

**Tenacity and welfare on the road to
elsewhere: one woman's efforts to make
stable life from Marikana informal settlement,
Potchefstroom, South Africa**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Ouma, who taught me about *lang moete* and a lot about life.



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
CWP	Child Welfare Potchefstroom
DA	Democratic Alliance
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
DIY	Do-it-yourself
DSD	Department of Social Development
GEAR	Growth Employment and Redistribution plan
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency

ABSTRACT

Post-apartheid liberation promised South Africans economic, spatial and social inclusion. Current everyday South African realities, however, show that the historical inequalities have not disappeared; instead, they persist and, in many cases, have deepened. This dissertation chronicles the life and everyday efforts of one woman, who I call “Ouma”, as she crafts stable life from a post-apartheid informal settlement and from the outskirts of the city and the economy. I use Ouma’s concept of *lang moete* (durable courages) – which she describes as the practice necessary for withstanding the instability of everyday life in the post-apartheid informal settlement of Marikana, in Potchefstroom, South Africa – and develop it as an analytical tool and a political claim to meaningful life. I illustrate that everyday life in Marikana is incoherent and episodic, and *lang moete*, therefore, relates not to sustained perseverance but multiple events of courage. Based on eighteen months of participant observation (and multiple return visits), I argue that mobility, navigating welfare as a system of social capital and tactical exchange, and learning to cultivate viable aspirations all capacitate the existence of *lang moete*. I provide a metaphorical geography of *lang moete* wherein I argue that the above-mentioned conditions all held together enough substance for *lang moete* to therefore exist a) on the move, b) from making an alienating welfare system work on one’s own terms and c) in the possibility for multiple and mobile futures. Throughout the accounts in this dissertation, Ouma becomes a figure through which the continuities and discontinuities from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa are portrayed. Instead of economic, spatial or social inclusion, post-apartheid liberation has placed Ouma in-between spaces and in-between personhood and non-personhood, and it was in learning to occupy these liminal spaces that Ouma has maintained stable life.

Keywords: aspiration, informal settlement, *lang moete*, mobility, stable life, welfare

OPSOMMING

Post-apartheidsbevryding het aan Suid-Afrikaners ekonomiese, ruimtelike en sosiale vryheid belowe. Die hedendaagse Suid-Afrikaanse realiteite dui egter daarop dat historiese ongelykhede nie verdwyn het nie, maar eerder bly voortbestaan het en, in baie gevalle, verdiep het. Hierdie verhandeling teken die lewe en alledaagse pogings van een vrou (wat ek “Ouma” noem) aan, soos wat sy daaglik stabiele lewe vanuit ’n post-apartheid- informele nedersetting en die buitewyke van die stad en die ekonomie geskep het. Ek gebruik Ouma se konsep ‘lang moete’ – wat sy beskryf as die nodige praktyk om die onstabiliteit van alledaagse lewe in die post-apartheid- informele nedersetting van Marikana, Potchefstroom, Suid Afrika te deurstaan – en ontwikkel dit as sowel ’n analitiese instrument en ’n politieke aanspraak op betekenisvolle lewe. Ek illustreer dat die alledaagse lewe in Marikana onsamehangend en episodies van aard is en dat ‘lang moete’ dus nie betrekking het op volgehoue volharding nie, maar eerder op veelvuldige gebeurtenisse van moed. Gebaseer op agtien maande se deelnemende waarneming (en herhaaldelike terugkeerbesoeke), argumenteer ek dat mobiliteit, die navigasie van welsyn as ’n stelsel van sosiale kapitaal en taktiese uitruiling en die kultivering van haalbare aspirasie alles ‘lang moete’ se bestaan moontlik maak. Ek voorsien ’n metaforiese geografie van ‘lang moete’, waarin ek argumenteer dat die bogenoemde bepalinge genoeg wesenlikheid bymekaarhou vir ‘lang moete’ om a) aan die beweeg te bly, b) die benutting van welsyn op haar eie terme moontlik te maak en c) in die moontlikheid van veelvuldige en mobiele toekomste te bestaan. Deurlopend in die vertellings in hierdie verhandeling word Ouma ’n figuur waardeur die bestendighede en onbestendighede van die oorgang van apartheid- na post-apartheid-Suid-Afrika bedink kan word. In plaas van ekonomiese, ruimtelike en sosiale insluiting het post-apartheidsbevryding Ouma tussenin ruimtes en tussenin menswees en nie-menswees geplaas, en dit is in die besetting van hierdie liminale ruimtes dat Ouma stabiele lewe kon onderhou.

Sleuteltermes: informele nedersetting, ‘lang moete’, mobiliteit, stabiliteit, strewe, welsyn

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CHAPTER 1: BEGINNING AFTER THE END: AN INTRODUCTION

'Maar', she said as we walked through the tall grass from her zinc-roofed house to my car, '*wat kan ons maak? Ons moet maar net lang moete hê.*' ('But what can we do? We simply need to have durable courages.') She had used this phrase often over the past eighteen months that I had come to know her, but for some reason, this time I was not convinced. As I greeted her, I looked her in the eyes and told her to be strong, making a fist with my hand. What a farce I was, I thought as I drove away from Ouma's house that Friday afternoon in February of 2020.

In October 2018, a month after I had started doing participant observation with Ouma,¹ I visited her one afternoon where she was sitting on a broken, upholstered grey office chair under an acacia tree in her garden in Marikana informal settlement. Ouma was a physically small and frail black woman of sixty years old and my main research companion for my master's degree fieldwork in social anthropology. She lived in a small *makhukhu* (colloquial term for corrugated iron shack) in Marikana informal settlement on the outskirts of the city of Potchefstroom with her partner, Madala, and four children.²

Whenever I think of Ouma, I picture her in a skirt or dress with a floral print, flip flops and a *doek* (headscarf) skilfully wrapped around her head. The fine wrinkles around her eyes and a few missing teeth revealed that she had had a tough life, and the protruding sores under her feet were evidence of years of hard labour and poor healthcare. Yet she loved to laugh, and her wrinkles and missing teeth reminded me of her laughter. None of the four children she cared for were her biological children. Three of the children (two boys, aged eight and thirteen, and a girl of seventeen) were her biological daughter's children, of which both parents had died. The fourth child she cared for was her partner's nephew, aged eight.

On this afternoon in October 2018, Ouma's partner's nephew was rubbing her shoulders where she sat on the broken chair under the tree. She said, '*Die stres lê hieso*' ('The stress lies here'), pointing to her shoulders. I asked her why she was stressed, and she started crying when she told me that the children's foster care grants that she had acquired a few years previously were

¹ 'Ouma' means 'grandmother' in Afrikaans. It is a term of respect, endearment and kinship.

² Marikana informal settlement is located about fifteen kilometres from the city centre of Potchefstroom, North West, South Africa. It was established in 2012 when a group of people occupied the vacant piece of land opposite the former coloured group area, Promosa. It receives no municipal service provision, and the residents live in small self-constructed corrugated iron shacks, colloquially called *makhukhus*. Potchefstroom is a small city with a university and a large student population. The closest large city is Johannesburg, around 150 kilometres away.

'afgekap' ('cut off') and that 'die geld wat nou nie weer uitsteek nie' ('the money that is not sticking out again' [not being paid]) caused her anxiety.

She said that she had visited the Department of Social Development (from here on 'DSD') multiple times, but the staff were striking. From October 2018, the DSD staff had participated in a labour strike of five months, demanding better salaries (Van der Westhuizen, 2019). In Chapter 4, I elaborate on the implications this strike had for Ouma's everyday life. The strike notwithstanding, in the next few months, we learnt that her grants were cut off because she had failed to disclose to the social worker who handled her case that she had moved from a small farming town called Delareyville to Marikana.³⁴ We also later learnt that foster care grants need to be renewed every two years and that her grants would have been cut off anyhow, if she did not continually renew them in time.

Furthermore, we learnt that she could not apply for any childcare grants, as the children did not attend school. I agreed to help Ouma enrol the children in school and reapply for her foster care grants. In an arduous process, outlined in more detail in the subsequent chapters, Ouma acquired formal foster care for her three grandchildren, and by April 2019 she was their lawful caregiver. She could not, however, obtain foster care of her partner's nephew, since we could not prove that he was indeed an orphan.

Eighteen months later (and ten months after the official end of my required fieldwork period), on a sweltering Friday afternoon in February 2020, I once again made the trip from my home in the suburbs of Potchefstroom to Marikana informal settlement to visit Ouma. Ouma was no longer only my research companion but had become someone I dearly loved and cared for. Now, in February 2020, Ouma no longer lived in a *makhukhu* in Marikana but in a brick house that Madala had built where their *makhukhu* used to stand (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of the house Madala built). Theirs was the only brick house in Marikana.

I pulled up to their zinc-roofed house, parked under a nearby tree and walked to the makeshift gate. Ouma, who was sitting on the same broken office chair under the acacia tree in her garden as eighteen months before, started crying as she greeted me with an endearing hug, saying that she had thought she would never see me again. During my visit to Ouma that Friday afternoon, I sat on a three-legged plastic chair next to her under the acacia tree, listening to her telling me that only one of her children was enrolled in school for 2020, meaning that only one of the three

³ Delareyville is a small farming town in the North West Province, located about 300 kilometres from Johannesburg.

⁴ Delareyville is a small farming town in the North West province, located about 300 kilometers from Johannesburg.

foster care grants she had acquired would pay out at the end of the month. In addition, she told me that her partner had become emotionally controlling and had locked her and the children out of the house that morning.

Similar accounts had become familiar to me. During the foster care application process, Ouma had decided to report these events to the social worker, who simply responded that she would talk to Madala about his behaviour. This time, however, Ouma insisted that she would take the children and move to her sister in Johannesburg. Her plans to move to Johannesburg were why she was scared she would never see me again. Although we kept contact via cell phone, Ouma was scared that she would leave before we were able to say goodbye.

From her previous experience of her grants being *afgekap* due to her moving, she expressed worry that her grants would once again be cut off when she moved. She also worried about how she would inform the social worker at the DSD of her moving, as she did not have time to travel to the offices to inform him before she planned to leave Potchefstroom. I stayed with her for a while, and then she walked me back to my car. As we spoke about her sudden loss of income and Madala's control, she stated in conclusion, '*Maar wat kan ons maak, ons moet maar net lang moete hê*' ('But what can we do? We simply need to have durable courages'). I responded by telling her to be strong, making a fist with my hand.

A few days later, she called me to say that she and the three youngest children were then living in an informal settlement in Protea Glen, a suburb of Johannesburg, and that she had managed to find schools for two children.⁵ When I asked her how she was, she responded that they were doing well and that she was happy. However, a few days later, she called me to ask for the number of the DSD, as she still had not managed to reach the social worker. When I spoke to Ouma the last time in September 2020, she still had not managed to transfer her foster care grants.⁶

As I drove away that Friday afternoon after my last visit with Ouma, I remember feeling incredible frustration. I wondered how it was possible that Ouma found herself in the same socio-economic position as when I had started my fieldwork, despite our efforts to secure three foster care grants and schooling for her children. I wondered whether our efforts had been futile and what precisely social support, in fact, meant if it did not produce a change in, or sustained, financial stability for the recipients thereof. With the memories of queueing at government offices for hours still sitting

⁵ Protea Glen is a suburb of Johannesburg located just west of Soweto and north of Lenasia.

