

Instead, the ruling party opted to reform the country's welfare system. By the 1990s, it had been deracialised to a significant extent. The bureaucratic machinery formerly privileging the white minority "came to be broadened" (Button et al., 2018, p.612), but many impoverished Black families remained unassisted. In 1996, the Lund Committee on Child and Family Support was launched. One year later, the Committee proposed to phase out and finally replace the State Maintenance Grant with a much broader and cost-effective cash transfer program, later called the child-support grant. Social scientist and worker Francie Lund, chair of the Committee, defined its political orientation as follows.

> A broadly 'left' committee, with strong commitments to state intervention as a way of addressing both the general levels of inequality in society, and the particular position of women and children (Lund, 2008, p.25).

Most on the committee were cognizant that the market, or better, a distorted market, could not be effective in the poorest areas (2008, p.26). The state, therefore, held an irreplaceable distributive role. The Committee also worked under the assumption that pro-jobs policies would be implemented and South Africans would earn an income mainly from their participation in the labour market. As the transition to democracy proceeded, however, the new political and bureaucratic elite watered down the enthusiasm with state provision and kept the rhetoric of "developmental social welfare" (2008, p.1). Grants were supposed to be a last resort support, whereas productive opportunities or job creation should usher all into better lives (Button et al., 2018, p.605).

Social assistance was again conceived as "residual" (Lund, 2008, p.vi;14). Only conceived, for, in fact, grants, not jobs, became the means of subsistence for millions.

Jobs are what Fouksman's (2020), Dubbeld's (2021), and my collaborators desire. Some even remember the ANC's "promises" and feel "betrayed". My interlocutors recognise how helpful the grant system is; most adopt a moderate tone when criticising the government and the grants. The local concept of "free money" precisely conveys such temperance. My collaborators do not call it "handouts", as Mandela once did (Button et al., 2018, p.605), but, like him, demand prosperity, not halfway[20] liberty. This Introduction is not a libel, yet contradictions are food for critical thought (Stahl, 2013). After 1994, national welfare in South Africa was extended, and poverty was reduced, though modestly, because its deepest roots lay in a labour market that privileges a tiny but now luxurious multiracial elite (Seekings and Nattrass, 2015). Without some Keynesian commitment towards the aggregate demand and a "human" reorientation of the economy towards the majority (Sharp, Hart and Laterza, 2014), poverty and inequality are likely to continue profound and coextensive with the prodigal waste of human inventiveness bestowed upon those South Africans who, malgré themselves, remain considered surplus (Ferguson, 2015; Ferguson and Li, 2017).

Section II – An Overview of the Thesis

I have organised this thesis into five chapters and an interlude on presence. Before outlining their empirical and theoretical contents, I shall comment on the whole range of ethnographic material underpinning my work and the periods in which it has been produced.

My first fieldwork experience in South Africa took place in July 2015. Several months before, I had contacted a *social entrepreneur* through a digital platform. He organised my stay in an informal settlement located at Pretoria-East. For a month, I dwelled in a brick house owned by Norah, a 55-year-old African lady[21]. She had already received a couple of international travellers and used such proceeds to finish the inside of her dwell. Previously, she had lived in a shack.

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[20] One of my interlocutors defined the grants as a "quota", leaving people "halfway" from meeting their needs.

[21] The so-called *social entrepreneur* generously received me in his family's state for occasional sojourns.

Norah's nephew, Luthando, a 30-year-old unemployed woman, worked as my field assistant. She took me up and down, day and night, around the township. So did she between March and mid-July 2016, while I conducted most of the fieldwork that ultimately underpins my master's dissertation (Lage da Cruz, 2017). We then led 16 semi-structured interviews and recorded seven life stories. I also wrote a 111-page field diary.

The reader will notice throughout the thesis that I often quote my interlocutors. Many of such quotes have been extracted from formal, so to speak, interviews, but some correspond to notes I took during ordinary socialisation. I have always enjoyed utter liberty and the gentlest patience from South Africans to talk about their social world and simultaneously write down in my diary. Some of my closest acquaintances have even asked me to take note of their thoughts on occasions when my diary had been left aside. Luthando frequently did so. In 2016, she typed on my personal computer more than once.

Quotes extracted from fieldwork in July 2015 or between March and mid-July 2016 have been labelled *personal archives* (see note 12). However, the bulk of the thesis is predicated on subsequent fieldwork. It was conducted in two different modalities, each lasting about seven months. My assistant Amahle and I led the first between November 2019 and March 2020 in a small town belonging to Mpumalanga province but only 100km from Pretoria. The second modality, led remotely by another assistant, Thabisa, occurred between November 2020 and June 2021, in conformity with the South African Alert system to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The field diary I wrote between October 2019 and May 2020 makes a 46-page PDF. Audio files comprising presential and remote fieldwork amount to more than 26 hours. I have personally transcribed almost all these recorded conversations, which total another 300 PDF pages. Chapter I builds on material from both 2016 and 2019-2010. Chapter II is comprised, to a large extent, of extracts from my 2019-2020 field diary and the first interviews conducted in Kwa-Ndebele. Chapters III and IV are based on the most extended presential interviews. Chapter V presents conversations recorded remotely in a Johannesburg township between November and December 2020. The interlude on presence mixes data gathered in 2016 and a phone interview with my assistant recorded in May 2022.

In The *Ways* to Fieldwork, on Fieldwork and its *Ways* (Chapter I), I narrate how Luthando and I consolidated an ethnographic partnership between March and mid-July 2016. Though she had already worked for me the previous year, Luthando remained insecure about the *job* (as she often referred to her activities as my assistant). Essentially,

her mother's sister, Norah, who hosted both Luthando and me in the informal settlement, wanted her unemployed 30-year-old son, Teboho, to have the position. Since I could neither afford another salary nor would dispense with Luthando's intelligence and social networks, a more than month-long distributive conflict ensued[22].

Only by mid-April 2016 did Luthando feel reassured about the *job*. She had taken me to her grandmother's house in Mpumalanga for a weekend stayover. Amid intense socialisation with neighbours and kin – Norah herself was there - Luthando ushered me into a private conversation with the family's matriarch, Martha. The latter and I then exchanged those "mutual pledges" on which gift-based bonds are built (Hénaff, 2010). I promised Martha to keep Luthando as my assistant, and Martha promised to receive me in Mpumalanga for my PhD fieldwork.

Luthando's attempts to secure her job had begun before our short trip to Mpumalanga. On a Friday night in March, while in the township, she asked me for my computer and typed a paragraph about dramatic episodes in her life. Luthando had been raised by her grandmother as a "churchgoer" but got pregnant at 18 while living her first love. She also contracted HIV and lost her baby minutes after delivery. Luthando died childless and aged 34 in June 2020.

Chapter I follows with reflections on ethnography as a collaborative and conflictual endeavour. By November 2019, when I commenced in-loco fieldwork in Mpumalanga, Luthando's health was seriously compromised. She remained bedridden. Fortunately, one of her oldest pals, Amahle, took on the *job*. Amahle was supposed to find female mothers willing to collaborate with the research and help me interview them. Soon, the task proved tense and feasible only within Amahle's and Luthando's intimate circles. Thabisa, my last interviewee in Mpumalanga and, later, my assistant, belonged to such a network. Clifford (1980, 1988), Middletown and Prahdan (2014), Gupta (2014), and Ferguson (2015) are the primary references to understanding fieldwork possibilities and predicaments in South Africa and elsewhere.

In Chapter I, I also discuss money and the therapeutic power of speech as two enabling factors of fieldwork. Enabling and, incidentally, deployed self-reflectively by my assistants and myself. Since 2016, I have paid my collaborators a modest sum (U$5 per interview). In December 2019, I invited Amahle to reflect on such a payment. From January 2020 onwards, I also discussed with my interviewees what they thought about

[22] Luthando's kinship diagram can be seen in Annex III.

being paid. On a theoretical level, I believe that money and gifts do not make necessary antagonists, not even in the West (Dalton, 1969). It is apposite to remember that socialist Marcel Mauss considered money and markets indispensable and criticised the Bolsheviks for the absurd and even "futile" attempt to dispense with them (1997).

Sharp (2013) belongs to that class of anthropologists who did not relinquish their salaries and regard money and markets as liberating mechanisms when not corrupted in plutocratic oligopolies. Most Anthropologists, though, do not like them (Hart, 2007). Truth and money make a classical pair of foes (Hénaff, 2010), but contrary to Socrates and Plato, the modern intellectual workforce does exchange knowledge for cash. I do not see why poor South Africans should do otherwise, and I believe I am not the first to conduct paid interviews[23]. For instance, Geertz (1968) and Crapanzano (1980) understood money as a matter-of-fact aspect of fieldwork. In South Africa, I believe that rather than enemies, cash, truth, and recognition make an appropriate trio.

Chapter I finishes with a discussion on the therapeutic power of speech. Since 2016, I have interviewed women whose personal circumstances involve diverse and sorrowful combinations of poverty, gender-based violence, and parental absenteeism. Their suffering stems from both present circumstances and sorrow-laden memories. As Freud et al. (2004) once said, human beings suffer significantly from "reminiscences". Two of my 2016 interlocutors argued that responding to the semi-structured interviews that Luthando and I conducted had somewhat alleviated their souls. Visiting their past through speech, in other words, relieved the pressure they felt (Freud et al., 2004). One of them, a fifty-year-old lady, observed she was "happy" with the interview and the possibility of speaking her truth.

> **Imani:** When you are interviewed, you must talk about all your life. That's nice.
>
> **Do you like to talk about your life?**
> Too much… You must talk about your life and tell no lies, say full truths[24]

According to Butler (2005, p.130), subjects have a relation to truth or to what has constituted them as the persons they are. She also considers that "narration has some

[23] I thank Elizabete Albernaz for telling me that her impoverished interlocutors in Johannesburg have charged her for the interviews she conducted.
[24] Personal archive.

propitious relation to survival" (2005, p.61). Since its inception, psychoanalysis has built on a similar empirical observation (Freud and Breuer, 2004). Words have a "magical power" (Freud, 1953), and "talking out" past experiences may placate their present suffering. In 2020, four years after having a glimpse into the healing properties of speech (Bowlby, 2004), I stumbled upon another such empirical instantiation. Following our second recorded conversation, Thabisa remarked that "coughing out" her *past* and taking her memories out made her feel free, as though long-haunting spectres had lost their grip over her.

Thabisa became my assistant between November 2020 and June 2021 (see Chapter V). She then spontaneously told our collaborators that participating in the semi-structured interviews she was conducting on my behalf would make them "forget about their past". Thabisa cast the *job* as a therapy of oblivion. According to her, some memories and thoughts install themselves deep into one's heart and can, like worms, eat oneself. Under the mind-corrosive power of the unsaid, one becomes immobilised[25] as a captive, for "suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject" (Adorno, 1973)[26]. In Thabisa's words, one simply "won't be free" in such a situation. Social forces often operate to keep suffering and violence unarticulated. Commenting on the elective affinities between psychoanalysis and anthropology, hence between psychical suffering and social violence, Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2011a, p.300) argued the following.

> Il y a quarante ans environ, Jürgen Habermas [1970] proposait un parallèle intéressant entre la théorie psychanalytique de la névrose et des situations d'interaction sociale caractérisées par des processus de communication systématiquement déformés, qui masquaient des relations de pouvoir coercitives, arbitraires et illégitimes. Ainsi, comme le refoulement dans le cas de la névrose, ou la forclusion dans le cas de la psychose, les discours de domination dans le monde social impliquent aussi la répression ou l'exclusion de symboles de l'horizon du citoyen

In literal Habermasian parlance, "desymbolisation" means that "conflict-filled" experiences are excluded from "public communication" (1970, p.208). In Chapter V, I

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[25] Definition of weigh on (redirected from weigh upon) [online]. In: The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/weigh+upon (accessed in November 8th, 2023).

[26] The full excerpt is worthy citing, for it also revolves around liberty. "Freedom follows the subject's urge to express itself. The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed" (Adorno, 1973, pp.17-18).

will present the interview of Sipho, one of Thabisa's closest neighbours. At 15, she was raped by her maternal uncle and prohibited, by her own mother, to take the case to the police. Moreover, others within her family discredited her. Sipho was accused of lying and felt lonely, for she had been coerced into social muteness. Familial connivance with the maternal uncle meant that the shared norm of patriarchalism was set in motion to mask reality, deform its communicational basis, and superimpose a social lie, the one according to which family members cannot rape[27]. Such cumulative violence was symptomised by frequent melancholy and an iterative desire for oblivion. Sipho could not be free while carrying the burden[28] of rape alone. In Thabisa's words:

> Daniel, abuse is not a good thing in the world, you know? It can make you not feel free sometimes.

As I mentioned earlier in this Introduction, South Africans have been educated on the virtues and the idiom of liberty[29]. It is one of the many languages they master and an existential condition to which they aspire. I reckon of paramount sociological relevance the fact that Thabisa deployed the language of freedom and unfreedom to characterise suffering derived from processes of gender-based violence followed by socially induced "refoulement" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011a). According to my assistant, Sipho felt "free" – even "too much free" - after the conversation in which she spontaneously confided the episode of avuncular rape and broke with the norm of secrecy[30]. The two women had been neighbours for eight years, but sexual abuse had remained unspoken among them.

I hope the reader concedes that liberty has been my guiding thread so far. Social assistance in cash gives people a minimum of "economic freedom" (Graeber, 2020, p.171[31]). Similarly, one may feel "free", in Thabisa's words, or "relieved", in Bowlby's (2004), when "the sore past [is] allowed to emerge into the present". Both forms of liberty, incidentally, have converged into the history of psychoanalysis. Freud and the European

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[27] Du Toit and Neves (2009, p.30) narrate a court case about marital violence dismissed by the magistrate on the grounds that "it [was] implausible that a man would destroy his own home".

[28] Definition of weigh on (redirected from weigh upon) [online]. In: The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/weigh+upon (accessed in November 8th, 2023).

[29] South Africans study the theme of freedom, rights, and obligations, in a primary discipline called Life Orientation (cf. Chapter III).

[30] According to other collaborators in this thesis, secrecy is a pattern of communicative rapport in older generations of parents – see chapter III.

[31] Graeber (2020) is discussing the so-called basic income grant as a minimum of "economic freedom".

avant-garde knew that "human liberation" remains contingent on both mental and economic well-being (Danto, 2005). Human misery is myriad, and social democrat Freud thought that inequality aggravated the malaise at the bottom strata of societies. It was, according to him, "the fundamental problem", for it distributed suffering disproportionately among impoverished populations[32]. Accordingly, he proposed and enthusiastically supported free psychoanalytic clinics in Weimar Berlin and Red Vienna. In the Budapest Conference of 1918, he stated that mental health should constitute a "right", that is, a "free" service performed as part of the state's obligations, and to be combined with "material support".

> The poor man should have just as much right to assistance for his mind as he now has to the life-saving help offered by surgery [...] Such treatments will be free. It may be a long time before the State comes to see these duties as urgent (Freud, 1955, p.167)

In addition to liberty and rights, the thesis has another guiding thread: the notion of "presence" (Ferguson, 2021). I started using this concept in Chapter II. Then, I offered an insider view of Martha's house in the region of Kwa-Ndebele, where nine other people and I dwelt by the end of November 2019 and the beginning of January 2020. In November, Luthando, her mother, Margaret, Mpho (a friend from the informal settlement), and I arrived from Pretoria. At Martha's, four other people were installed: Luthando's mother's brother (Ntuli), Luthando's brother (Gift), a family friend (Bongani), and Martha herself. Soon, two other guests arrived: Sizwe (another of Martha's grandsons) and Jan (Margaret's boyfriend). We shared the same roof and food until New Year - see Chapter I, Section I.

Two of these residents had not been invited. Sizwe just popped up by the beginning of December. At his previous visit, he had stolen Luthando's money and clothes and had not reappeared since. The other uninvited guest was Mpho. He had been one of my most relevant ethnographic partners in 2016 and kept friendship ties with Luthando and Margaret. On November 21st, 2019, when the two women and I took a pickup truck to Kwa-Ndebele, Mpho was among us and embarked on the journey. He was neither summoned nor rejected. The plot unfolded as follows: since he was *there* among us in Pretoria, and *there* on the pickup truck, Mpho arrived *there* in Kwa-Ndebele and

[32] For this very reason, Freud deplored the gentrification of psychoanalysis, a phenomenon he already noticed by the 1920s (Danto, 2005).

was given a bed *there* in what should be my (sic) room at Martha's. For a couple of weeks, we shared it[33].

"Being there" is one of the manners whereby James Ferguson (2021) defined the concept of "presence". It is not, though, the first definition he gives of the idea, nor the only core notion of *Presence and Social Obligation* (2021). Yet it speaks eloquently about how two non-invited guests at Martha's simply inserted themselves among us and, therefore, shared in almost whatever we had, even though they could not reciprocate[34]. Their presence triggered an immediate entitlement to partake in vital resources, but more was at stake, particularly where Sizwe was concerned. Unlike Mpho, who maintained a friendly bond with our hosts, Sizwe was unwelcome. After announcing his arrival, Luthando's brother, Gift, succinctly remarked – "We can't chase him away". Why couldn't they? An IsiNdebele *adage* (Mauss, 2002) comes apposite.

> *Ikhaya lakagogo abantwana boke* [Granny's home is children's home].

As one of Martha's grandsons, Sizwe had a customary right (Mauss, 2002[35]) to shelter and food (precisely what he got, neither less nor more). Despite his presence, Sizwe remained moral miles away from us. Others, such as Mpho, were integrated into our circuits of mutuality: they shared home chores, beers, *zolo*[36], and the care labour Luthando required. In other words, those with moral standing, that is, recognised as "benevolent" partners (Honneth, 2001), engaged in the daily flow of objects and practices with both the right to partake and duties to perform. As I said in the first part of this Introduction, reciprocity conveys the social norm of *rien sans rien* (Chanial, 2008). Save for Sizwe, whose presence was premised on kin legalism, Martha's guests shared common resources and tasks. Things and services - *dons et prestations* (Mauss, 1923-1924) – make the stuff of shared lives.

Mpho and Sizwe departed from Kwa-Ndebele after New Year. Unfortunately, so did Martha. The matriarch had a pulmonary disease and was taken to Norah's house in Pretoria. Martha's absence was a harsh blow to Luthando, but no void ensued. Two other

[33] When Sizwe arrived, I was admitted into the ladies' bedroom, and the latter shared the guest room with Mpho.
[34] Both Mpho and Sizwe were unemployed and incomeless young adults.
[35] *Les coutumiers, lorsqu'ils existent, s'expriment exactement comme nos adages de droit* (2002, p.104).
[36] *Zolo* is the local term for cannabis. Personal and private consumption by adults is not a crime in the country.

women – a distant and a close friend – gained access to the ladies' bedroom and our mutual routine (see Chapter II, Section II). They replaced Martha as a source of warmth beside Luthando. They filled a gap, for such is an existential state my South African interlocutors abhor. The two women offered Luthando and Margaret their company and services. Kaya helped care for Luthando and was reciprocated in kind, cash, and care. Nandi performed mainly cleaning chores and was also reciprocated in kind, cash, and care. Her lastborn was often in Margaret's arms or sharing Luthando's bed. The two women often fed him. Kaya's youngest daughter frequently ate from Luthando's plate.

Widlok (2016) and, before him, Bird-David (1990, 1994, 2006) dedicated great intellectual work to distinguish sharing from the notion of "generalised reciprocity" (Sahlins, 2017). Sharing may have an analytical standing of its own; some such acts are not meant to be reciprocated. However, as an insider observer of how Luthando, Margaret, Kaya, Nandi, and their children coexisted daily, I contend that generalised reciprocity has at least a pictorial purchase in South African lives. Between January and March 2020, the four ladies (and their children) remained mutually involved, alternately giving to and receiving from each other. When Luthando fed Nandi's baby with her own hands, who fed whom? Who provided, and who received what? Was not the presence of children at the deathbed of a childless woman a gift? Could it be analytically detached from the general flux of inputs and outputs making their vital commerce?[37]

Children make a gift, the grace of novel life (Ngobese, 2013; Caillé, 2019). Their presence is a source of zest, care, and mental health, particularly for grannies. As mentioned in the first part of this Introduction, pensioned older women have been essential to the lives of my collaborators and assistants. I had the privilege of interviewing my assistant's mother, Mary, a circumspect lady who received me for a couple of recorded conversations (see Chapter II). Previously, my assistant had told me that while she worked in Pretoria as an old-age nurse, her firstborn, Lassy, remained with Mary in Kwa-Ndebele. Grannies dislike being home alone, for they keep too self-absorbed in their ruminations. During our interview, Mary observed that when Amahle marries and moves, Lassy will remain with her. For years, grandmother and grandson have shared whatever they have, by virtue of which they now literally "have each other". Reciprocal rights and duties, shared presence and pleasure, sealed their lives in fact, law, and care.

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[37] Numerous other visitors, whether close or distant acquaintances, often came ask Luthando for some money or food, and put their children at her side. She then could enjoy the balm of novel human life.

The idea that presence creates obligations, including the obligation to share, is pretty much Ferguson's claim in *Presence and Social Obligation* (2021). It was, indeed, *by being there* over time that Lassy became part of Mary's estate, in a legal tradition where rights in people and things interweave (Kopytoff, 1987). In Chapter III, I will present the stories of two sisters, Ukhuna and Omkhulu, who gave me the gift of a thorough account of their lives. Aged 7, Ukhuna was given to her grandmother. The old lady had just lost her sister (and home companion) and asked Ukhuna's parents to have one of their children with her. Ukhuna, his second born, was given to *magogo*, who took care of her and received her care until she passed away in 2018. When I interviewed Ukhuna's sister, Omkhulu, she told me the following about her sister's early move to magogo Lisa's.

> [Gogo Lisa] told mom and my dad: 'Please, give me just one child, just one child, so I can stay with her, just one'. And my father said: 'Ah, just take Ukhuna because you are not supposed to stay alone. Just take Ukhuna'.
>
> **Why *magogos* are not supposed to stay alone?**
> It's not right!

I believe subjects, in general, and my South African interlocutors, in particular, keep a permanent regard to questions of moral correction, that is, to what is or not "right, adequate or just" in social life (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022a; 2022b). In Omkhulu's words, leaving a grandmother unaccompanied at home is morally wrong. South African elders are not expected to remain alone, so juniors shall prevent this from happening. With cases such as Ukhuna's, we have a glimpse of the moral infrastructure (Honneth, 2003) of social relations in South Africa and its presence-centered normativity. As I will discuss in the Interlude on Presence*, being there with* and *for* someone is not a social fact derived from physical proximity but from a moral order in which people shall live together or "be there for each other". To resume the case of Ukhuna's grandmother and paraphrase Ferguson (2021), "the is" of body and mental decay through time (oldness) remain indissociable from "the ought" of companionship. The latter participates in the intelligibility of the former, so much so that if the must be accompanied of old age does not obtain, the nature, or the is of elderliness is corrupted; it becomes both an immoral and unnatural state of affairs, a signal of improper human life.

Presence, in other words, is a paramount "value" (Dumont, 2013) in South Africa, and it is within this realm that I shall finish these introductory notes. As mentioned, all my work in the country is premised on Luthando's creative energies and social networks. She died in June 2020 from kidney failure derived from immunodeficiency. Aged 18, Luthando contracted HIV from her first boyfriend and the father of the baby she lost after delivery. She was then informed she would not conceive again. In the aftermath, Luthando kept an erratic pattern of anti-retroviral intake. According to her relative, friend, and my third assistant, Thabisa, she led a careless life. According to me, she embarked on self-destruction. Among my interlocutors in this thesis, life without one's own progeny is life improper, unnatural, and even "hateful". Not even a *job* can remedy the absence of children. When "the is" of human existence is detached from "the ought" of procreation, ergo from fertility as an individual and collective project[38], premature social death falls upon individuals: they live already condemned to "oblivion" (Ngobese, 2003, p.76). If childlessness is "unacceptable" and even a "tragedy" (Ngobese, 2003), then Luthando's decease is both tragic and emancipatory. May she rest in liberty.

[38] Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2022b) considers values as "projects for society". LeVine (1973, p.135) states the following about fertility in the African continent: "It would be hard to exaggerate the personal importance of fertility to individuals of both sexes or the fear they have of being sterile".

Chapter I - On the Ways to Fieldwork; on Fieldwork and its Ways

Section I – A Note on *Ways*

This chapter deals with the ways my South African research assistants and I pursued while conducting fieldwork. In each of the chapter's sections, I explore the means we deployed in our attempts to inquire into the life stories of young female recipients of the child-support grants. Specifically, I discuss four enabling aspects of fieldwork: time (Section II), collaboration (Section III); money (Section IV); and the therapeutic power of speech (Section V).

To better understand ways, I propose an analogy and a contrast between it and two notions akin: method and strategies. The English word method traces back to Greek *methodos*, a composite form meaning the "pursuit of knowledge" and made from *meta* "(expressing development) + *hodos* (way)" [39]. My choice of ways pays tribute to *methodos* because of their partial equivalence and because I mean to incorporate meta's developmental, time-based aspect.

In contrast to method, ways have neither a connotation of certainty nor the correlate premise of testable demonstration. As Cardoso de Oliveira, R. (1995, p.6-8) puts it, certainty and verifiability do not accommodate well within disciplines grappling with the meanings of social life and premised on unique, unrepeatable relations between subjects - ethnographers and their collaborators. Contrarily to method, which presupposes a "nomological link" between cause and effect, means and ends, ways have no such implication and better depict the contingent conditions under which Anthropologists and their collaborators work[40].

Strategies are the other notion to which I compare ways. I called money and the therapeutic power of speech two enabling ways of fieldwork, for they were consequential in my assistants' and my attempts to interview young female recipients of the child support grants. It is tantamount to say that both have been effective means to achieve an

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[39] Definition of method [online]. Oxford University Press. Available at: https://www.lexico.com/definition/method (Accessed: 1 July 2021).

[40] This existential aspect is not the only testifying to the inadequacies of the notion of method to Anthropology. As Cardoso de Oliveira, R. (1995) and Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (1990, 2008) discussed, the discipline is premised on a two-fold effort of self-reflexivity, which they call "non-methodic moments". The endeavour to find conceptual footholds in the community of pairs and the so-called "native communities" have no parallel with the notion of method as adopted at the inception of the social sciences.

end in so far as they operated as magnets, though not only. Components of a conscious design to interviewing recipients of the child support grants, money and the therapeutic power of speech fit Godbout's concise definition of *stratégie*.

> *L'être humain est rationnel: il utilise des moyens pour arriver à une fin. Parmi ces moyens, certain tiennent compte des autres acteurs et s'adaptent aux réaction des êtres humains. Ces moyens sont appélés des stratégies* (2008, p.70)

The problems with the notion of strategy derive from its connection with the concept of "instrumental reason" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972; Goodbout, 2008)[41]. Strategic, instrumental thinking consists of a model of rationality aimed at achieving ends by deploying means as efficiently as possible. In this equation, humans are treated as mere means to ends, or more often to *utilitarian ends* - self-interested economic gratifications (Godbout, 2008, pp.72-3). This framework resonates deeply with the critical tradition of social sciences and its diagnosis of the unprecedented reification[42] of humans (and nature) as a modern dystopia and the utmost negation of dignity.

The connection between reification, strategic and instrumental thinking already counsels against the notion of strategy. Nevertheless, the diagnosis goes further, for strategic action goes in tandem with the commodification of social life. The ubiquitous use of money and its property of general fungibility have created a world where even ultimate, priceless human values seem venal and, therefore, corruptible (Hénaff, 2010). This well-known critique continues to apply to large sectors of market economies. It is misleading, however, when pushed to the extremes, for the concepts of human beings and society are reduced to their 19th-century, utilitarian version. Polanyi called such a persuasive but ultimately "arbitrary" picture of social life "the economistic fallacy" (1977, p.11-12).

Even a critical social scientist such as Bourdieu fell prey to the idea that utilitarian self-interest is the ultimate end, and instrumental action is the only basis of human action (Caillé, 2018). I, therefore, prefer to treat the ethnographic use of money, for instance, as a *way* rather than a strategy. Conceptually, I agree with the proposition that *des motifs*

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3 It is worth noting that Jurgen Habermas (1984-1987) distinguishes instrumental and strategic action. Both, according to him, are meant to achieve egocentric ends, but the latter may involve some cooperation between actors.

[42] Understood as a pattern of relating to others as "lifeless objects – without a trace of inner sentiment or any attempt at understanding the other's point of view" (Honneth, 2008, p.18).

utilitaires et des motifs moraux s'entremêlent toujours dans les conditions réelles de l'action (Friedberg as cited in Goudbout, 2008, p.70). More significantly, the postulate that all action is instrumental and nothing else than economically oriented negates Anthropology's empirical commitment to *ex-post* analysis of social life.

> *Le chercheur ne doit jamais postuler ex ante des motifs, mais seulement les déduire de l'observation, ex post* (Godbout, 2008, p.71).

The far-reaching spread of the "economistic fallacy" (Polanyi, 1977) has made it a general tendency to believe that human games (Godbout, 2008) have no other ground than instrumental and utilitarian thinking. Throughout this chapter, I will show that *ex-post* analysis of the paid interviews my assistants and I conducted with female recipients of the child-support grants cannot be attributed to economic self-interest only. Even though all my interviewees appreciated the small sum I paid them (U$5 for each interviewing section), they assessed their experience in more complex terms. One of them, Mariah, said her participation in the research should not be understood exclusively in monetary terms – "You are helping me to express myself the way I'm feeling".

Among poor South Africans, it goes without saying that even a small sum of money makes a significant incentive to give an interview. However, again according to Mariah, "it's not all about money". In other words, payment does not account for the entire range of reasons this young woman accepted to be interviewed and even appreciated it. Another of my collaborators, Thabisa, mentioned the therapeutic effects she enjoyed after recalling grim episodes of her life story. In our last interviewing session, we had the following dialogue:

> **Do you think that these interviews should be paid?**
> **Thabisa:** No, [you are] helping us to forget about our stories, to forget [the] life we've been through before [we] come to this stage now.

Thabisa accepted and seemed grateful for the ZAR 300 I gave her after four interviewing sections, so I take *cum grano salis* her statement that the interviews should not involve money. As I understand Thabisa and others, the economic dimension of our interaction should not obfuscate other motives at play. Among the latter, the therapeutic effects of the interviews stood prominent for her. Thabisa was my first interviewee in the period 2019-20 to mention that narrating her past predicaments purged her, at least

temporarily, of a past marked by gender violence and familial disputes over money. When assessing the interviewing process, she said the opportunity to "cough out" her past had relieved her; she felt "free".

When I called the therapeutic power of speech an enabling way of fieldwork, I meant more than an outcome two of my interviewees ascribed to their interaction with me. I implied that the relief fostering quality of the conversations became a means to persuade young recipients of the child support grants to narrate their life stories. Such a strategy, or way, as I prefer it, was not mine but Thabisa's. As mentioned in the Introduction, I interviewed her in March 2019, and by November, she started working for me. The *job* consisted of conducting and enregistering shorter versions of the interviews and discussing their content with me. When asked why she chose her first interviewee, Sipho, my assistant told me the following:

> **Thabisa:** Because of Sipho, I know her. Sipho always tells me: 'I want to forget about my past tense'. So, I told Sipho: I have something. I want to interview you so that this interview can make you forget about your past tense.

Thabisa presented the interviews as conversations helping people "cough out" and "forget about their past". She turned the therapeutic effects she experienced when I interviewed her into a rationale and magnet in her quest for female recipients of the child support grants. The interviews Thabisa conducted were also paid, but, according to her, she never stressed it when inviting her neighbours and relatives.

Before drafting a broader ethnographic picture of this and other matters, I shall comment briefly on time as another conducive way. The ethnographic encounters on which this thesis rests took place due to a temporal investment in a partnership with a young South African woman named Luthando. Between 2015 and 2020, she and I kept a "rapport" (Clifford, 1988, p.34[43]) based on financial assistance, ethnographic guidance, and support. This young woman made all "possibilities for fieldwork emerge" (Gupta, 2014) by connecting my assistants, most of our interviewees and myself. In short, Luthando converted herself into a *sine qua non* of all my work in South Africa.

The time-based and money-based aspects of Luthando's and my partnership do overlap. As much as I was concerned, she most needed money. She appreciated my

[43] Clifford defines rapport as a social relationship premised on "minimal acceptance" and "empathy", but also having overtones of "friendship".

friendship, but as Levine (1973, pp.133-4) put it, “the quality” of our bond was inseparable from its material expression. Luthando, in turn, shared her intelligence, home, and innermost social networks with me. Within these, people had no reason to receive me kindly, as they did, save for the history she and I shared: they knew I had been her *boss*[44] for a while. Our continuous and timely[45] mutual relevance was vital to all my ethnographic encounters before and after her death. In treating time as the bedrock of our partnership, I finally pay a theoretical tribute to Hénaff (2010) and Clifford (1980).

The French author believes that relationships between strangers become social bonds over time. Clifford (1980, p.521), remaining within the politics of ethnography, asserts that Anthropologists and their collaborators need time to build “mutual confidence”[46]. They both argue that it is not time by itself that metamorphoses relations into alliances, but what Clifford calls the “ongoing process of gift and counter-gift” (1980, p.529), and Hénaff names “long-term procedures of engagement” (2010, p.148). With time and gifts, time and money, *trust* (or credit[47]), *data*[48] and debt flow under the light that only iterated reciprocity cast upon human encounters, in general, and between anthropologists and our collaborators, in particular.

Section II - On Fieldwork as Timework

I first met Luthando in July 2015, when she worked as my month-long assistant in an informal settlement in Pretoria. She was living with her mother's sister, Norah, who hosted me. Luthando introduced me to neighbours and friends in taverns and on the streets; she scheduled interviews and translated those who were not proficient in English.

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[44] I have never defined myself as Luthando’s boss. I rejected the predicate for a while but finally realized she and other interlocutors would not change their conceptual system because of me. I had no alternative than acquiescing.

[45] According to Thabisa, the financial assistance Luthando received in 2017 helped her recover from HIV-related sickness.

[46] Clifford refers specifically to the length of time it took between Leenhardt and an African chief, Mindia, to set their relation on mutual trust. Since the bulk of Clifford’s argument is that Leenhardt’s experiences could contribute to “rethink the social processes by which ethnographies are created” (1980, p.529), I deemed it reasonable to generalise time as a crucial component of all fieldwork, as it is of all alliances (Hénaff, 2010).

[47] *French, from Old French, from Old Italian credito, from Latin crēditum, loan, from neuter past participle of crēdere, to entrust.* Ethymology of credit [online]. The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/credit (accessed May 31st, 2023).

[48] *Latin, something given, from neuter past participle of dare, to give; see dō- in Indo-European roots*. Ethymology of datum [online]. The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/datum (accessed May 31st, 2023).

My assistant opened my eyes to the ways of life in a South African township and left an imprint on me of the vividness of her intelligence and the easiness with which she walked me around. In August 2015, I quit South Africa with the certainty that I would return and have Luthando as my assistant again.

In March 2016, Luthando's mother's sister received me for a five-month stay at the informal settlement. On my first day back, I took the following notes:

> Some settlers are a bit surprised at my coming back. Luthando is the happiest by far, but Margareth [her mother] is no longer living at the house. Luthando said that Norah doesn't treat her and her mother well. Besides, Luthando and Teboho [Norah's son] are no longer talking.

Discord loomed over Luthando and Teboho: they vied for the *job* as my assistant. Norah sided with her son and demanded that Luthando move from the shack she occupied just a fortnight before my return. An old settler at the township, Norah owned[49] her bricked house and another yard, where two shacks stood: Luthando's and Teboho's. According to my assistant, Norah’s request was adamant, and Luthando overcame it only by resorting to Martha, her grandmother and the family's matriarch. Martha told Norah she could pay the rent for Luthando if necessary. This move enabled my assistant to remain at the shack but did not clear the air.

The distributive quarrel I compounded once split over me. A couple of weeks after my return to the informal settlement, Norah argued that I should pay Teboho a monthly salary. Norah's son did help me occasionally: he would accompany me to local businesses or fix the house's power outlets when electricity was available. I could tip him for such services but not afford another salary. Thus informed, Norah reacted with discontent, though our relations never turned into sheer opposition. Luthando, not me, bore the brunt of Norah's irritation.

Teboho and Luthando, 30-year-old youngsters, had been experiencing structural unemployment for a long time (Ferguson & Li, 2017). Neither had passed *matric*[50] nor seemed inclined to perform domestic services. They could, since Norah worked for an aristocratic family in Pretoria, which had more than once offered them opportunities in house cleaning, gardening, babysitting, etc. Luthando and Teboho, as most of my South

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[49] Since the region still was an informal settlement, no inhabitant legally owned a plot. With the partial regularization of the area in 2019, older settlers, such as Norah, became proprietors.

[50] Roughly, the South African certificate of high school conclusion.

African interlocutors for the matter, seemed to despise such jobs[51]. Conversely, research assistance required their social and linguistic competencies, a dose of empathy, tolerance (Clifford, 1988), and some proficiency in English. These were not trivial abilities but seemed better, I suppose, than a domestic job.

I had more than once told Luthando that she, and only she, would work for me. Nevertheless, she remained uncertain about her status as my assistant, especially during my first month back at the informal settlement. When we argued, and the clashing of our manners often led us to quarrel, she asked me not to transpire annoyance. Luthando feared her mother's sister could turn minor sparks of discontent into a conflagration.

For instance, by my second weekend at Norah's house, I decided to leave the informal settlement for a stayover in a comfortable suburb in Pretoria. I had not yet gotten used to local patterns of weekend alcohol consumption and felt I had better give myself a couple of quiet days elsewhere. Luthando and one of her closest friends, Bela, approached me alarmingly. They thought Norah might interpret my withdrawal as an index of dissatisfaction with my assistant. I then took the following notes.

> Bela comes to my room and asks: “What is your problem”? She says she is angry with me. Luthando tries to convince me not to go. She says Norah doesn't like her and will blame her for my departure. She says I must stay for her sake. Norah asked her to move from the yard a few weeks before, claiming that Teboho needed a two-pieced shack. Luthando resorted to her grandmother, who told Norah she could pay the rent if necessary. Finally, Luthando tells me that Norah wants her to clean the house every day, which she won't do.

I did not attend to my assistant's request to remain at the township. Fortunately, no disagreement between Luthando and Norah followed my weekend withdrawal. Probably, Norah had already noticed I would not dispense with Luthando's assistance, so the opposition between the two women revolved around other subjects, such as cleaning the house and cooking. In any case, Luthando continued to evoke the conflict with Norah as a risk to her *job*. Two weeks after my Saturday withdrawal from the informal settlement, my assistant took two other steps to consolidate her position. Both, incidentally, centred on the family's matriarch, Martha.

On a Friday night in April 2016, Luthando asked me to give her typing classes and help write her curriculum vitae. In 2010, she completed an introductory computer

[51] The refusal to perform menial, socially insignificant jobs among Southern African populations has been discussed, inter alia, by Comaroff and Comaroff (1987), Ashforth (1990), and Atkins (1994).

course and worked in a store but lost both the job and the skills. One month after my second arrival at the informal settlement, she led my local inroads and gave me Isizulu classes in exchange for a salary (ZAR 1500[52]). On the face of it, Lutando's proposal merely implied the inclusion of another activity within the scope of our partnership. However, more was at play, particularly in the terms she deployed to persuade me. Luthando then narrated a story of unplanned pregnancy, school dropout and family disappointment.

> My grandmother raised me. When my mother got pregnant, she was 21 years old, so my grandmother had to take care of me from grade one until grade eleven. That's why I go out of school... By the time I was pregnant, at the age of eighteen, my grandmother was very sad on me because I was a churchgoer. And then, in 2005, I didn't go to school because I was still in pain for three months. And then, in 2006, I went back to school, but in June, I went out again. Cause I was still sick and too skinny, and they were laughing at me. It was my first love... At the age of 19, I repeated grade eleven, so I dropped out cause I thought: 'maybe I'm too big for grade eleven'. At 18, I was supposed to be in grade 12. So, I disappointed my grandmother a lot, and I was the hope for her. And for that, I won't forgive myself, cause even today she is busy telling me: 'You are the one I trusted. I thought you were the one who would show all of them the way of living, but you didn't'. I didn't.

At 18, when living her first love experience, Luthando got pregnant and lost her baby after delivery. In the aftermath, she had uterus complications, which belated her return to school for some months. When Luthando resumed classes, she was mocked, felt awkward and finally dropped out. Until then, her grandmother, Martha, had high hopes for her education. No one in the family completed high school, and Luthando was supposed to interrupt the circuit of school failure. Yet she did not and frustrated Martha. It was against this background that Luthando asked me to give her typing and computer classes. I said I would consider the proposal; we could discuss it at another opportunity. She nevertheless insisted on her demand, again on emotionally charged terms:

> You must. Do you want to see me happy?

Such conversation took place on a festive Friday night. We were many inside Norah's living room. There were neighbours, some kin (including Luthando's mother), and dearest friends, all at merrymaking time. Sad but told in private, Luthando's story did

[52] A meagre salary but what I could afford. In addition to this ZAR 1500, I sometimes would buy her food and toiletries.

not dampen our high spirits. We continued singing, dancing, and drinking, for the weekend had just commenced. My assistant insisted once or twice more on her proposal, but we did not settle an agreement. I knew I could not help her reacquire former skills. We were too present-oriented, too keen on the intensities of social life in a township to sustain a routine of classes. My lessons in IsiZulu, for instance, would not last more than a couple of weeks.

Luthando's narrative of past predicaments was her first move to fasten our bonds. Some pieces were missing in the puzzle; only time would give me a comprehensive view. My assistant's tale of fall and disappointment had stricken a chord and made me sympathise even more with her. I suspected, in any case, that more was already underway. With the notes above, I registered that Luthando seemed to propose a long-lasting partnership with me. Though she had not mentioned the time component of our rapport, precisely this factor came to my mind. One month afterwards, Luthando took a second step.

On a Friday morning, Norah, Luthando and I left the squatter camp for a weekend stayover at their "home" in Kwa-Ndebele. There lived the family's matriarch, two middle-aged adults (Luthando's mother and mother's brother), and two adolescents (Luthando's brother and a cousin). Martha's house in Kwa-Ndebele was a somewhat circular, multi-roomed dwelling with a large yard, a dog, and an ample view of the rural surroundings. After weeks within the narrow landscape of the informal settlement, the new environment relieved me. So did Martha's gentle and vivid presence. She was the cardinal piece in Luthando's proposal to fasten our alliance.

A month before, at the informal settlement, Luthando's narrative of unplanned pregnancies and family disappointment was preceded by the announcement that she would soon pay Martha a visit in Kwa-Ndebele. Since she was earning a salary as my assistant, she had to share it with the old lady. In her words:

> My grandmother raised me, so I can't eat my money alone. I have to provide for my grandmother 'cause she is the breadwinner.

Luthando's salary as my assistant implied the obligation to reciprocate with Martha and honour a story of labour and care. Aged almost 80, Martha still had a domestic job in Pretoria, where she commuted twice weekly. The matriarch remained the family's financial axis in Kwa-Ndebele, as she had been during the almost 25 years Luthando lived

with her. During the weekend, I stayed in Kwa-Ndebele, the matriarch, my assistant, and I had a moment to sip and chat privately while the others socialised in the yard. A respectable *magogo*, Martha no longer drank "with outsiders, only with family", as Luthando then wrote in my notebook. I had asked my assistant to interview her grandmother, and the latter acquiesced.

My first question to Martha concerned the differences between apartheid time and the present. Martha was born in 1942 and had worked as a house helper for White families since 1960. Translating her grandmother, Luthando told me that "they [Black people] were living not good" during apartheid. The matriarch turned directly to me – "The white people asked us the pass"[53]. Now Martha considered herself "free" but complained there was "no work" for the youth. She also told me that she had an old-age grant and a salary as a house helper.

Immediately after imparting this information, Martha talked to Luthando in IsiNdebele, and my assistant explained to her grandmother that the interview would not be published. As a recipient of the old-age grant, then worth ZAR 1420 per month, Martha thought she could not have another income source lest she lose the social benefit. She would not[54], yet the old lady insisted the interview should not come out. Both Luthando and I reassured her it would not and kept the subject of her job as a house helper.

Martha had started working for her current bosses when their children were still infants and told us she raised them as her own. She had their bosses in great esteem, and they respected her, too. Since the demise of apartheid, Martha was no longer supposed to address her employers as sir or madam. Now she can call the bosses by their name, Luthando told me. Then, again, the matriarch turned to me:

> Cause Mandela said there are no bosses here; there are no madams and sirs. We are all the same.

The semi-structured interviews I conducted in 2016 commenced with my interviewees' perceptions of the differences between apartheid and the present. There followed a question on the personal meanings of freedom. When I asked Martha whether she mainly felt the virtues of liberty in the domain of labour, she resumed her concerns about having two sources of income. Luthando translated her.

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[53] A work-permit that Africans had to carry while moving within areas defined as White by the apartheid regime.

[54] Martha's income as a house helper did not exceed the means-test limit.

> She doesn't want to disappoint her bosses because they do respect her. She's helping them, 'cause they're helping her. The government must not know [that she is still working]. She's the breadwinner.

We changed the subject. However, during my weekend stayover, I noticed that two other facts compounded Martha's anguish: consciousness of death and her three unemployed grandchildren. She complained the day after our interview: "I will die; Luthando must find a job! I work alone here!" Martha was indeed the only working person at her house, but others shared her concerns. Luthando reckoned the fragility of her personal situation. A day before our interview with Martha, my assistant asked me twice: "Do you have a plan for me?" She wanted to know if I could secure her a long-lasting partnership, as I had interpreted the request to have computer classes a month earlier.

When Luthando asked whether I had "a plan" for her, she did not mention computer classes. My assistant wanted me to set forth a temporal blueprint of our relationship before Martha. By the end of the short interview with the old lady, I told her I would try to remit monthly to Luthando after my departure to Brazil. I also mentioned I should return to conduct Ph.D. research in Kwa-Ndebele, and Luthando would continue to assist me. Martha nodded warmly and welcomed my intended sojourn: "Stay here as long as you give". Cognizant that Luthando and I had a source of strain within her family, Martha told me not to worry about anything – "Not even Norah". When the matriarch left us and entered her room, my assistant showed me profound gratitude.

> Ngiyabonga [thank you]. It's a prayer, and it's a gift. My mother's house is my house, my grandmother's house is my house[55].

The three of us had just sketched a compromise, the evening fell, and merry-making time continued inside and outside the house. Martha still took part in domestic beer drinking (discreetly but with brio). At some point in Saturday's jollies, she turned to Luthando and asked: "Where's the beer? I gave ZAR 50 for only two beers?" I had been given the twin privileges of interviewing and sipping with the matriarch, an activity she then kept beyond the purview of strangers. Thanks to our "mutual pledges" (Henaff, 2010) of hospitality and assistance over time, I had secured a present and future place within the family's innermost circle.

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[55] She was quoting the following say in IsiNdebele: *ikhaya lakagogo ikhaya abantawana boke* [granny's home is children's home].

I would again set my feet at Martha's only three years later. By mid-August 2016, I returned to Brazil but managed to keep my rapport with Luthando via periodical remittances, particularly after December 2016. I was then informed she had fallen seriously ill due to unchecked HIV. According to a mutual friend, she had weakened to the point of no return. Upon reaching Luthando, she told me she was "sick, not dying". In any case, I could not help being touched and giving a more sentimental tone to our bond. I called her more often, and remittances became regular. Fastening the currency component of our rapport consolidated me as her *boss*.

By July 2019, a few months before my return to South Africa, I resorted to Luthando's services. The country's Embassy in Brazil conditioned the visa on two invitation letters: from a South African academic institution and a South African host. Professor Sharp at the University of Pretoria gently attended to my request, thanks to the equally gentle works of Dr. Braz Dias. As to the host letter, there was Luthando.

> I hereby confirm that Daniel Mendonça Lage da Cruz, a Brazilian national with Passport number XY 000000, will reside with me, Luthando K. H., ID number 0000000000, during his stay in South Africa [...]. According to his research plans, we will be installed both at my home (Mpumalanga) and in the township X, Pretoria East. We shall spend 15 days in each place alternately, and in both I will exert the function of his main research assistant.
>
> Please feel free to contact me.
> Yours sincerely,
> Luthando K. H.
> + 27 00000000

Before landing for the third time in South Africa, my research plans were precisely the above, and Luthando had never objected to any part of it. She signed the host letter as I had written it. However, by the end of October 2019, upon my third arrival at the informal settlement in Pretoria, I noticed she looked frail and somewhat despondent. Only weeks later did Luthando tell me she would not stay in the township. In the meantime, her health deteriorated, and she was taken to a nearby hospital. I visited and kept assisting her but embarked on a short trip to prospect a new field in Limpopo Province.

When released from the hospital, Luthando urged me to return to Kwa-Ndebele. We departed immediately. Nevertheless, it took me a couple of weeks at Martha's house to finally decide to concentrate all fieldwork there. I had been considering the Limpopo alternative because the impossibility of counting on Luthando as my assistant disoriented

me. The field's new arrangement was just too unexpected, and the incongruency between my former plans and the ground situation inclined me toward a radical move to Limpopo[56].

A tandem of affective and ethnographic reasons rescued me from delirium and kept me in Kwa-Ndebele. First, I realised how rewarding it was to participate in the care work Luthando required[57]. Furthermore, I noticed a novel field was underway at Martha's. With *field* and Martha's, I do not mean any stabilised, spatially given categories (Ferguson and Gupta, 1997). On the contrary, I mean that thanks to the depth that time and timely mutual assistance had brought upon Luthando, her family and me, I was already observing and participating in interconnected processes and relations within their *household*, that is

> A 'small open system', a temporary set of arrangements and relationships embedded within, containing and overlaid with multiple other networks (Neves & du Toit, 2008, p.4)

Such a transient set of arrangements and relations revolved around two social facts: Luthando's return to Kwa-Ndebele and Martha's impending death. The matriarch had a pulmonary disease and was taken to Norah's house in Pretoria by January. Then, Luthando became the financial linchpin[58] of her grandmother's house and set old and new care networks in motion. There was Kaya, for instance, an impoverished 35-year-old woman who had never been close to my assistant. Still, in exchange for a small remuneration in kind and cash, she helped care for Luthando, and became her "good friend" and one of my interviewees. There was also Amahle, Luthando's old pal and my assistant between December 2019 and April 2020. Finally, there was Thabisa, my fifth interviewee and assistant between November 2020 and June 2021.

Isn't the field a "temporal and relational entity" requiring "enablers, interlocutors, and a network of connections" (Gupta, 2014)? Time and support had ushered me into Luthando's intimate circle by the end of 2019. As in 2015 and 2016, she was again making different sets of social bonds to overlap, but now in Kwa-Ndebele. Though frail and

[56] I would keep assisting and visiting Luthando, so nobody at Martha's house explicitly objected to my intended departure.

[57] Two days after our arrival in Kwa-Ndebele I went to the local clinic with Luthando. Upon noticing how close my assistant and I were, the *sisters* (nurses) decided to open me a medical file. I should accompany Luthando to the clinic every fortnight, for they would check me up too. Soon the nurses tested me for HIV, hepatitis, and tuberculosis. We discussed Luthando's diet, hygiene precautions, and other measures to improve her health.

[58] I was paying Luthando a rent of ZAR 5000, with which she afforded household essential expenditures, replacing Martha as the breadwinner.

mostly in bed, Luthando continued to be my *assistant*, for she made “certain kinds of possibilities for fieldwork emerge” (Gupta, 2014). Grandmother and granddaughter had provided me with in-situ anchorage within a double current: Luthando's convalescence and the seismic movements stemming from the near-death of Martha, the former breadwinner.

Section III - On Fieldwork as Collaborative (and Conflictual) Work

After two or three weeks at Martha's house in Kwa-Ndebele, Luthando told me Amahle would be my assistant. I had met the latter during my 2016 weekend stayover at Martha's but kept no significant memory of our interaction. In 2019, Amahle and Luthando were both 33 years old. They had attended high school together and got pregnant about the same time. Luthando’s baby died after labour, and she quit school without matric. Amahle had Lassy and got martric. Her educational trajectory went further: she obtained two college diplomas (nursery and catering). Regardless, she had been unemployed and living at her mother's home since 2018. Kamogelo, her second child and a remarkably communicative infant, also lived there.

As the assistant designated by Luthando, Amahle undertook two very delicate and demanding initial works: conceiving a semi-structured interview with me and finding our first interviewees. By the beginning of December, I invited Amahle to sit and think up the questions constituting Annex 1[59]. We also discussed etiquette strategies for approaching our collaborators. She suggested, for example, that before interviewing people, we should present ourselves and explain the nature of the *job*. Here follows an excerpt of the recorded conversation Amahle and I then had:

> **So, first, we introduce ourselves...**
> **Amahle:** Me and you will greet them and gonna tell them who are we. I'm Amahle, and this is Daniel. We are here to interview you guys about social grant money that you receive in South Africa. So, if you agree to talk to us, we will be happy. And then we start asking questions.
>
> **Do you think we should also present the questions before the interview?**

[59] I had already written questions 1-10, concerning the childhood and the familiar trajectory of child support grants’ recipients.

Yes, I think so.

Why do you think we should present the questions before the interview?
You know why? Because some people, they will be so defensive. That's why I have to represent first so that I will have permission and we can come together and interview them. And we gonna... we gonna ask them the questions that they will like to answer so that we leave the ones that they don't like.

We should tell them to choose the questions...
Yeah. When I ask them, they will tell me that I can answer this, and I can't force that person to answer that. So that's why I'm gonna choose the questions so that when we go together, we gonna ask them those questions so that you can write your research.

Amahle was thus formulating the first and foremost rule of the semi-structured interviews. After presenting the research, its subject, and us, we would inform our collaborators that they could skip any question. Months after conceiving such guidelines, my next field assistant, Thabisa, observed that our collaborators should feel “free” to talk. We followed such a premise, but not all interviewees avoided questions. The ‘freedom clause’ created a propitious interaction pattern, leaving our collaborators less defensive than they would be if approached otherwise.

The semi-structured interviews that Amahle and I conceived were not meant to have the centrality they ended up having. I first supposed they would be just one among other forms of interaction with female recipients of the child support grants. Before setting my feet on the field, I fancied that my assistant and I would have the opportunity to participate in the quotidian practices of women and their families[60]. Here follows an excerpt of Amahle's and my considerations on the matter.

I would like not only to have one interview but also to take part in family life as far as possible. So, I think that more than asking them to set one date, you should ask them for more dates, perhaps during the weekends. What do you think?
I think maybe. I can tell them that we want to spend more time with you guys, so maybe when we finish the interview, we gonna ask again: when can we come back? Maybe someday in the afternoon or later, we have dinner together, then we start our conversation. You see, we get used to the family, and they will get used to us. They will be happy for us, and that's why I'm saying that maybe we can tell them, we may ask them if we can come back some other day.

[60] Such was a privilege Levine et al. (1994) had after providing their Gusii collaborators a pediatric clinic.

> **I'm not asking them to receive us every day. But I would like you to think about how many days and meetings we can have with a family in a month. What do you think is reasonable?**
> Maybe four times.
>
> **Why four times? Why not more? Why not less?**
> We will hear about [it]. If they want us more, we will go there, but me I think four times. We won't get them angry, like them chasing us away or...
>
> **Do you think that four times are not invasive?**
> Yes.

Contrary to my delusions about meddling in the domestic routine of interviewees, Amahle was aware of the resistance we soon would meet. Scholars have insisted on the discipline's invasive and extractive nature (Clifford, 1988; Strathern, 2004), but no academic critique can excel what one encounters on the field. During my stay in Kwa-Ndebele, such ordinary critique expressed itself in sheer numbers. Besides herself and two other young women, neighbours with whom Amahle lived in close intimacy[61], my assistant found us no other collaborator[62]. More significantly, she experienced the local dislike of her working with me. Rumour had it that we were having an affair – which we had not - and I witnessed shop assistants at the local mall vexing her. They only stopped after the manager intervened.

Antagonism towards the enabling activity of assistants and the intrusive nature of fieldwork is not limited to South Africa. Prahdan, the longstanding assistant of Middleton (2014, p.370) in Darjeeling (India), is apposite quoting.

> You also begin to feel that, well, sometimes you get this feeling that, you know, it's about like prostituting yourself. There's some guy you are giving all this access to, all this information, and how he's going to deal with it? Because we had a lot of that in the past. And then I'm here, and someone can easily point a finger at me, or even the government can pull me and say, 'Hey, dude, what are you trying to do?' So, yes, at a certain stage I did have thoughts and feelings about. Hey, was I doing the right thing? Giving all this inside access and getting you everywhere. Was I carried away?

It is possible to draw a parallel between this case and Amahle's, for what counts in Prahdan's words are not the specificities of fieldwork in Darjeeling, but rather the cornerstone of research assistance: [to] "give inside access". Prahdan's feelings of

[61] In Chapter III, I will present the interviews and interaction with Amahle's two back neighbours.
[62] Luthando arranged the two other interviews we conducted in Kwa-Ndebele.

prostitution coincide, mutatis mutandis, with the accusations of sexual involvement looming over Amahle and me. The reproach Middleton's assistant self-consciously made to himself, she experienced as a critique by fellow South Africans. The accusation of being my lover amounted to the disapproval of her ushering me into a social world to which I, as an outsider, was not entitled.

Only halfway, however, goes the parallel between Prahdan's and Amahle's cases. Prahdan's resort to prostitution is metaphorical, while the accusation bearing upon my assistant was of a concrete, very concrete character. As Ferguson (2015) puts it, sex and material rewards go in tandem among the South African poor. As the custom called *mhamelelo*[63] indicates, men ought to reward their female partners after a sexual rapport. By a logical reversion, the flow of money from men to women is often interpreted as an index of sexual involvement[64]. Indeed, what Amahle experienced in 2020, Luthando experienced in 2016 and again in 2020, despite her illness[65].

In the next section, I will present another example of the conflictual dimension of fieldwork in South Africa. For now, I would like to instantiate how the questions Amahle proposed opened my eyes to the hardships of pregnancy and motherhood. When I asked her to help me conceive the semi-structured interviews, I said: suppose you are not a mother. What would you like to know about motherhood and childhood? She then drafted questions number 12 to number 25 (Annexe 1), which referred to pregnancy's and motherhood's first emotional and social impacts on women. Below, I present some of the answers our interviewees gave us.

> **Were you happy or sad when you received the news that you were pregnant?**
> **Amahle:** At first, I was sad. You see, sometimes... I can say what? Let me say we get a partner. If your partner is abusing you, what can I say? Even the relationship can ruin your happiness, take your happiness from you.

[63] Such practice does not bear the stigma of prostitution. Instead, it reveals a moral framework in which mercantile and non-mercantile transactions remain undifferentiated (Ferguson, 2015). In other words, whereas Westerners regard sex as a non-economic rapport, many among the South African poor consider it as an exchange presupposing a material or reward from men.

[64] And not only the impression, but in some contexts the "right", as it were, to have a sexual rapport. According to Wojcicki (2002), men feel entitled to have sex with those women to whom they paid drinks in taverns, for the latter have "drunk their money".

[65] In 2016, rumour in the informal settlement had it that Luthando and I were a couple. Her former boyfriend more than once accused us of having a romantic liason. So did Luthando's boyfriend in 2020. By February, he came to Kwa-Ndebele, accused us of "sleeping together" and threatened to "correct the situation". Fortunately, he was expelled from Martha's house, where everybody knew I had never had sexual rapports with Luthando - or Amahle for the matter.

> **Omkhulu:** I was so... I was not happy. My aim was... I was thinking [to] go to school and getting a job. I was so stressed. I [was] not working. I don't know even a job. Okay, I noticed that my boyfriend was working, but, ah... I was thinking like: I want to save money for myself.
>
> **Mariah:** I wasn't happy because it wasn't the way I wanted. If you are still young, you wish a nice work before having a kid, right? (Mariah).

Such answers made me realise my interviewee's desire for a *job*. I consequently reframed the speculations I had entertained before fieldwork, which revolved around two facts: that the grants give recipients "powers" (Granlund and Hochfeld, 2019) and that they are "not enough" (Hochfeld, 2016). After listening to my interviewees, it seemed that many desired to exert their intellectual and social capacities as professionals rather than earning a more significant sum provided as social assistance in cash. Other answers to questions formulated by Amahle also cast the wish to work in an assertive light.

> **How do you feel about being responsible for someone?**
> **Sipho:** Well, sometimes I feel happy, sometimes I don't when I can't satisfy what they [her children] are needing.
>
> **Mariah:** The good side is, when I'm working, I can meet ends. And the bad thing is, for me now, I want to study, but I can't start it. And I'm not even working. If I was working, at least... (Mariah).

Amahle's contribution allowed me to situate knowledge production into her universe of concerns, at least partially. While formulating the questions with me, she exclaimed: "This is not difficult!" (Amahle had previously questioned her ability to perform the *job*). She worked as my assistant between November 2019 and March 2020. During this period, five female recipients of the child-support grants (including herself) answered Annex 1 questions in Kwa-Ndebele. After the declaration of a National State of Disaster due to the COVID-19 pandemic (RSA, 2020), I left Martha's house and went to Pretoria. For a month and a half, I kept the expectation of returning to Kwa-Ndebele and resuming spatial fieldwork. In May, I decided to quit South Africa.

I landed in Brazil on May 23rd, 2021. By the end of June, Luthando passed away, which got me off guard. From my layman's perspective, her health had improved between December 2019 and March 2020. We talked while I remained in Pretoria. A couple of weeks before my departure to Brazil, she called to communicate her grandmother's death and the procedures for a funeral amidst one of the strictest lockdowns in the world. I was confident we would meet again. Lamentably, we did not, but Luthando's physical absence

since June 2020 has not meant the end of her "enabling works" (Gupta, 2014). Indeed, the connections she provided me within her innermost circle proved resilient and bore fruits beyond her death.

Thabisa is one such connection. We met at Martha's house by the end of February 2020. A thirty-year-old woman, she was formerly married to Teboho, Norah's son. Thabisa lived in Johannesburg, but her second child with Teboho, 12-year-old Andile, lived in Kwa-Ndebele. Margareth and Luthando had been prominent in Andile's upbring since infancy. Between February and April 2020, Thabisa remained with us at Martha's. She cooked very well and was one of Luthando's dearest companions. Thabisa helped her change, bathe, and eat. Her coming coincided with and furthered Luthando's health improvement.

Meeting Thabisa proved crucial for me in at least two senses. First, Luthando asked her to give me an interview, and she consented. Our conversation was the fifth and last I had in Kwa-Ndebele. Thabisa's life story tested our limits as listeners and speakers. Gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies, and money-based skirmishes with in-laws and blood kin combined heavily into her life and still burdened it. To my surprise, she claimed that revisiting and speaking out reminiscences had a therapeutic effect on her. After our second interviewing session, Thabisa told me that "coughing everything out" relieved her; she felt "free".

Second, Thabisa became my assistant between November 2020 and June 2021. By the end of March 2020, President Ramaphosa announced a three-week national lockdown, and I decided to move from Kwa-Ndebele to Pretoria. By the end of May, I landed in Brazil. In June, Thabisa messaged me to communicate Luthando's death. Then in Johannesburg, she asked me to help her commute to Kwa-Ndebele for the funeral. I remitted ZAR 300 for her and ZAR 800 to help Luthando's family with funeral expenses. That was all interaction between Thabisa and me until October. During this period, I kept sporadic WhatsApp contact only with older collaborators.

By October 2020, Thabisa resumed WhatsApp contact with me. Her grandmother had died, and again she would commute from Johannesburg to attend the funeral in Kwa-Ndebele. I offered her my sympathies, and she thanked me. We chatted a bit, and that was all until November 5th. She then messaged to compliment me on my birthday, and our conversation went afar. Thabisa told me that her son, Andile, had been sent to a traditional healer in Pretoria. She also said her boyfriend had cheated and requested my advice. Thabisa finally asked me when I would go back to South Africa. I had no idea. The travel

ban on Brazilians was still in force, so I considered alternative ways to conduct the research.

Thabisa observed she could interview people on my behalf. She remembered our conversations in March 2020 and could replicate it as the interviewer. Since September 21st, 2020, South Africa had moved to Level 1 of its Alert System (RSA 2020b), which meant that most normal activity could resume according to official specifications. Colleagues and collaborators had told me the shift towards less strict health regulations came with general relief - life was "normal" again. Alert Level 1 meant public venues were open and social gatherings permitted. Cinemas, casinos, restaurants, taverns, churches, and fitness centres could operate between 5 am. and 11 pm., limited to 50% of their capacities. The entry of persons into such places remained conditioned on their wearing a facemask and respecting a minimum distance of one and a half meters.

In addition to the official health guidelines issued by the South African Government, Thabisa and I established the following precautions: i) she would interview only close neighbours or relatives, people with whom she was daily in touch; ii) she and her interviewees should wear face masks even inside their home and keep their hands sanitised; iii) Thabisa should conduct a shorter version of the semi-structured interviews. I would pay her ZAR 1200 for two monthly conversations and ZAR 150 for each collaborator. After sending me the audio files, we would discuss the interview content by phone. She could then explain why she chose each interviewee and supply missing information with the memories of previous interactions or another short conversation.

Between November 5th and December 28th, 2020, Thabisa conducted four interviews. The longest lasted 30 minutes, and the others did 10, 15, and 10 minutes, respectively. Three interviews involved Thabisa's closest neighbours in a Johannesburg township; the fourth was a freestyle[66] conversation between my assistant and her grandmother-in-law (who also lived nearby). As planned, Thabisa and I kept frequent and long phone conversations to discuss and supplement the content of the interviews.

On December 28th, 2020, South Africa moved from Alert Level 1 to Alert Level 3, and we interrupted face-to-face conversations. Since I was unsatisfied with my material, I sought ways to continue the research and abide by Level 3 specifications. After a week, the second phase of our job started. It comprised Skype conferences between Thabisa, her interviewees, and me. It also included a reflexive exercise on our experience

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[66] Rather than following the semi-structured interviews for grandmothers (Annexe 2), Thabisa approached subjects as she pleased.

as research partners and a conversation about Luthando's life story. It finally involved a personal interview with me, for Thabisa wanted to elicit my impressions about our partnership[67]. We also kept our financial deals, the routine of calls, and the discussion of field and personal matters.

All in all, Thabisa worked as my research assistant between November 2020 and June 2021. Thereafter, we have chatted occasionally, and I sometimes remit or ask her for a paid interview (see the Interlude on Presence). More than once, Thabisa told me that Luthando has come to her dreams, and on these occasions, she thanked my former assistant for *the job* she inherited from her. Thabisa is very work-oriented and dislikes the bore of a jobless life. Albeit only modestly remunerated, she took pleasure as an interviewer and my intellectual partner. So did I. Despite the current sparseness of our phone contacts, Thabisa continues to address me as her *boss*.

Before meeting me in February 2020, Thabisa knew I was Luthando's *boss*. She learned it at the beginning of 2019, before my third fieldwork sojourn in South Africa. Thabisa then accompanied Luthando and Mpho, an interlocutor in Pretoria, to a Western Union agency. They would collect remittances I had sent to both Luthando and Mpho. Thabisa recalled the episode on the following terms.

> I remember you sent money for Luthando and Mpho. The money for Luthando was a lot, but for Mpho, it was too small. I was with Luthando. So, I remember when Mpho said: 'Ah!' And this and that, this and that [He complained]. Luthando then said: 'Daniel is my boss, not your boss'. Then she started shouting, which means she was feeling [like] beating him. This is the time I realised: ‘Oh, Luthando loves her boss more than anything’. Luthando showed me the way: when you are working, you have to protect your boss.

The rapport between Luthando and me caused a significant impression on Thabisa. After the former passed away, Thabisa took an active stance to replace her friend and relative as my assistant. By December 2020, when explaining to me why she chose her first interviewee (Sipho), Thabisa told me that she had approached the latter as follows.

[67] In Chapter V, I present two of the four interviews Thabisa conducted between November and December 2020. In the following two sections, I present fragments of two interviews conducted between January and May 2021.

> **Thabisa:** Sipho, I've got one person who can give me a job. That guy is the boss of Luthando. Because Luthando has passed away, I have to take her space.

In other words, the rapport Luthando and I had kept underpinned my research partnership with Thabisa – as had been the case with Amahle. When the opportunity came, by November 2020, Thabisa and I transformed our encounter at Martha's house into a new bond. Since then, she has addressed me as her *boss*, the same word Luthando deployed to define our relationship. If the assistant's work is to "forge connections" (Gupta, 2014, p.399), Luthando's labour has outlived herself and remains to be gauged on an open-ended temporal scale. It is relational labour, the dynamo of novel alliances. Formerly a pact set forth before Martha, the matriarch, it has moved through different fields, circumstances, and persons. Such a creation of social and ethnographic value is and will, alas, remain unredeemable.

Section IV – On Fieldwork and Money

In the last section, I dealt with the ways leading to fieldwork; I now discuss fieldwork and its *ways*. There is more than wordplay at stake. To put it succinctly, whilst I previously embarked on a temporal journey, I now examine one axial component of the trip: money. It appeared in the last section as mutual assistance, denoting one of the terms in a long-lasting exchange between my South African assistants and their *boss*. Now, money pops up amidst transient interactions with my interviewees. All the female recipients of the child-support grants who shared their stories and time with me received a small monetary gratification (U$5 per conversation). They were also invited to reflect on the connotations of such payment.

During my 2016 fieldwork in Pretoria, I was several times confronted with the following interrogation: "Are you making money here?"[68]. Such a question, or better, statement buffered by an interrogation mark, made me realise that some settlers understood and resented my local activities as a remunerated *job*. For a while, I tried to mystify them and myself with the tale that *research* and *job* had different essences.

[68] I was often confronted with another question: "Where's your shop?" My phenotype inclined many South Africans to think I was a "Pakistani" or "Indian". I have been mistaken as a Tunisian in Paris and an Indian by a native Indian at the international airport in São Paulo.

However, the more I squeezed to extract a non-economic juice of my queries, the less I persuaded others. An interlocutor once observed studies were levers, and by bitterly ironic alchemy, my investigations among jobless South Africans could transmute into a well-paid career. What other than the tragic consciousness of unbridgeable gaps would be left behind?

I again stumbled upon this realistic understanding of Anthropology during my 2019-2020 period of fieldwork in Kwa-Ndebele. Looking retrospectively at the period we stayed at Martha's, Thabisa observed that some locals frowned upon my activities, which was thought to imply economic accumulation. Here is an excerpt of a phone dialogue between my assistant and me in June 2021.

> **I don't know what people in Kwa-Ndebele think about me... Do they like me?**
> Let me say some of them like you. Let me give an example: Khaty. I don't think that girl likes you because she didn't want you to interview her. I think maybe she was thinking: 'He's going to make money out of me'.
>
> **Do you think she didn't like me?**
> I think some people think you're making money because of them... I'm not sure; I was thinking...
>
> **Do you think other people in Kwa-Ndebele thought I was making money from them?**
> The second one, I think, is Kaya. Do you remember the last interview? She was not nice... The interview was a little small: "I've got two kids", and then she stopped... She didn't explain anything, you see?

In "Thinking as Moral Act", Geertz (1968) postulates that the encounter between ethnographers and collaborators in the (still) developing world occurs under a malaise. Such a sense of unease stems from the "inherent moral asymmetry of the fieldwork situation" (1968, p.151) and is not limited to distinct cultural orientations suddenly brought to coexistence. Also compounding and heightening the malaise is that anthropologists embody the "life chances" to which many of our collaborators aspire but probably will not enjoy (1968, p.149). The resulting ironic moral tone looming over field encounters leaves ethnographers ethically disarmed. As to collaborators, it manifests itself as "demands for material help" and personal services.

> They never disappear, and they never cease to tempt the Anthropologist into the easy and useless trinkets-and-beads ways of

> establishing a relationship with the natives or of quieting his guilt over being a prince among paupers (1968, p.148).

I take *cum grano salis* Geertz's terms to depict the "trinkets-and-beads" approach: "useless", "bribery"[69], and "secondary gain"[70]. Curiously enough, he also seems to consider that quiescence to material requests is an inevitable part of fieldwork among people experiencing poverty: "One develops a certain resignation toward the idea of being viewed [...] as much as a source of income as a person" (1968, p.148). Geertz's point is that material incentives cannot sustain a long and authentic relationship alone. Though elusive and never altogether complete, an ethnographic rapport rests on the possibility of living the fiction – "fiction, not falsehood" – that anthropologists and informants may constitute a "single moral community" (1968, p.154). In other words, Geertz concomitantly recognises the premise of moral and material asymmetry and the paradox that a genuine human encounter between strangers necessarily presupposes some level of (never fully attainable) moral communion.

In *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*, Crapanzano (1980) also reflected on the subject. Like Geertz, though in a different tone, Crapanzano treats material incentives to collaborators as an ordinary aspect of fieldwork. "I paid Tuhami, as I paid all the Moroccans who took time from their own work to help me. This was expected" (1980, p.46). Furthermore, Crapanzano discerns in the monetary reward for ethnographic collaboration what I call, *faute de mieux*, a knowledge effect:

> Payment gave some of them an 'understanding' of my demands (1980, p.146).

I appreciate Crapanzano's down-to-earth reasoning, according to which those who share their time and words with a wandering intruder deserve compensation. I also think that payment to my South African interviewees has given them an "understanding", even though it did not quell the impression that my activities implied economic accumulation at their expense. Attributing a monetary value to our conversations seemed to cast its subject as significant. If, as Graeber reads Marx, money ultimately conveys "the importance of certain forms of human actions" (2001, pp.66-7), ascribing a monetary

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[69] "The only thing one really has to give in order to avoid mendicancy (or – not to neglect the trinkets-and-beads approach – bribery) is oneself" (1968, p151).
[70] "As for the informant, his interest is kept alive by a whole series of secondary gains; (...) a certain amount of direct or indirect material benefit of one sort or another" (1968, p.151-2).

value to the interviews brought their potential relevance into relief. I insist that, as Geertz (1968) posited, money cannot quench the moral asymmetry of ethnographic encounters. Still, it played its part in fieldwork's moral and epistemological dimensions.

In the last section, I mentioned that Amahle helped me conceive questions for a semi-structured interview. She also answered the latter and gave me her opinion on whether and why I should pay for the conversations with female recipients of the child-support grant.

> Yes, I think so. Because when you interview people, you learn more, you learn more from different families. They are helping you, you see? So that's why I think when you pay them, it's thanksgiving for them. You thank them, they thank you.

Amahle also opened my eyes to what I formerly called a knowledge effect and what Crapanzano termed the understanding associated with paying assistants and informants, such as Tuhami. Questions comprising Annexe 2 revolved around my collaborators' assessment of the interviews and opinions on their paid collaboration. Amahle, my assistant and first interviewee, answered as follows.

> **Did you like to take part in the research about SASSA grants? Why?**
> I learned a lot about the SASSA grant. Some things we don't even notice. Like other people's children suffer, and even the parents are suffering about the child-support grants. So, I learned more. Now I know that there are people who's suffering more than me, you know?
>
> **Did the interviews change your way of thinking about the SASSA grants?**
> Yes, it did.
>
> **What has changed?**
> What changed is like now we know that there are people out there who are struggling, and now I think this SASSA grant is too small, you see? The other families, they are big families...
>
> **Would you take part in another research about the SASSA grant?**
> Yes.
>
> **Why?**
> It makes you aware of other people's needs, of other people's lives. You learn more. You know more about people suffering and learn how to handle the money. Because when you have few children, and then others have more children, you know how to budget...

Amahle's learning process centred on the perception that larger families suffered more than hers. Before being my assistant, she had been unemployed. However, her material situation was perceptibly better than many other women's. Amahle lived with her two children at her mother's home. The latter was a beneficiary of the old-age grant and had a working son and a working daughter, who regularly helped with household expenditures. Such was not a typical configuration among other families in Kwa-Ndebele, many of which depended exclusively on state grants.

My fourth interviewee in the region, Kaya, was an impoverished mother of four. She lived with her mother, a beneficiary of the old-age grant, and an incomeless uncle in a poorly furnished bricked house. During the interviews, Kaya adopted a laconic approach and opted not to answer several questions, one of which concerned her childhood. Thabisa, my assistant after Amahle, interpreted Kaya's reservation as a signal that she had felt exploited or expected more money from the interviews. Be it as it may, Kaya told me that our conversations helped her understand the importance of my research and the child-support grant itself.

> **Did she like to take part in the interviews?**
> She feels all right because there's no one who ever asked her about these questions. [Amahle translated Kaya]
>
> **Did the interviews change her way of thinking about the SASSA grants?**
> It changed a lot in her mind because the questions that you were asking her... she noticed that they were so important. She can differentiate the first time and now, after the interviews.
>
> **Do you think that these interviews should be paid?**
> She said that you helped her understand these interviews, so now she can view the importance of your research and the SASSA grant. And she doesn't think that you must pay because you help us to learn more about the SASSA grant.

My last face-to-face interviewee in South Africa was Thabisa. Until 2018, Thabisa had had three jobs within a family of Greek origins: she nursed the family's matriarch, administered their car wash and, finally, a shebeen in a township. When we talked, the child-support grants were her only source of income. Here are some excerpts from our fifth and final interviewing section.

Did you like to take part in the research about the child-support grants?
Yeah, I liked it because that research will help me. Sometimes, you find someone to tell you about the SASSA grants... Like: Thabisa, you can [save] ZAR 50 every month until your child is 18 years old. It will be better for your child.

Did the interviews change your way of thinking about the SASSA grants?
- Yeah, it's changed my way because... I talked about my life, my SASSA grant. I didn't get the SASSA grant cause my sister was eating it. I think this could help other girls: don't allow your sisters, mother, or cousins to take the SASSA grants for your kids.

Thabisa's statement that the research helped her realise the benefits of saving expressed her autonomous ruminations. I have never offered such advice to my collaborators. The second excerpt above revolves around a familiar conflict over the administration of child-support grants. Thabisa first became pregnant at the age of 15, when she was not yet entitled to receive a child-support grant in her capacity. Thabisa resorted to Esulu, her sister, who cared for her first baby and administered the social benefit. Conflicts ensued, notably accusations that the latter had been "eating her money". About being paid for the interviews, Thabisa told me the following:

Do you think that these interviews should be paid?
No, 'cause [you] are helping us to forget about our stories, to forget the life [we] have been through before this stage now.

So, you think the interviews should not be paid...
Yeah, cause I think [you are] just helping us [and saying] thank you for the interview. But on my side, I don't think it's a force to pay it. I was surprised when [you] give me a money and said: 'Thabisa, thank you for your interview'. I didn't think that I'd get the money.

Thabisa, like all other interviewees, knew beforehand she would receive a few bucks for her collaboration. Her minor insincerity calls to mind the argument that most tend to repress purely self-interested transactions and live in "denial" (Bourdieu as cited in Caillé, 2018). I do not discard such a possibility and think payment has catalysed the interviews. However, that does not amount to posit money as the sole motive at play. The postulate that only material incentives matter is an "arbitrary", even "unrealistic" picture of human affairs, what Polanyi called "economic solipsism" (1977, p.16). Finally, my interviewees' ex-post (Goodbout, 2008) reflection indicated that they had (or found) a motive other than money: knowledge.

By the end of March 2020, while in Pretoria, I conducted a phone interview with Mariah, an acquaintance of my White host in the city. She was a thirty-year-old woman living in a nearby township with two children, her sister and father. The family's income was derived from Mariah's and her sister's child-support grants and her father's earnings in piece jobs. Our two first interviewing sessions occurred in March 2020, whereas the other rounds, including Annexe 2 questions, took place after I arrived in Brazil. As Thabisa, Mariah actively kept our rapport through WhatsApp messages, the media through which we had the following conversation in September 2020.

> **Do you think that these interviews should be paid? Why?**
> No. Because I gain knowledge.

By February 2021, we talked again about knowledge, money, and the interviews, but then via Skype. When I asked her whether our conversations had changed her perspective on the child-support grant, she told me that she had reconsidered how to use the money: “I only buy the needs for the kids. I use the money for their needs, not their wants: snacks and stuff like that. If you buy snacks, Danone, you won't be able to buy pap”. According to Mariah, the interviews had helped her see the grants in a new light.

> **Did the interviews change your ways of looking at the grants?**
> It does... It looks like it's not a must to get it. They are just helping us.
>
> **It's not a must...**
> How can I put it? It's official in South Africa, right? But some of people are taking it in the wrong way. Like me, I took it like: they are giving it to the children, but it's not enough. By the time I finished talking, after the interview between you and me, I just worked on it. I just use it on the kids. I only bought the needs for the kids.

Mariah's line of thought developed from taking the child-support grant for granted (“a must”) to envisage them as a form of assistance targeting children's needs. I neither mistrust her nor ignore the possibility that she was trying to conform to a socially desirable image of motherhood (Hochfeld, 2016, p.82). In any case, Mariah (and others) finally regarded the interviews as an intellectual exercise drawing a line between a less reflective past and a more thoughtful present. At the very least, the interviews stimulated these women to reassess the grants and uncover their prior matter-of-factness, a shift they

termed knowledge, awareness, learning, etc. I also asked Maria about the meaning of being paid for the interviews.