⁶ In a later conversation, I learnt that Ouma received the R350 monthly Covid-19 relief grant as well.

shallowly in my body, I was, above all, frustrated on Ouma's behalf and surprised that she was willing to start the process all over again.

Ouma reminded me of Sisyphus, who, in Greek mythology, was doomed by the gods to push a rock up a hill for all eternity, only for the rock to roll back down over his body and for him to repeat the process. It is said that the gods doomed Sisyphus to this terrible fate for two reasons: firstly, to punish him for betraying Zeus and tricking Hades, and secondly, to keep Sisyphus busy enough so that he could not get up to more trouble (Parker & Stanton, 2006:188-189).⁷

Initially, I thus thought that this dissertation should reflect on why nothing had seemingly changed in Ouma's life and why welfare enabled her neither financial security nor the hope of a better future. I felt that I needed to make sense of my own frustrations. Then a moment in the middle of my fieldwork made me realise that my ideas of what a 'better' life looked like were in dissonance with Ouma's ideas and that asking why nothing had seemingly changed only exposed my own liberal short-sightedness about the conditions of life in a post-apartheid South African informal settlement.

A moment in the middle

'Deur 'n gaatjie in die muur van haar nuwe sinkplaathuisie het 'n opdringerige morning glory sonder skroom op sy inwonerstatus aanspraak gemaak. Ek het gegrap dat dit 'n huisplant is. Sy het haar vingers deur sy gekrulde takkies gevleg, geglimlag en gesê: "En hy's mooi."

Own translation: 'Through a hole in the wall of her new corrugated iron sheet house, an insistent morning glory laid claim to its occupant status without hesitation. I joked that it was a houseplant. She wove her fingers through its curly branches, smiled and said, "And he's [it's] pretty.'" (Excerpt from my personal journal in reflection to a moment in the field on 22 February 2019).

On 22 February 2019, Ouma moved with the four children in her care from their self-constructed *makhukhu* in Marikana informal settlement to a backyard shack in Ikageng township, which used to be the black group area of Potchefstroom. We used my car for the move. The shack was situated in the backyard of a church and was, in fact, smaller than her *makhukhu* in Marikana but had an ablution block with flushing toilets, electricity and a tap close by. The yard also had a gate, and to Ouma, it was an improvement on her living conditions in Marikana. She explained that she

⁷ I reflected on the relevance of using an old Greek myth as reference to speak about post-colonial forms of structural violence. Although I agree with Latour (2007:20) that Sisyphus's lamentations of his terrible fate as a white man are outdated and not likened to the violence of the post-colony, I still maintain that the act of pushing a rock up a hill pointlessly is a useful image with which to describe my own frustrations and my initial understanding of Ouma's inability to escape poverty.

would rent it for R500 per month '*wanneer die kinners se geld uitsteek*' ('when the children's money sticks out [when the grants are paid]').⁸

Ouma said that the move was for the children to be closer to school (in order to comply with foster care requirements), but I knew that she was also trying to escape Madala's control.⁹ As Ouma, the children and I were packing their belongings into a corner of their new one-room shack, I noticed the curly branches of a purple morning glory (*Ipomoea Purpurea*) growing insistently through one of the holes in the back wall of the room. I bent down to look at it and jokingly said to Ouma, '*Ouma het 'n huisplant.*' ('You have a houseplant.')

Ouma, who loved plants and had cultivated a large vegetable garden in Marikana, came closer, also bent down to it, wove her fingers through the branches, smiled and said, '*En hy's mooi.*' ('And he's [it's] pretty.'). However, a few minutes later, she looked at the plant again and commented that she was going to pick it and put it in a 'two-litre' – an empty plastic two-litre cooldrink bottle – to nurture it. The plant was growing where she and the children were supposed to sleep. When I returned the next time, the plant was nowhere to be seen, neither in the wall nor in a 'two-litre'. When I asked her where it was, she simply responded that she had pulled it out and destroyed it because it had been in the way.

Making moments of liveability: an account of one woman's survival work

How does one tell a story that ends (or does not) the same way it began, without making it only about the absurdity of the story not ending any differently from how it began? In thinking through this question, I realised that my job as an anthropologist was not to define beginning or end but to describe what happened in Ouma's everyday life. Afterall, Joao Biehl (2013:367) maintains that '[l]ife stories do not simply begin and end. They are stories of transformation: they link the present to a past and to a possible future', and it is an anthropologist's job to make these connections apparent. Although Ouma's past and present and possible future seemed indistinguishable, there were still moments in the middle where many things happened and transformed and where Ouma worked to make a life for herself and her children, from a small *makhukhu*, first in Marikana, then in Ikageng (and later also in Johannesburg).

Ouma's life story was not only about non-endings but also about making life from the outskirts of the city and the economy. In this dissertation, I therefore provide an account of Ouma's survival work amidst adversity, or what Das and Randeria (2015:S8) call 'the work that the poor do in

⁸ 'Kinners' is an assimilated form of 'kinders', which means 'children'. Many Afrikaans words are assimilated this way in everyday speech.

⁹ This was a legitimate concern for Ouma, as the state may refuse grants if children do not attend school.

affirmation of life'. The questions that underpin my discussion are as follows: What kind of life did Ouma make and aspire to make? and Which tactics and relationships did she employ in her life-affirmative and survival work?

I argue that the moment in the middle, when Ouma bent down to admire the flower on the day that she managed to move away from Marikana, was what I call a 'moment of liveability'. I draw on Ana Tsing's notion of 'patches of liveability' (2016:14) to develop my concept. In her paper titled 'Earth stalked by Man', Tsing (2016) reflects on the recent global destruction of natural resources. She argues that if the epoch of the Anthropocene (the geological age in which humans influence and destroy natural, environmental processes) were truly global, no life would still exist on our planet. She argues that the fact that life still exists 'speaks to patches of liveability among new forms of death', which implies that the devastation humans have caused to nature is not yet all-encompassing (Tsing, 2016:14).¹⁰

I contend that although Tsing's concept is founded in environmental humanities, it is useful for me to make sense of the moment Ouma bent down to admire the flower. When one reads the first two accounts from after the end and the beginning of my fieldwork, it is easy to assume that Ouma's life was only defined by despair and precarity – that devastation was all-encompassing and inescapable. When Ouma bent down to the flower, she, however, asserted that there was still meaningful life.

The fact that she destroyed the flower later shows that this life was not lasting but patchy, episodic and momentary. Admiring the flower was a moment of liveability, but one that would pass. Her life in Ikageng soon passed too. A few months went by when Ouma and the children lived in the backyard shack in Ikageng, but then Ouma could no longer afford the rent, and as soon as the school year ended, they moved back to Marikana.

Throughout the subsequent chapters, I will show that Ouma was able to make multiple moments of liveability in her everyday life, but none of these lasted. I reflect on the conditions that enabled Ouma to make these moments of liveability and on the conditions that ensured their momentariness. I use Ouma's concept of '*lang moete*', which I translate as 'durable courages', to argue that Ouma's life story is not an epic account of sustained perseverance in the face of

¹⁰ With new forms of death, Tsing refers here to the demise of ecosystems and natural resources. The epoch of the Anthropocene has been widely debated, and scholars of the environmental humanities have come up with multiple alternatives, such as the Capitalocene (Moore, 2016), the Cthulucene (Haraway, 2016), the Plantationocene (Moore *et al.*, 2019) and the Planthropocene (Myers, 2020), to talk about the recent devastation of nature and current lifeworlds.

adversity but rather an episodic account of moments of courage crafted tactically from the precarity of a post-apartheid informal settlement.

Before continuing with my chapter outline, I provide a discussion of the methodology of doing anthropology with one woman and doing it 'care-fully' (with much care). As I have mentioned, Ouma became someone I loved, and my ethical obligation towards her was not only professional but deeply personal. I became intimately involved in her everyday life, did personal favours for her, often brought her fresh food, warm shoes for the winter and baked her a birthday cake for her sixtieth, which we ate together. Writing about one woman's life is difficult to do, especially if one has such an intimate relationship with her. I therefore turn to the work that Joao Biehl and Marjorie Shostak have done with individual women to think through how to write anthropology about one person.

'Making research' with Ouma: doing anthropology with one woman, and doing it care-fully

I first met Ouma in the summer of 2018, a few months before I started my fieldwork. She and Madala¹¹ had started a vegetable garden in their yard in Marikana, from which, at one point, they supplied food to at least seventy people in the settlement. During my fieldwork on water infrastructure in Marikana in 2016, I had visited Ouma's garden with my previous research companion Skhokhorito but never met Ouma. I, however, knew about her and their food scheme, as Skhokhorito had told me about it, and our department of anthropology had helped Ouma and Madala register what Ouma and Madala called 'the project' as a non-profit organisation called Kopanang. They had big dreams for 'the project', and some of their plans included extending the garden and using their non-profit organisation status for securing sponsors.

Ouma and Madala also wanted to professionalise 'the project' and – on my previous supervisor's suggestion – I visited them in 2018 to help them design a logo for Kopanang, as I enjoyed drawing as a hobby. During this visit, Ouma was cheerful. Dressed in a faded floral-print dress and *doek*, she walked me through the garden, proudly showing me the vegetables. She excitedly described and spoke about the printed Kopanang T-shirt she dreamt about wearing. She indicated the place on her chest where the logo was to be printed and wanted her name on the back of the T-shirt. In my notes from that day, I described her as someone with '*ongeloolike lewenslus*' ('incredible lust for life').

¹¹ Madala is the Setswana word for old man and, apart from being the name I called him, functions as a pseudonym.

After looking at the garden, we sat under a makeshift veranda in their yard made from green shading net extended over wooden poles. The shade under the net was a welcome alternative to the suffocating heat inside their shack in the hot summer sun. Ouma carefully selected the fanciest chair – an upholstered office chair that had lost most of its footing and relied on a stone and brick for support – for me to sit on. Madala and another young man also sat on broken upholstered office chairs, while Ouma sat on an old plastic school chair next to me.

When we sat down, Ouma instructed a woman who was running a small spaza shop from underneath the shading net to go buy us a ‘two-litre Coke’ (Coca-Cola) from the nearest shop. The woman sold other cooldrinks, but Ouma insisted that she buy real Coca-Cola. She returned a few minutes later with the cooldrink, and Ouma poured it into brightly coloured glasses. This was the last time I ever saw Ouma buy real Coca-Cola. On other visits, Ouma often sent one of the boys to buy us Twizza – a cheaper soft drink alternative – and once remarked that when her foster care application was successful, we were going to eat KFC and drink Kingsley’s, because what she called ‘*die rykmense se cooldrink*’ (‘the rich people’s cooldrink’) was suitable for a celebration. I found this ironic, as most middleclass South Africans very rarely drink Kingsley’s and, in fact, prefer Coca-Cola. Her buying real Coca-Cola on this occasion signified that it was an important event.

We sat under the net and discussed the logo. ‘*Dit moet ’n oumatjie met ’n swartpot en daai roerstok het,*’ (‘It [the logo] must have a granny with a black pot and that mixing stick,’ meaning with a cast iron pot and a wooden spoon), Madala explained. Ouma nodded in agreement. These elements signified clearly that Kopanang was primarily a food scheme and revealed the gendered nature of who did the labour of cooking the meals. Madala also maintained that it had to be in the colours of the South African flag, and feature the words of the national anthem, ‘Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika’. I drew in my notebook as they explained and then asked a graphic designer friend to refine and digitalise it as a favour to me. They were very satisfied with the outcome when I showed it to them a few weeks later during another visit (see Figure 1-1).

It was during this first logo-brainstorming visit that I asked Ouma if she would be willing to participate in my research project when I started with fieldwork later that year. I explained that I wanted to understand the relationship between childcare and infrastructure, and she agreed. It is possible that Ouma agreed to help me since I helped them with the logo and regarded her participation as a form of reciprocity for my efforts. Throughout my fieldwork, I repeatedly asked Ouma for continued verbal consent to use the data, and she always responded with ‘*ek gee jou toelaat*’ (‘I give you allowance [permission]’).

Madala also regarded me and my research as useful resources for 'the project'. When I started with fieldwork, he offered to introduce me to residents and instructed me to write down what people needed. He said that he wanted to use the data to acquire sponsorships and that, as I was from a university, sponsors would consider the data legitimate and official. What Madala did not foresee, however, was that many residents refused consent because I asked questions about childcare.

My initial plan was to study the relationship between childcare and infrastructure, specifically pertaining to the period after the first thousand days of an infant's life. In reading existing literature about childcare for my research proposal, I had noticed that most of the available literature focused on the first thousand days of an infant's life, and I wanted to address this gap in existing knowledge. I knew that Ouma cared for four children who were all past infancy, and I hoped that she would be able to introduce me to other childcarers.

In the months that followed, none of my initial plans came to fruition. I was not able to access more households or produce data about infrastructure and childcare. During my honours degree fieldwork, a man once chased me out of his house when I showed interest in his son, and Skhokhorito explained to me that the only white women who ever visited Marikana were social workers who removed neglected or abused children (Victor, 2016:3).

Although I was aware of the possibility that this perception of me would persist, I thought that if Ouma or Madala introduced me, the other residents would not be suspicious of me. Madala did, in fact, introduce me to a few residents, some of whom cared for young children. All agreed to speak to me once, but when I asked whether I could return for a follow-up visit, they declined or responded that they had already told me everything I should know. When residents refused to continue speaking to me, I concluded that they perceived me as a social worker or employee of the state. I respected their wishes.

Although I did not gain access to other households, Ouma allowed me to keep what she called '*maak* research' ('making research') with her and, instead of infrastructure, Ouma and I produced data about securing welfare and what it takes to make moments of liveability for oneself and children from a post-apartheid informal settlement. I am grateful towards her for letting me accompany her on her foster care application journey, for letting me into her life and for keeping up with my never-ending questions.

As I have mentioned earlier, Ouma became not only my research companion but someone I loved. She also incorporated me into her household, often asking me to scold naughty children or instructing me to cook. On one occasion, a few months into my fieldwork, it was my task to

chop onions for a meal. When I asked her where the knives were, she looked at me stunned and bluntly responded, 'Musa, *ek vat jou soos my kind.*' ('Musa, I take you like my child.') I took this to mean that by then I was enough of a member of the household to know where she kept her cutlery and that I should not have asked such a silly question.

Another indication of the intimacy of my relationship with Ouma, is that she called me Musa. On my second visit, Ouma and Madala agreed that 'Hestia' was too difficult for them to pronounce, and I proposed that they called me 'Musa'.¹² Musa is the name our Sesotho-speaking domestic worker gave me when I was a little girl, and it means 'Grace of God' in Sesotho. Ever since I was awarded this name, I respond to it and have come to know it as my other name. Both Ouma and Madala were satisfied and henceforth called me Musa, instructing the children to call me 'Aus Musa' (derived from *ausi*, which is the Setswana word for older sister or woman and in this case, signifies respect).¹³ Later in our relationship, Ouma once remarked that the name Musa suited me. According to her, I was a 'gift from God' because she said, '*Jy het my uit die modder uitgehaal*' ('You took me [Ouma] out of the mud').

In Ouma's metaphor, I helped her to move from messiness and darkness into lightness, something I argue in the rest of my dissertation might only be a transient state. Her metaphor indicated that she was not a passive research participant but actively using me as a resource to meet her own agendas. I will not flatter myself in thinking that I was the only person who could have helped her from this 'mud', since she would in all likelihood have found someone else to help her with her application if I had not come along. Just as Madala hoped that my research project would benefit 'the project', Ouma knew that I could benefit her survival work.

My work with Ouma involved many hours of driving with her in my car between welfare offices, schools and state departments. Apart from driving, I also spent various afternoons with Ouma and the children (mostly boys) in Marikana, where they performed gumboot routines and we would draw pictures together to keep the children off the streets. This often happened on a Friday afternoon. In Chapter 5, I provide a detailed discussion of my afternoon visits with the children and the drawings we made.

¹² This encounter is significant because in apartheid South Africa, white employers often struggled to pronounce black employees' names and rather gave them 'white', Biblical names. Both Ouma and Madala have 'white' names on their birth certificates. Madala's name is Andries and Ouma's name is Rebecca. Ouma, however, preferred her 'white' name, since her Setswana name was Baikhepi, which meant 'wicked people', and she did not associate with wickedness.

¹³ The Afrikaans version of this word, 'ousie', is controversial in post-apartheid South Africa, as in apartheid South Africa it was used to (and often continues to be used to) refer to domestic workers in a degrading way.

Whenever we drove somewhere or I visited in the afternoon, Ouma would say that '*ons maak weer vandag research*' ('we are making research again today'). Ouma's claim that we were collectively *making* research supports my argument above that Ouma was not a passive informant but an active research *companion*. She was not only an object or subject of research but a researcher in her own right, directing this ethnography about her life.

Her emphasis on *making* research also shows that the production of knowledge is neither an individual act but a collective practice, nor does it exist outside of relationships. Ouma knew and constantly reminded me that data did not appear from thin air but were produced collectively with hard work in relationships. As in the case of Ouma and me, these relationships sometimes extend beyond the field and can become personally meaningful. Moreover, as Allaine Cerwonka and Lisa Malkki (2007:171, 173) argue, data are made in relationships, and these relationships infuse thought and knowledge with affect (2007:176).

Similarly, in her ethnography about one !Kung woman's life, Marjorie Shostak asks what the implications are of telling someone else's story. She too had become personally close to her research participant Nisa and had acquired a !Kung name from her. Shostak (1983:350-351) concludes that it is the anthropologist's labour to tell other people's stories, but these stories are not only ours, and it is our moral obligation to tell them as collective knowledge.

Ouma's phrase, '*ons maak research*', thus also enables me to address the meaning of informed consent. To Ouma, saying that she gave me '*toelaat*' ('permission') to use the data from our research making efforts did not mean that she gave me permission to do with it what I pleased. She insisted on being a companion researcher and forced me to reflect on the fact that the information and accounts I provided in this dissertation were not mine, but ours – in fact, mostly hers – and that I had an obligation to represent them as co-produced knowledge.

Although I was deeply intertwined in Ouma's life and she often asked me to speak on her behalf at schools and government offices because '*jy kan praat*' ('you can speak', [meaning that I knew bureaucratic language]), she also knew how to 'speak' in particular contexts. Often as we were getting out of the car at an office of school, she explicitly told me that she would handle a conversation and that I was only to observe and listen. Sometimes she asked me to make appointments and to fill out forms on her behalf. Simultaneously, she managed to regulate my involvement in her affairs and the information she gave me access to.

As I wrote this introduction, I realised how little I knew about Ouma's life before Marikana. I know that she grew up on a farm in the North West Province and had worked as a domestic worker, as a farm assistant and for a farmer's wife who ran a deli. She rarely spoke about her history and

gave me contradictory stories when I asked her about her life as a young woman and mother. At one point, I assumed that she did not want me to pry into her history and I stopped asking. This led to my own confusion about which accounts of Ouma's life that I held to be true were, in fact, true. At first, I felt that I misunderstood or that none of my data were valid. Then I realised that this was Ouma's way of exerting agency in the admittedly invasive research process and handpicking the domains of her life that she was willing to let me into.

One example is the three different causes Ouma gave me for her daughter's death. At first, she said that her daughter had died in her sleep, then that she had started coughing in the middle of the night and then that she had died from a headache and seizure. My confusion was exacerbated when Ouma's granddaughter said that she had seen that her mother's death certificate stated 'natural causes' as the cause of death but adamantly asserted that her mother's death had been due to 'tradition *dinge*' ('tradition things'), not 'natural causes'. When I asked her which 'tradition *dinge*' she was referring to, she simply responded in English, 'traditional things, you know' and refused to talk about it further.¹⁴

In his book, *Vita: life in a zone of social abandonment* (2013) Joao Biehl follows the devastating life story of Catarina, a Brazilian woman whose family left her in an asylum called Vita when she started having trouble walking. Biehl developed a deeply personal relationship with Catarina, which spanned many years and many visits. He helped Catarina reconcile with her family, paid for her medication and arranged for her proper treatment. Vita is what Biehl calls a 'zone of abandonment' – a place where people who are no longer wanted by their families (such as the ill, mentally ill and disabled) are left to die, abandoned by their families and the Brazilian state.

Biehl argues that when doing anthropology with one person, it is not about giving that person a voice, as he or she already speaks on his or her own terms (2013:10) and 'claim[s] experience on her own terms' (2013:7). He shows that even if an individual lives in a context of abandonment and adversity, he or she is not completely subsumed to institutions (or researchers) but able to claim personhood and agency within that adversity. He therefore maintains that the ethnography that results from anthropology with individuals is useful for understanding 'how personal lives are assembled and valued and ... embedded in larger ... processes and institutional rearrangements' (Biehl, 2013:12).

¹⁴ I suspected that she was referring to witchcraft and that talking about it would further invoke curses or anger ancestral spirits. Ouma and her household identified themselves as Christian but also believed in the power of witchcraft and magic. John and Jean Comaroff (1997:153-154; 2001:274-275) have similarly observed the co-existence of Christianity and witchcraft among Setswana-speaking populations in the North West Province.

Catarina, Biehl (2013:4) argues, became a figure through which to think about larger political institutions. I argue that Ouma too is a figure through which to understand the continuities and discontinuities of life from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa – an embodiment of what has changed and what has remained the same. One concern with the anthropology of individuals is the extent to which these accounts can be used to speak to the conditions of life of other individuals in similar circumstances. Although Ouma may be a figure through which to understand the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa (since she represents a particular category of person, namely marginalised black South African women), this account remains an intimate and localised portrayal of one woman's survival efforts in very particular circumstances.¹⁵

Biehl writes, '[f]ollowing the words and plot of a single person can help us to identify the many juxtaposed contexts, path-ways and interactions, the 'in-betweenness' through which social life and ethics are empirically worked out' (2013:10). Biehl's focus on in-betweenness and how ethics and social life are worked out in liminal spaces is of importance for my own research. In Chapter 3, I argue that moments of liveability became possible in Ouma's occupation of liminal spaces and that much of my own, and our collective, reflection happened in-between places and conversations. The in-betweenness of social life in or from a post-apartheid informal settlement is also reflected in the episodic nature thereof. Episodes of liveable life happen in-between the general course of everyday life, in-between spaces and in-between people's relationship with the state.

Throughout his book, Biehl not only tells Catarina's story but asks what made Catarina and the other residents at Vita unable to escape its abandonment. Vita can be read as a life history but also as a metaphorical geography of abandonment as it is inscribed on one woman's body. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation each describe episodes in Ouma's life – episodes of adversity and episodes of liveability. They form the interrupted contours of a metaphorical geography of *lang moete* as I try to make sense of the conditions of possibility for *lang moete* in which relationship, aspiration and mobility hold together enough substance for *lang moete* to exist in a space such as Marikana.