> **So, the interviews made you think about the child-support grants. You reconsidered how to use the money.**
> Yes.
>
> **Okay, and I've been paying you for the interviews, right?**
> Yes.
>
> **And I would like to ask whether you consider it fair to pay for these interviews.**
> I think it's not fair.
>
> **So, you think I should not pay you...**
> I didn't say that, but I say I don't think that it's fair for you paying.

On the one hand, Mariah considered that the interviews involved more than money – "It's not always about money". On the other, she acknowledged that the expression of gratitude involved an act of giving – "You can give somebody food or clothes to say thank you. Anything". Yet she appreciated being thanked in cash: "With money, you can buy anything that you need". All in all, she remained ambivalent, and when I pressed her - so you think I should not pay you? -, she corrected me: "I didn't say that". Her hesitation on the meaning of money, coupled with her emphasis on giving, recalls Bourdieu's paradigm of denial. Again, I do not discard such a possibility but insist the case is more complex. Mariah and I discussed why she did not consider it fair to be paid.

> **Why not?**
> Because you are helping me to express myself the way I'm feeling. Nobody else will ask me those questions.

In September 2020, on WhatsApp, Mariah told me it was unfair to pay her because she had "gained knowledge". Five months later, she mentioned another reason, namely expressing her feelings. Mariah was not my last collaborator to account in non-monetary terms for her motives to be interviewed.

In November 2020, Thabisa interviewed Busi, a 25-year-old mother of three. Thabisa and Busi were close friends and neighbours, and the 15-minute recorded conversation occurred in a joking atmosphere. The two women kept teasing each other, and, at some point in their interaction, my assistant observed: "This is serious business,

Busi!" They both laughed out loud[71]. Thabisa told me she chose Busi because she and her mother had a conflictual relationship. Busi's mother cared for her three grandchildren and received part of their child support grants. By the end of December, I discussed the meaning of being paid for the interview with Busi.

> **Do you think that these interviews should be paid?**
> **Busi:** No, I just think that maybe we should change our lives [with] the interview
>
> **You should change your lives?**
> Yeah, the interview is changing our lives.
>
> **Can you tell me why?**
> Because the questions that are asked, they may be personal, but they don't mean to harm anyone. They make a certain change in your life because you can realise something...
>
> **What is it that you realised?**
> There is a question that ask you what [job] you won't do in your life, né? Then I replied prostitution because it realises me that if you have a baby, that doesn't mean that you must just sit around, né? There are [things] that you can do without having maybe a matric, when you have kids or stuff. There's something that you can do. You can open up a business, you see?
>
> **You are thinking about new possibilities in the future.**
> Yes.

The interviews had questions on which job one would like to do, and which one would never do. The latter struck a chord in Busi. The keyword about her thoughts on the matter was "to realise", which she used in connection with the idea that the interviews "make a certain change" in her life. Formerly my interviewee in Kwa-Ndebele, Thabisa, also argued that talking about her life and the child-support grants had changed her to some extent and might help other women. According to Crapanzano (1980, p.147), interlocution with strangers often induces "a reflective attitude" and, therefore, the possibility of questioning the "taken-for-granted". Let us listen to Thabisa's neighbour again.

> **Busi, did the interviews change your way of thinking about the child-support grants?**
> **Busi:** I never thought anything about the SASSA grants because the money is small, né*?*

[71] I assume the two women enjoyed beer-drinking conviviality when the rigours of lockdown and social isolation in South Africa seemed to be a past inconvenience.

> **You had never thought about it before...**
> I never thought.
>
> **And now, what are you thinking about this money?**
> I think that this money is helping, but it's so small that you can't buy everything that you need in the house.

With respect to the small financial reward I offered, Busi first asserted that the interviews should not be paid. When asked, however, if ZAR 150 constituted a fair value for the conversations, she told me the following:

> Yeah, I think it is because there's nothing much that you're doing. You just sit down, then you are asked some questions, then you answer. If it's not comfortable, you don't answer anything.

Before Busi, Mariah had said it was unfair to pay for the interviews, yet she did not mean I should not pay her. Busi also considered the payment unfair but deemed ZAR 150 to be a reasonable value for the conversations. My assistant and her friend seemed to enjoy each other's company very much. Even after social isolation in South Africa resurged, Busi remained a habitué at Thabisa's house. Nevertheless, the merry 15-minute interview with Busi was the last face-to-face conversation Thabisa conducted on my behalf. After December 30th, the COVID-19 alert level in South Africa moved from Level 1 to Level 3, and Thabisa and I led only phone interviews.

By mid-January, Thabisa proposed interviewing her sister, Esulu. They had a story of closeness and rivalry around money and motherhood, starting when Esulu became the primary caretaker of Thabisa's firstborn and received the correspondent child-support grant. At the time of the interview, they were on good terms. Through Skype, Thabisa and I conducted several interviewing sessions with Esulu. In our last conversation, we discussed Esulu's remunerated participation in the research. Thabisa translated from English to IsiNdebele and vice-versa:

> **Did she [Esulu] like to be interviewed?**
> **Thabisa:** Yes, she's happy for this interview.
>
> **Can she explain to me why she is happy?**
> She's happy because in this interview you gave her ZAR 200 and she went to buy a mielie-meal: 'So, I'm happy. I didn't think that this interview was going to pay me. And I'm happy because I talked with my life'.

Esulu mentioned in another excerpt that most interviews are unpaid; she felt, therefore, both happy and surprised[72]. Our conversations unfolded so well that, after we finished Annex 1 and 2, I proposed the two women to have another paid conversation, but without me. They could discuss, for instance, matters of the heart. Such was the subject my assistant indicated when she proposed to interview Esulu. According to Thabisa, Esulu wanted to talk about her marriage and divorce. They set a date for what my assistant called a "debate between women", and I finally asked whether she considered ZAR 200 a fair value for all five previous interviewing sections and the same sum for her upcoming conversation with Thabisa. My assistant translated her sister as follows: "I think it's fine; it's a gift". I insisted with Thabisa:

She considers it to be a gift?
Yeah, she thinks like it's a gift.

Can money be a gift? According to Dalton[73] (1965), it can. In other words, reciprocity does not necessarily dispense with the passe-partout mechanism of market exchange. Many Westerners, however, posit an antagonism between the paradigms of money and gift. Some have gone as far as overstretching the opposition to other forms of currency, as though they always implied mercantile exchanges. They do not, and presupposing it reveals a misapprehension of money, which is both personal and impersonal (Hart, 2007). In question is a misunderstanding of the so-called native's point of view, an Anthropological quandary going far beyond the ambivalences of a dollar bill - or a *nap* shell, for that matter (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 1993, pp.72-3). Neither money is incompatible with the gift, nor does the latter constitute a conflict-free mode of social experience.

Parry (2000, p.9) observes that even within societies where the market has not become as omnipresent as it is in the West, there is no such thing as a "morally unproblematic sphere of gift exchange". This reasoning applies to South Africa, and not only because its population is "money-oriented" (Ferguson, 2015). The latter author reminds us that the obligation to share is also conflict-ridden. It portrays an image of agonistic mutuality, which, contrarily to "our ideology of the gift" (Parry, 2000, p.9), was already present at *L'Éssai sur le Don* (Mauss, 1923-1924). In other words, even relations

[72] Busi and others said the same.
[73] If cash is given as a gift, it is means of (reciprocal) payment of the social obligation discharged by the gift giving (Dalton, 1965, p.48)

predominantly characterised as non-market involve some measure of self-interest, competitive striving and antagonism (Ferguson 2015, p.126). Unsurprisingly, conflictual sparks arose within the money-and-gift-oriented, hybrid exchanges between Thabisa, our South African collaborators, and me.

A flare of conflict over money and the interviews sprung between my assistant and her first interviewee, Sipho. Both women were close neighbours and friends in a large township in Johannesburg. Upon being invited to a private conversation with Thabisa, Sipho showed mixed feelings. According to my assistant, her friend first accepted being interviewed; an instant afterwards, however, she confronted Thabisa.

> I said to Sipho: can you please come to my place so that we can do this interview? And then Sipho didn't like it; she said: 'Oh, why? You want to make money about me?' I said no, I just want to help you forget your past.

Stumbling upon a grudge I had also faced in South Africa, Thabisa resorted to the rationale that the interviews consisted of a discursive therapy (Maranhão, 1986). Upon being requested an interview, Sipho was not yet informed that she would receive ZAR 150 for her participation. When payment came a couple of weeks later, Thabisa told me that her friend was grateful and even wanted to thank me on the phone - an opportunity we, unfortunately, did not have. By June 2021, however, a different picture finally emerged. When reassessing her field experiences, my assistant recalled that Sipho had not been entirely satisfied with the ZAR 150 she got: she wanted my assistant to *share* her fortnightly salary with her.

> Do you remember you told me you were going to give me ZAR 600? Sipho was thinking I was making money about her [and] had to share the ZAR 600 with her. I told her I'd give her ZAR 150, but ZAR 600 was for me. So, I think that she was angry.

Thabisa did not share her fortnightly salary with Sipho and seemed upset by the latter's request. Despite this spark of distributive dissent, the two women did not part company and continued being friends. Their disagreement over the amount of money to be shared remains noteworthy because it indicates that payment for the interviews does not really peacify relations between researchers and collaborators. Sipho did not mention me, but she may have thought that the interview would be capitalised on an academic career whose benefits she would not reap - as a township dweller made me notice in 2016.

Writing on the perceptions of South African commoners about foreign businessmen in townships, Hickel (2014, p.109) says that many among the latter "are said to participate in forms of accumulation that are considered immoral and anti-social, enriching themselves at the expense of others"[74]. I am afraid Sipho understood my research along the same lines.

Fortunately, my assistant's four short interviews with her neighbours in a township elicited more contentment than conflict. In one of our many phone conversations between January and June 2021, Thabisa told me another friend had asked to be interviewed on the following terms: "Yo! It's ZAR 150, for free! Just to talk with a person!" From my perspective, the ZAR 150 I offered Thabisa's interviewees can be called anything but free. Talking amounts to giving since *en parlant, on donne de soi* (Caillé et al., 2017, p.13). At best, money struck a fleeting measure of reciprocity between my South African collaborators, my assistants, and myself.

Thabisa reminded me once or twice that this neighbour expected to be interviewed, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, I preferred she did not resume face-to-face conversations on my behalf. Instead, between January and June 2021, we focused on a hindsight examination of field interactions, including money's role in our job. Once, Thabisa told me it was unnecessary to pay our interviewees since I was performing academic assignments: "You don't get enough money cause you're not working". However, she also acknowledged that we depended on our collaborators: "They are helping us, and they even help you to be good on your assignments". My assistant moved cautiously through the complex geometry of money and the interviews, leaving me the final word on the matter.

> **Thabisa:** In South Africa, it depends on you if you thank people with money. It depends on you whether you can afford it or not. You are the one who know. Cause a lot of people, they don't have money. Even you, you're not working.

As Amahle before her, Thabisa understood the ZAR 150 I offered our collaborators as an expression of gratitude with currency in South Africa. Still, her point had always been that participation in the interviews entailed some measure of psychological relief. When interviewed in March 2020, she claimed that *coughing out* her

[74] Steinberg (2018) has similar considerations on how South Africans perceive many foreign businessmen in townships.

life story made her *forget about the past*. As I discuss in the next section, her terms were similar to what a landmark patient in the history of psychoanalysis called *talking-cure* and *chimney-sweeping* (Freud et al., 2004). While working as my assistant, Thabisa turned those indexes of mind relief into her primary rationale and magnet. She never stressed the monetary component of the interviews.

Thabisa interviewed five recipients of the child-support grants and one of the old-age grants until May 2021. Despite the ethnographic value of these conversations, I still wanted more and proposed an experiment. Thabisa would choose two acquaintances for a ten-question phone interview about the child support grants. We would no longer dive into life stories and unravel the intricate webs of personal memories. Furthermore, I would not set beforehand the monetary value of the conversations. When asked how much we should pay our collaborators, Thabisa observed that these "quick, small interviews" called for a reward of no more than ZAR 50. For her, such money was "a gift, a surprise, a thank-you for your time".

A few days later, we called Elna, Thabisa's boyfriend's mother. My assistant presented me, the research subject and told Elna she should be "free" to skip any question. At the end of a ten-minute conversation on the child-support grants, I reminded her to inform our interviewee that we would like to reward her with a small amount of money. I also requested Thabisa to ask her boyfriend's mother how much she thought was fair for our brief conversation.

> **[Thabisa]:** Mama, how much do you think I must pay for this small interview?
>
> [The two women talked in IsiNdebele and Thabisa translated Elna:
> Daniel, she said it's up to you; you can give her ZAR 100 or ZAR 200. It's only a chat. It's up to you, 'cause she didn't think that you were going to pay her.
>
> **[I turned in English to Elna] Is a hundred fine?**
> Okay, it's fine (Elna).
>
> **[Thabisa]:** Okay, Daniel, she said a hundred rand is fine because this is a small, quick interview.

I thanked Elna, she thanked me, and I said I would like to meet her in the future. After we hung up, I remarked to Thabisa that our interviewee had priced the conversation at ZAR 100. At first, my assistant did not notice I was comparing her and Elna's

evaluation, and she said – “Yeah, that was a small question, small interview”. We then had a short dialogue.

> **So, you think a hundred bucks is fine?**
> No, 50 bucks...
>
> **But she asked me ZAR 100...**
> Ah, 50 bucks, Daniel. ZAR 100 means you have to make some 15 questions, 15 to 20 questions.
>
> **Okay, but now I think that instead of talking money at the end of the interview, we should do it at the beginning. What do you think?**
> Yeah, yeah... The beginning of the interview, not the end. Yeah, because when I tell people I'm going to interview them, I don't say anything about the money. That's why they are surprised when you tell them you're going to pay them. When I interview a person, I don't tell her about the money.

When confronted with our interviewee's price for the interview, Thabisa clung to her previous evaluation. Aware that pricing varies, we decided that talking about the value of the interview should come first; hence, our collaborators and we would be free to embark on the conversation or not. The following day, we called Tumelo, a 30-year-old mother of two. The phone conversation began with Thabisa announcing us in IsiNdebele. I then presented myself in English and reminded my assistant that she should discuss Tumelo’s monetary reward for her time with us.

> **[Thabisa]**: I'm going to ask you ten questions. Do you think this interview I have to pay you?
> Yes, you have to pay me (Tumelo).
>
> **[Thabisa]:** How much do I have to pay you? Don't be afraid to talk. I'm going to ask you ten questions. How much do you think I have to pay you for these ten questions?
> I'm not quite sure what interview I am invited here. But then if it's about money, you have to pay me more. I don't know what you are talking about.
>
> **[Thabisa]:** It's about the SASSA grant...

I confirmed the interview concerned the child-support grants, proposed ZAR 100, and Tumelo seemed satisfied: “Okay, sir, that will be my pleasure”. I also told her that she should answer only the questions she wanted to, thus keeping herself free to skip any. The interview flew naturally, and Tumelo shared thought-provoking insights. She

expressed herself with such a determined tone and sublime choice of words that I decided to call her again the following day. I wanted her opinion on the status of the monetary gratification she was about to receive. How did she understand such money? Was it payment, or was it a gift?

> I call it a token of appreciation. Somebody is appreciating to discuss with me our personal life, what we are encountering, where we are living. I'm taking it as a token of appreciation. It's not a payment. It's a token of appreciation (Tumelo).

I consider the gratification in money for my collaborators as payment, gift, and "token of appreciation". Nevertheless, I prefer Tumelo's compounded form because it seizes aspects of both payment and gift without merging with any. Above all, a token[75] of appreciation sets the debate on the symbolic terrain of gift-giving, where social pacts are performed[76]. It is symbolic in that an object (in case, a sum of money) stands as a gesture of recognition (Hénaff, 2010, p.132). Displays of respect vary, but no human encounter can unfold peacefully, and no Anthropological understanding succeeds without such tokens (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2008). Contrarily to the gift, which presupposes its iteration in a "long-term procedure of engagement" (Hénaff, 2010), the money in question between my collaborators and myself could only set an evanescent gist of reciprocity, hence a fleeting bond. My and most of my interviewees' pathways crossed briefly. We talked, thanked each other, and were again liberated to pursue lives apart, as if "paying" a price for the conversations had "peacified" us all (Mauss, 2002; Chanial, 2008).

Differently from mercantile transactions, however, paying cannot redeem ethnographic activities. Unfortunately, Anthropological careers are also premised on some measure of exploitation (Middleton and Pradhan, 2014). No financial reward and no assistant's salary can equal the disciplinary value of labour, stories, insights, and experiences shared in fieldwork, whichever alchemy the writing of ethnographies later sparks (Clifford, 1988). Whether settled by my collaborators or me, any price was bound to remain tokenistic, a fee of sorts, but paradoxically communicating appreciation. The standard measure of value, money let my interviewees question the "taken for granted"

[75]Something that takes the place of words in communicating a thought or feeling: expression, gesture, indication, sign. Definition of token [online]. The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/token (Accessed: July, 23rd., 2021).
[76] More generally, symbols are the material with which linguistic conventions, social pacts and tokens of mutual recognition pacts among free beings are constituted (Ortigues, as cited in Henaff, 2010, p.417).

(Crapanzano, 1980), an effect which some named "knowledge", some a "counterintuitive stance on the social world" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2008). It set most of my collaborators, assistants, and me on a proximate equal footing for at least some time. We were all on a quest for "emancipatory understanding" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018, p.9). In Busi's terms, "maybe we should change our lives with the interviews" [77]. A common quest for knowledge[78], ergo for transformative possibilities, was a twist money-induced reciprocity bred and which anthropologists, I guess, should neither dispense with nor conceal.

Section V – On Fieldwork and the Therapeutic Power of Speech

I now discuss the therapeutic power of speech as an effect triggered by participation in the semi-structured interviews (Annex 1) and the last *way* set in motion during fieldwork. I owe Thabisa the perception that the interviews could have a therapeutic effect and its conversion into an ethnographic strategy. After our first encounter in March 2020, Thabisa told me that the opportunity to cough her memories out had assuaged her. By November 2020, then working as my assistant, Thabisa spontaneously turned this therapeutic potential into a magnet in her quest for interviewees.

I believe there is an intimate connection between the therapeutic effects some of my interviewees ascribed to our conversations and what Freud (1953, p.283) called words' "magical powers". Later, I will give a more technical account of how speech can "drain away" affectively laden reminiscences and "operate as a form of relief" (Freud et al., 2004). Now, I shall portray the circumstances in which Thabisa transformed the alleviation of her past wounds into a way of conducting fieldwork. By December 2020, after she performed the first interview on my behalf, my assistant and I had the following dialogue.

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[77] According to Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2018, p.9) the emancipatory content of anthropology stems from its fostering a "critical reflection on current conditions of existence". Busi, who said she had "realised something" not only grasped such possibility of critique but also spoke of it as a lever for change.

[78] The condition of all sciences is detachment from "the real play of social activities" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.1), a privilege my collaborators in South Africa do not have. I consider, nevertheless, that they appreciated being paid to stop their daily routines and engage in a short exercise of critical reflection.

> **Tell me, Thabisa, why did you choose Sipho?**
> Because of Sipho, I know her... Sipho always tells me: 'I want to forget about my past tense'.
>
> **Does she?**
> Yes, so I told Sipho: I have something. I want to interview you. Sipho, this interview can make you happy and forget about your past tense. Are you nice if I ask you about your life? She said: 'Thabisa, you can ask about my life'. I said: I want to interview you. She said: 'Okay, Thabisa, no problem'.

According to my assistant, her neighbour and friend often complained about the lack of a social worker. Thabisa knew, furthermore, that Sipho had experienced difficulties like her own.

> The reason I like Sipho with all my heart is... cause Sipho... Do you remember my situation, Daniel? The situation of Sipho is the same.
>
> **What sort of situation?**
> About the father of the children, he doesn't help you and quit... And then the family... You can understand that situation. I just want Sipho to forget about her past tense.

My assistant presented the semi-structured interviews as a therapy of oblivion, and Sipho first acquiesced to talk about her personal life. However, when Thabisa mentioned me as her *boss* and said that the interviews constituted the bulk of her newfound *job*, Sipho confronted her: "Oh, you want to make money about me? Disconcerted, my assistant replied: "No, I just want to help you forget about your past tense". Sipho finally accepted to be interviewed, and Thabisa iterated her leitmotiv: "I wanted to make an interview with you, Sipho, just to make you forget about your past tense and move on with your life". Against Sipho's critical understanding of our activities qua exploitation, Thabisa had to insist on the interviews as a technique to soothe the burdensome remnants of past experiences.

Thabisa genuinely believed participation in the interviews could assuage Sipho's and other women's hearts. Formerly my interviewee, she had been particularly vocal about her relief after articulating personal recollections in four interviewing sessions. Realistically, however, the laudatory presentation of the interviews as a therapy of oblivion must be seen as it is: bivalent. For one thing, my assistant was trying to replicate the experience she once had with me, now within her closest neighbours. For another, she needed to counterweight the critique that my inroads into the lives of others were an

extractive intrusion. According to Thabisa, many South Africans thought I was annoying and making money out of them.

> **Thabisa:** Let me say 50%. Maybe half they think so, maybe half they don't. Just understand something, Daniel; some people, you bother them. But some people, they like to talk. People are not the same.

Clifford (1988), Strathern (2004), Middleton and Prahdan (2014) and others have pondered fieldwork's exploitative and meddlesome character, and it would be idle to insist on the matter from a scholar's point of view. With this brief hint at the objection Thabisa's and my activities met, I contend that exploitation and intrusiveness constitute the core of a social critique about fieldwork among poor and black South Africans. It is lofty but not far-fetched to call this disapproval an immanent critique (Stahl, 2013). Fortunately, Thabisa and part of her fellow South Africans also liked to talk – they are "highly social and cash-oriented" (Ferguson, 2015, p.121) – and seem to have found some relief after telling me their stories (and getting a few bucks).

Between March and August 2016, I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews in South Africa - 15 of which within an informal settlement in Pretoria. Nandi, a 35-year-old woman of Khosa origin, figured among those who shared their time and personal stories with me. She was born in Queenstown, Eastern Cape, and had lived in the township since 2002. My assistant at the time, Luthando was particularly attached to Nandi and her three children. Consequently, I also developed a warm relationship with them. I frequently accompanied Luthando to their yard, played with the children, and socialised with other Khosa migrants. They constituted one of the most cheerful and disadvantaged women on the street.

I interviewed Nandi in 2016, two months after my second arrival at the informal settlement. She then revisited her schism with her mother, the abusive relationship with her ex-husband, and the period she made her living from "survivalist sex" (Wojcicki, 2002) in taverns. The semi-structured interviews Luthando and I conducted in 2016 centred on local meanings of freedom and perceptions of social life in a township. Nandi, nevertheless, ventured into delicate past and present corners of her life. She needed, I assume, to speak her mind. By the end of our conversation, she touched her breast and looked moved. Luthando turned to me:

> **Luthando:** You relieve her heart. It's the first time she can explain all her problems. She will start crying now. You are the first person she's telling her problems. She's happy talking to you. She takes you like her brother because she feels free with you because she can talk. And you love her children, and they love you.

The excerpt above is not about me. It concerns the therapeutics of speech, which a landmark female patient in psychoanalysis, Anna O., termed “chimney-sweeping” and “talking-cure” (Freud et al., 2004). As an interviewer, I tried to be an empathetic listener and allowed Nandi to release her train of reminiscences and associations. This friendly approach and my daily pleasure with her kids made her feel welcome, and her desire to talk found an outlet. However, “talking”, “explaining” or simply “telling” her problems, not me, ultimately accounts for her sensation of freedom. Appositely, another woman living in Nandi’s yard mentioned freedom as the outcome of talking and being listened to. Themba, a sex worker, often received visits from a White woman –a Christian volunteer, a social worker? – with whom she “shared ideas”, talked about her “life and work”, and received donations (in clothes). Here follows an excerpt of our conversation, as translated by Luthando.

> **In which circumstance do you feel the most free?**
> She feels the most free when she’s staying with someone who can listen about her problems and experience problems like hers.
>
> **What kind of problems?**
> Life...

Luthando's rendering of Nandi's and Themba’s words raises two questions: first, the alleviating properties of talking; second, my structural position vis-à-vis these interviewees and the social circuits within the informal settlement. I shall begin with the latter subject and the following observation of Crapanzano in *Tuhami*.

> We were both strangers and, as such, encouraged openness. The stranger, Simmel noted, ‘often receives the most surprising openness – confidences which sometimes have the character of a confession and which would be carefully withheld from a more closely related person’. However this may be, a certain warmth and sympathy, an approachability is requisite for such openness even among strangers (1980, p.148).

As Crapanzano in Morocco and others elsewhere, I had no native standing at the informal settlement - unless we understand my being a foreigner a stance of sorts. Lack of roots meant I was and was not there, which sounds like another instantiation of what Simmel (cited in Crapanzano, 1980, p.144) called "unity of nearness and remoteness". Heart for children, shared cheerfulness in yard beer drinking, and Luthando (Luthando, above all) made me a somewhat near and reliable interlocutor. I was not a "total stranger" (1980, p.147). Still, I did not belong to the township, where my presence could only communicate remoteness in its temporary proximity. A mixture of structural distance and friendly but evanescent neighbourliness may have stimulated Nandi and others to speak their minds.

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, "transference-love" might be at play, too, and Nandi's taking me as a "brother" may signal something thereof (Freud, 1958, p.100). Her train of recollections went off as if my presence was propitious: she probably had "positive feelings" toward me (Crapanzano, 1980, p.169). To be sure, I have never acted or presented myself as a therapist, but it does not matter. In both the ethnographic and the psychoanalytic encounters, stages for the drama of self-constitution (Crapanzano, 1980, p.9)[79], one may become the object of the other's tenderness. Unconscious, "iterative"[80] models of affection are at stake. Analysts and ethnographers do not create transference but are somewhat caught in it. The phenomenon has an "element of spontaneity" (Freud, 1958, p.162).

Whatever the impact of transference-love in Nandi's disposition to narrate her quandaries, doing it warmed her heart, and she thanked me. If, as noticed at the turn of the 20th century, human beings suffer "for the most part from reminiscences", only the latter's verbal spring into the present can relieve its "pressure" (Bowlby, 2004). I insist that cordial manners and Luthando, who worked for me and endorsed my presence, helped cast me as a "trusted interlocutor" (Bowlby, 2004, p.11). Still, the "therapeutics of dialogue" is not exactly a matter of personal qualities but rather a "function" and a "power of speech" (Maranhao, 1986, pp.23; 152). Psychoanalysis' pioneers referred to such might in the following terms:

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[79] See also Crapanzano (1981, pp.139-40).

[80] It is true that the love consists of new editions of old traits and that it repeats infantile reactions. But this is the essential character of every state of being in love. There is no such state which does not reproduce infantile prototypes (Freud, 1958, p.168).

> The method removes the effectiveness of the idea that had not originally been abreacted by allowing its trapped affect to drain away through speech (Freud et al., 2004).

Their method was verbal but not strictly theirs. Anna O., a female patient of Dr. Breuer, formulated the idea of a "talking-cure", a speech-based therapy. As Bowlby (2004) puts it, Anna O. stands as the alfa and omega of modern psychoanalysis. A particularly endowed Jewish woman, she noticed that her mental suffering diminished significantly after hypnotically induced recollections, followed by conscious conversations with Dr Breuer. Then, she was "relieved" from her "symptoms"[81] and felt a noticeable increase in vitality and mood, for the disturbing affects[82] associated with memories and thoughts dissipated.

After the groundbreaking encounter between Anna O. and Breuer, he and Freud gave a late 19th-century medical formula to the therapeutics she had also described as "chimney-sweeping". The shift to medical lexicon changed the perspective from the subject of speech to the physician. Still, the patient's own words continued to be the medium of treatment (Bowlby, 2004). Despite the overtones of subject-object relations implied by the medical vocabulary and the notion of method, the latter has always centred on the patient's verbal activity. The release - or *abreaction* - of the emotional strain attached to ideas and past experiences occurs by virtue of the patient's speech and its power to drain away troubling and trapped affects (Freud et al., 2004).

According to these authors, tormenting reminiscences, symptoms, pains, and images can be "talked away". Pathogenic impressions, events, and even the clinical picture seem to disappear if "talked through". At the turn of the 20th century, Freud and Breuer expressed enthusiasm about the sweeping might of words and the telos of a total cure. It later gave way to the conception of "chimney-sweeping" as an interminable task, for daily life keeps leaving "unmourned ashes and dust" (Bowlby, 2004). In any case, mourning and clearing things away remained a function of speech in Freud's subsequent works – "The patient must be left to do the talking" (1958, p.134). By then, free associations had already substituted for hypnosis, but recollections and the articulation of "mere words" still constituted the therapeutic driving force (Freud, 1953, p.283).

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[81] Such as a general feeling of torment, visual disturbances, and loss of speech's grammatical structure (Breuer, 2004:95;115).

[82] Affect being understood as a quantum of energy of an emotional-like nature, associated or not with conscious representations, and impacting on one's body and subjectivity (Green, 1999; Favreet-Saada, 2009).

Before this digression on words' magical powers, I presented an extract from a 2016 interview with a Khosa woman named Nandi. She was the first South African collaborator to call my attention to speech-derived relief. However, the interview with Nandi remained forgotten in an ash-and-dusty corner of my files[83]. I stumbled again on the therapeutics stemming from the verbalization of reminiscences only in March 2020. I was then conducting my fourth interview in Kwa-Ndebele, and Thabisa embarked on a long and pain-laden review of her life experiences as a woman, mother, spouse and recipient of the child-support grants.

Thabisa's life story combined material privation, early teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence. Conjuring it up wore us all: she, my assistant, Amahle, and me. Thabisa did not refuse to answer any question, but at some points in her narrative, she would interrupt her speech and exclaim: “Next question!” “Another topic!” She mainly avoided talking about her in-laws, mother, and siblings, among whom she accumulated diverse grievances. When stumbling at episodes of deception and betrayal, Thabisa remarked the interview concerned “her life”, not others’, as though she could set apart the interwoven stories that compounded her own.

Often enough, however, attempts at diverting the spots where personal and social life entangled proved temporary. Despite Thabisa’s injunctions to herself, my assistant, and me, spiny junctures of her and her relative's life came to light, and, at the end of the four interviewing sections, we all experienced something “new” (Crapanzano, 1992, p.193). I called ‘knowledge effect’ the impression that something novel had sprung from the semi-structured interviews. Most interviewees deployed verbs and expressions in the domain of cognizance – “realize”, “gain knowledge”, “become aware of”, “learn” - to mean that unnoticed or taken-for-granted aspects of their lives had come to a new light. Thabisa, too, took the interviews as a reflective exercise, which she cast in terms of knowledge of life and love.

> **Would you take part in another research about the child support grants?**
> Yeah, I can, I can.
>
> **Why?**
> Cause Mr Daniel teach me how love it is.

[83] Also forgotten until the final writing of this Thesis remained the interviews with Imani (see introduction) and Themba (see page 41).

What?
How life it is.

I do not ignore that the ethnographic encounter rests on asymmetries and the writing of ethnographies on the ultimate power to edit and impress a theoretical orientation: “So much is obvious” (Crapanzano, 1992, p.212). Less clear, perhaps, is the idea that a dialogical encounter has “a spirit of its own that escapes the will of its participants” (1992, p.212). Thabisa's assertion that life and love had been in question baffled me. When she claimed that revisiting her life story had relieved her heart and made her “free”, she became a South African Anna O. (Freud et al., 2004), the first among my 2020-2021 collaborators to attribute a therapeutic effect to the semi-structured interviews. After our first interviewing session, Thabisa and I kept chatting at the kitchen table, and I took the following notes.

10/03/2020 - 08:15 pm.
Thabisa said the interview was a possibility “to cough out, to take my memories out”. A bit later, she repeated: “I coughed everything out”, and she mimicked the act of coughing.

Such impressions resurfaced the following morning. After breakfast, we concurred that our conversation had gone deep, and again Thabisa told me that coughing her past out had assuaged her pains: she was feeling “free”. Thabisa answered all questions comprising Annex 1 along the three following nights. Her prose entailed a dynamic we could hardly control. Once, I begged her to keep talking, as when she mentioned problems with her first husband and mother-in-law. After spontaneously recalling her marriage with Teboho, she said:

Ah, Daniel, please. I don’t like to talk about Teboho.

Please, talk to me. It’s important to me.
Serious?

I’m with you, please...
He abused me too much... And his mother said he was always right.

Sometimes, Thabisa’s recollections ebbed, flowed, and sneaked in discourse despite her own injunctions. Formerly managing a carwash, she hired her brother and

sister, but these two apparently abstracted some cash afterwards. All, including Thabisa, were licensed.

> **All of you were working there...**
> That's why... That's why I lost my job. Let us not continue...
>
> **[Amahle]: Yes, okay...**
> They betrayed me too much... No, no, no. That's why my job was [lost]...

Engaging in dialogue was worth our while. In the last interviewing section, we discussed questions comprising Annex 2.

> **Did you like to talk about your past?**
> Eish, it was hard. It was hard cause my past... Sometimes, when I think about my past, I've already cried... But since I've got this interview, I think it was a dream, the past... Now, I have to forget about my future...
>
> **You have to forget about your future?**
> I have to prepare about my future, forget about my past. Prepare my future, my future tense.
>
> **Do you think that ZAR 70 is a fair value for each interview?**
> Okay... I think it's an evaluation [and laughs] of the interview [and laughs again]. But I didn't think that even an evaluation... Cause now, we are evaluating this interview...
>
> **Yeah, precisely, we are evaluating.**
> Yeah. I don't think that I should get paid again.
>
> **Do you think that these interviews should be paid?**
> No, cause [you are] helping us to forget about our stories, to forget the life you've been through before you come to this stage now.
>
> **So, you think the interviews should not be paid...**
> Yes. Okay... Mr Daniel give me a... 'Thabisa, thank you for the interview'. So, that time, I didn't think that Mr Daniel would pay me. But I don't think it's forced to pay cause you're helping people to forget their past. And it's not easy to ask someone about her intergenerational lives. It's not easy. Cause some feel angry – 'Why this came to me?' We are not the same...

Mariah, the woman I interviewed after Thabisa, also told me she felt relieved after participating in the interviews. We talked by phone in April 2020, during my confinement in Pretoria. Then Mariah answered the twenty initial questions of Annex 1. She did not want to speak about her childhood but spontaneously told me a schoolmate raped her at the 16. As Thabisa before her, Mariah had different sources of distress during

her teenage years and afterwards: unstable parental relationships, conflicts between siblings, gender-based violence, and successive pregnancies. By October 2020, five months after my return to Brazil, Mariah answered Annex 1 remaining questions and Annex 2 questions by WhatsApp.

> **Would you take part in another research about the child support grants? Why?**
> Yes, it's such a relief to open up to someone you don't know.
>
> **Did you enjoy talking about your personal story? Why?**
> Not really, but when I talked about it, I heal inside

In February 2021, I proposed that we discuss by phone the same questions she had responded to on WhatsApp. She gladly accepted, and I gained a better perspective on the relevance of social distance in our conversations.

> **You told me it was a relief to talk with someone you didn't know...**
> Yes...
>
> **Why is it a relief to talk about difficult things with someone you don't know?**
> It's a relief because someone you don't know won't judge you...

I believe that a measure of empathy also accounted for the benign quality Mariah ascribed to our interaction. She said my overall "friendly, brotherly" tone contrasted with other experiences. I was not the first one with whom she spoke about her crudest trauma, the episode of rape. A psychologist and a counsellor had assisted her in the past.

> **Was it relieving to talk with a psychologist and a counsellor?**
> Not at that time, because I was hurt at that time... So they talked about me, telling me that I must forgive, I can't forget but must forgive. And they also taught me how to be strong in life...
>
> **It was not really relieving...**
> No, not at that time, but... In talking with somebody like you, I don't know, it's a relief...

Rather than simply listening and allowing her to act past events out (Freud, 1958, p.150), the professionals helping Mariah had a somewhat normative and professorial approach. They tried to "teach" her how to be strong and said she must forgive. Such a strategy bore no fruits. Short of other details on the counsellor's and psychologist's

approach, I cannot elaborate on the matter but suggest a contrast: the healing effects she ascribed to our conversation stemmed from the fact that instead of telling her what to do, I simply asked questions, listened, and paid for her time with me.

> **Mariah:** You are helping me to express myself the way I'm feeling... Nobody else will ask me those questions.
>
> **You think that I'm helping you what?**
> To express my feelings, to talk about anything in general... About the interviews... All those questions you are asking me...
>
> **You said that all the questions I asked you...**
> Nobody will ask it... Even the government won't ask you about those questions you asked.

At play, therefore, were not only empathy and occasional material assistance but also the healing properties of unimpeded talking, which Mariah expressed as follows

> If you have something that hurts... If you have a pain that hurts you, it's better to talk about it. The more you talk about it, then you will heal inside...

Mariah and I kept a rapport between my arrival in Brazil in May 2020 and mid-2021. As mentioned in the last section, in November 2020, Thabisa started working as my remote assistant. Until December 28th, when lockdown restrictions resumed in South Africa, Thabisa conducted four interviews on my behalf. When inviting her first interviewee, Sipho, she faced accusations of making money from her. Notwithstanding, Sipho finally accepted the invitation and decided to speak her mind even before the interviewing session. Despite their longstanding friendship, Sipho had never told Thabisa that her first pregnancy resulted from rape perpetrated by her maternal uncle. As with Mariah, who unexpectedly told me about being raped by a schoolmate, I came to know Sipho's case upon listening to the 6th question my assistant posed to Sipho.

> **What can you tell me about your childhood? Like you were happy or sad or abused...**
> Abused.

Thabisa included abuse in the question above because Sipho confided the episode to her before the interview started. A week after receiving the audio file from my assistant,

we discussed the material she had gathered. I learned other information on the whole range of violence falling upon Sipho. Besides being raped, her uncle never recognised paternity nor provided financial assistance. Furthermore, Sipho's mother did not allow her to resort to the police. They should treat the case “as a family”. Sipho was finally discredited by other relatives, who did not believe her uncle could have raped her. Sexual violence thus remained under an atmosphere of secrecy and distrust.

> **Is it a secret within the family?**
> **Thabisa:** Yeah... The family makes this thing a secret. I'm the person who knows this thing.
>
> **You were not supposed to talk about that, were you?**
> But she didn't say like that. She said, 'Thabisa, I'm free now'. This thing, I think, this thing was eating her.
>
> **Was it eating her?**
> Yeah, she needed someone to talk to.
>
> **Is she feeling free now?**
> Yeah, yeah, too much free.

Thabisa did not insist on the episode but advised her friend to search for a therapist, and Sipho agreed. According to my assistant, Sipho found a woman who stimulated her to narrate her stories: “I think that woman is her therapist. I think so. I'm not sure”. It also seems that the interviewing sections impacted the daily interaction between them. My assistant told me that she and Sipho widened the scope of their conversations, sharing more aspects of their personal lives and looking for reciprocal advice.

> **Thabisa:** We just communicate like woman to woman. I give her a tip, and she give me a tip.

According to Thabisa, such new dynamics followed the interview with Sipho, and the latter wanted to thank me. Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to talk. Hence, the only information I have on the interaction between the two women was provided by my assistant.

> **Do you think that she's feeling better now after the interview?**
> Obvious! She told me: ‘Thabisa, I'm feeling better now. And I'm happy to talk with some person like you'. And I told her: Sipho, now

> you've got another boyfriend. Just remember that maybe this guy is the person who will take care of you. Just forget about your past.

Thabisa's emphasis on the interviews as a therapy of oblivion was premised on her understanding that the questions offered our collaborators an opportunity to *cough out*, that is, to get rid of memories, feelings, thoughts, and past circumstances having a corrosive effect on their minds. In Thabisa's words, some aspects of individual lives could, like parasites, "eat" people from the inside. In March 2020, when I interviewed her, she had already deployed the verb *to eat* when referring to her state of mind when she discovered that her ex-husband was having a sexual affair with their neighbour: "That thing was eating me".

Thabisa talked about Siphos's life story in January 2021. By then, we had already interrupted face-to-face interviews and were assessing her activities as my assistant. I was particularly interested in Thabisa's usage of expressions such as coughing out and being eaten by something. Both concepts were related in her discourse in that to cough out constituted the only means to overcome emotional distress and recover the feeling of freedom again. In one of our many recorded conversations, she developed these ideas as follows:

> To cough out, Daniel, is like... When there's something inside your heart, that thing is eating you. You don't have someone. You want someone to talk about that thing, so you can cough out. You cough this thing out, so you'll be free. You'll never be free while you are still... That thing inside your heart is eating you all the time. You won't be free, Daniel.
>
> **Why not?**
>
> Because this thing is always inside, but when you talk to someone, you're free.

After reviewing with Thabisa the four presential interviews she conducted with her closest neighbours and relatives, my assistant proposed to talk with her sister, Esulu. According to Thabisa, the latter had just ended a love relationship with a married man and looked despondent. Thabisa thought her sister needed to forget about her past and proposed the interviews as the appropriate mechanism.

> I told her - My sister, can I make an interview with you? About your personal life, your real personal life. I want you to cough out anything you want to cough out. I see there's something on your chest, and you

> need someone to talk with. I want to interview you about your relationship. She said: ‘Yo, yo, yo, it's fine! Maybe I will be fine’.

I participated in the conversations with Esulu, whom I had personally met while in South Africa. Nevertheless, I also proposed a second paid conversation where only the two sisters could discuss matters of the heart without me. Both Thabisa and Esulu seemed particularly excited. My assistant understood the second interview as “a debate” and consulted her sister: “I told Esulu: We can talk about my marriage, my divorce. And then, on her side, we can talk about staying with a married man”. This second conversation constituted an opportunity to compare two different conversational settings: one involving Thabisa, Esulu and me, and the other comprising the two of them.

After the rounds of conversation between Thabisa, Esulu and me, I asked Esulu her impressions on the interviewing sections. She told me the following, in my assistant's words:

> I'm happy because this interview, you give me ZAR 200. I didn't think that this interview is going to pay me. And I'm happy because I talked with my life (emphasis added).

I then asked Esulu whether it had not been too difficult to talk about her past. Again, Thabisa translated her sister:

> I think it's fine when I'm talking with a person who don't know me. Cause when you talk with a person who know you at South Africa, they will laugh at you, talk [that] you're suffering, just talking lot of bullshit. So, it's fine cause you're not at South Africa and you don't know the people of South Africa.

In other words, Esulu felt comfortable talking with me because I did not belong to her closest circles and would not mock her predicaments, contrary to her South African acquaintances. As was the case with Mariah, according to whom our not knowing each other meant I would keep an unjudgmental stance on her life, Esulu emphasised anonymity, distance, and confidentiality as factors accounting for her easiness. We had the above dialogue before she and Thabisa talked about matters of the heart without me. After this last conversation, Thabisa, Esulu, and I had another conference, and I asked Esulu whether my absence had made her more comfortable. Esulu then spoke directly to me.

> **What are the differences for you to be interviewed by Thabisa or me?**
> **Esulu:** I don't have a problem, there's no difference.
> **Can you repeat?**
> I don't have a problem if Thabisa or you interview me.
>
> **But Thabisa is a woman, and I'm a man. Isn't it different for you?**
> Ah, there's no difference.

That was the last conversation between Esulu and me, and again she seemed at ease. I then took up the opportunity to ask whether the interview had helped her “forget about her past”. The two women talked in IsiNdebele, and my assistant told me the following:

> **Thabisa:** She didn't think that she's going to forget so easy, but it's better now.
>
> **What does she mean by “it's better now”?**
> She said she's better because she was talking to someone about her situation. [Before] she was talking by her side, but now she's better because she was talking with someone. That time she was still arguing alone.

Esulu's answer complemented what she had said ten days before, when I first asked her impressions on the semi-structured interviews – “I'm happy because I talked with my life” (emphasis added). As to the possibility of forgetting her past, she considered she would always remember it. In other words, oblivion, as such, was not her point. Instead, she seemed to understand her feelings better as the outcome of breaking off the self-enclosure of “arguing alone” and sharing her thoughts with someone outside her daily circuits of sociality.

Such a mix of geographic and social remoteness seemed to have attracted others. By June 2021, when Thabisa's job approached its end, she reminded me that we had not interviewed one of her neighbours. The latter was informed of the paid nature of the conversations and spontaneously offered herself for an interview. I then asked my assistant whether money was the sole motive at play.

> **Thabisa:** She want to talk to you so that she can cough something [out]. Because you are far! She told me: ‘Your boss is far! Thabisa, you are the one who know my story, but I just want your boss to ask me a question, and then if I don't know how to talk in English, you can translate’.

> **Does she want to talk about her life**?
> Especially because she knows you're going to ask about her life. When she was 23, and she had two kids, then her boyfriend passed away. So maybe she wants to cough this thing out. I think like that because she said: 'I'm talking about everything?' I said: everything. The thing that you don't want to answer, you say: 'No, I can't answer this question'. So, I'm telling her: you are going to talk about the relationship, your SASSA grant and your life, your personal life. She said - 'Okay, I'm free'.
> **And what is the point of my being far? What does it mean?**
> Because some people, when you are next to them, asking some question, they are afraid to answer you. [But] you're far, you're talking with a phone, and it's going to be the three of us. She will be free!

Having stayed among Black and poor South Africans a few times, I learned that money is welcome. 'They' need and like money, as most of 'us' do - save, perhaps, for Anthropologists (Hart, 2007). Thabisa's neighbour knew I offered ZAR 150 and did not pretend otherwise. Yet more was in question, and I had no reason to mistrust my assistant's report. Thabisa took her role as an oblivion therapist seriously.

> Some people they need some person to talk so that she will forget their past. And here I am. Do you hear me?
>
> **Sorry. Please repeat...**
> Some of people they need some people to help them to forget about their past... So now, just me, I'm helping them.

A few days after Thabisa finished presential interviews, she noticed that other neighbours wanted to participate in the conversations. She told them she would resume conversations only when I returned to South Africa. I asked my assistant why these girls wanted to talk to her, and she answered: "Maybe they are happy at the way I'm talking, the way I introduce [to] them". Curious, I asked how she was presenting herself and the *job*.

> I just tell them: I'm going to interview you about your personal life. If you are free, just tell me. If you are free, you can respond, and if there's a question you don't like to talk about... And you have to be free, cause we are just talking our personal lives.

Thabisa mastered rule number one of the interviews, the possibility to skip any question. I, too, had told my interviewees about the 'freedom clause', but it sounded charmer in my assistant's mouth. It had the lure of a shared sense of liberty: "You have to

be free 'cause we are just talking our personal lives". On Esulu's terms, they were also talking "with" their lives. Such a genre of other-mediated self-reflection (Crapanzano, 1981) demands from participants the positive will to speak and listen to themselves, their lives, and Thabisa. Indeed, my assistant did not conceive herself as a passive interviewer. On the contrary, she understood these conversations as "debates", a local genre of speech[84] in which the roles of speaker and listener alternate.

> **Thabisa:** We are communicating; we just make a topic, which means we are arguing. It's a debate.

Arguing means a "verbal exchange" and a "presentation of reasons and facts to persuade"[85]. Debating, one of its synonyms, is premised on an active stance and, on Thabisa's version, may touch upon very intimate matters:

> Please, don't be afraid to ask me a question. This is an interview. You can do anything you want. If you want to talk about my sexual life, we can talk, don't be afraid, cause we are communicating.

Thus conceived, debates are the opposite of self-enclosure and its potentially distressing effects. Thabisa's sister, Esulu, apparently felt better after conversing with us, for she finally talked to someone, contrary to when she was arguing alone. It is worth noticing that other driving forces were at play in these dialogical encounters, particularly the similarity of Thabisa's and her interviewees' experiences and the compassion shared suffering inspires. For the last time, I repeat Thabisa's rationale when inviting her first interviewee.

> The reason I like Sipho with all my heart is... cause Sipho... Do you remember my situation, Daniel? The situation of Sipho is the same […]. The father of the children, he doesn't help you and quit. And then the family...

When explaining why other girls in her neighbourhood wanted to be interviewed, Thabisa again alluded to shared conflictual experiences: "We are even talking about the

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[84] Among men, *debates* presuppose the fierce opposition of arguments. I first learned this dialogue genre in a South African tavern. One of its habitués then vehemently questioned my presence at a Black township. When another interlocutor noticed how cowed I was, he told me: "Don't worry, it's only a debate".

[85] Definition of argue [online]. In: The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/argue (accessed: June, 2nd, 2023).

SASSA grants, né? I told you, do you remember? I was not getting the SASSA grant. Norah took my...” Early pregnancy and motherhood were also experiences Thabisa could draw on, elaborate on, and finally transform into supportive, encouraging acts of speech.

> You are talking about something that you did before. I only tell that girl: you are right, girl. I was passing that before, especially with raising a child when you're still young. To help you, to make you break up with the father of your child while you are still young.

Unfortunately, Thabisa could not interview all the girls she wanted to. Still, an experienced-based reflective process was set off, and until June 2021, my assistant kept a stage and an audience for playing her and others' dramas. Thabisa tapped on her past to assert what she believed were the best ways to conduct one's life. More than a sympathetic listener (Freud, 1953), as I had tried to be, she had the authority of memory and pain: “I help them forget about their child's father. It's too hard when you become pregnant and after you raise your child alone. It's not easy”. After listening to this, I remarked the interviews were tricky, for people recalled harsh experiences. “You remember, but you will forget”, Thabisa stated. I told her it was fascinating: one remembers and forgets, indeed.

Chapter II: At the Matriarch's Home

IKaya lakagogo iKaya abantawana boke

Granny's home is children's home. So much, and solemnly, told me Luthando in April 2016, when she, Martha, and I sketched a long-lasting compromise of mutual support. I then promised the matriarch I would return, conduct my PhD research in Kwa-Ndebele and again have her granddaughter as my research assistant. Martha welcomed my plans and told me not to worry about anything.

Three years elapsed between our "mutual pledges" (Hénaff, 2010) and my return to Martha's house. Meanwhile, Luthando's health deteriorated, and she could no longer be my boots-on-the-ground assistant. Martha, too, looked impaired and older. She coughed frequently, was thinner, and had difficulties hearing us. As a result, grandmother and granddaughter stayed longer hours in bed, often sharing the same.

This chapter covers my four-month stay at Martha's house – from November 2019 to March 2020. A transformative process was underway, corresponding to Martha's bestowal of household affairs upon Luthando. For decades, Martha had been the "breadwinner" (in Luthando's terms) and held sway over her domains. When we arrived in Kwa-Ndebele, the matriarch, though frailer than in 2016, still reigned. After New Year, however, Martha was taken to her elder daughter's house in Pretoria.

The old lady was aware of her impending death. During a visit at the end of January 2020, she told Luthando, "My child, now you must take care of my house". Martha's departure to Pretoria changed her granddaughter's status and grip within the household: Luthando became the breadwinner. Such is the last portrait I keep from my friend, and I hope its depiction will do some justice to her final months.

The chapter has two sections, according to a temporal and social line. Section I ranges from November 21st, 2019, to January 2nd, 2020. Its landmark is my arrival at Martha's house; its term is the matriarch's move to Pretoria. Arrivals and departures were not restrained to Martha and me. In November, I was one of many guests at Martha's: Mpho, Sizwe, and Bongani came around the same time. In January, Martha did not quit the house alone; her male son, Ntuli, accompanied her. Mpho, Bongani and Sizwe had just left the house.

Section II extends from January 8th to March 25th, 2020. Again, time and the flow of people are at play. January inaugurated a new social cycle at the house. Until then, Luthando had had visitors. After Martha's departure, some became friends and got full access to Luthando's and Margaret's room – the ladies' bedroom. Two women, Nandi and Kaya, and their children were incorporated into daily household chores and comforts. They substituted for Martha as a source of warmth in Luthando's bed.

In their transiency, presence and absence, time and people, constitute the chapter's spine, flesh, and blood. Luthando's empowered return to her grandmother's house set in motion a "network of connections" (Gupta, 2014), and within this moving theatre, I found two assistants, Amahle and Thabisa, and most interviewees. In Section I, I intersperse the initial dynamics at Martha's and conversations with two beneficiaries of child support grant beneficiaries, Amahle and her son, and one of the old-age grant, Amahle's mother, Christina.

The first noteworthy arrival of Section II is Martha's first great-grandson, Andile. The new household dynamics then mingled with the story of Kaya, a mother of four and recipient of two child support grants. Also noteworthy are the circumstances in which Luthando and Thuli, another habitué at the house, started receiving the disability grant. The last arrival was Andile's mother, Thabisa, who would become my long-distance assistant months later. Section II ends with my departure to Pretoria due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section I – Arrivals / Departures: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Luthando, Margaret, Mpho, and I arrived in Kwa-Ndebele on November 21st, 2019. We brought Mpho's and my bags, my desk and chair, and Luthando's new bed on a pickup truck. At the yard, Luthando's younger brother, Gift, and Martha received us. Mpho and I got a small bedroom with two single beds while Margaret and her daughter returned to their old chamber, now added with a double, more comfortable berth. Martha's 55-year-old son, Ntuli, and Bongani, a friend taken in as a family, completed the list of residents at the circular, spacious house.

Two other guests would soon join us and live at Martha's for a while, but I shall first say a word about the eight initial residents. The 80-year-old matriarch had a pulmonary disease, which ultimately explains her departure to Pretoria on January 2nd,

2020. At the capital, she was closer to medical facilities. Her youngest daughter, 50-year-old Margaret, had lived with Martha since 2016. In charge of domestic labour and care, she experienced acute anxiety about Martha's health, particularly after her admission to the hospital by mid-January.

Luthando had been hit by abdominal tuberculosis due to unchecked HIV. She thought she might have caught it from *malume* (uncle) Ntuli in 2018. During that year's binges, she took antiretrovirals haphazardly: "Sometimes, I did not take the pills for the whole weekend". Before my return to South Africa in October 2019, Luthando had alternated between Gauteng and Kwa-Ndebele. She had a boyfriend and a close friend in *Joburg*, where she happened to be whenever I phoned her. Then she did not tell me – perhaps she did not know – how much her health was compromised.

Luthando's 20-year-old brother, Gift, was the youngest among us. He had a separate room in the yard, where he also ran a *spahlo* – a small barrack selling sandwiches, sausages, and fries. Luthando had been financing his business, but it did not thrive. The year 2019 was Gift's last at school: he failed Grade 11 and exceeded the age limit for his level. The news came with disappointment, not dismay: nobody in the family had obtained matric. Luthando spoke of his younger brother with deep affection, which he reciprocated daily. Like Margaret and me, Gift constantly attended to Luthando in the ladies' bedroom.

Fifty-five-year-old Ntuli, *malume* Ntuli, was Martha's only male son alive – the other, Jeremy, had committed suicide. Limping from one leg, Ntuli benefited from a disability grant and entertained a bohemian life. This habit of his incidentally explains why he accompanied Martha to Pretoria. When out of cash, Ntuli resorted to loan sharks, and his creditors started demanding payment by December. A habitué at the town's taverns, Ntuli seldom remained among us. When present, he was essentially a nice guy. Occasionally, though, he might turn quarrelsome.

Bongani arrived the first among Martha's guests. Unemployed and the father of a 6-month-old infant, he led an erratic life. While in Johannesburg, Bongani worked in a car wash with his two sisters, Thabisa and Esulu. Money-related issues, however, caused them to be licensed. He and Esulu then returned to the latter's house in Kwa-Ndebele. Again, conflicts over money put Bongani on the road, and he found a shelter at Martha's house. His younger sister, Thabisa, was the mother of Andile, Martha's first great-grandson. A soft-mannered, pleasant guy, Bogani quit us by the end of December due to money-related issues.

Finally, Mpho came on the same pickup truck as Luthando, Margaret, and me. They were close friends while living in the informal settlement, and, thanks to the two women, Mpho became my ethnographic partner in 2016. Like Luthando, he introduced me to his “network of connections” (Gupta, 2014). We observed and discussed *in loco* episodes such as the Tshwane Riots[86]. Between my departure from South Africa in July 2016 and my arrival in October 2019, we kept phone contact, and I occasionally remitted to him, though less than to Luthando. As mentioned in the last Chapter, they once had an argument on the matter, and he heard from Luthando:

Daniel is my boss, not your boss.

Luthando and I had a contract, a verbal but solemn agreement sealed before Martha. Accordingly, her statement above reflects our bond's durable and formal reality. Nevertheless, Mpho and I had a relationship involving ethnographic assistance, too. In 2016, he arranged a couple of interviews, helped translate them, and carried on with me the “interpretive work” on which data rests (Gupta, 2014). Mpho was keenly aware of his relevance as a collaborator to my work, which he bitterly voiced when his presence among us in Kwa-Ndebele became untenable.

A couple of weeks after our arrival, we became ten under the matriarch's roof. Margaret's boyfriend, Jan, and Sizwe, Martha's grandson whose father had committed suicide, also installed themselves among us. A mild, amiable man in his mid-fifties, Jan had been invited by Margaret to celebrate December festivities. Unemployed, he lived with his mother in Pretoria and would alternate between the latter's and Martha's house until my departure in March 2020. Jan had noticeable abilities in the kitchen and, like Bongani, often helped Margaret with cooking. He could braai, prepare the pork's head and lovely stews.

Martha's grandson, Sizwe, came to the family's surprise and discomfort. On December 3rd, Gift informed me that “someone new” had arrived. His tone was suspicious, for he and Luthando believed Sizwe consumed nyaope[87]. During his last stay at the house, Sizwe stole Luthando's clothes and money. After communicating his cousin’s presence, Gift warned me to keep my belongings safe, preferentially inside the ladies' bedroom. He also observed:

[86] Information about these protests is available in: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36584572.
[87] A dramatically addicting compound made of hemp, heroin, antiretrovirals, among other possibilities.

Gift: We can't chase him away.

I had never so suggested. Luthando's brother was venting his concerns and familial constraints: kinship norms precluded breaching the inclusive etiquette. Since Sizwe's presence was ineluctable, at least for a while, I was admitted into the ladies' bedroom. Sizwe took up my bed in the guest's chamber and shared it with Mpho, while I spent December nights in the same room as Margaret and Luthando.

Sizwe stayed for a month, but unlike other kin and non-kin, his presence was markedly faint. He remained outside for hours, reappearing at night mainly. He did not participate in domestic chores or family beer drinking, but his plate was always set aside for him. The day Sizwe left us, he entered Luthando's room and begged her pardon: a couple of days before, he had stolen ZAR 50. He promised to mend his ways: “I'm a man. This is my family”. Luthando and Martha seemed happier, and they had a warm farewell. I never saw him again.

Sizwe's evanescent but compulsory stay instantiates the chapter's epigraph - granny's home is children's home. At Martha's, however, not only kinship rules but also what James Ferguson (2021) terms “presence and social obligation” were at play. According to the American author, livelihood in Southern Africa is based on mandatory distributive schemes stemming from adjacency and stretching beyond individual convenience. Those in the same space are entitled to partake in vital resources, whether they engage in relations of reciprocity or not[88].

Three of Martha’s guests had come without being formally invited: Bongani, Mpho, and Sizwe. Neither had an income, yet they shared almost whatever we had. So did Margaret's boyfriend, who stayed with us for most of the period between November 2019 and March 2020. We were ten at Martha's, and only three contributed to household expenses: Luthando, me, and, to a lesser extent, Martha. The arrangement revealed some of the distributive forces shaping a South African household.

Since our arrival in Kwa-Ndebele, there had been a permanent flow of women and children at the house, well-known neighbours or mere acquaintances visiting Luthando. Mostly in bed, she seemed pleased at the comers. They sat beside her and engaged in vivid conversations. Some would bring children - I often observed infants sharing Luthando's bed and plate. Some ate breakfast; some stayed for lunch. Luthando shared

[88] I will discuss Ferguson’s recent work in the Interlude on Presence.

her private food (juice, fruits, and biscuits) with some. When short of snacks, she would ask me, her brother, or a neighbouring child[89] to buy her a bite at local shops.

These small and impoverished neighbours performed such services in exchange for money and food. They did not stay or eat with us every day but remained around and aware that Martha and her family then lived in more abundant circumstances. In turn, Luthando, Margaret, and Gift knew these kids needed more than their relatives could provide.

During my initial two weeks in Kwa-Ndebele, I still envisaged a new field in Limpopo province and consequently did not negotiate a financial arrangement with my hosts. Instead, I purchased whatever we needed on demand: Margaret and Luthando informed me of the house wants, and Gift and I would go shopping. Since I was "buying the food", Martha told me she would not charge me rent. Purchasing on demand, however, soon proved unfeasible.

I decided to stay in Kwa-Ndebele on the first days of December 2019 and proposed to Luthando a remuneration of ZAR 5000 per month. She seemed satisfied and undertook the responsibility of "buying the food". I would never stop purchasing part of the daily items we needed, such as extra meat and some amenities for Luthando. Still, from the day my host and I signed our contract, she administered a monthly sum, and I was no longer supposed to buy everything on demand.

When we settled the terms of my stay in Kwa-Ndebele, Luthando designated her friend Amahle as my assistant. Luthando had done *the job* in the past and knew its requirements more than well. Amahle spoke English fluently, had matric and two college diplomas - Nursery and Hotel and Catering. She was also the mother of two, an infant and a teenager. Like many young and skilled South Africans, Amahle was unemployed. She, Luthando and I signed a tripartite contract on December 10th, 2019[90].

I took my first notes at Martha's on December 26th, 2019. Amahle was accompanied by a neighbour, Maria, and we started chatting in the living room. Maria seemed curious about my friendship with Luthando and research designs in South Africa. I presented my interests in the child support grants and set a parallel with the Brazilian

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[89] Sending children and teens to buy groceries at shops is quite a regular habit among the South Africans I met. It is seen as a junior contribution to domestic chores, particularly in households with elders.

[90] I proposed Amahle a monthly salary of ZAR 2500. She and Luthando were aware that my research required far more than a scholarship allowance. We had to strike a delicate balance between Luthando's needs and Amahle's remuneration. Fortunately, the latter knew that Luthando should stand prominently in the painstaking equation between available means and ends.

Bolsa Família. She told me her albino brother received the disability grant. Though acknowledging the relevance of the benefit, Maria remained realistic about its value:

> It's a quota; it leaves you halfway. At the [state] clinics, we don't have the skin spray for him. I must go to Clicks [a local drugstore].

Fortunately, such was not Luthando's case. From the public clinic, she received antiretrovirals, vitamin supplements, and heartburn drugs - all essential items. My host and friend vomited frequently, which hindered the absorption of antiretrovirals and food nutrients. Luthando's thinness represented the nurses' utmost preoccupation, as revealed on November 27th, when we went to the clinic in an adjacent neighbourhood.

Upon arriving at the gate, Luthando asked me to go inside and get her a wheelchair. The doorman and I took her to the waiting room. All within the lounge noticed us, and as soon as we took our seats, the reception clerk told the other patients that Luthando should be cared for before them. Nobody in the room opposed it. The man finally summoned me to the desk and opened my file.

I informed my age, nationality, and current residence. A nurse – or *sister*, in Luthando's words - called us to the consulting room. She took a blood sample from Luthando and measured her temperature and pressure. Meanwhile, we discussed her ideal diet. Luthando should abstain from too salty or sweet food. Fruits and vegetables were highly welcome as complements to porridge and chicken. The *sister* thanked me when I mentioned I had been buying Luthando spinach and honey to relieve frequent coughing and increase her blood levels of iron. Gaining weight and vigour, the nurse observed, was priority number one.

I left the clinic very well impressed. All staff had treated us with cordiality. Patients in the lounge, including two mothers with infants, had allowed us to go first with a mix of curiosity and sympathy for an impaired fellow South African and her foreign friend. The reception clerk and the nurses were cognizant of Luthando's case. Later that day, my friend told me that the woman who attended to her was “her” sister, the one she loved most.

The idiom of kinship applied to all the clinic’s staff: sisters or just *sis* for the nurses and brother for the reception clerk. Those civil servants enjoyed great respect and offered the same in return. Luthando's beloved *sis* did seem the warmest. Eventually, though, I noticed my friend’s recovery was a joint project, one the staff conducted with professional

and personal dedication. This circumstance also influenced my decision to stay in Kwa-Ndebele: a field of care relations was underway.

Luthando and I returned to the clinic two weeks later. The receptionist got us a wheelchair and informed the other patients that my friend should be given precedence. Inside the consulting room, the same nurse received us. She also called Luthando *sis* and, while examining her, inquired about my health conditions. The nurse wanted to know whether I had tuberculosis and the last time I had tested for sexually transmitted diseases. Since it had been months before I arrived in South Africa, she noticed I should try again. The nurse took my blood and saliva samples and finally recommended I accompany Luthando every fortnight.

When I asked her whether Margaret and *magogo* Martha should come with us, for they lived as close to Luthando as I, the nurse responded we should all come regularly. However, Luthando said her grandma and mother would not accompany us. By the end of the consultation, the *sister* charged me with bringing a sample of my friend's cough secretion. Back in the lounge, the reception clerk took the wheelchair and ushered us to the gate. Luthando borrowed his cell phone, and I remarked that she was improving. He agreed, and when Luthando gave him back his device, he counselled her on the virtues of "self-love".

The reception clerk knew Luthando had not followed treatment with all necessary rigours. So did my friend's beloved *sis*. I collected Luthando's secretions the following day and returned to the clinic. At the town's fringe, it was only 15 minutes (by car) from Martha's. Upon noticing me at the entry, the receptionist called the nurse, and they both thanked me. I returned in the same taxi, again crossing hillsides, feeling a scent of homely landscapes and a somewhat infantine, self-infatuated pride. As the clinic staff, I felt sanguine about Luthando's recovery.

I arrived back at Martha's after lunchtime. A plate with pap, sardines, and tomato sauce had been put aside for me. Margaret and Luthando slept in the ladies' bedroom. I sat on the veranda, and soon, a young couple looking for Amahle joined me. My assistant had not yet popped up. The couple asked for a cigarette, and we began a friendly conversation. Soon Margaret joined us. Then came a neighbour and *malume* Ntuli. We smoked, I bought us a cold drink, and we just let time pass. When Margaret entered to clean the living room, Amahle arrived.

The day was December 12th. Amahle and I had signed a contract the previous week. We began the *job* with a draft of a semi-structured interview, a blueprint for our

interactions with recipients of the child-support grant – see Annex I. Amahle had also suggested we obtain an affidavit at the police station before we started our inquiries. Cesar, her boyfriend and father of her second-born, thought we might need a formal authorisation to conduct our activities. We did not. Still, my assistant and I went to the police station and heard from a puzzled officer:

It's a free country.

It is, indeed. I had been in South Africa for six weeks without facing any obstacles to roaming. My routine alternated between the domestic life at Martha's and frequent excursions into some of the town's public venues. Whether alone or accompanied, I strolled at least twice a day. In addition, Amahle, Mpho, and I often had beers at *shebeens*[91] or neighbour's yards. I wonder why Amahle's boyfriend fancied we might need an affidavit.

At the beginning of December 2019, a celebratory mood prevailed at Martha's, and we genuinely "enjoyed ourselves" - as Mpho often said. Luthando had been released from the hospital in Pretoria and was back home, surrounded by her dearest kin and friends. Amahle figured paramount among the latter. She sometimes came alone, sometimes with one-and-a-half-year-old Kamogelo. Amahle often laid him close to Luthando, and they slept together while we socialised on the veranda. In one such circumstance, Amahle gave me the first interview in Kwa-Ndebele.

Amahle was born in September 1986, the last of four children. A few months before her birth, Amahle's father, Francis, and mother, Mary, separated. He was her last partner. Mary was born in the 1940s and worked as a house helper for White families in Pretoria until 2008. Then, she started receiving an old-age grant. Mary also got financial assistance from Amahle's three elder siblings[92]. Mary's four children obtained matric; they constituted the most educated family I happened to know in Kwa-Ndebele.

Amahle completed secondary studies in 2004, one year after giving birth to her firstborn, Lassy. Pregnant at 16, she did not know how to prevent it. Amahle never lived with Lassy's father, but he assisted their child during his three initial years. Lassy's paternal grandparents were also a source of support: they kept the baby while her mother

[91] Once at the gate of a tavern, a woman exclaimed at me: "It's a free country, isn't it?" Even though she (and others) did not appreciate my presence among them, my *right* to be there remained unquestioned.
[92] Amahle's two sisters, aged 55 and 49, lived in Pretoria and worked for the national government. Her brother, aged 37, had a position in a private company and lived in Johannesburg.

attended school. Between 2006 and 2007, however, Amahle's relationship deteriorated. Lassy's father was a violent man who started cheating and interrupted financial assistance.

In 2008, Amahle went to Court and obtained a ZAR 400 monthly maintenance[93], which she added to ZAR 290 from Lassy's child-support grant. She also benefited from her siblings' frequent remittances. During Lassy's twelve first years (2002-2014), Amahle did not work outside the home. After 2008, she was free to pursue tertiary studies. Then, Mary quit her domestic job, got an old-age grant, and became involved full-time with Lassy's upbringing.

The old lady had always had a significant role in his life. With retirement and the end of a daily trip to Pretoria, she liberated Amahle, who moved to her elder sister's house in the administrative capital. Amahle studied Nursery and Hotel Catering while her mother cared for Lassy in Kwa-Ndebele. Amahle's elder sister, who worked for the national government, afforded her siblings' education.

Between 2016 and 2018, Amahle worked as a nurse in a private nursing home in Pretoria. She took great pleasure in healthcare: "I like helping the elder. We bathe them and change their sides, so they don't get sores. We rub them, and we feed them". Amahle worked weekly shifts and remained at her elder sister's house. At least once a month, preferably after payment, she would commute to Kwa-Ndebele "to look at magogo and my son". Amahle contributed to household expenses and left the child-support grant card with her mother.

Had Amahle considered taking Lassy to Pretoria with her? She had but could not. Amahle and her elder sister worked outside home, and the latter's children attended school. There would be no one to take care of Lassy. Even if a caretaker was available, Lassy should remain in Kwa-Ndebele. The reason? *Magogos*.

> **If you could, would you take your child with you to Pretoria?**
> **Amahle:** Yeah, but sometimes magogos... they don't agree.
>
> **Really?**
> They want their grandchildren to stay with them so that they can take care of each other, you see? Magogo take care of the grandchild, and the grandchild take care of magogo cause they are only two, you see? It's only two people, so magogo doesn't want you to take your child there.
>
> **Because she wants to stay with the child.**

[93] Amahle broke up with Lassy's father in 2010. Six-years later, he passed away.

> To stay with the child so that she can send him to plaza, buy electricity, and what, what... So that they can help each other.
>
> **And how do you say to help each other in IsiNdebele?**
> *Ukusizanah* [and Amahle writes it in my diary]

It was the second time Amahle used the word *ukusiza*. She had first mentioned it when referring to her job in the private nursing home. Her work consisted of helping older adults: “going to the toilet, changing their pantry”, etc. When asked to write the meaning of *ukusiza* in my notebook, Amahle gave it the following definition: [*ukusiza*] “is to do things for him/her that he/she can't do”. In the excerpt above, Amahle argued that grandmothers demand to stay with their grandchildren because age makes some activities difficult. In turn, *magogos* cook for the kids, bathe them, and prepare their lunch boxes. They bind through reciprocal care.

The dialogue above contains a concept similar to *ukusiza* but, according to Amahle, closer *to take care* - as in “magogo take care of the grandchild, the grandchild take care of magogo”. IsiNdebele word at play is *nagelela*. While *ukusiza* means to help with activities one cannot do alone, *nagelela* means to help with chores even though one can perform them. Amahle told me that 16-year-old Lassy was supposed to partake in domestic tasks such as cooking, doing the dishes and gardening. Thus, he cared for or looked after his grandmother (*nagelela magogo*).

Both *nagelela* and *ukusiza* concern the labours of social reproduction. Their differences are minor. Nevertheless, I was keen on grasping subtle distinctions between the two notions and insisted on the age aspect of their singularity.

> **Do you think that a four-year-old child can nagelela magogo?**
> **Amahle:** I don't think so, cause maybe magogo nagelela the child, and then maybe the child is going to crèche. That's why magogos they want to... to have someone in the house. They don't want to be alone.
>
> **And when a child is expected to take care of magogo?**
> Maybe at 13 or 12.
>
> **When she's a teenager, the child is expected to take care of magogo...**
> Hmm, you see? Like she can cook there, she can do the laundry, and she can clean the house. It's *nagelela magogo*.

I hope it is a fair rendering of Amahle's words to say that an infant cannot take care of magogo but offer some company and prevent her from being alone. In other words, a small child's "presence" (Ferguson, 2021) is appreciated as a source of well-being, which explains why grandmas want to keep their grandchildren close to them. From birth, the presence of another human being suppresses adult feelings of loneliness. When children grow up, they are supposed to help with the labour of social reproduction.

I also hope it is not far-fetched to speculate that presence implies an involuntary, passive measure of care. As Amahle observed, infants cannot *nagelela* magogo, but the child's "being there" (Ferguson, 2021) means that grandmas have someone other than themselves. Being two, i.e., daily existing within a palpable social bond, makes a mode of being preferred to social isolation.

> **So, some magogos ask mothers to leave their children with them...**
> **Amahle:** Hmm, so that maybe at night they are two, you see? Like you feel safe, at least somebody is inside the house. Look at this house, [it] is so big! So, imagine you're alone. You gonna be scared, there are totsies and what, what... So, when you leave the child there, at least you have someone to look after. You have each other (emphasis added).

I was then captivated by the power of "[to] have each other", so much so that I consulted Amahle on the possibility of talking with her mother, Mary, and her firstborn, Lassy. "Okay, there's no problem", she told me. By the end of December, the matriarch received me for two interviewing sessions at her house. Amahle translated most of our conversation, which revolved around Mary's status as a recipient of the old-age grant and a grandmother.

Mary was born in the rural areas of Mpumalanga in a family with seven children: six boys and a girl. Her parents planted corn and beans, which they sold in Johannesburg. Since they often remained away, Mary took early charge of her siblings and could not study. Only in her forties did Mary learn to read the bible in IsiZulu and speak some English. Then, she already worked outside the household as a domestic helper and inside it as a mother of four[94].

Between 2003 and 2008, Mary took a second shift home with Amahle's firstborn. Was not magogo too tired? No, said Amahle, "she was young and energetic". In 2008,

[94] Mary first got pregnant at 19 and told me to be disappointed at Amahle's having Lassy at 16. In my assistant's words: "She didn't like it cause I was so young, and then maybe she was expecting [to have a grandchild] at the age of 26 or 27. She wanted me to finish school".

Mary obtained an old-age grant and retired from domestic work (outside her *domus*). Since mid-2018, the matriarch has also cared for Amahle's second-born, Kamogelo, who remained with us during the interview. While he walked up and down the living room, Amahle exclaimed: "He's so naughty; he's always busy!" I then asked the matriarch whether she preferred a house with or without children.

> **Amahle**: She prefers the house with children.
>
> **Why?**
> When you are babysitting Kamogelo, you are always busy; you are not thinking too much. When you are alone, you have a lot of stress, you think too much. You are alone [and you wonder:] 'I don't have a child, I don't have...'
>
> **So, the kids are a company for her?**
> Yeah, she said that they are.
>
> [Kamogelo is laughing and walking around. Mary laughs and remarks something is IsiNdebele].
>
> **Amahle**: She's saying that this one [Kamogelo] loves to laugh... When maybe he's in the kitchen, he open the oven, open the fridge and take everything out!

My South African interlocutors do not appreciate "being alone" and "thinking too much". Mary regarded the presence of children at her house as an antidote against loneliness and the burden or "stress" caused by self-absorption. She clearly enjoyed Kamogelo's playing and chatting while we talked. The infant instantiated the pleasures of "having each other" and "being two". Amahle considered that the same applied to her and Lassy's being there.

> If Lassy was not here, and we were not here, she would be alone and sad. So, when we are here, we are helping too much.

Presence (Ferguson, 2021) does imply a measure of care (or help), involuntary but capable of alleviating the heavy loads of individual pensiveness. Also essential, according to Amahle, is actively occupying oneself with the care another human being requires. By babysitting Kamogelo, Mary kept "busy" and did not fall into the melancholic traps of overthinking.

The relief of not being alone shall not obfuscate other aspects of presence. Presence's length and depth cement the bond between grandmothers and grandchildren, creating, for the former, a right over the latter. Mary sounded entitled to Lassy's presence within her house[95], so much so that the meaning of having each other, in their case, seemed very concrete. When we discussed grandchildren's participation in domestic chores, my reference was Amahle's second-born, Kamogelo, but Mary mentioned Amahle's first-born, Lassy.

> **When do you think Kamogelo will start helping you?**
> **Amahle:** She said that... [Magogo laughs]. She doesn't know when Kamogelo is going to leave this house; maybe the father will get married and take the baby... So, she's not sure when to train Kamogelo; maybe he will be here, maybe... But if he's here, we'll teach him how to cook.
>
> **And do you think you will feel sad and lonely when Kamogelo and Amahle move?**
> She is saying that Lassy is her child. He belongs here. So maybe if Kamogelo's father get married to me, and then we are going, she will not have a problem cause I am supposed to be happy.
>
> **Will Lassy stay here?**
> Hmm...
>
> **Does she consider herself Lassy's mother?**
> Yeah, she said that she's Lassy's mother.
>
> **How many mothers does Lassy have?**
> [Amahle laughs]
> **Magogo Mary:** Two! [And laughs]
>
> **What about Ukhuna [Amahle's neighbour]? She helped raise him as well.**
> **Amahle:** She did...
>
> **So, three mothers?**
> **Magogo Mary:** Three mothers!
> [We all laugh out loud]

Good spirits apart, we did not depict grandmotherhood as motherhood only metaphorically. Lassy's eventual absence did not loom over Mary precisely because his

[95] With such a formulation about the "jural" aspects of children's residence (Fortes, 1953), I do not ignore other incident factors, such as the payment of *lobola*. In this case, Lassy's father had not paid for it, so the child belonged to his maternal house.

belonging to her house, as *her* child*,* had been established via the iterated puissance of "being there". Magogo Mary feared not staying alone and the corollary unhappiness because she had a child. Amahle's future happiness seemed away in a new house with Kamogelo and his father; Mary remained content with Lassy's care.

> **Can Lassy take care of you when you are sick?**
> **Magogo Mary:** Yes, he does.
>
> **What can he do for you?**
> **[Amahle translates Mary]:** When she asks – 'Lassy, I'm not fine. I'm sick. I feel weak' - he put the pot in the stove, he'll come and help steer the pap, and then Lassy will do the meat.
>
> **Does she feel more protected when Lassy is around?**
> **Amahle:** When Lassy is here at the house, she feels protected cause even if she can't do something, Lassy will do it.

In other words, Lassy both *nagelela* (takes care) and *ukusizah* (helps) *magogo* Mary. His presence, if nothing else, constitutes a source of protection and zest. After all, "having each other" implies more than reciprocal care: it commands celebration, that is, celebrating each other.

> **Amahle**: When he watch soccer, they watch together, they laugh. They celebrate each other. When there's a goal for Kaiser Chiefs, they run around the house; they celebrate [and Magogo Mary laughs].

As Ferguson (2021) has shown, presence also commands sharing, and it was precisely through this lens that Mary, Amahle, and Lassy regarded the social grants they received. I first approached the subject with Amahle, who received two child-support grants, totalling ZAR 860 per month. My assistant did not consider the money as a whole and set apart what pertained to each of her two children.

With the ZAR 430 she earned for Kamogelo, Amahle bought milk formula and nappies for two weeks. The ZAR 430 she got for Lassy allowed her to buy him "cosmetics", give him "pocket money" for a bite at school, and occasionally satisfy his consumption desires, such as "an Adidas". With part of Lassy's money, Amahle also bought herself cosmetics. In other words, they shared the social grant, and even though it was not enough, she was "happy" with the money.

> **It's interesting. You tell me you're happy with the money and also that it's not enough.**

> **Amahle:** To be fair honest, it's not enough, but we are happy because it's a free money. Like, you don't work for it; it's a free [money] just for the baby. It help you exactly to raise the baby, but for you, it's not enough. So that maybe we have to share it. Maybe me and my son, we have to share it.

Magogo Mary received an old age grant worth ZAR 1.900 per month, and I also inquired whether she was happy about it. Amahle translated her mother: “She's not happy, but it's not a problem to her cause it's a free money”. When I asked why she was unhappy, Amahle translated her mother in the following terms: “She said she's happy because it helps her”. In other words, the old-age grant made magogo both happy and unhappy. It allowed her to buy food, pay for two burial societies, and buy one dress or a pair of shoes monthly. She also shared the money with Lassy.