¹⁵ At first I argued that Ouma's efforts may represent the survival efforts of many South African women, since she represented a particular category of women, but have since realised that such generalised archetypes are problematic for anthropology since they detract from the strength of local, intimate and context-specific accounts. Still, many marginalised black women in post-apartheid South Africa live in similar socio-economic circumstances to Ouma and may therefore face similar challenges to those I portray throughout this dissertation.

The contours of *lang moete*: chapter outline

I title the second chapter 'The lay of the land of *lang moete*: Ouma's efforts in context and conversation', to describe the physical context of Marikana and to place Ouma's concept of '*lang moete*' in theoretical context. I return to a moment before the beginning of this fieldwork, when I did research about water infrastructure in Marikana for the purposes of my honours degree in 2016. In the moment that I describe, an old man called Rasta maintained that there was life in Marikana because children were born there. In my honours degree mini-dissertation, I argued that the life Rasta asserted was present in Marikana was buoyed by an innovative project that residents called 'DIY formalisation' (do-it-yourself formalisation), where they auto-constructed water infrastructure in their settlement (Victor, 2016, 2019).

I then contrast this to a moment, a few days after Ouma moved to Ikageng, when she described Marikana as a '*donker, swart plek*' ('dark, black place'). I use this tension to describe how the context and conditions in Marikana have changed over the past few years and discuss which conditions have enabled life in Marikana to persist and which conditions have made Ouma describe Marikana as a *donker, swart plek*.

Using the genealogy of thought that Elizabeth Povinelli (2011:134) calls the 'critical theory of life and death', I draw on the work of Achille Mbembe (2003), Giorgio Agamben (1998, 2005) and Fiona Ross (2010, 2015) to make sense of this tension between life and darkness. I argue that Ross's concept of 'raw life' (2010, 2015) is useful for speaking about the social and material conditions of life in Marikana and that Ouma's life could not simply be reduced to Agamben's politically unqualified 'bare life'.

I also heed Biehl's (2013:365) call that anthropologists do concept work with their participants' own concepts, and I develop *lang moete* as a theoretical concept to talk about Ouma's efforts. I place this concept in conversation with Elizabeth Povinelli's (2011) and Patricia Henderson's (2012) work on endurance amidst adversity and ask what *lang moete* look like and where *lang moete* can exist in a context of 'raw life' – what the possibilities and limitations thereof are. I return to my concept of moments of liveability to argue that *lang moete* do not speak to epic, sustained perseverance but to multiple episodes of courage.

I also trace *lang moete* etymologically to argue that Ouma's efforts were aimed at making life steadfast and stable, if only for moments. I argue that *lang moete* resonates with the ability to endure the episodic nature of life in poverty and create coherence and steadfastness amidst this 'episodic-ness'. I consequently expand my own concept of buoyant life to argue that the life I observed in Marikana in 2016 was not the life I observed from 2018 to 2020, and that buoyancy

and stability looked different. Thinking from the statement that ‘making courages’ and stability are crafted tactically in everyday life and arrangements, I use the next three chapters to describe what these arrangements looked like for Ouma.

In Chapter 3, titled ‘From Marikana *innie dorp in*: mobility, liminality and making moments of liveability on the move’, I therefore discuss what mobility meant for the emergence of *lang moete*. I use Ouma’s phrase *innie dorp in* to firstly situate Marikana and Ouma in the history of apartheid urban planning and to show that spatial inequalities persist. I then reflect on my car as a marker of historical and current spatial exclusions and conclude that the car was both a site of research making and a site where *lang moete* emerged.

I argue that liberation in South Africa has not meant social mobility for Ouma but rather placed her in-between spaces, always on the move. Using Povinelli’s (2011) notion of ‘eventfulness’, I provide a critique of development and its emphasis on *waiting* for progress. It was in moving that Ouma counteracted the violence of waiting and in inhabiting the liminal and remaining on the move that she was able to cultivate *lang moete*.

In Chapter 4, ‘Making *lang moete* on a road to nowhere: re-politicising and re-socialising welfare’, I provide multiple accounts of the encounters Ouma and I had with welfare throughout the course of my fieldwork. I journey through the history and policy of social support in South Africa, which is based on developmental principles such as empowerment and self-sufficiency to provide context for these encounters. I then use these encounters together with the work of James Ferguson (1990, 2005, 2013, 2015) to argue that welfare as a tool of development depoliticises poverty and makes it the poor’s problem.

Once again utilising Ross’s (2010, 2015) notion of ‘raw life’, I show that welfare keeps ‘raw life’ neatly intact, meaning that the self-sufficiency it promises is not enabled and the recipients thereof are instead kept on a road to nowhere. However, I also illustrate how Ouma managed to make welfare work for her and tactically used it in her networks of exchange, thereby re-politicising aid. Through crafting relationships across welfare organisations, she also managed to re-socialise an alienating aid system where grants only addressed material needs (albeit partially) and not social ones (Ferguson, 2013:235). I thus conclude that *lang moete* became possible where and when Ouma could draw on different kinds of relationships to access resources and work the system.

Chapter 5 is titled ‘Flower vases, taxis and houses: drawing pathways of aspiration from a *donker, swart plek*’ and deals with aspirations and possible futures. In this chapter, I use drawings that I made with Ouma and the children in Marikana, as well as a description of the brick house that Madala built to reflect on how one learns to aspire from a context of ‘raw life’ (Ross, 2010, 2015).

I take a brief tour through Bourdieu's practice theory to argue that learning to aspire and the practice of aspiration are contextual and regulated by one's material and social conditions. Using Appadurai's (2004) notions of the capacity to aspire, aspiration map and pathways of aspiration, I provide a discussion of the types of aspirational pathways that the conditions in Marikana make possible. I conclude that the possibilities for aspiration in Marikana are tactical in that they relate to what is viable and that these possibilities reflect 'raw life' and therefore, with welfare, reduce the possibilities of turning raw life into what Salo (2004) calls 'respectable' life.

However, I also argue that since aspirations are tethered to context, they reflect people's own ideas of what respectability looks like. I provide an account of Madala's house to support my position and to show that realising aspirations takes hard work and can have adverse side effects, such as an erosion in social networks or politically meaningful implications, such as claims to belonging, personhood and legitimacy. *Lang moete* become possible where different futures become possible and where these possibilities are kept open.

In my concluding chapter, I provide a short account from a moment 'Long after the end' of my fieldwork, when Ouma returned from Johannesburg to Marikana for a visit and to inquire about her foster care grants. During this visit, Ouma, a social worker from the DSD and I sat under the acacia tree to discuss the way forward for Ouma's grants and the implications her moving had on her ability to access aid. In reflecting on Ouma coming back to Marikana, under the tree, despite having moved to a different city, I conclude that life in a post-apartheid informal settlement is episodic and incoherent.

Survival requires the endurance of this episodic nature of life and repeatedly crafting moments of liveability and stability. In remaining on the move, occupying liminal space, tactically using welfare and the relations that it made possible, and all enabled moments of liveability and were the spaces and moments where *lang moete* could emerge and exist. Before continuing with Chapter 2, it is, however, necessary to provide clarification on some of the terms used throughout the dissertation.

On murky terms and turf: defining the terrain

Poverty or the poor

In their introduction to a special issue in *Current Anthropology* titled 'Politics of the urban poor: aesthetics, ethics, volatility, precarity', Das and Randeria (2015) interrogate what the term 'the urban poor' means. They illustrate that the category of 'the poor' has historically developed with charity and welfare so that 'the poor' have come to be regarded as people who are in need of aid and cannot sustain their own livelihoods (Das & Randeria, 2015:S9; see also Simmel, as cited in Englund, 2015:S138). However, they show that poverty means different things to different people

in different times and contexts. In some contexts, poverty refers to the quantity (often lack) of material belongings; in other contexts, it means not having social relations to draw on, while in yet other contexts, it means not having a specific place of dwelling or a physical shelter. There is not one singular, universal definition of 'the poor'.

Writing about the working poor in America, Kath Weston (2008:xx) argues that the terms 'rich' and 'poor' themselves obscure the nature of poverty as a relationship. She writes, 'Poverty is never some affliction that mysteriously fastens onto unlucky or unworthy people. A growing disparity has to come from somewhere' (Weston, 2008:xx). This somewhere, she argues, is structural.

Similarly, Andrew Spiegel (2020:7) and Andries du Toit (2019) have both expressed their aversion to the term 'the urban poor', since it obscures the long historical relationship between rural and urban poverty in South Africa that have emerged from the systems of distribution that the migrant labour system produced. Du Toit (2019:1) argues that rural and urban poverty are two sides of the same coin that have emerged from the migrant labour system but continues to persist as post-apartheid economic policies serve 'large multinational corporations and Taylorist trade unions rather than small business and the informal sector'. This makes them 'out of touch with the lived realities, actual capacities, material interests and livelihood strategies of the marginalised rural and peri-urban poor' (Du Toit, 2019:3).

Du Toit's concept of the peri-urban poor may be more useful than 'the urban poor' as an analytic category, since it acknowledges the historical emergence of urban poverty in South Africa. In a different paper, Du Toit (2004) does, however, recognise that poverty in South Africa has become a chronic problem. Writing specifically about poverty among farmworkers and ex-farmworkers, Du Toit (2004:996-997) shows that asset poverty and a lack of social capital are two main indicators of chronic poverty.

Du Toit (2004:996-997) describes asset poverty as an individual's or household's inability to easily access even basic assets, such as food. He further shows that the erosion of meaningful social relationships has contributed markedly to poverty, as having relationships to draw on for day-to-day survival are imperative (Du Toit, 2004:996-997).¹⁶ I elaborate on this point in Chapters 2 and 4.

Further indicators used to measure poverty in South Africa is the extreme poverty line, which is an income of R585 per person per month and the upper-bound poverty line, which is R1 268

¹⁶ These findings were the result of a quantitative poverty assessment study among farmworkers and ex-farmworkers in Ceres, South Africa. The Chronic Poverty Research Centre developed the tools used.

(Dean, 2020). Furthermore, healthcare, education, living standards and economic activity act as poverty indicators. Households where at least one child under the age of five has died in the past year, where children and adults are or were not able to receive education for at least five years, where people live without flushing toilets and use fuel such as paraffin for cooking and where household members are unable to engage in paid work all constitute what is called 'multidimensional poverty' (South Africa Gateway, 2018).

In the months when Ouma received all her grant money, she earned more than double the upper-bound poverty line amount. She and Madala also owned multiple electrical household appliances, such as a fridge, a stove, a small music keyboard, two computer screens, a small printer and a RaspberryPi (which our department of anthropology had donated to them, see Chapter 5), all of which they had acquired second-hand or from donations or had salvaged from rubble heaps.¹⁷

All Ouma's children survived the first five years of their lives, and most of them have been able to attend school for more than five years. She was able to participate in various forms of paid labour throughout her life, but these jobs did not offer advantages such as medical aid, and none of the jobs were sustainable for long periods. Furthermore, for the time that Ouma lived in Ikageng, she had access to electricity and a flushing toilet.

If one compared the poverty indicators above to Ouma's everyday life, she might not qualify as multidimensionally poor. However, Ouma still struggled to supply her household with clothing in good condition, to secure food and provide daily nutritious meals and to access healthcare. This shows the large discrepancies between the government's measurement of poverty and everyday realities. Returning to Spiegel's (2020) and Du Toit's (2019) arguments, these poverty indicators do not consider the historical emergence of poverty in South Africa and cannot account for its structural persistence.