> **Is the money from the old age grant enough for you and your grandchildren?**
> **Amahle:** Yeah, she said that [it] is enough because they also have their own grant. But for [her] money, she can share it with them.

Mary's opinion on the old-age pension remained bound to the fact that Lassy and Kamogelo benefited from the child support grant. I asked what she thought about the latter, and Amahle said: “Daniel, she's saying that it's not enough, according to her”. How much should it be? Maybe ZAR 700, Amahle answered. To whom does it belong?

> She said that it's the child's grant. It's not for mamas.

These were the last three questions I asked Mary when she first received me at her house. By the second time *magogo*, Amahle, and I met, we focused on something other than the grants. At the end of this shorter interview, I pulled from my pocket a subject I had been pursuing since my first fieldwork in South Africa.

> **Have you heard about the word rights?**
> **[Amahle translates rights to her mother]:** Amalungelo.
>
> **What do you understand by it?**
> [Magogo remains silent for a while, and Amahle turns to me]: Daniel, we have a problem! My mother doesn't understand anything about rights.

I have never met a South African unaware of *amalungelo* (rights). Magogo Mary was tired of my endless questions. Kamogelo had just cried; she took him in her arms and gently resumed the air of circumspection. Mary had generously given her contribution to her daughter's *job*. I thanked the matriarch, she returned my gratitude, and I left their home.

Two weeks earlier, I had the privilege of a short interview with Amahle's first-born, 16-year-old Lassy, then following grade 10th at school. As with *magogo* Mary, our conversation revolved around grandmother-grandchildren rapports and the child-support grants. We did, however, discuss the general notion of rights.

> **Have you heard about the word rights?**
> **Lassy:** I am not sure about the meaning. But, for example, I have the right to be respected.
>
> **By whom?**
> All the people. And rights to education. It means, like, I have the right to go to any school and try to gain some knowledge.
>
> **What about the grant? Is it a right?**
> I am not sure.
>
> **Why not?**
> Grant... I won't say like I have the right to have a grant. Because like we are many. We are not alone in this world. Like South Africa, there are many people, and they also deserve to get the grant.
>
> **Who deserves?**
> Citizens, people who live around.
>
> **Men as well?**
> Yes.
>
> **Even young men? You are a young man; do you have the right?**
> Yes [and laughs].
>
> **Who doesn't deserve it?**
> A grant? A person that is employed.
>
> **Why not?**
> He or she has a salary.
>
> **What about the unemployed?**
> I think they deserve it. Because in South Africa, there is the highest rate of unemployment, while they qualify.

My South African interlocutors are not alone in this world. Lassy remained aware that others were "around", sharing the same space, hence entitled to the benefits of citizenship. What Ferguson (2021) calls presence constituted the moral nucleus of Lassy's realistic and generous conception of rights. Realistic because he considered that being many in this world implied a limitation. What if all citizens had the right to a social benefit in cash? Lassy knew that boundless entitlement posed difficulties. Accordingly, he hesitated when provoked to ascribe himself the right to a grant.

Lassy's realism notwithstanding, he premised the right to benefits in cash on the social fact of "being around" with only one generous qualification: lack of income. He included the unemployed within the scope of those deserving, for they could work had it not been the massive, structural fact of unemployment in South Africa (Ferguson and Li, 2017). One such deserving person was Lassy's mother, Amahle, a bright and skilled young woman.

> **To whom does the child-support grant belong?**
> **Lassy:** I think it belongs to both of us because she [Amahle]can share it with me.
>
> **Always?**
> She does. She can use it like to buy her stuff.
>
> **What do you think about them?**
> They help a lot.
>
> **With what?**
> I can buy some clothes. Mama can do lady's stuff, buy some food, and help magogo.

Magogo, to whom the old-age grant was both enough and not enough, said she "shared it with them". So did Lassy and Amahle, and Lassy and Mary. When I asked the young boy what he bought for his grandmother, he mentioned "airtime to call her relatives". He also purchased electricity for his PlayStation stationary and "all the home". In sum, the child support grant belonged to him and his mother but benefited the household as a structure predicated on sharing.

Lassy and I talked on December 12th, 2019, on Martha's veranda. By evening, Margaret, *malume* Ntuli, Sphiwe (a dear neighbour), and I sat at the same place to have a beer. Sphiwe then recalled stories of his time working as a hydrometer agent. He sometimes would find people "cheating on the water meter box". Once, in an Afrikaans-

populated area in Pretoria, he was told: *Los die ding so* [leave it like this]. He also said that, in 2018, Kwa-Ndebele municipalities tried to connect houses to water meter boxes and charge a fee. The population, however, did not accept such a move. Sphiwe then remarked:

Asiwabhadali amanzi (We don't pay for water).

Immediately after helping me write the phrase in my notebook, he asked whether I would not ask him *why* they did not accept to pay for water. I did as ordered[96], and he explained:

> Sometimes, you get water. Sometimes, you fail to get it. You can spend three weeks without water, then why you are paying? Now, people are getting water only on Fridays. At least, they give us every Friday.

Serendipity brought two reports about the unwritten contract between South Africans and the state on the same day. In the afternoon, I learned Lassy's opinion that living around entitles many to the benefits of citizenship. Adjacency (Ferguson, 2021) defined citizenship for him. By evening, Sphiwe claimed that irregular provision of water should not be charged. Six days later, Bandile told me that such discontent led to a protest in 2018[97]. The local police then shot rubber bullets at the demonstrators, who retaliated by attacking Pakistani shops[98].

Despite these clashes, water provision in Kwa-Ndebele remained poor. Only on Fridays could we tap running water in the yard and store it for another seven days. Time-consuming and heavy, pooling water in buckets required the labours of Margaret, Gift, Bandile, and myself. Held in Martha's spacious kitchen, the water sufficed for all our shared and personal needs, but how bothersome was it not to have a permanent source of running water! This and other reasons predisposed me to commute occasionally to Pretoria.

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[96] In 2016, Sphiwe was my host's next-door neighbour in the informal settlement. We had a friendly rapport, and he knew I liked such stories, He was also used to my frequently asking *why* things happen in this or that way.

[97] More information available in: https://013.co.za/2019/04/18/kwagga-residents-demand-water-jobs/.

[98] The Somali running a *spaza-shop* (a small shop selling staples and snacks) in my host's yard was one such target. Publicly known as a *Pakastani*, Annan had been living in the region for several years. His small shop was not destroyed during the 2018 protests. Bongani managed to dissuade the demonstrators on the grounds that all damages and losses would come at Martha's expenses.

One day after listening to Sphiwe on the water predicament in Kwa-Ndebele, I took a bus to the capital. I stayed five days in a suburb and returned to Martha's house on December 18th. I arrived at lunchtime and immediately entered the ladies' bedroom to greet Luthando. Upon seeing me, she spoke out loud:

> I missed you too much. Nobody takes care of me.

I felt flattered. Those were not habitual words in Luthando's mouth. As far as I was concerned, she had never been prone to miss-you expressions. While I was in Brazil and Luthando in South Africa, I often ended our phone conversations with a 'miss u', but only sometimes did she answer in kind. When she did, it was timidly. Luthando and I recognised and portrayed mutual dependence in quite different terms. I, therefore, experienced a mix of surprise and pleasure when she openly declared she missed me. There was, however, more than tender affection at play.

I had stayed five days in Pretoria. Before my departure, Margaret, Gift, and I had alternated in the ladies' bedroom. Margaret responded for Luthando's most personal cares, but the latter often called Gift and me: to bring her a bite, to change her sides, to take her to the veranda, or to chat a little. Luthando's mother and brother had undoubtedly *ukhusiza* (helped) and *nagelela* (cared for) her in my absence. My friend's health did not allow otherwise. Proud as though I felt, Luthando exaggerated her longing for me. In praising my return, my friend accused Margaret of negligence. Why?

I sat on Luthando's bed, and we caught up. She told me her mother's sister, Norah, had come for a weekend stayover, and the family quarrelled about household income and expenditures. I was surprised, yet before telling me the reason, she changed the subject and started criticising her mother. Margaret had been in and out over the weekend, enjoying beer and zolo conviviality with friends. According to Luthando, merry-making Margaret behaved in "childish" manners, below Ndebele's standards of respectability for a 50-year-old woman. Patently deploring her mother's elated version, Luthando remarked:

> Everybody has a culture...

To be read: everybody but my mother abides by cultural norms on age etiquette. Again, Luthando overstated. Margaret did appreciate weekend jollies: a middle-aged woman, she liked to dress up, hang out and enjoy her life. Margaret's enthusiasm was

often paramount and a jovial source of distention for me. My pleasure notwithstanding, Luthando envisaged the matter on quite different terms. She considered Margaret juvenile and remained discontent about her weekend strolls[99].

After my return from Pretoria, when I first registered these complaints, I took abundant notes on Margaret's domestic work. By mid-afternoon, while Luthando and I caught up, Margaret washed the blankets outside. She had begun it by morning. Laundry was a rough and lengthy activity without running water and a machine. Water had to be transferred from the kitchen buckets to washing bowls in the yard. There, Margaret would alternate between scrubbing the blankets and leaving them soaking. She finished the task almost at dusk and went socialising with a neighbour but returned soon and did not join us in the yard. She looked exhausted.

I woke up the next day and noticed Margaret preparing Luthando's breakfast. Afterwards, she came to the veranda, where her brother, a neighbour, and I smoked. She stayed a little among us and entered to tidy up the ladies' bedroom. Margaret also cleaned the dining room and the kitchen. Meanwhile, Luthando called her mother to bring her guava juice and to discuss household affairs. By 6 pm., Margaret was still cleaning the house. I then went out for a stroll with Amahle and ended up in a neighbour's yard. A couple of hours later, indefatigable Margaret popped up: she and Luthando wanted to know my whereabouts.

Three days later, on a Saturday morning, I found Margaret and her dearest friend, Cristina, drinking a beer and cleaning the kitchen. Luthando summoned us, announced she desired to spend the day elsewhere, and urged us to get her a car. Margaret proposed we go to Cristina's house, just up the street. Cristina lived in a cosy home with her husband, and when no longer involved with household chores, Margaret could come and enjoy the Saturday with us.

Luthando rejected the proposal and complained that we were trying to "control" her. I remarked nobody so wanted but to no avail. She continued grumbling and indicted her mother for negligence: she was "always" absent. Margaret felt the blow and frowned sorrowfully. She took her hands over the breast and declared to be wounded as a "mother": she did not deserve those "manners". With Gift beside us, we reminded the plaintiff that someone was always available for her. Luthando cooled down and tacitly

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[99] Back in 2016, during a weekend hangout in the informal settlement, Luthando remarked irritatedly: "She [Margaret] behaves like Vicky". The latter was Luthando's best pal in Pretoria, a 21-year-old woman.

acquiesced. As to her Saturday stroll, we would get her a car; she did not have to go to Cristina's. Nobody wanted to control her.

An old fellow of Gift helped us with the transport. We paid for the petrol, and he drove Luthando and me to a nearby village. Esulu, who was both one of Luthando's dearest friends and Bongani's sister, lived there. We bought meat and snacks along the route and enjoyed the trip peacefully. Esulu dwelt in a simple but airy and spacious house, where Bongani himself had been before moving to Martha's.

Upon our arrival, Esulu laid Luthando on a double bed close to her baby's cradle. I left myself comfortably in the yard, where our host would often come and chat a little. On one of these occasions, she observed how difficult it was to care for two children without a *job*. Esulu was aware of my research interests. Two days before receiving us, she had been at Martha's, and Luthando asked her to give me an interview. On that Saturday, though, I had no such inclination. After lunch, we all took a nap and woke up only when Gift and his friend came to drive us back.

A day outside Martha's brought about respite. Luthando, Margaret, and I had many reciprocal needs but could not permanently satisfy them through one another. Margaret needed Luthado and even a grandchild from her, yet she also wanted outside jollies on Saturdays. Luthando needed Margaret always beside her, but also a flare of former liberties. After all, many South Africans consider that freedom is doing "whatever you want" and going "wherever you like" (Lage da Cruz, 2017). Luthando then longed for Esulu's home and care, not Cristina's. Though unaware of it, I also needed Esulu's doors open. One year later, I would interview her and reap the endless ethnographic benefits from Luthando's "network of connections" (Gupta, 2014).

I woke up the following Sunday and found *malume* Ntuli and Bongani on Martha's veranda. Both were suffering from *babalas*, the Afrikaner word for hangover, but contextually meaning lack of energy and craving for another dose. "Babalas doesn't go if you don't drink a beer" – Luthando once told me. Malume Ntuli soon left us, and Bongani spontaneously told me a story about Esulu, Thabisa, and himself. He explained that Esulu was his mother's sister's daughter, whereas Thabisa was his "blood" sister[100].

By 2018, Esulu, Bongani, and Thabisa lived at the latter's house in Johannesburg. They also worked together in a car wash. Out of a sudden, however, Bongani and Esulu were licensed. He said Thabisa "talked badly" about them with the car wash's owner. Two

[100] Luthando used to refer to her mother's sister son as her "same-blood-brother". I fancy Bongani resorted to blood only to make my understanding easier.

months later, Thabisa also lost her job because the facility was sold to a Pakistani businessman, who hired "his own people". Bongani saw in it a signal of divine righteousness. He also believed he would soon find another *job* and provide for his 6-month-old boy, who sometimes came to Luthando's with his mother, Gugulethu[101].

Bongani's mother lived and worked as a public servant in Johannesburg, cleaning streets and a public school. She sent him money sometimes, and though it was not much, he did not spend it on himself, implying he used it for his child's and Gugulethu's needs. Her parents had passed away, and she had only him to assist her. Unfortunately, Bongani could not provide adequately. He then changed the subject and observed that *malume* Ntuli had invited him to a tavern sooner. My interlocutor refused, for he did not want to drink others' money without contributing at least ZAR 30 – roughly two beers – in reciprocity.

Martha's second-born, Ntuli, already lived at his mother's house when I first visited Kwa-Ndebele in 2016. A mid-fifty-year-old man, he had no children. Ntuli limped on one leg and benefited from a disability grant - worth ZAR 1980 (US$ 142) in December 2019. Albeit Luthando and I arrived at Martha's on November 21st, 2019, my registers about *malume* date from December 8th. Still unaware I would remain, I took sparse notes during my first two weeks in Kwa-Ndebele. More significantly, Ntuli did not speak English and seldom stayed home.

By the end-of-year festivities, Bongani and I discussed Ntuli's drinking habits. My interlocutor told me *malume* spent his days at taverns "whenever" he had money, coming back home only to eat. Save for Luthando and Martha, all other residents and guests drank quite often. Ntuli, however, was a step ahead of us. Though he had a disability grant, *malume* did not help with household expenditures: nobody counted on him for financial matters. Worse, Ntuli triggered economic anxiety. He resorted to Martha[102] or loan sharks when his grant finished.

I have never seen Ntuli asking Martha for money, but, according to Bongani, *malume* sometimes tried to persuade her by threatening to commit suicide. Unfortunately, I did notice that *malume* had problems with the loan sharks. During the first three weeks of December 2019, I twice observed a bunch of men and women searching for Ntuli in

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[101] Gugulethu helped Margaret with domestic chores in exchange for a monetary reward from Luthando.

[102] When Luthando and I interviewed Martha in 2016, we asked her opinion about the drinking habits in South Africa, and she indicated Ntuli three times. First, the matriarch observed he "liked spirits too much". Second, she said that Ntuli used to *"drink and fight"*. Finally, Martha exclaimed, exasperatedly: "he wants my money! I have to buy everything. It's my money!"

the yard. The group, whose age range seemed to vary between 25 and 40, charged a debt of ZAR 1200[103]. On both occasions, *malume* was away, and altercations followed with Margaret, who managed to expel them. Since loan sharks, locally called *mashonisas*, had no operating license, they could not enforce payment.

On the day Bongani was invited to a tavern and refused because he could not reciprocate at least two beers, Ntuli returned earlier to the yard. He needed more money. By mid-afternoon, he crossed the gate and, upon seeing me, required my cell phone. Ntuli called his elder sister, Norah, in Pretoria and argued that the *mashonisas* had again come to charge him. He needed money to settle the debt. A few minutes after they hung up, Norah called Margaret, who contradicted Ntuli: the loan sharks had not appeared.

Malume reiterated he had met them on the street and asked Bongani to be his testimony: if Bongani accompanied him, he would see the mashonisas. Bongani refused to play such a farcical role. Nobody in the audience believed malume. Margaret ironically blinked at me; she knew her elder brother too well to give him the emergency money she kept inside the ladies' bedroom. Ntuli tried to talk Margaret into his tale for a while, but the more he insisted, the less credence he inspired. Finally losing his face, he grumbled and left the yard. We all laughed out loud.

The following morning, Bongani informed me that Norah had acquiesced to give Ntuli ZAR 400. The latter, however, was not satisfied and, by noon, approached Margaret to claim the integrality of the ZAR 1200 she kept. Again, Luthando's mother rebuffed him, but then an argument started.

Tragicomic the previous day, the atmosphere took on confrontational contours, and Margaret found it better to take her way to Cristina's. Though Ntuli had never been rude to me, I asked Bongani to accompany me to the Mall. When we returned, he was no longer there, and Bongani reiterated that malume never stayed home when he had money. We were on December 23rd, and I did not register Ntuli's presence on Christmas[104].

What a pity! We had a memorable celebration. On the 24th, Bongani started cooking beetroots, carrots, and potatoes in the morning. Meanwhile, Margaret cleaned the house, and Gift bathed her sister's torso. He also prepared her a copious breakfast with bread, eggs, tomatoes, and polony. Luthando ate in the living room, where she walked with my assistance. Her mobility was on the rise, I joyfully observed in my diary. Luthando wanted to throw a *braai*, and Mpho and I went out to buy meat and charcoal

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[103] Ntuli had borrowed ZAR 600 at an interest rate of 100%.

[104] I would take further notes on Ntuli only four days later, in the small hours of December 28th.

and borrow a grill. By mid-afternoon, we were already enjoying ourselves on the veranda. When evening fell, Margaret put Ntuli's plate inside the oven.

An early morning buzz woke me up for the first time on December 25th. Margaret and I pooled resources in the kitchen to buy more food and beer. I returned to bed, though not for long. Luthando's mother woke me up for the day's festivities. In the ladies' bedroom, two female friends of Margaret dressed up Luthando. Outside, Gift was doing the hair of little neighbours with a machine. High-spirited Margaret asked my phone to greet Nora and Martha at the informal settlement: "Happy, happy, happy!" Once Gift finished with the kids, we went to the mall again.

Malume Ntuli was not the only one to disappear during Christmas. Bongani did not enjoy the whole festive period at Martha's either. He remained among us until the small hours of December 25th, when he went to a square where locals gathered. Bongani said it was a massive, public Christmas party with crickets, fireworks, bonfires, and booze. Everybody was drinking, he told me. When I suggested I would like to glance at the celebrations, he advised me not to go. There he went, though, and did not return to Martha's.

Let me recapitulate some facts. On December 22nd, *malume* tried to persuade Margaret to give him the money she kept in her closet. The following day, Norah phoned and allowed Margaret to give Ntuli ZAR 400. Not satisfied, *malume* unfriendly requested the other ZAR 800. Margaret headed to Cristina's, and *malume* disappeared for several days. On December 24th, Margaret asked Bongani to safeguard the remaining ZAR 800. Then, in the small hours of December 25th, he went to Christmas public celebrations.

On December 26th, I learned that Bongani had "drunk the money". I felt outraged. He had been living at Martha's as kin, which technically he was not, so how could he betray Margaret's trust? Mpho, with whom I discussed the whole story, regarded it through different lenses. He deemed the "situation", not bad morals, the key to understanding Bongani's behaviour. At the square, he had probably run into friends, and the intensities of Christmas may have made it impossible not to afford continuous fun.

December 26th elapsed without news from Bongani. On the 27th, Luthando and I discussed his case. She told me Bongani had arrived at Martha's a few months before us. Until then, he had dwelt at Esulu's house, where they ran a *spahlo* - an informal barrack selling sandwiches, sausage, and fries. Bongani, however, snatched their shared money, came to Martha's neighbourhood and "drank it". When asked whether Esulu and Bongani

were on good terms, Luthando said: “She has a good heart. She accepted it”. Thenceforth, Bongani had been at Martha's.

Luthando also observed that Bongani was seen in the vicinity after Christmas, and we found him there on December 27th. Someone informed Margaret that Bongani was at a friend's, and we did encounter him a few streets away. Margaret spoke to him in a tone that was not too harsh. Embarrassed, Bongani admitted he had spent the ZAR 800. He accompanied us on the way back and promised to repay. Margaret's boyfriend praised Bongani's earnestness: “I am pleased to see the guy. He told me he used the money, but he will make a plan tomorrow”.

Bongani's plan was not set in motion while I was at Martha's; neither did he retrieve his place among us. A month after Christmas, I talked about the episode with one of his pals, Bheka. He knew Bongani had eaten Margaret’s money during Christmas, though not with him and their old fellas. Bongani had partied with “new friends” and in another neighbourhood. Yet, in the aftermath, he resorted to Bheka and the others. Could they make a plan? Unfortunately, they could not “fix the problem”. Bheka noticed how sorry Bongani was and finally remarked that Martha had received him “as a family”[105].

The matriarch did not celebrate Christmas with us. Martha had been taken to Norah's house in Pretoria in the previous days. Magogo's health was increasingly fragile, and Norah wanted her to consult traditional healers. Martha returned home on December 27th and immediately entered the ladies' bedroom to get some rest beside Luthando. Sooner on the phone, Norah informed us that *magogo* should drink holy water.

Though the matriarch was not physically among us until December 27th, Luthando and I had been talking about her. On the 26th, while we pooled resources to buy more food and beers, Luhando discovered she had no cash. I told her not to worry: I could lend and discount it from the monthly sum I would pay her in a few days. She objected: my so-doing at the beginning of December prevented *magogo* from making a ritual.

> You don't take money from my salary. Me, I give it to you. Cause last time I want gogo to make a ritual for the money. Gogo was supposed to make a ritual on the first day... to the ancestors. [Luthando simulates magogo] ‘My child has some money, so bless her’. But I couldn't, 'cause you took it. Magogo was supposed to take the [whole] money and tell the ancestors: ‘Here's the money my grandchild is getting. She must get lucky, and more, a job’.

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[105] By March, I run into Bongani, then living at his grandmother’s house, a few streets distant from us. We greeted each other warmly and chatted a bit. He told me he was looking for a *job*.

In other words, Luthando would contribute to post-Christmas[106] celebrations but did not want me to discount her part from impending payment. Instead, I should hand her the integrality of her money, and after Martha performed the ritual, she would pay me. Interestingly, the prayers she simulated had a *job* as the ultimate desideratum. The following day, Luthando and I resumed the conversation about ancestors and the matriarch. Sonner, Norah had phoned her.

> **Luthando:** They say the ancestors are making gogo sick.
>
> **Why?**
> She [Norah] doesn't know; they can't talk.
>
> **Do you give them money?**
> No, what would they do with the money? The ancestors, I give them [and she asks my notebook to write it for me]: umqombothi or water - if you don't have money for umqombothi. And then you slaught a chicken or goat. And then the sniff [snuff]. Others they sniffed before they died. The one who don't drink, drink water; the one who drinks, drinks umqombothi; for the one who smokes, they put zolo, cigarettes.

The ancestors needed not cash but the very stuff of our celebrations. Luthando, on the contrary, needed her full money as a lever for a *job*. Unfortunately, the matriarch did not have the time to propitiate the ancestors. She left us again on January 2nd. Norah insisted that she return to Pretoria and stay closer to medical facilities. While among us, Martha remained mainly in the ladies' bedroom. Here are some notes I took.

> **December 28th**
> 14:30: Magogo is taking a nap on Margaret's bed.
> 17:00: On Luthando's bed, Martha tells me she has slept well. Luthando remarks: When she's with me, she's fine. She has a stress when she's alone.
> 19:00: Magogo and Luthando are still sharing the bed. Magogo is lying upside down.
> 19:40 Granddaughter and grandmother continue on the same bed. Luthando tells me we'll have samp for supper.
>
> **December 29th**
> Noon: Martha is inside the ladies' bedroom again.
> 14:00h: Granddaughter and grandmother share the same mattress on the veranda. Luthando turns to me: You see? She likes to stay with me.
> 16hs: Both women are still on the veranda. Luthando asks me to go to the Mall. She wants two apricots and one mango; Martha wants sleeping pills.

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[106] Not really post, for Decembre, in South Africa and in many other places, is considered a festive month.

> 19:42: Martha and Luthando lie on the same bed inside the ladies' bedroom.

According to Luthando, Martha loved her above all others. More than once, my friend declared she was the only one at the house able to calm down her grandmother, even though her illness was Martha's primary cause of concern. In other words, Luthando regarded herself as a source of both anxiety and relief for the matriarch: "When I'm like this [sick], gogo is uncontrollable. She only listens to me". So Luthando told me on December 7th, just after arguing with her grandmother about the electricity bill. Soon afterwards, peacified Martha and Luthando napped side by side in the ladies' bedroom.

Martha's and Luthando's "shared vulnerability" (Ferguson, 2021) required their reciprocal and warm presence at the same berth. When explaining the meaning of *nagelela*, Amahle observed that "just to be with someone" amounted to a form of care. She then referred to Margaret as a company to Martha: "You see gogo? She can wash, she can bath herself, she can... Just to be with her!" Had Amahle noticed the symbiosis between grandmother and granddaughter, she might have mentioned Luthando as the prominent instantiation of *nagelela magogo* and Martha as the primary agent of *nagelela* Luthando.

It does not follow that Margaret's care for Martha was trivial. On the contrary, "being there" for the old lady and responsible for domestic standards of organisation amounted to a form of care, the comfort upon which our daily feelings of homeliness were contingent[107]. Margaret also had to *ukusiza* (help) Luthando, that is, doing what she could not by herself. Margaret nurtured us all and sustained the slight but continuous improvement of Luthando's health. On December 31st, while I rubbed my friend with a skin regeneration lotion, she told me:

> In our culture, we do not say thank you. They say the medicine won't work. I gonna walk.

Luthando walked, indeed, but only in March. We then lived under a different household configuration. Until December 25th, we had been ten at Martha's. Bongani, who spent Margaret's money at the plaza, lost his plate and bed among us. Sizwe followed him on December 29th. Martha's grandson had stayed at the matriarch's for a month but

[107] Young (2005) does not treat "homemaking" as a form of care but acknowledges its indispensable value contra male and female detractors of domestic chores.

was not involved with household chores and pleasures, thus somehow absent. On January 3rd, Mpho also left us. His presence had become financially untenable, and after Christmas, Margaret announced his time to depart. Mpho showed discontent, but not at Luthando's mother; he knew I was behind her.

Martha and Ntuli had moved to Pretoria the previous day[108]. When I asked Luthando why *malume* departed, she laconically observed: “He's a trouble”. The loan sharks (*mashonisas*) had become an acute source of distress. The third and last time I noticed them in the yard was in the afternoon of January 2nd. Several hours before, Ntuli and Martha had taken a bus to the capital. Upon receiving this information, the group quit the yard without quarrelling. I never saw them again.

In Pretoria during Christmas, Martha celebrated New Year in Kwa-Ndebele. On January 2nd, the old lady did not object to another temporary stay at Norah's. However, I doubt the matriarch remained there until her death in May out of her own will. Several times, Luthando affirmed that Martha wanted to return home but could not overcome Norah’s will to have her in Pretoria. There notwithstanding, the matriarch kept somehow present among us, for her self and health coalesced in her house. Fortunately, her place in Luthando's bed did not remain void.

Section II - Departures / Arrivals / Departure: Now a Different Coin

On January 3rd, I commuted to Pretoria. I needed distance from the field and comforts such as permanent running water. On January 8th, Luthando dropped me a message.

> Hey, how are you? I just want to know when u are coming back. Yr friend Luthando.

My friend reminded me of the monthly payment, which was four days late. I remitted her money through *Shoprite* (a supermarket chain) and gave myself five other days in town.

I returned to Martha's on January 13th and found Luthando in the living room. We greeted each other warmly, and I asked her about *magogo*. She was “not well”, Luthando

[108] Between then and March, when I left the house, Martha and *malume* visited us twice.

said. To make things worse, *malume* Ntuli had dreamt of red meat - an ill omen. Luthando also feared a family quarrel might ensue from Martha's death. The matriarch had been saving money, and there was no consensus on inheritance shares.

At night, Margaret and I caught up in the kitchen. She told me magogo was "not right" and observed how much it "stressed" her. Margaret looked worn out and slept earlier than usual. The following day, further bad news came from Pretoria. Martha had been admitted to the hospital, and nobody could say whether and when she would be released. Margaret remained absent-minded and uncommunicative throughout the day. Though there, she was far from us - or *secluded*, as I put it in my notebook.

Unlike her mother, Luthando did not appear downcast and preserved her self-assertive demeanour and spirit. By night, while alone taking my notes, I heard an impatient call from the ladies' bedroom. It took me time to realise that Luthando was calling me by my first surname (Mendonça):

> Don't you remember your name, Mendoza?

I asked if she needed something. No, she was just "bored". I sat at the bedside and recalled aloud my day. Amahle and I had discussed IsiNdebele's concept of *ukuvala* (to replace) in the afternoon. My assistant said children and grandchildren were considered "replacements" for deceased family members. Amahle's case in point was her firstborn, Lassy. Since his father died in 2015, Lassy's paternal grandparents wanted him to live at their house. Amahle explained their rationale in the following terms: "They feel like [Lassy's] father is still there, with his image, his character". She then reiterated the meaning of *ukuvala*:

> It's to replace, to replace the one who's dead. Ukuvala is to close the gap. When you lose someone, you replace. It's to replace.

Amahle also observed that *ukuvala* referred to both things and persons. One might say, for instance, *ukuvala* [to close] the window, and *ukuvala* someone, that is, "to fill the gap" left by one's death. Empty spaces should not remain as such, and this was precisely the case when a couple lost an infant and conceived another in the aftermath. Lying on her bed, Luthando listened carefully to my recollections. Once I finished the report, she told me to "correct" my assistant.

Tell Amahle that nothing replaces a person.

Luthando mentioned Martha: “Maybe she's dying now. Nobody will replace her”. To be sure, Luthando knew that *ukuvala* meant to *close the space* or *fill the gap* left by death, but such belief, she remarked, represented an instantiation that people talk without thinking. One thing was the language formula according to which new people replace those who passed away: *ukuvala space saka loya.* Entirely another was the actual replacement of the deceased. In this respect, Luthando remembered she had lost a baby, and no other replaced him.

I had returned to Kwa-Ndebele the previous day. Martha's admission into the hospital was not the only bad news. A friend of both Luthando and Amahle had just lost her 14-month-old infant. My assistant and I were chatting in the yard when the bereaved mother called her. They cried together on the phone, and after hanging up, Amahle remarked: “It was a good day. Now it's ruined”. She would not impart Luthando on the matter lest she turns “full of hate”. Unfortunately, bad news followed its course and reached Luthando the following afternoon.

I woke up on January 15th and asked Luthando what she wanted for breakfast: bread, eggs, and achar, she said. I looked for Margaret and found her lying alone in the living room. She complained of stomach pains, and I prepared Luthando's breakfast myself. While we ate, I noticed how abstracted Margaret had been since my return. Luthando concurred. News about *magogo* was distressing her mother.

Fortunately, Margaret's stamina had an unexpected boost, which gave me a better glimpse of the malaise I felt in her seclusion. Before noon, Luthando received a visit. Mama Lethu, a Zionist religious woman, was acquainted with Martha and her granddaughter from the time they frequented the church together. They had not attended the same temple, but when Luthando needed spiritual help, she would go to Lethu's congregation – “a strong one”.

The round, smiling mama entered the ladies' bedroom, greeted Luthando, sat at her bedside, and stretched my friend's arms. We had seen each other before, but only then were we formally introduced and talked a bit. I soon quit the ladies, yet continued hearing their chatting from my worktable. The spirited conversation also reached Margaret on the couch in the living room. She woke up, entered the ladies' bedroom, and joined their heart-to-heart. Then Luthando summoned me. They wanted watermelon.

I went straight to the kitchen, sliced the fruit, set it on three plates, and returned to the ladies' bedroom. At the entrance, I stopped short. Margaret's breasts were nude. She, Luthando, and Lethu ordered me to proceed – my friend in her typical rumbling style. I had spent the whole of December inside their room; why should I baulk now? I handed them their plates, and Luthando grumbled again: they needed just one. I entered my room and took the following notes.

> We all live as warm presences to one another, under a particularly sensory atmosphere. That's why I felt Margaret's relative absence and absent-mindedness as seclusion.

I had been at Martha's for three days, and so the matriarch at a hospital in Pretoria. During this period, Margaret remained partially cut off from daily household chores and sociability. "Stressed", as she put it, Luthando's mother had been sleeping more and earlier. She had stomach pains, headaches, and a barefaced air of discouragement. Margaret stayed long hours in the living room and twice missed the preparation of meals. On the evening preceding mama Lethu's visit, Margaret forgot to cook dinner or ask Gift to do it.

Margaret was there, but not quite. That was why I baulked before catering watermelon inside the ladies' bedroom. Of course, upon noticing her breasts nude, I tried to show respect - respect, not prudishness. But that was not all. Margaret's sudden bodily presence caught me up for the abrupt contrast to her cold seclusion a few minutes earlier. Fortunately, the vivid conversation between Luthando and mama Lethu had rescued her from exile in the living room. *There* she was again among us.

I remained working inside my room while the three women chatted, but soon Luthando called me again: she had just learned about the death of her friend's infant. She then resumed the last day's conversation on the meaning of *ukuvala* and what she considered the impossibility of actually replacing people.

> Can you replace a 14-months child? You can't.

Since Luthando had asked me to "correct" Amahle, my assistant and I discussed the subject in the afternoon. Amahle disagreed with Luthando's objection to *ukuvala*. She recognised that human beings are unique, though she also pondered that the reality of *ukuvala*/*replacement* depended on the intimate thinking of people in their variety.

Bereaved parents might well conceive that a new baby would fill the gap: "It's up to a couple what they are thinking". After all, as I had heard many times from my interlocutors, "people don't think the same". Crucially, people do not *feel* the same.

> **Amahle:** In your mind and your heart, you're replacing the lost one. If you lost a baby and maybe don't want another baby, it's up to you. But if there's no one running around, you feel empty. You feel you have lost someone important to you. So, trying another baby will fill that gap.

I did not rediscuss the matter with Amahle or Luthando. Much later, however, I learned that Luthando had once tried to fill the gap left by her perished baby. Luthando took Andile, her nephew and Martha's first great-grandson, as her "own child". Andile, incidentally, had been living with us since my return on January 13th. Like the departures of the matriarch and *malume*, Andile's arrival was full of consequences to household dynamics and, consequentially, to this research.

Before returning to Kwa-Ndebele, Andile dwelt with Norah, his grandmother, in Pretoria. Thabisa's and Teboho's firstborn, Andile, alternated his thirteen years between the family's *home* in Kwa-Ndebele and Norah's *house* in the informal settlement. I first met him in 2016, during my second fieldwork period in Pretoria. Then, at age 7, Andile and one of his sisters were under Norah's care. He studied in a nearby public school and took his first steps in English. Curious and witty, he often asked to see pictures of my dogs and family in Brazil.

Between 2017 and 2018, Andile studied in a private school in a well-off suburb of Pretoria. A South African *social entrepreneur*, who applied private funds to the education of Black kids, financed his education. Short-lived, Andile's experience in a school for the local elite ended due to disciplinary issues: he frequently resorted to physical force against schoolmates. Transferred back to a public school, Andile remained with his grandmother in Pretoria until January 2020.

Then he returned to Kwa-Ndebele, where he had lived most of his six initial years under the care of Margaret and Luthando. He affectionately called them *gogo* and *auntie*, respectively. I had the opportunity to discuss their pivotal role in Andile's upbringing. Such was the subject of conversations with Luthando and Andile's mother, Thabisa (see Chapter IV). Luthando described her and her mother's bond with Andile and Thabisa in the terms below.

> I helped her [Thabisa] since they came here. Andile was six months old. Thabisa [then aged 15 or 16] was a little girl, so me and mama... I was taking care of him, and mama was taking care of him and Thabisa. Mama was teaching her how to take care of Andile when he's sick, soothe him when he's angry, feed him, things like that.

In other words, Luthando participated in the care works required by Andile, and so did Margaret, who also taught his mother to care for an infant. Then a recently married girl, Thabisa, often commuted to Pretoria to stay with Andile's father. Soon after their firstborn completed one year, Thabisa got pregnant again. Luthando and Margaret then increased their daily dedication to Andile.

> We took him. You know what, Daniel? We took Andile from Thabisa when he was one year cause Thabisa was already pregnant with Lerato.

We shall not take Luthando's words at face value. With Thabisa's third pregnancy, Luthando and Margaret took full-time care of Andile, inasmuch as his biological parents consented. Furthermore, the transaction they performed did not have the character of a definite, once-and-for-all operation. Instead, it accrued the complex articulation of rights and duties, joys and predicaments of parenthood and filiation. It finally provided Luthando with a substitute.

> Andile is the first child in this house, so we were all happy for him and loved him too much. I just took him like my child, cause me, I lost my child, so I give him the love of my child.

Luthando resorted to an affective replacement similar to *ukuvala*. I do not think her claim about the impossibility of actually replacing people and her maternal attachment to Andile is contradictory. Luthando's opposition to *ukuvala* arose in January 2020. Andile was back in Kwa-Ndebele, but she remained concerned with Martha's health and was stricken by the death of her friend's lastborn. Luthando's substitute bond with Andile was confided to me in May 2020, after the matriarch passed away and when the issue of his belonging had arisen full-fledged. By mid-January, only the first signs of it had come into view.

On January 18th, early in the morning, Margaret took a bus and visited Martha at the hospital in Pretoria. She came back in the afternoon with improved morale. *Magogo* would soon return to Norah's house. Good news notwithstanding, Luthando told me that she and her mother were "upset". Teboho had phoned Andile and prohibited him from fetching anything on the streets for either Margaret or Luthando. My host and friend

considered that Teboho should not have approached Andile directly. He was supposed to call the *family* and solve the issue among adults.

Teboho had short-circuited the chains of command at Martha's and tried to undermine the authority of both Luthando and Margaret over Andile. There was a second sign of dispute over the boy's rights and duties within the family. Upon my arrival on January 13th, Luthando said that Norah had brought him back to Kwa-Ndebele but apparently kept the SASSA card in Pretoria[109]. In other words, she continued administering Andile's child support grant. Luthando observed that the card should "follow the child" and asked:

> Who's gonna buy bread for him?

She would. Again, the point was less the practical outcomes of Norah's action than its semantics. Andile now lived in Kwa-Ndebele, yet his right to a social benefit in cash was administered in Pretoria. I wonder how much the contradiction affected the boy himself.

Despite the conflicts over Andile's rights and obligations, he and Luthando remained warmly attached. He often brought her a bite, took her to the toilette, and changed her sides on the bed. Despite his father's prohibition, the young boy continued to perform household chores, such as the dishes, Friday's water storage, and, more importantly, shopping on the streets. Andile also cared for Suzy, the house's dog, pouring her water, giving leftovers, and cleansing the indexes of her canine manners. He remained perfectly integrated into homely circuits of care and labour.

He also stayed a long time away with friends - in indefinite locations he named "that side". Andile's daily movements seemed erratic. On his first days back, he returned after 8 pm more than once. Another habit of his kept out of pace with his age: when I arrived from Pretoria, the first thing Luthando told me about Andile was that he had been smoking *zolo* and cigarettes. She was "shocked", not least because the boy remarked he could not stop.

Andile's classes in Kwa-Ndebele started on January 15th. Eight days later, I noticed him at home earlier than usual. When Gift entered the kitchen, he told me that Andile had been expelled from school. The previous day, he and several mates had beaten

[109] Bähre (2007) indicates how contentious a field money makes in South Africa.

younger children, the same reason that led to his expulsion from an upper-class educational institution in Pretoria.

I went out for a stroll and stumbled upon Sphiwe. He was Teboho's best friend and had already heard the unfortunate news. He believed Andile might have a second chance should his father and mother attend an appointment with the school principal. However, he supposed Teboho would not show up since the child was already “corrupt”. Sphiwe also feared a shift from zolo to nyaope.

Contrary to Sphiwe’s forecast, Teboho came to Kwa-Ndebele the following day. He met the school’s principal but to no avail: Andile had been given a removal. Teboho stayed with us for the weekend and returned to Pretoria on Monday. The previous night, I took the following notes:

> **January 26th**
> Andile comes home late, and Teboho beats him. Amahle states the pedagogical value of beating and its legitimacy as a cultural solution to transgression.

Those were difficult days. Andile looked downhearted and suspicious, as though all conversations revolved around him. They did not. Margaret remained anxious about Martha and concentrated all her energies on domestic chores. According to Luthando, Margaret could not stop working, which gave her the last resort against the pitfalls of “thinking too much”.

Margaret was no longer the only one responsible for home care. By mid-January, two other ladies became habitués at the house. Nandi and Kaya helped care for Luthando and performed cleaning and cooking tasks. I first registered Nandi among my notes on December 25th, 2019, as a Christmas commensal. My notes on Kaya date from January 15th, 2020, but she had already been at the house before this date. Both women become intensely involved with the domestic circuits of labour and pleasure after Martha’s departure to Pretoria in January.

Luthando had received visitors since our arrival in Kwa-Ndebele by the end of November. Until New Year, these were shorter visitations. One might come, bring one's child, have a bite, and chat vividly. Seldom, though, would one share Luthando's bed since Martha was often there. After the matriarch moved to Pretoria, the buzz and social flow within the ladies’ bedroom increased noticeably.

Several times, Luthando remarked how satisfied she was with Nandi's and Kaya's care and company. However, she did not entertain illusions about the whole gamut of motives attracting them and others. Though fellowship was at play, Luthando's enhanced financial condition accounted for their integration into household dynamics. In my friend's words, all her visitors came "because" she had money.

Luthando took no offence at such a genre of interest. Neither did she think it was at odds with genuine friendship and caring love. By giving their company and helping hands, Nandi and Kaya took care of Luthando and were also assisted by her. The circuit of care started with money itself. Once in need of cash, I asked Luthando to lend me some bucks, and she answered:

> This money is taking care of me. I cannot give it to you on credit.

Overall, Luthando distinguished her visitors and friends between those in need and those in a more comfortable situation. Mama Lethu, the religious woman who once rescued Margaret from exile in the living room, belonged to the latter case. At least once, Lethu asked Luthando for money but did not get it. According to my friend, Lethu had two remitting daughters and faced no financial problems. Luthando also remarked that her visitor was not the kind of person willing to help others.

> She never gives money, not even ZAR 50.

Kaya, a forty-year-old mother of four, belonged to those in need. Formerly an acquaintance, she found in Luthando a helping hand and vice-versa. Luthando assisted her in kind and cash; Kaya helped Luthando bathe and change; she also brought news from Plaza and the neighbourhood. In so doing, Kaya proved a "better friend" than much older but then less connected pals. Usually, Khaya's youngest daughter, a timid five-year-old girl, accompanied her mother. Both frequently ate from the same plate as Luthando or Margaret and shared their beds.

Thanks to a request from Luthando, Kaya accepted to be interviewed by Amahle and me at the end of February 2020. We had four relatively short interviewing sessions, and only the first occurred at her place, a very modest, bricked house where her mother, her mother's brother, and her two children lived. Kaya preferred the remaining three

conversations to occur at Martha's. In one of them, she spontaneously mentioned why she had become a habitué at the house.

> **When the money is finished, do you have somebody helping you?**
> [**Amahle translates Kaya**] Sometimes, when the money is finished, she comes to Luthando and ask her to borrow money so that she can buy electricity.

At the end of our third conversation round, I asked Kaya whether she would like to tell me anything more. Again, she spontaneously alluded to financial hardship as the reason she started visiting Luthando.

> [**Amahle translates Kaya**] Sometimes the money is finished, and then her small child doesn't understand whether the food is there or not: she wants food, she wants to eat, and then Kaya must make a plan. So that's why she's coming with her daughter here so that Luthando can give her food. She's struggling because the [child support grant's] money is finished before she can buy all things.

The child support grants increased food security and empowered women in South Africa (Lund, 2008; Streak, 2011; Grandlund and Hochfeld, 2019). However, more recent evidence indicates that its current value (ZAR 460) cannot meet nutritional ends, for the country's Food Poverty Line has reached ZAR 744,96 per person. *Children Social Assistance and Food Security* (Zembe-Mkabile et al., 2022) sets forth worrisome findings.

> The Child Support Grant is not enough even to support a single mother and her young child, highlighting the need to increase the CSG to afford children (0-18 years) adequate nutrition.
> Food insecurity, manifest in high rates of child malnutrition, is an ongoing struggle and an emotional burden and distress for caregivers and community-based support systems (2022, p.28).

In our first conversation, Kaya, Amahle, and I discussed the former's childhood. Kaya was born in 1981 and had one sister and five brothers. Kaya's father worked as a bricklayer while her mother cared for their children. In 1998, Kaya's father died, but her mother was receiving an old-age pension. By the time of the interview, Kaya's mother remained the breadwinner. In addition to the old-age pension, she derived some income from sewing mats.

Does your mother help you?
She's saying that her mother is helping her with the children and buying food inside the house. When her money is no longer there, then Kaya takes her child-support grant and help the mother.

Kaya first got pregnant at 19. She did not know how to prevent it and quit high school three years before completing her studies. The father of her firstborn was a schoolmate. Kaya's other three children have another father, to whom she is still married. They live in different houses, but the husband occasionally provides for Kaya and the children. Unfortunately, he was unemployed by the time I interviewed Kaya.

Kaya considered children “a gift from God”. The name of her firstborn conveyed delight because “someone new has come, and we are now many”. Kaya's second child was called “thanks-giving”, for God bestowed her a “gift”. The names of her third and fourth children meant “beauty” and “bright as the sunlight”. Kaya did not want more children (though she got another one two years after our interview). When asked about the responsibilities of motherhood, she said the following:

She feels right because she has someone to talk with. She can call them, teach them how to behave, how to go to school, how to be in front of others, how to respect older people, and how to play with other children.

She likes to teach her children how to live...
Yes, she does.

Is it rewarding to be a mother?
It is rewarding cause when she tells them that they must do this and that, they listen to her, so she said it's rewarding.

As I understand my assistant's rendering of Kaya's words, motherhood is rewarding as it sets an ethical process in motion. That certainly sounds grandiloquent but does justice to Kaya's understanding of the maternal role: teaching children how to behave toward different others. Parental life, however, does not lay on a bed of roses, and Kaya mentioned some of the predicaments she experienced with her children and husband.

How is the feeling when you're pregnant?
She felt bad at the firstborn because she didn't know anything about the baby, and the father was still at school. Kaya, too, was at school, and they didn't know how to raise the baby. That's why the parents [were] included...

With her current husband and father of three children, Kaya faced problems related to alcohol consumption: "She was stressed [because] only the father was having money, and then he went out with his friends to drink some beers". Stress increased when the couple's third-born presented allergic symptoms. The child needed types of food beyond her parents' means but fortunately got accustomed to an ordinary diet. In all respects, cash and care above all, Kaya's mother has been prominent.

> Magogo is sewing mats. Did you see them the other day? She sell those mats, and then she have money, and then she helps Kaya to raise the children. Even inside the house, she was bathing the children, feeding them.

Care relations between grandmothers and grandchildren are not a one-way street, but rather a reciprocal engagement. When I asked Kaya if her grown-ups helped inside the house, Amahle translated her into the following terms:

> The children help magogo. When she want to buy some bread and cold drinks, even the groceries at the mall, they go. Even inside, the chores, to clean, the dishes. Yeah, everything they do it because magogo is doing the mats so that she can sell and have some money.

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to talk with Kaya's mother. She never responded to my request for an interview. According to my third assistant, Thabisa, already at Kwa-Ndebele when Amahle and I interviewed Kaya, the latter and her mother possibly thought I was "making money out of them". In addition to my one visit to their house, I saw the old lady when she popped up at Luthando's and was given a pack of chicken tripes.

Only two of Kaya's three children received the child-support grants. Her last-born was not yet registered[110]. The household's fixed income amounted to ZAR 2820: two child-support grants (ZAR 920) plus an old-age pension (~ZAR 1900). Kaya did not reckon how much her mother made monthly with the mats. When asked whether she was content with the child-support grants, my interviewee said it was not enough for the kids. However, she did not think the social benefit should rise significantly more. In her opinion, ZAR 500 per child should suffice.

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[110] Kaya had lost her identity card and needed another one before registering her lastborn.

> Because the child support grant is for free, we are not working for it. She thinks that maybe when she has someone to help her financially or she has her own job, maybe it will cover the children.

Kaya's formulation that the child-support grants are *free* needs qualification. The upbringing of humans involves no less than four toiling activities: childbirth, physical care, emotional care and involvement, and socialisation – or the transmission of values (Walker, 1995, pp.424-5). The fact that these tasks are not perceived and paid as the utmost work they constitute traces back to assumptions about human essence and a gendered, patriarchal division of labour according to which women are natural nurturers (Young, 2005; Walker, 1995)[111].

In South Africa, what Button et al. (2018, p.603) call the welfare and care regime has been a "hybrid" of conservative, liberal and social democratic features. In practical terms, it involves significant expenditure in public cash transfers alongside appeals to kin solidarity and a rhetorical restriction of the meaning of citizenship to employment outside the household. Hardly could grant recipients remain immune to longstanding stigmatisation of the welfare state and the correlated lauding of the "dignities of labour" and "self-reliance" (Seekings and Nattrass, 2015; Button et al., 2018).

When I asked Kaya about the word rights, which Amahle translated as *amalungelo,* the interviewee showed she was aware of it. According to my assistant, Kaya said that parents could not deploy violence against their children and beat them excessively because they had rights. When I asked whether she understood the child support grant as a right, Kaya answered directly: "Yeah". It seems, however, that she was not using right as a noun, or at least not as a legal right (or franchise), but rather as an adjective meaning the 'right thing' or "morally correct" (Cardoso de Oliveira 2022a; 2022b). Let us have a look at the corresponding excerpts of our conversation.

> **Kaya, have you heard about the word rights?**
> **Amahle**: *Amalungelo* [and they talk in IsiNdebele].
> **Amahle:** She knows that the rights… About the word rights, she understands that we don't have to abuse our children, we don't have to beat them, it's the rights, that's what she knows.
>
> **And do you think that the child-support grants are a right?**
> **Kaya:** Yeah.

[111] So entrenched and generalized is such an assumption that welfare systems in both developed and developing countries have laid on unpaid parenting and domestic labour (Fraser and Gordon, 1994; Pateman, 1998).

> **Amahle:** Except the money, she thinks that it's good. It's the right, because it helps a lot with children, especially when maybe they come from school, they have to eat, so, when she doesn't have that money, she won't be able to buy bread, or clothes or food inside the house.

Kaya considers the grants morally correct, a right thing, for they provide some measure of food security. Indeed, child nutrition was one of the objectives that oriented the Lund Committee (Lund, 2008, p.47). Yet the picture is more complicated, for Amahle started the last excerpt above with the preposition "except" - as in "except for the money, she thinks that it's good". As I understand my interviewee and assistant, the existence of social assistance in cash targeting children's elementary needs is to be praised from the moral point of view, but its amount remains insufficient, ergo 'not right'. However, I insisted with my interlocutor whether she understood the child support grant as a right, a question Amahle deemed "tricky". Kaya again transpired ambivalence. On the one hand, providing for the kids was her and their father's responsibility. On the other, state support in cash was essential, and she welcomed it.

> She's saying that... She thinks that... That's why she's saying that money is not the right for the children; the right is for us parents to raise our children. We must help each other. She and the father, they must help each other. But because of government contributed the money to children, so it helps a lot.

Kaya did not answer my question as I tried to formulate it. I intended to ask her whether she considered the child-support grant as the franchise it is. Instead, she kept the sense of "right" as morally correct or adequate (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022a; 2022b), but with another emphasis. For Kaya, the right thing is for parents to collaborate in providing for their children. It means that parents, not the state, have the moral and financial obligation to raise their kids. I suppose Kaya did not want to stress the government's responsibility to assist the citizenry, lest her discourse seem an instantiation of the so-called entitlement culture and its supposed ethos of "dependency" (Barchiesi, 2012).

Possibly, Amahle called my question "tricky" because she sensed the entitlement trap[112]. Both women probably felt that to underscore the child-support grants as a right would ipso facto cast my interviewee as the South African version of the "welfarist mother" (Fraser and Gordon, 1994). Reliance on public cash transfers is not appreciated

[112] The question was meant to probe into my interviewee's understanding of *rights*.

by all Black South Africans. According to Seekings (2019), the opposition between "deserving" and "non-deserving" recipients indicates that some mothers fall short of legitimacy before the public eye.

> South Africans express a clear normative hierarchy of desert, ranking the elderly and disabled as most deserving and young able-bodied adults as least deserving. [...]. Survey data consistently show [...] deep ambivalence over support for young mothers, some of whom are viewed as abusing the grants intended for their children by spending them on themselves (Seekings, 2019, p.5).

Neither Kaya nor Amahle hesitated when I asked whether the child-support grants belonged to the children, the mother, or both. Kaya also proposed a parallel between the grants and food schemes at school.

> The money belongs to the child, according to her. Because of why? Like, at school, the government gave them food. Because sometimes we find the child sleeping in class. When the teachers follow the story, the child is hungry. So, the money helps at home; it helps a lot. At school, they get food from the government. She thinks the money belongs to the child.

Kaya told me she never spends the grant on herself. Other women seemed less strict. Amahle, for instance, said she sometimes used it to buy cosmetics. The child-support grants are meant to benefit both mothers and their children (Lund, 2008; Seekings, 2019). The legal possibility of mothers' personal expenditure notwithstanding, young South African mothers remain subject "to public scrutiny, judgement, and prejudice" (Button et al., 2018). Social normativity on good motherhood revolves around self-abstention and full deployment of all available resources for children (Walker, 2008).

Kaya once worked as a domestic helper for a White family in Pretoria. She told me she could have this occupation again but was not searching for a job. There were activities that Kaya would not like to do, such as selling vegetables on the streets[113]. Instead, she would like to engage in the purchasing and reselling of clothes. Kaya likes fashion, and many women in Kwa-Ndebele enjoy acquiring garments directly from people. Unfortunately, my interviewee had no money to "buy stock" and initiate her business.

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[113] What Ferguson (2015, p.110) calls a "survivalist" trade, "engineering tiny diversions of value" from having somethings to have-nots.

Overall, Kaya answered Annex 1 questions laconically. Our fourth and last conversation concerned my paying for the interviews. She thanked me for the ZAR 280 I gave her and for being "patient with the questions". She finally observed that our interaction made her realise that the subject of my research was relevant.

> The questions that you were asking her, she noticed that they were so important. She was not aware that they were so important. So, now she can differentiate from the first time and now, after the interviews.

Between January and the end of March 2020, Kaya remained a source of comfort to Luthando and Margaret. In caring for the former, she alleviated the heavyweight incumbent upon the latter. By April 2020, Kaya was the only "friend" still frequenting the house despite the draconian rules of social distance enacted in South Africa. The novel circumstances must have affected Luthando's and Margaret's morale: both were fond of the female habitués at their house.

Nandi was another dearest companion. Probably in her forties, she had two sons: a teenage boy and a newborn baby. The latter was often with his mother. Both usually shared Luthando's bed. Margaret frequently bottle-fed with formula, lullabied, and changed the baby's nappies. Luthando could feed him, too. Within the ladies' bedroom, Nandi's infant had diverse sources of care. Below are some excerpts from my diary.

> **January 20th**
> Nandi prepares soft porridge while Amahle has her baby on the back.
> Now, the baby and Luthando nap on the couch. Nandi is doing the dishes.
> Nandi bottle-feeds her baby.
> Nandi and Margaret eat from the same plate.
> Now Margaret swings the baby on her back.
> Nandi and her baby sleep in the ladies' bedroom.
>
> **January 21st**
> Luthando tells me she fed Nandi's baby during the night.

Luthando, Margaret, and the several female insiders at Martha's took pleasure in caring for Nandi's infant. It was an essential part of their daily coexistence, a continuum of care and sharing not to be disentangled into discreet transactions. To be sure, Nandi's presence at the house had a definite economic aspect in that she helped Margaret and Luthando in exchange for money. As is the case among real persons, a monetary rapport does not mean "economic solipsism" (Polanyi, 1977).

It is tantamount to saying that since Nandi, Margaret, Luthando, and Kaya coexisted intimately, they helped each other in all possible ways. Nandi, more than Kaya, performed cleaning tasks. Kaya assisted Luthando more than Nandi. In turn, they and their youngest children got from my hosts all the help the latter could provide, such as money, care, food, etc.

Above, I presented many excerpts of my diary on January 20th and only the first information I registered the following day. Below is my last annotation on January 20th and the notes I took until the next noon.

> **January 20th**
> Nandi and her baby sleep in the ladies' bedroom.
>
> **January 21st**
> Luthando tells me she fed Nandi's baby during the night.
> Nandi and her baby are no longer around.
> Luthando buys us fat cakes for breakfast.
> Nandi pops up at the kitchen door: Sis Margaret! Sis Margaret! Nandi comes inside with her baby at the back.
> Woman A comes and keeps talking with Margaret and Nandi.
> Woman B comes, greets me, and joins them.
> Margaret, Nandi, Woman A and Woman B talk vividly.
> Nandi is feeding the baby with milk formula.
> Woman A helps Margaret with garden maintenance.

The kitchen door no longer had the semantics it did before Martha's departure: a portal requiring visitors to stop and wait for one of *us* (dwellers) to usher them inside. While the matriarch remained home, there was neither comparable a flow of people nor such an ease of access. After she moved to Pretoria, a female freeway formed between the kitchen and ladies' bedroom; its traffic code was premised on sisterhood: "Sis Margaret!" [114]

None of the above practices should be singled as the most relevant within a shared routine. Most women coming to Margaret and Luthando were so doing "because" (in Luthando's words) she had money. Once they were there, however, its primary cause dissolved into camaraderie and coworking, for there were numerous tasks to perform and pleasures to enjoy[115]. In other words, the whole set of reciprocal practices in time, not in synchronic isolation, constitutes the appropriate unit of analysis.

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[114] Not only did Nandi called Margaret *sis,* so did others and Margaret when addressing them.

[115] Mainly beer drinking and zolo smoking. Such a portrait shall not be generalised. I visited houses with far less liberal mores.

> **March 3rd**
> Nandi's baby cries. Margaret and Luthando give him milk and soft porridge.
> Margaret takes him into her arms and breasts and calms him down.
> Now Margaret and the baby are sleeping. On the other bed, Luthando and Woman A are talking. The latter stayed for lunch.
> Thabisa and Nandi drink a beer in the kitchen.

Let us call Woman A *mama* Thuli. Aged 58, she lived on the front street. Formerly, Thuli had worked as a domestic helper and caretaker in Gauteng. She quit her last job in 2017 because her bosses "didn't pay well" and moved back to Kwa-Ndebele. Incomeless since then, Thuli found daily support in her brother, whose backyard coincided with hers. She occupied the house left by their parents, a spacious but poorly furnished dwelling.

As Nandi and Kaya, Thuli frequented my hosts since our arrival on November 21st, though my first note on her dates from Christmas Eve. She invited Amahle and me to eat the cow's feet with her. Involved with Christmas celebrations at our respective places, my assistant and I did not appear. On December 26th, amid continuous Christmas celebration at Martha's veranda, Thuli remarked on my absence the previous day, and Luthando immediately turned to me:

> Now, you must make a plan.

I told *mama* Thuli I would, and she thanked me. On January 2nd, I registered her in my diary during continuous New Year's festivities. Around 11 am., Thuli, Nandi, Margaret, and I were chatting in the kitchen, and she spontaneously told me a bit of her story. Raped, she had a deaf son who lived in Pretoria and whom she seldom visited. Thuli complained about her current financial situation; she had no grant or job. She then asked me to write her a CV since she wanted to work again as a caretaker for the "old and sick". Thuli had a certificate for childcare and finally set a parallel between the elderly and children:

> The old people are like a child. You have to be patient. I can cook, I can clean for them.

On January 17th, a Friday, I made the *plan* Luthando had asked me. By morning, mama Thuli and I went to the supermarket to buy meat for a Saturday lunch. Since

Margaret visited Martha in Pretoria, Thuli would cook for us. Back from the supermarket, Luthando observed that some of Thuli's kin might appear at her house. I looked surprised, for the initial "plan" comprised only us. My friend and host remarked succinctly:

> Here we share.

The following morning, *mama* Thuli came to fetch the meat and mentioned that neighbours would pop up to see me. They came, indeed, and we had a lovely Saturday. Thuli prepared a beef stew, pap, rice, and veggies. We had plenty of food and beers. Though Luthando spent most of the time on Thuli's double, comfortable bed, she was happy with the novel airs. Andile came, and so did Margaret by the end of the day. She seemed relieved after seeing Martha, and we kept drinking and talking on the veranda till 8 pm. Then, amid memories of her time as a domestic helper, Thuli approached me critically.

> The White people are not clean. You, the White people, are using Black people. We must go after you because you pay, but it's a small amount.

I told mama Thuli I was not a White but did not try to alter her classificatory system. Above all, I reiterated that domestic work in South Africa paid poorly. Mama was in good spirits, and I was somehow accustomed to being included in bitterly realistic remarks on racial and economic exploitation in the country. Furthermore, I appreciated mama's frankness and always found ease in her presence. She mastered English and always treated me warm-heartedly. We drank the last beers and, by 9 pm., Margaret and I returned home.

Two days later, I woke up and noticed Luthando, Margaret, and Thuli eating and chatting in the living room. I soon learned Thuli would benefit from a scam within the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). A man recently introduced to her brother had a business selling official SASSA forms for people who did not qualify for a state grant. Mama Thuli had fulfilled a form claiming she was "blind" and "mentally impaired". She should proceed to a SASSA doctor and, once confirmed the diagnosis, would obtain a disability grant (~ZAR 1900).

Cheerfully, Luthando detailed how mama Thuli should behave before the SASSA doctor: not answering his questions and laughing to simulate an utter lack of

understanding. My friend also proposed that I accompany and assist Thuli's performance of folly. I observed my theatrical skills were substandard. Luthando concurred, and Margaret decided to take on the role of Thuli's helper. She would keep a circumspect demeanour and not laugh during the consultation.

Thuli and Margaret went to the SASSA doctor on January 23rd. On January 27th, the joyful mama became entitled to a disability grant. Thuli told me that before the appointment with the SASSA doctor, she and Margaret smoked *zolo*, which helped her simulate madness. Thuli answered none of the physician's questions and pretended she could not see anything. The scheme had cost her ZAR 1500: ZAR 500 before the medical appointment and ZAR 1000 after the first payment. Thuli finally acknowledged that fraud was not the appropriate means to get a grant, yet she had to "survive". I observed that she deserved a better life, and she replied: "Everybody deserves".

Had it not been for the scam, Thuli would have had to wait three years to qualify for an old-age pension. This meant three more years depending on her brother and neighbours. Thuli spontaneously showed me the document she had been given at SASSA, which indicated she would remain entitled to a disability grant for the rest of her life. Her first payment, corresponding to the last ten days of January and the whole of February, would total ZAR 3000. Thuli was already making plans about the money: pay a burial society, save a little to help her grandchild get matric in the future, and finally start her newfound job.

The previous day, I learned Thuli had received a proposal to work as a shopkeeper in the grocery store just down the street. Thuli then observed she was used to working: she was not a "lazy person". A jobless routine dissatisfied her enormously: after daily cleaning her house, she usually sat down in dull inactivity for hours. She had been offered ZAR 1000 at the grocery store and believed she could negotiate a better salary. Thuli finally recalled her years as a caretaker: she could bath children, cook, feed them, etc.

Mama Thuli and I were having lunch at her house again; this was the second time she used the word "lazy" with me. A few days before, then at Martha's, she had employed it in a different meaning. Before leaving us, she came to say goodbye, remarked she felt "lazy", and would go home to sleep. Then I understood the adjective lazy not as an indisposition to work but as a feeling akin to boredom - which, as Freud et al. (2004) once put it, constitutes a "torment" and a source of "unpleasure". I will discuss these two uses of laziness. Before, let me present other information I was given around the same time.

On January 18th, when we first had lunch at her place, she observed by the end of the day: "You, the White people, are using black people". In other words, she included me among Whites as opposed to Blacks. Why does it matter? As is well known, "laziness" constitutes a longstanding cliché in South African racial relations (Ashforth, 1990; Atkins, 1994). Probably because of that, ten days later, while telling me she would accept the job as a shopkeeper, Thuli stated she was not a "lazy person" but one accustomed to working.

Thuli's second use of "lazy" corresponds to boredom as an occasional feeling, not a predicate. A week before employing the word in this sense, I passed in front of her house and found Thuli and two female neighbours talking on the veranda. Thuli then observed that she had no means to "make time pass". A week later, she remarked that her daily routine was limited to cleaning the house; eventually, she would sit and remain in what I called dull inactivity. In other words, *mama* Thuli constantly felt bored precisely because she had no additional labour other than household chores to spend her vital energies.

Boredom is a predicament from which others in Kwa-Ndebele suffer. One day after Thuli told me she was "feeling lazy", two neighbours approached me and complained they felt "bored". The first was Lunga, an impoverished man who shared a packed one-piece room with his wife. He usually came to Martha's veranda to smoke with us and, I suspect, make time pass. On January 22nd, he came looking for me with the explicit complaint that he was "bored". A bit later, while I sat alone at the house's external wall, an unknown man asked for my cell phone and observed how "bored" one feels when not working.

My notes on boredom and similar affects date back from much earlier and continued after my departure to Brazil[116]. I first stumbled upon the subject when I began taking fieldwork notes at Martha's.

> **November 26th**
> Afternoon: Mpho and Gift got 'bored' and asked my computer to watch a football match. Yesterday, while we watched the highlights of another game, a neighbour thanked me for 'making things happen'. I interpret it as a pastime, something allowing time to pass.

[116] Thabisa, my long-distance assistant between November 2020 and June 2021, also articulated boredom and joblessness. We had only started discussing the financial terms of the interviews she would conduct on my behalf, and she showed eagerness: "When are we going to start? Uh, Daniel, I was bored, I already needed a job".

By the end of January 2020, I again stumbled upon the subject. Joseph, an unknown young man, approached Amahle and me during a Saturday stroll. He wanted to sell his cell phone for ZAR 450. We declined, but he followed us first to Plaza and then on our way back. The next day, I left Martha's alone for a Sunday promenade and again met Joseph. He told me he was "bored" and asked whether he could accompany me to plaza. While we chatted and walked, the young man asked me if I was not "bored" in Kwa-Ndebele.

I told Joseph I was not, that is, I lied. Despite the fascinating experience of "being there" (Ferguson, 2021), I sometimes had nothing to do. Then, I stayed on the veranda, watching the day fade slowly. Often, neighbours came and joined Margaret and me. We chatted a bit and smoked; sometimes, we drank out of boredom, just to find, in alcohol-induced high spirits, the feeling that something was finally happening. Interestingly, one of my interlocutors in 2016 often referred to beer drinking in the following terms: "I was busy drinking". Without jobs and diverse possibilities of leisure, how can one occupy oneself?

I started this digression on boredom because just a week before becoming entitled to a disability grant, *mama* Thuli told me she was feeling "lazy" and needed a nap. I think *bored* would have been another word to describe a condition that affected many of her fellow Ndebele, young and old. Not all my interlocutors attributed boredom to a jobless life, but some did, such as Thuli, Thabisa, and the unknown neighbour who unexpectedly asked for my cell phone.

Fortunately, Thuli had been given two sources of human well-being: a social grant worth ZAR 1900 and a job at the grocery store down the street. In the first days of February, she began shopkeeping the small business, but I was not in Kwa-Ndebele. On January 31st, I commuted to Pretoria and would reencounter mama Thuli only three weeks later. Before I resume my conversations with her, I present a brief portrait of the two days preceding another of my departures from Martha's house.

On January 29th, Luthando and I went to the public health clinic. It had been weeks since our last appointment. Margaret found us a driver and a car at a reasonable price. After a short trip, our vehicle was exceptionally admitted within the clinic's front yard, close to the entrance. With my help, Luthando walked to the front door, entered the lounge, and sat. *Her* nurse joined us joyfully and exclaimed: "She's picking! The hard work is showing". Upon seeing us, the reception clerk asked for Luthando's card and

prepared her files. He, too, came closer and talked to my friend, whom he addressed as "sista".

We were ushered inside the consulting room while two nurses still searched for Luthando's last blood and saliva exams. We then got mixed news: though she no longer had tuberculosis, the HIV rate had increased. How high? "Sky high, from five to six-digit numbers", the nurse said. Luthando had also lost weight, and the sisters lowered the antiretrovirals to a compatible dose. They also gave her pills to control vomiting. Luthando's clinic picture seemed a little worse, but the fact that she could walk kept our confidence in her recovery.

On the eve of my departure to Pretoria, Martha, Norah, *malume* Ntuli, and Teboho appeared in Kwa-Ndebele. They brought several *sangomas*, traditional healers who performed a ritual on behalf of Martha's health. I unexpectedly saw all of them by evening. I was allowed to enter the house and noticed the *sangomas* had painted crosses on the top of most doors. In tears, Margaret came to my room to communicate that *magogo* was "very sick". From my window, I saw a thinner and paler Martha in the yard.

The *sangomas,* Norah, *malume* Ntuli, Teboho, and the matriarch returned to Pretoria immediately after the ritual. Once the cars left the yard, Luthando called me. We now had new rules inside the house: all windows closed, and no more visitors after 8 pm. People burned the *muti* (an herbal medicine) at this time, and evil spirits might intrude into the house. Luthando also told me that weeping Martha had come inside to see her and stated: "My child, now you must take care of my house". According to her, the matriarch wanted to return home, but Norah resisted.

...

The next day, I embarked on a bus to Pretoria. On February 4th, Margaret phoned to inform me that Luthando was admitted to the regional hospital due to acute stomach pains and frequent vomiting. We could do nothing but wait.

...

I returned to Kwa-Ndebele two weeks later and found an airier atmosphere. Luthando looked better, Margaret was calmer, and the female flow inside the house was

larger. On my first morning back, Nandi, Kaya, and two other ladies were in their lovely traffic inside and outside the ladies' bedroom. They all stayed for the copious lunch Margaret cooked. We had cabbage, beetroots, macaroni with mayo, and chicken, which we ate together in the ladies' bedroom. Luthando and Nandi's daughter shared a plate, and so did two other ladies.

By night, Thuli came to chat. She had been working between 7 am. and 8 pm., with no weekly rest. Thuli was tired but remarked the job had done her good, "keeping the mind busy". Moreover, the salary would allow her to repair her house's electricity grid and weary doors. She looked freshly transmuted with a charming red scarf and lucent earrings. I had never seen her in such an elegant outfit. Thuli planned to "push" for three more months and then quit the job. It left her no free time, and she had a house to care for after all.

Another person looking novel and brisk was Andile. His classes at a new local school had begun. One day after my return from Pretoria, I heard him entering the house and greeting everybody enthusiastically; he also came inside my room and told me he was about to start reading and writing in IsiNdebele. In a private institution for the wealthy in Pretoria, he learned to write in English, which he also spoke gorgeously. Writing in IsiNdebele remained a bit of a problem, and the opportunity to overcome it thrilled the young boy.

Luthando was still feeling abdominal pains, but not as much as before her admission into the local hospital. She kept good humour and the ability to surveil and manage the house confided to her. Upon noticing I had slept my first night back with open windows, she warned me I could get sick because of the *muti*. I remarked that my White host in Pretoria burned it (implying I was used to the herb's smoke). She reiterated the risk and the eventual need to consult the *sangomas*: "We are all witches here". She, not me, was shielded. My friend then showed me the tiny, protective cuts the healers had made on her arm.

We also had good news from the front in Pretoria. Martha felt better and wanted to return home, yet still to the opposition of Norah and *malume* Ntuli. Luthando suspected they had ulterior motives[117] to keep the matriarch but acknowledged Martha should come only after her own (Luthando's) full recovery. Margaret could not take care of two simultaneously. While her daughter and I talked, unflagging Margaret did the laundry

[117] Such as to "eat [Martha's] money".

outside. She then had the company and helping hand of her boyfriend, Jan, again among us.

Alternating departures and returns, I had completed three months of fieldwork in Kwa-Ndebele but still felt disappointed. By the end of February 2020, I had interviewed three young female recipients of the child-support grants, one recipient of the old-age pension, and Amahle's son. With the benefit of hindsight, I now reckon it was an abundant material, yet I did not think along these lines at the time. Fortunately, Luthando had been asking visitors and friends to help me.

Without any request on my part, she arranged an interview with Ingel, who had visited her while I was in Pretoria. Ingel told Luthando she would receive Amahle and me at her house, and there we went on a Wednesday afternoon. Ingel was not there at the scheduled time. Amahle and I sat in front of her modest bricked house and waited. A neighbour, whom Amahle called *malume*, asked me for a cigarette and came to chat. According to him, Ingel had gone to the mall. He and Amahle concurred that she usually stayed quite a while there.

Malume thought Ingel should be at the casino; he and my assistant then talked about the experience of trying to make money at the machines. In case Ingel won anything, Amahle remarked, she would still buy groceries at the supermarket. After the man returned to his yard, I asked my assistant to tell me more about Ingel. I had no recollection or previous information whatsoever about her.

Forty-one-year-old Ingel lived in the house left by her deceased parents. She had two siblings in Johannesburg. Ingel had lost her job and had five or six children, whose child support grants constituted her only income[118]. After almost an hour and a half waiting for our interviewee, Amahle finally told me that, in a previous conversation, Ingel said she did not want to be interviewed. Back home, Luthando observed she had the feeling that Ingel did not really want to talk with Amahle and me, yet she said she would. It was probably out of reciprocity since Luthando's visitors came to ask for her money.

I then sat on my friend's bed, and we conversed for almost two hours. She told me that Ingel had been seen earlier at her boyfriend's place, which meant she had not gone to the local casino. Nevertheless, Ingel often gambled, like many other local girls. Some, Luthando observed, even resorted to loan sharks and were forced to give their SASSA and identity cards as collateral. A couple of weeks later, Luthando would entice me to

[118] Occasionally, Thuli's two sisters remitted to her.

enter *Bettabets* and "see the girls with my own eyes". I preferred not to, but I believe that gambling, as drinking, is often taken as an antidote against the "torment of boredom" affecting the jobless (Freud et al., 2004).

In the aftermath of Thuli's no-show, Luthando gave me two other pieces of information. First, she would fill out a SASSA form and request a disability grant. Kaya, whose child played while we chatted, would conduct her in a wheelchair. I could accompany them if I wished. Again, I preferred not to. Second, my friend notified me that her ex-boyfriend, Masozi, would visit her on the weekend. Martha herself had asked him to "check on" her beloved granddaughter.

Luthando knew that Masozi and I disliked each other. Back in 2016, he committed sexual violence against my assistant. It happened a few weeks after my arrival, and I had to coexist daily with him for another five months. Masozi would arrive the following Saturday. On Friday, I imparted to Luthando my intent not to socialise with him; I could stay inside my room or leave the house for a daylong stroll. Luthando barely finished hearing and rebuffed me: there was no such thing as keeping myself apart from the domestic circuit of sociability. I was supposed to interact with him and all others, whether I liked it or not.

Luthando gave me no license to break the etiquette and shared sense of normalcy. Fortunately, I have an above-average capacity to sleep and put it into practice on Saturday. By noon, one of our visitors knocked on my window and said that "the guys" were outside. Teboho, Sphiwe, *malume* Ntuli, and Masozi were sipping and listening to music in the yard. I greeted them and returned inside. Martha had also come and asked about me.

Magogo and I greeted each other warmly. The matriarch observed she was "happy" to see that we were taking good care of her house. Martha still seemed frail, though slightly better than a month before. She and Luthando were sitting side by side in the living room. Grandmother and granddaughter looked relieved to have each other again. I sat among them just for a few minutes and went to the kitchen, where Margaret and Norah chatted vividly.

I remained a bit with the two sisters. We sipped and smoked. Then Norah asked me for two beers: she liked *Hansa*. I agreed and returned to the yard. Sphiwe observed how "boring" the week was, contrarily to weekends, always jolly and spirited. We sipped briefly, and my turn to buy us beers came. Masozi asked me two *Amsteel* in a not-quite-friendly tone. He had to insist before I consented. I went to a nearby tavern with Sphiwe.

When we returned, Norah sang in the kitchen. Martha and Luthando shared the bed in the ladies' bedroom.

Divide among us had not dissolved into happy *communitas*. Masozi and I kept our mutual disgust, and Norah and Luthando their competition over Martha's presence and heritage. All these tensions remained as palpable as our bodies, and we had to cope with our dissenting presence, for ignoring each other was not an alternative. We, therefore, demanded and exchanged the available objects of value among us – beers. We shared it not because we had "warm sentiments" (Ferguson, 2021) toward each other. Some of us had none, nor should we pretend. By exchanging, however, we domesticated mutual estrangement (Hénaff, 2010, p.147).

Masozi, Norah, Martha, Teboho, and *malume* Ntuli returned to Pretoria by mid-afternoon. While together, Luthando and her grandmother mainly stayed in bed. None of the habitués in the ladies' bedroom appeared while the family gathered. By night, mama Thuli popped up and remained with Margaret, the latter's boyfriend (Jan), and me until Sunday dawn. I then went to bed and stayed for long hours. Intermittently, though, another visitor called me out of the room. Andile's mother, Thabisa, had arrived from Johannesburg and wanted to socialise. I took the following notes:

> **March 1st, 2020**
> I slept most of the Sunday. Thabisa woke me up twice or more, always asking me to socialise, to be socially awoken. Luthando complained about my long hours inside my room, thus away. On Friday, when I proposed to retreat to my chamber since Masozi was coming, Luthando rebuffed me, indicating I was supposed to socialise with people, not to take me out of the house circuit of sociability. I think Thabisa demanded something similar.

I still was unaware that making my presence available to others was obligatory. Nevertheless, the social signs of this duty were already making themselves visible. On Saturday, I stayed in bed till noon. Then, Sphiwe knocked on my window. Thabisa, on Sunday, did almost likewise. Contrary to Sphiwe, who called me from the yard, Thabisa entered my (sic) room. I resisted longer since I had not met or knew she was coming. When I finally woke up, Luthando admonished me: I could not remain apart as I pleased. I had breached the etiquette (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011), as I had tried to do on the eve of Masozi's coming.

Like Andile's father, Thabisa had been summoned to Kwa-Ndebele by the beginning of February, when the young boy received a "removal" from the school.

However, she decided to wait and come only in March. Thabisa knew Andile's current predicaments, such as premature smoking and his father's prohibition that he goes to the plaza for Margaret. On Sunday night, Luthando's mother, Thabisa, and I sat in the kitchen and conversed.

Thirty-year-old Thabisa lived in her bricked house in Johannesburg. She had four children, two with Teboho. Thabisa referred to him with sorrow and disgust. Their short-lived marriage had been punctuated by marital infidelity and violence. Fortunately, she had the help of Margaret and Luthando to take care of Andile and her second-born, Busi. Thabisa called them *gogo* and *auntie*, respectively, and showed affectionate gratitude to both: they had been crucial in her children's upbringing.

During our night interaction in the kitchen, Thabisa remarked that Andile considered Margaret his primary caretaker, for she prepared his food daily. Accordingly, *gogo* Margaret had the authority to send him wherever she needed. Such was Thabisa's opinion on the matter, and sooner, she asked for my cell phone to communicate it to Norah. She wanted to "tell her the truth", that is, reinstate Margaret's powers over Andile. Thabisa usually talked about Norah with disappointment and antagonism.

Barely twelve hours after my first and abrupt encounter with Thabisa, I had been caught up by a torrent of intimate details about her rapport with Martha's family. I would interview her only a week later. On Sunday, when we first met, she spontaneously spoke her mind. Margaret, too, needed to talk. Except for sparse, anxious remarks about Martha's health, Luthando's mother had never approached me to discuss internecine conflicts. That night, though, she found in Thabisa and me an outlet for thorny, upsetting perceptions about the previous day[119].

March 1st, 2020 inaugurated the last cycle I witnessed in Kwa-Ndebele. Three weeks after Thabisa's arrival, I would take a bus to Pretoria and could no longer return due to the declaration of a National State of Disaster on March 23rd. My encounter with Thabisa had a substantial impact on the research. Her life story highlights the various predicaments looming over Martha's family, such as unplanned teenage pregnancy and gender abuse. Furthermore, she became my long-distance assistant between November 2020 and June 2021.

I will deal with Thabisa's life story and her work as my assistant in Chapters IV and V. I shall now focus on two other events that occurred soon after she arrived in Kwa-

[119] Margaret had the impression that Norah had been surveilling Saturday conversations between Luthando and Martha.

Ndebele. First, Andile was expelled from the school he had started attending two weeks before. Second, Luthando became entitled to a disability grant. Though Thabisa got involved in both episodes, I will mention her only marginally throughout this section's last pages.

I woke up on March 2nd when Nandi entered my (sic) chamber with a cup of unsolicited morning coffee. She ordered me out of bed and started cleaning the room impromptu. Dizzy and sore, I searched for solace in the ladies' bedroom and told Luthando that I did not know that my (sic) room fell under Nandi's jurisdiction. My friend observed she had been "helping" Nandi (with money), and the latter was obsessed with cleanliness. There was nothing we could do to stop her. After a few days away, Kaya had also shown up and assisted Margaret in restoring domestic standards of order.

Before noon, I noticed a police car in front of the yard. Two officials brought Andile inside. He had been expelled from another local school. Again, he was accused of threatening younger mates. The cops talked with Margaret in the kitchen and soon quit the house. Andile went to Luthando's room and sat with her and Nandi. There they remained until after lunch.

By 5 pm., I went to buy us meat at the plaza. When I returned, Margaret approached me for a puff and observed she needed to sleep. She did not, and I soon noticed she and Thabisa arguing. They entered the ladies' bedroom, where Luthando was. I remained inside the guest's room until 9 pm. Then Margaret called me to drink a beer and chat. Thabisa joined us. With delight, Margaret recalled my morning exasperation when Nandi dragged me out of bed. We all laughed. Fortunately, we had not lost the ability to enjoy our different selves.

I woke up the next day at 6 am. and noticed Margaret cleaning the stove. I returned to bed but soon had my sleep interrupted. Restless, Margaret needed something to smoke. Before lunch, Luthando's mother started washing the clothes and went out after finishing them. She would try to get Andile a place in another school. By 4 pm., Margaret returned home, looking vexed and grumbling. The school's principal had told her to come with Andile and Thabisa the following day. There with us, Amahle suggested that the only solution for the young boy was a *stout*[120] school.

By evening, I visited mama Thuli. After two weeks of nonstop working at the grocery store, she had taken a day off and invited me to supper. Thuli welcomed me at

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[120] *Stout*, in Afrikaans, corresponds to naughty. *Stout* schools are institutions receiving children with special needs in socialisation.

the front door, and we sat in her spacious living room. We chatted briefly, and I asked if she had heard about the so-called *stout* school. She called it "naughty school" and remarked it was the appropriate solution for Andile. Thuli knew his records of indiscipline and lamented, above all, his expulsion from an upper-class institution in Pretoria. "There he could be someone", she observed.

According to Thuli, Andile had had the same problem in the last three schools he attended: beating younger children. She remarked that his mother (Thabisa) drank too much and did not provide him with a reliable, mirrorable model. I reminded her that Teboho had an unenviable past of gender violence and brawls. Thuli added that he also was a serial father, so to speak. Teboho had five or six children with four different women. After an hour of conversation, Thuli packed Luthando's dinner in a bowl, and I returned home.

The following day came with good news. Thabisa took Luthando to the SASSA office and set forth her claim for a disability grant. They left the house early in the morning and, once at the SASSA building, barely waited 15 minutes until being received by a doctor. To my surprise, Luthando did not undergo a clinical examination. She remained in a wheelchair while the physician talked to Thabisa. The latter informed him that Luthando had not walked since October and had poor kidneys. Luthando reported the episode as follows:

> They don't examine people. He [the doctor] just looks at people. He was talking only to Thabisa and doesn't talk too much. He's a brother like you. Me, the paper is talking for me.

In other words, the SASSA doctor, a 40-year-old man, did not inquire or conduct a thorough examination of applicants. He confirmed Luthando's physical impairments with Thabisa, had a look at the discharge letter issued at the term of Luthando's last admission into the local hospital, and took her fingerprints. Luthando sounded certain she would soon be entitled to a disability grant: "I'll get it", she remarked.

I remained in the ladies' bedroom for a while and asked my friend whether Thabisa had accompanied Andile and Margaret to the intended new school. She had not, nor would she take him to Johannesburg to live with her - a possibility Thabisa had been venting. According to Luthando, Andile's current habits of smoking *zolo* and wandering about would exasperate Thabisa, and the latter might resort to beating beyond the advisable. In that, Luthando remarked, Thabisa and Teboho coincided.

Luthando contrasted their methods with hers toward Andile. She had always talked instead of beating the young boy. She thought Andile's resort to force against schoolmates paralleled the violence he experienced with his parents. The kid replicated with smaller peers the bellicose means he encountered at home.

> When you beat him every day, he don't understand, and he'll do it again. The child, you must talk to him, but when he do something wrong, they just beat. So, you see? They gave him anger; they just make him angry […]. Me, I'm just talking. Me, I don't beat the child. I know the words. You beat him today, tomorrow he's fine, and then he forget. But the words, he can't forget[121].

Margaret also disapproved of how Teboho and Thabisa dealt with Andile's faults. She deemed their parental manners "not right". Margaret admitted being exhausted and anguished by Andile's case; she no longer slept peacefully at night. Nevertheless, Margaret asserted she was Andile's primary caretaker and would thus remain. While talking to me, Margaret beat her chest, reiterating her responsibility toward him. She would not allow Thabisa to take Andile to Johannesburg.

On March 8th, I woke up and witnessed an extraordinary fact. Luthando had gone to the supermarket for the first time in months. Dressed up, she and Thabisa took a car early in the morning and returned with loaded bags. While shopping, Luthando remained mainly in a wheelchair. At home, though, she no longer needed our assistance to walk from the ladies' bedroom to the kitchen. Luthando was in an excellent mood and transpired pride. She said she had bought red meat for us all, including Andile, though "she did not have a child". Thabisa reacted immediately:

> Don't you?

The two ladies debated the subject. I limited myself to writing down in my notebook that the ultimate responsibility for Andile seemed to be an issue among them. I left Luthando and Thabisa and went out for a stroll. Back home, I found my host in the kitchen, separating the food for lunch. She looked empowered, a dominating presence over the table, literally the breadwinner - a role Martha had performed for decades.

March 9th came with further good news. I woke up and noticed Margaret sleeping while Nandi, Busi, and Kaya kept an animated conversation in the ladies' bedroom.

[121] Excerpt of a phone conversation Luthando and I had in May 2020.

Luthando and Thabisa were absent; they had an appointment at the SASSA office. By mid-day, they returned with Luthando's SASSA card and a document attesting her entitlement to a disability grant - worth around ZAR 1800 per month.

On March 10th, I noticed Luthando frying chips in the kitchen. I grabbed some, and she complained about my manners. I should have taken a fork; hands, she claimed, were often "dirty". Mine were not, I replied. They were, she said; they were not, I insisted. She reiterated her point, and so did I, just to have the pleasure of a debate. Later, I registered in my diary that she had been much more active those days.

A week afterwards, I again came across Luthando in the kitchen. Then she, Andile, and Thabisa carefully picked and chopped veggies for lunch. Luthando again looked sovereign, vested with the authority Martha had bestowed upon her. Noticing me at the door, she remarked that *magogo* had prohibited us from using the house's second fridge within the food pantry. I had been infringing the rule but pretended I would no longer. She pretended she believed, and we chatted for a while. Luthando and Andile finally entered the ladies' bedroom, and the young man did *aunties'* nails.

By 1 pm., we had a copious meal of potatoes, cabbage, beetroots, and fried chicken. We had received the unexpected visit of Lunga, a distant neighbour, and his wife. He often came to Martha's to smoke with us but remained mainly on the veranda. His wife had never been among us. She shared Luthando's plate at lunch and, afterwards, her bed. They napped together between 2 pm. and 4 pm.

At 6 pm., I went jogging. While running up and down the street, a man in his yard yelled something at me that I could not fully understand, except for his unfriendly tone and mention of "the virus". We were on March 15th, and though we did not wholly ignore the COVID-19 pandemic, we remained unaware of its scope. There was a TV set at Martha's, but we rarely watched it, among other reasons, because of constant load shedding[122].

On the evening of March 17th, two middle-aged men approached me in front of a tavern. One of them asked if I came from Morocco[123]. I told him I did not. Bitterly, he insisted that I did. His companion asked me where I came from and posed questions about "the virus". Seeing my discomfort, a third man came closer and told me to "stay free",

[122] I had intermittent and limited access to the Internet on my telephone and kept infrequent and very brief contact with family and friends in Brazil.

[123] My dark brown skin and beard have often caused many South Africans to believe I was a Pakistani or Indian. In France, and even in Brazil, I have already been taken as a *Maghrebin*.

for he was there with me. I left the tavern alone and met a neighbour on my way back to Martha's. He reminded me that I should avoid being alone in shebeens.

On March 19th, I noticed that downtown was less crowded. After buying us meat for dinner, I stopped to talk with mama Thuli. She wondered whether the shop would have to close and seemed inclined not to visit us that night. At Martha's, Andile mentioned that a girl in the neighbourhood no longer wanted to play out "because of the virus". However, most of the nearby children still gathered outdoors. Save for Thuli, the habitués at Martha's had not yet interrupted their daily coming and going.

By then, I had already received callings from Brazil urging me to commute to Pretoria. I still resisted, though, and fancied I could cope with the new circumstances at Martha's. I was wrong. On the afternoon of March 21st, I took my last notes in Kwa-Ndebele.

> Wake up around 13h. Boys and girls come to play with Andile and stay for lunch. They eat pap and cabbage, and one reminds me that I promised to buy them a *simba* [a local snack]. Amahle accompanies me down the street to mama Thuli. In front of the shop, an unknown man asks me for a cigarette. I give it; he accepts but nags at me: "*Voetsek*[124], I don't want to be infected". Back home, two neighbouring girls who stayed for lunch were doing the dishes.

On March 23rd, President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed the nation on television and announced a 21-day strict lockdown to begin on March 26th. Luthando, Thabisa, Andile, and I watched Ramaphosa's speech. Only with the "escalation of measures to combat the COVID-19 Epidemic" (as the address read) did I finally decide to leave Kwa-Ndebele. I departed on March 25th and installed myself in Pretoria. I kept in touch with Luthando, remitting to her and hoping I would return to Martha's in a few weeks. By mid-April, the matriarch died at Norah's. On May 23rd, I landed in Brazil. Luthando passed away in June 2020 at the age of 34.

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[124] "Interjection. Southern African: offensive, informal, an expression of dismissal or rejection". Definition of *voetsek* [online]. Available at: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/voetsek (Access: September 20th, 2022).

Chapter III – At (another) Matriarch's

I here present the interaction I was pleased to have with my assistant's closest friends, Ukhuna and Omkhulu, and their children, Bomini and Mandisa. They were the second group of recipients of child support grants to answer the semi-structured interviews that Amahle and I conceived at the beginning of our job. Ukhuna and Omkhulu received us in their house for six interviewing sessions between December 20th, 2019, and January 2020.

Ukhuna and Omkhulu, both in their thirties, are the elder siblings of four. They have lived together since December 2018, after their 85-year-old grandmother, Lisa, died. Until then, the two sisters had dwelt in different houses. At 6, Ukhuna was given to Lisa, whilst Omkhulu remained with their parents. Distanced by only 100 meters in the same street, they did not grow up apart. On weekends, Omkhulu would enjoy life at *magogo*'*s*.

The chapter centres on the two sisters and their children but benefits significantly from my assistant, Amahle. The latter, Ukhuna and Omkhulu, have been neighbours for three decades. Their backyards communicate through a wooden gate, and their children refer to them all as *ma* (mother). They share memories, issues, and desiderata to an impressive extent. Their lives intertwined, and so did their discourse. Among them, I sometimes found myself listening to a choir.

Amahle's contribution here is threefold: she provided the opportunity to interview Ukhuna and Omkhulu and their children, helped me conduct the conversations, and answered part of the interviews in a mixed stance of commentator and interviewee again. Amahle left me an inexhaustible gift: a glance at five coalescing lives in their past, present, and future voices.

The chapter begins with Ukhuna's story, mingles with Omkhulu's, and finishes with 14-year-old Bomini and Mandisa. All interviews took place on their generous veranda

Section I – It was raining

> **Ukhuna:** My name is Ukhuna Benawa. The meaning of my name is rain.
>
> **Why?**
> Because I was born when the rain...

The second in a four-children family, Ukhuna came to life in August 1989. At the time, her parents had not yet married, which they finally did in 1995, once the bride's family received *lobola*. Ukhuna was aged 6. Until then, she, Omkhulu, their mother, and auntie abode at grannie's place.

Ukhuna remained in her father's household for three years. When her auntie passed away, *gogo* Lisa saw herself alone. This intolerable circumstance did not last long.

> **Ukhuna:** My father decided... Like, because we were three, he told my grandmother: 'I'm leaving Ukhuna with you so that you have a child to'…
> **Amahle:** To send to the shops!
> **Ukhuna:** Yes, then I grew up here with my grandmother.

Ukhuna's bond with *gogo* Lisa and her house then took a decisive turn. Yet their attachment dates to my interviewee's birth. Once Ukhuna's mother started feeling contractions, Lisa rushed to find transport and take her daughter to the local clinic where Ukhuna was finally born.

> **Ukhuna:** *Gogo* said: 'I'll call her Ukhuna because it was raining. I was running in the street in the rain, looking for transport! Her name is Ukhuna, the rain'. She named me because of the weather that day.

Ukhuna had *gogo* Lisa as her "everything" and showed no sorrow about her father's long-ago decision to leave her with the matriarch. The latter was her "mother and father"; when Ukhuna missed her genitors, she could visit them just up the street. With time, however, Ukhuna and her parents' bonds weakened. My interviewee first approached the subject with matter-of-factness: they were not "that close" because her parents did not "raise" her. Instead of complaining about her father and mother, Ukhuna expressed allegiance to the matriarch and her house.

> This house I see as my legacy […]. It's my duty to love her house like she did. Because she was there for me, she raised me with all her heart. She loved me as if I'm her own child.

Lisa's being there for Ukhuna created a "duty" that not even death could obliterate. Magogo's house, now Ukhuna's "legacy", remained a bond between the two women.

> **Ukhuna:** I owe my grandmother. I feel like I owe my grandmother for raising me and my child.
>
> **What do you do to pay this debt?**
> I buy her tombstone.
>
> **What else?**
> When I get money, I want to renovate her house, buy new furniture, even paint this wall, everything.
>
> **To do it for her?**
> Yes, to show that I'm grateful, and I won't ever, ever forget that she raised me.

When Ukhuna first deployed the idiom of debt, she did not refer to her grandmother. Right before the excerpt above, we were talking about her father. After *gogo* Lisa died in 2018, Ukhuna's father invited her to return to his home. Why?

> **Ukhuna:** He wants to take care of me now. He feels like he owes me.
> **Amahle:** Maybe he thinks now it's his duty to take care of her cause now *magogo* is gone.
> **Ukhuna:** He feels like he owes me to raise me.
>
> **What does he owe you?**
> **Ukhuna:** Nothing, nothing. Actually, I owe my grandmother. I feel like I owe my grandmother for raising me and my child.

Ukhuna's father felt guilty for not having upbrought his second-born, yet his regret remained unexpressed. Ukhuna termed him a "secretive" man: "He don't want to <u>cough it out</u> and say in words: 'I owe you, my child, because I didn't raise you' (emphasis added). Ukhuna saw the spectre of debt in her father's reactions and general airs, not in unequivocal words. She had no reason to move: "I told him I can't close my home. This is my home"—hers and *gogo's*, whose presence she still felt.

Is your grandma still present in your life?
Ukhuna: I feel, I dream about her, even talking to me.

What was she talking about?
Ukhuna: When I dream, she always says: 'Take care of my house. Stay there. Don't be afraid. I'm still here'.

How do you feel about it?
Ukhuna: I'm happy because when I hear her voice, it's like she's here
Amahle: talking to you...

She's present...
Ukhuna: Yeah.

How do you say to be present in IsiNdebele?
Ukhuna: *Ukhona*
Amahle: *ukhona!*

Is she *ukhona*?
Ukhuna: Yeah. Even though I'm sleeping, I can feel she's here in my room. She's my security guard.

Is she? Does she take care of you?
Ukhuna: Yes!
[And we all laugh].

Ukhuna, Amahle, and I had been talking for a mere 50 minutes. My assistant and I had a semi-structured interview in our pockets and would have followed it if the dynamics of our heart-to-heart had allowed so. Fortunately, it did not. Ukhuna seemed eager to talk about *gogo*, and so I was to listen to her. Having also lost my granny by the end of 2018, I did not feel death and presence as oxymora.

Neither Ukhuna nor I ignored the inconveniences of finitude. We searched for reciprocal solace and tokens that absence should not prevail between our deceased grandmothers and us. We found metaphorical remnants of presence in dreams and feelings. Ukhuna also had a normative sense of *gogo*'s continuity, which she communicated through the notion of respect.

> I'm respecting her. Even though she's not available, I'm respecting her. I teach Bomini and Mandisa everything she taught me. I respect everything she taught me. I used to say: Bomini, no! Gogo doesn't want that. Mandisa, gogo doesn't want that!

Presence's normative remnants call for a normative account. *Gogo* remains an "ought to" (Benda-Beckmann, 2002) or deontological bond between her teachings, Ukhuna, Bomini, and Mandisa. As her house, Lisa is *legacy*, that is, *will*[125] - sovereign will. When (deceased) Lisa does not want this and that, this and that shall not be. For all she was, *gogo* still commands recognition, hence respect for her normative guidelines. That Lisa remains as *law* in the practicalities of Ukhuna's motherhood does not obfuscate more cheerful aspects of her former presence. In merry-making time, too, Lisa wanted herself respected. Amahle called my attention to *gogo's* demands when Ukhuna and her friends drank on the veranda.

> **Amahle:** Daniel, you see, gogo, when we used to drink like this, she would ask: 'Buy me mine'
> **Ukhuna:** 'Where's mine'?
> **Amahle:** 'Where's mine? Buy me a *Savanah*' [a local alcoholic beverage]
> [We laugh out loud].
>
> **Did you drink together?**
> **Ukhuna:** No! But when I put some beers in the fridge, she say: 'Buy me a Savanah; I like it!'.
>
> **Would you buy her a Savanah?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yeah! Cause [otherwise] she would take those beers and hide it! 'You can drink; why I'm not drinking?'
>
> **How many Savanah would you buy her?**
> **Ukhuna:** One! She only wanted one! Then she say: 'You can drink the way you like, I don't care'.
>
> **She wouldn't complain about your drinking?**
> **Ukhuna:** No, actually, she was enjoying. She say it's safe. She didn't want a girl to walk around at night.

Magogo intertwined normative and merry-making motives in a composite but unitary motherhood technique. First, she wanted her presence, her "being there" (Ferguson, 2021), recognised in a single *Savanah*. Tokenistic drinking? Yes, symbolic drinking. Gift theorists claim that humans need things to recognise each other and reaffirm their bonds (Hénaff, 2010; Caillé, 2019). With the demand of a Savanah, Lisa wanted her authoritative presence to be publicly acknowledged. Publicly and under the

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[125] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). Legacy. In *thefreedictionary.com.* Retrieved on 17th, January, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/legacy.

penalty of curtailing fun (hiding the other beers). Second, *gogo* did not want her *daughter* to wander about by night. Taverns and associated alleys are dodgy, especially for women. At home, Lisa had Ukhuna under her nose.

> **Ukhuna:** Even loud music, she didn't...
>
> **She didn't complain?**
> No, no.

Why would she? By being generous, *gogo* advanced her paramount objective: keeping Ukhuna safe and attached to their home. This ambivalent mix of liberality and self-interest suggests that a gift-like rapport steered Lisa in her dedication and demands toward Ukhuna. At nine, the latter was given to *gogo*, who gained rights over the child she received, such as sending her to the shops. When I asked which IsiNdebele word meant to send, Amahle spelt *unthume*, and Ukhuna imagined her father's words to *gogo*:

> **Ukhuna:** 'I'm giving you a child so that you can...'
> **Amahle:** you can...
> **Ukhuna:** which one? *Thuma in* [to send in]
> **Amahle:** so that you can
> **Ukhuna:** have a child!
> **Amahle:** have a child! So that when you want something at the shop, you ask her to go and buy something.
> **Ukhuna:** I was the one assisting my grandmother.

I asked Ukhuna what else she did for her grandmother: "Fetch water; when she wash dishes, I wipe them". Ukhuna learned to cook at twelve but did not have to do it daily. While alive, *gogo* kept engaged in home chores.

> **Ukhuna:** She said to me: 'Ukhuna, when...'
> **Amahle:** 'I can't do things for myself'
> **Ukhuna:** 'I will tell you. Now I'm able to do it for myself'. I never do anything for her except cleaning the house, cooking. But when I'm not around, she cook. When I'm not around, she clean the house.

Interestingly, Ukhuna kept the present tense whenever remembering *gogo*'s words. Unfortunately, I did not explore this aspect of her speech. I was then keen on listening more about the differences between *nagelela* (to take care) and *ukusiza* (to help). When asked whether she was mainly caring for or helping magogo, Ukhuna called my attention to a third notion.

Ukhuna: Actually, she liked it because I was staying with her. She was having someone at the house.

How do you say having someone in the house? Is it *nagelela*?
Ukhuna: No, to have conversation...
Amahle: to have someone to talk to; to have someone maybe to watch TV.
Ukhuna: to drink tea; to have someone at home.

Which is the word?
Amahle/Ukhuna: *ukubanomuntu endlini*.
To have someone to talk to, to watch TV, to drink tea together. *Ukubanomuntu endlini*: not to get bored [126].

In the previous chapter, I observed that *gogo* Mary and Lassy, respectively Amahle's mother and son, also entertained a rapport premised on companionship. They watched football, laughed, and "celebrated each other". Then my assistant also stated: **"**When you are alone, you have a lot of stress. You think too much". These distressing mental states and "to get bored" constitute variations on a theme: the agonies attributed to solitude and inactivity (whether caused by joblessness or the lack of a social partnership). From such forms of suffering, I deduce a model of the good predicated on the social bond, that is, on concretely "having each other" – as Amahle justified why many South African mothers leave their sons with grannies. Let us listen to what Omkhulu, Ukhuna's sister, had to say about why the latter was given to *gogo* Lisa.

Omkhulu: That's why Ukuna grew up here. My auntie passed away in 1998, and it was no one [to stay with *gogo*] cause my mother married. My father said: 'Take Ukhuna and stay with this young girl'.

Otherwise, magogo would stay alone.
Omkhulu: Alone. That's why she [*gogo*] told mom and my dad: 'Please, give me just one child, just one child, so I can stay with her, just one'. And my father said: 'Ah, just take Ukhuna because you are not supposed to stay alone. Just take Ukhuna' (emphasis added).

Why *magogos* are not supposed to stay alone?
Omkhulu: It's not right!

It's not right?

[126] Google Translate renders *ukubanomuntu endlini* precisely as "having someone in the house". In *translategoogle.com.* Retrieved on 17th January, 2023, from https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=english+zulu+translation&ie=UTF8&oe=UTF-8.

> **Omkhulu:** Nooo! You have to cook yourself, clean the house, no! She's supposed to get someone who can help her.
>
> **What else, just help with domestic activities?**
> **Omkhulu:** It [is] not right. To stay alone?

Right means both entitlements and that which is fair and correct in social relations (Cardoso de Oliveira, L. 2022b). Since the second meaning is evident in Omkhulu's words, let us search for the first. Are there rights at play?

> Supposed
> 4. (foll. by: to) expected or obliged (to)
> Adj.1 Supposed [...]
> [Related to] obligated - caused by law or conscience to follow a certain course; 'felt obligated to repay the kindness'[127].

According to Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2019), normativity comprises consciousness, sentiments, and feelings - such as feeling obligated to "repay the kindness". *Gogo* was once given Ukhuna not to feel bored and "think too much". She raised Ukhuna in care, love, and law. Not only Ukhuna. Omkhulu also grew up close to Lisa and later felt the corollary obligation of repaying *gogo*'s kindness with her own daughter, if necessary.

> **Omkhulu:** It [is] not right! To stay alone? Even I told myself that when she [her daughter] grew up, and we see that my grandmother is... We are supposed to do everything for her! I'll never take my grandmother to that old-age home. No! I prefer to [say to] Mandisa: go and stay with your grand, yes. It's not right!

Gogo Lisa passed away in 2018. One year later, Ukhuna and Omkhulu continued to deploy the present tense to speak of their obligations towards the matriarch. Had it been necessary, Omkhulu would have given her daughter to *gogo* Lisa to prevent the latter from being alone. She would have behaved like her father, who, thirty years ago, gave Ukhuna to *gogo* Lisa. Omkhulu was not given, but also received the gift of *gogo's* love. The two sisters, her offspring, and the matriarch embarked on a love-based, law-based rapport in which the juniors were supposed to be there for the elder and vice-versa. As a

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[127] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). supposed (Adj.1). In *thefreedictionary.com.* Retrieved on 17th, January, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/supposed.

matter of expectations, duties, and feelings, their arrangement was wholly legalistic[128] and sentimental, therefore Maussian. When love, care, and law are at play, grannies and children make a reciprocal gift for each other: *iKaya lakagogo iKaya abantawana boke*[129].

Section II: "I understand a gift is from your heart"

Amahle and I had the second interviewing session with Ukhuna and Omkhulu a couple of days after the first. We then followed the semi-structured interviews. Issues on the gift soon emerged, but not related to Ukhuna's being once given to *magogo*. On the contrary, Ukhuna resorted to the idiom of the gift to criticise her parents' behaviour after the death of *gogo* Lisa.

Before examining Ukhuna's gift-based grievances, let us consider other information about my interviewee and her grandmother. *Gogo* Lisa was born in Kwa-Ndebele in 1933 and had seven children[130]. Between 1986 and 2001, she worked as a cleaner in a public health care clinic. Once retired, she (and Ukhuna) lived on an old-age grant.

Ukhuna first attended school between 1996 and 2005. Then, at 17, she got pregnant from her first boyfriend. In 2006, Bomini was born, and Ukhuna resumed her studies the following year.

> **Ukhuna:** I left my child with my grandmother; I go back to school, and then she raised my son for me. She was there for me all the way (emphasis added).

In Isizulu, be there for[131] and be present[132] read as *ube khona*. It was such a supportive mode of presence (*ukhona*) for her and her child that made Ukhuna remain at *gogo's* house after her death.

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[128] Widlok (2016) criticizes Mauss for introducing a "legalistic" bias in social theory. I criticise Widlok (2016) in the next chapter.
[129] *Granny's home is children's home.*
[130] Of which only two were alive in 2019.
[131] Google Translate. (n.d). be there for. In *translate.google.com.* Retrieved on 17th, January, 2023, from https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=english+zulu+dictionary&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8.
[132] Google Translate. (n.d). be present. In *translate.google.com.* Retrieved on 17th, January, 2023, from https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=english+zulu+dictionary&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8

Ukhuna: When I got pregnant, she was here for me. She raised my son until last year. Last year, 23rd November 2018, she passed away. Because she raised me, I took it as my duty to stay at this home (emphasis added)

Has your grandmother ever complained about raising you and your child?
Ukhuna: No.

Did she tell you: 'now, Ukhuna, you must work?'
Ukhuna: She didn't. Actually, she was there (emphasis added)

Magogo also had a prominent caring role during Ukhuna's pregnancy. For instance, she sometimes bather her granddaughter – "because I had a big tummy!" (Ukhuna). Ukhuna could bathe herself, but Lisa wanted to help her. *Gogo* wanted to be there for Ukhuna in different manners. Sharing these reminiscences delighted Ukhuna, Amahle and me. We were pleasantly laughing when I asked Ukhuna the following:

How is it to be bathed by your grandmother? Tell me about this experience, please!
Ukhuna [still laughing]: I was shy the first time.

And in the 4th, the 5th time?
Ukhuna: I was enjoying then! [We laugh out loud].
Amahle [clapping]: You're naughty!

Still obsessed with the differences between *nagelela* (to take care) and *ukusiza* (to help), I asked which she applied in the case of bathing.

Ukhuna: *Uyamsiza*
Amahle: *uyamsiza*

What else did she do as *uyamsiza*?
Ukhuna: After giving birth?

Yes
Ukhuna: She was teaching me how to handle a baby because I was young, at the age of 17, yes. How to bathe a baby, how to feed a baby, how to breastfeed a baby.

And is it *uyamsiza*, too?
Ukhuna*:* *Uyamsiza*.

Ukusiza/Uyamsiza was first explained to me as meaning "to help" when someone could not do something by oneself. In strictly physical terms, Ukhuna could bathe herself

during pregnancy and handle a baby. Yet her "culture" posited that someone should help her perform these activities and introduce her to motherhood techniques. Again, there was *gogo* Lisa for her. In teaching Ukhuna how to mother her baby and in bathing and cooking for her, Lisa acted out of love and delight, but not only. She also paid tribute to cultural normative guidelines.

> **Ukhuna:** After giving birth, our culture says... When you come home from the hospital, you stay in the bedroom. You don't cook; you don't clean; you don't do anything. You have to have a helper to cook for you, even to bathe your baby, everything (emphasis added).
>
> **To bathe you as well...**
> **Ukhuna:** Yes
>
> **So, a mother is supposed to stay in bed after giving birth?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yes
>
> **What do you call this custom?**
> **Ukhuna:** *Mtswedzi.*

A loving and caring individual, *gogo* Lisa also belonged to her time and culture. She, therefore, had duties[133], such as *mtswedzi* - or to help a novice mother[134]. If *gogo* had obligations, Ukhuna had to have a helper. When asked how much time *magogo* should perform the responsibilities of *mtswedzi* toward her, my interviewee said that "it depended".

> **It depends on what?**
> **Amahle:** Umbilical cord.
> **Ukhuna:** Umbilical cord. It must fall.
>
> **When the umbilical cord falls**
> **Ukhuna:** then you come out.
>
> **You can walk, you can bathe yourself.**
> **Ukhuna:** Even cook.
>
> **How much time?**
> **Ukhuna:** Three to four days.

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[133] Moore (2013) argues that many South Africans consider the *parenting* of grandchildren as a duty old ladies are supposed to carry out.
[134] Google translates *mtswedzi* as "girl". In *translategoogle.com.* Retrieved on 20th December, 2023, from https://translate.google.com/?sl=zu&tl=en&text=mtswedzi&op=translate.

I did not have the intuition to explore other meanings of the umbilical cord. However, I listened to Ukhuna on another cultural index of motherhood: the womb. Ukhuna was then telling me that *magogo* would sometimes call her by the name of her mother or mother's sister – that is, Lisa's two alive daughters.

> **Ukhuna:** my mother is Umadi, and she [gogo] used to call me Umadi.
> **Amahle:** And then she remembered: 'Voetsek, man! You're not Umadi. You're Ukhuna!' [Amahle and Ukhuna laugh].
>
> **How did you feel about that?**
> **Ukhuna:** I feel happy! Because I feel like I'm her child. She takes me as her biological child!
>
> **What do you understand by the word biological?**
> **Ukhuna:** From her womb. I felt it like I'm from her womb. So, she takes me as her kid. Her grandchild is my son, Bomi. So, me, I call her *mama*. I felt like I can call her *mama*. Then my child called her *gogo*.

Ukhuna's son was born in 2007 and named Bomini. What does it mean? "Live, have life" – Amahle first said. "Have life", Ukhuna iterated. One year after giving birth and name – that is, social life – to her son, Ukhuna resumed her studies. She finished high school but failed matric, and then concentrated thoroughly on Bomini's upbringing. In 2015, Ukhuna started working.

> **Ukhuna:** In 2015, I started to sell table charms [tableware]
>
> **Was it your first job?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yes.
>
> **How much money could you make per month?**
> **Ukhuna:** Maybe ZAR 1200 to ZAR 1600.
>
> **Why did you start working?**
> **Ukhuna:** Because I've got needs. My child was old [aged 9]. When the child started growing, he needs more.
>
> **What did he need?**
> **Ukhuna:** Expensive clothes.
>
> **Like Adidas[135]?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yeah, Adidas, whatever, because he's a boy.

[135] I had already interviewed Amahle's son, Lassy, who was keen on having Adidas sandals, which Amahle soon gave him.

> **Do you think boys need to have brands?**
> **Ukhuna:** I like to do that; actually, I like.
> **Amahle:** It's good, yeah, it's good.
>
> **Was he asking for it?**
> **Ukhuna:** He didn't ask, but me, I like to do it for him, as a mother.

In this synonymic fabric of preferences and needs, it is difficult to discern one and the other. Such an intertwinement of tastes and wants might be a reasonable criterion to assess the value and possibilities of social assistance in cash. It was not, however, Ukhuna's first standard to judge the child support grant.

> **Are you happy about the money you're receiving from the government?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yes... I can say I'm happy because I didn't work for it. It's for free. Government is helping where she can.

Ukhuna was my third interviewee in Kwa-Ndebele to deploy the concept of "free money". Before her, Amahle and her mother had also mentioned such a notion. Neither of them was precisely happy nor felt it was fair to complain about a social benefit without a counterpart in labour. Ukhuna put this mix of realism and moderation towards the child support grant in the following terms: "It's small, but I cannot say it's small". When asked how much money she deemed enough for the monthly needs of a child, Ukhuna again sounded realistic and modest to my ears.

> Because it's a social grant for children, I think the best amount... maybe ZAR 800 per child. I think it's enough for a child.

Such was almost two times the sum she received monthly (ZAR 430). Fortunately, Ukhuna still worked as a commissioned salesperson, going door-to-door to offer tableware. With the average ZAR 1.400 she took as profit, Ukhuna bought most of the household food stock. She accordingly reserved the child support grant for Bomini's needs. She gave him daily ZAR 5 as "pocket money" to buy snacks and airtime. With the remaining amount (ZAR 280), she purchased him soft porridge (for breakfast), a t-shirt, a haircut, etc.

Ukhuna believed the child support grant belonged to children: "Because it's small, it's for the child only". If need be, she could buy her airtime – "Just ZAR 30 to call my customers". Most of the time, though, she did not deploy the grant on herself. The

business of table charms allowed her to stand on her own. Occasionally, though, Ukhuna could not make ends meet.

Question 11 of the semi-structured interviews (see Annex I) read: Do you borrow money from neighbours, family, or friends to help you when you are out of cash? Ukhuna answered me laconically: "Not from family, from neighbours". Until then, I had believed the job as a saleswoman gave her a steady income. Suddenly, however, that seemed not to be the case, and I stepped back. Do you have to borrow sometimes? "Yes", Ukhuna told me, and Amahle intervened energetically:

> Why not from your family? That's a good question: why not from your family? [Amahle raises her voice a tone further]. Why not from your family, why [from] your neighbours?
>
> **Ukhuna:** It's a burden. I don't want to be a burden for them. My family? No. When my granny passed away, they said: 'Don't cry. We are here for you'.
>
> **Amahle:** Yes...
> **Ukhuna:** But even today, they are not there.

Amahle had spontaneously set the stage and the tone for a familial drama framed as a matter of "not being there for". When *gogo* Lisa died, and Ukhuna saw herself without her former financial linchpin, her parents told her not to worry; they would help her. These, however, were empty words, for they did not make themselves present to their daughter. My assistant continued to conduct the subject con brio.

> **Amahle:** Daniel, here's the question [And she turns to Ukhuna, first in IsiNdebele]
>
> **Amahle:** Someday, did they [Ukhuna's parents] come to visit you, just to check on you?
> **Ukhuna:** [Not] even a single day...
> **Amahle:** It's a year now since gogo passed away!
>
> **They have never been here?**
> **Ukhuna:** No
> **Amahle:** No one?
> **Ukhuna:** No one... They call only. 'Are you ok?'
> **Amahle:** They don't send money, just to…
> **Ukhuna:** No.
> **Amahle:** Just to check on *gogo's* house?
> **Ukhuna:** No!
> **Amahle:** They don't come just to check on *gogo's* house?

Ukhuna: They say: 'Are you ok?' On the phone...
Amahle: On the phone?
Ukhuna: I say, yes, I'm ok.
Amahle: Not physically here?
Ukhuna: No.
Amahle: Wow!

Amahle more than knew this story: she had helped her friend navigate the deep waters of remorse. Nevertheless, my assistant still felt appalled and wanted to impart it to me dramatically. How could Ukhuna's parents deny their support and keep only sparse phone conversations with their daughter? How dared they when *gogo* Lisa, Ukhuna's "everything", was no longer there? To be sure, Ukhuna's parents observed part of the normative conventions applying to death. They attended and afforded *gogo*'s funeral, offering "money, food, and everything".

> **Amahle:** [After burial] people have to come and eat, and then have to find some food. We take the table outside, we put the food, and when they come back from the cemetery, they stand in a line here. [Some get a] take-away; [others] eat [here]. After eating, drinks.
> **Ukhuna:** Drinks.
> **Amahle:** If you want to stay for drinks, you stay for drinks.
> **Ukhuna:** If you wanna go, you go.

Sponsoring the burial ceremony and the so-called "after-tears" – when the attendants to the funeral eat and drink – sufficed not. The whole funerary set of normative expectations included physical presence. In the aftermath of Lisa's death, Ukhuna's dearests were supposed to sleep for a week at her house, filling the void left by the deceased with bodies and good spirits. One such dearest was Amahle's mother, Mary.

> **Ukhuna:** She comfort me from day one *gogo* passed away. She even sleep with me the whole week while my family was not around. We slept in the dining room cause we removed all furniture.
>
> **Why?**
> **Amahle:** It's our <u>culture</u> (emphasis added).
> **Ukhuna:** It's our culture. When... We remove everything...
> **Amahle:** We remove everything. So that people will sleep with you.
> **Ukhuna:** Yeah.
> **Amahle:** You have a funeral, someone passed away at your family, and then we have to come, more and more and more.
>
> **Many people have to come...**
> **Amahle:** Many people have to come.
> **Ukhuna:** Yeah.
> **Amahle:** And then we sleep here, all of us.

> **Ukhuna:** Yeah.
> **Amahle:** We sleep in the dining room.
> **Ukhuna:** We cook in one place; we eat
> **Amahle:** and we sleep here
> **Ukhuna:** until!
> **Amahle:** until!
> **Ukhuna:** The funeral

Their "culture" – patently cast as a normative entity – has it that when someone dies, the bereaved must enjoy the company of closer friends, who prevent her or him from staying alone and, I assume, 'thinking too much'. A couple of minutes before the two women explained to me the custom of filling the bereaved's home with people, Ukhuna portrayed her vulnerability after *magogo*'s death in the following terms:

> I was so afraid... What I'm going to eat? What I'm going to... <u>Everything was on my mind.</u> Who I'm going to sleep with in this house? (emphasis added).

Ukuna's parents did not help palliate the existential void left by *gogo*'s death, which presupposed daily and nocturne solace until the funeral. Such and other comforts Ukhuna found in Amahle's family and other neighbours. They not only slept at her house but also promised material assistance. When Lisa passed away, Ukhuna faced different but intertwined needs. Seeing herself alone, she experienced the frailty derived from absence - presence's negative face (Widlok, 2016).

> **Ukhuna:** I said, why, *gogo*, you leave me? You leave me alone in this house! What I'm going to eat?

Ukhuna did feel her material existence threatened, because the household had suddenly lost *gogo's* old-age grant (~ZAR 1900). Fortunately, Ukhuna sold table charms at the time and had a child support grant. She did not fall incomeless. Yet losing half of the previous budget entailed quite a financial downgrade. Though she still could survive, she sensed survival at risk – "Eish, I was afraid". From our conversation, how often she resorted to neighbours is uncertain. Whatever the case, she felt free to ask Amahle's mother and others for help.

> **Why do you feel free to borrow from your neighbours, not your parents?**
> **Ukhuna:** Because my neighbours, they keep their promises. They told me: 'Don't you worry, *gogo* leave you for us'.

> **Amahle:** And they are here for you.
> **Ukhuna:** They are. Even *gogo* Mary [Amahle's mother], if I need help, I'm not afraid to go and ask her: *gogo*, I want this.

I did not ask my interviewee what her neighbours gave her, yet I have a frank statement about what her genitors did not give her: a *gift.* After learning that Ukhuna's father and mother had sponsored *magogo*'s funeral, I asked my interviewee whether they had also offered future help. She said they did but never put it into practice. I suggested she could have reminded them of their words, but Ukhuna thought otherwise.

> **You could call them and say: 'Hey, remember?'**
> **Amahle:** Yeah. Why don't you ask? Why don't you ask?
> **Ukhuna:** I understand a gift is from your heart.
> **Amahle:** Ok, that's good!
> **Ukhuna:** A gift is from your heart.
> **Amahle:** Case closed!
> **Ukhuna:** I don't wanna force anyone to help. [It] must come from inside. I don't see any reason to remind them. They know I'm alone here. I don't wanna remind them what they said at the funeral.
> **Amahle:** And they said...
> **Ukhuna:** They said - 'Don't cry, don't cry, we are here for you'.

Not fulfilling promises is a risk inherent to the very act of promising (Arendt, 1958). Still, promises create obligations or debts (Ricouer, 2007), hence the expectation that they will be redeemed. Ukhuna did not want sheer payment (let alone payment on demand). In refusing to remind her genitors of their words at Lisa's funeral, Ukhuna wanted them to act out of love and desire. It was precisely this declaration of philia and the proposal of an alliance through a *gift* (Hénaff, 2010) that Ukhuna's parents denied her.

Ukhuna's emphasis on the period above undoubtedly falls under the voluntary, free dimension of gift-giving. However, she also contrasted promise-abiding neighbours to breaching parents. She felt "free" to demand the former precisely because they kept their promises. In other words, spontaneity was not all that mattered. The case also revolved around the obligatory, constrained dimension of gift exchanges, or better, somewhat constrained and somewhat free.

> *Un acte hybride, chargé d'ambivalence* [...], *à la fois libre et obligé* (Caillé 2019, p.10).

Unfulfilled parental promises and unmet expectations of love and support deepened the abyss under Ukhuna's feet. Fortunately, her neighbours did not allow her to drown. Magogo was no longer there, but her absence was not to be doubled by Ukhuna's. In other words, Ukhuna should not let mourning and overthinking abscond her from her immediate circle of sociability and solace. Ukuna's presence and availability for dearest neighbours ought not to evanesce. An actual instance of giving worked out a subtle equilibrium between being and not being there, and between formal and elective kinship.

> **Did you buy the beers for the after-tears?**
> **Ukhuna:** No, I didn't. But my brother, Amahle's brother, buy for me
> **Amahle:** bought for Ukhuna.
> **Ukhuna:** He said: 'This one is for Ukhuna'.
> **Amahle:** *Sky Vodka*.
> **Ukhuna:** *Sky Vodka* with a case of *Strongbow*. He said
> **Amahle:** 'You know what? This is for you. Just to release your soul. Just to calm down. Gogo passed away, we know, but you have to calm down. You have to be here with us. We are your family'. And then we stay, and then we drink beers (emphasis added).

I asked Ukhuna whether she considered her neighbours to be family. She responded in the affirmative. Amahle took a step further – "More than your family?" Ukhuna started crying. I suggested we should stop. Amahle reinforced my suggestion but also asked: "You want to continue?" Ukhuna nodded, and Amahle took another step forward.

Section III – "Can I Ask You a Question?"

The next question of the semi-structured interview read: How is the feeling when you are pregnant? Ukhuna answered Amahle in the following terms:

> **Ukhuna:** The first time, I was so scared, but after maybe a couple of months, I started bonding with my baby. I was ready to be a mother and raise him or her with love, with care. I was so happy cause I was starting to bond with him or her.

Sooner in the interview, we were told that *magogo* helped Ukhuna accept being pregnant. Once the fears associated with her novel existential framework started

dissipating, the joys of motherhood emerged, centred on the social-biological bond between mother and foetus. By definition, Ukhuna's happiness with this new bond was derived from "attachment" or the "formation of a close human relationship"[136]. Such was a social pleasure par excellence because it concerned the mother, the foetus, and Ukhuna's family.

> **Ukhuna:** I go to the doctor to see...
> **Amahle:** the sonar.
> **Ukhuna:** The sonar, to see the gender of the baby, then I found out he's a boy.
>
> **Were you happy?**
> **Ukhuna:** A lot because we have only one brother. So, I said: he's going to extend Thato [her brother]. He's going to be a brother to us.
>
> **What is it to extend someone?**
> **Ukhuna:** Ungezelela [Amahle writes it down in my notebook]. Cause I have two sisters and one brother. So, when I found out he's a boy, I said: he's going to be our brother too.

Ungezelela[137] means "to add". Ukhuna was about to bring a second brother to her family. Ukhuna's parents had been "blessed with four children": Omkhulu (aged 35), Ukhuna (32), Khetu (25), and Thato (14). Ukhuna's youngest and only male sibling came to life in 2005, precisely when she got pregnant. This coincidence was even more joyous because it meant the extension of male lives in a predominantly female family. There also was a more mother-centred pleasure with the coming of a new life, for a child is someone to whom a mother can "talk".

> **What is it to be a mother, Ukhuna?**
> A mother is someone who care, who love until... To take care, even to support. Someone who can talk to... Cause many children they're raised by their mothers. So, the mother is the only person who bond with the baby. Cause many fathers
> **Amahle:** they run away.
> **Ukhuna:** They run away. So, only we raise our child. Actually, we're like single mothers.

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[136] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). Bonding. In thefreedictionary.com. Retrieved January 16th, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/bonding.

[137] Google Translate. (n.d). Ungezelela. In translate.google.com. Retrieved January, 16th, 2023, from https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=english+zulu+dictionary&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8.

When explaining why she was given to *magogo*, Ukhuna observed that her granny was not supposed to stay home alone. She needed someone with whom "to have conversation". In the period above, Ukhuna portrayed motherhood as a conversational or dialogical bond. She also indicated the crossroads between motherhood's joys and predicaments. Historically associated with segregation and the frontier economy, father absenteeism persists even when fathers live in the adjacencies.

> **Ukhuna:** We're like single mothers, even if their fathers are available. They see their child sometimes; full-time, it is my duty [...]. He [the father] is not here every time; who is every time is me. I wash him; I make breakfast for him, give him his pocket money, everything, even wash his clothes. And when he came from school maybe late, after three, I'm the one who's getting worried – Where's my child?

Availability, where fathers are concerned, means potentiality rather than actuality. Physical proximity – or "adjacency" (Ferguson, 2021) – in this case, is not to be confused with the social obligations, worries, and joys attached to parental labour, which Ukhuna considers her non-stop "duty". As a consequence of raising children alone, only mothers properly bond with them. The corresponding lack of attachment between children and fathers causes, among other things, "fear".

> **Ukhuna:** Everything is on my shoulders. Cause, I don't know, he's afraid to ask his father. Anything he wants, [he calls me]: 'Mama'
> **Amahle:** 'Ice cream'.
> **Ukhuna:** No, Bomi, why can't you ask your father? 'Ah, mama, ah, mama...'
> **Amahle:** He's afraid.
> **Ukhuna:** Our child are like that.
> **Amahle:** Lassy too. Lassy is so...
> **Ukhuna:** They depend on us for everything.
> **Amahle:** Lassy is so generous. I can say he's so furious, or he's so dependable on me, not on his father.

Amahle then struggled with the appropriate words to characterise Lassy's spirits towards his fathers. When explaining why Bomi did not demand his father an ice cream, Amahle observed that he was "afraid". As to her own kid, Lassy, she applied three utterly different terms: "generous", "furious", and "dependable" (on her). Later, she again remarked that Lassy was furious with his father - with his father's absence, I suppose.

Fortunately, Bomi's father started making himself present, in financial terms, after *gogo* Lisa was deceased. While the latter lived, he helped Ukhuna only "there and there".

Once the matriarch died, he started giving Ukhuna ZAR 700 monthly in recognition of a "debt" he had accumulated toward her.

> **Ukhuna:** He said - 'Ukhuna, I owe you. You raised a child. You raised our child by yourself, so don't be afraid to use my money for yourself'. He said – 'I'll take care of you' - after my granny passed away. Yeah, he said so; he said so.

Money takes care of people, Luthando once told me. Accordingly, giving money imparts care and is a form of presence that my interlocutors appreciate. On the contrary, unprovided cash communicates a form of absence that my interlocutors deplore and resent. Sentiments and economics intertwine in many African contexts, whether through gifts (and counter-gifts) or money (Levine 1973, p.134). In both forms, material transactions play an outstanding moral and sentimental[138] role in social relations, particularly among kin.

> There is another dimension of content, however, that Africans emphasise when describing relationships of equality or inequality [...]. Africans are frankly and directly concerned with the material transfer itself as indicative of the quality of the relationship (Levine 1973, pp.133-4).

The fact that Ukhuna's ex-partner resumed a care-based rapport through money after Lisa's death was not trivial. I cannot say if and how it impacted the relationship between Bomi and his father. In any case, the latter's acknowledging a "debt "towards Ukhuna and attempting to redeem it through monthly financial help recast the relationship between father and mother in a favourable light. When asked how she feels about him, Ukhuna spoke light-heartedly.

> Ah, today we talk too much [a lot]. And we don't fight. We understand each other for the sake of the baby.

Bomini's father had been absent during most of his son's upbringing. This typical (hélas) pattern of male involvement and care began when Ukhuna decided to separate from him. Bomini was aged two. Until then, his father had been supportive, or, as Ukhuna

[138] Kopytoff is also worth quoting on the matter: "Consequently, the modern Western tendency to separate the realm of sentiment from the realm of economic relations and material exchange did not exist in traditional Africa" (Kopytoff, 1987, p.39).

put it, "he was there until we broke up". They finally separated because Bomini's father tried to control Ukhuna's every movement. Even though they dwelt in different houses, he behaved like a "control freak. At some point, Ukhuna decided that such was not the life she wanted to live.

Then Bomini's father turned absent, offering help only sometimes. Ukhuna benefited from a child support grant, but we shall not overestimate its powers. Neither shall we overplay *gogo*'s Lisa old-age grant. Undoubtedly, it allowed her to remain "there" for Ukhuna and Bomini. She could buy food for the household and help her granddaughter with ordinary expenses, such as transport to the health clinic and medication. Yet *gogo* could not afford, for instance, all the milk formula Bomi needed, and Ukhuna was not breastfeeding. Fortunately, another *gogo,* the paternal, was there.

> **Ukhuna:** The one who was buying the milk was gogo Lucy.
>
> **Is she still close to Bomi?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yoooo! A lot! She will kill you for Bomi!

When Ukhuna got pregnant, she and her boyfriend were only 16. Neither worked by then. Consequently, care - financial and otherwise - was provided by *gogo* Lucy.

> **Ukhuna:** She said to me: 'Everything you need, you just call me'. She was so happy! It was her first grandchild, yeah. So, she was supportive.

I did not have the pleasure of meeting *gogo* Lucy, but I fancy she is a generous lady, inclined to give and help for the joy of it. I cannot, though, neglect Ukhuna's syntax, which casts her mother's in-law support as a consequence of having a first grandchild and being happy. *Gogo* Lucy felt much *obliged*[139], in the polyvalence of a term in which *law* and *willingness* blend in the single but complex gesture of thanking.

> **Ukhuna:** Bomi arrived in this world at 10:50 p.m. on Saturday. They [Bomi's grandparents] called me: 'Thank you, thank you for making [us] grandparents'. After seven days, [gogo Lucy] come here with clothes and everything, all stuff for the baby. Gogo is so kind and caring. Gogo was so happy.

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[139] Merriam-Webster. (n.d). Obliged. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved 16th, January, 2023, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oblige.

Do not think the reader that all *gogos* provide care and solve debts of gratitude in the same manner. Familial rifts remain an area to be studied (Du Toit and Neves, 2009), and conflicts in South Africa and elsewhere constitute a privileged instance to examine the varying quality of social bonds (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2012). Amahle's relationship with her in-laws is a case in point; I shall comment on it later. My point now is that, in being supportive, *gogo* Lucy did act out of pleasure and gratitude, but not only. There was also a more normative aspect to her behaviour. Duty and desire (Karsenti, 2012a) followed seamlessly in Ukhuna's speech. Again, "culture" stood as her normative reference.

> **Ukhuna:** Gogo is so kind and caring. Gogo was so happy. After one month... Our culture says when you're pregnant, they [the father's parents] have to pay a money to...
> **Amahle:** *ukuhlawala marasizothini*. What can we say? To pay the damages.
> **Ukhuna:** After one month, Bomi's father came and paid the damages.
>
> **How much?**
> **Ukhuna:** ZAR 2000.
>
> **To help you with the whole pregnancy?**
> **Ukhuna:** No, just to pay.

To my normative ears, it was just to accomplish a customary duty. One, however, performed with pleasure: pleasure and through Bomi's father, who solved, with his parent's money, the damages attributed to pregnancy. A schoolboy, he could not afford the compensation imposed by (customary) "law for loss or injury"[140]. Which loss? Literally[141], *ukuhlawala marasizothini* means loss of weight[142]. According to my interlocutors, at stake were loss of "waist", "figure", "life"; in sum, "ruin".

> **Ukhuna [**impersonating *gogo* Lucy]: 'My son ruined this home'.
> **Ruined?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yeah, it's like you're wrong when you get pregnant a girl. You're wrong.

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[140] Merriam-Webster. (n.d). Damages. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved January 16th, 2023, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/damages.

[141] Google translates the IsiZulu expression *ukuhlawala marasizothini* as "to lose weight". In *translategoogle.com.* Retrieved on January 22nd, 2024, from https://translate.google.com.br/?sl=zu&tl=en&text=ukuhlawala%20marasizothini.&op=translate.

[142] Amahle told me that she decided to stop breastfeeding her secondborn when she noticed she was losing weight.

> **Why?**
> **Ukhuna:** Our culture says so. You have to pay the damages.
>
> **Cause you got...**
> **Ukhuna:** Someone pregnant. It's like you...
>
> **You ruined her life...**
> **Amahle:** You ruined her life
> **Ukhuna:** Yes. So, you have to pay the damages.
> **Amahle:** And you ruined her figure, the waist.

I was puzzled. Since fertility is a paramount value in South Africa and elsewhere in the continent (Krige, 1968; Levine, 1973), how could it also be associated with ruin? I saw the point of a changed body, the discomforts of pregnancy, and the toils implied by parenthood. Still, to cast the payment of damages as compensation for a "ruin" sounded contradictory beyond my immediate comprehension.

> **Is it a ruin to be a mother?**
> **Ukhuna:** No, no, no!
> **Amahle:** To us, to be a mother is not ruining, but for the family... You ruined the family's...
>
> **Reputation?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yes!
> **Amahle:** Reputation! You ruined the girl's reputation, and you ruined...
> **Ukhuna:** even her future!
> **Amahle:** Her future, cause she has to raise the baby, maybe two years before going back to school. So, you have to pay the damages.

The word ruin had initially sounded exaggerated to my male, ignorant and (then) childless ears, but all things considered, pregnancy involved a set of social and existential shifts worth of compensation. Amahle and Ukhuna felt that paying an indemnity for a loss as ample as "the future" was a just cultural norm - "for Black people, it's fair". In addition to the support Ukhuna found in her own family, I assume *gogo*'s Lucy law-abiding behaviour helped my interviewee overcome the anguishing atmosphere she once breathed.

> **Ukhuna:** I was so scared because I was so young. I have to drop school to raise a child. After maybe two months, I started accepting that I'm going to be a mother. Then, I started to bond with my unborn baby. I was looking forward to be a mother.

Unfortunately, not all mothers encounter the same disposition from in-laws. Amahle, as mentioned, once found only scant and ill-willed support from Lassy's paternal grandparents. When I interviewed her alone, she voiced moderate criticism toward them. At Ukhuna's house, though, Amahle seemed comfortable to vent accumulated resentment.

Lassy's father had been an abusive partner, but Amahle never resorted to the police: "I don't know what was blocking me". Her family and his occasionally met to try to terminate violence, but in vain: "He apologised and then started again". Amahle finally broke up with him in 2006. Until then, her frequent complaints imbued Lassy's paternal grandparents with animosity towards her.

Lassy was born in 2003. The following year, Amahle resumed high school. At the time, *gogo* Mary worked outside her home, and the one-year infant was left with his paternal grandparents. His grandfather, incidentally, was Ukhuna's father's brother. Ukhuna ate daily at his house. Also pursuing her secondary studies, Ukhuna did not benefit from a satisfactory feeding scheme at school.

> **Amahle:** When Ukhuna arrived [at her father's brother home], they would tell her: 'Take your friend's baby, change the pampers, and feed him'.
> **Ukhuna:** Sometimes I would go back to school without eating cause time is out.
> **Amahle:** Cause, why? They were giving the baby to her.
> **Ukhuna:** They said: '[Your] friend's child, [your] friend's child'.

Lassy's father's death in 2015 represented a turning point. Amahle and Lassy's paternal grandparents reconciled, for the latter then saw in the small boy the possibility to "close the gap" (*ukuvala)* left by his perished father – see Chapter II. What surprised me, however, was that in caring for "her friend's child", Ukhuna bonded with him.

> **Ukhuna:** He's my son. Even today, when he starts doing some things I don't like, I tell him: [Lassy] if you push me…
> **Amahle:** push me too far
> **Ukhuna:** too far…
> **Amahle:** I'll beat you!
> **Ukhuna:** I'll beat you because I raised you! I [would] go back to school without food because I was changing your nappies! And I was so young. I was not having a child at that time!
> **Amahle:** Yes, at that time…
> **Ukhuna:** Bomi was not there.
> **Amahle:** Yes.
> **Ukhuna:** But I started raising a child, Lassy!

Amahle: Lassy!
Ukhuna/Amahle: Lassy!

Though acquainted with the imagery of the African household, with “many mothers” (Oyewumi, 2000, p.1097), the junctures of Ukhuna’s, Amahle’s, and Lassy’s lives rendered me speechless. Noticing my disarray, Amahle exclaimed: “Surpriiiise!” The two women laughed at my discomposure. A few days later, I learned how much obliged Amahle felt toward her friend Ukhuna. My assistant then articulated the quality of their relationship in the idioms of money and motherhood. I also came to know that more lives coalesced around theirs. Omkhulu, Ukhuna’s elder sister, had joined the conversation.

Section IV: “It’s a blessing; it’s my work; it’s my duty”

Omkhulu – or *queen* – was born in Kwa-Ndebele in 1984. The elder of four children, she was named by a “sister” (nurse) in the local clinic. The latter, Omkhulu’s mother, and *magogo* Lisa worked together, the last two as cleaners. By the end of pregnancy, Omkhulu’s mother arrived at work, and her contractions began. The *sister* examined her and realised the baby was about to come out. Time was insufficient to transfer the parturient to the local hospital: “So, she just helped my mother”. Afterwards, the nurse suggested the name Omkhulu.

Omkhulu: Mama told [her]: ‘It’s a beautiful name, it’s fine, I can take it’.

Unlike Ukhuna (*rain*), who sounded natural when associating her name and birth circumstances, Omkhulu seemed intrigued. At school, no other Omkhulu would ever be called; she bore alone an imperial weight: “This name is too... What can I say? [In] Kwa-Ndebele, we don’t name a child Omkhulu”. Later in life, she came to terms with her name and became somewhat regal herself. When asked about the belief according to which “the name follows the person” (*igalami lyandela*[143]), Omkhulu told me a story.

[143] Or *the following grammar*. Google Translate. (n.d). *Igalami lyandela*. In translate.google.com. Retrieved 16th, January, 2023, from https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=english+zulu+dictionary&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8.

> **Omkhulu:** When I was in Joburg, [a] man called me: 'You look like a princess. You were born in a royal
> **Amahle:** family'
> **Omkhulu:** 'family'. I say I don't, no, why? [And he said]: 'In our country, there's a young girl exactly like you'.
> **Amahle:** And [she is] from the royal house, né?
> **Omkhulu:** Yes...
> **Amahle:** Maybe his spirit tells him, maybe he feels you, he feels the queen in you.

Amahle knew Ukhuna's and Omkhulu's stories by heart. The three women and their children grew up together. Omkhulu had not been given to *magogo* Lisa but found her most profound affective bond in the matriarch: "My mother loves me, but my grandmother told me: 'Omkhulu is my child'. And I feel like I'm the last born of her". Omkhulu lived with Lisa until she was 11 years old. Then, her mother married. After moving to her father's household, she frequented *gogo's* place on weekends.

> **Omkhulu:** Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, I have to help my father with homeworks. And on Friday! I tell my parents that I'm going to spend some time with my grandmother.

> **Amahle:** How much time did you spend with *magogo* here?
> **Omkhulu:** Weekend. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

> **And where did you prefer to stay?**
> **Omkhulu:** Actually, it was here with my grandmother.

I asked why Omkhulu preferred *gogo's* house: "My grandmother was so... so different". Magogo differed particularly from Omkhulu's mother, who did not have the same conversational habits as Lisa. "My mom is exactly like me. She [does not] like to talk [too much]. But my grandmother was talking [about] everything, everything!" By temperament, Omkhulu is a more reticent person. However, she admired and put *magogo*'s talkative virtues into practice with her firstborn, Mandisa.

> **Omkhulu:** I just have to talk about everything to Mandisa and be a friend with Mandisa, even [though] I'm not a person that can talk too much. I prefer to be like... When you [Mandisa] look for advice and everything, just come to *mama*...
> **Omkhulu** [impersonating Mandisa]: 'Mama, even?'. Everything, I said everything, Mandisa.
> **Amahle:** Maybe when she start her periods, or... You can see, an adolescent...

> **Omkhulu** [impersonating Mandisa]: 'This guy told me that he want me. What am I supposed to say to him?' All those things...
> **And you think you're like that because of *magogo*?**
> **Omkhulu:** Yes
>
> **Your magogo made you less secretive?**
> **Omkhulu:** Yes.

With secrecy as an uncommunicative pattern of relation between parents and children, we approach another cultural or normative theme. The adjective secretive was deployed seven times during the six interviewing sessions I had with Ukhuna and Omkhulu. The first to use it was Ukhuna, when she observed that her father could not explicitly acknowledge the debt he felt towards her. After Ukhuna, Amahle also resorted to secretive when accounting for teenage pregnancy in South Africa. She and Ukhuna then cast secrecy as a normative guideline.

> **Amahle:** They [their parents] don't even tell you to use a condom or what. No, they don't tell you 'cause, you know what? In South Africa, our culture is like... They are so secretive.
> **Ukhuna:** Yeah, they don't
> **Amahle:** they don't talk openly
> **Ukhuna:** with their children.

Secrecy as a cultural norm appeared again in Amahle, Ukhuna, and Omkhulu's articulated speech. Fortunately, they were setting a contrast between the past and the present.

> **Amahle:** Now, it's not the same. Our parents didn't have the <u>right</u>; our <u>culture doesn't</u> accept them to... <u>doesn't allow</u> them to talk about sex (emphasis added).
> **Ukhuna:** Hmmm.
> **Amahle:** But now, us, younger mothers
> **Ukhuna:** we tell our children; we talk out to children
> **Omkhulu:** everything!
> **Ukhuna:** Every day!

What opposes secrecy is to "talk openly" with and to "talk out" to children. Before my own usage of the adjective secretive, Omkhulu herself deployed it, again as a cultural pattern, and one encompassing even *gogo* Lisa.

> **Why is your grandmother so important to you?**
> **Omkhulu:** Always talking.

> **She was always talking?**
> **Omkhulu:** About everything. Everything.
> **Even about children and boyfriends?**
> **Omkhulu:** Yes!
>
> **Sex?**
> [Amahle laughs]
> **Omkhulu:** No, no, no! When it comes to that, no! [We all laugh]. You see, our parents [were] like too secretive when it comes to that. [And she impersonates *gogo* Lisa]: 'It's for parents, it's not for you children, just shu, shu... You can talk about everything, everything, but not that'.

Culture as a constraining social force is far from trendy; well, *tant pis*. The excerpts above left me with no analytical alternative to a normative framework, however *legalistic* (Widlok, 2016) it may sound. Parents had no "right" to talk about sex; not even *gogo* Lisa, in her communicational generosity, could approach such a subject. In shushing her beloved 'last-born', Omkhulu, the respectable grandmother abided by an imperative situated between outward duty and inward will.

> Living socially does of course mean submitting to an external order. But the externality of that order, all the difficulty it involves, is to be found first within the subject, as one's of the subject's own dimension (Karsenti, 2012a, p.35).

Fortunately, Omkhulu found in *magogo*'s communicative largesse of speaking about everything but sex the reason to talk about everything, therefore sex, with her firstborn (Mandisa). In opposition to their parents' secrecy, Amahle and Ukhuna also found the liberty to speak openly to their children.

> **Ukhuna:** Our parents, they didn't tell us…
> **Amahle:** They were so secretive.
> **Ukhuna:** So, now teenage mothers are free to talk to our children
> **Amahle:** to teach our children.
> **Amahle:** I tell Lassy everything
> **Ukhuna:** everything!
> **Amahle:** You know what? If you're sexually active, please, use a condom
> **Ukhuna:** do this, do this, do this
> **Amahle:** or you gonna get the baby
> **Ukhuna:** and don't do [that]!

In other words, the three women went beyond their parent's normative guidelines and adopted, with their children, a candid approach to sex. In Omkhulu's case, *gogo*'s talkative liberality inspired her with a communicational abundance she did not have by

temperament. The predicaments of early motherhood may also have steered Omkhulu towards dialogical liberty with her children.

> **When you found out you were pregnant, what did you feel?**
> **Omkhulu**: I was so... I was not happy. My aim was... I was thinking [to] go to school and get a job or... I was so stressed, I [was] not working... I [didn't] know even a job. Okay, I noticed that my boyfriend is working, but, ah! I was thinking I want to save money for myself.

Omkhulu wanted a job before having a child and was not thrilled at finding herself pregnant from her first boyfriend. The prospect of being a mother was then experienced with anguish and reluctance, for she did not want it at all: "No!" The verb Omkhulu (and others) used to express a shift of attitude towards undesired pregnancy was "to accept".

> Nine months is too long. The more... When time goes, I just [ended up] accepting that I'm going to be a mother. I have accepting [sic, accepted] this situation. That's all.

Two grannies played an essential role in Omkhulu's path towards acceptance. *Gogo* Lisa first advised her "not to stress too much". Contrary to girls aged 16 or 17, Omkhulu had already obtained matric when she got pregnant. Her situation, gogo Lisa remarked, was "better". Omkhulu was not immediately convinced: "It's not better, *gogo*, it's not better. I'm not working". Omkhulu's mother-in-law also helped her. Once told about the coming of a grandchild, the former offered her help, particularly financial. Omkhulu had been pregnant for three or four months and finally accepted her "situation". In August 2004, Mandisa was born[144].

Omkhulu became a mother at 20. She still wanted to go to university, so she took a test to improve her matric grades. Omkhulu failed and "concentrated" her energies on her child's upbringing. She started receiving the child-support grant three months after Mandisa's birth. The official procedures were then meandrous. She went to Home Affairs with the newborn and faced a long queue to get a birth certificate. Only three weeks later could she apply for the social grant. Fortunately, her first payment included all months

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[144] Unfortunately, Mandisa's father tells an ordinary history of oscillation between no support and occasional assistance on demand: "I have to remind him: do you remember you have a child with me?" (Omkhulu).

since birth, or ~ZAR 1200[145]. When asked whether she was happy with the child support grant, Omkhulu also deployed the vernacular concept of free money.

> It's free money, but I'm not happy. It's too little. I don't want that money. If they tell me, 'Omkhulu, stop receiving the money and come work'. Wow! I'll find a nanny next thing in the morning.

The ZAR 430 benefiting 15-year-old Mandisa has been spent mainly on food and the latter's personal needs, such as "toiletries", "cosmetics", and occasional hair maintenance. Mandisa is given ZAR 5 daily as 'pocket money' to grab something at school. Omkhulu deems the school feeding scheme for teenagers insufficient. Again, though, she tempers dissatisfaction with the notion of gratuity.

> And you'll never say - why they give our children small food? Because it's free from the government. Education is free. All things, it's free. It's free.
>
> **So, you can't complain.**
> **Omkhulu:** You cannot complain when it comes to that. Because they have to hire *magogos* to cook for our children [at school] and pay them. You have to help the government on that path. You have to help because they give us a grant.

Other interviewees associated the child support grant and school-feeding schemes. Kaya (see Chapter II) also mentioned the latter modality of social assistance, noticing that it complements the former. Omkhulu put both under the umbrella of "free" governmental benefits and acknowledged their relevance, costs, and shortfalls, particularly the fact that her personal needs are not contemplated.

Among the ten female child support grant beneficiaries contributing to my research, none showed criticism as vocal as Omkhulu's. She reckoned a child, not to mention herself, needed at least ZAR 1200 per month. Yet her, Ukhuna's, and Amahle's discourse and energies did not centre on the demand for more free money but rather on their desire to work.

> **Omkhulu:** That's why I keep on saying they should cancel this grant
> **Amahle:** and open jobs
> **Omkhulu:** yes, cancel…
> **Ukhuna:** Create jobs for us

---

[145] Omkhulu, Ukhuna, and Amahle told me the official procedures for applying for the child support grant have become much faster.

> **Omkhulu:** create jobs for us. It [the grant's value] means I don't need anything? I just need ZAR [430 per child], and what? That's all? No! What about me? I'm not supposed to save money
> **Amahle:** for them?
> **Omkhulu:** For their future?
> **Ukhuna:** For their studies?
> **Omkhulu:** For their studies? It's too little! [That's] all I think about the grant, yeah.
> **Amahle** [turning to me]: So, can you pass?

When the three women shared a core belief, their speech constituted a mighty choir. Omkhulu, Ukhuna, and Amahle were among the most educated women I interacted with in South Africa. Beneficiaries of social assistance or simply "the poor" constitute a multifarious crowd (Simmel and Jacobson, 1965). My three first interviewees belonged to an elite group among recipients of the child-support grants; their complaints, needs, and wishes paralleled their education, purview, and dreams, past and present. Affording University studies, ergo the social mobility of their children, was an ambition all of them cultivated.

> **Omkhulu:** That money can make [their] life better, better than mine.
> **Amahle:** Oh, it can change lives for them.

Was not Omkhulu satisfied with her life? She once told me not to be, but it is not as univocal as it may sound. Omkhulu draws enormous pleasure from mothering Mandisa and six-month-old Lungelo. Motherhood fulfilled an ingrained cultural duty and desire (Karsenti, 2012a). Yet providing for her children sufficed not. Omkhulu also longed to enjoy a higher status within her broad family.

> If I have a job, you know, at home, I'm a big sister. I'm a big sister. Sometimes, I feel like
> **Amahle:** you fail your family.
>
> **Omkhulu:** I fail my family. If I have a job, they call me: 'Sister, you know what? Eish, can you help me with ZAR 1000'? Ok, no problem, I can help you. Cancel that grant, and then
> **Amahle**: give us jobs.
> **Omkhulu:** Oh, maybe I'll be happy.
> **Amahle:** Maybe we are becoming sisters.

Then reiterating Omkhulu's meaning of the word sister (a female provider at home), Amahle also longed to become a sister in another sense: as a nurse. As indicated in Chapter II, Amahle had worked as a caretaker in a private nursing home for Afrikaners

until 2018. Two years later, she wanted more than to retrieve the former status. Amahle longed to ascend higher in the social ladder of prestige and remuneration.

> **Amahle:** I wanna epaulettes here. I wanna be a sister. I wanna be a nurse, a real nurse. So how can I do that if they don't hire us?

Amahle's wishes for insignia concern more than herself as a shining but insular monad. Her ambition to become a nurse comprises Ukhuna. In case she gets a decently paid job, Amahle envisages affording Ukhuna's training as a sister.

> **Amahle:** With my pay from my job, the one I studied for... I'm a health care worker. I can even help others. Maybe Ukhuna wants to be like me. If [she is] short of money, if I'm working, I'll help her. Ukhuna helped me so much in my life, especially for my son. I can't throw [it] away. She's the mother for Lassy, so I can help her with my own money to get that certificate, the one I have now. It's a six-month course.

Amahle's aspirations are relational and premised on reciprocity as a *grundnorm* or "the bedrock" of social life (Mauss, 1923-1924; Chanial, 2008). Help formerly received to upbring Lassy now begs for help to boost Ukhuna's professional life. Amahle's desire to reciprocate takes the form of a money-mediated recognition of a longstanding "alliance" with Ukhuna (Hénaff, 2010). At stake is the quality of their social bond in its durée, not a quantitatively calibrated exchange of this for that (Cardoso de Oliveira, 2012).

> **Amahle:** We are so close, me and Ukhuna. We come
> **Ukhuna:** a long way.
> **Amahle:** We are coming from
> **Ukhuna/Amahle:** a long way.

Amahle, Ukhuna, and Omkhulu longed for a job, epaulettes, and an income that would change their and their children's lives. They dreamed, though, of more than financial might, familial and professional prestige. They longed for the feeling that they deserved what they wished. As an intellectual exercise to rethink and elaborate the taken-for-granted (Crapanzano, 1980) and glance at the counter-intuitive dimension of social life (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2008), I asked them why they preferred jobs to grants. Their intertwined voices took me by storm.

> **Amahle:** That is our money.

Omkhulu: You work for the money
Amahle: you work for it. You earn
Ukhuna: you wake up each and every morning.
Amahle: You earn. *Uvula ocha lekona*
Ukhuna: yeah!

Amahle [turns to me eagerly]: Where's your dairy? Where's your dairy? I wanna write something now. Where is your dairy? *Uvula ocha lekona*: you reap where you plant!
Ukhuna: Yeah! You reap
Omkhulu: and it's better
Amahle: that's your success
Ukhuna: hm...
Amahle: You reap where you plant
Omkhulu: and it keeps you going
Amahle: it keeps you going.
Omkhulu: It doesn't matter if I wake up at four.
Amahle: It's your life; it doesn't matter how you spend it or what! It's your money
Omkhulu: it's my money!

With *uvula ocha lekona* (to reap where one plants), the three women imparted to me IsiNdebele's formula to convey the relevance of merit and self-worth. They ardently desired to put their hands to work and enjoy the resulting harvest in terms of self-contentment and purchasing power.

Amahle: So, now, the money they are giving us, it's so... And then our children are growing up. Now they want ZAR 800 tekkies [sneakers].
Ukhuna: Hmm
Amahle: ZAR 800 or 900 [sneakers]
Omkhulu: or ZAR 1.2.
Amahle: Where you get ZAR 900 when you achieve only ZAR 430 for [one child]?

Paraphrasing Ferguson (2015, p.137), if sneakers are a "major asset" in modern life, lacking them corresponds to a "distinct social disability". Ukhuna considered expensive clothes a need for young boys. Affording it was a pleasure to which she aspired "as a mother". Omkhulu, likewise, cast "perfume, Mandisa's hair", etc., as wants to be fulfilled through labour. Only a salary would allow them to raise their children properly. In this connection, motherhood and a job outside the home necessarily merged.

Could you be happy without a child? If you had a job and not a child...
Omkhulu: It's not happy at all.

What about you, Ukhuna?

> **Ukhuna:** Ah, it's not okay. Bomi is my reason to hustle. When you don't have children, you are going to work for what? For whom? Who's going to enjoy your money with [you]?
>
> **Yourself...**
> **Ukhuna:** Only? No.
> **Omkhulu:** When you have children, you say that
> **Ukhuna:** I [have] a companion. I have to enjoy my money with Bomini, Lungelo. It's so fun. It's so great!

Motherhood gives a reason to work, and a job allows mothers to enjoy the pleasures of filial companionship. My interviewees also cast motherhood as a "full-time job" (in Ukhuna's terms) and as "work" (in Omkhulu's). Two other nouns complexified motherhood's polyvalence: "duty"[146] and "blessing". With both, we depart from the terrain of personal needs and pleasures and embark on culture as an overarching normative order and nativity as a transcendental "gift" (Ngobese, 2003).

> **What is it to have responsibility for another human being? Why do you like this responsibility?**
> **Omkhulu:** It's a blessing... my work.
>
> **It's a blessing?**
> **Omkhulu:** Yes...
>
> **Why?**
> **Omkhulu:** It's my work; it's my duty. Every time when I take care of them, I feel so proud.

Blessing first popped up in my conversations with Ukhuna and Omkhulu when the former referred to their mother's progeny: "She was blessed with four children". The second time that "to bless" emerged, Ukhuna, Amahle, and I discussed the concept of *ukuvala* (to replace or fill the gap).

> **Amahle:** To replace is when someone is dead.
> **Ukhuna:** Then God, maybe
> **Amahle** then God
> **Ukhuna:** blesses you
> **Amahle:** bless you
> **Ukhuna:** with another one.
> **Amahle:** Then, it's to replace.

[146] Amahle also cast motherhood as a duty when I interviewed her.

My interviewees are perfectly aware that conception occurs through sexual rapport, yet they consider nativity a God-related phenomenon. Why? Their lexical choice reveals that life stems from "the bestowal of a divine gift"[147]. In less grandiloquent terms, suffice it to say that "life as a biological fact remains outside human power" (Hénaff, 2010, p.226). Conception also stands as a blessing for unfortunate, negative reasons: not conceiving a baby entails social damnation among my interlocutors.

> **How do you feel about this responsibility to be a mother?**
> **Ukhuna:** Being a mother is like... it's a full-time job. And I really enjoy it, cause to have a child is a blessing. Many women out there are suffering to have a baby. Even they call them names, they are barren, and that name is very hateful: *unyumba*.

Motherhood is a blessing, therefore a gift, because *unyumba* is hateful. It amounts to social doom because women are supposed to have children. Supposed by whom?

> **Ukhuna**: Actually, Daniel, in our culture, when you get married, it is a force
> **Omkhulu**: it's a force
> **Ukhuna**: to have a child.
>
> **It's a force?**
> **Omkhulu**: Yes
> **Ukhuna**: It's a force, full force. You must have
> **Ukhuna/Omkhulu**: you must.
> **Ukhuna**: To have a child in that family, to give birth, it's a force.
>
> **Why?**
> **Ukhuna**: It's like, it's a culture... It's a culture. Now I have Bomi, but when I'm getting married to another family, it's a force. *Makotinwe*: must have our child.
> **Omkhulu**: The sisters-in-law, they are going to [ask]
> **Ukhuna**: yes
> **Omkhulu**: 'What's happening?'
> **Ukhuna**: Yes. It's a force.

Having a child is mandatory for married women on penalty of in-law's disparaging. Appositely, normative phenomena in the Durkheimian-Maussian tradition are defined by sanction – see also Benda-Beckmann (2002). The institution of marriage

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[147] The Free Dictionary. (n.d) Blessing. In *thefreedictionary.com.* Retrieved in 16th, January, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/blessing.

undoubtedly accrues the pressure to add a human being to the household, yet not even unmarried women can find joy or self-realisation without offspring. Neither Omkhulu nor Ukhuna conceived of happiness without children.

> **Is it possible to be happy without a child, for a woman, in Ndebele culture?**
> **Ukhuna**: No, 'cause you will be called with names: barren, *unyumba*. So, it's important when you're a Black person to have a child.

"Culture", blackness, and "force" are hallmarks of cogent impersonal vectors with deep roots in personal minds and hearts. Individuals appropriate the normative order as theirs and express this personal adherence in "currents of feelings and will - attachment" (Karsenti, 2012a, p.34). Ukhuna enjoyed performing the full-time job of motherhood, and Omkhulu took pride in it, for "ideals", such as fertility, both constrain and delight. Longing for a big family and appreciating its "beauty" also testify to the "power of attraction" that society's cardinal *idéaux de valeur* have towards individuals' actions and speech (Karsenti, 2012a; Dumont, 2013).

> **Ukhuna:** We want more children! The big family is so beautiful!
>
> **Is it beautiful?**
> **Ukhuna:** Big family? Yo! It's so beautiful!
> **Omkhulu**: I want to have a family! I want to be a grandmother!
>
> **Why?**
> **Omkhulu:** You know, Lisa, my grandmother, used to say to me: 'You have to have a big family, just like me, because I'm the firstborn, just like you'. Ah, no, no, gogo, it's a lot of responsibilities… I don't understand, but when she passed away, I just realised to have a family is... I feel happy.

Ukhuna and Amahle wanted four children; Omkhulu wished for five and already had two. At the time we talked, she had a stable and supportive relationship with her partner and father of six-month-old Lungelo. Omkhulu expected to marry him, and only within marriage did she consider having more children.

> **Let's imagine you continue living with Ukhuna. Would you have five children?**
> **Omkhulu:** No, never. In our culture, né?, our parents say: 'How can you? Why you have children like you're married?' There's a <u>procedure</u> that you have to follow. I have to go to dad and tell him that I'm going

> to have another child. [And] we have to go the father's house and tell them that... They feel like you're disrespecting when you [do not] do like that (emphasis added).

Culture, culture as *law* – procedural, in this case – is only possible "through us" or inasmuch as we conform to or revolt against its "ideals" (Karsenti, 2012a, p.30). Interestingly, Omkhulu did not condemn extensive progeny outside marriage, provided such mothers could care for their children properly. Her open-mindedness notwithstanding, she preferred to abide by IsiNdebele standards: "If I don't get married, case closed. Lungelo will be the last born".