So, when I use the terms 'poor', 'poverty' or 'the poor' in the remainder of this dissertation, I recognise that their definitions are not singular or universal.¹⁸ What I mean with these terms is the structural conditions that inhibit people, such as Ouma, to sustain their basic needs (such as food and water, clothing and basic healthcare) on an everyday basis even though they may have access to money (in the form of grants), own household appliances and have received more than five years of education. This definition of poverty also relates to the notion of adversity.

¹⁷ The ownership of multiple electric and electronic appliances is not an unusual occurrence in South African informal settlements (Meintjes, 2000; Yose, 1999), and Meintjes (2000) argues that it is a performance of propriety.

¹⁸ I recognise that many of the poor people living in South Africa are not South African citizens.

Adversity

Drawing on Ouma's material conditions outlined above, I use the term 'adversity' to refer to insecure everyday life, where securing basic needs are more difficult some days than others, and some days impossible without the help of others. In Chapter 2, I argue that Ross's notion of 'raw life' (2010, 2015) offers a useful vocabulary to talk about the particular kind of adversity that is present in Marikana.

Marginalisation

Ouma's adversity was also historically produced and intergenerational. Ouma was born in 1959, around the time of the Bantustans' establishment in South Africa. Ouma received what was in apartheid South Africa called 'Bantu education' but was only able to complete schooling until Standard 7 (Grade 9) and never matriculated. She could read and write basic Afrikaans, a little English and Setswana. Not being able to read and write well inhibited Ouma from freely accessing the bureaucratic functions of the state, and someone literate always had to accompany her if she had to fill out forms.

She could not obtain a tertiary education and later in her life relied on '*skroppies*' ('piece jobs'), such as domestic day labour. As a young woman in the 1970s and 1980s, Ouma was subjected to apartheid pass laws, and she lived on the outskirts of cities and the economy her entire life. Marikana is situated on the outskirts of Potchefstroom, and so is Ikageng.

Therefore, when I use the term 'marginalisation', I speak about both historical and continued forms of social and economic marginalisation that keep Ouma on the outskirts of the city and the outskirts of the economy. I refer to her inability to participate extensively in the market economy and not being able to access things like money, food, transport, documents or infrastructure without massive trouble (and transport and helpers from inside the city and the economy).

I am aware of the concerns about marginality, especially those raised by Janice Perlman in her book *The myth of marginality: urban poverty and politics in Rio de Janeiro* (1979), where she argues that the poor are not marginal to the economy but instead, deeply intertwined in it, as they provide the labour that keeps the economy going. In 2005, she revisits her argument and agrees that with rising numbers of 'surplus' or 'redundant' labour, most of the poor can also no longer participate in productive labour and therefore are in fact marginalised from the economy (Perlman, 2005:32; see also Wacquant, 1996, for a similar argument). I expand on the matter of redundant labour in detail in Chapter 4.

Tactic

In his book *The practice of everyday life*, Michel de Certeau (1988) distinguishes between strategy and tactic. He argues that strategy refers to the 'calculation of power relations ... aimed at managing threats' (De Certeau, 1988:36). Strategy, he maintains, is reserved for the proper and is about controlling circumstances and managing space, plans and outcomes (De Certeau, 1988:27, 36). Tactics, on the other hand, are not about management but about 'making do' and using what one has at hand. It is not about controlling space but about manipulating space. He argues that tactics are 'dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances' (De Certeau, 1988:27) and 'play on and with a terrain imposed on it' (De Certeau, 1988:37).

Tactics are therefore more suited than strategy to talk about the things the poor do to get by every day, as these things often require making do with what is available. Throughout this dissertation, I therefore use the term 'tactic' to refer to improvisatory practices that are reliant on using or playing with the conditions and opportunities that the given terrain offers. Throughout the following chapters, I chronicle various tactics that Ouma employed to make moments of liveability. Starting with the 'lay of the land' in Chapter 2, I provide descriptions of how and where the various terrains made these tactics possible or not.



Figure 1-1: The Kopanang logo

CHAPTER 2: THE LAY OF THE LAND OF *LANG MOETE*: OUMA'S EFFORTS IN CONTEXT AND CONVERSATION

In 2016, I spent five weeks in Marikana informal settlement learning about a process that residents called 'DIY formalisation'. Marikana receives no municipal service delivery, and all residents live in small, self-constructed corrugated iron shacks, colloquially called *makhukhus*. A few months after the residents occupied the empty piece of land where Marikana is now situated, the Democratic Alliance (DA, the political opposition party) took temporary control of the ANC (African National Congress)-run Tlokwe Municipality and gave permission to Marikana residents to connect a water pipe to the pump that provided the nearby government-funded neighbourhood of Bram Fischer with access to water.

The residents received donations for pipes and tap appliances and installed the first tap in Marikana in July of 2013 (eNCA, 2013; Victor, 2016:7). Under the guidance of a residential committee, the residents then planned to 'pull' more taps throughout the settlement, but first, they wanted to lay out streets and measured stands.¹⁹ Their reasons were twofold. Skhokhorito, who was my main research companion, a member of Marikana's residential committee and a major driving force of DIY formalisation, told me that the first reason was to simplify the DIY construction of taps, as it was easier to connect taps on straight lines.

The second reason was political. Skhokhorito explained that the municipality had refused Marikana municipal formalisation, as the settlement was too congested. Skhokhorito explained that laying out streets and measuring stands would be an insurgent way for residents to 'meet the government halfway', so that the municipality would no longer be able to use the excuse of congestion to refuse Marikana service delivery (Victor, 2016:8). The residents called this process 'DIY formalisation'.

Moreover, the Marikana residents planned to 'pull' taps to more places in the settlement with the aspiration of one day having a tap at each stand. Skhokhorito argued that if each household had easy access to water, water consumption would increase, the municipality would suffer a noticeable financial loss and would be forced to supply the residents with municipal bills. The municipality cannot supply a bill if there is not a recipient address, Skhokhorito explained. The residents hoped that the increased water consumption would convince the municipality to award

¹⁹ Residents' use of the word 'pull' implies that the tap construction process was laborious and drawn out. The residential committee consisted of five men, including Skhokhorito and Rasta.

residents title deeds to the DIY-formalised stands.²⁰ I have written about this process extensively in my honours degree mini-dissertation (Victor, 2016) and a paper titled “‘There is life in this place’: ‘DIY formalisation’, buoyant life and citizenship in Marikana informal settlement, Potchefstroom, South Africa’ (2019).

While I was doing the fieldwork for my honours degree, I met a man called Rasta. He had long dreadlocks, wore a hoody, a black beanie with yellow, red and green stripes and old, ripped skinny jeans. He was charismatic, poetic and philosophic. He was also the ardent chairperson of Marikana’s residential committee. He was about sixty years old, small built and frail and therefore always carried a knobkierie with him for protection. I, however, doubted that anyone would try to mess with him, as he was well respected.

Rasta was respected not only because of his charisma but also for his ability to – in his capacity as residential committee chairperson – make things happen. From the establishment of the settlement in October 2012 up to September 2016 when I completed my fieldwork, Marikana’s residential committee applied DIY formalisation to approximately two thirds of the settlement. Even though the residential committee was able to DIY-formalise a large part of the settlement, ensuring closer water access to many residents, there was still no tangible possibility of municipal development.

Instead, Marikana was still characterised by the forcible eviction of new residents and the demolition of newly erected shacks by a private security firm working under the mandate of the Tlokwe Municipality.²¹ From my perspective, Marikana was what Achille Mbembe (2003:40) calls a ‘death world’ – a space where the state has abandoned residents to make do or die, and from which they could not escape, very similar to Biehl’s (2013) zones of abandonment. However, after an early morning demolition on a cold, miserable winter morning, Rasta joined Skhokhorito and me on a walk through the settlement.

As we walked from house to house, Rasta stopped at every child under the age of four years. He would stand next to the child, pause and then recite, ‘Do you see this child?’ I would nod and he would continue, ‘When children are born in a place, it means a lot. It means that there is life in this place.’ Marikana was approaching the fourth anniversary of its establishment, and Rasta’s

²⁰ Marikana is situated on a slight slope and the water pressure to many taps is very low. It is thus unlikely that their plan would have worked, as the water would not have reached each tap, and water consumption would possibly not have increased. Skhokhorito knew about this problem, but still maintained that DIY formalisation was a way of ‘meeting the government halfway’.

²¹ The residential committee reached an agreement with the Tlokwe Municipality to allow new residents and shacks only when these residents reported to the committee and received permission to stay. The municipality has since been renamed J.B. Marks Municipality.

adamance that children being born in a place meant that there was life astounded me (Victor, 2016:28; 2019:303).

I consequently changed how I perceived life in Marikana and argued in my honours degree mini-dissertation that the residents' ability to DIY-formalise their settlement and install water infrastructure mirrored and supported Rasta's claim that there was life and meant that Marikana was not a 'death world' (cf. Mbembe, 2003:40). I nevertheless argued that life in Marikana was not all-encompassing or romantic but what I called 'buoyant life' (Victor, 2016; 2019). I maintained that life was buoyed by residents' ability to construct DIY infrastructure and that DIY formalisation was enabling them to resist the curtailing waves of demolitions, evictions and nearly non-existent municipal service provision.

In the backyard shack Ouma and the children inhabited in Ikageng, Ouma was slightly closer to the infrastructural development she had hoped DIY formalisation would bring to Marikana. She now had access to electricity and flushing toilets and was closer to public transport options. A few days after she had moved, I visited her in the shack in Ikageng. She and I sat on white plastic chairs in a small strip of shade of the roof of a neighbouring shack. I asked her whether she was satisfied with her move. She smiled satisfied, nodded and said, '*Dit gaan bietjie ligter*' ('It is going a bit lighter [better]').

On that same day, she and I returned to Marikana to collect more belongings from their shack. We drove in my car, and as we turned into the gravel road leading into the settlement, she sighed and said, '*Hie's ons nou wee by hierrie donker, swart plek*' ('Now here we are again at this dark, black place'). '*Hoekom sê Ouma so?*' ('Why do you say that?'), I asked. She responded, '*Die mense hiesô se harte is swart, pikswart*' ['The hearts of the people here are black, pitch black'].

Memories from before the beginning

As I started this dissertation with an account from after the end of my fieldwork, it feels only fitting to start this chapter with a memory from before the beginning. The purpose is not only stylistic but serves to contextualise my field site. It serves as the first setting in my geography of *lang moete* and provides a figurative 'lay of the land'. In the rest of this chapter, I contrast Rasta's claim that 'there is life in this place' to Ouma's claim that Marikana is a *donker, swart plek* to interrogate how the lay of the land has changed from 2016 to 2020, which parts of social life in Marikana have eroded that provoked Ouma to say that the residents' hearts were black and what the implications thereof are for Ouma's ability to produce moments of liveability.

I therefore use the two themes of a 'vocabulary for life in 'dark, black' abraded places' and 'the erosion of meaningful relationships' as lay lines along which to unravel Ouma's comment that

Marikana was a 'dark, black place' and along which to draw the shifts in context in Marikana, as they relate to political dynamics, material conditions and social networks. I use the word 'lay' instead of the correct term 'ley lines', because 'ley lines' in geography indicate straight lines between two geographical points. The contextual and social connections that I refer to here are not straightforward but messy and wind through different times, places and relationships.