Section V – "People, give them jobs. Then, they can satisfy their family. But not hanging on social grants"

I visited Ukhuna and Omkhulu between the end of December 2019 and the first fortnight of January 2020. The two sisters lived with *their* three children. Ukhuna had 14-year-old Bomini; Omkhulu had 14-year-old Mandisa and six-month Lungelo. In saying that the three children were *theirs*, I want to highlight that Ukhuna and Omkhulu treated them equally and shared their money and resources without distinctions based on who gave birth to whom.

I do not ignore that local kinship categories equate mother's sister and mother. Nevertheless, the discussion about their shared maternal rapport toward the children emerged when Omkhulu told me how she allocated the two child support grants she received monthly. After buying groceries and electricity for the household, Omkhulu set apart ZAR 50 to give Bomini and Mandisa weekly. Both should have ZAR 5 per day as "pocket money" at school.

> **Do you give money to Bomini [Ukhuna's son]?**
> **Omkhulu:** Yes, we share everything here.
> **Amahle:** Even Nomvula [gives money to Omkhulu's daughter]
> **Omkhulu:** I will never say this is not my child; that is my child. No.
> **Amahle:** You support both of them.

Of course, Bomi was Ukhuna's child, and Mandisa was Omkhulu's. However, there should be no practical distinction between them regarding the issue of personal treatment.

> **Omkhulu**: Actually, I treat them equally.
> **Amahle**: For treatment, yeah.
> **Omkhulu**: Equally, equally. When [Bomini] wants something from me, [he'll] never say: 'My mother is not here'. He's supposed to come to me. I'm his mom.

Such a portrait of (co)motherhood is incomplete unless we include Amahle and her son. Ukhuna considered Lassy the first child she raised, a fact Amahle fully recognised. The two friends and Omkhulu had great pleasure in showing me that Bomi, Lassy, and Mandisa referred to them as *ma* (mother). Even though the latter term indexes their age cohort as opposed to their children's, I would not dare reduce their delight in shared motherhood to a structural status.

> **Omkhulu**: You can ask Mandisa. When she call Amahle, [she] will never say 'mama Lassy'.
> **Amahle:** Han, han [nope]
> **Omkhulu**: She say 'mother'.
> **Ukhuna**: Even Bomi...
> **Amahle:** Call them now.
>
> **Let's call them, just to see.**
> **Omkhulu:** Mandisa!
> **Amahle** [to Ukhuna]**:** Both of them
> **Ukhuna:** Bomini!

Bomini arrived the first. Omkhulu talked to him in IsiNdebele. She probably asked how he referred to Amahle. He answered, "mom", and the three women laughed. I then turned to him: Amahle or *mama*? "Mom", he iterated, to his mother's delight. I asked if he saw any difference between the words Amahle and *mama*. "I'm not sure", he responded. We all laughed, still waiting for Mandisa to come.

> **Omkhulu**: Mandi?
> **Amahle**: Mandi?
> **Mandisa**: [to Amahle]: *Ma*? [Ukhuna laughs]
>
> **Amahle**: Daniel, hear this: Mandisa?
> **Mandisa**: *Ma*?
> **Amahle:** Did you hear that? Mandisa?
> **Mandisa:** *Ma*?
> **Amahle**: Case closed!
> **Ukhuna**: Case closed [and laughs].

We all laughed and thanked each other copiously that evening. Fortunately, it was not our last appointment. Back in the second interviewing session, Amahle observed that there were many teenagers in Ukhuna's family, and we should interview them. Ukhuna and Omkhulu gave me their consent, and so did Bomini and Mandisa. By the end of January 2020, they received me for the last time at their house. We began the conversation in the following terms.

> **Hey guys, what do you know about my job?**
> **Bomini:** Ah, maybe... to know how people live.

Fourteen-year-old Bomini was doing grade 9 at school, and his favourite activity was drawing. He showed me some sketches before the interview started. Also aged 14 and attending grade 9, Mandisa liked to sing. She enjoyed other things, too, such as "knowing how people in other countries live". South African "cultures" interested her as well.

> **You also like to know how people live...**
> **Mandisa:** Yes, maybe the social science, the past, how people lived; because - you see? - they suffered. I want to know more about that.
>
> **Who suffered, Mandisa?**
> **Mandisa:** Black peoples.
> **Bomini:** Mostly blacks.
>
> **Why did they suffer?**
> **Bomini:** They [the Whites] take them [the Blacks as] slaves because they [the Blacks] didn't have much money to do something for themselves. So, Whites decided to take them and make them their slaves.

Mandisa was acutely aware of her country's past plights. Bomini fused lack of money and "slavery". He also correlated cash and the capacity to act – "money to do something". Such consciousness would pop up again later in the interview. At the beginning of it, we focused on the child support grants.

> **What have you heard about the child support grants? What is it?**
> **Mandisa***:* I think it's a money they give from government, but it's not enough for us. It's ZAR 430. Because you must get food, clothes, things to bathe, and that's not enough for us.

Bomini thought along the same lines. One does not only buy clothes but also "casual" clothes, "school" clothes, and "even shoes" - which he deemed "very expensive". Bomini believed that the government should raise the child support grant. Thus thought Mandisa, for whom ZAR 900 might suffice. She also considered that the grant should continue after teenagers reach 19. Bomini thought otherwise.

> **Bomini:** I think when you're 19, you're old enough to make your own money. I'm going to finish school [at] 17, and maybe I can go to university and earn some money. I think it's right. Because we have a strong population, people giving birth every day.

A strong population meant one "growing too much; too much pregnancy". I then asked if Bomini considered teenage pregnancy a problem in South Africa.

> **Bomini:** I think it's a problem. Social grant is what's causing teenage pregnancy. Because they get pregnant, and they know that 'I have a social grant'. But it's not enough.

In this regard, Bomini converged with Ukhuna and Omkhulu. Amahle, the two sisters and I had previously discussed the hypothetical link between the child support grant and teenage pregnancy. They believed that teenagers were well informed about the means to prevent conception. The new generation had learned it at school, and their parents were "free" to approach sexual matters with them at home. Accordingly, if some still get pregnant, it should result from economic calculi.

> **Omkhulu:** If [one] can have five children, then one is going to receive ZAR two point something. The young one [may think]: 'Eish, it's better to have a child because I'm going to receive free money from government'.

I am not sure whether all genitors and kin have the communicative largesse of Omkhulu, Amahle, and Ukhuna, who talk frankly with their children about sexual matters. What about uneducated parents? What about the conservatives? Do they really talk about sex and pregnancy prevention with their children? Mandisa called my attention to yet another aspect of the matter. According to her, some girls get pregnant on the assumption that fathers will take care of the baby.

> **Mandisa:** Boys promise: 'I'll handle the baby' and what, what. Then they run away. Then, we depend on the social grant. And the grant is

> ZAR 430. I don't think it's enough for them, so they can [not] trust the boys to sleep with them. No, because the boy will run away, then what?

Omkhulu, Mandisa and Bomini also considered that transactional sex impacted the rates of teenage pregnancy. The two teenagers believed that parental lack of means to afford teenagers' needs led some of the latter to date better-off men.

> **Mandisa**: That's why teenagers get pregnant, cause they think that [their] mothers doesn't give [them] money. So, the boyfriend get the chance to promise that: 'I'll give you money to do hair, to do nails, buy clothes'. Then [they] end up pregnant.
>
> **Bomini**: And the elders are taking that advantage. We call it a blesser. That person have money. The girl maybe is busy trying to tell her mom that [she is] looking for a new phone. So, her mom keep on promising her – 'I'm going to buy you that phone'. [At some point, the teenager] is going to take the decision to date a very rich man.

The excerpts above followed two questions. First, I asked them to whom the child support grant belonged. Bomini believed it belonged to both mothers and children. Mandisa considered mothers should manage the grant exclusively since "they know better than us". Second, I asked them whether it was fair for mothers to spend the grants on themselves. Both considered it wrong and spontaneously associated mothers' personal expenditures with teenage pregnancy. After their above-transcribed answers, I consulted them on the old-age grant.

> **Have you heard about the old age grant? What is it?**
> **Bomini**: When someone is old... Like a pension. Pension: 60 above, you get it.
>
> **And what do you think about these grants?**
> **Bomini**: I think they are right.
>
> **Why?**
> **Bomini**: I don't have an explanation.
>
> **The first thing that comes to your mind.**
> **Bomini**: Someone who's old... you can satisfy yourself. Maybe [she] don't ask a grandchild, a daughter, a son to buy her something. Just give him or her money [to] buy something
> **Mandisa**: And they don't buy expensive things. They buy clothes...
> **Bomini**: Mielie-meal.
> **Mandisa**: They don't do hair, nails...
> **Bomini**: All those things.

> **Mandisa**: He can manage; he can be there.

South Africans distinguish deserving and non-deserving recipients of state grants according to expenditure patterns (Moore & Seekings, 2019). The elderly figure among the deserving because, among other things, they stand as primary providers within many households; they "can be there" - for others, I suppose. In contrast, young mothers are believed to have needs that are at odds with the provision of essentials. Supposedly futile expenditure patterns are frowned upon as "not right"[148]. In my teenage interviewees' discourse, the general notion of righteousness often overlapped with the idea of "legal rights" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011b).

> **Do you think unemployed people should receive any money from the government?**
> **Bomini**: Not all of them cause others are drinking. Maybe they can check someone who's drinking too much, [using] the social grant money to buy alcohol. They should not give that person a money. But those who are right, they should give them the money.

Mandisa answered in the same terms, adding that, in families with heavy drinkers, authorities should give the SASSA card directly to children. Both teenagers believe that only those who behave according to their criterion of propriety – "those who are right" – should remain entitled to grants.

Our conversation about cash assistance to the unemployed was preceded by a discussion about the noun, not the adjective, rights, which they identified by IsiZulu's word *amalungelo.* Mandisa and Bomini learned about rights in a primary school discipline called Life Orientation (LO). When asked what they understood by rights, both presented examples, such as the right to have education and shelter. Bomini vacillated on a formal definition of the word – "Eish, I just understand. I don't have an explanation". He also wavered on whether the child support grant constituted a right – "I'm not sure. I think they are, but I don't think they are". I stated they were and turned to Mandisa.

> **What do you think, Mandisa?**
> **Mandisa:** I don't have a good explanation for them. But I think they are cause they [the government] see Africa is suffering a lot. That's why they give us money and so on. Because they [people] don't have... In SA they don't have work, many people...

[148] As Omkhulu put it when we discussed the consumption of alcohol by recipients of the child support grant. It is worth noticing that she, Ukhuna, Bomini and Mandisa did not condemn alcohol consumption per se but rather excessive intake.

> **Bomini:** are jobless.
> **Mandisa:** So, they think that this money can make us
> **Bomini:** satisfy us.

As a right, the child support grant opposes "suffering", that is, the hardship entailed by joblessness. Mandisa also mentioned suffering at the beginning of our conversation, when she associated my job with the study of social science and the past. She wanted to know more about these subjects "because they [Black people] suffered". At school, my interlocutors had learned a history of plights and the attempts to offset them through rights (*amalungelo*).

Another notion worth noticing in the excerpt above is satisfaction. It popped up in the interview when Bomini said the old-age grant allowed older people to "satisfy themselves" without resorting to kin. Social assistance in cash seemed justified if in accordance with a highly moral – moralistic even - expenditure pattern: "They [the elder] don't do hair or nails". As was the case with Mandisa's notion of suffering, satisfaction reappeared in Bomini's speech when I asked what he preferred, a job or a grant.

> **What is more important for you, to receive a grant or to have a job?**
> **Bomini:** It's a job.
>
> **Why?**
> **Bomini:** To have a job, something that can satisfy you. When you're having it, you know that when [you] need something, [you're] going to get it. But social grant, when you're looking for something, you must save first. Maybe you can work, you can also buy things for school. Buy something that you want. Maybe you can buy a laptop, but you can also buy something for your kids.

A job satisfies because it confers comprehensive and immediate purchase power: comprehensive in that it allows one to buy different products simultaneously, and immediate in that it does not require lengthy savings (contrary to the child support grant). In my conversations with Omkhulu, Ukhuna, and Amahle, they had already complained about months-long lay-by as the only means to afford their children's "wants", such as ZAR 900 sneakers. Cash, indeed, abbreviates the lapse between desire and satisfaction. However, Bomini's concept of satisfaction is not restrained to individualistic, prompt purchase power. His pleasure encompasses that of others.

> **What would you like to have as a job?**

Bomini: I'm not sure. I haven't decided. But I'm looking for something that can help... maybe a community, even the world.

Why do you want to help the community and even the world?
Bomini: Because, you see, our place doesn't have that vibe. I want when someone is coming to [KwaNdebele] to say: 'Wow! This place is amazing! I'll create job opportunities. Maybe when I grow up, I don't want to be rich; I want to afford. I can build a building and give half of [his town] a job. People, give them jobs. Then, they can satisfy their family. But not hanging on social grants.

You don't like to depend on social grants.
Bomini: Yeah, I don't like to depend on social grants.

But you recognise that they help you.
Bomini: Yeah.

Though to a limited extent, the child support grant "gives powers" (Granlund & Hochfeld, 2019), and Bomini said he was "happy" with it. My ultimate impression, however, is that he was not exactly satisfied but rather *reconnaisant* (Caillé, 2019) of a social benefit in cash which bestowed agency upon him (in the generality of "doing something").

Are you happy about the child support grant? [Mandisa leaves us for a moment]
Bomini: Yeah, I'm happy.
But you told me it's not enough.
Bomini: It's not enough, but at least I can do something. Not like I'm suffering or something.

Suffering led me to Mandisa, who had left us to talk with her father on the phone. When she sat back on the veranda, I asked her whether she had the right to work (the question I had just posed to Bomini).

Mandisa: At this age?

No, when you finish matric or after university.
Mandisa: Yes, I think so. Cause I want to be a doctor. A doctor will help people, maybe if he's sick. And the clinic is too far. Maybe someone is giving birth in the neighbour. Then I go and help. Maybe a gogo is sick. Then I say: ok, take [her] to clinic. They bring the armlets and go maybe to hospital. I see some people suffering a lot. They wait a line, and they [the health staff] are old. I think they must resign and give other people the chance to be nice.

Bomini and Mandisa navigated a similar categorial framework. Both wanted to "help" and "be nice" to people. More than his sister, Bomini focused on "satisfaction". More than her brother, Mandisa minded "suffering". From her familial epopee, she knew the discomforts of giving birth in a clinic, not a hospital. Omkhulu, whose name was given by the nurse who helped her mother during labour, welded that experience into their shared history. So did Ukhuna, whose name permanently recalls the inconveniences of finding transport under the rain. Finally, in observing *magogo* Lisa's final years, Mandisa realised the elder deserved better.

> **Mandisa:** I was seeing magogo Lisa going to the clinic. If you go to the clinic, you wait a lot. You wait a line... Cause gogo maybe goes on 7 [am], and [finish] on 10 [am]. Imagine four hours at the clinic, you see?

Like Bomini, Mandisa was neither satisfied with the child support grant nor "suffering". Nevertheless, her desires and means had not grown at a similar pace.

> **Mandisa:** Eish, I was wanting a better education, maybe going to boarding school, things like that, you see? But because of money, I don't have that.

A grim part of "fieldwork as a moral experience" consists of noticing the rifts between aspirations and actual possibilities (Geertz, 1968). Fortunately, three reasons allow me not to be dismayed. First, time intervenes between Mandisa's current impossibility of getting a better education and her desired future as a physician. Second, this lapse may separate a time when jobs are scarce, and there is no right to work from another in which Mandisa's parents will have the right to work and the means to afford the education she needs to become a physician. Before my third and final reason not to discourage, I have a word on this right-based temporal distance.

Even though the South African Constitution has no provision on the right to work[149] – contrary, for instance, to the right to social assistance (see Chapter IV) – some South Africans believe they are (or should be) entitled to have employment. In the introduction's epigraph, I quoted a 50-year-old interlocutor who considered she had such a right[150]. Bomini and Mandisa think along the same lines, which makes me believe that

[149] According to Seekings and Nattrass (2015, p.154), the National Development Plan proposed a "weak employment guarantee or right to work" in 2012, but it was never implemented.
[150] I quote the epigraph again and remind it corresponds to an excerpt from a semi-structured interview Luthando and I conducted in 2016. **What are rights for you?** "My right is to have a job" (Imani).

vernacular understandings of rights in South Africa are, in some instances, more generous than the country's positive law – or "legal rights" (Cardoso de Oliveira, 2011b).

When I asked Mandisa whether she had the right to work, she answered me with another question: "At this age?". I said no, but rather once she passed matric or finished university. "Yes, I think so" – she observed. When I posed Bomini the same question, Mandisa had quit the veranda. Serendipity allowed me to elaborate on the subject with him.

> **Do people have the right to work?**
> **Bomini:** They have the right to work, earn money and satisfy their family.
>
> **So, you think you have the right to work.**
> **Bomini:** I don't have a right to work.
>
> **I mean when you grow up.**
> **Bomini:** Yeah. When someone gives you a job at my age, that person can get arrested. Cause it's not right to give someone like me a job.

Righteousness and rights overlap. Bomini does not have the right to work at his age because it is "not right" (or moral). Nevertheless, he believes that once he reaches the legal threshold, he is, or at least should be, entitled to the dignities and pleasures of labour, such as satisfying one's family. The young boy weaves morality and legal rights, those he has and those he expects to have, in a composite realm. If I understand Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2022a, 2022b) adequately, the normative dimension of social life articulates rights, morals, and conceptions of fair treatment.

My final reason not to discourage before the current gap between Mandisa's desires and possibilities relates to normativity, as defined above, but more intimately to values (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b)[151]. It is also linked to what the latter author regards as the "emancipatory dimension of Anthropology" (2018), which consists of finding local standards to assess and transform unsatisfactory states of affairs instead of importing criteria strange to a given life world (Hegel as cited in Stahl, 2013). My final reason not to discourage stems from the fact that South Africans themselves remain engaged in an "immanent critique" of their social world and thus have the means to

[151] According to Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2022b) in concrete ethical lives, norms and values always appear in articulated form. Fassin (2012, p.10) treats morality and ethics as, respectively, norms and values, which he sides with sensibilities and emotions in his concept of "moral economies".

change it "for the better" (Stahl, 2013, p.20). While we waited for Mandisa, I explored Bomi's statement that he did not want to be rich.

> **You told me you don't want to be rich; you just want to afford. What is the difference between to be rich and to afford?**
> **Bomini:** To be rich is like you can do anything, but to afford, I can just save for two weeks, and then I can do something. But when you are rich, you can buy anything anytime. But I just want to live a normal life.
>
> **What is a normal life, Bomi?**
> **Bomini:** A normal life... Like to be like all the people. Others, they like to keep their selves away from other people. I used to ask myself: why they are doing that? They are not living the life.

The life opposes a world made of selves away. In Bomini's normal, normatively desired life, people grow together – or coalesce, a term I have insisted upon throughout this thesis. Too much wealth, in his words, turns togetherness into lives apart. Such a configuration of the social world leads to disrespectful, undignified treatment between people (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b).

> **Bomini:** […] They are not living the life.
>
> **Because they are away from other people?**
> **Bomini:** Yeah.
>
> **And why are they away from other people?**
> **Bomini:** I don't know. You can grow together. You can grow and grow and grow. Maybe that person got a job, got a paying job. Then suddenly he don't talk to you. Why? Because they are *niazo*.
>
> **What does it mean?**
> **Bomini:** It means like he's looking you down. He doesn't take you...[152] He doesn't deal with people like you, a person like you. He deals with, he thinks like someone rich. Someone who can do anything. Maybe you are jobless, and he have everything. He can just leave you because that person is rich.

Richness entails a sense of superiority that distorts the relations between formerly connected selves. Though physically close, these selves remain morally apart. They no longer exhibit reciprocal regard. One looks down on the other and even dispenses with the quotidian etiquette and its practices of respect, such as greeting and talking (Cardoso

[152] In consideration, I suppose.

de Oliveira & Lage da Cruz, 2023). Excessive power – and too much money equals too much power (Hénaff, 2010) – ignites arrogance and causes, ironically, a profound loss: the sense of common humanity, which only performances of considerate, dignified treatment can keep alive (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011a).

But why, in more South African terms, does such a configuration of the social world antagonises local values?

Why is it wrong to look down on people?
Bomini: I don't think that is *ubuntu*.

What do you understand by *ubuntu*?
Bomini: Ubuntu means you have to be nice on someone.

According to Bomini, *ubuntu* means to be "nice" to people, whereas *niazo* means looking down on them[153]. In a dictionaried sense, *ubuntu* reads as "humanity or fellow feeling; kindness"[154]; to look down implies "contempt or disdain"[155]. A step further, fellow feeling means "sympathetic awareness of others and rapport"[156]. With contempt, we find "an attitude of regarding someone as inferior, base, or worthless"[157].

Ubuntu and its antagonist (*niazo*) set us on the terrain of the worth of human beings and the attitudes confirming or negating it. As a "project for society" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b)*,* *ubuntu* centres the good life on the idea that people are not only individuals but live in a community and must share things and care for each other[158]. With its scent of solidarity, *ubuntu* stands at the core of Bomini's understanding of a normal life. Here, I find a halt and underscore his blend of righteousness and rights.

Do you think that to have a normal life is a right?
Bomini: Is right...

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[153] Google Translate converts *niazo* into "you have them", which I take as the opposite of Amahle's "having each other". In *translate.google.com.* Retrieved on January 17th, 2023, from https://translate.google.com.br/?sl=zu&tl=en&text=niazo%0A&op=translate.
[154] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). Ubuntu. In *thefreedictionary.com*. Retrieved on 17th January, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/ubuntu.
[155] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). look down. In *thefreedictionary.com*. Retrieved on 17th January, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/look+down.
[156] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). fellow feeling. In *thefreedictionary.com*. Retrieved on 17th January, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/fellow+feeling.
[157] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). contempt. In *thefreedictionary.com.* Retrieved on 17th January, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/contempt.
[158] Oxford Learners's Dictionaries. (n.d). Ubuntu. In *oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com.* Retrieved on January 17th, 2023, from https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/ubuntu.

> **It is a right?**
> **Bomini:** Yeah, it's a right.

I interviewed Bomini and Mandisa on January 29th, 2020. The previous day, I had met the two of them on my way to Plaza. While walking to and from it, Mandisa told me she wanted to be a doctor for the first time. She also noticed a lack of health professionals around. Bomini corrected my pronunciation of the click sound whenever I ventured into IsiNdebele and asked me words in Portuguese, particularly how to say how you are[159]. At some point, the young boy observed that he wanted to be like me whilst remaining himself. He envisaged his own ways (and appropriate words) to "travel and discover other places". May Bomini and Mandisa find the means to pursue personal desires and abilities in a configuration of their social world more akin to their values.

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[159] Another sign that issues on fair treatment and the etiquette of daily life made a prominent concern for him. During the interview, Bomini asked me to remind him how to say how you are in Portuguese. I wrote it down and sketched the expected answer - *Estou bem* (I am fine). *Estou bim*, he tried. *Estou bem*, I corrected him, and he thanked me.

Interlude on Presence

In this Interlude, I engage with a critical theme in Southern African studies, the notion of "presence", as elaborated by Ferguson (2021). According to him, "physical proximity" involves humans in "involuntary commonalities" as neighbours ineluctably bound to each other in the here and now. "Adjacency", in other words, entails social relations and concomitant "social obligations". In a nutshell, Ferguson proposes a route from the physicality of shared space to the sociality of duties among those thrown together in close vicinity. Even though he focuses on problems at a different scale, and has in mind situations where demands for a share, or for sharing, involve parties that had no prior relations between themselves, as immigrants or refugees that are suddenly in contact with local populations, the differences Ferguson makes between sharing and reciprocity contrasts in important ways with the views of subjects in my research, and contributes to a better understanding of the local context.

I have mentioned Ferguson's notion of presence quite often, alternating between its critique and the recognition of its relevance to understanding social life in South Africa. To remain with a recent example, Ukhuna still felt the presence (*ukhona*, in IsiNdebele) of her deceased *magogo* in dreams. She always heard from the matriarch on such occasions: "Take care of my house. Stay there. Don't be afraid, I'm still here". Presence accounts for her obligation to stay there, but I believe something more, particularly something *moral*, is at stake.

Ferguson (2021, p.12) acknowledges that anything social presupposes a moral component, and communities rest on sanctionable obligations - in a Durkheimian sense. However, he departs from the French author by emphasising obligations' social and factual aspects to the relative detriment of its moral, normative elements. Ferguson proposes a "perspectival shift" from the ethics of generosity and Kantian-like subjectivities to the pragmatics and vulnerabilities of "being here".

My critique of such an approach has theoretical and ethnographic facets. Above all, *Presence and Social Obligation* lacks a theory of recognition. Once we consider the German and French literature on how humans recognise each other and ultimately share their lives, we reinstall morality and expectations of reciprocity at the core of social life and theory. From a more ethnographic angle, I believe South Africans live and believe in "culture" as a normative order underpinned by imperative values (Dumont, 2013).

Presence and sharing are paramount among these, and I both praise Ferguson's insights and propose a different elaboration of the matter.

This Interlude has three sections. First, I offer an account of *Presence and Social Obligation* and its relation to the work of Thomas Widlok (2016). Second, I revisit part of my ethnographic material - and part of Ferguson's - reading both through the lenses of classic and contemporary texts within the French and German traditions of social thought. Third, I connect previous discussions with the main themes of this thesis (the child support grant and motherhood) and discuss the proper place of anthropology of law and morals from a Brazilian perspective.

Section I – *Presence and Social Obligation*: from Membership and Moral Sentiments to the Demands of "Being Here"

Why do people share things in Southern Africa? Foragers do it because they live in an everyday world of shared presence. Ferguson (2021, p.i) calls "involuntary commonality" such a "blunt" state of affairs. Those living in such circumstances share out of practical quiescence to one another's demands rather than sentiments like empathy or generosity. Adjacency, he argues, exposes human vulnerabilities, and one shall, if a neighbour is hungry, let him join in the meal (2021, p.40). Food refusal might trigger a God-only-knows type of reaction. What if one's neighbour is a sorcerer (2021, p.47)?

This section threads through the italicised concepts above. First, Ferguson took the notion of presence from Widlok's extensive research with San foragers in Namibia (2012, 2013, 2016, 2019). This German author dedicated much intellectual effort to demonstrate that sharing, a conspicuous aspect of foragers' lives, differs significantly from gifts and reciprocity. Second, the idea that physical proximity creates involuntary commonalities is an attempt to rethink the nation-state model of community. Finally, the statement that food sharing often derives from a mix of pragmatics and fear, as opposed to morals, is a call to rethink the value of normativity in social life and theory.

I will explore the oppositions sketched above, beginning with the notion of presence, which Ferguson defines as "the blunt fact of being here" (2021, p.15). The blunt and factual components of the concept are crucial to understanding it. They mean that, in

some contexts, people have a *direct* and even *abrupt* experience of each other[160]. Foragers living in hamlets made of tightly arranged tents, for instance, exist daily in a physical closeness that leaves them no distance between themselves. Bird-David borrowed the concept of "immediacy" from phenomenology to depict this circumstance.

> In pure immediacy [...] a person shares common space and time with the other, experiences the other in person, not as type, and responds to the flow of joint experience, to the vivid presence of the other rather than to any reflection thereof (1994, p.598).

Let me highlight two ideas above. As a *spatial* regime, immediacy is premised on sharing time and space; as a *social* regime, it means that collective experience is handled in personal and pre-reflexive terms. As a matter of fact, spatial and social coincide and make one living arrangement. In other words, those bound together in close physical proximity, such as the Nakaya in India, exist in a regime of permanent sharing of persons and things and have no space, neither time – nor penchant – for too much "elaboration about how relationships are or should be" (Bird-David, 1994, p.598).

Ferguson (2021) borrowed his notion of presence from the works of Thomas Widlok (2016). I took, however, a detour into Nurit Bird-David's reflections on immediacy and Nakaya sociality to indicate some of the leitmotivs running through the literature on foragers. Let us see how they appear in Thomas Widlok.

> Sharing works because people have a shared history of mutual involvements as kin, because they master numerous ways of initiating sharing through implicature and other forms of talk, and finally because they recognise the presence of others as the (often silent) demand that it constitutes toward those who have and who are in a position to give (2012, pp.188-9).

The sharing of things among African foragers succeeds in the context of shared histories among those living as kin (whether fictive or not), which resonates with Bird-David's notions of "us, relatives" (2018, p.309) who deal with each other as biographic persons (1994, p.598). Presence for Thomas Widlok (2012) also has a physical dimension - it occurs between those "hanging around" – and may involve particular modes of

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[160] Definition of blunt. 2023. In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved December 26th, 2023, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blunt.

communication, from silence to nagging. Voiced or not, presence implies a demand for "recognition".

In *Anthropology and the Economy of Sharing* (2016, p.72), Widloks further developed the intertwined concepts of presence and sharing. Inviting the reader to a photographic tour of ethnographic scenes, he argues that "bodily presence" conveys a silent demand among the #Akhoe Hai//. Hanging around a fireplace, for instance, communicates to those eating, smoking, or drinking that a share is awaited. This unvoiced demand often suffices as "a prompt" for sharing.

Even though one's body presents a potential claim, one is not always recognised and accorded a share. For this reason, Widlok (2016, p.72) distinguishes bodily and practical presence - the latter meaning that an act of "recognition" has occurred. In any case, the author's emphasis rests on silent demands implied by "mere" physical presence.

> Insofar as these demands are pre-reflexive, they can be said to be incurred simply by a situation of co-presence. In the context of human sociality, mere bodily presence always constitutes a demand for being acknowledged as a partner, as a personal being with legitimate needs (2016, p.75).

Here, we touch on the phenomenologically pre-reflexive moment, which Nurit-Bird David (1994) also noticed among the Nakaya and counterposed to normative theorising - or how social life ought to be. The pre-discursive demand derived from the silent encounter of humans often triggers sharing because, differently from other animals, we can put ourselves into another's shoes and remain aware of our legitimate needs. We know we have similar demands and need each other to meet them precisely because we share our lives with others (Widlok, 2016, p.78).

The ability to perceive and respond to silent demands does not preclude rejecting them. There remains an element of "freedom and choice" in sharing, even though its parameters are conventionalised. Accordingly, one may not share, despite one's cultural templates, such as kinship talking, about who gets what and from whom (2016, pp.76-9).

This element of freedom is one of Widlok's criteria to set a dividing line between gift exchanges and sharing demands. Mauss' statement about "the social lie of the gift" conveyed the strictly obligatory dimension of the exchange, which only self-deception might conceal. To the "gift's lie", Widlok opposes "the individual truth of sharing". In the latter case, subjects must not trick themselves into liberty. They are, indeed, "free to deliberate" over the requests of others (2016, p.80).

The opposition between lies and truths leads to another: social contracts versus social contacts. In both cases, a social order is supposed, but the means to keep it going vary diametrically. Social contracts function on the basis of "coercion", at the very least from an "external" position of authority, a moral or legal force emanating from an "absolute or transcendental source outside the social practice." On the other hand, social contacts build on communities of practice and "ongoing social interaction", whose ultimate figuration (and driving force) is shared lives (2016, pp.79-81).

The opposition between social contracts and contacts revolves around another cleavage: externality versus internality. Gift systems and social contracts lay on processes such as an "externally imposed moral code" (2016, p.xvii) or "moral indoctrination towards generosity" (2016, p.111)[161]. Sharing and the ethnographic model of ongoing social contacts are premised on patterns of relatedness, communication, and presence "enshrined in practice itself". Therefore, they need no "explicit rules of generosity nor centralised authorities that enforce them from the outside" (2016, p.87)[162].

In communities of social contact, "it is practice itself that creates the group" (2016, p.111). Sharing and shared lives in small-scale open environments involves knowledge and skills found in practice and among practitioners. The ability to share requires no reference to anything beyond "particular constellations" of objects and peers in time and space. "Situated learning" substitutes for the "legalistic" element Mauss introduced in social theory (2016, p.93;81). Accordingly, the "realistic", grounded perception of what others can provide to self and the sentiment of empathy replaces "generosity forced by an external morality" (2016, p.80). Not only external but also "eternal" and founded on reciprocity (2016, p.192).

> To avoid further confusion, I suggest that we speak of mutual recognition rather than reciprocity (2016, p.28).

As I mentioned at the beginning of this Interlude, my account of *Presence and Social Obligation* (Ferguson, 2021) explores some of its constitutive oppositions. The first involves the contradistinction of presence and recognition in sharing systems from indoctrinated morals and reciprocity in gift-based systems. As noticed, presence, which

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[161] And the likes, such as "codified system of generosity", "codified moral rules" or "explicit cultural systems of rules of generosity" (2016, pp.87-111).

[162] Consider that Widlok's model also opposes "abstract principles" and "actual practices", and we are perhaps not far from what Durkheim (1913-1914) understood as a clash between American pragmatism and French rationalism.

Ferguson cast as the "blunt fact of being here", implies a form of "direct" experience in face-to-face settings. Direct or blunt presence, however, is not so blunt, for Ferguson is careful in two significant manners.

First, presence needs mediation through processes of recognition. Presence, therefore, is neither "literal" nor "self-evident" (Ferguson 2021, p.37). In any case, it constitutes a "powerful basis to share" and has a very factual component: it is "by virtue of the fact" of being here that some claim a share. Actuality is another word to express the facticity of presence, as in "proximity actually makes itself felt" (2021, p.52), and "a responsibility to share becomes [...] an actual obligation – an obligation that is obligatory not only in theory but in fact" (2021, p.49).

The second caution Ferguson adopts to mitigate the bluntness of being here concerns scale. He factors the differences in the size of foragers' groups and large-scale societies. Such was a measure that Widlok had also adopted (2016, p.194). Ferguson deploys a double strategy to be consistent with the need to scale the share, that is, adapting this social practice from micro to macro levels of personal interaction. Ethnographically, he underscores that the status of being a neighbour favours the emergence of "strong claims" (2021, p.21). In a more imaginative framework, he conjures up the African mini-taxi model of sociality.

> Each time new passengers board, the old ones must rearrange themselves, give way, yield a precious share of that scarce, tightly packed space. There is no social contract here, not even any real reciprocity. It is something more like demand sharing. When new passengers enter the vehicle, we are obliged, we feel we must give up at least some space (2021, pp.25-6).

This portrait of the African mini taxi corresponds well to the feelings one experiences inside it. Though benefiting from an ethnographic basis, Ferguson casts it as an imaginative device. As such, the portrait suggests a spontaneous model of sociality. Ferguson (2021, p.25) does hint at spontaneity or unplanned sociality when affirming that passengers in the mini taxi join in an "involuntary, haphazard association". Their relations are "accidental" and "contingent" yet constitute a "nontrivial" form of sociality imposed by lack of space. Copresence and minimal rules of civil conduct make for a photographic negative of social contracts and their *grundnorm* - reciprocity.

Ferguson's realistic portrait gives food for thought. So much so because it contrasts with communities of "membership and shared identity" (2021, p.25). In his

contrast between sharing and Gift-based systems, Widlok argued that the latter created solidarity through “substantive communion” (2016, pp.81-2) since, in accepting a gift, the receiver took up some of the giver’s essence. The resulting social contract, though not voluntaristic and commercial in spirit, was nonetheless obligatory because it was founded on reciprocity.

According to Widlok, Mauss drafted his social contract as an alternative to the “coercive authoritarianism” of market societies and commercial contracts (2016, p.190). Nevertheless, he could not dispense with coercion and authority. At the very least, a pressure toward generosity (conceived as the other of self-interest) stemmed from a Durkheimian-like society, an entity larger than flesh and blood humans. Seemingly mirroring Widlok’s critique, Ferguson’s mini-taxi model amounts to a form of association without ultimate and external (sic) sources of validity. Neither morals nor law regulates it, rather an abrupt recognition of everyone’s needs and the concomitant “pragmatic adjustments” (2021, p.25).

Ferguson searches for a new concept of society through metaphors and the discussion of ethnography cases depicting obligations simultaneously “real” and internal to ongoing “social contacts”. Widlok did the same on the basis that foragers’ sharing practices and lives suggested

> Nothing less than a new figuration of “the social” as something which is not defined by a social contract or by the integrative power of authoritative structures (2016, p.157).

Ferguson’s quest for “new possible figurations of social obligation” dates back to *Give a Man a Fish* (2015). He has dedicated intense intellectual work to overcoming the opposition between gifts and markets, national and cosmopolitan membership. In the first case, he suggests sharing as a third, autonomous model of distribution, thus answering his own question: “How are the things of value in our world to be divided up among us (2021, p.1)?” His answer to the antagonism between national and cosmopolitan membership responds to a different question: “Who gets what and why?” Let us look at his argument via two contrastive concepts: involuntary commonality/collectivity and bounded collectivity (2021, pp.I;1;9;33).

To illustrate the first, which had already appeared as a “haphazard” association, Ferguson gives ethnographic examples concerning service delivery in Africa. The first case is water provision. The democratic state in South Africa committed itself to the

universal allocation of an essential minimum of free water. Later, there were localised attempts to charge user fees, which finally proved infeasible (see Chapter II). In Kwa-Zulu Natal, halting the supply for non-payers and noncitizens led to a cholera epidemic. People took water from contaminated pools, and the consequent spread of the virus made no distinction between paying and non-paying users, citizens and non-citizens.

The resumption of free and universal water provision followed necessarily, but not as a rights-based state duty. Instead, it derived from the "inescapable pragmatics of presence" (2021, p.31). In other words, those inhabiting the same region should be considered as a whole where drinkable water is concerned. Despite utterly different national origins and economic backgrounds, their shared vulnerability to the virus bonded them in a "community". However, one without the moral and cultural, national, and legal overtones we ordinarily attribute to the notion. It was a community for practical purposes.

Ferguson does not take this whole as a biological population. His reader is advised not to understand involuntary commonalities as a sheer aggregate of vulnerable bodies: "It's not a matter of bare life – a nonsocial biological relation" (2021, p.i). Presence and shared vulnerabilities are facts of a social nature in that physical proximity entails an experience of our social existence and the need to recognise our shared humanity. Bodily needs and vulnerabilities, albeit not entirely biological, make the bedrock core of solidarity. Through them, Ferguson found a passage from the "is" of spatial copresence to the "ought" of social obligation.

The involuntary commonalities Ferguson perceives in pandemics and service delivery in Southern Africa are as much political as physical. At least since *Proletarian Politics Today* (2019), he has argued that the "threatening presence" of urban masses has endowed the modern plebs with a demanding power to which authorities cannot turn a deaf ear. The plebeian ability to occupy and "disrupt" the social space (2019, p.19) amounts to a form of politics with significant persuasive force: violence. Such a de facto and social state of affairs, not generosity, entails pragmatic adjustments on the side of authorities and bureaucrats.

The concept of "bounded communities", as opposed to involuntary commonalities, is as much political as the latter. Yet, in bounded communities, the adjective political predicates the type of imagination prevalent in nation-states. Many still figurate "the social" in modern polities as people inhabiting a bordered territory and sharing an institutional framework and a somewhat substantive identity. This prevalent idea of political membership in mass-scale societies conditions the formulation and

application of social policies, limiting the number of those entitled to distributive shares. For Ferguson, such a conception now fails spectacularly (2021, p.13). Why?

The answer revolves around macroeconomic, political, and de facto aspects. Where the former two are concerned, recent financial deregulation and its impacts on national sovereignties and boundaries tell most of the story. So much so that many in the global South, and South Africa is a case in point, effectively live among significant contingents of immigrants, many of whom do not officially count as citizens. As co-present "denizens", "co-dwellers", or undesired neighbours – nomenclature abounds - they must enter experts' and politicians' calculi.

> Which children should attend school? Who gets vaccinated for measles? Who gets toilets? The answers often proceed not according to a logic of right but of practicality. (...). Not legal abstractions but brute sociological and immunological facts give the answers to such questions: certain services must, for practical as much as ethical reasons, be extended not to whoever is an authorised member but to whoever is here (Ferguson, 2021, p.24).

Experience counsels to think less about exclusionary, bounded collectivities and more about inclusive commonalities and associations. Ferguson argues that we shall not let our national, legal, and cultural allegiances close our eyes to our duties towards our neighbours precisely because they are such. The material – social, bodily, biological - connections between us and them make them part of us - of sorts, if you will, but with substantial consequences for the general well-being.

The excerpt quoted above speaks eloquently about the practical reasons we have to alter obsolete thinking habits by counterposing the brutality of social and "immunological facts" to the "abstraction" of legal and ethical reasoning (2021, p.24). As I indicate below, such is not a literal rendering of the author's words. Still, it leads us to the final opposition I found in *Presence and Social Obligation*: pragmatics and fear versus morals and ethics. Since this contrast between the realities of presence and, say, the ethereality of moral reasoning heralds my arguments contra Ferguson, let me briefly present the reasons why I opted for a biased reading of the following excerpt:

> Certain services must, for practical <u>as much as</u> ethical reasons, be extended not to whoever is an authorised member, but to whoever is here (2021, p.24) (emphasis added).

I contend that practical prevails over ethical reasons throughout *Presence and Social Obligation*. Such is the ultimate message of Ferguson's recent booklet. This thought-provoking work concerns the fact of being here and its consequences as duties towards others who happened to be "thrown together" in space. It attempts to build an ethnographically sound bridge between what "is" - or the realities of human copresence - and the "ought to" of political and social practice. To put it in concrete terms, it says that South Africans, for instance, have duties towards the undocumented Mozambicans living next door, whether they like it or not. The analytical point is to derive the concept of "real" obligations from proximate sociality. It proposes more than an alternative lexicon (2021, p.33): it is a bid on the increased reality of practice and pragmatics in social affairs.

Indeed, the message I ultimately found is that one should consider the pragmatics of presence, hence practical reason, *rather than* legal, ethical, and moral abstractions, ergo deontological reasoning. Ineluctably, even Ferguson reaches a deontological dimension, not only because he is tackling the issue of social obligation. He also takes a normative register when suggesting that, since the predicaments of viruses and uneducated children affect us all, vaccines and education should be provided for all, irrespective of legal status. Ferguson, I insist, does not and cannot defenestrate ethics, but his concept of obligation centres less on law, ethics[163], and sentiments than on the consequential realities of "proximate sociality" and the "practical imperatives of governance" (2021, p.23).

Decisive is the claim that adjacency, as a fact, entails "real", "actual", "true", and "active" obligations. Throughout his booklet, Ferguson predicates obligation five times on real, two on actual, three on in fact, and one on true and genuine. That takes me back to the last opposition in terms of which I read him: pragmatics and fear versus morality and ethics. Let us consider the ethnographic accounts and imaginative devices backing Ferguon's reasoning. Referring to Elizabeth Colson's fieldwork with agriculturalists in Zambia, he reports a case of food sharing derived, prominently, from fear.

> The ethnographer witnessed a local woman's response to a visit from another woman (not especially well-known to her) from a neighbouring village. When the visiting woman asked for grain, her host unhesitatingly responded by offering her a meal and filling her grain

[163] "On my account the "have to" in social obligation does not come from either ethical contemplation or legal sanction. Instead, it derives specifically from the force of the social - that is, it is linked to what other people will think of you, and how other people will behave towards you (Ferguson, 2021, p.46).

> basket to overflowing. It was an act apparently made out of gracious generosity (Ferguson, 2021, pp.47-8).

Real sharing, however, was triggered by the dangers of denying food to those who ask. Negating food was neither "safe" nor really a "possibility". Fear left no room for choice; it had a binding effect. Fear signals a "Hobbesian" world instead of a "Rousseauian" one. Such a perspective revolved around the costs of enmity in the neighbourhood and expressed the obligatory and factual dimensions of sociality, not their theoretical and utopian underpinnings. Again, I caution the reader that Ferguson qualifies many of his statements. He speaks, for instance, that the responsibility to share is "not just a pious ideal but an actual obligation" (2021, p.49). Still, I contend that the ultimate grammar of *Presence and Social Obligation* fosters a pragmatic rather than an ethical reading of this and other ethnographic frescos. This reading derives from an iterated opposition between the compulsory reality of adjacency as opposed to the abstraction of moral sentiments and Kantian-like subjectivities.

> That is what real obligation feels like. Indeed, as the geographers Clive Barnett and David Land have observed, when we make actual allocative decisions, it is normally not as isolated, contemplative Kantian subjects, but in real social contexts, where thinking about sharing unfolds in the push and shove of active social relationships and active claims and demands. And it is these relationships and these active claims and expectations, more than abstract ethical reasoning, that actually drive allocative outcomes (2021, p.27) (emphasis added).

As an authoritative stance on how allocative decisions are "actually" taken, the quotation above helps us understand the ethnographic instantiation of food giving in agricultural Zambia. However, the excerpt connects, textually, with an "imaginative device" about the meaning of true obligations and how one feels them in ordinary life.

> Encountering a true obligation, though, is not a matter of compassion [...] like when your no-good brother fails to pay his rent because he spent all his money on drugs and now wants to sleep on your couch [...]. What do you say? Probably not: "Oh, I feel so sorry for him, that I'm moved to generosity!", but something more like "How incredibly annoying – but what can I do, he's my brother?!" That is what real obligation feels like (2021, p.27).

In other words, the truth or reality of obligations lies in the absence of subjective deliberation: "obligations are obligatory" (2021, p.27). That is no tautology, for

obligatory, in Fergusons's parlance, means that some facts have a compelling force due to their sociality. They overwhelm individual convenience and leave one under their sway. It remains to be seen in more theoretical terms how Ferguson understands the social and factual vectors making obligations obligatory in such an unavoidable sense. Before, let us check what the no-good brother case tells us about the sociality of "real obligations".

> What would be the consequences when he tells your parents about how you have treated him? What about that old friend of his who now has a job at your workplace – what will he say about you, and to whom? [...]. We should be careful not to ignore the ways that expectations about sharing involve genuine obligations enforced by real social consequences and not just sentiments (2021, p.45) (emphasis added).

At stake are neither sentiments nor one's sense of ethical propriety but calculi about the costs of denial regarding social esteem and reputation. Such is quite a departure from the Hobbesian fear of retaliation through sorcery in Zambia. But it is also built as an equation in which the practical consequences of not sharing weigh more than one's will. Genuine and real, such obligations index the "force of the social" (2021, p.12). This raises the question: which ultimate concept of society and its obligatory force runs through *Presence and Social Obligation*?

Ferguson's booklet benefits from manifold theoretical references, most discussed in an addendum. Two francophone authors he discusses, Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, also receive attention in the book's initial sections. Durkheim is revisited due to his legacy on presence, society, and obligations; Mauss because of his concept of sociological fact.

L'Essai sur Le Don, according to Ferguson, is premised on observed facts as opposed to a normative stance. The American author praises the French for beginning his masterpiece by recognising that giving, receiving, and reciprocating gifts constituted obligations in diverse cultures. Mauss did not postulate that the three classical obligations should be compulsory; instead, he noticed they were.

> It is simply a sociological fact (in Mauss' account) that the gift is everywhere bound up with these three obligations. This, he says, must be our starting place (Ferguson, 2021, p.16).

"This" – namely, sociological, not normative facts - Ferguson posits as his point of departure. In a note before his considerations on Mauss, the former author contrasts his approach to what "is" as opposed to the "ought" question debated in political philosophy (2021, p.59). Sociological facts correspond to what occurs in the world; as such, they differ from what one thinks the world should be. The reality or actuality, the "is" of social affairs, interests Ferguson[164] and connects his and Mauss' work.

Ferguson considers presence a fact*;* factual is also "the social" and its compelling power. These facts constrain the analyst, forcing him to move from philosophical problems to the realm of spatial experience, where one can observe that the reciprocal presence of human beings binds them in involuntary commonalities. I take the passage below as an index of the facticity or actuality that Ferguson ascribes to presence and his shift to a speculative and somewhat deontological register.

> My approach has been to track real developments on the ground, not to propose some imaginary pie in the sky of universal sharing and happily-ever-after.
>
> At the same time, however, I feel that it would be a missed opportunity for a scholar tracing an emergent politics to remain satisfied only [sic] to describe what is (2021, p.35).

Taken from Mauss, Ferguson's emphasis on facticity is indispensable to understanding the equally core concepts of "the social" and "obligation". These concepts he debates with Émile Durkheim, to whom he pays an ambivalent tribute. Let us consider the following excerpt.

> Obligations, in my account, flow from pragmatic circumstance and shared vulnerabilities, not intimation of the transcendent (2021, p.50).

To what Ferguson opposes Durkheimian transcendence? To the "mundane bumping up against each other of adjacency" (2021, p.50). The American author concedes that the physical gathering of individuals triggers "sensory experiences" that make them feel something larger than themselves: a community with its scents of "solidarity" (2021, p.ii). Yet he contends that the "charismatic and magical Durkheimian" crowd entailed a "sanctified" version of norms and the obligation to abide by them (2021, p.49). This

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[164] It is only in the ending sections of *Presence and Social Obligation* that Ferguson allows himself a shift to a more "speculative" mode of reasoning.

perspective on society and the binding force of its law and morals mystified the pedestrian reasons why social subjects fulfil their obligations in everyday life.

Again, the imaginative (*ma non-troppo*) device of the African taxi offers a more realistic picture of society and social obligation: "the muddling through of strangers in the minibus" (2021, p.50). "Pressing up against" (2021, p.28) is another relevant expression. All this suggests physically imposed, unavoidable obligations as the fact of presence.

> Like giving way in the crowded minibus, we are not simply acting out of a discretionary and beneficent generosity. We are under real obligation. Obligations are obligatory (2021, p.27).

Real obligations are not a matter of contracts, compassion, and contemplation. To be sure, Ferguson acknowledges that one cannot simply dispense with all these concepts[165]. The same applies when he recalls the Durkheimian legacy: "obligations need to be understood as simultaneously moral and social" (2021, p.49). However, the types of obligations he is calling attention to have far less connection to morality, law, and their transcendent source of validity than to what he takes as "real social contexts" and "actual social practice" (2021, pp.27;38). In this connection, Ferguson's tribute to the Durkheimian sociology of morals sounds more like a literary concession than real inspiration, as in the excerpt below.

> The social in social obligation [...] refers (as Durkheim rightly insisted) to a moral unity. And for Durkheim, any notion of the social implied precisely "a society" [...]
>
> But what is "a society" today, and what does "social obligation" really mean? (Ferguson, 2021, p.120) (emphasis added).

Reality – real meaning – is the template against which Ferguson contrasts his notion of society and obligation to 19th-century-based social theories. The adversative construction – "But what is a society" – and the emphasis on the current state of affairs and its real significance patently show opposition to the "old organismic" Durkheimian society (2021, p.50). Yet, on a theoretical level, Ferguson also rejects the purely associative and amoral model of Latour's actor-network approach (2021, pp.50-1). I, therefore, propose a final look at his imaginative devices, ethnographic frescos, and the

[165] Accordingly, constructions recur such as "not only [ethics], but", "not simply [generosity], but", and "not just [ideals]" (2021, pp.27;47;48).

theoretical clarifications concerning two other authors he briefly discusses: Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler.

The lack of space inside the African mini taxi entails the ineluctable obligation to squeeze oneself for the other's sake. There is a minimum, though nontrivial, sociality between passengers, but the overall picture looks too "incidental" and "contingent", according to Ferguson himself (2021, p.25). Something resembling more to a society emerges from the ethnography of service delivery in Southern Africa. In local-based struggles for free water provision, the concerned populations became "the governed" (2021, p.30), a conceptual and practical image far less unitary and abstract than citizens but more cohesive than the cursory association between passengers.

Struggles over waste in Kampala tell a similar story. The "disposability" and "distribution" of life's goods and "bads" entail potent links between people (2021, pp.30-1). Such connections are less concerned with political citizenship and productive integration than with environment-based contests over value and filth. Ferguson takes another example of "commonalities" formed around crucially sensitive objects in urban landscapes from the former mining areas in the Rand – South Africa's economic hub. The toxic residues left in the aftermath of mineral extraction raised collective issues of resource "co-usage" and "shared environmental vulnerability" (2021, p.32). These commonalities contrast with the region's former model of associations based on labour and political identities.

I take a last detour in Widlok. In his attempt to offer a new "figuration of the social" via the ethnography of sharing among foragers, he highlights that "objects' affordances" impact social forms. In other words, the different "things we share" mould particular configurations of communities (2016, p.94). The range and specificity of communal possibilities stemming from the objects at stake do not unilaterally determine the community of practice. Other social and environmental factors intervene between the objects and the group gathered around them[166]. Nevertheless, an outline of "the social" emerges in close relation to things, personal evaluations thereof, and people's practices and moral skills.

> While it is difficult to predict sharing by simply looking at the shared objects and their affordances, there are still good reasons to look more

[166] The environment, incidentally, is the classic case of affordances, that is, the possibilities for human action and thought, considered as a creative function of nature's potentialities and constraints (Ingold, 2000).

> closely at how the things we share are integrated as constitutive parts into a community of practice. After all, the most basic affordance of any shared object is that it creates something like a community, however loosely constituted (2016, p.94).

Turning back to Ferguson, "objects" as different as water and waste, transport, and toxic mine tailings create various "political dangers and possibilities" (2021, p.32). In the contextual and usage-oriented dealings with these things and the shared problems they raise, new, equally contextual figures of the social emerge, albeit "loosely constituted" - to recall Widlok's formula above. Does it have to do with rights, classes, and cultural identities? To a limited extent only since practical interests and risks matter more than traditional allegiances. Consequently, classic politics and group formation give room to improvised collectivities made of people who stumbled upon their commonality when tackling issues connected to social goods and bads (2021, pp.29-33).

On a theoretical level, Ferguson's ethnographic focus on "struggles" takes him to Arendt's elaboration of the *polis* as the locus of active life and the commonly built reality of the body political. But the citizens' assembly in Arendt is too classic and institutionalised a mode of presence and politics in the public space (2021, pp.54-5). Worse, her model builds on a dichotomy between the political and the social corpora, locking bodily needs and social reproduction away in households' private, pre-political life.

Ferguson praises Butler's critique of Arendt and the rescue of vital needs from exile into the classical *oikos*. Her recasting precarity as a proper political subject also resonates with his comprehension of society as a collectivity shaped by struggles for basics in Southern Africa. There are, however, lines of dissent between Ferguson and Butler. Where the latter emphasises the ethical imperatives of human interdependencies, Ferguson prefers the unilateral claims derived from presence. Finally, Butler's conception of politics still has a romantic bent for citizen assemblies and organised demonstrations, whereas Ferguson focuses on the "everyday social relations of adjacency" (2021, pp.56-7).

Cryptic as it seems to me, Ferguson's concept of "the social" has at least five noticeable characteristics: it is *processual* rather than foundational, and *spatially sparse* rather than territorially cohesive; it is highly *political* (in that it presupposes clash) but not driven by classical allegiances in a political body of authorised members; its *form* varies with the demanded *objects* and the connected practical possibilities of association

they afford; finally, it is *pragmatic*, in that moral unity and ethics of mutuality, of a French scent, are replaced by the practical interests and realistically possible adjustments in adjacency and heterogeneity. Next, I debate this non-normative figuration of "the social" in South Africa.

Section II – On Presence and Sharing among South African Interlocutors

I now hope to restitute part of the light that normativity and moral theory deserve in South Africa. I previously tried to show that, in moving presence and adjacency centerstage, Ferguson (2021) took some of the relevance of moral reasoning and attitudes in the region. The statement that adjacency and proximate sociality entailed obligations "real", "actual", and "true", etc. implied that duties of a moral basis sounded less real, actual, and true. Co-presence in close vicinity, not generosity, makes the obligation to share inescapable. In Ferguson's framework, reciprocity and moral sentiments still matter - but matter less.

I aim to search for the meanings of presence and sharing among South African interlocutors. I contend that both notions are suffused with a moral perspective on social affairs, more than *Presence and Social Obligation* purport. The quest for local meanings follows a path Ferguson himself indicated. According to him, the idea "that some people are here among us" is an "elaborate" construction and requires "reworking" (2021, p.41). I, therefore, discuss two IsiNdebele terms, *ukhona* (to be there) and *ube khona for* (to be there for), and some of the situations and beings to which it is applied. I also follow Ferguson when examining another paramount construct in South Africa: neighbourliness.

Though my moves are extensions of Ferguson's, I differ from him in two respects. I treat presence, sharing and neighbourliness as paramount value-ideas (Dumont, 2013), what Durkheim called *idéaux de valeur* (1911). Such a theoretical stance does not imply a minor commitment to practice and observed reality. Instead, it posits that what Ferguson (2021) calls "actual relationships" and the "push-and-shove" of social reality are not blunt experiences since they are mediated by what people think and feel their world is and shall be. Value ideas articulate cognition, sentiments, and deontology; they indicate the existence of a "*paysage mental*" (Dumont, 1983, p.18). What one thinks and feels to be

right makes the background against which one's action becomes significant, hence social. As such, it can be judged by one, others, and the observer.

As a value-idea, presence means that a particular group of humans believe that persons *are* and *must be there* for each other, for such is their appropriate mode of life. In other words, presence articulates "the is" and "the ought" as indissociable aspects of a shared reality. My South African interlocutors conceive human existence as necessarily a collective enterprise. In ascribing to such a way of living a paramount value (worth or relevance), they raise it from ordinary conceptions to the realm of the good life. Living together becomes an "ethical project" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b). Whether their action accords with their perspective on social affairs and obligations is a post-fact interpretive task (Goodbout, 2008); be it as it may, humans become automatons driven by hunger and fear without reference to an overall normative framework.

The contention that value ideas have a sentimental texture means that people are attached to their worldviews and values (Karsenti, 2012a). They desire it, feel pleasure in it, and may experience "insult" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011) by actions that do not honour what they want to be honoured. People live their ideals and values with their minds, bodies, and hearts. Mental (even unconscious) and physical energies – *affects* (Favret-Saada, 2009) - are invested in what one believes. Back in 2016, one of my dearest South African interlocutors used to say about sharing in South Africa: "We share with an open heart! That's freedom!"[167] Such was not a declaration of unrestrained generosity but the acknowledgement that sharing remains a source of delight and contentment that makes life a free and pleasurable enterprise. Another interlocutor once exclaimed - "I love Barcelona. They share the ball like we share the beer!"[168]

The second conceptual line threading through the section is recognition (Honneth and Margalit, 2001; Honneth, 2003). Ferguson knows that presence cannot be understood without such a theory but does not go beyond an end note (2021, p.62). It is a curious situation because recognition allows him to move from the blunt to the social fact of presence. Recognition implies a recognition order: anything resembling a society institutionalises the patterns of respectful interaction that ultimately communicate human dignity. In this connection, morality has a primary status in social affairs. As part and parcel of what ongoing social relations mean and how they are experienced, recognition

[167] Personal archive.
[168] Personal archive.

indicates that social contacts and contracts are conceptually (and practically) indissociable.

Gestures and objects play a substantial role in recognition processes (Honneth and Margalit, 2001; Caillé, 2019). Gestures, gifts, and reciprocal services – *dons et prestations* (Mauss, 1923-1924) – are the vectors through which mutual recognition becomes a lived reality. Reciprocity, or mutuality, is core here, but it does not mean tit-for-tat equivalence, pace Widlok (2016). Strict symmetry is dispensable, and so is unilateral and sheer generosity. Swinging between the giver and the receiver's pole is not. One imparts that others matter in welcoming, transmitting things, and performing favours to others. Thus, dignity is mutually reinforced, alliances are established, and humans perceive that their value as persons remains contingent on others. A Nguni proverb comes to help:

> A person is a person through other persons (Ngobese, 2003).

That means reciprocity consists of more than "vague" mutual engagements Widlok (2016, p.21). It is more than vague precisely because it is *objective* or contingent on the circulation of objects and reciprocal gestures to be efficacious. It also goes beyond vagueness in that it is *constitutive* of subjects. The personhood of grandmothers and the entitlements ensuring their special status include, inter alia, that they do not rest alone at home and that their grandchildren perform the domestic obligations stemming from their status as juniors. In turn, grandchildren grow and mature in close rapport with their grannies and as receivers of their love and material support. Neither grandchildren's nor grandmother's personhood subsists outside their necessary entanglement.

In Chapter I, I mentioned the circumstances in which I first went to Martha's house in Kwa-Ndebele. In 2016, Luthando was my assistant at an informal settlement in Pretoria. By April, precisely after I paid her salary, she spontaneously told me her life story and her grandmother's pivotal role in it. It was a Friday night, and she would take a bus to Kwa-Ndebele the following day. While we talked, she asked me to take notes in my notebook.

> At noon, Luthando is going to Kwa-Ndebele to see her grandmother because she must give her grandmother something – 'Cause my grandmother raised me, so <u>I can't eat my money alone. I have to provide</u> for my grandmother cause she is the breadwinner. She raised me' (emphasis added).

I contend that eating one's money with someone – the opposite of eating one's money alone – is a synonym for sharing and illustrates the various situations in which it occurs. In the excerpt above, Luthando told me she was supposed to share part of her salary with her grandmother in Kwa-Ndebele. Her duty to so do was expressed in the normative language of "I can't" (eat her money alone) and "I have to" (provide for her grandmother). Luthando's construction also, and patently, presupposed reciprocity: *magogo* Martha had raised her and remained the breadwinner[169]; therefore, she should be given something in return. As I discuss below, another way of expressing magogo's status was to say that she had been there (*ube khona for*) for Luthando throughout her life.

Luthando went alone to Kwa-Ndebele the following afternoon while I remained in the informal settlement. A week later, my assistant, her mother's sister, Norah, the latter's youngest granddaughter, and I paid a weekend visit to Martha. On the eve of a two-hour trip to the countryside, Norah observed that we would enjoy intense celebrations at Martha's: "We are going for *islala*!"[170] Indeed, it was a weekend of warm, non-stop socialisation between Martha's family and dearest neighbours. We shared everything we had: money, food, beers, ideas. By Sunday, amid continual merry-making, Luthando exclaimed

> In South Africa, we live to share! We share even boyfriends and girlfriends!

The bond between Luthando and Martha brings me to the first time I heard the word *ukhona* (presence) in South Africa. Three years after the above-quoted episode with my assistant, I arrived in Kwa-Ndebele to conduct my PhD fieldwork. In December 2019, I interviewed Ukhuna, her sister, Omkhulu, and their shared children (see Chapter III). We talked extensively about Ukhuna's recently deceased grandmother, Lisa, and I asked my interviewee whether the latter was still present in her life. Ukhuna responded that her grandmother sometimes came in dreams and said: "Take care of my house. Don't be afraid. I'm still here". On such occasions, my interviewee felt that her granny was indeed there. *Ukhona*, she told me, made IsiNdebele's equivalent of English presence. I could not help but ask her:

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[169] Both Luthando's mother, Margareth, and brother, Gift, lived at Martha's and had no income at all.

[170] In IsiNdebele, *islala* means literally "not to sleep" and often implies nigh-long drinking.

> **Is she *ukhona* [present]?**
> Yeah. Even though I'm sleeping, I can feel she's here in my room. She's my security guard.

I did not ask further questions on the meaning of *ukhona*. Only when writing this thesis did I realise that the word was vital to understanding other aspects of my interviewee's *culture*, a notion she often deployed to justify relevant elements of South African social relations and customs. Ngobese (2003) wrote about a Zulu ritual called *ukubuyisa*. Literally, the word means to *bring back or retrieve*[171] and consists of a ceremony in which relevant ancestors are honoured (through the sacrifice of a beast) and invited to return home.

> The 'bringing back home' is greatly valued as a religious ritual. It serves to "Invite the dead to come and make their presence in the midst of the family" [...].
> The living dead is invited to be within the homestead for a very important purpose. His/her presence assures the members of the family that they are always safe (Ngobese, 2003:91) (emphasis added).

My two points here are apparent. First, ancestors are the beings to which the notion of presence applies. This social fact contrasts with the hunter-gatherers Widlok (2016) studied. They take human existence as a finite venture. Furthermore, ancestors' presence amid agropastoralists[172] is symbolically efficacious. Back home, they stand as "security guards" - in Ukhuna's words. According to Ngobese (2003), families feel "safe" then.

During our five interviewing sections, Ukhuna did not mention the ukubuyisa ritual, yet she and Amahle narrated another mortuary custom prescribed by their *"culture"*. In the aftermath of one's death, relatives and dearest friends are supposed to come and fill the bereaved's house with their presence. Furniture is removed for people to stay over until the funeral, after which they gather again to eat and drink. Ukhuna and I had the following dialogue about the so-called after-tears.

> **Did you buy the beers for the after-tears?**

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[171] Google Translate. (n.d). *ukubuyisa.* In https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=zulu+english+dictionary&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&safari_group=9.

[172] Widlok (2016, p.188) himself recognizes that, different from San hunter-gatherers, agropastoralists conceive human existence as a continual endeavor and one centred on reciprocicty between the living and the dead.

> **Ukhuna:** No, I didn't. But my brother, Amahle's brother, buy for me [...] Sky Vodka with a case of Strongbow. He said: 'You know what? This is for you. Just to release your soul. Just to calm down. *Gogo* passed away, we know, but you have to calm down. You have to be here with us. We are your family' (emphasis added).

Presence again was at play, though in a sense that, albeit physical, transcends physicality. Ukhuna was given a gift of alcohol for a spiritual reason, not to let her mind wander in aimless and lonely despair. Ukhuna ought to remain *there*, connected with those neighbours who became family through affinity and support. As I demonstrated in Chapter III, Ukhuna's discourse about her history rests on tense dialectics between those who *were* and those who *were not there for* her. In other words, her life story builds on a notion indissociable from *ukhona*, namely *ube khona for* (to be there for[173]). The few weeks between her grandmother's death and the days following the funeral revealed the value of these two categories.

Ukhuna's genitors did not sleep over at her house the week preceding *magogo* Lisa's funeral. On the contrary, her best pal, Amahle, and her mother, Mary, did. Ukhuna's genitors neither visited nor sent her money; they did not "check on" her. Ukhuna's neighbours, however, gave her moral and material support. In Amahle's words, they *were there for* Ukhuna. So was Ukhuna's grandmother throughout her life, which created a bond transcending *magogo*'s death.

> This house I see as my legacy. It's my duty to love her house like she did. Because she was there for me, she raised me with all her heart.

We cannot understand Ukhuna's "duty" to remain at her grandmother's house without considering three facts set on the continuum of relations between the living and the dead. First, her grandmother's spirit remained *there*. Second, she had always been *there for* Ukhuna and her child, Bomini. Third, Ukhuna's genitors told her at the funeral: "Don't cry; we are here for you". Nevertheless, they were not, and their absence (or lack of material support) triggered Ukhuna's resentment toward them. My interviewee expressed in the following words:

> I understand a gift is from your heart.

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[173] Google Translate. (n.d). Ube khona for. In: https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=zulu+english+dictionary&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&safari_group=9,

They should have given her *something* as a token of their alliance[174]. This story contains at least two capital differences from Ferguson's notion of presence and sociality. First, what prevails in Ukhuna's discourse is not physicality but the concrete gestures through which relevant others assured or did not assure her of their bond. These actions, or omissions, were all cast in the language of help and giving. Accordingly, two antagonist patterns of social relationship emerged: on the one hand, those who were neighbours and became family; on the other, those who were only relatives.

> **Do you consider your neighbours to be your family?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yes.
> **Amahle:** More than your family?

Ukhuna started crying. Her parents lived just up the street, but they were not there, neither physically nor in support. In a very concrete sense, they were not even proper neighbours – for the latter offered Ukhuna the necessary things and solace. Ukhuna and her parents got along yet were "not close". Better, they were close in space and genealogical descent but miles apart in their hearts. A poignant, contradictory mixture whose outcome was cold distance – "I used to visit them, but I don't feel it's like my home there".

In his endeavours to distinguish agropastoralists' and hunter-gatherers' models of sociality and transmission of objects, Widlok stated:

> Sharing is an intrinsic realization of access to goods [...] sharing is in the first place about the practice of sharing itself and not about the allocation of goods or the creation of social bonds. [...] the allocation of goods or the creation of collective identities can be maintained in other ways (2016, p.182).

The German author also correlates sharing and social bonds (2016, pp.10,12,182), but his ultimate definition of sharing, what the practice intrinsically is, ranks access to goods first. This makes me question how apposite Ferguson's move was: from presence and sharing among the San in Namibia to sharing and presence in Southern Africa more broadly. Attention to an IsiNdebele conception of presence in its composite form – *be there* / *be there for* – offers a somewhat different portrait: the circulation of objects serves

[174] That was precisely what Luthando told me after she received her first salary: she should give magogo something, they had kept a longlasting alliance.

the creation of bonds and identities, defining what here among us means and who shall be included. Within this circuit, generosity matters less than genuine interest in the social bond itself.

Ukhuna shared her life story and feelings of attachment and estrangement to neighbours and kin in five appointments with me. Another report on presence that deserves the reader's attention occurred a month before the interviewing sections at Ukhuna's veranda. A couple of weeks after my arrival in Kwa-Ndebele, my host family received an unexpected guest. A doubtful guest, though one with rights to make himself present among us. Well, neither quite present nor entirely among us, though entitled to remain there for a while. Sizwe was Martha's fourth grandchild (see Chapter II). I was communicated of his arrival by Luthando's brother, Gift, who approached me with unease. There was someone new around us, he said, and after commenting on Sizwe's tragic story – his father committed suicide – Gift noticed, laconically:

> We can't chase him away.

Such was not a pious declaration. Above all, Gift transpired resignation before two blunt facts: his cousin was *de facto* there and belonged, *en droit*, to the family. Blunt facts, indeed, because entailing an immediate consequence: Sizwe's presence *ought to* be accepted. The customary rights of a relative prevailed over will and made an obligation obligatory indeed.

At Sizwe's arrival, Gift did not say: "Oh, we are moved to generosity and can't chase him away" (Ferguson, 2021). The necessary, therefore needless-to-say premise of his laconic words was "he's not welcome but". Of course, physical *presence* mattered: not recognising a human being is a harsh attitude and may taint its perpetrator with the indignity of regardlessness for others. Even more if one has the status of grandson: *ikhaya lakagogo abantwana boke*[175]. Sizwe's presence challenged Martha, Luthado, Gift, and Margaret; Sizwe's legal status gave him the ultimate ground to stay four weeks around us.

Paraphrasing Ferguson (2021), he was a no-good cousin. Luthando believed he consumed nyaope. He stole her money and things during his previous stay at Martha's. Again, he took ZAR 50 from her. Sizwe thus acknowledged when he departed on

[175] Granny's home is children's home.

December 28th, 2019, one of the few scenes involving him and registered on my notes. While at Martha's, Sizwe was not with us. He did not participate in either domestic division of labour or merry-making time. His plate was always set to him, and so was his bed in the guest chamber, which he shared with Mpho (our friend from Pretoria). Sizwe, however, spent most of his days outside, and even when physically *there* at Martha's, he was not *really* there. The situation resonates with the concept of "invisibility".

> A form of being made invisible, of being made to disappear, that evidently involves not a physical non-presence, but rather non-existence in a social sense (Honneth, 2001, p.111).

I invite the reader to pause over the epistemology of recognition. Above, Axel Honneth refers to a Black protagonist in a novel who suffers from invisibility among his White counterparts. The character is there, as visible as the sun, but the former insists on looking through him. They thereby communicate his lack of worth as a partner. Though present, the protagonist remains socially meaningless (Honneth, 2001, p.112). Human worth is not a given – a sociological fact of which Ferguson is aware (2021). I am afraid, though, that his emphasis on "bodily presence", "shared vulnerabilities", and "pragmatic adjustments" overshadows the moral infrastructure of recognition, namely that

> It possesses a performative character because the expressive responses that accompany it symbolize the practical ways of reacting that are necessary in order to 'do justice' to the person recognized. In the felicitous formulation of Helmut Plessner, one could say that the expression of recognition represents the 'allegory' of a moral action (Honneth, 2001, p.118).

Acts meant to attest that someone is welcome as a socially valuable human are both performative and allegoric. Through visible gestures, facial expressions, or audible utterances, one expressively communicates that the other is welcome and deserves attention, even some "reverence" (2001, p.118-20). Only those practical and empathetic ways of reacting to the other's presence do justice to human dignity. Even when prelinguistic, these acts are communicative: they convey one's value and signal that the interaction is to follow a *benevolent* path – benevolent, not generous. Recognition is symbolic and not *diabolic*: it amounts to extended, associative hands instead of hostility and dissociation (Caillé, 2019, p.38).

Let us return to Sizwe's four weeks around, but not within us in Kwa-Ndebele. There he was, but moral miles away, extracted from all those doings that constituted our shared existence. Lack of engagement and assignment of functions in the household routine made him somewhat invisible. Did we greet him in the morning? We did, but awkwardly. Were his plate and bed there for him? Yes, as an unequivocal display of kin customary legalism. Formal attachment to norms kept a relative fed, sheltered, and the family's face. The overall situation was underpinned not by the presence in itself but by a theory of kin obligations, a set of rights attached to the personal status of a grandson. The opposite of what Ferguson means by

> An obligation that is obligatory not only in theory but in fact (2021, p.49).

Let us examine the situation of another guest at Martha's, Bongani (see Chapter II). To call him a guest is already misleading. According to Luthando, nobody invited Bongani to Martha's. He arrived without notice in July, and there he stayed. Unlike Sizwe, Martha's grandson, Bongani was only distantly related to the family. His sister, Thabisa, was the mother of Martha's two first grand grandchildren. Before going to the matriarch's house, Bongani had lived with his other sister, Esulu. They ran together a *spahlo* (a small business on sandwiches and fries) until Bongani evaded her house with their money.

After spending it, Bongani headed to Martha's. Pretty much like Sizwe, he simply made himself *present* there. Despite similar arrival strategies, their mode of incorporation into household life diverged thoroughly. Sizwe enjoyed the status of kin but remained alien to our shared life. A friend, Bongani was incorporated into a shared moral and practical framework. He often cooked and helped Margaret with domestic cleansing and the caretaking Luthando required. Bongani ate, chatted, and partied with us. *There* he was in a strong sense: as a socially valuable person, as a welcome and relevant partner (Honneth, 2001).

Like Sizwe, Bongani left us before New Year. Amid fiery Christmas celebrations at the local square, he spent the ZAR 800 Margaret had entrusted him. In the aftermath, he took refuge at an old friend, and Margaret found him on December 27th. He promised to restitute the money but did not; neither did he come back to Martha's house. A month after the episode, I met one of his friends, who told me Bongani was living with his

grandmother. He observed how sorry Bongani was but did not spare him from criticism. He had been taken “as a family”, even though Martha’s was not his home. He also mentioned that Bongani asked the old chaps to “make a plan”, i.e., help him repay Margaret. Unfortunately, they could not “fix the problem”.

Bongani’s and Sizwe’s short stay among us in Kwa-Ndebele tells a meaningful story about presence. Sizwe enjoyed the status of kin, which secured him a bed and a plate. His rights and needs were publicly acknowledged; his incorporation as a valuable partner remained foreclosed due to a lack of stable moral standing. A kin code of obligations prevailed, making his presence obligatory but spectral. On the contrary, Bongani had no right to be there, but fellow feelings alchemized him into a family member for practical purposes - daily duties and delight. However, when expectations of reciprocal benevolence (Honneth, 2001) vanished, so did his presence. He remained in the neighbourhood but moral miles away from us, therefore invisible.

I propose these episodes as extreme indexes of the delicate but ultimately paramount value of moral and legal structures underpinning the social meaning of presence. I agree with Ferguson (2021) that the vulnerability a human body communicates is hardly neglectable. Yet the actual responses to it, and ultimately the scope of pragmatic adjustment to presence and claims to sharing, vary according to subjects' reciprocal adherence to a shared normative framework. Socialised subjects know what they owe and can expect from each other. Our intersubjective or “second nature” (Honneth, 2001, p.115) has a supra-individual basis; criteria of social respect are embedded in cultural milieux.

> Forms of reciprocal recognition are always already institutionalized in every social reality. [...]. What is therefore required first of all is an attempt to explicate the moral order of society as a fragile structure of graduated relations of recognition; only then can it be shown in a second step that this recognition order can touch off social conflicts on various levels (Honneth, 2003, pp.136-7).

In daily interactions, the public standards of respect remain implicit. Conflicts, however, recall them to the actors’ minds and even teach foreign Anthropologists some manners. Another episode deserving the reader’s attention concerns Luthando’s ex-boyfriend's presence in Kwa-Ndebele (see Chapter II). She and Masozi split in 2016 but were on good terms three years later. He and I, on the contrary, continued to experience mutual dislike, so much so that Luthando and I had a small argument on the eve of his

arrival. While night chatting in her room, she told me Masozi would visit her. When I mentioned my intention not to socialize with him – either remaining inside my room or going on a daylong stroll – she contested me. Keeping myself apart was simply not a possibility.

Luthando preemptively denied me the liberty to escape Masozi, which also proved unfeasible on practical grounds[176]. This situation suggests that presence presupposes an *etiquette* (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011). For presence to be recognized or given the appreciation it commands, one must observe prescribed courses of action. At Saturday family gatherings, specific modes of conduct become imperative when some friends, such as Masozi, are admitted as family. One presents oneself and greets them; one smiles at them; one chats and shares one's things with them. One keeps himself available for others through "emphatic forms of expression" (Honneth, 2001), the well-known social gages of respect. Less than this is frowned upon: it goes against the "nature" of things (a point I will resume soon).

Unfortunately, I did not record Luthando's exact words to curb my intention to evade Masozi. Two unrelated episodes, however, show how aware she was of the specific normative texture of the South African social fabric and its bearing on my work and expected behaviour. In April 2016, while we waited for the bus to transport us from Pretoria to Kwa-Ndebele, I started stretching my arms and legs. Occasionally, my t-shirt moved over my belly, exposing it to the public eye. Noticing that others observed me with discomfort, Luthando ordered me to stop. "These people believe in culture", she said, meaning that the onlookers believed in *their* code of conduct and that it did not allow one to show one's belly at the bus station.

The second revealing episode took place in January 2020. I then organized a Saturday lunch at *mama* Thuli's house for a few people. By morning, Luthando warned me that some of Thuli's neighbours and relatives would join us. Noticing my surprise and discomfort, Luthando succinctly reminded me that I was there "to learn" how South Africans live. She also remarked:

> Here, we share.

[176] I tried hard to remain inside my room but was summoned out of it by one of our visitors.

On the eve of Masozi's coming, Luthando might have said that my intended absence went against their culture and my own purpose: learning about South African ways of life. The day after his visit, I wrote in my notebook that I was supposed to socialize with him and the others. Interestingly, I then set a parallel between his Saturday visit and Thabisa's Sunday arrival. The latter and I were not yet acquainted. However, she took the liberty to enter my (sic) room twice. When I finally surrendered, woke up and approached Luthando in despair – Who was urging me out of bed? – she again complained about my manners. I ought not to keep myself away while we had guests. Making my presence available for others, being there for and with them, was not a matter of choice but of culture – a central piece in a puzzle called how people live[177].

Thabisa would work as my assistant between November 2020 and May 2021 (see Chapter V). Our rapport continues until now (April 2023). I recently interviewed her about the meanings of *ukhona* (be there) and *ube khona for* (be there for) and how these notions applied to relations between neighbours[178].

> **Do you think that neighbours are supposed to be there for each other?**
> Yes, yes.
>
> **And how can they show that they are there for each other?**
> Sometimes when you don't have a mile meal, you can go to your neighbour and borrow. Maybe you are going to travel; you can tell your neighbour: 'Please, take care of my place for 2 to 3 days, I'm going out'. That's a responsibility of the neighbour. You have to love each other, to take care of each other. I think you should be with your neighbour because you can't live without a neighbour.

Thabisa's world is neither a Hobbesian nightmare nor a Rousseauian paradise (Ferguson, 2021, p.48). Instead, it is a world with a shared ideal of neighbourliness. As "standards of judgement" (Bellah, 1973), ideals give conceptual means to assess the quality of social relationships and facts. Their social life takes form in "value judgements" (Karsenti, 2012a). As such, an ideal is as real as vicinities. Indeed, many South Africans understand and assess their neighbours' behaviour through a framework based on categories such as "family", "friends", "to borrow", "to give", "to talk", and "to take

[177] Not only Luthando defined my job in terms of learning how South Africans live. Bomini, Ukhuna's son, conceived my activities in the same terms (see Chapter III).
[178] The interview was a paid one, as all other works Thabisa has performed for me.

care"[179]. Thabisa's deployment of "responsibility" goes a step further, possibly indicating an aspect of what Mauss (1934) called "institutions". What matters, in any case, is that such concepts help grasp the expectations composing reality's moral infrastructure (Honneth, 2003).

After Thabisa stated that one could not live without a neighbour, I asked her why. She observed that many township dwellers live far from their families in the countryside. She recalled the informal settlement in Pretoria East (where we both lived) as a setting where neighbours constitute a last resort against hunger.

> At least, if I don't have a mielie-meal, he or she [neighbour] will give me.

What if one's neighbour does not give it? I then asked a question beyond Thabisa's horizon of expectations, and her speech vacillated – "Which means he or she... I don't know what to say. That neighbour can't take care of all people". When she resumed the assertive register of "you can't live without a neighbour", Thabisa added a remark on the *nature* of things.

> Because you can't live alone. You never live alone. You'll need other people to help sometimes, even if it's not the money. But one thing... Lots of things. There's a lot of things your neighbour can help you, as a nature.
>
> **What?**
> As a nature, we live like...

They live like *that* – I presume. Thabisa thinks that living together, therefore being there for neighbours, is the "nature" of neighbourhood. In other words, she thinks that "the is" and "the ought" of neighbourhood overlap. There is no chasm between is and ought, nor, strictly speaking, the sense of addition presupposed by is *and* ought. Neighbourhood exists (or *is*); neighbours help - or *ought to*, in our Kantian lexicon. Our lexicon, indeed, not Thabisa's, for she can barely conceive – "I don't know what to say" - a situation in which a neighbour *is* not what it *shall be*. To my interviewee, there is always something to be done. At stake is an imperative definition of things neighbour, not a guarantee on the actual content of individual actions. A definition has practical

[179] These terms appeared repeatedly in the 17 semi-structured interviews I conducted in 2016 at an informal settlement in Pretoria East.

consequences: it helps organize one's behaviour and assess others' (Karsenti, 2012; Bellah, 1973). Still, it is not a mechanical catalyst and a far cry from unrestricted generosity.

I agree with Ferguson's claim that individuals take allocative decisions not as "isolated, contemplative Kantian subjects" (2021, p.27). I do agree but for reasons different from his. What he seems to suggest as *Kantian* is contemplative insulation and a mode of ethical reasoning compulsively geared toward generosity or premised on abstract humanity. Non-Kantian, in a more consequential sense, means that the concept of things and the value attributed to them have not been dissociated. That does bear upon action: as a non-Kantian woman, Thabisa's attitude toward neighbours remains imbued with their importance in her world. Notwithstanding, concrete action remains irreducibly diverse (Godbout, 2008; Karsenti, 2012a).

> By not making an a priori separation of ideas and values, we remain closer to the real relation - in non-modern societies – between thought and act, while intellectualist or positivist analysis tends to destroy this relation. [...] From a comparative point of view, modern thought is exceptional in that, starting with Kant, it separates 'is' and 'ought to be', fact and value. [...]. There is no need to impose this complication or distinction on cultures which do not recognize it: in the comparative study, one will be considering value-ideas (Dumont, 1979, p.814).

Not even weirdos, at least not weirdos in all domains (Dumont, 1983), can keep severed the "is" and "ought", the idea or representation of something and its concomitant value. Before resuming Thabisa's ruminations on the importance of neighbours, let us consider Ferguson's example of the "no-good brother" (2021, pp.27;46). A burden notwithstanding, he should be hosted because of the "force of the social", in case the good brother's fear of being considered an "asshole" by common acquaintances (2021, p.27). Ferguson did not realise that the reproach is contingent on the value ascribed to brotherhood and, consequently, on some form of deontology. Not meeting the expected duties entails moral sanction. Even in the mainly "value-free" West (Dumont, 2013), brothers shall stand for each other as a last resort. Brothers are so supposed; neighbours are not (at least in the West). In South Africa, they are.

> **Thabisa:** You see how important is your neighbour? Just like me. I'm staying at Joburg [but] I don't have a family at Joburg. So, I have to be at my neighbour, so that my neighbour can help me. Even if it's not the

> money or mile-meal, but there's something your neighbour can help you. That's why your neighbour have to be your friend.
>
> **It's a must, right? He must be your friend...**
> Yeah. It's like your brother from another mother. Or your sister from another mother.

Brother or sister from another mother is a recurrent expression among my South African interlocutors and speaks eloquently about the family-like, even moralistic expectations looming over neighbours. Some may fulfil them by fear; some by generosity; some by pleasure; some by convenience; and some by composite reasons. Some may not fulfil them at all. The latter risk sanction. When I asked Thabisa about foreign neighbours who are not there for South Africans, she pretended not to understand my question, and I did not insist. In 2016, however, I talked with an ethnographic partner about Pakistani neighbours.

> The Pakistanis are neighbours. [...]. They can't talk... We call them 'makula'. They are the guys who sell everything but alcohol and cigarettes. They don't employ people, unlike the British. They're coming just to sell. In their minds, they just sell everything and take the money away[180].

Not talking and only selling to neighbours make an unacceptable mode of presence in townships[181]. It antagonises what neighbours are expected to do. The same goes for having a business in areas marked by scarcity of jobs and other resources (Sharp, 2008) and not hiring locals or reinvesting one's profits around. Many South Africans deem these patterns of social relations insulting or morally intolerable (Hickel, 2014; Steinberg, 2018; Cardoso de Oliveira, L. and Lage da Cruz, 2023). At stake are indigenous standards of respect and a "moral economy" (Thompson, 1991, p.271). In the absence of a relative moral consensus about the value of neighbourhood and the attendant duties, disrespect and violence leave little margin, if any, for pragmatic adjustments[182].

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[180] Personal archive.

[181] Once I was fiercely reprehended for not greeting a township dweller who overtly disliked my presence. He then shouted at me something like "never fail to greet someone in a township!" I was supposed to abide by local standards of sociality even toward someone who usually complained about my being there.

[182] In 2016, I witnessed the Thswane Riots in an informal settlement in Pretoria (Cardoso de Oliveira, L. and Lage da Cruz, 2023). Then, grassroots segments of the African National Congress protested against a top-down decision of the party, which nominated Thoko Didiza as its candidate in the regional election. The strategy to make the party's dome to revert its decision and nominate the mayor of Pretoria, Kgosientso Ramokgopa, involved the destruction of public equipment and the ransacking of foreign shops in townships. At the informal settlement I was located, Pakistani's businesses were targeted. A couple of weeks after these incidents, I talked with a South African shop owner about Pakistani's businessmen. He observed that

As mentioned, Thabisa did not say a word about foreign neighbours who are not there for South Africans. She knows it is a thorny issue in her country. I did not insist on the matter but asked her whether neighbours should greet each other daily. “You have to greet a neighbour all the time”, Thabisa answered. I then imagined a taciturn, uncommunicative neighbour; in her words, a “shy” one. How would she feel about such a person? “I’ll be shy too. But I’ll greet my neighbour. And sometimes you can even start a topic”. In other words, Thabisa would feel timid, not remain passively silent. After all, by talking and greeting, one comes to know what kind of person the other is and whether a “benevolent” relationship is expected (Honneth, 2001). Socialising with neighbours is, therefore, “a must”, a term I propose as the South African equivalent to Ferguson’s notion of “obligatory” obligations (2021, p.27).

> **It’s a must, right? Neighbours must talk to each other...**
> Yes, I think it’s a must.
>
> **What is the difference between talking to each other, greeting each other, and being there for each other? Is there a difference or not?**
> I think... The same thing. Because greeting each other means we are there for each other, we are talking to each other. Greeting each other, be there for each other. It’s the same thing, there’s no difference.

In Ferguson’s terminology, these obligations, and, above all, the obligation to share, derive from “presence”, “adjacency”, “proximate sociality”, “co-usage”, and “pragmatic accommodation”. Save for the latter, whose margins in South Africa have been narrowed by developments such as Operation Dudula, all the other terms partially describe forces operating on the ground. Only partially, because the neutral, aseptic lexicon suggests a spatial field of relations devoid of meaning and affective investments in a specific world of ideas, values, and practices. Lack of depth concerning what and how things are said implies inattention to “currents of feeling and will” (Karsenti, 2012a). People often “desire” their normative order; they are non-Kantian subjects because duty and pleasure overlap (2012a, p.25).

Moral life's unique texture derives from the fact that one is bound by duty and attached to it through positive feelings. Concrete individuals are not contemplative

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competition among those who are “close” to each other must be “straight”. According to him, this entailed not practicing lower prices and not retaining the money inside the home. Instead, money should circulate in the neighbourhood. Again, the notion of moral economy is necessary to make sense of this tense relationship between South African and Pakistanis and the hatred it arises among the former.

Kantian subjects because they have not been split into *raison* and *sensibilité*, obligation and pleasure (Karsenti, 2003; Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2020). These indissociable pairs reveal that morality, as a composite phenomenon, does not dispense with subjective investments of both a rational and an affective nature. The attachment of individuals to social ideals and values and the attendant duties and pleasures presupposes a force. We may call it a "social physics" (Karsenti, 2012a), hence not a metaphysic or a mystic derived from a supra-individual entity, as Ferguson (2021) and Widlok (2016) suggest. In this connection, obligations come to subjects not by the indirect via that "intimation" implies. Instead, they take root in "desire" and an overall conception of what the world is and shall be (in its non-Kantian unity).

Society as a source of moral authority and delight exists inside socialised individuals. It is a reason, though not deterministic, for their actions and how they make sense of them. Social norms, such as neighbourliness, and core conceptions, such as that people do not and shall not live alone, are part of who South Africans are and feel their nature is. This mental and moral *paysage* (Dumont, 1983) influences South Africans' daily practices, attitudes, and behaviour toward those around or with them - whether no-good cousins, good fellas, or shy neighbours[183]. The ideal of neighbourliness helps manage and judge the quality of concrete social bonds among people living together. So does sharing as both a practice and a value-idea. Finally, sharing also signals a "collective identity"[184]*:* who South Africans think they are.

Luthando once interrupted my complaining about unexpected guests with a no-reply statement: "Here we share". It was not the first time she called my attention to how South Africans live and what I should learn about it. Neither was it the first time she applied the verb to share to a situation analytically closer to reciprocity. I then organized a lunch for a few friends and was suddenly warned that other people would come. Indeed, our host, mama Thuli, invited a couple of neighbours and relatives to lunch without telling me. Incomeless for years, mama Thuli had lived on their resources. Understandably, she took our planned lunch as the opportunity to share food with those who previously shared theirs with her. In returning food for food, she was nourishing meaningful social bonds.

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[183] Norms and ideals, incidentally, derive from within the social practice, and this unacknowledged aspect of Durkheimian sociology should be considered by those reducing it to the externalist moment of the *Rules of Sociological Method* (Terrier, 2011).

[184] According to Widlok (2016, p., sharing does not constitute the collective identity of San foragers in Namibia.

I contend that, among my South African interlocutors, the word sharing applies to diverse contexts. In many of these, reciprocity is at stake precisely because the social bond is also at stake. I wonder whether Ferguson's move from the "exceptional" (Widlok, 2016) case of San foragers to Southern Africa might have been a little hasty. Let us consider another ethnographic example. In 2016, during an interview with Luthando's best pal, we discussed the expectation that boyfriends provide for girlfriends. Our interviewee, Vicky, answered as follows: "He must share the money! You know what? I cook for him, wash for him, I sleep with him". After this unequivocal statement, Luthando observed: "We live to share here. We go 50% to 50% in South Africa". I regard Luthando's figures not as a quantitative, tit-for-tat expectation but rather as a definite emphasis on reciprocity as the proper mechanism to "ensure the maintenance of social relations" (Chanial, 2008, p.25).

Before presenting other ethnographic considerations on sharing and reciprocity in South Africa, I shall advance a theoretical point. It concerns Ferguson's ethnographically based attempt to emphasise "demand sharing" at the expense of reciprocity and a correlate opposition, namely "social contacts" or the like – "push and shove", "mundane bumping against each other of adjacency" (2021, pp.27; 50) versus "social contracts" and its normative, reciprocal structure. Let us have a look at two excerpts of *Presence and Social Obligation*. The first concerns Ferguson's imaginative (*ma no troppo*) device of the African mini-taxi; the second concerns the ethnography of hunter-gatherers and the centrality of demand sharing among them.

> Each time new passengers board, the old ones must rearrange themselves, give way, yield a precious share of that scarce, tightly packed space. There is no social contract here, not even any real reciprocity. It is something more like demand sharing (2021, p.26)

> Social obligation is not really a kind of fee paid in reciprocity for services rendered, but something else entirely – not the contractual – "I owe you x because you have given me y" – but something more like the foragers' "Of course you will join in the meal because you are hungry and you are here" (2021, p.40).

In the first case, we have an imaginative device (the African mini-taxi) illustrating a model of sociality derived from adjacency and social contacts. The reference to demand sharing has an ancillary but non-neglectable weight since Ferguson is describing "the is" of things in Southern Africa and therefore preparing his reader for the more speculative -

or quasi "ought to" register of his last remarks. It is precisely here where the second excerpt is situated and serves a double function. First, redefining the notion of social obligation away from contracts and closer to the forager's non-reciprocal sharing model; second, proposing political strategies and policies centred on adjacency and involuntary co-presence as "future pathways" toward inclusion (2021, p.35).

My first contention derives from Widlok's warning that sharing among the San in Namibia is intended to keep neither social bonds nor collective identities (2016, p.182). Since my ethnography among poor South Africans shows a contrastive picture, I believe it is misleading to leap from the San case to a regional one. It is not a matter of scale but the qualitative differences between a homonymous set of practices in two distinct Southern African contexts[185]. My second contention derives from the first and concerns the opposition between social contacts and social contracts and the suggestion that the latter is less real or actual than the former. It is an unfortunate contention because Ferguson recognises that sharing must be understood in connection with expectations. An ethnography oriented by what people do and say demonstrates that reciprocity is an expectation embedded in many South African lives and current predicaments.

Conflicts, some of them appalling, show that expectations of reciprocity often orient social affairs in South Africa. Wojcicki's (2002) work with women practising survivalist sex in Gauteng taverns is one such case. The interviewees told her that accepting beers from men in taverns implies the latter's "right" to have sex[186]. When a woman "drink's someone's money" but refuses to sleep in return, forced sexual intercourse is not considered rape[187]. Unfortunately, neither by men nor all women, precisely because their contacts are premised on a well-known clause – *l'empire du rien sans rien* (Chanial, 2008, p.24). Reciprocity also obtains contrarywise, as in the custom

[185] Another point deserving attention is Widlok's consideration that foragers and agropastoralists in Africa conceive differently the relations between the living and the dead. His findings about presence and sharing among the San reverses what Kopytoff found among agropastoralists, for whom reciprocal obligations play a more relevant role. Among hunter-gatherers, the practical presence of both the dead and the elder fade away, which Widlok himself considers as exceptional case (2016, p.182). Personhood is conceived as finite: the living neither expects from nor offers the dead anything; there is no debt ever to be solved and recreated. The opposite obtains among those for whom the ancestors are present and need to be honoured in exchange for their benevolence. Reciprocity, in this case, shapes the fundamentals of a worldview and the connected practices.

[186] "Many argue that a man has a right to demand sex from a woman who has accepted drinks" (Wojcicki, 2002, p.275)

[187] If she then unsuccessfully resists a sexual relationship after accepting beers, it is not considered rape (Wojcicki, 2002, p.276).

of *mkamhlehlo*, according to which a man is supposed to give his partner some money after a night of consensual sex (Lage da Cruz, 2017).

Local drinking patterns provide another conflictual example of the weight of reciprocity in South African social affairs. Once in a conversation with a frequent interlocutor in the informal settlement, I was told the following about township night-long drinking – *islala* or six-to-six (6. pm to 6. am)

> Six-to-six is not right. People fight when the money is finished. For example, you drink every day with Mazi. If you meet him in the morning, you'll force him to share the beer with you. If he doesn't want, you fight[188].

This excerpt from an informal conversation resembles Wojcicki's in that if one often drinks the other's beers, the latter feels entitled to drink one's and may resort to violence to make his urge prevail. My interlocutor gives the verb to share a contextual meaning closer to reciprocal exchange. Worthy noticing, this conveyance of reciprocity through the idiom of sharing often appeared in complaints. One of my closest South African interlocutors in 2016 would grudge about those who enjoyed his beers, cigarettes, and *zolo* with him but did not "share" theirs. Such a complaint indexes the existence of a contractual infrastructure centred on the expectations of reciprocity. The latter, as the pair be there (*ukhona*) and be there for (*ube khona for*), also constitutes a standard of judgment (Bellah, 1973) about the quality of social bonds, separating better from worse neighbours, kin and drinking partners.

My attempt to overcome Ferguson's opposition between social contacts and social contracts through the ethnography of sharing does not mean blurring the distinction between reciprocity and demand sharing among the San in Namibia (Widlok, 2016)[189]. Instead, I aim to complexify the ethnographic and analytical picture of Southern Africa presented in *Presence and Social Obligation*. In so doing, I also intend to discuss the idea that social obligations do not involve the norm of reciprocity but rather the facticity of irrecusable demands. The factual and conceptual aspects of township brawls and sexual violence show how sadly real and obligatory reciprocity may be. Calling these exchanges reciprocal does not justify nor reduces violence, in its unfortunate intricacy, to a moral

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188 Personal archive.

189 On the other hand, I do not think it is conceptually and ethnographically sound to set acts of demand apart from the gift's circuit. In *Extension du Domaine du Don*, Caillé (2019, p.38) proposes that the gift's whole circuit comprises four actions, namely *demander, donner recevoir* and *rendre.*

infrastructure (Fassin, 2012). Nevertheless, when actors themselves deploy the grammar of reciprocity to make sense of their lives and conflicts, so must the analyst. Widlok's endeavours to set apart sharing and reciprocal exchanges sound apposite.

> Insisting on "reciprocity" and "exchange" disregards the perspective of the practitioners and instead privileges a perspective that is usually called "bird's eye view", or "view from nowhere", or "perspective of structure". [...]. A major error occurs when this perspective is then planted – as causal motives and strategies – back into the agents who are involved in the exchange (2016, p.22).

I contend that a significant error occurs when demand sharing among the San is "planted back" in South Africans, as though sharing, a polyvalent intellectual construct and set of practices, could be reduced to one of its modalities. I next present some excerpts of semi-structured interviews I conducted in 2016 while living at an informal settlement in Pretoria. Save for excerpt number one, sharing appeared spontaneously in all others.

I

How do you say sharing in Sepedi?

Interlocutor A [Sepedi speaking]: *Watelana*.
Interlocutor B [Venda speaking]: Because sharing it doesn't change. To share is one word. We look out for each other.

Is the meaning the same in all South African languages?
Interlocutor B: The meaning is not the same in all the languages, but all South Africans understand it.

II

Do you go to taverns?
Interlocutor D: I do. I just go to stay with other men to share my ideas. I limit my time. I go during soccer; we share ideas about how teams are playing.

The things we share, to use Widlok's words, matter. Ideas, as in excerpt II, involve reciprocal exchanges. My South African interlocutors do not appreciate silent presences. In my frequent introspective retreats, I was urged to "share" my ruminations, give my presence a voice and keep an intellectual barter: ideas in return for ideas. Less than that seemed to perturb the order of things. The "is" and the "ought to" (Dumont, 2013) of the world into which I was kindly received presupposes chatting as an index of mutual

contentment and availability. As Thabisa put it in our last interview: "Greeting each other, being there for each other, always laughing, it's the same thing". Finally, the definitions we share also matter, and Sepedi's *watelana* casts sharing in the reciprocity of "looking out for each other".

What is my interlocutors' perspective about sharing? One plastically associated with other core values in their shared existence, such as "family", "freedom", and "friendship". Let us look at two other excerpts from the semi-structured interviews I conducted in 2016.

III

> **In which circumstance do you feel the freest?**
> **Interlocutor C**: I'm only free when I'm staying with my family because we share everything.
>
> **What is the relationship between sharing and freedom**?
> **Interlocutor C**: Share and freedom? There is no difference.

IV

> **What is a 'real man'?**
> **Interlocutor D**: My real man is Gift. We grow up together. Gift, if I want some money, he gives me, he doesn't want it back. We can share even the clothes, me and him. Even now, I can go inside his room and take the sound. I'm just free for him; he's just free for me.
>
> **Could you explain it to me?**
> **Interlocutor D**: I can give whatever he wants, anything. I don't have a secret for him; he doesn't have a secret for me.

Freedom and rights came about through a struggle of which South Africans, old and young, are more than aware. Like Sepedi's *watelana* (sharing or looking out for each other), all South Africans understand freedom. I deem it significant that sharing, freedom and family appear together in Excerpt I. These terms indicate both a daily reality and the utopia of a free world where everyone shares everything. This ultimate kingdom does not correspond to the current social reality in South Africa, nor will it. It remains an ethical project (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b) and an actual gauge of concrete relationships. Such is precisely the case in Excerpt II. My interlocutor and his "real man" (in case, best chap) grew up together; they coalesced in shared lives and now take each other's things as *free* beings. They need not, paraphrasing Widlok (2016), keep a balance sheet precisely because theirs is a mutual life. When one and the other are reciprocally available, clothes,

money, ideas, and gadgets flow as in a borderless stream – which, incidentally, some South Africans call freedom.

> I'm free like the water, just running under the bridge. The water runs nicely, it's free, there's no border (Mary)[190].

Whilst shared lives build on reciprocity, individual acts of sharing may be reciprocal or not, associated with fear or pleasure, and driven by reasons as inexhaustibly multifarious as human action (Karsenti, 2012a). As the latter, values are myriad, but some are core, and without close attention to these, human agency loses a great deal of its intellectual and ethical bright. Among my interlocutors, presence, sharing, and freedom deserve particular attention, for the trio signals a specific understanding of being alive. An enjoyable life, one worthy of living in South Africa, requires the presence of others (including children) since "you have a lot of stress when you are alone" (Amahle). A pleasurable existence also presupposes freedom, for "freedom is to enjoy life, to be happy"[191]. Finally, freedom implies living together, the happiness of shared lives.

> Freedom is happy[ness]; you live together[192]

Without a theory of values, we cannot grasp other people's theories and practices, their daily dealings with themselves, their obligations, and pleasures – the composite "is-ought to" of social life in non-Kantian subjectivities (Karsenti, 2012a). When ethnographers do not search for a distinct sense of duty and enjoyment, we lose sight of the variety of sensibilities to what vitally matters. A society with Durkheimian (and Maussian) scents remains a source of duty, delight, coercion, and freedom (Miller, 1996). It is also the wellspring of fellowship, which matters above all for those who "cannot live alone" (Thabisa). Such is the message I have heard from my interlocutors about presence, sharing, and freedom. In its mélange between "the is" and "the ought to", these are the fundamentals of a world where people have each other, have to have each other, and like to be free and share each other's *selves* and *things*, lest one is *niazo* and thinks he may have others *unilaterally* or keep himself apart from the social stream (see Chapter III). The have-each-other, look-for-each-other, be-free-for-each-other figuration of the social

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[190] Personal archive.
[191] Personal archive.
[192] Personal archive.

is not averse to pragmatic adjustments in adjacency. Yet it revolves around a singular gusto for the reciprocity of shared lives. In *being there* qua *being there and free* for each other, I propose a formula better attuned to the South African lives I came across and the conception of social anthropology I think is worth professing.

Section III – Why an Interlude on Presence?

It is high time to remember this is a thesis about child-support grants. As such, it has been developed via paid conversations on money, children, mothers, grandmothers, and their living arrangements. These are premised on different modalities of cash transfers (often child-support and old-age grants combined) and expectations of respect and reciprocal care in daily affairs. Sharing grants is a conspicuous aspect of all the households I have presented so far. Ultimately, shared lives rest on shared grants. Ultimately, I insist, because it all began with the presence of children turning women into mothers and mothers into grandmothers - two major status shifts in the female lives I observed and discussed.

My South African collaborators depicted the coming of children as a gift or a blessing[193] from God, two quasi-synonyms for a physical phenomenon with practical, social, and transcendental significance. Another recurrent way of communicating the meaning of children in their lives was to say that they were no longer "alone"; they had someone to "talk to" and "teach"; they "added" a "companion" or "brother" to their lives. Grandmothers, particularly, appreciate the presence of children in their houses. They do not like being alone, a circumstance in which they "think too much" and feel unsafe. To remedy this circumstance, they must "be two" and "have each other", as Amahle told me more than once.

Both the young and the older women I interviewed want to live within intimate, family-based social bonds. This presupposes fertility and procreation to ensure the continuity of life within households (Ngobese, 2003). In analytical language, children have value and even are the utmost value (Dumont, 2013): they matter, above all things, to my female South African interlocutors. We shall not, though, let analytical language deceives us. To speak of children as a value depicts in colours too dim their towering

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[193] Blessing (*Isibusiso*) and Gift (*Sipho*) are, furthermore, two names frequently given to South African children.

importance in concrete lives. The negative register of barrenness – "*unyumba*, a very hateful name" (Ukhona) – and the consequent absence of children do better justice to what their presence means.

> Sterility or childlessness is regarded as a curse. It is unacceptable. (Ngobese, 2003, p.103).

Since children's absence is a curse, their presence does mean a blessing or gift. Starting in 2015, my incursions into South African lives have always rested on the works and social networks (Gupta, 2014) of a childless woman named Luthando. Aged 18 in 2004, she got both pregnant and HIV positive from her first boyfriend. Luthando's baby did not survive labour. She neither conceived another one nor, I am afraid, could overcome her loss. We never approached the subject directly. However, in January 2020, when I mentioned to her IsiNdebele concept of replacement (*ukuvala*), according to which the birth of a new person can fill the void left by a deceased one, Luthando corrected me: "Nothing replaces a person". No one had replaced the baby she lost, and no one would replace *gogo* Martha, then patently approaching the end of her life.

In the last section, I stated we need a theory of society as a structure of meaning and value (Dumont 1979, 2013) to have at least a feeling of the intertwinement of pleasure and duty (Karsenti, 2012a) in the performance of an obligation such as sharing. I am afraid we need the same theory to understand my friend's dramatic existential situation and attempts to cope with it[194]. If children carry a cardinal value in South Africa and elsewhere in the continent (Levine, 1973), then a joyful, fulfilling existence becomes improbable in their absence. While Luthando was alive, her mother insisted she give her a grandchild. In a phone conversation in June 2021, my assistant, Thabisa, impersonated Margaret approaching her daughter: "Please, give me a child so that I can remember you. When I see your child, I will see you". She feared Luthando's death would cast her into "oblivion" (Ngobese, 2003, p.76).

For the first time, let me answer this section's title – Why an Interlude on Presence? Because the presence or absence of children makes South African lives worthier or less worthy, and more or less attuned to an overall normative framework my interlocutors refer to as "our culture" or [us] "Blacks". Is it possible to find happiness outside one's cultural model of the good life? Hypothetically, it is, but I contend

[194] Such as mothering her nephew and giving him the love of her lost child (see Chapter II).

childlessness left a bitter scar on my host and friend, one from which she never recovered. Between November 2019 and March 2020, while mostly in bed, Luthando received numerous visitors carrying their children, even newborn babies. These were often accommodated beside her as though their presence could soothe an unfortunate young lady.

Presence matters: in Maussian parlance, Ferguson seems to have touched *le roc* (1923-1924, p.96). This, however, is an ambivalent tribute I pay Ferguson, for *le roc* support a moral order, and issues of morality figure in the second plan of *Presence and Social Obligation*. In his quest for "real", "true", or "actual" duties, the American author borrowed the paradigm of demanding share, in which reciprocity plays a minor role and morality is posited as "external" to individuals and confounded with generosity (Widlok, 2016, p.80). Now, one thing is to demonstrate that sharing among San foragers often proceeds without expectations of return; quite another is to set morality outside the community of practice and to reduce it, hence the reasons why one shares, to "warm sentiments" and "pious ideals" (Ferguson, 2021).

Being a Thesis on the child support grant, this became a work on the intertwinement of the latter and the old-age pensions in at least three households: Luthando's, Amahle's, and Ukhuna's. Though sharing grants levered shared lives, these stories of mutual attachment revolved, in varying degrees, on considerations about the reciprocal benefits of presence and the predicaments of absence. Loneliness is deemed immoral and intolerable as childlessness (Ngobese, 2003). In those three cases, grannies and grandchildren bonded in caring-for-each-other relationships. By definition, these are reciprocal bonds in that the personhood of two human beings interlaces through a circle of mutual services, which, in the long run, proves benign for both.

But it is not only in the long run that reciprocity obtains. As I mentioned in Chapter II, even the presence of small infants amounts to a form of care. In one sense, babies and toddlers cannot take care of magogo. They do not have the active capacities presupposed in the taking moment of care. Yet they have culturally received a kind of passive agency: in being there, grandchildren give their elders company and rescue them from insulation and overthinking. Ultimately, interdependency is also at stake in the polyvalent form of *nagelela* (to take care). Even though infants depend on their grandmothers for everything, grannies depend on them literally to have someone in their daily lives.

Ferguson's notion of presence presupposes vulnerabilities rather than interdependencies. This was why he took distance from Butler's notion of "precarity".

The latter is premised on some reciprocity, whereas Ferguson (2021, p.57) prefers the rather unilateral claims derived from the human body. Unlike him, my interlocutors seem to conceive of grandmother-grandchildren relations as a mutual rapport from the beginning. Children are understood as gifts and giving subjects: they are donors of companionship. And companionship is more than sheer presence; it is a puissant, transformative presence. Presence becomes a social fact when two vulnerabilities and sources of care meet.

Should this be the case, we ought to revise some theoretical premises. Let us consider, first, Widloks' (2016, p.7) statement that presence conveys "a silent demand for provisioning and care". One's body, indeed, seems to make a plea for the "acknowledgement of one as a partner [...] with legitimate needs". Such is precisely the case of the human infant. Still, when we grasp its cultural value and existence as a social being in South Africa, we rescue him from sheer vulnerability. Once retrieved from the nature of a helpless being to a particular social constellation, children became brothers and companions. This bespeaks a passage from the asymmetry of unilateral assistance to the (relative) symmetry of constitutive partnerships, in which the gift of children (from God to parents or from the latter to grandmothers) casts humans as partners in care.

> *Et ceci parce que le don est un opérateur de reconnaissance. Il reconnait l'autre comme sujet. Mais comme sujet capable de donner à son tour* (Caillé, 2019, p.124)

If, as I contend, we are closer to the gift paradigm in South Africa than to unilateral sharing among San foragers, we must rescue reciprocity from the infantile reduction to generosity or charity. Rather than a pious ideal, reciprocity conveys an ideal of *philia, celui de l'amitié partagée et réciproque* (Caillé, 2019, p.22). Ethnographically, that helps understand the rapport my host and friend Luthando established with Kaya (see Chapter II) and others who started frequenting her house since her return in November 2019[195]. They have long known each other but were not close. Because of money, though, Kaya started visiting Martha's house and became *"a friend"*, one even "better" than some of

[195] For an external observer, such as me, it all seemed as though the two ladies had always shared their lives. Yet on a strictly temporal basis, they had only recently initiated a cycle of mutual services. Though to a lesser extent, such was the case of other visitors. Solomon, a distant neighbour who always visited us to smoke *zolo*, sometimes came to share his, and seemed to take pride in reciprocating. He could also go to Plaza to Luthando, probably in exchange for a few bucks. Finally, some very impoverished children in the street started visiting the house to eat or get some money in return for small services, such as going to Plaza or doing the dishes for Margaret.

Luthando's lifelong pals. Why? Because of a mutual rapport i.e., Kaya "took care" of Luthando, and Luthand "helped" Kaya with money and food, including sharing her own plate with Kaya's youngest daughter.

One of Ferguson's ethnographic illustrations of demand sharing in Southern Africa speaks firstly about reciprocity as the appropriate course of social affairs among strangers.

> A gifted Zambian ethnographer, Patience Mususa, has recently given a fine example of this from the Copperbelt. Having purchased for her own use a fixer-upper house in an urban neighbourhood of Luanshya, Mususa was soon approached by a neighbourhood man, who asked if he and his family might move into a spare room at the back of her property, on the understanding that his wife would in exchange serve as a domestic worker (2021, p.21).

Only after having the proposed exchange declined did the family resort to self-help and occupy the room at Mususa's house. In other words, people often initiate social contacts via a barter involving services and objects – *dons et prestations* (Mauss, 1923-1924). The push-and-shove of social life is not an unregulated, haphazard process. On the contrary, it follows locally patterned modes of interaction and exchange. As Arendt (1958) posited, human action is unpredictable in its development. However, socialised subjects are aware of the proper mechanisms and manners to initiate it. Reciprocity contemplates diverse individual inclinations and needs and sets them in a cooperative structure. It is a fundamental norm (Chanial, 2008, p.25) of balance between one's needs and obligations, one's own interests, and interest for the other – *aimance* (Caillé, 2008).

There is one theoretical point about recognition here, for it concerns the human capacity to identify one as both a needy and worthy partner, as a subject both able to provide care and in permanent need to be cared for by others – in Caillé's (2019) formulation - or deserving love, respect, and esteem and equally capable of respecting and acting benevolently – in Honneth's (2001). Recognition, in any case, starts within the primary settings of human experience and according to the patterns of love between infants and their primary caretakers, their first constitutive others. To some extent, these prototypical relations mould further interaction with different, increasingly anonymous others. The passage from the family to the nation, from love in the *oikos* to respect at the *polis*, involves some reference to elementary standards. In Margalit's (2001, p.139) terms:

> The issue is how to extend recognition outside the tribe [...]. The big worry is how to move from thick 'tribal' relationship to recognition based on formal rights of people who are strangers to us.

One of my core contentions in this thesis is that minimal expectations of reciprocity already loom over South African children. They are the ones who will assist their grandmothers and flourish through her love – "*magogo* help the children; the children help *magogo*" (Amahle). They come as companions and mediators between the house and the market. Some of their names reveal what is expected from them: to give their mothers a house in the future and take good care of them in old age, for instance – see Chapter IV. Rapport in other spheres, such as that between mere acquaintances – say, Luthando and Kaya – also proceed under the sign of reciprocity and engender friendship and mutuality.

I also contend that the relative quiescence of South Africans toward the small amount of cash delivered by the child-support grants requires attention to reciprocity as *lémpire du rien sans rien* (Chanial, 2008). By calling the grants *'a' free money*, that is, cash without a counterpart in labour, my interviewees showed some acceptance of their small amount (ZAR 520 in January 2024). All stated it could not cover the whole gamut of children's needs, but they did not vent more than moderate criticism. As Fouksman (2020) has demonstrated, South Africans' continual desire to have a job, and not state grants, indexes a "moral economy" or a widespread awareness of "social norms about the proper economic functions [...] within a community" (Thompson, 1993). It is worth remembering that Malinowskian reciprocity, the existence of mutual obligations between human beings, underpins the concept of moral economy (Thompson, 1993, p.187).

In answering this section's title – Why an Interlude on Presence? – for the second time, I propose: because without close consideration of expectations of reciprocity in South Africa, we can hardly grasp: *i)* patterns of interaction between children and elders in households and the continuities of reciprocity from primary settings to neighbourhoods and polities; *ii*) the reason why the child support grants, though insufficient, undergoes only mild criticism among my interlocutors. There remains another reason for this Interlude. It concerns the proper place of critical legal and moral anthropology as a grounded theory on normativity and its bearings on "the ought to" of politics and policies (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018).

I have spoken alternately about morality and ethics. Now, I propose an operational synthesis with the notion of normativity. To begin with morals and ethics, I believe both

belong to a field centred on distinctions between right and wrong - or simply “the right” and conceptions of the good life - or simply “the good” (Fassin, 2012, pp.5-6). In speaking of a field, this author does not presuppose homogeneity between morality and ethics but somewhat different approaches to questions akin. To set morality closer to “norms” and a “social superego” and ethics to “values”, “rules of action”, and subjective “agency” (2012, p.7) testifies to the variety of possible research programs and their background in the issue of assessing the varying quality of human conduct.

Though normativity encompasses morals and ethics, it has a constitutive emphasis on shared norms as a prominent aspect of social life (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b). In keeping a twin reference to the Habermasian and the Durkheimian traditions, Cardoso de Oliveira, L. posits that acting subjects always face the problem of what is “adequate, correct, or just” in concrete situations. Furthermore, they remain imbued with ideas on the good life (values), or what in social existence shall be pursued (projects for society). In addition to proposing a comprehensive framework for (moral) norms and (ethical) values[196], Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (1989) takes from Max Gluckmann the emphasis on conflicts and legitimacy.

Conflicts reveal a normative dimension of social action: the varying quality of the relationship between its parties. In other words, lived disagreements revolve not only around interests and rights (legal norms). Parties in conflicts often articulate a concern with “dignified treatment” or expectations to be paid due “respect” and “attention”. In other words, subjects internalize parameters of fair treatment or standards of appropriate behaviour: those able to communicate that their interaction is respectful and, therefore, legitimate. Breaches of this *etiquette* usually trigger the sentiment of moral insult or outrage (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011; Thévenot, 2022).

We are, indeed, navigating what Axel Honneth[197] called the “moral infrastructure” of societies as revealed through the negative lens of disrespect. Yet Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2013; 2020) refracts Honneth’s emphasis on equality of treatment twice. First, through the perception that equality of treatment in different polities is expected within the respective civic world (which does not have the same configuration everywhere), and is always dependent on local civic sensibilities, modulated by the articulation of rights, status, and dignity, according to ideals of dignified treatment. To the extent that

[196] In other words, Cardoso de Oliveira, L. contemplates the value-based Hegelian critique of Kant but holds the primacy of norms (2022b, pp.1-2).
[197] See Honneth (2003).

differences in the allocation of rights take place out of the civic world or do not threaten ideals of equal dignity among citizens, they may be legitimized. Second, through ethnographically found conceptions of adequate or fair treatment. In his parlance, demands of consideration for personal dignity and even deference to the singular value of specific communities may not deny or confront perceptions of equality in the realm of citizenship (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b).

In this framework, the normative dimension of social life encompasses reference to norms, values, ideals, and what Thévenot (2022, p.2) calls “regard for person[s]”. Comprehensive as it is, Cardoso de Oliveira’s joining of morality, rights, and the ethical life (made of heterogeneous calls for recognition) helps grasp a contemporary phenomenon of critical relevance: “the overflowed liberal norm” (Thévenot, 2022). According to this author, societies in both the global North and South have seen a profusion of normativity modes that exceed what liberal Constitutions frame (2022, p.1). Strictly legal rights in liberal democratic traditions, despite their variance, no longer contain the whole range of claims to entitlements and obligations.

To remain within South African borders, the term “take the law into one’s hand” has gained a notable currency in official and popular discourses. Current President Cyril Ramaphosa, for instance, has deployed the expression in dramatic episodes, such as the violence against Nigerian immigrants in August-September 2019 and more recently after Operation Dudula[198] came into the spotlight. Both cases seem to fall under “vigilantism” (another term deployed by Mr Ramaphosa), which was defined by Buur and Jansen (2004) as localised practices of “sovereignty and authority” aimed at tackling moral and economic issues “pertinent” within their contexts. Both, finally, are evident instantiations of the overflowed liberal norm, given that experiences of disrespect or insult cannot be adequately dealt with by the available means for conflict management.

In South Africa, violence against immigrants' rights has called global attention since 2007. Professor Sharp (2008) was, perhaps, one of the first to say that labelling similar episodes as xenophobic was somewhat misleading[199]. A courageous statement for violence, let alone violence against poor African immigrants, shocks the liberal-democratic sensibilities prevailing among scholars (Haynes and Hickel, 2016). Since

[198] See https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60698374.

[199] “Anthropologists have long been aware of the danger of facile labeling of violence in various parts of the world. Whether the reference is to ‘sectarian’ violence in Northern Ireland’s past […] or – in the present case – ‘xenophobic’ violence in South Africa, we have come to realize that these labels invariably hide at least as much as they reveal” (Sharp, 2008, p.2).

then, other authors have written on violence against foreigners in South Africa, often highlighting its moral and economic dimensions (Hickel, 2014; Steinberg, 2018). Cardoso de Oliveira, L. and I also took part in the debates. We tried to understand the ransacking of Pakistani shops in June 2016 within a normative framework that included the demand for recognition of local patterns of respectful and reciprocal social exchanges (Cardoso de Oliveira, L. and Lage da Cruz, 2023).

These local standards of social interaction have binding, sanctionable force (Mauss, 2002; Benda-Beckmann, 2002; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). Interlocutors in a township in Pretoria deem insulting the attitude of those neighbours who overlook local obligations, such as greeting, talking, and buying in the local shops. Neighbours, such as the so-called Pakistani, who do not share their ideas – "They can't talk!" (Mpho)[200] - and resources trigger resentment among many Africans. The latter perceive it as disrespecting what is deemed adequate and correct among those living in a space characterised by scarcity. In this Interlude's terms, such modes of presence are frowned upon and often become untenable – alas.

We need more, not less, legal and moral anthropology to understand such a delicate aspect of South African social affairs and its inhabitants' acute sensibility to legitimate, rightful patterns of presence and social obligation. Once we introduce concerns with recognition, status and correlate claims to the singular worth and rights of some (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b), we can no longer speak in terms of "adjacency", "accommodation", and "pragmatic adjustments". We must realign academic discourse with local elaborations on similar matters, lest we impose on others a lexicon – hence a bunch of theoretical postulates – they may not share (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018). My ultimate contention is that non-normative concepts do not suit a normative-oriented population, one frequently, and literally, taking the law into their own hands.

Likewise, we need more legal and moral anthropology to understand the SASSA grants – as many South Africans call their national system of social assistance in cash. We need all ears to feel the moral and legal nuances in the discourse of an adolescent, such as Amahle's firstborn, who baulked when asked if the child support grant is a right.

> Grant... I won't say, like, I have the right to have a grant. Because, like, we are many. We are not alone in this world, like South Africa: there are many people, and they also deserve to get the grant.

[200] Personal archive.

> **Who deserves?**
> Citizens, people who live around.

Lassy knew he had the right to be "respected" and to "education". When asked about the grants, though, he hesitated. The fact that South Africans are numerous poses problems, budgetary at least. "Being many", "living around", and "not alone in this world": all these expressions make variations on the theme of presence as a category with bearings upon issues of rights and citizenship, particularly when we try to understand the latter notions from a "local point of view" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018). I did not ask Lassy if all those living around him were South Africans. Still, other interlocutors consider that citizens are those who indigenously belong to the country, those whose ancestors were born there.

> Citizenship is about those people being in SA before the whites when they come here. It's those people who own the country. The blacks are the owners of this country because they were here before the whites. I'm born here. All my ancestors were born here[201].

What kind of politics can we legitimately expect from such a vernacular theory of citizenship? Perhaps, practices of compromise between a laudable ideal of shared vulnerabilities and the conception that some are legitimately entitled to have an increased share of the national well-being and enjoy their lives more than they currently can[202]. This signals neither an "expanded politics of presence" nor an open-ended invitation to partake in a meal, pace Ferguson (2021). It revolves around a hierarchy[203] stemming from the ancestors. We cannot dispense with a theory of aboriginal presence and claims to distinct statuses and rights[204] (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b) when moving to a more speculative mode of reasoning unless we consider that our perspective on Southern Africa keeps a privileged track of the complex realities of presence, sharing and politics among its 'owners'.

All things considered, why an Interlude on Presence? Because, in a quest for how recognition makes others here, we risk finding local reasons for a perspective centred on

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[201] Personal archive.

[202] Most of my interlocutors complain that the promises associated with the demise of apartheid, such as jobs and houses, have not been kept.

[203] Haynes and Hickel (2016) have highlighted the analytical relevance of hierarchy and the Dumontian framework on values to analyse South African society.

[204] Such as that South Africans, not foreigners, must be "prioritised" in the labour market. See https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/south-africans-must-be-prioritised-for-job-opportunities-nxesi/.

the dominant presence and value of some. With the help of legal and moral anthropology, we may move from this version of "the is" of things to a correlate "ought" - a compatible theory of rights and duties. And if, as seems to be the case, the ensuing framework does not fit our best intellectual efforts and liberal wishes, then we had better engage in a frank debate with our interlocutors and ourselves, in a double movement targeting our and their versions about presence and social obligation. That means practising critical legal and moral anthropology (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 1993).

What shall we understand by critical? In the first instance, it means recognising that anthropological knowledge involves a double reflexive endeavour, which consists of questioning both the preconceptions and categories of scholarly analysis and indigenous representations and practices (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018). Nothing, in a sense, is immune to critique. However, critical also means taking seriously indigenous conceptions and sensibilities to what is adequate, correct and just in social relations. It requires sincere openness and even detachment or the ability to let oneself be persuaded by what they claim to be legitimate. The thorough and empathetic consideration of their point of view is precisely a prerequisite to criticising them. Critique has traction (and legitimacy) when anchored in a particular lifeworld. Then, our shifts to what Ferguson (2021) called the "speculative" register of future politics and policies may keep us better attuned to the life path our interlocutors seem to desire to walk (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018, pp.10-11).

In focusing on presence and the obligation to share[205], I believe James Ferguson grasped categories with a trenchant and grounded critical potential. They are deployed by South Africans themselves, who remain acutely aware of those who are or are not *there for* them, those who *share* or do not. Yet I also think Ferguson's emphasis on shared vulnerabilities, commonalities, and the conceptual limits of the nation-state overpassed local concerns with order and law[206], rights and obligations, and legitimate patterns of social rapport. Issues of (national) ownership, (aboriginal) citizenship, and expectations about the rightful state of affairs, including fair and reciprocal treatment (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b), have more weight in concrete South African lives than *Presence and Social Obligation* suggests. In shifting his theoretical vocabulary and ethnographic attention to the pragmatic possibilities stemming from an adjacent-based form of social relation and politics, Ferguson distanced himself from local civic sensibilities[207], familiar

[205] Understood as a polysemic category and practice, one larger than demand sharing.
[206] See Comaroff and Comaroff (2009).
[207] See Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2020).

(and familial) patterns of recognition, and concrete demands – including that for *jobs*, and not *grants*, as I shall discuss in the Conclusion.

Chapter IV – Thabisa or “Everything Happens for a Reason”

I now present the life story of Thabisa, a 30-year-old woman who came to Martha's house on March 1st, 2020. We dwelt under the matriarch's roof until March 25th, 2020, when I moved from Kwa-Ndebele to Pretoria due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thabisa is the mother of four children, two of whom belong to Martha's family: 12-year-old Andile, then living with us, and 10-year-old Letho, then living with her grandmother in Pretoria.

Thabisa’s arrival almost coincided with Andile’s second expulsion from a local school and is related to his disciplinary problems, though not only. Luthando had called Thabisa to come and help her recover. My host and friend wished Thabisa’s care. Luthando had been seriously weakened by HIV three times, and in all such cases, she resorted to Thabisa’s loving hands. Theirs is another story of mutual engagement in shared lives.

When Thabisa was a teenager, Luthando and Margaret helped her withstand premature motherhood and marriage. They took Andile, Thabisa’s second born, as their child while he was still a toddler. They gave him the love meant to Luthando’s stillborn baby. Unexpected and Letho, Thabisa’s first and third born, respectively, also received their love and support. Thabisa more than once observed with solemn and gift-based gratitude that she, Margaret, and Luthando had “come a long way” together.

The Chapter has six sections. I first present Thabisa’s initial ten days with us in Kwa-Ndebele and how Andile’s disciplinary issues affected our morale. In Section II, I discuss pivotal episodes and characters in Thabisa’s childhood and emergence as a 15-year-old mother. I subsequently deal with Thabisa’s two marriages and three other pregnancies. The movement of her children between the households of different kin receives particular attention. In Section IV, I examine Thabisa’s professional life and, in Section V, her experience as a recipient of the child-support grants.

The final Section concerns Thabisa’s answers to Annex II questions and includes two theoretical points. I first propose some equivalence between the notion of “work” in psychoanalysis (Ventura, 2016; Freud, 1953) and the mnemonic toils Thabisa undertook when answering the semi-structured interviews. Second, I argue that the narrative endeavour Thabisa set in motion (Butler, 2005) helped her cast her person and agency in different tenses. In crafting a discursive truth about herself, Thabisa felt she could begin anew.

Section I – "Another topic, please"

My first impressions of Thabisa were not the best. On March 1st, 2020, she interrupted my Sunday hibernation twice. Though not yet an acquaintance, the energetic lady urged me to get up and socialize. The previous day, magogo Martha, Norah, Teboho, and Masozi had come from Pretoria. We drank all day, and I slept by Sunday's small hours. Tant pis. Thabisa's insistence prevailed and dragged me into the ladies' bedroom, where Luthando reproached my long insulation in dreams and introduced me to our new visitor. Thabisa was Teboho's ex-wife. She lived in Johannesburg but would spend March with us.

I chatted with the ladies for a while, barely hiding a peculiar mix of irritation and dizziness. I soon returned to my (sic) room. While taking my notes, Thabisa's uproarious voice and laughter abducted me again. Her sounds filled the whole atmosphere. Whether I wanted it or not – and then I did not – my ears remained open to Luthando's recently arrived, dear companion. Luthando, whom Thabisa called *auntie*, sounded as thrilled as her visitor. Their heart-to-heart crossed the afternoon.

By dusk, I quit the house for a stroll. There was no sign of Margaret. Thabisa would cook us dinner. Back home, I sat in the kitchen with her and Luthando's mother. They chatted vividly. I joined their sipping and was caught by a torrent of intimate, unexpected details about Thabisa's life. The outspoken lady had four children, two of them with Teboho. She got pregnant by him at 17, and they married. Thabisa moved to the informal settlement in Pretoria and lived in a shack belonging to her mother-in-law, Norah.

Thabisa's marriage with Teboho was not a happy union. Without reservation, my new acquaintance declared she would "hate" him "for the rest of [her] life". Fortunately, they were now living far from each other. She felt much better, gained weight, and often drank beers – she, therefore, had "no stress". Some guys in Joburg suggested she was a lesbian, yet she knew they only wanted sex. She did not need men but believed God would give her the one to be loved for the "rest of [their] lives".

My second impressions of Thabisa were mixed. She sounded infantile, particularly in addressing Luthando as *auntie* and Margaret as *gogo*. More than once, Thabisa depicted herself as "rude", and there was something rough about her, indeed. During our second but fraught interaction, I did not discern whether rude meant indelicate

manners or an acute inclination for the truth (no matter how harsh). Like hatred, the words "truth" and "true" came into her mouth without reservation, as full-fledged as they are possibly meant to be.

Thabisa knew, for instance, that Norah and Teboho had prohibited Andile from performing outside duties for Margaret. She considered it preposterous and Norah "selfish". Thabisa asked on which side of the familial schism the "truth" was. The truth, I answered, sided with Margaret. She had been caring for Andile since his return to Kwa-Ndebele in January. In saying an obvious fact, I only reiterated Thabisa. Before sitting in the kitchen, she borrowed my cell phone and called her ex-mother-in-law to tell the "truth": she had no monopoly over Andile.

The boy acknowledged that *gogo Mag* prepared his food daily, so why did Norah try to undermine her sister's authority? Thabisa was fed up, but all, finally, had been said to Norah. As to Teboho, she expected not to meet him at Martha's. Thabisa took cognizance of Andile's disciplinary predicaments a month before her arrival but decided not to commute while her ex-husband remained in Kwa-Ndebele. They would start "accusing each other" and end up fighting again.

So much, my morning acquaintance told me in a couple of evening hours. When I woke up the next day, called by one of the house's habitués, Thabisa was not around. I found harbour inside the ladies' bedroom, though for too little a while. Before noon, we heard a siren by the yard. The police conducted Andile, again under the charge of beating younger mates at school. I remained at Luthando's bedside while Margaret handled the situation. The officials left the house, Andile entered the ladies' bedroom, and life resumed its daily course.

I met Thabisa by mid-afternoon on the veranda. She had a sleeping friend with her. The chap appeared at 7 a.m. to continue *islala* (night-long drinking). Thabisa was informed that Andile received another "transfer letter". She considered taking him to Johannesburg and simultaneously cautioned herself against it. Given his current habits, she might beat him to excess. Furthermore, townships in Gauteng can be dodgy. Thabisa faced a conundrum, had the impression of living a nightmare, and asked me for advice.

I took a minimalist approach, noticing that Andile needed the care of his beloved kin. Thabisa observed she cared for him until Norah took the young boy to Pretoria. Afterwards, Margaret pled to have him in Kwa-Ndebele. Thabisa did not deny that the young boy had circulated among his *gogos* and *aunties*, but that did not mean lack of care - which, in any case, I had not suggested. Thabisa looked disoriented and asked for my

cell phone. I invited her inside, but she had to look after her sleeping friend. I brought her the phone and took my way to Plaza.

By 7 p.m. Thabisa had gone out again. "She's drinking", Luthando remarked while the two of us and Andile watched a soapie. Margaret came for a cigarette and transpiring exhaustion. She soon quit us for a nap, but two hours later, she gathered with Luthando and Thabisa for a conversation. Afterwards, the latter, Luthando's mother and I had some chords in the kitchen. When gloom fell among us, Thabisa asked where my thoughts drifted. I did not lie: Andile's disciplinary problems preoccupied me. In a manner both polite and laconic, Thabisa requested: "Another topic, please".

I woke up the following day with loud voices outside. Margaret and Thabisa swept the yard. I returned to bed, and when morning finally set off for me, Thabisa was no longer among us. Andile, too, was out. Luthando had asked him to buy us fat cakes. He and his mother returned at lunchtime. By mid-afternoon, Thabisa left us again for a promenade with a friend. I remained in the ladies' bedroom with Luthando, who told me for the first time that she and her mother had upbrought Andile and his sister, Letho.

On March 5th, Margaret tried to enrol Andile in another school. The principal told her that Thabisa should also come for an appointment — a useless request, according to Luthando. Thabisa did not have Andile's guard. She asked to have the boy in Johannesburg the previous year, but Norah refused. Luthando then observed: "It is no longer her [Thabisa's] problem". I doubt Thabisa thought along the same lines. In any case, the signs that the situation overpowered her were patent.

Thabisa reappeared at Martha's two days later. She had been at her grandmother's house with her boyfriend. The couple joined us before noon, in time to prepare lunch. Thabisa always cooked with pleasure. She and her boyfriend drank energising Vodka with guarana, and other ladies sipped with them. We kept an animated chat in the kitchen, and, in passing, Thabisa remarked she should care for Andile and take him to Johannesburg. Later that day, Margaret foreclosed the possibility: "Andile stays here. She's not right".

Should we, by *right*, understand a state characterized by "good mental or physical health or order"[208] ? In case we do, we shall also ask: who was right?

Margaret looked weary and on the verge of a breakdown. She drank more, smoked more, grudged more, and slept less. She once affirmed that Andile's situation made her

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[208] Definition of right [online]. In: The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/right (accessed in January 3rd, 2023).

"sick". Margaret, in other words, was not exactly right, and rightly so. Andile's case drained her energies, but she would not give up on him. Meanwhile, she discharged overthinking and suffering in domestic chores and unwavering efforts to find him a place in Kwa-Ndebele, close to her and away from hotspots in Gauteng.

What about Luthando? My convalescent friend looked less frail. Thabisa's presence increased her stamina, and at least twice the two ladies went out to solve personal and household matters[209]. Luthando remained sick but on the right path, we supposed, toward recovery. Though somewhat distant from Andile's predicaments, she knew he would not move with Thabisa. Yet provocatively, Luthando once stated that she "did not have a child", a poignant hint against which Thabisa promptly reacted.

Don't you?

Luthando was not right, for her bond with Andile and Thabisa subsisted. Despite occasional naughty remarks, *auntie* kept mothering the young boy. Several times, I noticed Andile listening to her at the bedside. "Me, I don't beat the child; I know the words. The words he can't forget"[210]. Luthando did know the words and their might. Thabisa and I did not - not yet.

Section II – "Situation. Situation"

Those were the circumstances in which Thabisa came to Kwa-Ndebele and some aspects of her bond with Martha's family. Andile's disciplinary problems resurged old questions, particularly Thabisa's status as a mother. Was she a good one? In singling out this question, I am neither restricting it to Thabisa[211] nor limiting Thabisa's life to motherhood.

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[209] Such as requesting her disability grant before the competent authorities and buying us food for the weekend.

[210] Excerpt from a phone conversation Luthando and I had on May 2020.

[211] South African mothers remain under public scrutiny (Button et al., 2018). Three episodes I witnessed speak eloquently about kin and public surveillance over them. When the child of an acquaintance died, rumour had it that she had not searched for medical assistance in time. Another acquaintance lost the guard of her baby due to frequent alcoholic consumption. On similar grounds, the toddler of a third acquaintance was taken to the paternal household for a week. His mother did not lose his guard but understood the temporary, unofficial seizure as a threat thereof.

However, the semi-structured interviews that Thabisa gently agreed to answer revolved a great deal around the feelings and sentiments, as well as the practical and economic aspects of motherhood. All my interviewees entered the "interlocutory scene" (Butler, 2005) as mothers. All of them, incidentally, had been caught in the motherhood grid since adolescence. Some even desired their children or younger siblings "not to be" like them (parents at a young age). None, however, posed such will and self-questioning with Thabisa's vehemence.

Only in our second interview did Thabisa vent, in more robust colours, some of her qualms and wounds. Such an expressive transmutation probably resulted from a shift in the interlocutory scene. Amahle participated in the first interview with Thabisa but, for reasons I ignored, did not show up for the second round. Thabisa and Amahle had grown up together, though not as besties. Ambiguous closeness seemed to have inhibited Thabisa's first efforts to narrate her story. Once freed from Amahle's presence, Thabisa felt more at liberty.

Thabisa G. was born on February 2nd, 1990. Her name means *waiting*. Thabisa's mother became pregnant at 34. She had long longed for a child. Thabisa was the first of three children. Her two brothers were aged 27 and 8. Only the latter, conceived in a second marriage, lived with their mother in Pretoria. Thabisa did not grow up with her two parents. They separated when she was still an infant. Her father formed another family and vanished. Only 15 years later did he reappear and provide financial and emotional support.

> My father showed up in 2005. [Then] he was taking good care of me. Since last June 23rd, he's dead.
>
> **So, between 2005...**
> Until his last day, he was taking good care of me. He always said – 'Sorry, my child, cause I didn't take care of you and your brother'.

When her father resumed contact, Thabisa already had her first child. She welcomed him and his endeavours to redeem a debt he deplored. My interviewee spoke about her father tenderly, the opposite tone she adopted towards her mother. Thabisa blamed the latter when I asked why her father did not assist in her and her brother's upbringing.

And why didn't he take care of you and your brother when you were small?
Because of... My mom was wrong.

Why was she wrong?
[She] was drinking, and my dad [was] a pastor. I don't know all the story. They always... They just told me like that.

Such was a curious appraisal, for her father disappeared, but her mother was "wrong". I did not explore the contradiction and only asked Thabisa whether her mother had stopped drinking, which she did. Thabisa had not lived full-time with her mother either. When Thabisa was 7, her mother married again and started a business in Pretoria. Thabisa called her mother a "businesswoman". While in Kwa-Ndebele, she sold beers; in Gauteng, she traded vegetables and fruits.

Between 7 and 17 years old, Thabisa lived at her grandmother's house in Kwa-Ndebele. They were five at a sizeable house: the matriarch, an auntie (Thabisa's mother's sister), the latter's daughter (Esulu), Thabisa, and her brother, Bongani. Household members shared everything – "We were eating together". Thabisa referred to her grandmother as a playful, merry granny as opposed to a "rude", shouting mother. Unfortunately, bad manners were not her mother's main fault. Thabisa held the latter responsible for her four pregnancies.

So, you grew up most of the time with
My grandmother.

With your grandmother.
That's why I've got a lot of kids, cause my mom, she didn't stay with me.
Amahle: [didn't] take care
Thabisa: Ideas, you see? Sometimes I'm blaming [her]

Blaming your mother?
Thabisa: Yeah.

Why?
Thabisa: Cause if was staying with her [...] maybe I [wouldn't] get so much babies. Cause it's your mom, supportive.

Later, Thabisa included her father in the equation, but only in passing. Above all, the "ideas" coming into her mind and slipping into speech concerned her mother's flaws. Among them, attachment to money figured prominently. Thabisa's mother did not receive the child-support grant when she departed for Pretoria nor remit her (meagre, I suppose)

business earnings to her children in Kwa-Ndebele. When asked about financial support from her mother, Thabisa shifted to IsiNdebele and approached my assistant. The word "never" crept into Thabisa's mouth, and Amahle reacted with a vocal expression of reprobative surprise.

My interviewee did attribute her first pregnancy to lack of money. Aged 14, she started dating two older teenagers, Teboho and Johan, in exchange for some cash or gifts. Thabisa's grandmother benefited from an old-age pension, yet it sufficed only to buy food and general items for the house. Thabisa and her 10-year-old brother needed more than the old lady could afford.

> **How old were you at the time you got pregnant?**
> **Thabisa:** 14, 15... Yeah, I have to get two boyfriends [...] cause my mom went to [Gauteng]. That's why I told you that if my mom was staying full-time with us...

Teboho was Thabisa's official boyfriend and the one she loved. However, she got pregnant by Johan. At the time, Teboho attended initiation school – "traditional culture, culture things, like circumcising" – and remained secluded in the hills among his male mates. Thabisa's first child was named Unexpected precisely because my interviewee did not think she would get pregnant[212].

> **So, Teboho was at the initiation school.**
> Yes, he knew that [...] it's another guy's child. We were talking, not fighting, until birth, until I raise Unexpected.

Since I knew Teboho had been a violent husband, I received with astonishment the information that he dealt on good terms with circumstances that were not ordinary. All my interviewees got pregnant from their first boyfriends, but while dating only one. Thabisa exceptional situation still embarrassed her, and Amahle's presence at the interview showed how controversial the subject was. When the issue surfaced, my assistant laughed, and Thabisa reacted with indignation.

> **You were staying with two guys.**
> **Thabisa:** Yes.
>
> **Teboho and another one.**

[212] Thabisa then thought that pregnancy occurred only after iterated and frequent sexual intercourse.

> **Thabisa:** Johan, yes. Ah, it's a truth; you said you want my personal life, so why Amahle is laughing?
> **Amahle:** You are the one who make me laugh!
>
> **Thabisa [to me]:** Why should I tell you a lie? You record it!
> **Amahle:** You're not lying, you're not lying.
> **Thabisa***:* I have to tell the truth! Why Amahle is laughing? She know!
> **Amahle:** I know! I know that you were having two boyfriends.
> **Thabisa [to me]**: Tell her don't laugh!
> **Amahle:** And they were older than her, but I told her: don't have two boyfriends, because you gonna have a problem. Here comes the child.

Social proximity between Thabisa and Amahle disconcerted the former. If, as Crapanzano (1980) puts it, distance encourages openness, then closeness may well hamper it. More significantly, Amahle's laughter enacted a sanction[213], a second one. Thabisa broke with sexual conventions and was punished twice: with a child (cast as a "problem") and social derision. Amahle is four years older than Thabisa. They attended the same school. As is often the case, fellowship and rivalry amalgamated, a fact Thabisa more than once brought to light.

> **Thabisa:** Amahle and me were fighting, but we grew up together.
> **Amahle:** I know Thabisa's life.

Amahle also has a normative stance on Thabisa's life. The same mores, or set of rules, which South Africans call "our culture", submit both ladies. This fact created tension, which also manifested in other interview moments. When approached about a job she would not like to do, Thabisa mentioned domestic work. And when, after me, Amahle asked if Thabisa would never do such a job, our interviewee grudged – "Ah, wena!" [fuck off]. Something similar occurred when Amahle asked Thabisa whether she or her second husband had decided to divorce.

In Chapter I, I claimed that my being alien in South Africa may have made it easier for interviewees to talk about their lives. I had neither previous knowledge nor a consolidated appraisal of their actions. Be it as it might, I attribute paramount relevance to the excerpt concerning Thabisa's first pregnancy for a second reason. While arguing with Amahle, Thabisa observed she should tell me her "personal truth". A wholehearted

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[213] "If I do not conform to ordinary conventions, if in my mode of dress I pay no heed to what is customary in my country and in my social class, the laughter I provoke, the social distance at which I am kept, produce, although in a more mitigated form, the same results as any real penalty" (Durkheim, 1982, p.51).

woman, Thabisa embarked – wholeheartedly, I dare say – on the laborious effort to give me an account of herself (Butler, 2005).

The interview and the circumstances of Thabisa's arrival in Kwa-Ndebele faced her with at least two fundamental questions: who and what type of mother are you? In searching for intelligible answers, Thabisa engaged critically with the "unchosen" (Butler, 2005) in her life. She broke the norm of female monogamy and got pregnant because of poverty and absent parenthood. Thabisa called these unwilled circumstances the "situation", an overall field of constraint (Butler, 2005) that accounted for her emergence as a mother.

> **Thabisa:** Situation... Situation […] But if my mom or my dad was with us, life maybe... My mom has got money but this snake[214]... Ah, let us not talk [about] that woman!

Thabisa's critique of her mother's excessive attachment to money exceeded the framework of her first pregnancy. She considered that greed had become a pattern of rapport between them. For a couple of years, Thabisa worked for a White man. She started providing home care to his bedridden mother. When the latter passed away, Thabisa was hired as a chef in the family's restaurant. She subsequently managed a township tavern and a car wash. Throughout this period, Thabisa's mother tried to keep close contact with her daughter.

> **Thabisa:** Eish, Daniel, you don't know. Now, cause I'm not working
> **Amahle:** she [Thabisa's mother] don't want to...
> **Thabisa:** Cause I'm not working. But when I'm working, she will call second after second.
> **Amahle**: because you have money.

Often in our four interviewing sessions, Thabisa deployed a bitter motto: "When I'm working, they love me. When I'm not working, they don't love me". A centrepiece in her narrative, it involved other relatives than her mother and two other critical episodes - divorce from her second husband and dismissal from her last employment. The former subject was not discussed: Thabisa refused to answer Amahle's question. As to the events causing the termination of her previous job, Thabisa told us the following.

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[214] Luthando once deployed the imagery of the snake to criticize (supposedly) over-accumulating businessmen in townships.

> **Thabisa:** [My boss] said – 'Thabisa, you should hire people; I want to open a car wash for you'. I hired even my sister [Esulu] and Bongani.
> **Amahle** [to me]**:** Do you remember Bongani?
>
> **He worked in the car wash!**
> **Amahle:** Yeees.
> **Thabisa:** That's why... That's why I lost my job. Let us not continue...
> **Amahle:** Yes, ok.
> **Thabisa:** They betrayed me too much. No, no. no. That's why my job was...

Thabisa's professional life recurred in our four rounds of conversation. She felt pride in her capacity to conduct profitable businesses – "I am a woman; I know how to make money". She deemed herself a businesswoman, the same term she applied to her mother. The two years Thabisa worked for *umulungu* (White man) sounded like a golden age of self-affirmation and reciprocal care – "That umulungu was loving me too much, was taking good care of me". Unfortunately, the greedy pattern of rapport inaugurated by her mother turned familial. Sibling betrayal, another leitmotiv in Thabisa's story, precipitated some of her most dramatic falls.

> When you put your family, you'll see a snake.

In March 2020, Thabisa came to Kwa-Ndebele in response to a double call. *Auntie* Luthando needed her company and care, and Andile required more guardianship than Margaret could provide. After a week of occasional (but fraught) kitchen chats, Thabisa, Amahle, and I sat for a recorded conversation about what our interviewee called her "personal life". Soon, however, personal proved impersonal. Thabisa's story came forth entangled in a web of social norms, constraints, and relations surpassing her agency. Faced with the unchosen, Thabisa played the "social theorist".

> When the "I" seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist (Butler, 2005, p.8).

A pungent venture we, nonetheless, resumed the following evening - then without Amahle.

Section III – "I Coughed out. I took my memories out"

Thabisa's name means waiting: her mother had long longed for a daughter. Thabisa's firstborn was named Unexpected. In common, the two girls found support among *aunties* and *gogos*. Thabisa grew up with her grandmother and her mother's sister. After delivering Unexpected, she also relied on a granny beyond her original circle of kin. *Gogo Mag* – that is, Margaret, Luthando's mother – helped my interviewee cope with premature motherhood.

> **Thabisa:** My auntie started helping me. Even *gogo* Mag, while she knows that it's not Teboho's child... *Gogo* Mag was helping me too much […] I'm coming a long way with *gogo* Mag and Luthando.

Thabisa deemed the help she found in Margaret and Luthando extraordinary because the conception of Unexpected occurred outside her dating relationship with Teboho. A week before our second interviewing session, Thabisa had already referred gratefully to *gogo* Mag. When I asked her why she called Margaret *gogo,* she observed the latter had up-brought her two children with Teboho. Margaret was Andile's and Letho's granny, not hers (Thabisa's).

Such is a point I disagree with my interviewee (though we never discussed it). Undoubtedly, Margaret undertook the role of Andile's and Letho's primary caretaker and became their grandmother. I suspect, however, that *gog* Mag, in Thabisa's mouth, conveyed more than a rapport between her children and Margaret. Whenever Thabisa vocalised it, I also heard a granddaughter calling her granny.

Mother at 15, Thabisa found another *gogo* in Margaret. When I asked what the latter did for her and her firstborn, Thabisa responded in a tone concomitantly laconic and suggestive – "Hm... many things". Two minutes later, she briefly specified Margaret's caring assistance: "Buying clothes. Even if I want to go to the taverns, she stay with Unexpected". Margaret's support allowed Thabisa, then both a mother and a teenager, to move on with her life.

> **What do you think about *gogo* Mag and Luthando?**
> **Thabisa:** Yo! Long life so that they can walk. Eish! Find them something that they will remember me. One day…

Thabisa regards Margaret's love as a gift, and such is the language through which she communicates how much obliged she feels. Thabisa wishes to carve herself permanently into Margaret's recollections. When my interviewee first mentioned Margaret's remarkable gestures toward her and Unexpected, she suggested they had crossed "a long way". Thabisa continued to desire a long path for them to walk - together, I assume. Gifts seal alliances and symbolise unions; they *throw*[215] partners together in a "circle of closeness" (Hénaff, 2010, p.145).

Thabisa's and Margaret's circle of closeness enhanced, among other reasons, because Unexpected's paternal grandparents offered too short-lived support. When the baby was five months old, they cut off assistance, financial and otherwise.

> **Why?**
> I don't know. But now they told me they want Unexpected. I told them: hey, you want what? Unexpected is 14 years. I don't know even that you [can] show me: 'Here's Unexpected'.

Past omissions only cast Margaret's care under a brighter light. Becoming a mother at 15 turned out to be a burdensome experience for my interviewee. After delivery, Thabisa and Unexpected were taken to a nearby village for a while. Attending grade 9 at school, Thabisa kept studying for two more years, or better, studying, dating Teboho, and frequenting Martha's house. At 17 in 2007, Thabisa got pregnant for the second time.

> **So, tell me a bit about your life when Andile was conceived and when you gave birth to him.**
> I didn't sick, like vomiting, no, no, no. I was just Thabisa. Me and Luthando were drinking too much, drinking Hansa [a local beer]. One day, I was bathing, and Luthando said – 'I think you're pregnant'. I said no, no, no! You're mad! Cause I was [having] my periods. Hm... So [after] two months, my period stop. I go to her: hey, auntie, I think I'm pregnant again.

I take the excerpt as signalling a shift in the relationship between Luthando and Thabisa, precisely the former's transformation from Luthando into *auntie.* At 17, Thabisa used to hang out with Luthando, addressed as such but four years older than her. They were close pals, not yet relatives. Until, in a context of shared intimacy, Luthando suggested Thabisa might be pregnant. The intuition proved accurate a couple of months

[215] The ultimate etymology of symbol reads: "from Greek sumbolon, token for identification (by comparison with a counterpart): *sun*-, syn- + *ballein*, to throw". The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/symbol (Accessed: June, 15th, 2023).

later. When Thabisa approached her friend to confirm the latter's prediction, Luthando became *auntie* – "Hey, auntie, I think I'm pregnant again".

The two ladies reacted diversely to an advent implicating both. Luthando ululated at the coming of a new child. She also comforted her pal – "Ah, don't worry, man!" A second pregnancy intimidated 17-year-old Thabisa. Once in a conversation with me, Luthando recalled her friend as a "little girl" by the time Andile was born. That is one of the reasons she and Margaret involved themselves so intensely with the new child and his mother – "Mama and I were taking care of Thabisa and Andile". Care included transmitting motherhood techniques to Thabisa and the far more she needed.

> **Were you happy or sad when you received the news that you were pregnant for the second time?**
> Ah, I said everything happens for a reason.

I surmise the little girl was preoccupied, or "thinking too much", as my interlocutors define pensiveness. As a caring *auntie,* Luthando tried to calm Thabisa's disquieted soul – "Everything will be ok!" Andile was Martha's first grand grandchild. Luthando had lost her baby one year before Andile's birth. I assume the family was eager to engage with newborn life. Thabisa told me the following about the hours preceding Andile's birth.

> **Thabisa:** Then I went [to the informal settlement] in Pretoria. Malume Ntuli and I were playing. Malume Ntuli said – 'Ah, ah, it's so long time you're pregnant! Take your full bucket of water'. [It was] hard to me. We were playing, after I started getting pain. He just...
>
> **Poured water on you?**
> **Thabisa:** he just told me – 'Ah, we're waiting for this child! It's so long time you are pregnant, man! Let me take this water'. And he poured on me. After, I started getting pain.

Thabisa's second labour was induced (no irony), and although one disapproves of the method, it expresses how much expected Andile had been. When Thabisa got pregnant from Teboho, they married, and she moved to the informal settlement in Pretoria. She and her husband installed themselves in a shack contiguous to Norah's, then living with her brother, *malume* Ntuli. As Teboho's *male mother* (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952), *malume* had a privileged status over his uterine nephew/son and an interest in the coming of Teboho's first child.

To use Butler's (2005) terms, Thabisa found herself partially "dispossessed" from the reins of her transformation into Andile's mother. And so was the baby himself, whose full name replicates Ntuli's. The marital deal between the two families did not involve lobola but marriage and the payment of damages to Thabisa's mother. Be it as it may, the fact that 17-year-old Thabisa moved to Pretoria suggests she had little control over the new situation.

I am not saying she felt wholly displeased. Thabisa also has dear recollections from the period. She and Teboho were "staying together" and "loving each other". He worked and had the means to "take good care of her". She also enjoyed communal life with neighbours in a lively, sometimes feverish, street in the informal settlement. Finally, Thabisa put high hopes on her second-born, whose composite name reads Andile-Ntuli.

> **Why did you call him Andile-Ntuli?**
> Cause he will go to build a big house for me. Andile means: my child's going to build a house for me. And Ntuli poured water on me. I say, oh, it's your grandfather's name, Andile-Ntuli.

Thabisa's firstborn, Unexpected, also lived in the informal settlement for a time[216]. Still in Kwa-Ndebele, Margaret often commuted to visit (and help) them. Unlike her mother, Luthando moved to Pretoria. In Thabisa's words: "When I'm staying there [at the informal settlement] full time, auntie came and stayed with me. And when I'm coming back here [Kwa-Ndebele], Luhando came back". Luthando was so thoroughly going with Andile and his mother that they set up again in Kwa-Ndebele after a year in Pretoria. Thabisa was then pregnant with her and Teboho's second child.

Thabisa had returned to her hometown for the funeral of another *auntie* (her mother's sister) but stayed for about six months to help care for her grandmother. The latter was already 90 and had only Esulu's company and assistance. Thabisa, Unexpected, and Andile installed themselves at the matriarch's and kept a pendulum movement to Martha's, where Margaret and Luthando were. Let us listen to Luthando's recollections about the bond she and six-month-old Andile established.

> I was sleeping with him, washing him [...]
> Me, I was giving everything to Andile: my time, my happiness, everything. When Thabisa was around me, I was just happy.

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[216] Probably less than one year. After Thabisa got pregnant from her third child, Letho, Surprise went living with Thabisa's sister, Esulu.

> **You were happy whenever he was close to you?**
> Then, he was not crying, even at night, when he saw that his mom is not around.

Luthando had lost her baby several years sooner and knew she would not conceive again. In January 2022, Thabisa told me about *auntie*: “She was always saying – “I’ll never do a baby again”. It seems Luthando could not have another child, but Thabisa treated the matter as if Luthando did not want it. Whatever the case, before completing three years, Andile started staying full-time under Luthando’s and Margaret’s care. A source of zest for both, the fact was unfortunately related to the deterioration of Thabisa’s marriage with Teboho.

Thabisa gave birth to Letho, her second child with Teboho, two months after settling back in Kwa-Ndebele. Thabisa had a healthy baby girl who, like her brother (Andile-Ntuli), took her second name from Martha’s family. She was called Letho-Norah, after Teboho’s mother. Thabisa wanted to name her second daughter Banele, meaning “my kids are enough”. However, Norah did not have a granddaughter, so Thabisa paid her a tribute and yielded to the circumstances.

> **Why did you give up Banele and put Norah as a name?**
> ‘Cause Norah, she didn't have a girl. I said, ok, let me give her grandmother's name so that I will remind everything I came from. But [inside] myself, I was thinking Banele. But I didn’t get a chance.

Letho-Norah was born in February 2010. Three months later, she and Thabisa moved back to Pretoria. Soon, however, Thabisa’s *situation* among her in-laws changed. Norah sometimes swore at her, and Teboho started cheating with younger girls at the informal settlement. Arguments and fights between the couple became more frequent. As Thabisa put it – “The deal started changing”. In addition to his extra-marital affairs, Teboho’s jealousy increased – “Cause, you see, when a man starts cheating, some are respecting his girlfriend, and some are not”. In other words, local men courted 20-year-old Thabisa, and Teboho reacted violently against her.

Between January and May 2011, Thabisa commuted between Pretoria and Kwa-Ndebele. In June, she decided to reinstall herself at her grandmother’s house. Teboho had become too abusive a partner. They remained married, but after months in Kwa-Nedebele, she discovered that Teboho was living with another woman in the informal settlement.

Norah consented to her son's new partnership. Thabisa shattered, and not only because of marital infidelity.

> There's something on social media we call gossiping. Everyone was, like, you see, [on] WhatsApp, Facebook. Everyone was [talking]. I was useless in Kwa-Ndebele.

In the public's eye, Thabisa became a "fool" and was ridiculed, that is, punished a second time for her husband's behaviour. Fortunately, she again found solace and care with Margaret and Luthando. "When I pack my bag and come back home, Luthando and *gogo* Mag were taking good care of me. Good care". They were also caring for Thabisa's, or rather *their* shared children. By the beginning of 2011, Andile lived at Martha's. Contrary to his sister, he no longer breastfed. Soon, however, Margaret and Luthando also requested Letho, for Thabisa experienced a crisis upon learning that Teboho had a second wife.

> I was getting thin, thin, because of the stress. Cause, eish, I didn't think one day it would be like this. Never. Never.

It is difficult to reconstitute the movement of Thabisa's children at this point in her life. Though she and Luthando verbalised the coming and going of children in terms of "giving" and *"taking"*, it seems that Andile and Letho then lived in two houses. They continued until Thabisa quit Kwa-Ndebele and started a new life in Johannesburg. In August 2011, she began dating again. Thabisa's new boyfriend, Anthony, was friends with one of her closest pals in Kwa-Ndebele. She recounted her first conversation with Anthony in the following terms.

> Letho was sick, né? So, I've got a guy, it's my friend. [Anthony called him and said]: 'Ah, man, you always tell me about Thabisa. You are always drinking; just give her the phone'. My friend gave me the phone
>
> **[Thabisa impersonates Anthony]**: Hello, how are you?
> **Thabisa**: Ah, I'm good, I'm good.
> **Anthony**: One day, you have to come to Joburg with me. What are you doing?
> **Thabisa**: Ah, I'm stressed.
> **Anthony**: Why?
> **Thabisa**: My child is not good.

> [Then] he sent money through Shoprite: 'Take your child to the doctor'. He didn't know me. He never saw me. Just a voice on the phone!

Money takes care of people, and Thabisa appreciated the gesture. Phone conversations became more frequent, and Anthony insisted that she visit him. Formally, Thabisa and Teboho remained married. When my interviewee finally decided to see Anthony, she pretended to be with her mother in Gauteng, and Teboho did not oppose her. Thabisa took 2-year-old Letho and spent a week in Johannesburg. Andile remained with Luthando and Margaret in Kwa-Ndebele.

Between August and September 2011, Thabisa visited Anthony twice. By the third time, she remained for almost three months, then without Letho. Thabisa's sister, Esulu, had asked to care for her, a task she shared with Margaret and Luthando. Thabisa celebrated end-of-year festivities in Kwa-Ndebele but had already been invited to live in *Joburg*. Feeling loved and valued again, she gladly accepted to embark on a novel relationship – "He was taking good care of me [...]. Taking good care of my kids, buying clothes for my kids, buying clothes for me. It was nice". Nice to such an extent that Thabisa once approached Anthony on the matter.

> I asked him: Why are you always buying me expensive clothes, buying my child expensive clothes? Why don't you buy it for your child? He told me: 'I don't have a child'.
>
> **How old was he?**
>
> Maybe 20-something. It was a surprise cause, in South Africa, you see, even a 17-year-old guy has a child. It was a surprise. He told me: 'Ah, me, I'm not doing babies'.