I draw on Ross's (2010, 2015) ethnography of everyday life in a post-apartheid informal settlement and use her notion of 'raw life' to argue that it is a useful vocabulary for speaking about everyday life in Marikana. As Ross has done, I question the usefulness of Agamben's notion of 'bare life' to explain what Ross (2010:4-5) calls the slow erosion of the everyday and simultaneously use the work of Povinelli (2011) to expand this vocabulary for talking about the life that is possible in the ruins of everyday forms of structural violence and devastation. I also expand my own concept of buoyant life and show that, although still useful, buoyant life looks different now.

After that, I do concept work with Ouma's concept of *lang moete* to argue that *lang moete* is a political claim to life and a refusal of what Povinelli (2011) calls the 'state's mechanisms of letting die'. I place *lang moete* in conversation with Povinelli's (2011) and Henderson's (2012) work on endurance amidst adversity to argue that *lang moete* do not imply sustained perseverance but having the courage to make episodes of liveable life and to craft the contexts in which these moments can endure.

Unstable contours: from 'life in this place' to a 'dark, black place'

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, when I first met Ouma in her garden in the summer of 2018, the garden was beautiful and lush, 'the project' was doing well and she and Madala were hopeful about the future of 'the project'. Her aspirations for 'the project' were supported by DIY formalisation and the potential for life and infrastructural development that it made possible, especially seeing that it was with DIY formalisation that a water tap was 'pulled' right to their yard that enabled the garden. Both Rasta and Skhokhorito (the instigators of DIY formalisation) also supported 'the project' and it thus carried political weight. It was therefore in this context that I expected to encounter Ouma again when I eventually started my fieldwork. Little did I know how much things had changed.

By early 2017, both Rasta and Skhokhorito had left Marikana. Rasta and his wife obtained a government-funded house in Mafikeng, while Skhokhorito left due to political quibbles with other residents. When I spoke to him afterwards, he told me that he then lived in another new informal

settlement in Potchefstroom called Baipei Ward 4 and that he was starting a DIY-formalisation project there.²²

I assumed that, despite their leaving, the remaining members of the residential committee and the residents of Marikana would continue with DIY formalisation and that they would finally receive municipal service provision. My assumptions and hopes proved deceptive. When I started with my fieldwork in 2019, the residents had failed to DIY-formalise further parts of their settlement, and the air of possibility I previously felt in Marikana had waned.

Moreover, Ouma was no longer bubbly and hopeful that ‘the project’ would bear fruit. She never spoke about wearing a Kopanang T-shirt anymore. Her garden stood testimony to this. The garden was empty and neglected, except for a small grapevine, the acacia tree and a few succulents. Even after I had brought her seeds, the plants seemed reluctant to grow, as if they too fell victim to despondency. Besides, Ouma was getting old and had callouses under her feet that prevented her from labouring in the garden as she used to do.

With her statement that Marikana was a *donker, swart plek*, Ouma implied that she no longer experienced the life, and the possibility of future life, that Rasta had adamantly asserted was present. Her statement was not much different from the image I held about Marikana before my walk with Rasta in 2016. In fact, after my walk with Rasta, I spent a large part of my honours degree mini-dissertation showing how Marikana was precisely not ‘a dark, black place’, as I too had thought at first. I drew mainly on Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s work on ‘bare life’, which he defines as politically unqualified life (1998:8).²³

I argued that the Marikana residents’ construction of DIY infrastructure enabled them to refuse the reduction of their lives to politically unqualified life, since DIY formalisation was a deeply political claim to physical and social life. I used Povinelli’s (2011:118) image of what she calls the ‘victims’ of state abandonment ‘swimming against the tide until they cross a line or exhaust

²² Baipei is the Setswana word for ‘informal settlement’, and many informal settlements in Potchefstroom are called by this name. Marikana was also first called Baipei, until the residents changed its name to signify solidarity with the 34 mineworkers who were killed at Marikana on 12 August 2020 (Alexander, 2013; Victor, 2016:1).

²³ Agamben (1998:12) argues that sovereign power determines which life and populations qualify for human rights, and which are exempted. He writes mostly, albeit not exclusively, about the Nazi death camps of the Second World War and interrogates what enabled Nazi soldiers to justify the deaths of Jewish prisoners. Agamben (1998:8) then argues that life in the camps was in what he calls a state of ‘exception’, where human rights no longer applied to the Jewish population, so that their lives were consequently ‘bare life’. He defines bare life as life that ‘may be killed and yet not sacrificed’ (Agamben, 1998:8). Later, in his book *State of exception* (2005), Agamben extends the camp metaphor to prisons. See also Edkins (2000:4-6) for further discussion. Fassin (2010:82-83), however, points out a weakness in Agamben’s argument. He maintains that Agamben’s separation of physical life from existential life is problematic because it oversimplifies life and does not allow us to talk productively about survival (Fassin, 2010:82-83). I will return to further discussions in the main text of the chapter.

themselves'. I argued that with DIY formalisation, residents were swimming against the tide, refusing to be overcome by abandonment or to be reduced to bare life; their life therefore was buoyed by DIY formalisation (Victor, 2016 & 2019).

Using this argument, I showed that Marikana was not Mbembe's (2003:40) 'death world'. Inherent in Mbembe's idea of death worlds is the notion of impending slow death. Rasta's adamantness that there was life in Marikana was so convincing that it outshined the possibility of imminent slow death. However, Ouma's description of Marikana as a *donker, swart plek* powerfully invoked Mbembe's death world and now overshadowed Rasta's claim that there was 'life in this place'.

Yet, despite the stagnation of DIY formalisation, the residents kept their measured yards intact, neatly maintained fences, erected speed bumps in the streets, planted trees and increasingly made beautiful small gardens with canna lilies and succulents. The infrastructure and remnants of DIY formalisation were still tangible and carefully maintained. This implies that the residents were still using DIY formalisation (even in its inertia) to claim political life and that evidence of the life Rasta experienced had remained. Similarly, I maintain that Ouma's commitment to *lang moete* revealed that she thought that life was still possible and that, like Tsing (2016) has argued for the Anthropocene, physical and social death was not yet all-encompassing. How then could one talk about the kind of life that was present in Marikana in the aftermath of DIY formalisation?

Lay line one: a vocabulary for life in 'dark, black' abraded places

In her monograph titled *Raw life, new hope: decency, housing and everyday life in a post-apartheid community* (2010), Ross develops the concept of 'raw life'. She too draws on the conversational lineage of Agamben's (1998, 2005) 'bare life' and Mbembe's (2003) 'death world' to formulate her 'raw life' concept. Ross (2010:4-5) struggles with writing about the ugliness that she saw in her field site called 'Die Park' (later 'The Village'), without pathologising its residents, while still recognising the efforts that people have made to ensure stability and coherence in everyday life.

Die Park was an informal settlement on the outskirts of Cape Town. The residents lived in self-constructed shacks without municipal service provision, and most of them were unemployed. They were later relocated to a government-funded neighbourhood called 'The Village', where they received brick houses and basic service provision, but Ross (2010:29-210) shows that poverty, unemployment and precarious material conditions persisted.

Writing in response to Ross, Das and Randeria (2015:S11) comment that Ross's work is about forms of 'everyday devastation' and how people make lives amidst them. Ross (2010, 2015) argues that Agamben's bare life is therefore not useful for talking about the everyday life that she

observed in Die Park, since this life was not marked by the dramatic violence of war (as in Agamben's work) but by the slow erosion of the everyday. Instead, she calls life that is marked by disruption, instability, loss and structural violence 'raw life' – life that is uncooked, unfinished and rough (Ross, 2010:4).

Ross (2010, 2015) goes on to explain that she derived her notion of raw life from Mbembe and Agamben's work, but that it was most notably formed by Susan Griffin's comment on an etching by artist Käthe Kollwitz called 'Poverty' (1897). On the etching, featuring an impoverished mother sitting with her head in her hands next to her dying child, Griffin (in Ross, 2010:4) commented, 'Never have I seen so clearly that what we call poverty is simply a raw exposure to the terror and fragility of life.'

In her book *Economies of abandonment: social belonging and endurance in late liberalism* (2011), Povinelli similarly questions the usefulness of Agamben's and Mbembe's ideas for talking about contemporary everyday devastation. She calls the canon of literature on life amidst precarity 'the critical theory of life and death' (Povinelli, 2011:134).²⁴ Writing about indigenous Australians' everyday struggles to make alternative life projects in post-colonial Australia, Povinelli (2011:134) too argues that this canon of thought has focused too narrowly on large-scale killings. She specifically refers to Michel Foucault's and Agamben's work on Nazi deathcamps (and later prisons) and to Mbembe's work on African colonisation (Povinelli, 2011:133-134) and the concepts that emerged from this work (such as 'death worlds' and 'bare life'). Instead, she (like Ross) proposes to extend the conversation about life and death to more mundane, everyday forms of killing, such as those faced by her indigenous Australian interlocutors and friends. She argues that the everyday precarity her interlocutors face is not spectacular and characteristic of the mass killings or catastrophe that Agamben, Foucault and Mbembe have written about, but rather 'everyday, uneventful forms of misery and dying' (Povinelli, 2011:146).

Having been oppressed under colonial rule, Povinelli's (2011:53) indigenous research companions still endure poverty and marginalisation even in post-colonial Australia where they are largely dependent on the welfare of the state. This represents a situation like the socio-economic position of many coloured and black people in post-apartheid South Africa, including Ouma.²⁵

²⁴ Although Povinelli acknowledges that the critical theory has to some extent 'run out of steam', to use Bruno Latour's (2004) phrase, because it always says how the world should not be, instead of offering useful alternatives, she agrees that it is still valuable to be able to point out what is wrong in the world.

²⁵ I do not wish to exclude South Africans of other races who are also poor, but coloured and black South Africans continue to be most notably ostracised by post-apartheid economic policies. The term 'coloured' is currently contested, but still an official category.

Taking her critique of the 'critical theory of life and death' canon as starting point, Povinelli (2011:145) then extends Mbembe's ideas of what death worlds mean to show that instead of being spectacular, these worlds (such as those her interlocutors inhabited) are what she calls 'rotten worlds'. She uses the macabre image of decomposition to illustrate that death and decomposition in these rotten worlds occur slowly during the mundane course of everyday life (Povinelli, 2011:135-137, 143-145). She is sceptic of simply reducing her research companions' lives to abandonment pure and simple, precisely because her participants were able to keep making lives even when their material conditions were precarious. Still, she does recognise that her correspondents' worlds were slowly decomposing and that the possibility of death by abandonment, or what she calls 'letting die', was real (Povinelli, 2011:134).

In her book, Povinelli (2011:22, 29) focuses specifically on economic abandonment and the 'letting die' of all forms of life that are not able to contribute to the market economy. This idea resonates well with a comment by one of South African anthropologist Patricia Henderson's (2012:34) participants that his rural KwaZulu-Natal village was 'deliberately forgotten' by the state since there was no municipal service provision.

Ferguson (2015:3), however, shows that the very existence of something like social support in the form of grants means that the state has neither deliberately forgotten or abandoned the poor nor completely excluded them from the market economy, but marginalised them (as Perlman [2005] would argue). A place like Marikana, where many residents are dependent upon state social support, is therefore not characterised by complete abandonment.

In fact, in early 2020, the local J.B. Marks Municipality announced that it was considering formalising and providing *in situ* upgrades to parts of Marikana. The municipality distributed the plans to residents, including Madala, who allowed me to take a picture of it (see Figure 2-1). A prominent reason the municipality offered for not providing development sooner was that the area was dolomitic. Since the establishment of Marikana, the local municipality had withheld dolomite reports from the residents, which made the residents believe that dolomite was simply an excuse to refuse Marikana *in situ* development (Victor, 2016:28).

According to the plans issued to residents in 2020, various parts of the settlement are indeed dolomitic and cannot receive *in situ* upgrading.²⁶ Parts of Marikana are geographically situated on a high-risk dolomitic area, and the potential for large-scale physical erosion is imminent, including

²⁶ On 21 July 2017, the residential committee (assisted by the South African Human Rights Commission) did, in fact, enter into an agreement with the municipality to secure development in Marikana. The residential committee used my mini-dissertation as a supporting document to secure the deal. However, no infrastructural development has happened since then, and the promises remain empty (Leshage, 2019:4).

the piece of land where Ouma and Madala lived. Marikana is geographically situated on an abraded place which complicates the implementation of municipal formalisation.

The promises for *in situ* development have also run dry, and at the time of submitting this dissertation, the municipality has not yet installed any infrastructure in Marikana. These empty promises and the inertia of DIY formalisation ensured that Marikana was also politically an abraded place – not abandoned, but slowly being scraped away not only by persistent material precarity but also by hollow promises. Instead of Povinelli's (2011) 'decomposing worlds' or Biehl's (2013) 'zone of abandonment', I therefore propose the term 'abraded place' to speak about Marikana. Apart from physical and political abrasion, Ouma hinted at social abrasion when she maintained that Marikana was a *donker, swart plek* because people's hearts were darkened.

Lay line two: the erosion of meaningful relationships

Ouma's explanation for Marikana being a *donker, swart plek* was that '[d]ie mense hiesô se harte is swart, pikswart' ('the hearts of the people here are black, pitch black'). Taking the biography of DIY formalisation into consideration, I contend that Ouma's comment referred, firstly, to the abrasion of hopefulness among Marikana's residents. Ouma indicated that the people in Marikana no longer had high expectations of municipal development and their hearts had been darkened by weariness.

Secondly, Ouma's statement alluded to Madala's control of her and her children. She often spoke about Madala being, in her opinion, too strict with the children. In addition, she said that sometimes he chased them away and that he was stingy and refused to share the income he received from piece jobs with her.²⁷ Her statement also alluded to Rasta's and Skhokhorito's leaving, which produced a gap in Ouma's social and political network and in the social and political legitimacy of 'the project'. After they had left, she often commented that she missed them because they were not only concerned with politics but truly cared for the residents of Marikana.

Apart from Rasta and Skhokhorito, Ouma did not have many friends in Marikana. One of her friends was an alcoholic woman who always spoke very incoherently. I only saw her visit Ouma twice in the beginning of my fieldwork. Both times, she brought her *skafting* (empty yogurt container) to fetch and drink Tlokwe – home-brewed beer – which Ouma stored in a twenty-litre

²⁷ In a later conversation, Madala explained that he did not believe he was abusing the children and that he was simply laying down ground rules, for example that the children should be home by six o'clock at night and needed to show respect to elders. He argued that if children did not behave properly, it meant that they thought they were adults; therefore, he chased them away because this meant that they thought they were big enough to care for themselves. Ouma concurred that after a conversation with a social worker, she then agreed that Madala was only being strict, not abusive (notes from 9/11/2020).

paint bucket in a corner of her *makhukhu*. Sometimes Ouma's neighbour from across the street, Antie Magi, brought them food, but Ouma did not like Antie Magi's food as Antie Magi was a coloured woman and, cooking from her Cape Malaysian descent, her food was too spicy for Ouma.²⁸

Ouma often complained that people in the settlement were '*snaakserig*' ('funny-ish', meaning 'nasty') with her because she had a big yard, a close-by tap and a vegetable garden. She used to play card games and gamble with a group of women in the settlement. I accompanied her once, but thereafter she told me that she wanted to stop gambling because she knew that God did not approve of it.²⁹ Furthermore, she was especially worried that the boys would become involved in local gangs, something she tried to counter with our afternoon drawing activities. After Madala had built his brick house and Ouma moved back to Marikana from Ikageng for a few weeks over the December holidays, Ouma told me that no one came to visit her anymore because people were jealous of their house.³⁰

I argue that the meaningful relationships Ouma had and could draw on in Marikana had either disappeared as people moved away or became jealous, or she had exhausted these relationships and they were no longer beneficial to her survival work. 'The project' and the garden as spaces for meaningful sociality had also stagnated and eroded over time and no longer offered Ouma the possibility for creating moments of liveability within them. Once again Ross's work is useful for making sense of the crafting and erosion of relationships in the contexts of 'raw life'.

Ross (2010:5) explains that where life is marked by disruption, loss and violence, 'people must put much effort into developing and maintaining relationships and ordinary rhythms of everyday life'. She shows that despite raw circumstances, her interlocutors from The Park managed to create new hope in solidarity and what she calls 'durable relationships, even if fraught' (Ross, 2010:6). The kind of durable relationships Ross describes here are aimed at creating steadfastness and stability amidst uncertain, raw circumstances. She writes as follows:

Ordinary social relationships are undercut by poverty's cruelty and by forms of violence – both structural and interpersonal – that shape and taint everyday interactions. The effects of apartheid and poverty play out in residents' lives, relationships and social structures: forces against which people pitted themselves and in relation to which they sought to forge meaningful and fulfilling everyday lives in conditions of humiliating impoverishment and contexts that can only be described as ugly. Theirs is a story of constant effort in the face of ongoing erosions

²⁸ 'Antie' is a term of respect for an older woman and is mostly used by South Africans classified as 'coloured'. Most white people use the word 'tannie' instead.

²⁹ I never saw her gamble again, but I am uncertain if she did, in fact, stop.

³⁰ I have considered that my own involvement in Ouma's life may have produced jealousy in other residents, since I often brought Ouma food and resources and offered her my car for transport.

of family, work, stability and residence, created by what I call the 'raw life'. (Ross, 2010:4)

As Ross describes, Ouma also placed value on relationships as things that produced stability and coherence to everyday life, and a lack of sociality therefore meant that Marikana was a *donker, swart*, insecure and abraded place. Ross (2010:4), however, places specific emphasis on how much effort goes into developing and maintaining relationships in raw life and that these relationships do not always last. Relationships are unmade as new solidarities are formed and, as in Ouma's case, as people move around.

All these conditions made Marikana what I call an 'abraded place'; yet (as I have shown in Chapter 1 and will show in the next chapters) Ouma managed to make moments of liveability from this abrasion. In the next section, I develop the concept of *lang moete* as a theoretical tool with which to make sense of the tactics that Ouma employed to make life bearable and to counteract the slow erosion of everyday life.

The conversational contours of endurance: *lang moete* in context and as analytical concept

I have decided to translate the word '*lang*' in Ouma's *lang moete* as 'durable'. Although the direct translation would read 'long', 'durable' better conveys what Ouma meant with this expression. The word 'durable' in Ouma's notion of 'durable courages' share two related, albeit slightly different etymological origins. Firstly, 'durable' comes from the Latin word *durabilis*, which means 'to last' (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2020). Secondly, the word 'durable' also descends from another Latin word *durare*. Although similar in etymological origin and context, *durare* varies from *durabilis* in meaning. Where *durabilis* implies the temporal ability to make something last, *durare* means having the ability 'to harden' or to become steadfast (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2020). *Durare* relates not to time but character.

The best translation for '*moete*' in Ouma's *lang moete* is 'courage', but in Afrikaans, the word '*moed*' refers not only to bravery and valour but also to strength of character and fervour amidst disparity. Therefore, if one wants to say one is disheartened, the translation would be '*moedeloos*' (without *moed*), and if one has new fervour to do something, one would say one has '*nuwe moed*' (new *moed*). Ouma's phrase is possibly her own version of the popular Afrikaans saying '*hou goeie moed*' ('keep good faith') – something one would typically say to someone in a discouraging position, such as a long illness. To rewrite 'durable courages' in this language then means to 'make steadfast and hardened one's ability to encounter life's adversity repeatedly'; and this indeed takes multiple events of courage.

In order to develop *lang moete* as an analytical concept, I use Elizabeth Povinelli's and Patricia Henderson's work on endurance as conversational contours to structure what *lang moete* in the context of raw life means. In her book *Economies of abandonment: social belonging and endurance in late liberalism* (2011), Povinelli draws on long-term fieldwork and friendships with a group of indigenous Australians in Northern Australia. She writes specifically about an augmented reality museum that was aimed at establishing connections between participants, their ancestors and the land that the previous colonial government had removed them from (Povinelli, 2011:6, 110, 138, 140).

Later, Povinelli worked with some of these same interlocutors on an indigenous film project called 'Karrabing Film Collective', which aims to question and intervene upon the longstanding implications that colonial rule has had on indigenous Australians, on the economy and on land (MoMA, 2019; Povinelli, 2019).³¹ Povinelli, however, not only writes about indigenous Australian projects but also draws on fieldwork with alternative projects in the United States of America. She uses all these projects to ask how alternative projects endure marginalisation and state abandonment.

In her beautiful but devastating ethnography, *A kinship of bones: AIDS, intimacy and care in rural KwaZulu-Natal* (2012), Henderson writes about the ethics of doing anthropology with people who are dying from HIV/AIDS (2012) and asks how individuals endure illness and structural violence. Drawing on fieldwork she conducted in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa between 2003 and 2006, Henderson provides multiple accounts of the everyday lives of her research companions who were very ill and poor, lived in rural homesteads (often without municipal service provision) and were largely dependent upon the South African welfare system.

Unlike Povinelli, Henderson (2012:177) is not interested in the endurance of alternative projects but rather in how marginalised individuals make lives 'beyond, despite and up against' the inadequacies of the state. Published around the same time, both authors address questions such as what it means to make meaningful life in a post-colonial country with persistent socio-political inequality, and what death and survival mean in a context of economic marginalisation and everyday devastation.

Povinelli's (2011:32) interest is not in how everyday devastation occurs but in people's substantive 'ability to suffer and yet persist' through this devastation. 'Sustaining perseverances' – the phrase Povinelli uses to describe endurance – implies the ability to last over time, which is, by definition,

³¹ The objective of the films that they produced is educating Australian children (and adults too) on the history of their country, providing an alternative history and re-establishing ethical relationships between humans and land (Povinelli, 2019).

temporal (Povinelli, 2011:118). Temporality is therefore particularly fundamental to Povinelli's endurance, but she does not view endurance only as a simple linear expression of perseverance.

In my reading of *Economies of abandonment: social belonging and endurance in late liberalism* (Povinelli, 2011), she provides two possible interpretations of endurance. In the one, she invokes the notion of exhaustion to describe endurance as 'swim[ming] against the tide until [you] cross a line or exhaust [yourself]' (Povinelli, 2011:118). In this definition, she provides a clear endpoint (*until*) to the project of endurance, namely crossing a line (be that social mobility or getting in trouble with the state) or exhaustion.

Povinelli's image of swimming against the tide towards a finish line reminds one of a marathon where endurance and ultimate victory is possible with perseverance and effort. If one perseveres in the long term, there is a chance of success in the form of escaping the decomposition of rotten worlds. The other possible outcome is exhaustion and therefore the lack of energy to continue persevering. In the Sisyphus image, either one gets the rock to the top of the hill or it rolls back down and one is too tired to start pushing again. However, this interpretation of endurance is not the only one Povinelli offers.