When Thabisa and Anthony first talked on the phone, he told her he had four children. Anthony lied, probably out of shame. The lack of children suggests something ominous has befallen a human being (Ngobese, 2003). It is not alluring to introduce oneself as childless to a potential partner. Anthony had kept his secret and feelings of personal and social failure until he had a stable relationship with Thabisa. Since 2012, they had been living together at his house in Johannesburg. Two years later, Thabisa unexpectedly got pregnant.

> I said: hey! It's a surprise, this one! Cause that guy [Anthony], he's not doing the babies... Anthony was too much happy. Too much happy. More than words [can] say happy. More than... Yeah.

Thabisa's whole reaction to her fourth pregnancy remains opaque to me. She felt "sharp, but not sharp too much". Her recollections about the period articulated a happy marriage and strain derived from the relationship with her mother.

> **Thabisa:** I was stressed even with my mom.
>
> **Were you having problems with your mom at that time?**
> Yeah. Even now, I told you...
>
> **When you discovered you were pregnant?**
> My mom didn't shout at me, cause that guy, he's got the money. He's got too much money.
>
> **What sorts of problems were you having with your mother?**
> Ah, the problem is that when I'm working, my mom love me; when I'm not working, my mom don't love me. When I'm staying with a guy [and] he's not working, my mom don't need me. But when I'm staying with the guy who's got money, my mom needs me.

Thabisa did not include her mother in any other pregnancy-related memory, save for the first, which she considered to be caused by her mother's absence. Such, however, was a comprehensive view[217] – "Ideas, you see?" – about the effects that her mother's presence might have had by the beginning of her teenage years. Interestingly, the excerpt above does not belong to this general causative scheme. It is enounced as a particular remembrance associated with Thabisa's last pregnancy and reiterates the motto according to which her mother was there only in a self-interested mode.

Yet the recollections above also indicate her mother's reaction to her three previous pregnancies (none with a prosperous man). Thabisa's mother probably shouted. Anthony worked as a manager in the food industry. Money had never been an obstacle in his relationship with Thabisa. It seems that after the conception of their child, he became even more generous. Anthony decided to afford Thabisa's private education – she had quit school in grade 11th (after Letho's birth). They also had a white wedding, and lobola was paid.

Thabisa called her last-born Jasmin because a flower had finally sprung into her father's garden. Anthony wanted to call his daughter after the name of his deceased sister (Ula), but Thabisa's mother had the final word on the matter. Around pregnancy's mid-

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[217] The ultimate etymology of theory reads: *Late Latin theōria, from Greek theōriā, from theōros, spectator: probably theā, a viewing + -oros, seeing (from horān, to see*. The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/theory (Accessed: July 4th, 2023).

term, Thabisa often felt sick and decided to move to her mother's house in Pretoria. Her fourth pregnancy involved more risk and discomfort than usual, so she needed her mother's assistance and finally underwent a Cesar-section. Thabisa chained these events and their rationale as follows.

> I went to stay with my mom because I was sick. I was not feeling well. Then I get birth at A.B.C. Hospital. With operation [C-Section], cause I was not feeling well. That's why my mom called her Jasmin.
>
> **Why did she call her Jasmin?**
> Cause her father, he was not... Cause [her] father, he don't have a baby, so [it is] his Jasmin, cause even when you go outside, you see many flowers, yes... Flower of his baby. [But] Anthony said – "No, I will call her after my sister's name". Cause his sister, we buried her last year.
>
> **What was her name?**
> Ula. I said no, I'll call her… [Someone entered Martha's kitchen, and Thabisa stopped talking].

Thabisa represented her mother's presence during her fourth pregnancy as a source of strain and authority over the name of her lastborn. From the excerpts above, I deduce Thabisa sided with her and prevailed over her husband's will. Grandmothers are relevant name-givers in South Africa, and the "message" (De Klerk & Bosch, 1996) Thabisa and her mother wanted to convey was one of floral joy. Anthony accepted their decision yet did not forgo his sister's memories.

> Her father always calls her *sesi*. When you [say] *sesi*, it's sister, like a nickname. Her nickname is *sesi*, meaning my sister. So, her father, he's always playing: '*sesi*, *sesi*, my sister, my sister'.

As *sesi* or Jasmin, Thabisa's lastborn inaugurated a novel, brighter cycle for her father and mother. Thabisa obtained matric and started attending Nursery School. The couple had a house, a car (Thabisa learned to drive), and the amenities making for an enjoyable existence – "Life was good". Efflorescence lasted for about two years but had a permanent effect on Thabisa's path. In this respect, though with antagonistic valences, her second and first marriages coincide. Both determined Thabisa's emergence as the woman she depicted before me. Both, incidentally, led to Jasmin.

Thabisa discovered her last pregnancy at the hospital, where she was admitted after a trauma derived from gender violence perpetrated by Teboho. In February 2015,

five days after her 25th birthday, Thabisa visited Luthando in Pretoria. While they socialised, Teboho showed up with airs of irritation. A local man had been courting Thabisa. She told her ex-husband to mind his own business since he had another wife, and he broke two of her frontal teeth. Thabisa was taken to a nearby Hospital by Luthando, who called Anthony. He said Thabisa should be transferred to a private facility in Johannesburg.

> He took me to a special doctor. Special doctor said I got four months pregnant. [Anthony] didn't believe. He cried a lot – 'Me?'

Jasmin was born in August 2015. When she completed five months, Thabisa's sister, Esulu, "took" the baby to Kwa-Ndebele.

> **Thabisa:** I didn't raise a child since I was born.
>
> **And do you miss that?**
> I really wanted, but they say – 'No, no, no, you don't know how to raise a child'. So, Esulu took my child when she got five months.
>
> **Why did she take the child?**
> She said I'm going to beat the child. I said no...

Anthony was not thrilled at his daughter's move to Kwa-Ndebele but finally accepted the new situation. He knew Esulu was a good caretaker. Furthermore, Thabisa had started attending nursery school in Johannesburg. In 2017, before Jasmin was 2, Thabisa and Anthony separated. Their daughter remained with Esulu for two more years. Only in 2019 did Anthony ask Thabisa to take their daughter to his hometown in Northern Mpumalanga.

> He said – 'Thabisa, just give me my baby because we are not together'. But when I want Jasmin to visit me, he send [her]. We are not fighting about that. He loves her more than anything. He always told me – 'Even if I find a girlfriend, [and she] gets pregnant, I won't love that girl like Jasmin. It's my everything... It's my mom, my sister, my brother, my everything'.

When Jasmin was born (August 2015), Thabisa's three other children lived in different places. Andile was in Pretoria with his grandmother, Norah, and Luthando. Aged six in 2014, Andile attended Grade 1 in Kwa-Ndebele but failed it and was taken to

Norah's house in the informal settlement one year later. Norah then invited Luthando to dwell at her place and help care for the young boy.

Letho was in Kwa-Ndebele, where she had spent her first two years (2010-2011). In February 2012, when Thabisa started a novel life with Anthony in Johannesburg, Letho accompanied her: "My ex-husband was taking care of her. He put Letho in a private school in Grades 1st and 2nd". Probably after the birth of Jasmin, Letho returned to Kwa-Ndebele, again living with Esulu and *gogo* Margaret.

Like Letho, Thabisa's firstborn (Unexpected) went to Johannesburg in 2012. Until then, Esulu had cared for her in Kwa-Ndebele. Unexpected stayed with Thabisa and Anthony until mid-2016. Then Thabisa found her daughter was "jollying with boys" and beat her beyond the advisable. In the aftermath, Unexpected went to live with her maternal grandmother. When recollecting the episode that led her firstborn to her mother, Thabisa observed the following:

> What must I do? I don't want Unexpected to be like me.

Thabisa did not want her daughter to become a premature mother – "I want the best things for my kids, Daniel, with all my heart". Thabisa is a lovely, wholehearted woman.

Section IV - *Nyatanda ulagelela abo gogo* [I like to take care of grandmothers]

In our first interview, Thabisa spoke about her experience as a nurse for an older woman. When talking about her father's decease in 2018, Thabisa observed she was working, which helped her cope with his death. My assistant took the initiative to ask our interviewee which occupation she then had.

> I started nannying grandmothers 'cause I was doing Nursery. Only one year left. After, I was a chef. After, I was a manager of a car wash.

Thabisa's second husband, Anthony, afforded her education between 2016 and 2017. After their divorce, Thabisa quit College before obtaining the certificate but did not give other information on this period of her life – "Don't ask about my husband. Another

topic, please". When I tried to summarise her professional trajectory – from nursery to chef and finally manager – Thabisa noticed she had all these jobs with the same employer, an *umulungu* (White man) called John. He had a tender attachment to his old mother, whom he addressed as *yaya* [grandmother], and remained particularly well-impressed by Thabisa's dedication to her. After the matriarch passed away, John invited Thabisa to continue working for the family.

> **[Thabisa impersonates John]** 'You are taking good care of my yaya, so I'll take you to my restaurant as a chef. They will teach you...'

Thabisa had never cooked professionally but learned it fast, and I did not develop the subject further. After she mentioned that John's *yaya* had died "on her hands", I inquired what she understood by "taking care" [218].

> **Thabisa:** That's the job I want in my life, nannying grandmothers.
> **Amahle:** me too.
>
> **You want this job...**
> **Thabisa:** Eish!
> **Amahle**: me too
> **Thabisa:** with all my heart.
>
> **Why?**

A wholehearted woman, Thabisa puts her essence into whatever she does - or does not, more on it later. After I asked my interviewee why she wanted so much to nanny grandmothers, she replied – "Cause I was enjoying". I cannot conceive of a better reason, but there were others, and I believe they help understand why Thabisa deployed the verb *nanny* to the noun *grandmother*.

> I was knowing that early in the morning... She was a child. I have to change a nappy, put an injection.
> **Amahle:** Hm, hm [agreeing with Thabisa]
>
> **Thabisa:** First time, she was not using the oxygen, but when time goes [she] started to sick too much
>
> [Amahle follows with interest].

[218] As the reader remembers from Chapters II and III, I had extensively discussed the words nagelela (to take care) and ukhusiza (to help) with previous interlocutors in Kwa-Ndebele.

> **Thabisa:** Oxygen after five months, cause [she] started sicking. But I was knowing that I've got a child to take care.
> **Amahle:** Yeah.

Thabisa and Amahle equalled grandmothers and children in that both required caretakers to do what they could not do for them. Even though Thabisa knew how to care for both, she patently preferred the elder, for they could communicate in words what they felt and needed.

> **What would you like to do as a job?**
> My favourite job is to nanny grandmothers.
>
> **What do you prefer, taking care of grandmothers or children?**
> Grandmothers.
>
> **Why?**
> Eish, I don't know, what can I say? I like it. Children, ah, hey! When I'm nannying your child, when you see a mistake, you will harass me. Grandmothers will tell you – 'Lindiwe, I'm feeling pain here'. I know what I must do. I know that I should take him to exercise. I know many things.

My interviewee first mentioned her desire to nanny grandmothers spontaneously. Soon afterwards, the semi-structured interviews led me back to the subject, and I explored the contrast between nannying children and the elderly. Thabisa's answer focused on the fact that speaking elders could express their wants in words. Children's inability to communicate verbally uneased my interviewee, and her experience as a mother had been punctuated by criticism from family members, who often told her: "You don't know how to raise a child!"

Thabisa experience as a nurse for John's *yaya* affected both women deeply, and they bonded. At the beginning of the job, Thabisa attended to the old lady twice a week. When John perceived that his mother's appetite increased when Thabisa was there, he asked her to work daily.

> Two minutes to two minutes – 'Thabisa, give me a Danone'. When you're taking good care of a person, she will like you. So, John said – 'You should start working every day 'cause she does not want to eat when you're off'. She died calling my name. That's why John said: 'We have to take good care of her [Thabisa]'.

My interviewee's professional rapport with John began when she cared for his mother and was extended as a caring act toward Thabisa. Thabisa was given (and fully embraced) an opportunity at John's restaurant. It is unclear how long she worked as a chef - probably not long. Impressed by Thabisa's entrepreneurial abilities, John confided her with two other simultaneous businesses: a car wash and a township tavern. As the car wash manager, Thabisa hired her sister, Esulu, and brother, Bongani. Meanwhile, she also administered a home-improvised liquor shop, where she could make around ZAR 4500 weekly[219]. When finishing our fourth and last interview, we had the following dialogue.

> **Where were you running a shebeen?**
> **Thabisa:** At my place, Joburg, so... The shebeen fell apart because of my sister and brother. I told [you], Daniel, I don't want to talk about my sister and my brother anymore.

It is partially unclear what happened between Thabisa, Bongani, and Esulu. Whatever it was, John dismissed the three of them. From what I could grasp in our four interviewing sessions, Bongani and Esulu subtracted part of the tavern's weekly cash and accused Thabisa before John. Esulu, who also had a close relationship with him, suggested Thabisa had 'drunk his money'.

If so, Thabisa's bond with John began and ended because of Esulu. The latter started working as a domestic helper at John's, cooking and caring for his children. When their grandmother fell ill, Esulu told her boss that Thabisa had almost completed Nursery School. Once hired, Thabisa levered herself above Esulu's status within the household.

> **Thabisa:** Esulu was jealous. And then she started sending that *umulungu* messages. And then everything fell apart. Another question?

Thabisa and Esulu were sisters, like their mothers, and had long lived at their granny's house in Kwa-Ndebele. It is not wrong to say that they grew up together, but Esulu is ten years older than Thabisa. When Thabisa got pregnant, her sister already had a child and helped care for Unexpected and her mother. The emotional and practical, adult support Thabisa found in Esulu constitutes, I suppose, the reason why my interviewee twice referred to Esulu as "my auntie". Their history of mutuality is a complex one and defies facile categorisation.

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[219] In exchange for a week-salary of ZAR 1500.

In the interviewing sessions of March 2020, Thabisa deployed "betrayal" four times in relation to Esulu and Bongani. After the episode at the home-improvised liquor shop, Thabisa and her sister parted ways. Fortunately, in January 2021, they had already reestablished their bond. Then working as my long-distance assistant, Thabisa proposed to interview Esulu and told me the following.

> Do you remember I told you the story about Esulu? And now we sat down. We called our family. We sat down, Daniel. We started discussing everything. Now we are fine; we are sisters, and Esulu is the one who's taking care of me.

Esulu and Thabisa discussed the subtraction of John's money in December 2020. Thabisa's mother mediated their conversation during a Christmas family gathering in Kwa-Ndebele.

> **Thabisa:** My mom said: 'Esulu, why did you do that?' Esulu said: 'I don't know, I think it's the witch things. I didn't think before I do that. <u>I was thinking I'm going to open another place for quarters</u>. But I didn't manage to do it' (emphasis added).

Esulu wanted to open an informal liquor shop instead of working as Thabisa's subordinate and living at her house in Johannesburg. The plan did not succeed, but they reconciled. Thabisa and Esulu share their lives and have much in common, such as enthusiasm for caring activities[220].

In other aspects, they differ significantly. When Thabisa narrated her becoming a nurse to John's mother, she remarked that Esulu then worked as a "kitchen girl" at his house. The expression does not sound particularly lauding, but I cannot tell how much, if any, disdain it conveys. Be it as it may, Thabisa dislikes domestic labour (outside her own house), which, contrarily to Esulu, she has never performed.

In Section II, I observed that Thabisa, Amahle, and I addressed what job the former would not like to do. Our interviewee mentioned domestic work but grumbled when Amahle asked if she would never do such a job. Fortunately, our dialogue did not terminate then.

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[220] When Thabisa and I interviewed Esulu (January 2021), the latter told us she likes very much to *nagelela* (take care of) people. Besides nanying John's children, Esulu worked in a community care program for the elder and the sick.

So, what you wouldn't like to do as a job? A job you would never do.
Thabisa: Cleaning.

Cleaning?
Thabisa: Yes, washing dishes [and laughs]
Amahle: Ok, home chores.
Thabisa: Ah, domestic work.

Why not?
Thabisa: I'm lazy.

In Chapter II, I presented my interaction with *mama* Thuli. A lady in her mid-fifties, she once stated not to be a "lazy person" but rather "used to working". Since I had never suggested Thuli might be lazy, she attributed to me, qua White man[221], a colonial pigeonhole she hurried to rebuff. Thabisa adopted a different approach. Instead of contesting what she assumed to be my opinion on the matter, she ironically took it upon herself as though such was actually the case.

I knew it was not. South African populations despise some forms of job, particularly those they consider socially insignificant, a predicate the term *bereka*, in Tshwane, indexes (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1987). Ashforth (1990) associated the phenomenon with pride or the feeling that some occupations are below local standards of dignity. In a definite contribution, Atkins (1994) demonstrated how much Northern-Nguni's "moral codes" revealed aversion to non-prestigious, low-paid, and menial chores. In sum, when Thabisa called herself lazy, I knew it was a "dead myth" (Tallie, 2019) but continued probing into the matter.

You're lazy?
Thabisa: I like to cook. Ah, cooking, I can cook times million. Dishes? No.

Cleaning the floor?
Thabisa: Ai, ai [Nope]
Amahle: [laughs]
Thabisa: [laughs]

You don't like it?
Thabisa: I like it, but I don't want you to push me: 'Do it, do it!' No! I will do it by myself.
Amahle: Yes!

[...]

[221] White was the racial category my closer interlocutors ascribed to me, despite my protestations.

Amahle: You're lazy...
Do you think it's laziness?
Amahle: it's laziness

I don't think it's laziness.
Amahle [to me]: You think it's what?

I think Thabisa abhors domestic work, contrarily to nannying grandmothers and running *shebeens*. As economists say, people have *preferences* and attribute value to different occupations in a hierarchic form. Thabisa would take on a domestic job for a living only if a (dim) situation compelled her. When allowed to choose, she rejects such tasks, for they wound the sense of "autonomy" (Atkins, 1994) communicated in: "I don't want you to push me it: 'Do it, do it!' No! I will do it by myself".

Neither Thabisa nor Amahle nor I conflated laziness and disdain for domestic chores performed on *umulungu's* behalf. We played with stereotypes whose adherence to racial rhetoric in South Africa runs against evidence and the state of affairs propitiated by the country's massive cash-transfer policies. Ethnographic data suggests that many in South Africa[222] and elsewhere[223] prefer grants to a servile, "unfree" role (Coser, 1973). We do not have to profess modernization theory to reaffirm that domestic*,* when beyond one's *domus*, often functions as a euphemism for relations of a "master-servant" class[224].

Section V - Do you live with this money?
"Yes, 'cause now I'm not working. I eat this money"

In our third interview, Thabisa said she had not worked since the beginning of 2019 and was living on two child-support grants (~ZAR 900). That she was not working was a contentious statement. Though Thabisa no longer worked as a manager or a nurse, she performed at least three toiling activities in March 2020. First, she cared for Luthando; second, she helped Margaret with domestic chores; third, she answered my never-ending questions[225]. If pleasure and sore, meaning and the absence thereof, predicate different forms of labour, then Thabisa worked for Luthando, Margaret, and me, deriving from each activity diverse mixes of joy and pain.

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[222] See Seekings and Nattrass (2015, p.75).
[223] For Brazil, see Rego e Pinzani (2013).
[224] As Atkins (1994) puts it for a wide range of domestic services in colonial KwaZulu-Natal.
[225] I discuss the laborious nature of answering the semi-structured interviews in the next section.

In casting these three activities as labour, I deliberately impose an external perspective on Thabisa's. She did not treat any of these tasks as such. Yet taking them as labour allows me to deepen Thabisa's perception and reasons she likes some jobs, dislikes others, and prefers the grants to the latter. Since this section deals with diverse aspects of Thabisa's experience as a beneficiary of social assistance in cash, looking at the notion of labour may foster the comprehension of the child-support grant's value or "relevance" (Graeber, 2001).

In March 2020, Thabisa was summoned to care for Luthando in Kwa-Ndebele for the second or third time. In 2017, Luthando also felt seriously ill due to unchecked HIV. Thabisa stayed with her for a month and later commuted to Kwa-Ndebele on weekends until Luthando recovered. Summoned again in 2020, Thabisa exchanged care for care. Indeed, as such she understood the monetary reward she received from Luthando or the things the latter bought for her.

> Even now, you know that I'm not working; I'm not doing anything. [But if I ask Luthando] Can you please buy me something? She will buy me and say – 'Thabisa, when you've got money, you're always taking care of people'.

Luthando required a great deal of care work. Thabisa did not perform such tasks alone since Margaret, Gift, and I were also there for her. Our presence notwithstanding, Luthando preferred Thabisa to us. Thabisa did not consider her rapport with Luthando in terms of labour but as a form of reciprocal care, which had been the keynote of their long-lasting relationship. Luthando had always cared for Thabisa and her, or better, *their* children, particularly Andile and Letho. And Thabisa, whenever summoned, did likewise. Why? Because Luthando had an incomparable meaning for her.

> It's not the first time I came to take care of Luthando.
>
> **Is it the second time?**
> **Thabisa:** Yeah. Luthando is my everything. Yeah, my everything.

By which means can we cast caring for Luthando as a form of labour Thabisa performed? First, by imposing on the two women a language that is not theirs, for theirs is the gift's idiom[226]. Second, by defining labour as broadly as a "human being's capacity

[226] In June 2021, Thabisa recalled the episode when she had to convince some nurses to give Luthando medication in a clinic in Johannesburg. She described the circumstance and Luthando's retribution in the

to transform the world, their powers of physical and mental creativity" (Graeber, 2001, p.55). Third, by adding a scent of Melanesian ethnography and stating that humans invest their ingeniousness in the production of things and the creation and reproduction of meaningful social relationships.

> Commodities have to be produced [...], social relations have to be created and maintained; all of this requires an investment of human time and energy, intelligence, concern [...]. One invests one's energies in those things one considers most important, or most meaningful (Graeber, 2001, p.45).

Thabisa also deployed her energies to tend to her relationship with Margaret. Thabisa did not love domestic chores (save for cooking) but performed them at Martha's throughout March 2020. Thabisa disliked in domestic services the fact of being pushed and the feeling of lost "autonomy" (Atkins, 1994). At Martha's, though, she swept, washed, and did the dishes with no expression of grudge. In other words, the same chores had different values according to the specific others on whose behalf they were performed. When performed to Margaret, love and respect were at play, i.e., patterns of human attachment that only the gift's language can express.

> **What can you tell me about Margaret?**
> Ah, this woman... I think [if] Lord gives me [enough money], I'll buy her a car. [I'll] buy her something she will never forget.

The present section concerns Thabisa's history as a child-support grant recipient. I proposed a specious equivalence between labour and the activities she performed for Margaret and Luthando to highlight the existential value of social assistance in cash. Indeed, the ~ZAR 900 Thabisa received as "SASSA money" allowed her not to perform "bullshit jobs" to insignificant others (Graeber, 2020), thus keeping free her time and self for those she loved. In other words, Thabisa derived a minimum of "economic freedom" (2020, p.171) from two child-support grants.

> **Thabisa:** So, [if] I walk to Pretoria doing domestic work, it's forced.

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following terms: "I was begging the sisters... After, Luthando bought a pair of jeans and a t-shirt to say: 'Thank you Thabisa, you are the best' ".

Not being constrained is the liberal form of liberty par excellence (Hardy, 2002). However, Thabisa's experience as a recipient of social assistance in cash involves far more than freedom. The grants to which her children are entitled have circulated among the latter's diverse caretakers, a fact Thabisa casts as usurpation. It has not always been so, for the principle that the grant "follows the child" has vernacular and official currency (Lund, 2008). Once the primary caretakers of children prove themselves as such, they immediately obtain the grant's titularity[227]. In Thabisa's case, that became a source of dispute and resentment.

Thabisa gave birth to Unexpected in 2005. At age 15, she had not yet reached the threshold (16 years old)[228] to receive the child support grant. Thabisa then lived with her grandmother, her mother's sister, and 25-year-old Esulu. The family decided the latter would obtain Unexpected's birth certificate, apply for the child-support grant and manage it. In Thabisa's words, Esulu was then "buying the food".

Thabisa's second child, Andile, was born in 2008. Then married to Teboho, Thabisa lived in an informal settlement in Pretoria. After Andile's birth, she commuted to Kwa-Ndebele for a couple of months to show her family the newborn. At 18, Thabisa could apply for Andile's child support grant, but Esulu asked to "do the grant" for her. Their grandmother endorsed the suggestion, for Esulu already received Unexpected's grant and took care of her.

Thabisa accepted the arrangement and returned to Pretoria with Andile. Esulu was supposed to remit monthly his child-support grant (then worth ZAR 210). Seven months after Andile's birth, Thabisa got pregnant from her third child, the second with Teboho. Letho was born in February 2010, and Thabisa was in Kwa-Ndebele for her mother's sister's funeral. Again, Esulu applied for the grant. Letho was not yet six months old when Thabisa returned to Pretoria and discovered Teboho had been cheating with local girls. A crisis befell their marriage.

As Thabisa and Teboho fought and reconciled, she moved between Kwa-Ndebele and Gauteng. In June 2011, Thabisa decided to settle at her grandmother's house. Then, the matriarch, Esulu, her child, my interviewee and her three children were living on one old-age grant and five child support grants. In August 2011, Thabisa started dating Anthony. The following January, she moved to his house in Johannesburg.

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[227] Irrespective of being kin or not.

[228] Available in: https://legal-aid.co.za/2018/09/26/child-support-grant/ (accessed on July 26th, 2023).

> **Thabisa:** When I went to stay in Joburg, my sister started eating the money. The problem comes there when I [went] to Joburg.

While Thabisa lived in Kwa-Ndebele, she, Esulu, their children, and their grandmother ate *together* their grants - they shared them. After Thabisa departed from Kwa-Ndebele, her sister started 'eating' part of the child-support grants belonging to Unexpected, Andile, and Letho. Thabisa had taken them to Johannesburg, but the grants remained administered by Esulu.

> Sometimes, she was sending it. Sometimes, sending me later. Sometimes, sending for two kids [or] one [and saying]: 'I was busy. Hey, the machine!'

Arguments ensued. Working and having a good salary, Thabisa's husband told her not to be bothered. She tried to, yet neither forgot the matter nor forgave Esulu's appropriation of the grants. That proved a thorny corner of my interviewee's memories, one we first stumbled upon in our second interviewing session. We then talked about her second marriage and the circulation of Thabisa's children between different households. When I asked about the correlated movement of grants, Thabisa mentioned for the first time that her sister 'ate' the money. Soon, however, she asked me to change the subject.

> Let us drop this cause I feel pain when I talk about the grant—another question, Daniel, please.

I proceeded as required, but the issue resumed in our third appointment while we discussed other questions of the semi-structured interviews. Then Thabisa shifted to an ironic tone. Noticing my astonishment at Esulu's misappropriation of the grants, she laughed and exclaimed – "It seems you're surprised!" I was, but Thabisa's sarcastic vein did not last long. After recalling Esulu and the grants, she narrated an apparently similar episode concerning Margaret and Andile.

> **Thabisa:** When I started staying at Joburg, I took all my kids. Then *gogo* Mag asked me: 'Can you please give Andile back to me?' I give *gogo* Mag Andile. Then they cut the grant of Andile.
>
> **They what?**
> Cut the grant of Andile.

In January 2012, Thabisa and her three children lived with Anthony in Johannesburg. Esulu received their grants in Kwa-Ndebele but remitted only part of the money. Soon, Margaret asked Thabisa to have Andile with her and Luthando. Thabisa sent him to Kwa-Ndebele. Margaret headed to the local SASSA office and requested Andile's child-support grant because she had become his *primary caretaker* (RSA, 2004). In other words, Andile's social benefit was not precisely "cut". Instead, it changed hands, from Esulu's to Margaret's. During the interview, though, I grappled with the overall picture of children and grant circulation. I then asked Thabisa why they had "cut" Andile's grant.

> I don't know, Daniel. I'm not... There's no other question [about] grant thing? We have to do about the grant.
>
> **It's very important to me, Thabisa, to know if you were receiving it or not...**
> I'm not receiving, even now.

Two aspects of the excerpts above deserve attention. First, Thabisa moved from irony to caution and proposed to skip the question of why "they", that is, Margaret and probably Norah, took over Andile's grant. Thabisa then resumed the grave note adopted when she first remembered the issue with Esulu. Second, some layers of Thabisa's familial memories remained laden with spinose affects – "I feel pain when I talk about the grants". Nevertheless, I negotiated a more elastic boundary with Thabisa, for I found myself: *i*) unsure about the meaning of "they cut Andile's grant"; *ii)* unaware of the system's plasticity, the fact that the grant quickly circulates among caretakers; *iii*) confused about children's and grants' whereabouts; *iv*) touched by "I'm not receiving even now". Fortunately, Thabisa acquiesced to my request.

> Ok. Sometimes my sister was sending me the money. Sometimes, my sister send it later; sometimes, won't send total.
> [...]
> Gogo Norah took Andile and Letho's money. I asked, why? Cause you said you want to help me about kids. Why you took this money? We started shouting, and I leave it. They take Andile's and Letho's grants, but […] we didn't discuss. I found the grant is closed. When I asked, we started shouting at each other. So, I leave it. I'm not getting their grant. But now I want it, cause I'll take Andile to me.

Between 2005, when Thabisa had her firstborn, and January 2012, when she moved to Anthony's house in Johannesburg, her sister Esulu administered the child support grants corresponding to Unexpected, Andile, and Letho. While the children and Thabisa herself circulated between different households, the financial arrangement functioned well. Thabisa and Esulu started arguing once my interviewee took her three children to Johannesburg. Installed in Kwa-Ndebele, Esulu no longer participated in their care work nor sent the integrality of the money to which Thabisa was entitled, not as their mother but as their primary caretaker (RSA, 2004).

Another contentious movement of children and grants took place in 2012. Margaret asked to take care of Andile, and Norah requested Letho. The first time Thabisa alluded to such moves, she said that "they" took Andile's grant. In the last quoted excerpt, she initially mentioned Norah, but finally resorted to the impersonal formula of "they" took Andile's and Letho's grants. Indeed, Andile went to Kwa-Ndebele, where Margaret and Luthando were, and Letho to Pretoria. Yet Thabisa finally avoided including *auntie* Luthando and *gogo* Margaret in the imbroglio for a reason beyond circumspection – love, I assume.

The excerpt contains other relevant information. Margaret and later Norah asked to care for Andile and Letho but did not solicit Thabisa's permission to take their grants – "We didn't discuss. I found the grant closed". As indicated, neither Andile's nor Letho's child-support grants had been "closed" or "cut". The money changed hands, for the system is elastic enough to accompany the flow of children among caretakers (Lund, 2008)[229]. Though such is a laudable and realistic policy aspect, I understand Thabisa's irritation at the not-very-courteous gesture of asking the kids and taking their grants without request. That accrued the rancour Thabisa had accumulated, particularly from Norah.

Thabisa challenged her ex-mother-in-law with an opposition between care and money – "You said you want to help me about [the] kids. Why you took this money?" Thabisa imputed Norah with duplicitousness: the latter had pretended to assist my interviewee with her kids while keeping a disguised interest in their grants. Disparity

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[229] According to the SASSA webpage, one can prove to be the child's primary caretaker through an affidavit from a police official; a social worker's report; or a letter from the principal of the school attended by the child. Mothers do not need any of these, but as Thabisa's case reveals, primary caretakers do not need parental permission to hold the grant. Once one presents any of the documents listed above at a local SASSA office, one is officially considered the primary caretaker and becomes the child support grant recipient. Information available in: https://www.gov.za/services/child-care-social-benefits/child-support-grant (accessed on August 17th, 2023).

between speech and intentions constitutes a profound moral critique, and I appreciate Thabisa's radical inclination for the truth. Nevertheless, money and care remain inseparable, for the former "takes care" of people (according to Luthando and Thabisa herself[230]).

Thabisa argued with Esulu and Norah but "left" them after Anthony's advice. The couple lived informally together between 2012 and 2014, and as official espouses after Jasmin's birth in 2015. Then Thabisa applied for her grant but did not change the other children's social benefits. This half-consented, half-resentful arrangement lasted until 2019[231]. Since then, Thabisa has made her living on the child-support grants belonging to Unexpected and Jasmin.

The overall scenario is quite intricate. Thabisa applied for Jasmin's grant in 2015 but did not keep it for long. In 2016, Jasmin was sent to Esulu in Kwa-Ndebele, and the grant "followed the child" (Lund 2008, p.51). In 2017, Jasmin moved to her paternal household in Northern Mpumalanga, and her social benefit followed suit. Unexpected was then living with Thabisa's mother in Pretoria, but Esulu held her grant in Kwa-Ndebele. For a while, Thabisa and her mother assented, in a partially generous[232], partially contentious arrangement.

> **Thabisa:** It's been so much time she [Esulu] is eating my money. It changed last year, August".

In August 2019, my interviewee took up the grants belonging to Unexpected and Jasmin. Once unemployed, Thabisa called Anthony's relatives and requested Jasmin's grant, even though the child remained with them. Thabisa recounted the conversation with her ex-in-laws as follows.

> I [told] everyone I [would] take it. Then I send the money. If maybe I've got problems, I tell them: no, this month I won't [send the money]. They say: 'Ok, don't worry'.

[230] For Luthando's statement on money and care, see Chapter II. Thabisa more than once recalled the beginning of her marriage with Teboho as a time when he was taking "good care" of her. Care, in case, encompassed the money he gave her monthly, as in: "When Teboho was working, he was taking good care of me, I won't talk lies. Even when he stayed in Pretoria, Teboho was coming [to KwaNdebele]: 'Here's your money'.

[231] Between 2017 (when Thabisa and Anthony divorced) and 2019, Thabisa worked as a nurse and a manager for John.

[232] Esulu is more impoverished than Thabisa and her mother. I did not meet the latter personally but came to know she has a stable job as school cleaner in Pretoria.

Such is also a generous arrangement. Jasmin's paternal kin could take over the grant, for the child remains under their care. Thabisa's mother could also take over Unexpected's child-support grant but has not.

> **So, today, you have the same SASSA card for Unexpected and Jasmin. Do you live with this money?**
> **Thabisa:** Yeah, 'cause now I'm not working.
>
> **And does your mother ask for Unexpected's money?**
> These days, my mom need that money.
>
> **So, you send it to her.**
> Han, Han [Nope]. I told you I won't. So, I don't know [if] she's going to close it or what. But I told you, I won't.
>
> [**Thabisa** simulates a conversation with her mother]: When I've got money, I always give you, but now you don't understand that I'm no longer working? I don't have even money to pay the [Burial] Society. Now I'm late to pay it, I'm owing three months. I have to start it again.
>
> [**Thabisa** approaches me again] So, I told her, no, I won't. I don't know [if] she closed it or [not]... I don't know. I'll see when I withdraw the money.
>
> **Can she go to the SASSA office?**
> Yes, 'cause she's staying with Unexpected now. She can.

I asked Thabisa if she thought her mother would request Unexpected's grant, and she answered in the affirmative. She also repeated her life's motto, according to which her family "loves" her when she is working and has money but "doesn't love" her when she falls penniless. And then, somewhat abruptly, Thabisa exclaimed – "Next [question]!" I proceeded as ordered.

> **How much are you receiving as CSG?**
> ZAR 860, for two kids.
>
> [...]
>
> **Are you happy about the money you're receiving from the Government?**
> Yeah, cause this money [is] helping us. If your child go to school, you can pay the transport with the child grant money. Yeah, it's fine.

Thabisa did not think the child support grant should be worth much more than the ZAR 430 (~U$ 30) it did in March 2020. Thabisa considered that ZAR 500 sufficed,

provided one knows "how to use" the grant. Albeit happy with the money she receives monthly, Thabisa believed it was disproportionately less than the old-age grant (~ZAR 1900). She deemed it an unfair distributive scheme, for, according to her, most grandparents were cared for by their juniors. She mentioned her own grandmother as an instantiation of this unbalanced state of affairs.

> **You think that the old-age grant is much more than the child-support grant.**
> Yeah, it's much more.
>
> **Do you think it's fair or not?**
> Eish! Ah, man, it's unfair... Cause my grandmother is too old. Why should government give old people lots of money while the children attend school [and have to buy] uniforms? Some of us are far... Some of us are not supporting the kids, you see?

Two of my teenage interviewees, Ukhuna's and Omkhulu's children, also disagreed with the asymmetry between child support and old-age grants. They, like Thabisa, mentioned school uniforms and other educational needs as a reason to equilibrate the two modalities of social assistance in cash. Lund (2008, p.94) reports similar debates by the 1990s, when bureaucrats and experts searched for means to finance the child support grants. The issue remains relevant, and I would like to recall one aspect of Thabisa's experience with the old-age grant.

When her mother married for the second time and moved to Gauteng, Thabisa and Bongani remained in Kwa-Ndebele. Both were living mainly, if not totally, on the old-age grant received by their grandmother. They were "eating [her] SASSA grant". Such money, apropos, had allowed their *gogo* to quit a domestic job and care full-time for them. In other words, the old-age grant had a crucial effect on Thabisa's upbringing. Still, it remained insufficient. We already know Thabisa once dated two boyfriends because her grandmother's old-age grant could not meet her and her brother's needs.

I do not aim to underscore Thabisa's contradiction but rather to indicate the far more relevant sociological point that an increase in the child support grants could, indeed, allow some mothers to care for themselves and their progeny without suffering the excruciating trade-off between their and their children's needs. Let us have another look at an excerpt quoted on the last page.

> Why should government give old people lots of money while the children attend school [and have to buy] uniforms? Some of us are far from the kids [and] are not supporting the kids, you see?

I believe many South African mothers face the conundrum between their and their children's wants. Thabisa is one such person. Far from her first and lastborn, she cannot remit to them as often as she would like. Fortunately, her mother, who now cares for Unexpected, and her ex-in-laws, who care for Jasmin, make ends meet without the child-support grants. However viable the arrangement is, Thabisa remains aware that her firstborn, particularly, has needs she also had as a teenager. Let us compare two excerpts. The first concerns the time Thabisa lived at her grandmother's. The second concerns the period when Unexpected dwelt with Thabisa and Anthony.

> **I**
>
> **You were living with your grandmother, right?**
> **Thabisa:** But sometimes my grandmother won't buy me pads, won't buy me something to bath, cosmetics...

> **II**
>
> **Did you use to give your children pocket money?**
> [When] I was staying with [Unexpected], I was giving her ZAR 200 for something to... Pads, cause she saw her periods, [and] things to bath... Cosmetics.

The inescapable needs Unexpected now has as a teenager appeared for the first time when I asked Thabisa whether the child-support grant belonged to mothers, children, or both.

> <u>Both</u>. Cause even us... even me when I don't have [any other money], and I've got the money of the grant... Like, I'm not working, I have to pay a funeral cover. I should take that money and pay. And it's right for the kids, cause even Unexpected... Unexpected is fifteen years old now. She want to bathe, you see? That's why I said <u>both</u> (emphasis added).

Such was a courageous statement that none of my adult interviewees before Thabisa dared make. Amahle and her mother, Mary; Ukhuna; Omkhulu; Kaya: all said the child support grant belonged exclusively to children, even though they might use the

money to supply their essential needs, such as toiletries[233]. I cannot say whether those interviewees would frown upon Thabisa's expenditure on funeral cover, for the passage between life and death is a crucial moment in South Africa.

Be it as it may, funeral cover goes beyond the official parameter of the grant's value, namely food security (Lund, 2008; Zembe-Mkabile et al., 2022). So goes the payment of TV subscription, another of Thabisa's monthly expenditures. To be sure, there is no legal prohibition against food-unrelated forms of spending. Yet South Africa's vernacular norm on good motherhood revolves around the notions of self-abstention and full deployment of the grant on children's behalf (Button et al., 2018; Moore and Seekings, 2019) In setting a parallel between her and Unexpected's needs, Thabisa exposed herself fearlessly.

When asked whether she considered the child-support grants to be a right, Thabisa answered in the affirmative, but in a structure suggestive that she was not only speaking of franchises but also of right as an adjective meaning what is morally correct (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b).

> **Do you think that the child-support grant is a right?**
> Yeah, cause it's helping us.
>
> **It's a right because it's helping.**
> Helping children, your kids.

Thabisa cast the child support grant as a right because they perform the *morally* laudable function of helping women and children. The latter aspect was also mentioned by other interviewees who, nevertheless, carefully wavered when inquired about the status of the grant as a right. When I again put this question to Thabisa, she observed the following.

> **You have the right to it?**
> Yeah, cause some of the girls, we don't have the father of our kids [...]. So, it's better when you've got the grants to support, you see? Grant will help you. Cause some of children, they don't have a father[234].

[233] Among my teenage interlocutors, only Amahle's son, Lassy, considered that the child-support grant belonged to him and his mother, and that the latter could use it to do "ladies'stuff". Ukhuna's and Omkhulu's children, Bomini and Andisa, respectively, also thought the grants belonged to mothers and children but frowned upon personal expenditures such as coiffure (for mothers).

[234] Thabisa meant that many South African fathers do not acknowledge paternity.

Thabisa considers the child-support grant a right and justifies it through a moral wrong: lack of paternal support. Even though she affirmed the grants as the right they are, she also kept a tactful approach by tempering the concept of rights with the moral framework of righteousness and wrongness. She thus reproduced a caution I found among almost all my interlocutors[235]. That only reinforces Thabisa's boldness when she states that the grants belonged to her children and herself.

Section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is dedicated to children. It reads that those below 18 years old have the right to "basic nutrition, shelter, care, and social services". When the Social Assistance Act (RSA, 2004) set forth the criteria governing eligibility for social assistance in general, it deployed the notion of "entitlement". When ruling the child-support grant, it states that *primary caretakers* – those responsible for "meeting the daily care needs of a child" - are eligible to become "recipients" or "beneficiaries". In other words, the child-support grant is, indeed, a right, one attributed to children but administered by caretakers. As Lund puts it, the grant is "child-focused" (2008, p.52)[236].

Section VI - Thabisa, for me, it's done. Do you want to talk about anything more?
"I'll say about my personal life"

I now deal mainly with Thabisa's answers in our fourth (and last) interviewing session in March 2020. I articulate them with some theoretical ideas taken from Ventura (2016), Butler (2005), and Freud (1953), as well as with related excerpts from other conversations. For instance, I took the title above from our third interview in Kwa-Ndebele. After finishing the questions on the child support grant, I asked whether Thabisa wanted to speak more, and she deployed one of the expressions through which I defined and inaugurated my interactions with collaborators. At the beginning of the interviews,

[235] As observed in Chapters II and III, my interlocutors tend to blend *rights* (franchises) and *righteousness* – or moral correction (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b).

[236] Though my personal stance on the matter is somewhat irrelevant, I shall note, just for the record, that I believe children's and mother's needs to be legitimate in their variety. Both children's and mother's material, relational, and subjective wants compose the multifaceted realm of human and familial wellbeing (Devereux and Mcgregor, 2014, p.300).

they were told that these concerned their personal lives/stories and that they should be free to respond or skip questions.

Three years have elapsed, and I believe that Thabisa, more than any other interlocutor, took both clauses as an indissociable couple. She let herself speak her life and story in full-fledged words, and once she felt we had trespassed personal boundaries, she resorted to injunctions – “Next!” – or requests – “Now ask me about my personal life, please”. Fortunately, personal stories cannot be personal in the strictest sense, for “the I” emerges at the crossroads between social norms and relations (Butler, 2005, pp.8; 132).

I deem it significant that Thabisa was willing to ‘say’ her personal life precisely after we had finished Annex I's questions. I take her continual disposition, despite the long and laden route we had gone through, as a signal that she embraced the interviews wholeheartedly. I contend that one cannot grasp Thabisa’s assessment of our four rounds of conversation without considering that she found, in the interviews about her “personal life”, an opportunity to reassess the *person* she was, the *life* she had, and the one she *desired*. Let us see how she answered Annex II's last question.

> **If another person came here, would you take part in another research about the SASSA grants?**
> **Thabisa:** Oh, that person come and ask me about the SASSA research?
>
> **Yeah, like another Daniel.**
> **Thabisa:** yeah, I can. I can.
>
> **Why?**
> **Thabisa:** Cause Mr. Daniel teach me how love it is.
>
> **What?**
> **Thabisa:** How life it is.

I never tried to teach Thabisa (or any other interlocutor) anything. Instead, I addressed her in an “interlocutory scene” (Butler, 2005) inside Martha’s kitchen. Within it, she seems to have experienced the interviews as a reflexive exercise on love and life, one through which she claimed to have moved into a renewed understanding of herself. Such is the reason I stated above that her evaluation of the whole interviewing process is premised on a reassessment of the meanings of *personal* and *life*. Almost one year after the conversation above, precisely in January 2021, I resumed the subject with her. Thabisa then worked as my remote assistant, and I proposed we evaluate our rapport since its beginnings at Martha’s.

> **I was reading the interview [of March 2020], and at some point, you told me that I had taught you about life and love... Can you explain that a little bit?**
> **Thabisa**: Let me start with life. Life is how you see the things happening in your life. Suffering, betrayal, crying: that's a life. You have to know life before. If you're going to be happy, you have to suffer before. God can put ramps. Ramps... That's a life. Lord can give you [problems? The excerpt is unclear] so that you can jump that ramp, so that you can see life on the next level.

Thabisa's definition of life focuses on a perspective on life courses – "how you see things happening" (emphasis added). Throughout our interview in March 2020, she mentioned tears and betrayal from her absent, unsupportive mother, Esulu, Bongani, and even her second born. Though a happy life remained possible, suffering seemed to be its prerequisite. Ramps existed to be jumped, and then a perspectival shift might ensue. Life opened to contemplation from a distinct angle. Let us consider another excerpt from our final interviewing session in March 2020.

> **Did you like to talk about your past? Was it a good opportunity?**
> **Thabisa:** Eish, it was hard. It was hard 'cause my past... Sometimes, when I think about my past, I've already cried. But since I've got this interview, I think it was a dream, the past.

In Chapter I, I discussed Thabisa's experience of the semi-structured interviews as a therapy of oblivion. It is worth noticing that the idea of distinct life stages or levels was also elaborated as a transformation of time's form. According to Thabisa, after talking through sore events constituting her past, it took up a dreamlike consistency. Indeed, as one "coughs out" one's past, reminiscences laden with distressing affects lose part of their pressurising power, which amounts to a "form of relief" (Bowlby, 2004). It was precisely such an effect, cast as oblivion, that Thabisa indicated as the reason why the interviews should not be paid.

> **Do you think that these interviews should be paid?**
> No, cause this guy is helping us to forget about our stories, to forget the life we've been through before you come to this stage now.

When I iterated the preceding question in affirmative form – So you think the interviews should not be paid – Thabisa observed she understood the ZAR 250 I gave her as a "thank you". My interviewee said she was somewhat "surprised", even though all my interlocutors were told, at the beginning of the interviews, that their collaboration with

my research involved a small monetary reward. All in all, Thabisa thought that payment was not mandatory, and again she praised oblivion.

> Ok, Mr. Daniel give me a... 'Thabisa, thank you for the interview'. I didn't think that Mr Daniel would pay me, but I don't think it's forced to do that cause you're helping people to forget their past. And it's not easy to ask someone about her intergenerational lives. It's not easy 'cause some feel angry: 'Why this came to me?'

Thabisa and others faced a harsh task when asked to answer Annex I and Annex II questions. Whatever else our encounter may have represented, it involved a labour-like effort. Speaking about one's filiation, childhood, pregnancy, motherhood, and status as a grant recipient implies a reflective plunge into one's life - even "intergenerational lives". One faces one's parents, *gogos*, siblings, and *aunties*; one's conflicts, hopes, wants, dreams, and nightmares with them. If one accepts to go back and forth through one's life, a narrative elaboration of "the I" (Butler, 2005) takes form. I contend that such an endeavour parallels the *work* analysands perform in the psychoanalytic setting.

> It is noteworthy the work of revisiting a past that has not passed; the work of dealing with the excess of affections that hurt us; the work of putting into words what is still silent and harasses us every day [...]; the work of asserting our uniqueness in a world forged by norms and standards; and the work of finding paths and meaning for our own existence (Ventura, 2016, p.282).

Attempting to bring to light one's innermost corners involves a significant deal of "unpleasure" (Freud, 1953, p.266). I do not cast all labour as toil, though I agree with the claim that anamnesis and the psychoanalytic experience often run through "arduous work" (Ventura, 2016). It requires "sincerity"; it "absorbs time" and is therefore "costly"; it makes, in sum, "great demands upon the patient". Well, neither Lindiwe nor any of my collaborators were patients. However, as collaborators in 'a SASSA research', they walked a "circuitous and laborious path". They accepted, though in different measures, the "sacrifice" (Freud, 1953, pp. 262-266) of confronting the said, the unsaid, and the unspeakable in memories[237] and experiences (some of which they chose, some of which they did not).

[237] Not everything can be put into words for different regimes of truth govern what can and cannot be said (Foucault as cited in Butler, 2005, p.121). What is more, the notion of unconscious reveals that much in the psychical life does not attain conscient representation, so one remains in large part "opaque" to oneself (Butler, 2005).

> **Thabisa:** Next!
> **The next questions are about children: do you want to continue or stop?**
> **Thabisa:** [keeps silent for a moment]
> **Shall we continue?**
> **Thabisa:** Yeah.
> **Amahle:** You are fine?
> **Thabisa:** Hm, half.

The labour-like experience of diving into one's existence and turning it into a "social manifestation" involves more than pain. It is possibly conducive to recreating one's "capacity for relationality" (Butler, 2005, pp. 50-1). Elaborating on "the I" one has become in an interlocutory scene - say, an interview about the SASSA grants – allows one to contemplate one's view of the good life - or, in Thabisa's words, a loving, happy life in freedom[238]. In all this, we remain inside the laborious domain of self-production and reproduction through speech. Fortunately, using linguistic abilities to tell the story of the person one came to be may foster care and self-care. Once engaged in the "narrative work" of accounting for one's life, one may end up convinced that one "must take care of himself and others" (Butler, 2005, p.130).

> **Did the interviews change your way of thinking about the SASSA grants?**
> It's changed my way because of... I talked about my life, my SASSA grant. I didn't get the SASSA grant cause my sister was eating my SASSA grant until I became... It's time for me to just forget about that. I have to take a SASSA grant for my kids, taking care of my kids (emphasis added).

Thabisa's story as a mother began controversially. When she narrated the circumstances in which she first became pregnant, my assistant laughed and recalled an old admonition: "I told her, don't have two boyfriends because you gonna have a problem. Here comes the child". Amahle ascribed premature motherhood to the normative breach of female monogamy. As indicated in Section II, Thabisa reacted as the "social theorist" (Butler, 2005), who deflects individual agency into social conditions, what she termed "the situation". Above all, Thabisa warded the charge of female polygamy off by calling into question the quality of her mother's motherhood: the latter had not *been there for* her. Absent motherhood, not bad morals, had driven Thabisa's emergence as a mother.

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[238] According to one of Thabisa's definitions of love in January 2021, when we reassessed the interviewing sessions of March 2020.

Thabisa did not negate "accountability", the subjective ability to respond for one's actions as a self-reflective being (Butler, 2005). Most of the time, though, she took up a defensive stance. Thabisa arrived in Kwa-Ndebele when Andile's disciplinary problems exceeded local capacities. Within an inquisitive framework, some considered Andile's behaviour his fault; others alleged that his mother had flaunted the norm of good motherhood. "She's not right"; "She drinks too much"; or "They only beat him" (in a rare acknowledgement that his father also should be held accountable): all these observations called into question Thabisa's quality as a parent. Under this charged moral atmosphere, Thabisa embraced our encounter, and so expressed in the thorny language of "truth".

> You said you want my personal life! So why is Amahle laughing? Why should I tell you a lie? You record it!
> **Amahle:** You're not lying, you're not lying.
> **Thabisa:** I have to tell you the truth.

Thabisa understood the concept of an interview as a truth-oriented exercise. In our four appointments, she often resorted to expressions such as – "I won't tell you a lie" or "I talk straight". Thabisa was not telling me a story but rather what she took as *her* story – "Do you remember I told you all the story about my life?" Numerous versions of Thabisa exist and shall appear in different scenes of address. What matters ultimately is truth as a mode of rapport, through alterity, with self. Via an interpellation, an other-mediated question – Who are you? – Thabisa engaged with herself – Who am I? By crafting a narrative self, that is, articulating in an intelligible, recognisable form her agency, words, and the unchosen circumstances she went through, Thabisa may have crafted herself anew (Butler, 2005, p.66). At the very least, she figured herself out in another tense.

> **Did you like to talk about your past? Was it a good opportunity?**
> Since I've got this interview, I think it was a dream, the past. Now I have to prepare [...] my future, forget about my past. Prepare my future, my future tense.

What should her future be? Thabisa's first formulation revolved around managing the child-support grants and caring for her children. However, she knew she could not meet all their needs with social assistance in cash, 'a free' but insufficient money. Her future and agency as a mother and desiring woman were contingent on a job. At the end of our last interviewing session, I asked Thabisa whether she wanted to talk about

anything else, and again, she showed herself available: “If there's something I can talk about, I can. If you can, ask me a question”. I inquired what she would like her future to be.

> Eish, I want to be a shebeen woman. I want to run a business or to nanny grannies. That's the work I like.

I interviewed Thabisa in Kwa-Ndebele in March 2020. She was then unemployed and so remained until November 2020. Between then and July 2021, she worked as my long-distance assistant. Though a far cry from the job (and future) she desires, Thabisa embarked wholeheartedly on the available venture. Such is the story I tell in the next Chapter.

Chapter V – Thabisa Interviews

I now present and comment on two interviews Thabisa conducted in South Africa between November and December 2020. As indicated in the previous Chapter, Thabisa worked as my long-distance assistant from November 2020 to July 2021. During the two initial months of our ethnographic partnership, she worked on three shorter versions of the semi-structured interviews and a free-style conversation with her boyfriend's grandmother. She sent me the audio files on WhatsApp, and we discussed their content on Skype. On December 28th, 2020, I told her to interrupt face-to-face appointments on my behalf.

Between January and July 2021, three other interviews were recorded. First, we had a Skype Conference with her sister, Esulu, who patiently answered Annex I and Annex II questions. Second, we had two short, five-question chats on the child-support grant with her boyfriend's mother and a neighbour (again via Skype). Thabisa participated in these conversations but less intensely than in the previous ones. Between June and July 2021, we discussed our ethnographic rapport, from our encounter at Martha's to the end of her *job*.

Now focusing on the material directly produced by Thabisa, I aim to offer a brief portrait of how she appropriated the position as my assistant, the *job* Luthando once performed. When telling me how she approached her first interviewee, Sipho, Thabisa recalled saying:

> Sipho, I need a job, [and] I just told myself one day I will find some job, one day. So, I told Sipho: I've got one person who can give me a job. That person, he knows my situation.
>
> **And this person is me?**
> Yeah, I told Sipho about you - Oh, that guy [Daniel] is the boss of auntie. Because of auntie has passed away, I have to take the space of auntie.

Thabisa also mentioned the *job* to her third collaborator, Busi. When the latter asked my assistant why she wanted an interview, Thabisa replied it was her "only money". Busi understood Thabisa's interviewing activities as her "piece job" and consented to a private conversation. Busi later gave me a phone interview, in which we discussed Annex II questions (see Section III below).

Another crucial aspect of Thabisa's way of persuading our collaborators was the claim that the interviews would help them "forget about their past". Being anthropology an invasive and exploitative trade (Clifford, 1988; Strathern, 2004), Thabisa justified her steps towards neighbours on the grounds that talking out their past experiences would relieve them. After I interviewed her in Kwa-Ndebele, Thabisa observed she had "coughed out" her memories and, consequently, felt "free". In June 2021, we discussed the subject again.

> To cough out, Daniel, is like... When there's something inside your heart, that thing is eating you. You don't have someone. You want someone to talk about that thing so you can cough out. You cough this thing out, so you'll be free.

I will neither re-elaborate on the therapeutic power of speech nor on the idea of self-crafting through narrative work (Butler, 2005), so let me delineate this Chapter's structure. Section I deals with the opening and closing moves of the first phase of my ethnographic partnership with Thabisa. On November 5th, 2020, we had a long WhatsApp chat. She complimented me on my "birthday month" and mentioned personal matters distressing her. In addition to the decease of her grandmother, Thabisa discovered her boyfriend had cheated. Finally, Andile had been sent to a traditional healer in Pretoria. At the end of this interaction, I mentioned I searched for ways to continue my job, and Thabisa said she could conduct the semi-structured interviews on my behalf, for she "remembered them". On December 28th, after President Cyril Ramaphosa moved South Africa from Alert Level I to Level III, I told Thabisa to interrupt face-to-face appointments on my behalf.

In Section II, I present and comment on Thabisa's first interview: an 18-minute conversation with one of her dearest neighbours, Sipho. When asked why she chose the latter, my assistant expressed compassion. Sipho often complained about the lack of a social worker and sometimes even remarked: "I want to forget about my past tense". Thabisa's neighbour also had a conflictual rapport with her mother, who received two of the three child-support grants to which her children were entitled. Thabisa could feel her friend's pain because it resonated with her own "situation".

> Do you remember about my family? My sister Esulu... Then Sipho is the same like me. You can understand that situation. I just want to help Sipho to forget about her past tense.

Section III deals with the second interview Thabisa conducted. She then talked with another neighbour and friend, Busi. Their 11-minute conversation occurred in a jocose climate. Yet I later learned Busi had a contentious relationship with her mother, with whom she worked as a "traditional healer". That was an aspect of Busi's life that Thabisa emphasised during and after the interview, for it resonated with Andile's experience in Pretoria.

The notion of "experience" is crucial to understanding how Thabisa appropriated the *job*. When we discussed why she wanted to interview her boyfriend's granny[239], the last face-to-face appointment she had on my behalf, my assistant first observed that – "Some of them [South African grannies] did not grow up nicely because of apartheid". According to Thabisa, *magogos* loved to talk about such memories. When I asked how she could sound so sure about this general inclination of old ladies, Thabisa affirmed:

> Because I'm talking from experience, my grandmother liked to talk about her childhood.

Let me finish this introductory note with three general aspects of the interviews I present below. Like those already discussed, the ones Thabisa conducted were paid. Each of her four interviewees received ZAR 150 for their collaboration. I also requested Thabisa to warn her interviewees that they could skip any subject as they pleased. Finally, I decided to present the interviews almost as Thabisa recorded them. Since the audio files have inaudible excerpts, I often added information[240] my assistant gave me when we discussed the ethnographic material she produced.

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[239] As mentioned, I did not include the whole conversation between Thabisa and her grandmother-in-law in the present version of this Thesis.

[240] I cast Thabisa's interactions with her interviewee in bold characters. Thabisa's interactions with me are indicated by their proximate date, e.g., Nov 15th, and the following text corresponds either to my assistant's speech or to my appropriation of her words. Information given in brackets corresponds to corrections and specifications I introduced to improve readability. Brackets with ellipsis mean inaudible excerpt.

Section I – [6:49 a.m., 11/5/2020] Thabisa: Happy birthday month Daniel 🎂🍾💃

This title is a Microsoft Word transcription of a WhatsApp message I received from Thabisa a few days after my 40th birthday. I had been in Brazil since May 23rd, 2020, and during this period, I kept only occasional and brief conversations with her. By the end of June, she messaged me to communicate Luthando's death and ask for financial help to commute to Kwa-Ndebele. I sent her ZAR 300 to travel and ZAR 800 to contribute to Luthando's funeral. In July, again on WhatsApp, I asked how Thabisa was. She replied to me a month later – "Gud an u?" In October, she informed me of her granny's death. I offered my sympathies - ❤️ - but none of us pursued the conversation. Given the laconic and, at best, monthly-sparse nature of our digital exchanges, her compliment surprised me.

> [6:49 AM, 11/5/2020] **Thabisa**: Happy birthday month Daniel 🎂🍾💃
> [8:47, 11/5/2020] Daniel Cruz: Hey, Thabisa! Thank you so much!!!
> [8:47, 11/5/2020] Daniel Cruz: You remembered it!
> [8:47, 11/5/2020] Daniel Cruz: How's life?
>
> [8:59, 11/5/2020] **Thabisa**: Jah, I remember life is bad that side
> [9:00, 11/5/2020] Daniel Cruz: What's going on?
>
> [09:01, 11/5/2020] **Thabisa**: Andile is dowing [doing] traditional holling [healing]
> [9:03, 11/5/2020] Daniel Cruz: Is it bad? Why?
>
> [Thabisa sent me an audio file]: It seems like he's crazy, like [a] crazy person. He was sick too much, Daniel, until he end up to traditional healing.

I soon learned that "life is bad that side" comprised more than a reference to Andile. Thabisa had just discovered her boyfriend cheated on her. Even though she no longer trusted him, he continued in her house. She still loved him and asked my advice on the matter. I offered several truistic guidelines and said I was searching for ways to continue my job. Two South African acquaintances had already proposed to conduct the semi-structured interviews on my behalf, yet I had not decided what to do. Thabisa sent me another voice message, saying she remembered the semi-structured interviews and

could replicate them. I asked how much she would charge me and got another voice message, which I transcribed as follows.

> **Thabisa:** When we are going to start? Oh, Daniel, I was bored. I already need some job.
>
> [I then inquired what she expected as remuneration]
>
> Daniel, no, no, no. You know, you're like my brother. You can do it any way that you call fine. No problem, don't you worry about me. You can even start tomorrow morning. You can send me all the questions. I can even start tomorrow.

On September 21st, 2020, South Africa moved to Level I of the Alert System implemented to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift meant that most public venues were open and social gatherings permitted[241]. Restaurants, cinemas, taverns, fitness centres, etc., could operate from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. at 50% of their capacity. Attendants should wear masks and abide by the other health guidelines – including a minimum distance of 1.5m and frequent hand sanitising. All my acquaintances in the country received the ease of lockdown restrictions with relief.

Thabisa and I decided that, in addition to official guidelines for public venues, she would talk only with close neighbours and wear masks while interviewing them. As to her payment, I proposed ZAR 1200 for a monthly pair of interviews, plus ZAR 150 for each collaborator. On November 10th, she sent me three audio files on WhatsApp, totalling a 14-minute conversation. A few days later, we discussed it by Skype, and I asked Thabisa whether she could have another chat with her interviewee, which she had a couple of days later. Throughout November 5th and December 28th, we kept a fortnightly routine of calls, all punctuated by mutual preaching on the benefits of following the health protocols[242].

Thabisa sent me the fourth and last recorded conversation on December 21st. On December 28th, President Cyril Ramaphosa addressed South Africans to warn that the country would return to Level III of its Alert System. I read the news and messaged my assistant promptly.

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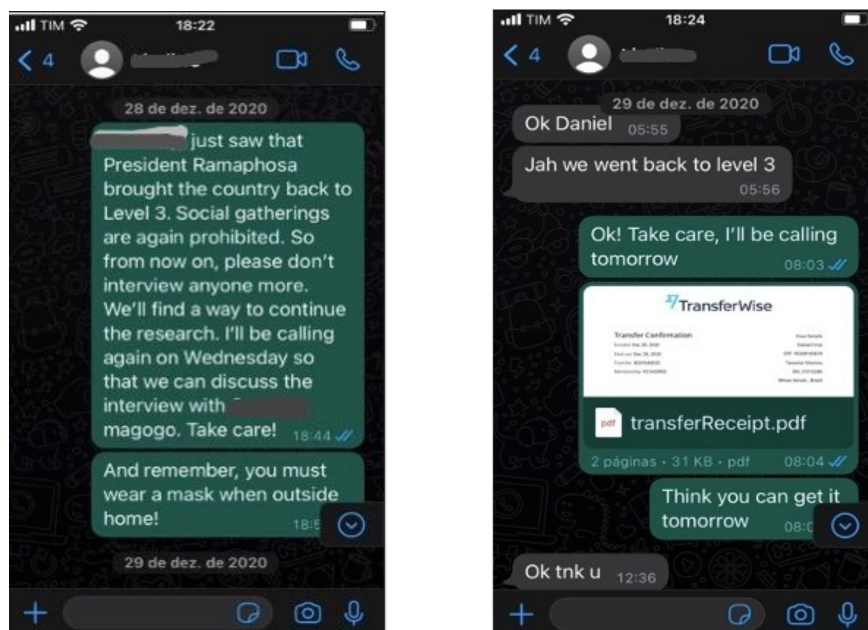
[241] Available in: https://www.gov.za/covid-19/about/about-alert-system (access on September 29th, 2023).
[242] Much later, Thabisa remarked that my wife and myself were pivotal in her decision to take the vaccine against Covid 19. Vaccination in South Africa attained 65% of the population.



Later, I learned that not all social gatherings were prohibited under Level III specifications. Churches, cinemas, theatres, casinos, and workplaces could operate at a smaller capacity than before. Something similar applied to restaurants, libraries, galleries, piercing and tattoo parlours, make-up, and nail salons[243]. Whatever the case, the resurgence of sanitary restrictions in South Africa led Thabisa and me to finish the first phase of the *job*.

Section II – Thabisa Interviews Sipho

Hey, girl, how are you?
Sipho: Fine

I'd like to start the interview with some personal questions about your life. Could you please tell me your name and your surname?
Sipho: My name is Sipho.

What's the meaning of your name?
Sipho: [...]
Wow!

[243] Information available on https://www.gov.za/documents/disaster-management-act-regulations-alert-level-3-during-coronavirus-covid-19-lockdown-28#gatherings (access August, 22nd, 2022).

[Nov 15th] Sipho [means] it's finished. We finished to make girls. It's finished, it's enough! If I'm going to be pregnant, I'll have a baby boy, not a baby girl. That means enough with girls!

Where were you born?
Sipho: Gauteng.

Thabisa: What was the first language of your mother?
Sipho: Isizulu.

You've got brothers and sisters?
Sipho: Yes.

How many?
Sipho: I have two brothers [...].

Did you grow up with your parents?
Sipho: Yes.

How about your brothers and sisters?
Sipho: No, the life [...]. They are separated.

If there's a question you don't want to respond, it's not a force. Have you ever lived with your grandmother?
Sipho: Yes.

Okay, what can you tell me about your childhood? Like you were happy or sad or abused?
Sipho: Abused [...]. My grandfather [...]

Did your parents working?
Sipho: No.

[Were] **they receiving any grant?**
Sipho: No.

[Were] **they still happy?**
Sipho: No.

Do you have your matric?
Sipho: No.

Did you quit school before matric?
Sipho: Yes.

Why?
Sipho: Because of my mom was sick [...]

Are you working?
Sipho: No.

Have you ever work[ed]?
Sipho: Yes.

Okay. Which things you've ever worked?
Sipho: [...]

In your life, which job you want to work?
Sipho: I want [...] like business.

What kind of a business?
Sipho: [...]
[Nov 15th] Now, she wants to open some small business [...], like selling snacks, cigarettes. Sipho said: 'I want to be like that'. The problem is she doesn't have the money [to start her business].

Wow! You want to be a [...] **businesswoman!** [...] **Yeah, I see. Now, we are going to questions** [on] **paper two. I'm going to ask you about your children**. **How many children do you have?**
Sipho: [...]
[Nov 15th]: Three.

Wow! What are the names of your children, like the meaning? Will you tell me the names of your children?
Sipho: My firstborn is Samuel. My secondborn is Lawrence. My third born is [...]

What is the meaning of your children?
Sipho: Samuel is thanks.

Wow! The second?
Sipho: Lawrence is [...]
[Nov 15th] Happy.

Third?
Sipho: Third is Jasmin
Wow, wow! Jasmin![244]

Okay! How old were you when you become pregnant?
Sipho: Fifteen.

Did you know how to prevent pregnancy?
Sipho: No.

Ah, because you [were] **still young... And even your mother didn't sit down and tell you about... When you sleep with some guy, you get pregnant.**
Sipho: Yes.

Can you tell me a little bit about [the circumstances] **in which you had each of them? Let us jump this one cause I don't understand it[245].**

How old were you when you get pregnant? When you were dating, like, how old were you? You were fourteen years old?
Sipho: Yes.

[Were] **you happy or stressed** [when you thought] **– "I'm going to be a mother".**
Sipho: I was stressed.

Okay. Are you living with the father of your children?
Sipho: No.

Have you ever lived with the father of your children?
Sipho: No.

How many children do you want in your life?
Sipho: [...]
[Nov 15th] She said she wants to get four babies. I think one is left now. She doesn't want her kids to suffer like her.

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[244] Thabisa also has a girl named Jasmin.
[245] It seems Thabisa did not understand the word circumstances, as the question fully read.

Which means only one left!
Sipho: Yes.

Ah, okay! Do you like to have a big family?
Sipho: Yes.

Why?
Sipho: Because of I want to stay with my child.
Yes...
Sipho: And I want to be happy.

Okay. You want your child to grow up with [...]. **Your house...**
Sipho: Yes.

Big family… Okay, I see. How is the feeling when you are pregnant? You were happy or sad?
Sipho: I was sad.

Okay. You [were] **sad. When you found out you were pregnant, how you feel about your boyfriend? When you tell him that... When you think that – 'I'm going to tell my boyfriend that I'm pregnant'. Do you think that your boyfriend would be happy or sad?**
Sipho: I thought he would be sad.

Why?
Sipho: Because of we didn't plan our children.

How is it to be a mother? How do you feel [when you thought] **– 'Now I've got responsibility, I'm a mother'? You have to take care of your children. How do you feel about that?**
Sipho: I feel bad because of I'm not working.

Okay. Do you like to breastfeeding your child?
Sipho: Yes.

Did you drink alcohol during the pregnancy? [Thabisa laughs].
Sipho: No.

Okay. Were you happy to hold your baby for the first time after birth? [...]. **Were you happy or sad?**
Sipho: I was happy.

Yeah, because it's the first time!

How did you feel when you hear your first child crying after birth?
Sipho: [...]. Even me, I was wanting to cry!

Wow! How did you feel when you thought – 'Now I'm a mother' Now you've got your own responsibility; you have to take care of your child. How did you feel about that? And you are not working...
Sipho: I feel bad because of I don't have money to support my child.

Okay, sister Sipho. **Now, we are going to the last questions. We are going to talk about the social grants**, **SASSA. How much are you receiving as a social grant for that three kids?**
Sipho: I receive only one [...] social grant.

How much?
Sipho: ZAR 440.

Do all your children receive the grant?
Sipho: No.

Why?
Sipho: [...][246]

Are you happy about the money you are receiving from the social grant?
Sipho: No!

Do you think it should be more? [...] **The government could improve with extra money?**
Sipho: Yes, because of that money is too small.

How much [more] **do you think** [you should get from] **social grant?**
Sipho: [...] On [top of] that money? I think ZAR 500 would be okay.

Do you hear about the word rights? In the world, you've got rights. You know about that?
Sipho: [...]
[Nov 15th] Yes. She just said: 'Yes, I know about the rights'.

---

[246] Sipho's mother takes care of two grandchildren and administers their child-support grants.

Do you think the social grant are a right?
Sipho: No[247].

Yes, because of it's too small for [three] **children.**
Sipho: Yes.
Yeah.

Do you think the social grants belong to the mothers, to the children or both?
Sipho: Both of us.

How does the social grant help you?
Sipho: It's not helping me because of I buy for my child the clothes.

When the money is finished, do you have somebody helping you?
Sipho: No.

Does the father of your children help you?
Sipho: No.

If the father of your child help[ed] **you**, **do you think how much** [he should] **give you?**
Sipho: Maybe a thousand.
Because of the crèche, clothes, food.
Sipho: Yes.
[Nov 15th] Sipho's current boyfriend, not the father of her kids, occasionally helps her with ZAR 1000.

How much do you spend monthly for the groceries?
Sipho: ZAR 500.

How much do you spend with pampers or clothes for the children?
Sipho: Pampers [...] ZAR 200-and-something.
Yeah
Sipho: And clothes, I can't say how much.
Cause you don't buy clothes every day, every month.
Sipho: Yes.

Okay, let's say... Maybe pampers, it's ZAR 220. The clothes maybe you spend ZAR 500, and you have to budget before cause it's three kids.
Sipho: Yes.

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[247] Sipho is probably stating that the grants are not right, or morally correct (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b), because they are "too small", as Thabisa subsequently puts it.

How many kids you've got wearing pampers?
Sipho: Only one.
The last born.
Sipho: Yes.

Okay, okay. Do you have other expenses like school fees, uniforms, pens, notebooks?
Sipho: Yeah, uniform. And that, the last one, I [...]

Ok, for the creche, né?
Sipho: Yes[248].

What do you do when your child is sick?
Sipho: I take him to the clinic.

The government clinic... Okay. Do you have other income than the social grant?
Sipho: No.

Are you struggling with the social grant?
Sipho: Yeah, it's too small.

Is the money too small? Is it enough to the children?
Sipho: No, not enough. ZAR 440 is too small.

Do you spend this money on you, like buying something for you?
Sipho: No, I buy for my children.

Okay. How?
Sipho: I try. This month, I buy for Samuel; next month, I buy for Lawrence.

What do you do on SASSA day, when you're going to get that 440? What do you do first?
Sipho: I take that money and buy for my children the clothes.

Okay. Do you borrow money from neighbours?
Sipho: No.

Oh, cause you can't afford to pay.
Sipho: Yes.
[Do you borrow from] **family or friends?**

---

[248] It seems Sipho's last born occasionally attends daily care outside home.

Sipho: Hun, hun [nope].

They help you when you're broke out with cash?
Sipho: No.

Do you lend money to your neighbours, family, or friends? You lend money like you go and borrow money, like loan?[249]
Sipho: I can't go and borrow the money. I can't pay because of that money [the child-support grants] is too small. When I go and loan, I can't afford to buy for my children.

Okay, okay, I see... It was nice you answered all these questions, né? Can I ask you a last one? Are you happy about this interview?[250]
Sipho: Yes, I'm happy because of maybe [it] will help me some other day...

It's going to help you a lot. A lot. A lot. It's going to make you to change your life.
Sipho: Okay.

Some people are struggling. When [one] ask - 'Can I please do some research?' - you think they're going to make money for them, but no. This is how to help people. Especially people forget about their past tense.
Sipho: Yeah.

Okay, Sipho, thank you. Thank you a lot. Thank you! Why did you not go to [court], [to] **take** [from] **the father of your child** [a] **support maintenance?**
Sipho: [...]
Okay, Sipho, thank you

•

I shall proceed in this commentary from the end to the beginning of Sipho's interview. I first focus on Thabisa's words. As an interviewer, my assistant tried to persuade Sipho that her newfound job was not meant to make money from people. Instead, it consisted of an interlocutory form of engagement capable of producing relief (understood as oblivion) and changing one's life. In more technical words, Thabisa cast

[249] Thabisa probably wanted to inquire whether Sipho lent money to neighbours but ended up asking again whether she borrowed it from them.
[250] Thabisa included this question by herself.

the interview as a form of "discursive therapy" capable of helping people deal with their existential problems (Maranhao, 1986, p.8).

When Thabisa approached Sipho for a recorded conversation, the latter agreed to collaborate but soon accused my assistant of capitalising on her life – "Why do you want to know about my life? You want to make money about me?" More significantly, Sipho demanded that Thabisa share the ZAR 600 she got from the interview, which Thabisa refused. Sipho got only the ZAR 150 set apart for our interviewees.

Between January and June 2021, Thabisa and I discussed my research activity in Kwa-Ndebele and the one she conducted on my behalf in Johannesburg. Thabisa believed half of my collaborators felt I "made money" from their lives and thoughts. Many also considered my activities.

> Just understand something, Daniel; some people, you bother them. But some people they like to talk. People are not the same.

What did Sipho experience in her conversation with Thabisa? I cannot draw a clear-cut answer from the first 14-minute audio file my assistant sent me. Sipho transpired neither annoyance nor enthusiasm – if I may define things negatively. When Thabisa and I discussed the ethnographic material she produced, my assistant observed that Sipho's irritation with our activities was punctual and did not last beyond the invitation for a recorded interview. Furthermore, Sipho agreed to participate in a second conversation with Thabisa (more on it later).

The second aspect of the interview I highlight is Sipho's understanding of the child-support grants. When asked whether they belonged to children, mothers, or both, Sipho chose the last option. Her opinion paralleled Thabisa's and, as discussed in Chapter IV, differed from most of my collaborators, according to whom the grants belonged to children. Interestingly, though, Sipho affirmed twice that she did not spend the money on her – "It's not helping me; I buy for my kids". In that, she contrasted with Thabisa and most of the other interviewees[251].

Sipho was unhappy about the grants but did not temper it with the notion of *free money*, that is, cash without a counterpart in labour other than social reproduction. Neither did Sipho consider the grants right. When asked whether the child support grants were a

[251] Even those mothers who believed the money belonged to children acknowledged they bought at least toiletries for themselves.

right, she resorted to the understanding that other interviewees also displayed, but with negative valence. Kaya, for instance, reckoned the grants "right" (or morally correct) because they helped children, but Sipho deemed them not right (or morally flawed) because they were insufficient.

What may enhance Sipho's vexation is the fact that she receives only one child-support grant (ZAR 440), even though she has three children. When discussing the interview's content with Thabisa, I learned that Sipho's mother administered the two other child-support grants. Sipho lived in a shack within her mother's yard and, where food and other essential needs – say, care and electricity - were concerned, they composed a single household. On November 23rd, Thabisa and I had the following dialogue

> **So, she lives with her mother.**
> **Thabisa:** Yeah, because her kids like to sleep with her mother. And [her] mother said – 'You can't stay here without paying food. You have to buy food, pay rent. Also, electricity, because you've got [three] kids'.

The financial and care arrangement at Sipho's household paralleled Thabisa's in two senses. Sipho got pregnant with her firstborn at fifteen and delivered at sixteen. She then did not have an *ID* and could not receive the child support grant in her capacity. As was the case between Thabisa and her elder sister/*auntie*, Esulu, Sipho's mother became the grant recipient and did likewise after Sipho had her second child. Since their "intergenerational lives" (as Thabisa once put it) remained bonded in the same household, Sipho's mother kept exerting the function of her grandchildren's primary caretaker (Lund, 2008; RSA, 2004).

In our conversation on November 23rd, Thabisa questioned the quality of such care. However, from a legal point of view, the arrangement remains legitimate, for Sipho stays at her mother's place, and her kids receive food and shelter from their grandmother. In other words, she fulfils the definition of primary caretaker set forth by the Social Assistance Act (RSA, 2004). Unfortunately, Sipho perceives the arrangement as morally and practically contentious. According to Thabisa, the rapport between Sipho and her mother remains entangled in a moral short-circuit between care and self-interest.

> When Sipho don't have the money, I think her mother doesn't like her. But When Sipho has got the money, her mother loves her.

As indicated in the last Chapter, such is Thabisa's motto about her relationship with her mother and siblings. Let us also remember that my assistant's choice of Sipho as her first interviewee was driven by the twin sentiments of identity and compassion. Sipho's predicaments struck a puissant chord within Thabisa, that of sympathy or shared suffering[252]. I again call the reader's attention to the dialogue opening the conversation Thabisa and I had on November 23rd.

> **Okay, so tell me, Thabisa, why did you choose Sipho to speak with?**
> **Thabisa:** Because of Sipho, I know her. Sometimes, Sipho always tells me – 'I want to forget about my past tense'.
>
> **Does she tell you that?**
> **Thabisa:** Yes, so I told Sipho I have something; I want to interview you so that this interview can make you forget about your past tense. [...] I think you heard about the last conversation. I [asked her] how this interview made you happy or what? Did you hear the last conversation?
>
> **Yes, but I missed it because the audio was not perfect.**
> **Thabisa:** Yes, I told her: Sipho, this interview can make you happy and forget about your past tense. Are you nice if I ask you about your life? She said – 'Thabisa, you can ask about my life'. I said I want to interview you. She said – 'Ok, Thabisa, no problem'. The reason I like with all my heart Sipho [is] cause Sipho... Do you remember my situation, Daniel? The situation of Sipho is the same.
>
> **What sort of situation?**
> **Thabisa:** About [the] father of the children doesn't help you and quit. And then the family... Do you remember about my family?
>
> **Yes.**
> **Thabisa:** My sister Esulu... And then Sipho is the same like me. You can understand that situation. I just want to help Sipho forget about her past tense.

I said that identity and compassion presided over my assistant's choice of Sipho also because the "unchosen" social circumstances that led to their "emergence" as mothers are similar (Butler, 2005). Thabisa was not raped but constrained by poverty to keep a sexual rapport with two older teenagers. Furthermore, neither Thabisa nor Sipho

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[252] Middle English *compassioun,* from Late Latin *compassiō, compassiōn-,* from *compassus,* past participle of *compatī*, to sympathiz: Latin *com-*, com- + Latin *patī,* to suffer. Ethymology of compassion [online]. The Free Dictionary. Huntingdon Valley: Farley, 2003. Available in: https://www.thefreedictionary.com/compassion (Accessed August 25th, 2023).

found support in the fathers of their firstborns. My assistant depicted these vectors of constraint in their lives as the "situation".

Another coincidental aspect of their social experience is the type of support they found within their families. Esulu and Sipho's mother cared for children born in adverse circumstances. Both women undertook such responsibility as elders, with the minimal, indispensable support the child support grant offered. They became recipients of the social benefit not only as primary caretakers but also because their respective juniors had not reached the threshold to apply for it – which only reinforces how prematurely Thabisa and Sipho became mothers.

Thabisa and Sipho had their childhood interrupted by forms of social violence that carved into their infantile bodies the indelibly tragic imprint of their society. If the social scientist's task was only to find what makes the human world "inhuman" (Adorno as cited in Butler, 2005) – that is, unworthy of the dignity human beings should enjoy (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2013) – then we could say that, ultimately, Thabisa and Sipho derive an involuntary commonality from structural predicaments. Yet before resuming Siphos's specific story and the effects of her encounter with Thabisa, I would like to venture into another personal trait both women share.

Let me shift, for a brief while, from the register of violence to the realm of vitality and notice that both Thabisa and Sipho continue to desire to live or persist in the being they are (Butler, 2005) despite having been brutally dispossessed of the reins over their emergence as subjects. In other words, violence did not extinguish the *élan* to be and recreate themselves. They still want to be happy and stay with their children[253]. They also desire their children not to suffer like them and even wish for a last child. They finally long for work as businesswomen since they know that fulfilling their maternal responsibilities remains contingent on a job. Let us compare what Thabisa said in March and what Sipho said in November 2020.

> **How do you feel about being responsible for someone? What can you tell me about this feeling?**
> **Thabisa:** It's hard. It's hard too much [...]. And then you are not working... It's hard [...], it's too much. But when I'm working, it's not too much.

[253] On having a big family and staying with the kids, Thabisa told me the following: "When you've got a big family, [you] stay with your kids. I just wish all the time, please, God, give me many more years to live. I always pray. So, I'll be happy with my kids, with my granddaughters".

> **How do you feel** [when you thought] **– 'Now I've got responsibility, I'm a mother'? You have to take care of your children. How do you feel about that?**
> **Sipho:** I feel bad because of I'm not working.

The two women's perspectives on the good life coincide to a significant extent. An autonomous job, a happy family with children and grandchildren, a house, a loving husband and father: so much they desire, and I deem it fortunate that, despite the violent attacks of the social order they underwent (and still undergo), Thabisa and Sipho keep longing for a better life for themselves and their folk. The frustrations of not enjoying what they need and aspire to constitute no minor issue, but could there be life without desire? Life dispenses with neither desire nor hope (Butler, 2005).

Being such the case, the task of "moral philosophy" and the "critical social sciences" is to both denounce the inhuman and to quest, via locally diverse forms of "immanent critique", where the possibilities of hope, relief, and change lie (Butler, 2005; Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018; Stahl, 2013). Albeit crucial, denouncing what debases human existence is but one moment in the lengthier endeavour to probe a better life within this world, i.e., to search for "transcendence within social immanence", ergo transformation through values and practices rooted in the lifeworlds our interlocutors inhabit (Honneth, 2003; Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018).

It is, of necessity, with an eye on hope, relief, and potential for change, that I would like to discuss the fact that Sipho was raped by her maternal uncle when she was 15 years old[254]. While discussing the first audio file Thabisa sent me, I asked her what else she could discuss with Sipho.

> **What could we still explore?**
> **Thabisa:** I think the topic I can give you is about abuse.
>
> **Why do you think we should talk about abuse?**
> **Thabisa:** Because, Daniel, abuse is not a good thing in the world, you know? It can make you not feel free sometimes.

They met again and had a four-minute conversation. Thabisa promptly approached the subject of rape.

[254] During the first interview, Sipho identified the rapist as her "grandfather". On the characterization of the mother's brother as grandfather/uncle, see Radcliffe-Brown (1952).

Hey, good morning, Sipho. How are you?
Sipho: I'm good, and you?

I'm good. Today, we are going to talk about your personal life, especially abuse.
Sipho: Yes.

Can you please explain me just a little bit about your abuse?
Sipho: Okay, no problem. I was abused by my uncle. He raped me, and so when I tell, my family said I'm lying. That's why I feel like I'm lonely, cause they don't take my story.

Okay. Eish! Did your mom said anything about this rape? Or she just said – 'No, no, it's my brother, we can't do anything'. Like going to police station...
Sipho: She said I can't go to the police station to open the case for her brother

Oh! Okay, okay, Sipho, this is a bad thing. You have to know that… you have to forget about that and move on with your life.
Sipho: But it's hard!

You think like you need some counselling?
Sipho: Yes.
Okay. Like a therapist
Sipho: Yeah.
Okay...

Sipho suffered from two related forms of violence. In addition to rape, her words were discredited, and her mother negated familial and institutional redress. Such moral violence could not but widen the wounds physical, psychic, and social left by abuse (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2008a; 2011a). Sipho defined the pain caused by this compounded violation as loneliness. Since nobody "[took] her story", she saw herself abandoned and denied the recognition that evil had been inflicted on her. For years, rape remained an uncommunicable individual reality instead of a social, therefore shared, problem. A criminal case would implicate others in a quest for punishment and reparation, which, I imagine, could at least alleviate the overladen burden Sipho carried alone. So could the availability of a professional such as a therapist or a social worker[255].

Particularly relevant in the case is that Sipho imparted Thabisa on the matter of rape spontaneously and before they met for the first recorded conversation. While conducting the first interview, Thabisa inserted into Annex 1, question number ten, a

[255] When Thabisa told me why she decided to interview Sipho, she mentioned that her friend sometimes approached her with a complaint: 'Thabisa, why this time we don't have a social [worker]?'

reference to abuse that the semi-structured interviews did not have – "What can you tell me about your childhood? Like you were happy, sad, or abused?" Sipho then confirmed abuse even though my assistant had just warned her that she could skip any question she wanted. Thabisa and Sipho lived nearby and had frequented each other for eight years. Throughout this period, however, Thabisa remained unaware of that excruciating fact in her friend's life. In the lapse between the invitation to talk and the first interview, Sipho revealed her story to Thabisa. Why?

My main contention is that Sipho needed to talk. Paraphrasing Freud et al. (2004), human beings suffer significantly from reminiscences. The Austrian psychiatrist also singled out sexual attacks by family members as particularly traumatic episodes. One of his earliest patients (Katharina) was molested by her father at fourteen and continued, in later years, to experience the remnants of the "anxiety" she felt as a girl[256]. Once the opportunity arose, Katharina approached Freud (2004) by herself – "Perhaps the Doctor would have a bit of time now, my nerves are bad, you see". On the contrary, Thabisa invited Sipho and argued that talking about her "personal life" would help her forget about the past and move on. Sipho probably believed my assistant and confided a subject muted for eleven years.

> **Is it a secret within the family?**
> **Thabisa**: Yeah... This family makes this thing a secret. I'm the person who knows this thing. But even me, I didn't know this thing [before the interview].
>
> **You were not supposed to talk about that, were you?**
> **Thabisa**: But she didn't say like that. [Sipho] said – 'Thabisa, I'm free now'. This thing, I think, this thing was eating her.
>
> **It was eating her?**
> **Thabisa:** Yeah, she was [in] need [of] someone to talk to.
> **Is she feeling free now?**
> Thabisa: Yeah, yeah, too much free. But within the family, it's still a secret.

Before Thabisa's proposal for an interview, Sipho had sometimes mentioned that she "hated" her uncle, though not why. After being invited by Thabisa, Sipho moved from occasional remarks about hatred to its objective cause. After the interview, Sipho

[256] "The anxiety from which Katharina suffered in her attacks is hysterical, meaning that it reproduces the anxiety that arose during every one of the sexual traumas" (Freud et al., 2004).

searched for professional help – "She's got some woman who make her tell her stories, then I think that woman is her therapist". If such is the case, Sipho shifted from the passivity of being addressed by Thabisa to the activity of searching for a professional. In both voices, telling stories remains core, probably because "narration has some propitious relation to survival" (Butler, 2005, p.61). Let us compare what Freud spoke about Katharina and what Thabisa told me about Sipho.

> On completing these two sets of stories, she pauses. She is as if transformed: the sullen, suffering face has come to life, her eyes are bright, she is relieved, exalted (Freud et al., 2004).

> **And do you think that she's feeling better now after the interview?**
> **Thabisa:** Obvious! And then she told me – 'Thabisa, I'm feeling better now. And I'm happy to talk with some person like you'.

These quotations help finish this commentary in the voice of hope. They both indicate that the passage from silence to speech is consequential. As observed in Chapter III, secrecy is an un-communicative pattern of rapport in some South African families, particularly as to sexual and affective matters. Ukhuna's father, for instance, looked stricken by bad conscience but could not address her daughter and "cough [out]" the guilt he felt by not having up-brought her[257]. His case remains miles away from Sipho's, save for one factor: in both, cultural forces operate against the reality of things, whether father absenteeism or sexual violence among kin. What results, though again in incomparable forms, is the reproduction of distorted patterns of intersubjective relation and the maintenance of "contradictory normative commitments"[258] - in Sipho's case, the social norms of familial solidarity and connivance.

> **Why didn't she call the police?**
> **Thabisa:** Because of her mother.

> **What happened?**
> I think her mother said – 'We have to talk it like a family' (emphasis added).

[257] Thabisa's father, conversely, begged her pardon and sealed an alliance that proved beneficial for both. He, at the very least, was forgiven, which is also a potential consequence of truth-oriented interlocutions (Butler, 2005, p.136).
[258] See Stahl (2013, pp.13-19).

Familial tacit consent with rape is a tragic state of affairs in South Africa and elsewhere. In speaking her past and mind to Thabisa, Sipho overcame connivance and the rule of secrecy, thus restituting truth as a shared reality in the social world. To some extent, she acted as those Butler called "Foucaultian subjects" (2005, pp.22-6). When they give an account of their selves, these subjects engage critically with social norms, those explicit and those operating in the shadows. While searching for something like the veracity of their lives, they often go beyond local regimes of discourse (or what particular social configurations define as speakable/unspeakable). As a victim, Sipho was forced into muteness, discredit, and loneliness. In the active voice of talking to Thabisa, she crossed a barrier and played the philosopher or the anthropologist: she shook up the "unproblematic view" (Maranhao, 1986, p.15) of families as safe havens.

I guess we have reached the crossroads between social critique and social therapeutics (Maranhao, 1986; Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011a), for relief, in Sipho's case, is coterminous with the expressive, "symbolic" endeavour of pushing the sayable to a novel and ampler field of possibilities. In disclosing what had haunted her private self and kept beneath shared awareness through mechanisms of social *refoulement* (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011a), Sipho breathed freely, at least for a while. I believe such is the power of the female communicative action that Thabisa depicted for me on November 15th.

> Even today, I was with her [Sipho], talking like some stories. We just communicated, just like woman to woman. Giving some woman a tip. I give her a tip; she give me a tip.

What woman-to-woman storytelling and tipping might signify on a broader scale requires further research. Meanwhile, I shall be glad if the reader also fancies the route is worth pursuing.

Section III – Thabisa Interviews Busi

Thabisa: Good day, girl, how are you?
Busi: Fine, and you?

I'm good. Can you please tell me your name?
Busi: My name is Busi.

What is the meaning of your name?
Busi: My name means love.

Okay, where were you born?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] She was born at a township in Gauteng. I think she's 25 years.

Wow! How many brothers and sisters you have?
Busi: I only have one brother.
Sisters?
Busi: No.

Oh, I don't talk English like you [Busi]**.** [And Thabisa turns to me] **Ah, my boss!**

Did you grow up with your parents?
Busi: Yeah.
[Dec 23rd] Only with her mother.

What about your brothers?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Yes.

Have you ever lived with your magogo, like your grandmother?
Busi: No.

What can you tell me about your childhood? You were happy or what?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] When she was 13 years old, she went to traditional healing, for her life was not going well. After, she became pregnant. She was sad 'cause she was still young.

I see you believe in the ancestor thing. Can you please tell me a small thing about your ancestors?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Busi was too muck sick; they didn't know what was the problem. At the hospital, they didn't see anything [and Busi went to] traditional healing to see what was the problem. She had to do it. She got better after it.

Okay, thank you, thank you! Were your parents working?
Busi: No.

Your grandmother?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] She didn't live with her grandmother.

Do they still help you?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] No.

Do you have matric?
Busi: [Laughs. Thabisa also laughs]
[Dec 23rd] No.

Okay, why you didn't have matric?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] She was sick. After sickness, she became pregnant. She was doing grade 9.

Would you like to work?
Busi: Yes.

What kind of job do you want to do?
Busi: Any job.

Like traditional healing.
Busi: Yeah.
Helping people.
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Yes. Now she's working with people. She helps people when they are sick.

Okay, okay. What is the thing that you don't like to work?
Busi: [...]

There are so many things we cannot do in the world. Can you please tell me something, a job that you don't want to work?
Busi: Prostitution.
Thabisa: Why?
Busi: Cause I'm a traditional [...]

[Second Interviewing Section with Busi]

Okay, today we are going to talk about the second question paper. How many children do you have?
Busi: Three.

What are the names of your children?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Thabisa forgot and asked me to remember her on WhatsApp, which I forgot.

Okay, the meaning of your children... the names. [First born?]
Busi: [...]
Wow! [Second born?]
Busi: [...]
Wow! [Last born?]
Busi: [...]

Wow! Ah, girl, you know how to make the names of children!
Busi: [Laughs]
Don't laugh! Why are you laughing? I'm serious [and Thabisa laughs, too]. **Daniel, sorry, you see? Busi is too much friendly, and I don't know what can I say! We are going to** [question] **number 4. How old were you when you became pregnant?**
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Pregnant at 14. Birth at 15[259].

Did you know how to prevent pregnancy?
Busi: No.

Can you please tell me a little bit about the circumstances...
Busi: I don't know anything.
[Dec 23rd] Her mother didn't tell her about the prevention thing.

How old were you when you were dating? You became pregnant when you were fourteen, then you... That year, you became pregnant, you were dating.
Busi: Same year.
Same year, okay[260].

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[259] Later in their conversation, Thabisa said that Busi got pregnant at 16.
[260] Busi got pregnant in the same year she started dating.

Did you plan to become pregnant?
Busi: No.

How did you like it? To have the children stress?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Yes, she was stressed cause she was young and she was not working.

You are stressed, né?
Busi: Yes.

Are you living with the father of your child?
Busi: No.

Have you ever lived with the father of your child?
Busi: No.

How many children do you want to have in your life?
Busi: Three is enough.

Really? You don't want any extra? But it seems like you're pregnant! Ah, don't laugh. Why are you laughing? It seems like you're pregnant! Ah, Busi, don't laugh! We are serious here!
Busi: [Laughs]
[Dec 23rd] It seems like she's pregnant. In her life, she wants to have four kids.
Do you like to have a big family?
Busi: Yeah.

Why?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Because she doesn't want her children to grow up like her. She wants her children to grow nicely.

Oh, you want a big, happy family. Like your ancestors want you to have a big family.
Busi: Yes.
Okay.

How is the feeling when you are pregnant? You were sad, happy? Your first child?
Busi: I was so sad.
Yes. Why?

Busi: Because I didn't know how to prevent.

Yeah, your boyfriend did wrong things to you.

When you found that you are pregnant, how do you feel about your boyfriend? Like – 'I'm going to tell my boyfriend that I'm pregnant. Maybe he will dump [me]**, maybe he will say it's not my child'. How do you feel?**

Busi:

[Dec 23rd]: Her firstborn, she was sad because her boyfriend refused the child.

Okay, you never told anything, you just[261]... I don't talk too much English, you want to tell my boss? [And Thabisa laughs.]

How do you feel [when you thought] **– 'Now I'm going to have my responsibilities'?**

Busi: [...]

Wow!

[Dec 23rd]: It was hard because her mother doesn't help her about anything. Her mother helps her about traditional healing only. [They work together].

Did you drink alcohol when you are pregnant?

Busi: [...]

[Dec 23rd] No.

Were you happy the first time when your child cried? You were happy or sad?

Busi: I was happy that my child is alive.

Okay.

How did you feel when you thought that 'now I'm a mother?'

Busi: [...]

Okay, okay. I see you were happy, né?

[Dec 23rd] On the one side, she was happy. On the other, she was sad cause the father refused the child.

[261] Busi did not tell anything to whom? Unfortunately, I did not resume with my assistant this enigmatic excerpt.

[Third Interviewing Section with Busi]

Okay, girl, today we are going to do the last questions, né? How much are you receiving from the SASSA grant?

Busi: [...]

[Dec 23rd] I think it's ZAR 1.300.

Do all the children receive the SASSA grant?

Busi: [...]

[Dec 23rd] Yeah.

Are you happy about the money?

Busi: […]

Yeah, because it's too small.

Do you think it should be more?

Busi: Yes.

How much?

Busi: [...]

Yeah, because ZAR 440 is too small!

[Dec 23rd] ZAR 500 in addition to what Busi already receives.

Have you ever heard about the word rights?

Busi: Yes.

Do you think the SASSA grant are right?

Busi: No.

Do you think the SASSA grant belong to the mother?

Busi: Yes.

And the children?

Busi: Yes.

How does the SASSA grant help you?

Busi: [...]

[Dec 23rd] It's helping her because she's not working. [She works] only when someone needs traditional healing.

Okay, when the money is finished, do you have somebody helping you?

Busi: No.

Does the father of your child help you?
Busi: No. [And laughs.]

Okay... How much of the money do you spend monthly [on groceries]**?**
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Thabisa forgot.

How much do you spend on pampers or clothes for the child?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Thabisa forgot.

Do you give them pocket money?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] I don't know, Daniel, I'll answer on WhatsApp. [I did not ask her, though.]

Do you have other expenses?
Busi: Yes.
Like school fees, crèche.
Busi: Yeah, yeah.

What do you do when the child is sick?
Busi: [...]
Okay, government clinic.
Busi: […]
[Dec 23rd] Government clinic and even the traditional healing.

Do you have an income other than the grant?
Busi: […]
Cause now your ancestor is not working for you, you don't have the money to build the ancestors' house.
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] She has a separate house for the ancestors, but it's only one room. The name for that house, we call it *intumba*.

Do you spend this money on your own?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] No, because her children are staying with her mother [who holds the SASSA card].

But how?
Busi: [...]

Oh, cosmetics.

What do you do on SASSA day? [Thabisa laughs a bit.]
Busi: [Also seems to laugh]

What do you do when you are going to SASSA?
Busi: [Seems to laugh.]
The first day, when you going to SASSA?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] She doesn't get the money for SASSA grant.

You are happy, or you are sad? Cause the money is going to Plaza...
Busi: [...]

Do you borrow money from your neighbours? From any friends?
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] No.

Do you lend money on your neighbours, like, lending, *machonisa*?
Busi: Yes.
[Dec 23rd] No, she doesn't lend money for neighbours or people or what.

Okay, okay, I see. Thanks for this interview. You said your name is Busi. It means *love*. Okay, can you please tell me about your ancestors' healing? Just that childhood only, please.
Busi: [...]

So, I heard your mom say you were wearing expensive clothes. So, why you're going rough on [the] **street?**
Busi: [...]
[Dec 23rd] Her mom is like Norah [Thabisa's mother-in-law.] Her mom is selfish. When someone comes to do traditional healing [Busi has to give the money to her mom]

•

The conversation between Thabisa and Busi occurred in a jovial atmosphere. I suppose the two friends were sipping at Thabisa's when the rigours of the South African lockdown seemed past[262]. They teased each other, and Thabisa called my attention to how *"friendly"* Busi was and how well she spoke English. However, Busi had a "sad history",

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[262] At least another interviewee was an occasional drinking companion of Thabisa.

as Thabisa told me before interviewing her. When my assistant approached Busi, the latter asked her why she wanted an interview. Thabisa replied she was working for me and it was her "only money". Busi understood my assistant's activities as her "piece job" and assented to a face-to-face appointment.

Contrary to Sipho, Busi did not think Thabisa was making money out of her. Nevertheless, the circumstances leading to the interview also involved cash. Thabisa had gone to a local market but lacked ZAR 5 to buy meat. There by chance, Sipho lent my assistant the money and was invited to a private conversation about her personal story. According to Thabisa, Busi had not been told that the interview was paid[263]. Thabisa thus emphasised how available and openhearted her last interviewee had shown herself.

> Busi, she was free! Some people like to talk. Some people don't like to talk, you see?

Thabisa (and I) think that Busi belongs to that class of South Africans who enjoy a conversation, even one about the predicaments they have experienced throughout their lives. As the reader has noticed, Busi's path raises questions similar to those of other collaborators in this Thesis. Absent parenthood; teenage pregnancy; school dropout; uncooperative (to put it mildly) partners; money-based contention with mothers: all these factors have shaped Busi's existence, yet she derived pleasure from her encounter with my assistant. Sipping possibly made it easier for her, but I think there is more than alcohol-induced joy at play.

> **Did she like to take part in the interview?**
> **Thabisa:** She was happy to hear this interview. And she was happy with the 150 bucks.
>
> **Why was she happy?**
> Because this interview helped her to forget about her past, she didn't talk with anybody about her past. It was the first time.
> **Was it hard for her?**
> It was not difficult. I think she was happy. It's the first time she was talking about her traditional healing.

In the second part of this commentary, I will indicate that Busi's interest in the interview did not necessarily correspond to the motives Thabisa attributed to her. It is crucial to distinguish between my assistant's mantra – "This interview helped her to forget

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[263]In our conversation, though, Busi told me she was aware the interviews were paid.

about her past" – and each interviewee's singular experience. In other words, Thabisa and her neighbours had private reasons to talk, and they all matter. What went on between them was not the mechanical execution of a task determined from overseas but an address to reflect on subjects influencing their lives, in their commonalities and differences. One commonality between Thabisa and Busi concerned traditional healing, a theme my assistant spontaneously explored with her interviewee.

In the first Section of this Chapter, I indicated that Thabisa's firstborn (Andile) had been sent to a traditional healer. In March 2020, when South Africa declared a state of national disaster, Andile commuted to his grandmother in Pretoria. His "naughty" (as Thabisa put it) behaviour had exceeded Margaret's capacities, and the family decided he should leave Kwa-Ndebele. By November 5th, when Thabisa complimented me for my birthday, Andile had moved from his granny's house in the informal settlement to the domain of a local traditional healer[264]. Then Thabisa depicted him as "crazy" and "sick too much". On December 7th, while discussing Busi's interview with me, Thabisa again - and spontaneously – mentioned Andile.

> I'm helping Norah with Andile. Cause you know Norah. If I won't send her money[265]... And Andile is my only son, Daniel, my only son. Yo!
>
> **You must take care of him.**
> Too much, 'cause... Do you remember? Andile was too much stout. Smoking... While we didn't know that it's our ancestors.

In other words, at least since November 2020, Thabisa remained not only concerned about Andile but also willing to talk about him and the therapy he then underwent. I suppose that was why she insisted on traditional healing with Busi and later with me (see next Section). The theme first emerged when my assistant inquired about her interviewee's childhood. The response is inaudible, but Thabisa reacted in the following terms – "I see you believe [in] the ancestor thing. Can you please tell me a small thing about your ancestors?" Again, I could not hear Busi's answer, but on December 23rd, when my assistant and I finally discussed the interview's content, Thabisa told me the following:

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[264] Where the young boy stayed until June 2021. By then Thabisa spontaneously sent me on WhatsApp a video displaying the final ritual Andile underwent at the so-called traditional school.

[265] Thabisa and Norah were sharing Andile's costs (ZAR 500 monthly) at the traditional healer.

> Busi was too muck sick; they didn't know what was the problem. At the hospital, they didn't see anything. [She went to] traditional healing to see what was the problem. She had to do it. She got better after it.

At the hospital, doctors investigate pathologies and apply therapies accordingly. Yet sometimes theirs is not efficacious, for human beings suffer from myriad causes, not all detectable by physicians. Human pathos is possibly numberless; fortunately, many techniques exist to cope with it. Busi's sickness stemmed from her family's ancestors, and she got better after dealing with them. A similar diagnosis applied to Andile. He was sick – even "sick too much" – because of his ancestors. Differently from Busi, who was taken to a Hospital, Andile was referred first to a traditional healer, for his symptoms (stoutness, smoking, etc.) were probably better handled by these professionals.

My assistant resumed the subject when Busi answered the question on the job she wanted – "Any job". By her initiative as an interviewer, Thabisa narrowed down the uncountable possibilities of "any" to traditional healing, also cast as "helping people". On December 23rd, while conducting with me the interpretive work on which data is contingent (Gupta, 2014), my assistant reiterated traditional healing as a form of labour aimed at those who suffer – "Now she's working with people; she helps people when they are sick". During the interview, Thabisa used the words she later deployed with me: "helping people". Busi confirmed such a general description of her métier and hinted at its social status (or comparative respectability) in the following excerpt.

> **There are so many things we cannot do in the world... Can you please tell me something, a job that you don't want to work?**
> **Busi:** Prostitution.
> **Why?**
> **Busi:** Cause I'm a traditional [...].

While discussing Busi's account of herself with Thabisa, I discovered the former exerts her trade with her mother's assistance. They work together, but this instantiation of parental assistance seems to remain an exception – "Her mother doesn't help [Busi] about anything". Such is not only an index of daughter-mother contention but also a contentious statement in itself. Thabisa asked Busi whether she spent the child-support grants to supply her personal needs, and I learned that Busi's children "are staying with her mother. I promptly asked my assistant whether Busi's mother kept the SASSA card and got a sonorous *yeeebo* [yeees] from her. Part, however, of the SASSA money reaches Busi. When Thabisa asked how she spent it, Busi – like all but one of my interviewees –

mentioned "cosmetics"[266]. Fortunately, cash is not the exclusive source of social welfare for Busi and her children.

> **What do you do when the child is sick?**
> **Busi:** [...]
> **Okay, government clinic.**
> [December 23rd]: Government clinic and even the traditional healing.

I suppose Thabisa was more interested in traditional healing than her interviewee, not only because Andile was undergoing an ancestor-based therapy - or "science" (Horton, 1967). At the end of the interview, my assistant found a source of conflict between Busi and her mother in the former's activity as a traditional healer. Busi lacked the means to buy better clothes, and Thabisa related her friend's "being rough on the street" to her mother's greed. Again, I could not hear Busi's reaction to Thabisa's observation, but on December 23rd, Thabisa offered me the following personal interpretation.

> [Dec 23rd]: her mom is like Norah [Thabisa's mother-in-law]. Her mom is selfish. When someone comes to do traditional healing...

Though Thabisa compared Busi's mother and Norah, I flare in the excerpt a scent of Thabisa's rapport with her own mother, also based, according to her, on greed and uncooperative distance - save when money is involved. It is worth noticing that the question leading to the critique of Busi's mother had no relation whatsoever to Annex I questions. Instead, once she finished the latter, Thabisa thanked Busi for the interview, reiterated the meaning of her name (*love*), and added a last question.

> Okay, can you please, Busi, tell me about your ancestors' healing? Just that childhood one, please?

Thabisa is a wholehearted woman who wants the best for her kids. Finding Andile a cure[267] then obsessed her.

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[266] There is another index that Busi receives part of the child support grants. When Thabisa asked how the money helped her, Busi's response was inaudible. Still, my assistant later told me: "It [the SASSA grant] is helping her because she's not working, only when someone needs traditional healing".

[267] Dunker and Fragelli (2018) understand the term cure as a synonym of *care* – as it is, they argue, in the word French *cure.*

II

Thabisa sent me three audio files containing Busi's interview on December 2nd, 2020. I gave them a cursory listening and called my assistant the next day. I then expected to speak with Sipho, Thabisa's first interviewee. The previous week, she had been available to talk about her experience with my assistant, but I did not phone them as scheduled. On December 3rd, Sipho did not meet my assistant. Busi, however, was there. After Thabisa and I exchanged a few commentaries on the audio files she had sent me the previous day, my assistant announced her friend's presence.

> Daniel, I'm with Busi now. You can talk to her and record it. If you want to talk to her, maybe you got... You can talk to her and ask some questions, cause I'm with her now. You can record it.

Surprised, I asked Thabisa whether Busi felt like talking to me, and my assistant answered in the following terms – "She says it's fine". I greeted Busi in IsiNdebele – *Unjani?* - she replied in kind and kindly laughed at my attempt to salute her in an African language. I informed Busi of what my PhD was about, thanked her for the interview with Thabisa, and we had a dialogue on payment.

> **Did Thabisa tell you that these interviews are going to be paid?**
> **Busi:** Yes.
> **I'll try to send you ZAR 150, okay?**
> **Busi:** Okay.
>
> **If you think it's fine, I'd like to pose five questions for you. Would you like to answer them? You are not forced to answer them, just if you want.**
> **Busi:** That's okay with me; you can ask me.
>
> **I'll send you the money even though you don't want to answer these questions. I'll send you the money anyway.**
> **Busi:** Okay.

I assured Busi that the ZAR 150 concerned her interview with Thabisa. She would get the amount regardless of talking to me. She sounded thus aware, and I remembered the interviews' first clause.

> **You just answer if you feel all right, is that fine?**

Busi: It's okay with me; you can ask me.

Did you like to take part in the research about the SASSA grants?

Yes, Busi enjoyed it, and I asked her why: "It's because this grant is helping too much people"[268]. She was also pleased by the fact of being interviewed by Thabisa, a subject I did not explore (hélas). Instead, I followed the road sketched in Annex II.

Did the interviews change your way of thinking about the SASSA grants?
Busi: I never thought about the SASSA grants because the money is small, né?

You had never thought about it before.
Busi: I never thought.

And now, what are you thinking about this money?
Busi: I think that this money is helping, but it's so small that you can't buy everything that you need in the house.

Busi had obviously reflected on the grants, though not in a "scene of account" (Butler, 2005) proposed by a Brazilian researcher but set in motion and partially re-elaborated by a friend of hers. The "who" approaches one, the "how", and the "stage" on which an interlocution takes place considerably influence the given account (Butler, 2005). In Busi's case, a sense of novelty (or "never" before) emerged together with the impression that the child support grants, formerly cast only as insufficient, now also seemed helpful. I then consulted Busi on whether the interviews should be paid.

No, I just think that maybe we should change our lives [with] the interview

You should change your lives?
Busi: Yes, the interview is changing our lives.

Can you tell me why?

I have a Habermasian orientation (Stahl, 2011) where my interviewees' sincerity is concerned: I do believe they mean their words, which, in Butler's terms, signifies they desire and keep a rapport with truth (2005). Despite my understanding that "changing

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[268] To be understood, I guess, as people get *quite a significant* help, rather than too many people get helped. Thabisa's speech also abounds on examples of *too much* as very much.

their lives" should involve loads of structural reforms, I took my interlocutor seriously and dealt accordingly with her elaboration of the interviews as an incitement for change. So why, or better, how were the interviews changing their lives?

> **Busi:** Because the questions that are asked, they may be personal, but they don't mean to harm anyone. They make a certain change in your life because you can realise something.

Before specifying what Busi had in mind, let us consider her prose in the indefinite cast of "a certain" change and [to] realise "something". With a change and to realise as vague as that, we can read Busi saying that the interview's immediate effect was a stimulus to think anew. She grasped a half-local, half-foreign address as an invitation to think otherwise about herself and the grants. Let me alter her words and word ordering to make my reading explicit: they [the interviews] *can* change your life because you *think and* realise something. Should this be the case, then it is not really the interviews but reasoning and communicating with Thabisa (and later with me) that led Busi to an altered perception of things relevant to her.

Though beginning with the ethereal vocabulary of "a certain" and "something", Busi specified the content of change. It concerned a state of dependency, probably the so-called entitlement attitude/mentality, a preoccupation among die-hard free marketeers and sectors of the ANC (Barchiesi, 2011; Ferguson, 2015). In an over-moralistic tone, part of the South African ruling class deplores what they deem a widespread culture of placing excessive expectations on the state's capacity to provide.

> **You say [the interviews] don't harm anyone.**
> **Busi:** Yes... But they can make you realise [there] are some things in life that you can [can't[269]] depend on.

What were these things on which one could not (and perhaps should not) depend? The grants, possibly, though cast in indirect language – "It realises me that if you have a baby, that doesn't mean that you must just sit around, né"? Yet Busi turned alert against such a stance not when answering the specific questions on social assistance in cash but after Thabisa inquired which job she would not like to perform.

[269] The first time I heard and typed Busi's conversation with me (another audio file I apparently no longer have), I either misunderstood her or committed a typo. As the excerpts on the following page indicate, Busi probably said that there exist in life things on which one *cannot* depend. I take her words as a relative declaration of independency (Fouksmann, 2020), an expression I will resume in the upcoming Conclusion.

> **You told me that the interview made you realise some new stuff. What is it that you realised?**
> **Busi:** There is some question that ask you what you won't do in your life, né? Then I replied that prostitution, because it realises me that if you have a baby, that doesn't mean that you must just sit around, né?

Busi worked as a traditional healer in a contentious, according to Thabisa, arrangement with her mother. When asked about the job she would not like to do, Busi mentioned prostitution and counterposed it to her status as a *therapist*[270]. In our brief conversation, she also imagined starting a business.

> There are [things] that you can do without having a matric when you have kids or stuff. There's something that you can do. You can open up a business, you see?
>
> **You are thinking about new possibilities in the future.**
> **Busi:** Yes.

Addressed to reconsider "the taken for granted" (Crapanzano, 1980), Busi rebuffed the passivity of "just sitting around" and figured out an entrepreneurial (as some say) shift. The last three collaborators in this Thesis, beginning with Thabisa, observed they would like to venture into the market. Even the temporary schism between Thabisa and her sister exemplified the will to conduct profit-oriented activities with autonomy. Instead of toiling at a car wash, Esulu and Bogani wanted to sell quarters in Kwa-Ndebele. Finally, Thabisa once called her mother 'an entrepreneurship' [entrepreneur]. We may conclude that labour *&* business parlance has entered the desiring imagination (and practices[271]) of ample segments of Black South Africans.

Rather than living with a monthly small sum provided as social assistance, Busi and others, if allowed to choose, would engage in activities more rewarding in both financial and moral terms. That, at least, is what they told Thabisa and me when invited to speak about their lives and preferences. Their orientation to jobs and businesses does not mean they despise the child-support grants. On the contrary, Busi's reflection on the grants also triggered the recognition that they helped people more than she had realised

[270] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). healer. In thefreedictionary.com. Retrieved on January 9th, 2024, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/healer.

[271] Such as Luthando's brother temporarily selling sandwiches and fries at Martha's yard – see Chapter I.

before. Overall, the opportunity to reflect anew on these matters pleased her, and so did the monetary value I attributed to it.

> **I'm paying you ZAR 150 for the interviews. Do you think it's a fair value, a fair amount of money?**
> **Busi:** Yeah, I think it is because there's nothing much that you're doing. You just sit down; then you are asked some questions, then you answer. If it's not comfortable, you don't answer anything.

Busi skipped no question of either Annex I or II. When I asked whether she would participate in another research about the SASSA grants, Busi answered in the affirmative and said: "I'd like to know more because I'm not the only one maybe who's complaining it's so small". She was not. All my collaborators complained about the current value of the child-support grants. None, perhaps, sounded as "free" as Thabisa's second interviewee. So much free, I guess, that, at the end of my conversation with Busi, my assistant still desired to listen to her. After Busi and I thanked ourselves reciprocally for the conversation we had just had, Thabisa approached me.

> Ask her about her childhood! [And laughs]. Daniel, are you happy now?
> **Yes, I'm happy!**
>
> **Thabisa:** I was thinking you should ask her about traditional healing.
> **She must answer only the questions she feels all right to answer.**
>
> **Thabisa:** But on the interview, she answered all the questions! Ask her about traditional healing because of Andile. She answered it, you heard it, <u>she's very free!</u> (emphasis added).
> **Okay, okay.**
>
> **Thabisa:** I like her English, she's just like Andile.

As I mentioned in the last Section, Thabisa remained eager to know more about the possible effects of traditional healing on Andile. With the latter confided to a specialist in Pretoria, Thabisa took the *job* as an opportunity to inquire more about the therapeutics he underwent. I did not attend to Thabisa's request promptly. On the contrary, I asked her again about Sipho, with whom I was supposed to talk. Thabisa had invited Sipho to a final appointment at her place, but she was no longer available. Since this possibility was lost, Thabisa insisted on another.

> I think I should ask Busi about childhood and traditional healing, newborns and traditional healing. I think it's fine for Busi. Busi, she said like – 'Children are a blessing of God'. So, I think I should ask Busi those questions.

Thabisa is not the kind of person who lets opportunities pass; she does have a sense of entrepreneurship. Even though I had finished my conversation with Busi, my assistant thought we could talk about traditional healing and why children were a blessing from God, an expression that Busi (and other interviewees) had deployed. I observed we could approach Busi on the subject if she felt comfortable, and Thabisa answered for her friend and herself.

> She's fine, cause I'm putting the phone on the loudspeaker. She said it's fine!
>
> **Really?**
> Really!

I was not exactly expecting a follow-up with Busi, let alone during the same phone call. Thabisa, however, gave me no alternative but to grasp part of our opportunity. Part, indeed, because I inquired Busi on only one subject: the one suiting my research agenda rather than Thabisa's.

> **Okay, so Busi, just one question. Do you think that children are a blessing from God?**
> **Busi:** Yes.
>
> **Can you tell me why?**
> **Busi:** Because you know there are some people who can never get children, né? So only if God blesses you, you can have a child, because you can have so much money without kids, né? But you can be poor and have lots of kids. That's a blessing from God.

This Thesis stems from the social and intellectual labour of a childless woman who, I am afraid, was convinced in the bitterest possible sense that children are blessings from God. I deem it fortunate to terminate its final Chapter thanks to the creative powers (Graeber, 2001) of Thabisa, a mother of four, including Andile, whom Luthando once took as her child.

Conclusion

I called this Thesis Give a Girl a *Job*: Reflections on Ethnography, Money, and Suffering among South African Mothers. Now, I deal with the four italicised terms and the concept of presence (Ferguson, 2021), including its negative face - absence (Widlok, 2016, p.182).

I

> Luthando showed me the way. When you are working, you have to protect your boss (Thabisa).

This excerpt was taken from a conversation between Thabisa and me in June 2021. We were about to close the work she had performed on my behalf since November 5th, 2020. In that last recorded conversation, we discussed our rapport with Luthando and how collaborators in KwaNdebele and the township where Thabisa lived in Gauteng understood our ethnographic activities – the *job.*

The excerpt above relates to an episode in 2017. Thabisa accompanied Luthando and Mpho to a Western Union agency in Pretoria. The latter two would collect remittances I had sent from Brazil (see Chapter I). After Luthando withdrew the money and gave Mpho his share, he complained. Why was his significantly smaller than hers? Luthando yelled at him – "Daniel is my boss, not your boss!"

Luthando protected me against Mpho's indignation. Indeed, I had a closer bond with the former: the *job* was hers. However, Mpho had been a reliable and insightful interlocutor between March and mid-July 2016. He shared his knowledge of the township life and his social networks within it[272]. Mpho knew his relevance to my research in South Africa and wanted more than he got. He felt exploited.

Ethnographic rapports involve considerable ambivalence (Geertz, 1968; Clifford, 1988). They are a potpourri of empathy, asymmetry, friendship, exploitation, and *labour*, or rather, the appropriation of others' social networks and mental powers of creativity (Gupta, 2014; Graeber, 2001). In the reflexive exercise Thabisa and I conducted in June

[272] Mpho's reflections on normative patterns of popular insurrection in townships are the guiding thread of Cardoso de Oliveira, L. and Lage da Cruz (2023).

2021, I asked her if my collaborators in KwaNdebele thought I made money from them. "Let me say 50%", she said. When asked whether her interviewees in Johannesburg thought the same, Thabisa recalled Sipho.

> She was thinking I'm making money about her. I think she was angry.

My first conclusive remark is that ethnography, as we technically call our ways into the lives of others, is perceived by some South Africans as an intrusive and money-oriented activity. They resent it as a form of personal accumulation[273] whose benefits do not flow back to our collaborators. Can we overcome such an immanent critique (Stahl, 2013)? Hardly. Still, in a jobless country (Ferguson, 2015; Ferguson and Li, 2017), offering someone a *job* and striving to secure it for the longest possible time may palliate the anger of some - not all, according to Thabisa.

> Some of people, you bother them. But some of people they like to talk. People are not the same.

Keeping a job-like rapport with assistants may sound trifle to well-financed students and social scientists. The case is painfully diverse for most of my research compatriots, who struggle to survive and work with minimal means. The picture turns dimmer if we add another potential field expense: interview payment. Other Brazilian ethnographers working with Black and poor South Africans have met cash demands in exchange for data. I have paid my interviewees and consulted them on the meaning of such money.

> I call it a token of appreciation. Somebody is appreciating to discuss with me our personal life, what we are encountering, where we are living. I'm taking it as a token of appreciation. It's not a payment. It's a token of appreciation.

Such was Tumelo's response when asked how she understood the ZAR 150 she received for a short conversation about the child-support grants. Another interviewee, Esulu, treated her monetary reward as a "gift". Busi stated the interviews should not be paid[274]; instead, the interviewees should change their lives. Myriads are the angles to

[273] Hickel (2014) also reflects on such critique of accumulation at the expense of others, but his subject are immigrants involved in commercial activities in South African townships.
[274] Though she also considered ZAR 150 a fair value for it.

"evaluate", as Thabisa put it, payment for the interviews. Thumelo's formulation attracts me, above all, for its focus on recognition. Though tokenistic, the monetary reward for the interviews communicated appreciation or literally

> Recognition of the quality, value, significance, or magnitude of people and things[275]

Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2011, 2022b) has argued that the quality of social relations remains significantly contingent on the ability of partners to reassure themselves of their value or intrinsic worth. Laurent Thévenot (2022) compares this form of mutual recognition to Latin *acceptio personarum* (regard for person), which involves one's favourable disposition towards alter's identity and situation. Satisfactory social bonds often imply substantive demonstrations (or performances) meant to signal that the interlocutors appreciate the value derived from the person they are – as opposed to what they have achieved (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018, p. 205). Gifts operate precisely as tokens, symbols conveying such recognition and establishing alliances (Hénaff, 2010; Caillé, 2019).

Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2018) also articulates the inclination to engage in gift-based relations and Anthropological understanding: reciprocity helps abridge chasms between interlocutors and attune their perspectives[276]. We are not far from Clifford's notion of "complicity" between fieldworkers and informants, particularly if we add to his comprehension of *data* qua "things given", the need for counter-gifts. Working with beneficiaries of the Brazilian Bolsa-Família, Rego e Pinzani (2013, p.105) met the following demand from an interviewee:

> Next time, bring me a gift!

Do cash and gifts abhor each other? According to Dalton (1969), Parry (1989), and Sharp (2013), their supposed antagonism traces back not to Marcel Mauss but to what Parry (1989, p.9) calls the gift's ideology among social scientists and the corollary condemnation of money as an operator of friendship. According to Hart (2007, p.14), anthropologists do not like money (though not many, I believe, have relinquished their

[275] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). Appreciation. In thefreedictionary.com. Retrieved on October 8th, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/appreciation.

[276] Cardoso de Oliveira, L. (2008) refers to the Gadamerian fusion of horizons.

salaries). South Africans, instead, do like cash (Ferguson, 2015). For them, as for other populations that possibly did not dissociate economics and morals, there is nothing inappropriate about making gifts in money (Parry, 1986, p.9).

I dare say money often constitutes part of fieldwork's mode of production, perhaps more than Anthropologists acknowledge. Whatever the case, my second conclusive remark is that paying South African collaborators functioned as a display of recognition that set us on more balanced terms, at least for a fleeting while. Since money indexes the "meaning" (Graeber, 2001) of things, attributing to the interviews a monetary value also earmarked them as relevant and novel, as in Sipho's – "I never thought about the SASSA grants"[277]. A sine qua non of critical knowledge, reflecting on social existence anew and with our interlocutors reflects anthropology's best emancipatory wishes: those rooted in "concrete lifeworlds" (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018; Stahl, 2013).

Since knowledge and cash have made a classical couple of foes (Hénaff, 2010 274), it feels funny to have asked about one (money) and have got the other (knowledge, awareness, etc.) as an answer. Thabisa, however, called my attention to yet another aspect of the paid interviews, which she experienced as a therapy of oblivion. By "coughing out" afflictive recollections, Thabisa felt "free" and later promised the same to her interviewees. In other words, "relief" (Freud et al., 2004) was at play. With relief, or "freedom from worry"[278], we remain within the realms of *emancipation* - the act of freeing. Now, though, we move from cash and its reflexive tricks to local forms of suffering.

My third conclusive remark is that a contingent of young South African mothers suffers from diverse combinations of parental absence, premature motherhood, secrecy and repressed reminiscences. They suffer from poverty and the correlated debasement of daily lives and expectations. Privation aggravates the human condition; inequality is a fundamental problem (Freud, 1955). Nevertheless, there is more than poverty at stake. Contrary to Thabisa, her interviewees did not get pregnant because of transactional sex. Sipho was raped by her maternal uncle. Busi did not know how to prevent conception. Neither their mothers (nor their schools, possibly) treated those matters openly with them. According to my interlocutors in Chapter III, their "culture" is secretive. A normative-

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[277] Kaya (see Chapter II) said that she had noticed how "important" *the questions we discussed were* and that she had "learned" more about the SASSA grants.

[278] The Free Dictionary. (n.d). relief. In thefreedictionary.com. Retrieved on 17th, November, 2023, from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/relief.

laden term, culture indexes a moral order: one, in case, foreclosing dialogical openness on sexual matters. Such a predicament led most of my interlocutors to early pregnancy and the interruption of their educational path.

My interlocutors and I are not thrilled at anything remotely like the Club of Rome. We just believe that some young women might benefit from dialogical overture and planned pregnancy. Secrecy, however, does not lead only to early pregnancy. It also triggers processes of social *réfoulement* or repression (Habermas, 1970; Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2011a). After being raped by her maternal uncle, Sipho was prohibited from her mother to resort to the police and was finally discredited by her closest kin – "They didn't take my story". Desymbolisation (in Habermasian jargon) made her feel "lonely". In spontaneously narrating sexual violence to Thabisa, Sipho broke off the spiral of secrecy and connivance. She felt "free" after the interview, thanked Thabisa, and found a therapist - someone stimulating her to "tell her stories" (in my assistant's words).

As I argued in Chapter I, "talking out" remains the therapeutic nucleus of psychoanalysis (Freud et al., 2004). Speech heals inasmuch as the utterance and elaboration of traumatic experiences mitigate their affective grip over one's mental and bodily health (in their unity). In Chapter I also quoted an interlocutor who underwent rape and was not given, neither by the available social workers nor by her family and school, satisfactory means to express herself and her feelings. Mariah spontaneously confided sexual violence to me, perhaps due to the mix of distance and empathy in our dealings (Crapanzano, 1980) and the lack of (or her inability to find) adequate institutional care. Mental health has always been costly, whether in South Africa or Red Vienna and Weimar Berlin. For this reason, Freud and the European avant-garde embarked on the free clinics project (Danto, 2005). In Reich's Sex-Pols, commoners, trained analysts, and social workers enjoyed a salutary measure of dialogical and practical liberty.

> In his own writings, Reich used the term social work to describe his community-based approach to mental health services, a unique blend of social action and direct services not unlike the contemporary social work paradigm.
>
> Girls had become pregnant unwittingly, simply through clumsiness or ignorance or, worse, by rape or incest. […]. Many years later, when Edith Jacobson, a fellow traveler who had repudiated Reich, was asked just how this counseling could help with adolescents, she replied, "Surprisingly much". (Danto, 2005, p.307).

Save for the case of Sipho, who, according to Thabisa, had occasionally complained about the lack of "a social" [worker], and Mariah's complaint about how she was approached by the available such professionals, I have no information on the quality of these services in South Africa. Be it as it may, their relevance has been attested precisely by the social scientist and worker who chaired the Committee that proposed the child-support grants. Lund (2008) knew that well-being in the country depended on far more than a family allowance.

> The best-trained social workers are skilled counsellors and healers […], and these therapeutic roles will remain much needed in this fractured and violent society for years to come (2008, p.44).

Fortunately, healers abound in South Africa. They have different therapeutic orientations – as I showed by narrating Andile's disciplinary issues and his referral to traditional healers. Without any contempt for the latter, I still believe that a mix of discursive therapeutics (Maranhao, 1986) and social work - as was the case in Red Vienna and Lund's statement above – can also mitigate the suffering of many South African women, particularly the victims of rape. So far, I have crossed three who spontaneously mentioned it, which makes me think they needed to talk it out (Freud et al., 2004). Since liberty and human relief are wide-scope projects, I believe Thabisa's creative appropriation of the *job* remains worthy of attention.

> Some people they need some person to talk so that she will forget their past. And here I am. Do you hear me?
>
> **Sorry. Please repeat.**
> Some of people they need some people to help them to forget about their past. So now, just me, I'm helping them

Could we turn assistants into skilled listeners or even lay healers? Could we invest time, money, and interdisciplinary knowledge in their abilities as interviewers and societal counsellors? After their face-to-face and recorded conversation, were not Thabisa and Sipho tipping each other in a renewed female form of dialogical care? Was not Thabisa open to discussing personal lives and sexual matters freely, that is, frankly? Were not other neighbours desirous and free to talk about their personal lives (and get a few bucks)? Could we not further build on such enthusiasm and, through a therapeutic, affective-oriented anthropology (Crapanzano, 1980; Favret-Saada, 1977, 2009), actually

render our trade less exploitative? Could we not contribute a fuller, deeper measure (as opposed to peanuts, U$5 per interview) to our interlocutors' well-being? I think the subject deserves further discussion and research.

II

> **Could you be happy without a child? If you had a job and not a child?**
> **Omkhulu:** it's not happy at all.
> **Ukhuna:** Ah, it's not okay. […]. When you don't have children, you are going to work for what? For whom?

For my interlocutors in this Thesis, a childless is a hapless life. Not even a job can change the picture. Fertility remains a supreme value for many in South Africa (Ngobese, 2003; Krige, 1968). It is a sublime project for society in its existence through individuals (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b; Karsenti, 2012a). Yet values are myriad, and escalating the social ladder of occupation, prestige, and wealth also ranks high among my interlocutors.

> **Omkhulu:** Cancel that grant, and then
> **Ukhuna:** gives us a job.

Mutatis mutandis, so much has been argued by Elizaveta Fouksman (2020). After extensive fieldwork - 40 interviews (paid or not?) – with South African adults, she concluded that her interlocutors aspired to jobs and sufficient money (2020, p.10), not grants. Fouksman reads her ethnographic findings through Thompson's concept of moral economy: "a set of socially-held values and norms around the way the economy should function" (2020, p.2). Life through labour and in the abundance of a deserved and proper paycheck is life in propriety for Fouksman's interlocutors and mine. In propriety and pleasure, since duty and delight make morality's charm for non-Kantian subjects (Karsenti, 2012a).

> **Ukhuna:** Gives us a job
> **Omkhulu:** have a job
> **Amahle:** yeah....
> **Omkhulu:** Oh, maybe I ['ll] be happy (emphasis added).

Fouksman (2020) criticises Ferguson’s main ethnographic and normative claim in *Give a Man a Fish* (2015). As the title suggests, its author argues that massive, preferably universal, redistributive policies do not debase the dignity of citizens for at least two reasons. First, which is also the point of Ferguson and Li (2017), the Fordist era of jobs – let alone “proper” jobs - is much bygone. Second, Southern African patterns of association and subsistence, considered in the *long durée*, have centred on establishing dependency relations and the practice of demand sharing. Aboriginal populations, in short, have long relied on distributive modes of reproduction, so why not implement similar policies throughout the region? Why not assume reliance on grants as a legitimate “declaration of dependency” (Ferguson, 2015)? Fouksman's response is concise.

> The people I spoke with seem to be invoking specifically the access of cash through labour as a declaration of independence (2020, p.16).

Independence – or rather its synonym, autonomy – has long been noticed in the “moral codes” of Nguni populations (Atkins, 1994). As I put it in Chapter IV, local versions of “bullshit jobs” (Graeber, 2013) - say, domestic - continue to be despised precisely because they entail a frowned-upon form of subordination. Interestingly, the bulk of Fouksman’s (2020) interlocutors do not desire any occupation, but rather those they deem rewarding, in monetary and moral terms, because grounded on personal expectations of “deservingness” and “fairness”. These South Africans do not rebuff dependency *tout court*. Instead, they seek inter-dependence within “social networks of family members, potential and current employers, and patrons” (2020, p.16). My interlocutor Omkhulu, for instance, wants to be a dependable family member - less than it sounds desponding.

> **Omkhulu**: If I have a job, you know, at home, I'm a big sister. I'm a big sister. Sometimes I feel like I don't have...
> **Amahle:** you fail your family.
> **Omkhulu**: I fail my family.

Without anthropological attention to norms and values (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b), we cannot understand South Africans’ obsession with jobs as opposed to grants. Elizaveta Fouksman (2020) has reached such a conclusion through ethnography and the works of E. P. Thompson (1971; 1991). The latter’s emphasis on the paramount relevance of norms, values, and rights among commoners is a landmark in moral philosophy, for it

reveals immanent critiques of capitalism and classical economics (Honneth, 1995). Honneth and Fouksman have only forgotten to highlight that Thompson's moral economy taps into Malinowskian reciprocity as a regulating principle of social life (1991, p.187)[279].

Authors such as E. P. Thompson and Karl Polanyi (1977, p.16)[280] were acutely aware that social thought had become too vulnerable prey to what the first called "crass economic reductionism" and the second "economic solipsism". Not only the social life of Trobrianders but human action, as such, is driven by diverse motives. Before both, Marcel Mauss was acutely conscious of this and pledged a return to *les droits anciens et les économies anciennes* (1923-1924). He knew that, save for a bunch of acquisitive societies, those that had separated rights in person and res (Maine, 1861), humans are *échangistes*, not *machines à calculer* (Mauss, 2002, p.18;100). For Mauss' students, it was a handbook truism that economics had not parted ways with morality and law[281].

Moral economy (Thompson, 1991) builds on the vernacular comprehension that the circulation of things and their prices cannot be extricated from reciprocities or mutual obligations among persons. My point is that it converges with Mauss's understanding of the economy as a moral phenomenon. Both authors emphasise *reciprocity* as a widespread regulatory principle of social life. To be sure, utility remains a significant value, and *homos reciprocus* and *eoconomicus* are not alien to each other (Chanial, 2008). As I said in Chapter IV, the latter author summarises reciprocity as a rule premised on *l'empire du rien sans rien.* One of Fouksman's interlocutors expressed it with succinct elegance.

> It's better to work than to get something for nothing. It's just better to get money for something you've done.

Fouksman's interlocutors (and mine) long to define themselves by what they do, among other reasons, because a jobless life is a bore - and boredom is a "torment" (Freud et al., 2004). My second assistant, Amahle, also wanted insignia – "I wanna epaulettes here, I wanna be a big sister!" Her current status as a recipient of a public gratuity fits her poorly. When she and other interlocutors call the child-support grants 'a free money',

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[279] We know all about the delicate tissue of social norms and reciprocities which regulates the life of Trobriand islanders, and the psychic energies involved in the cargo cults of Melanesia; but at some point this infinitely complex social creature, Melanesian man, becomes (in our histories) the eighteenth-century English collier who claps his hand spasmodically upon his stomach, and responds to elementary economic stimuli (Thompson, 1991, p.187).

[280] As Freud, Polany dwelt in Red Vienna and was an enthusiast of the city.

[281] *Au-dessus de l'économique et la régissant, le droit, des phénomènes juridiques et moraux* (1926, p.11).

they convey an understanding of its minimal value: it is cash given without a counterpart in labour. And labour, save for "menial" (Atkins, 1994), may well constitute a pleasure[282] and an obligation, as the country's majority party has historically proposed and promised[283]. Amahle and her sisters (Omkhulu and Ukhuna) complained about the grant's value but deemed it unfair to raise their voices too loudly.

> **Are you happy about the money you are receiving from the Government?**
> **Ukhuna:** Yes, I can say I'm happy because I didn't work for it. It's for free. Government is helping where she can.
>
> **You don't sound too happy.**
> **Ukhuna:** Yes, it's small, but I cannot say it's small.

Only free citizens can complain; only moderate free citizens reckon they shall not complain about things free and helpful. I also see such dialectics of moderation and freedom at play in the alternation of interlocutors who deem the child-support grants "right" (or morally correct) and not right (or morally flawed because insufficient). I interpret this comprehension that a gratuity cannot be simultaneously free and copious as another signal that a temperate, reasonable conception of rights, not an abusive culture of entitlement, prevails among my interlocutors. Most of them desire money redeemed (or reciprocated) through work. No free lunch, they exclaim, but a deserved and gorgeous meal afforded by a decent paycheck!

My fourth conclusive remark reads: I do not think scholars should call for grants when our interlocutors' moral economy and desiring imagination remain centred on jobs and businesses[284]. Calling for a human economy (Sharp et al., 2014) with some measure of commitment to the aggregate demand may resonate better with our interlocutors' perspectives on social affairs. That is not all an anthropologist should do (Sharp, 2013), but it seems a necessary kick-off for a social science attentive to its resonance and legitimacy (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2018; Stahl, 2013). More than bottom-line survival allowed by free cash, my collaborators long to put their creative energies into practice and enjoy the pleasures and toil of creating and recreating their social and material world

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[282] Graeber (2020) has acute observations on the perversity of defining labour as a self-sacrificing, miserable experience.

[283] We still are in freedom, but people are suffering, and the government promises us big jobs, houses, big thing, but didn't do it! (Personal archive.)

[284] That does not mean being against grants – which I am not at all. The same, incidentally, applies to planned pregnancy. Supporting it does imply enthusiasm at anything like the Club of Rome.

(Graeber, 2001). *Homos faber* and *eoconomicus* do keep an existential rapport with capitalism (Thompson, 1967; Ingold, 2000). Fortunately, they are neither the absolute realities that economic solipsism portrays (Polanyi, 1977) nor minor aspects of our shared humanity.

Like fertility, education and a rewarding professional life are cherished values in South Africa, among other reasons, because of a history in which labour and educational demands and proselytism mingled with the struggle for freedom, or rights and citizenship in their indissociable tandem (Marshall and Bottomore, 1950; Pocock, 1995; Seekings, 2000; Lodge, 2011). In this connection, I would like to add another pinch of Thompson to Fouksman's extraordinary work and appropriation of moral economy. In other works (1966, 1978), the British historian also described how a three-centennial "plebeian" struggle later made a right-conscious and labour-oriented collectivity. His point is that historical confrontations between groups – say, the "plebs" and the "gentry" (1978, p.145) - perceiving their interests and customs as antagonists come prior to more cohesive social formations, such as class and its fervid expression in class consciousness.

As Dubow puts it for White colonists in the Cape, "the struggle created a people" (2011, p.28). So did the African national struggle: it brought forth a people (and a constituency) speaking the idioms of liberty and labour[285]. From the 1980s on, the connection between a renewed (and organically based) ANC with the unionised Black workforce altered the country's balance of power and led to the democratic settlement (Lodge, 2011). The working class, the educated but unemployed, and more lumpen elements participated in generalised mutiny. Though they had different approaches to the national revolution underway (Lodge, 2011), freedom –understood as liberation from apartheid, not liberal democracy (Hickel, 2015)[286] – and labour served as an accommodating umbrella for most. That does not imply, pace Ferguson (2019), a Eurocentric analytical frame, but rather the acknowledgement that work and liberty had always been a Black project[287]. As a discursive norm (Butler, 2005), and despite massive unemployment, labour continues to limit what is sayable and legitimate for South Africans. Some have chosen not to work (Seekings and Moore, 2013). Still, most within

[285] Dubbeld (2021, p.12) states that the "anti-apartheid struggle" made powerful "collective subjectivities" possible.

[286] On more "traditionalist" approaches to the social and political order, more generally, and gender relations, in particular, see also Dubbeld (2021). Interestingly, the latter author and Hickel (2015) conducted fieldwork Kwa-ZuluNatal.

[287] According to the Constitution of the South African Native National Congress its objective was to "educate the Bantu on their rights/duties" and "propagate the gospel of the dignity of labour" (ANC, 1919).

the vast and heterogeneous universe of the country's "poor" (Simmel, 1965) consider that jobs, not grants, make the moral manner of social reproduction. And they so think precisely because many before them struggled for the right and duty to work.

> The right is for us parents to raise our children. […]. But because of Government contributed the money to children, so it helps a lot (Kaya).

The right, correct or adequate (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b) is for parents to provide. Kaya told me she once worked as a domestic helper in Pretoria and could try it again. To my knowledge, she has not. Other interviewees said the same, but none, to my knowledge, has done so. The dignities of work have been internalised as a local project and according to local standards or work ethics (Atkins, 1994). They, therefore, remain submitted to an equally local hierarchy between the desirable and the intolerable. The child-support grant offers an intermediate path, keeping an overall normative orientation to labour while allowing women to avoid the undesirable (Coser, 1973). Among all my interviewees, only Thabisa said she disliked domestic labour and relied on a couple of child-support grants whilst two of her kids lived with their grandparents, who accepted the situation for a while[288]. The grants shielded her from a job she overtly abhors. In other words, they granted her some level of autonomy and dignity (Wright et al., 2015). My fifth conclusive remark is that the child-support grant fosters *freedom* because it is given for free and allows some to live as they choose: very modestly, but without resorting to local versions of bullshit, menial jobs (Graeber, 2013; Atkins, 1994).

III

> You don't take money from my salary. Me, I give it to you. Cause last time I want gogo to make a ritual for the money. Gogo was supposed to make a ritual on the first day... to the ancestors. [She] was supposed to take the [whole] money and tell the ancestors: 'Here's the money my grandchild is getting. She must get lucky, and more, a job' (Luthando).

I registered the excerpt above on December 26th, 2019, after Luthando and I pooled money to continue the Christmas celebration. My host, friend, and assistant complained that I had discounted from her salary a couple of expenses I incurred on her

[288] At some point in 2022, they took the child-support grants to which Jasmin and Unexpected were entitled.

behalf at the beginning of the month. Luthando warned me not to do it again, for she needed the integral payment to propitiate the ancestors. Magogo would offer them some chicken, *mqombothi* (sorghum beer), etc*.,* in exchange for good fortune and a *job*. That was, in other words, a tit-for-tat transaction between the living and the dead, all present in this world (Ngobese, 2003).

To be sure, ancestors remain present in Luthando's world, not among the foragers discussed by Widlok (2016) and taken by Ferguson (2021) as his main inspiration. San hunters and gatherers believe the dead are gone and absent. They cannot be called to support the living nor demand them anything. There is no commerce between worlds apart.

> The living are freed of limitations and demands that may be ascribed to the dead because the dead cannot back-up their claims through a recognised form of bodily co-presence. In comparative perspective, this finiteness of personal presence is in fact a social achievement that seems to be an exception rather than the rule (Widlok, 2016:82).

I cannot say it is a freer world, as Widlok seems to suggest, among other reasons, because some of my interlocutors think of freedom as the bilateral availability of those who coalesced in shared lives and partake in each other's things and thoughts as they please, that is, mutually. As I argued in the Interlude on Presence, these interlocutors "have each other", "look after each other", and remain "free for each other" in each other's ineluctable sense, that is, reciprocally - unless one is *niazo*[289]. It does not follow that all exchanges are meant to be reciprocated in a balance-sheet-like equilibrium. Instead, it means that happy bonds are mutual – "Freedom is happy[ness]; you live together"[290]. For instance, when living together in the narrow adjacency of informal settlements, people are expected to be there for each other. In these cases, "the is" of neighbourhood and "the ought" of neighbourliness amalgamate. Thabisa, for instance, fell short of words when asked about a hypothetical neighbour who was not there for another.

> **Why you can't live without a neighbour?**
> Because sometimes you got a problem, and your family are staying far. So your neighbour is going to help you! Like, I don't have mile-meal right now. I'm staying at [the township], my family is staying at

[289] Niazo indicates a haughty person, one who thinks he has others unilaterally and can look down on them – see Chapter III.
[290] Personal archive

> KwaNdebele. It's far. At least, when I come to my neighbour - Can you please borrow me some miliemeal? She or he will give me.
>
> **What if he doesn't give you?**
> Which means... She or he... Oh, I don't know what I can say. That neighbour, she can't take care of all people… Because you can't live alone. You never live alone. You'll need other people to help sometimes, even if it's not the money. But one thing, lots of things. There's a lot of things your neighbour can help you, as a nature. We live...

At stake is the nature of neighbourhood as a social concept, not *physis* recast as sociality in adjacency. Presence in this Thesis matters not only because of neighbours' duty to help each other and keep a rapport based on some level of mutual availability, ergo reciprocity. My three South African assistants took me into shared worlds either consolidated by reciprocal alliances (Henaff, 2010) or disrupted by the absence thereof. Amahle's neighbour and *sis,* Ukhuna, remained obliged to her grandmother because the latter had always "been there for her". Ukhuna expressed her allegiance to magogo through a legalistic language: "I took as my duty to stay at this home. This house I see as my legacy". When the matriarch passed away, my interlocutor expected her father to signal his presence. In Amahle's words, he should have checked on her and gogo's house. Money as much as a visit might have communicated to Ukhuna that she was no longer alone, but her genitor offered none. She interpreted his tacit refusal as follows.

> **Ukhuna:** I understand a gift is from your heart.

In the Interlude on Presence, I stated that the reduction of the gift to warm sentiments and generosity (Ferguson, 2021) was infantile. I overstated a little. The gift's morality does presuppose munificence and warmth – or warm sociality and affects (Hénaff, 2003, p.318). It is also underpinned by the kin sentiments of gratitude and obligation, as in *much obliged.* The gift's world, in any case, is neither a pristine Rousseaunian fraternity nor the Christian love sublime conveyed in the grace of non-reciprocable gifts (Henaff, 2010). On the contrary, warm sociality remains intertwined with a pragmatic orientation to reality, in that part of the ego's relation to alterity is genuinely made of self-interest. In Caillé's (2008, p.185) formulation, *l'interêtet pour soi et l'interêt pour l'autre* [or *aimance*] go in an actual tandem. Both are real; none is truer.

In Presence and Social Obligation (2021), Ferguson over-romanticises the gift-based model of sociality to finally state, as "actual", a Hobbesian world, in which fear for the other is the primary drive and immediacy-derived pressure the ultimate or sanctioning force of obligations[291]. Obligations, in this sense, are not only blunt or *immediate*, that is, non-mediated by reflection (Bird-David, 1994). Above all, such duties are premised on an anti-social human nature – the *homo homini lupus* paradigm. More than a non-contractual world, it is an asocial world, for there is no desire for the other (Butler, 2005) and no desire for norms and values (Karsenti, 2012a). I believe there is no better instantiation of the social bond qua a unity of love and duty, presence, pleasure and constraint than Ukhuna's summary of her rapport with magogo through the latter's house.

> **This house is your legacy.**
> I said, because [...]. When my grandmother started to build this house, I was young. I was 7 or 8 years old. She love[d] her house very much. She loved her house, so that's why now it's my duty to love her house as like she did. Because she was there for me, she raised me with... with all her heart.

In other words, a duty to love, a pleasure in obligation, and a gesture of recognition mingled in the empirical attachment to a thing as concrete as a house and constraining as a legacy. All this makes an adorable combination of South African vernacular legalism and gusto for *magogos* in their fantastic ability to bind through love, care, and *presence* (or "being there for"). Amahle, one of my few interlocutors who did not grow up with a magogo, had a similar example at home. By virtue of his longstanding presence and a routine of reciprocal daily pleasures, cares, and duties with magogo, 17-year-old Lassy had become part of gogo's real estate.

> She is saying that Lassy is her child... He belongs here.

Thabisa also had a language of attachment to magogo's house, yet one commensal, not legalistic. She and her younger sibling, Bongani, had grown up together at magogo's. There with them was also Esulu and, until 2011, Esulu's mother. When the latter passed away, and Thabisa's marriage with Teboho started deteriorating, my

[291] Ferguson (2019) also discusses the relation between fear, presence, and redistributive politics.

interviewee quit Pretoria and returned to her grandmother's house. She kept good recollections from the period.

> **And what were you doing together**?
> **Thabisa:** Eating our grandmother's SASSA grant, buying us food, staying, laughing, good. Life was good.

This commensal alliance is to be understood through the contrast it forms with the pattern of rapport between Thabisa and her mother. To a familiar, even jocose granny, my interviewee opposed a "rude", shouting mother, who was also portrayed as overly self-interested and money-oriented[292]. Thabisa attributed her pregnancies - above all, the first one – to her mother's absence – "If I was staying with her, maybe I won't get too much babies, cause it's your mother, supportive". In Ukhuna's language, Thabisa's mother had not been there for her (through material support) after moving to Johannesburg. Mokoene and Khunou (as cited in Moore and Seekings, 2019) have recently indicated tensions derived from maternal migration.

In the account of herself she gave me, Thabisa affirmed that part of her trajectory had the imprint of unfreedom – or, in Buter's (2005) words, represented the "unchosen" in her life. We can speak of it as a missing alliance with her mother, but it also involved the state's absence or economic unfreedom. According to Thabisa, her mother did not receive the child support grant by the time she (Thabisa) got pregnant (2004). As little money as U$30 monthly might have made Thabisa not "have to have" two boyfriends.

Thabisa's emergence as a mother indexes the social fact of dispossession (Butler, 2005). Her agency was undermined by structural factors, such as a policy to tackle extreme poverty that had not yet reached a massive scale. Fortunately, she found solace and caring support in a magogo and an auntie beyond her consanguine circle of kin. Margaret and Luthando helped Thabisa care for her firstborn, and my interviewee spoke the gift's language whenever depicting their assistance. Thabisa fancied giving Margaret things as expansive and unforgettable as a car, converted into an eloquent sign of recognition and gratitude.

[292] Through the *imagérie* of the snake. By 2016, Luthando depicted wealthy businessmen in townships as having a deal with the reptile. So have Hickel's interlocutors (2014). One considered the snake a dissociative animal, as opposed to cows. The latter is productive of kinship, whereas the former is destructive of it (2014, p.123). Hickels called it a local critique of accumulation stemming from "the moral economy of witchcraft". Surprisingly, Hickel teaches at the London School of Economics, but he does not mention the works of E. P. Thompson.

> The value of the object matters but only to the extent that it is a symbolic value: a value that testifies to the importance of the relationship and, therefore, to the wish to honour the recipient (Hénaff, 2010, p.144).

Margaret cared for Thabisa's firstborn even though she "knew" the child did not belong to her family. Later, Margaret and Luthando cared for Andile and Lethu as their own children. Thabisa, in turn, offered her excellence in cooking and nursery until Luthando's decease in June 2020. Before then, Luthando had been two times on the verge of death. In all these circumstances, she resorted to Thabisa's caring hands. For a long time, they kept a vital exchange of gifts and services, reaffirming and honouring their alliance in shared lives. By June 2021, while we discussed our bonds and ethnographic partnership with Luthando, Thabisa recollected another vital, gift-based exchange between herself and our shared friend.

> [Luthando] told me – 'Thabisa, I've got three months I didn't drink the [antiretroviral] pill. I have to go to the clinic'. I take Luthando to the clinic. I was begging the sisters [nurses]... After, Luthando bought a jeans and a T-shirt to say – 'Thank you, Thabisa, you are the best'. Cause the sisters, they say – 'We don't want to give you the pills again'. I was begging, Daniel.
>
> **Why didn't they want to give the pill again?**
> Because of she... She didn't take the treatment nicely.

I have reached the end of this Thesis and would like to begin it with a proviso. All my interlocutors and I benefited from free health care in South Africa and are grateful for a liberality that only free countries offer their citizens and their guesses. I have been a guest treated with care, respect, and warmth in South Africa. As an interlocutor once said, I was received "as a brother". Indeed, and, as Maussian, I am and shall remain much obliged - *reconnaissant* (Caillé, 2019). In Chapter I, I narrated Luthando's and my iterated attendance to a public clinic in KwaNdebele, where I was tested for sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, and given the hearty attention of all staff. Luthando, too, received all available care, medicine, respect, and love from these public servants. Love for a *sis* was, I suppose, the reason why the clinic's receptionist once recommended Luthando the virtues of self-love.

Luthando did remain for long periods without taking the "pills". Such was a well-known fact among some, including myself and the clinic's staff in KwaNdebele. In 2017,

Luthando mentioned difficulties accessing anti-retrovirus medicine in a clinic serving the informal settlement in Pretoria. This information was finally eliminated from the available version of my master's thesis due to a recommendation from the board (which I found adequate). I now present it for two reasons. First, Thabisa communicated it to me, and my démarche is premised on the belief that my interlocutors have given me sincere accounts of their and other selves. More significantly, I think the receptionist at the health clinic in KwaNdebele praised the virtues of self-love to Luthando precisely because her erratic behaviour concerning the free antiretroviral therapy indexed a self-destructive drive.

Let me state my last conclusive remark. Without a theory of values particularly sensitive to the local hierarchies in which values exist (Haynes and Hickel, 2016), one cannot comprehend the tragic seal Fortuna marked on Luthando's lot. Pregnant and HIV positive at the very beginning of her sexual life, my first and foremost South African assistant, host, and friend also lost her baby and was subsequently informed she would not conceive again. Not even ancestors in their reciprocal commerce with human beings could help her. According to Thabisa, Luthando used to say – "I'll never do a child again". Being reproduction and fertility utmost values for many Black South Africans (Ngobese, 2003; Krige, 1968), Luthando was condemned to a less than meaningful, less than wholly worthy life. Martha's decease in May 2020 made things more complicated for her. She lost her dearest source of bed warmth.

The fact that Luthando could not conceive again does not mean she had no other project (Cardoso de Oliveira, L., 2022b). She did have, and I returned to South Africa in 2019 because her plans included me. Between October 2019 and May 2020, Luthando would say she longed to buy Margaret a house and help her brother thrive, perhaps affording him a professional course. Luthando continued longing for a job in her commerce with the ancestors and counted on Martha's mediation. She also enjoyed being the breadwinner at her granny's house and receiving a daily flow of female and child visitors. Luthando affectionately shared her food, bed, time, and care with them. Yet she counted on Martha's return from Pretoria. In April 2020, Luthando called me in the administrative capital to communicate the matriarch's death. Laconically, my friend observed she had to be "strong".

> Another way of looking at presence then is disappearance and absence (Widlok, 2016).

Luthando no longer had the strength to face Martha's absence at her bed. After losing her child and discovering she was HIV positive at 18, she occasionally embarked on self-destruction. Sixteen years later, Luthando reached a point of no return. Thabisa thinks the infection by HIV in 2004 had desperately revolted her. I believe the awareness she would no longer conceive made it finally unbearable. *Unyumba* (barren) is a "hateful" word in IsiNdebele, according to Ukhuna. When I asked her whether it was possible to be simultaneously happy and childless, she answered in the negative – "No, cause you'll be called with names. Barren. *Unyumba*". Not even a job could remedy the situation. None of my South African interlocutors has ever used *unyumba* or milder terms to speak about Luthando. I guess they were too sorely aware of the stigma and suffering at stake. If children are blessings from God, then the absence of such a gift may make things "unacceptable" (Ngobese, 2003). When we take values seriously, we must envisage their pleasures and the tolls they take on those we love.

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Annex I – Semi-Structured Interviews[293]

I - Personal Questions:

1- What is your name and sir-name?

2- What is the meaning of your name?

3- When and where were you born?

4- What is your first language/mother tongue?

5- How many brothers and sisters do you have?

6- Did you grow up with your parents? What about your brothers and sisters? Have you ever lived with your magogo? What can you tell me about your childhood? Were you happy?

7- Did your parents were working?

8- Did they receive any grant?

9- Do they still help you?

10- Do you have matric?

11- Did you quit school before matric? Why?

12- Are you working? Have you ever worked?

13- Would you like to work? What would you like to do as a job?

14- What wouldn't you like to do as a job?

[293] Semi-structured interviews conceived by my assistant Amahle and me in December 2019.

II – Questions on Children:

1- How many children do you have?

2- What are the names of your children?

3- What is the meaning of the names of your children?

4- How old were you when you became pregnant?

5- Did you know how to prevent pregnancy?

6- Can you tell me a bit about the circumstances in which you had each of them? How old were you? Were you dating? Was it planned? Why did you decide to have the children?

7- Are you living with the father of your children? Have you ever lived with the father?

8- How many children do you want to have?

9- Do you like to have a big family? Why?

10- How is the feeling when you're pregnant?

11- Were you happy or sad when you received the news you were pregnant?

12- When you found out you were pregnant, how did you feel about your boyfriend?

13- Now that you have full responsibility, how do you feel about being responsible for someone? Is it tiring to be a mother? Is it rewarding?

14- Do you like breast-feeding?

15- Did you drink alcohol during the pregnancy?

16- Were you happy to hold your baby for the first time after birth?

17- How did you feel when you heard your child first crying?

18- How did you feel when you thought, 'Now I'm a mother'?

III – Questions on Child Grants

1- How much are you receiving as CSGs? Do all your children receive the CSG?

2- Are you happy about the money you are receiving from the Government? Do you think it should be more? How much more?

3- Have you heard about the word rights? Do you think the CSG are a right?

4- Do you think the CSG belong to the mother, to the children or to both?

5- How does the CSG help you?

6- When the money is finished, do you have somebody helping you? Does the father of your children help you? How much does he give you monthly?

7- How much money do you spend monthly for the groceries? How much do you spend with pampers or clothes for the children? Do you give them pocket money?

8- Do you have other expenditures, like school fees or items for school, such as uniforms, pens, and notebooks?

9- What do you do when the child is sick?

10- Do you have other income than the CSG?

11- Are you struggling with the CSG/OAG? Is the money too small? Is it enough for the children?

12- Do you spend this money on you? How?

13- What do you do on SASSA days?

14- Do you borrow money from neighbours, family, or friends to help you when you are out of cash?

15- Do you lend money to neighbours or family members when they are out of cash?

Annex II – Questions on Payment[294]

1- Did you like to take part in the research about the SASSA grants?

2- Did the interviews change your way of thinking about the SASSA grants?

3- Did you like to talk about your past? Was it a good opportunity?

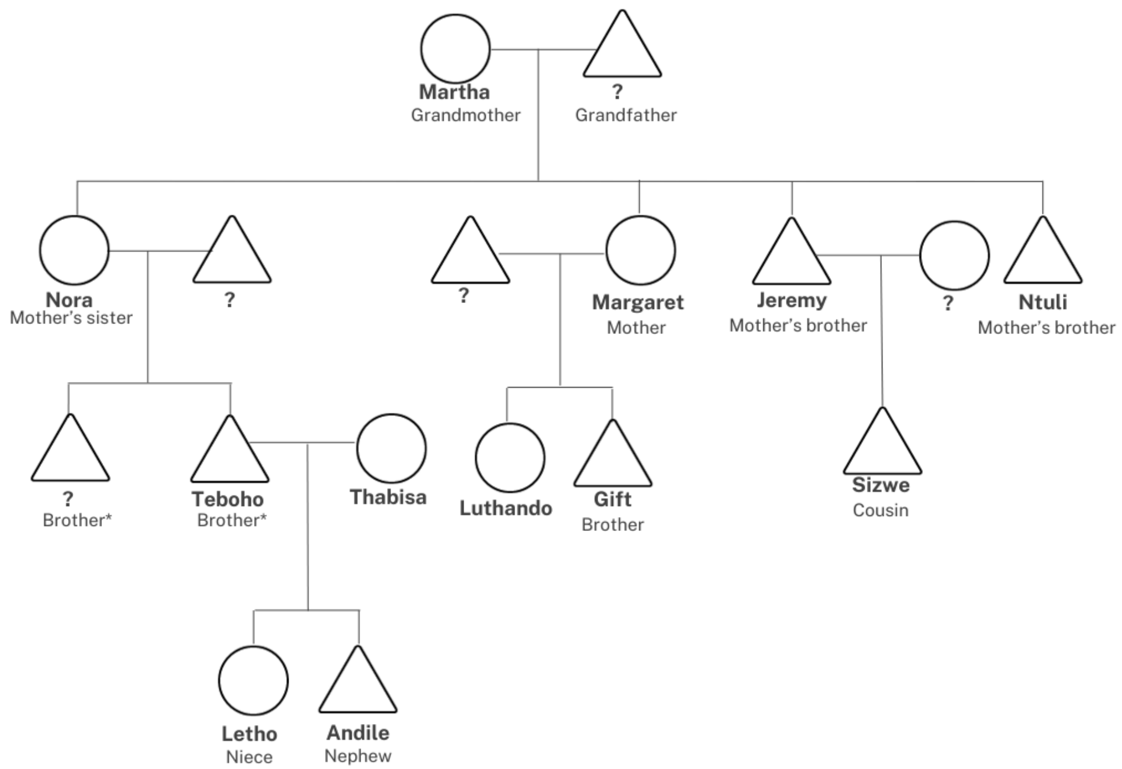
4- Do you think that these interviews should be paid?

5- Do you think that ZAR 60 is a fair value for each interview?

6 - If another person came here, would you take part in another research about the SASSA grants?

[294] Questions conceived by me in January 2020.

Annex III - Luthando's Kinship Diagram[295]



[295] I put question marks to signal those relatives whose names I do not know.