Povinelli (2011:32) also recognises that often, endurance is a continuous project without specified beginning or end. She admits that the aim of endurance is often not to make life remarkably different but to keep life intact and make the sameness last (Povinelli, 2011:160). Endurance in this interpretation therefore relates to the ability to keep pushing the rock, hoping that it will not roll back down. Although I contend that the latter interpretation more suitably describes *lang moete* than the former interpretation, it still implies a bout of continued perseverance rather than the multiple bouts of courage that Ouma's concept implies.

Similar to Povinelli's (2011:32) definition of endurance as the 'ability to suffer and yet persist', Henderson (2012:20) describes endurance as an insistence on mattering: '[a] defiant insistence on the coherence of personhood on the brink of death'. As for Povinelli, endurance to Henderson is firstly an act of defiance – an act of refusing to succumb to the mechanisms of letting die. Secondly, for Henderson, endurance is also about insisting on the substance of being, or personhood, and refusing to be made into Agamben's bare life.

Inherent in Agamben's idea of 'bare life' is the notion that some people do not qualify as fully human and therefore that something like human rights – and the right to life, specifically – do not apply to them. This state of not qualifying as fully human he calls a 'state of exception' (Agamben, 1998:8-12; 2005). Similarly, Joao Biehl (2013:24) also grapples with how to describe

the humanity that defines his participants in Vita and calls humanity that is situated between life and death 'ex-humanness'. Biehl (2013:52) explains it as follows:

[W]hen I say ex-human, I want to highlight the fact that these people's efforts to constitute their lives vis-à-vis institutions meant to confirm and advance humanness were deemed good for nothing and that their supposed inhumanness played an important role in justifying abandonment.

However, as I have argued above, neither Marikana nor Ouma was completely abandoned or completely forgotten by the state, and the full bill of constitutional rights applied to her – at least on paper. Neither the notion of 'bare life' nor the notion of 'ex-human' can therefore accurately describe personhood in Marikana.

Writing about notions of personhood among Tswana-speaking people in South Africa in the latter half of the 1900s, Jean and John Comaroff question simplistic, Eurocentric ideas of personhood. They argue that what they call people's 'imaginings of being-in-the-world' are locally produced and contextually specific (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001:268). Elaine Salo (2004), Jacob Doherty (2020), Alberto Jimenez (2003) and James Ferguson (2013) have all illustrated this well. There are, however, two elements of their conceptualisation of late-colonial Tswana personhood that I contend are useful for making sense of Ouma's life-affirmative practices.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2001:275, 271) argue that among their Tswana-speaking participants, personhood was a figurative work in progress and that it depended upon protecting oneself from becoming static or passive and being 'undone'. It is not my intention to imply that, since Ouma was also Tswana-speaking, these notions apply easily and homogenously to her (besides, the context in which John and Jean Comaroff conducted fieldwork was very different from the contemporary everyday lives of Tswana-speaking South Africans), but their argument resonates well with Ross's notion of raw life and Ouma's insistence on *lang moete*.³²

In Comaroff and Comaroff's (2001:271) argument, stasis and passivity (social or physical) mean that one remains 'undone' (raw), which, in turn, means social death. In this paper, Comaroff and Comaroff (2001:274) refer to the ability of people to 'produce people and things' as central to the construction of personhood.³³ The stasis that they refer to therefore implies a stasis in the production of people and things.

³² As Ferguson (2013:230, 234, 238) argues for the decline in wage-earning labour that undermines people's ability to secure personhood in productive labour (and in reproductive labour, since women's work is devalued if a continuing workforce is not needed), the terms on which personhood is constructed change continuously.

³³ This definition of personhood mirrors the liberal definition of personhood as reliant upon productive labour. See Chapters 3 and 4 for detailed discussions of the critique of this definition.

The production of people and things was, however, not what Ouma attributed her personhood to; instead, she attached her personhood to the mobility of her body and the stability of her relationships. Ouma's insistence on having *lang moete* was a counter-practice to passivity and stasis and therefore an attempt at restraining the 'undone-ness' of life and asserting meaningful personhood. In this way, *lang moete* was a practice of and a claim to what Elaine Salo (2004) would call *ordentlikheid* (respectability, decency).

In her doctoral thesis titled *Respectable mothers, tough men and good daughters: producing persons in Manenberg Township, South Africa* (2004), Salo interrogates the notion of personhood in a township called Manenberg in Cape Town. She notes that the idea of *ordentlikheid* (respectability, decency) is central to her coloured research participants' experiences of personhood. She describes respectability as a discourse used to 'describe, order and assign moral value to the array of actions [and] social relationships ... associated with personhood' (Salo, 2004:187). She noticed that respectability was a gendered concept and largely related to women's behaviour and everyday practices (Salo, 2004:6, 116). She explains that '*ordentlikheid* refers to the intense, lifelong social and physical work that women have to do to keep the natural order of the *bos* or the wilderness at bay' (Salo, 2004:187). Ross (2010) later extended this argument to show that practices of and claims to respectability in her field site were aimed at keeping raw life at bay.

Salo also emphasises that her participants associated personhood with being recognised as an agent in one's own life (2004:31). Mirroring Comaroff and Comaroff's (2001:271) argument that passivity engenders social death, she therefore connects respectability with people's ability to actively (albeit with varying implication) ward off the reduction of their lives to bareness (Salo, 2004:31-34), thereby confirming agency and claiming political life and personhood.

To conclude, *lang moete* therefore are what Henderson (2012:20) calls a 'defiant insistence on mattering'. As a concept, it is not only a claim to personhood but also an active refusal of death by stasis, as well as material and social abrasion. It is, however, not temporal in the sense of *durabilis* (to make last) that Povinelli and Henderson describe, but an active tool to counter the rawness, instability and incoherence of everyday life in a post-apartheid informal settlement. It therefore relates more closely to *durare* and implies not one epic bout of perseverance but multiple episodes of encountering adversity and multiple attempts at making moments of liveability in order to make raw life steadfast and stable, if only temporarily.

Lang moete is a political claim to personhood in a context where Ouma's social-and economic exclusion have abraded her humanity. *Lang moete* is also an active refusal of the state's practices of letting die (Povinelli, 2011) and therefore a profound political claim to the right to life and

resources. In practicing *lang moete*, Ouma asserted that she had some degree of power and agency in accessing the state and that she refused to succumb to its bureaucracy completely. To Ouma, *lang moete* was an insistence on mattering and being recognised by the state.

In my view having *lang moete* is therefore a form of participating in buoyant life, albeit not in the temporal sense that I described in my previous work, but it is as powerful a declaration of politically meaningful life as the construction of DIY infrastructure, especially in a context where DIY formalisation (like relationships) have abraded.

While in my honours degree research I argued that DIY formalisation ensured buoyant life in Marikana, I now argue that buoyant life is no longer located in DIY formalisation. Like Povinelli's and Henderson's definitions of endurance, buoyant life implies enduring *until* either municipal formalisation or exhaustion. *Lang moete*, however, reveal that Ouma sought out and made *moments* of stability and coherence (rather than sustained buoyancy) and regarded these more practical and politically more meaningful for counteracting abrasion. These moments, though meaningful to Ouma, were mundane and might therefore seem uneventful.

Creating eventfulness: counteracting the violence of slow abrasion

Povinelli (2011:3, 118) calls the quality of something to qualify as an event 'eventfulness'. She argues that Events – with a capital E – are happenings worthy of public attention. Something like an earthquake or a global pandemic would serve as an Event and enjoy media coverage and public interest. Ouma moving from Marikana to Ikageng does not qualify as an Event (because it lacks sensation or populist interest); yet Povinelli (2011:118) maintains that such moments are eventful and need to be recognised for their importance in people's everyday lives and their abilities to 'sustain perseverances'.

It is the eventfulness of an incident such as Ouma moving or admiring a flower in a small backyard shack that is at stake in current vocabularies of suffering and endurance (cf. Povinelli, 2011:3-4, 11-14, 134). Thus I want to borrow Povinelli's concept of eventfulness to introduce the next contour in my geography of *lang moete*: producing the conditions for *lang moete* to emerge and exist.

In a talk titled 'After the end: stubborn affects and collective practices', Povinelli (2019) uses Gilles Deleuze's work on exhaustion to show the relationship between non-eventfulness and exhaustion. Deleuze (1995) argues that there is a difference between being tired and being exhausted. Being tired is transitive – one is tired *of* something; but being exhausted is intransitive – one is exhausted *by* nothing (Deleuze, 1995:3-4). For Deleuze, and thus for Povinelli as well, uneventfulness causes exhaustion and if one is exhausted, one can no longer imagine

alternatives or different possibilities of life (1995:3). For Povinelli, it is therefore not what the state does to people and the events that happen to them that let them die, but what the state does not do – the non-eventfulness of everyday life. She calls this the ‘violence of enervation’ (Povinelli, 2011:132).

Povinelli (2011:132) defines the violence of enervation as ‘the weakening of the will, rather than the killing of life’ and notes that often, endurance in the ruins of the post-colony is about ‘enduring the exhaustion of numerous small quasi-events’ rather than enduring multiple catastrophic events. Once again, she draws the reader’s attention to the fact that ‘the modes of exhaustion and endurance’ that she speaks of are ‘ordinary, chronic, and cruddy rather than ... sublime’ (Povinelli, 2011:132). Like the everyday devastation that Das and Randeria (2015) write about and the erosion of the everyday that Ross (2015) describes, enervation happens gradually through the course of everyday life.

Whereas Povinelli describes survival here as the endurance of small quasi-events (happenings that are almost event-like but do not qualify as Events), *lang moete* expose a different kind of endurance. Instead of quasi-events, I argue that *lang moete* resonate with the endurance of the episodic nature of life in a post-apartheid settlement. Ouma knew that none of the events in her life (e.g. moving or admiring the flower) were sustainable and therefore crafted *lang moete* as a tool with which to repeatedly endure their momentariness, not their quasi-eventfulness.

To summarise, *lang moete* become possible, emerge and exist exactly where people make eventfulness, but *moete* must be multiple because moments of liveability do not last. *Lang moete* are therefore also an active counter-practice to the violence of enervation (Povinelli, 2011:132) or what I call ‘the violence of abrasion’, where everyday life is slowly eroded when resources, places, DIY projects and relationships become exhausted.

The concept of *lang moete* means to push the rock up the hill for a short distance, then let it roll back down, then repeat the process. There is therefore nothing heroic or romantic about *lang moete* as a practice or analytical concept, yet it remains a poignant political claim to life and personhood. Henderson (2012:38) shows that people’s ‘capacities for endurance’ are contingent upon their conditions and relationships. Likewise, I maintain that Ouma’s capacity to make *lang moete* was contingent upon her conditions. In the coming chapters, I therefore extend my geography of *lang moete* and describe where and how *lang moete* emerge and exist and which conditions make the agency to cultivate *lang moete* possible. One tactic that Ouma used to counter the violence of enervation and abrasion was moving.



Figure 2-1: Madala's copy of the prospective plan for *in situ* municipal development in Marikana

CHAPTER 3: FROM MARIKANA *INNIE DORP IN*: MOBILITY, LIMINALITY AND MAKING MOMENTS OF LIVEABILITY ON THE MOVE

As we came around the bend, approaching Ouma's *makhukhu*, my car became visible where I had parked it under a tree in the street. A young black girl, who was walking alongside her mother, firmly clutching her hand, giggled softly, looked back at me and then whispered something into her mother's ear. Her mother started laughing, turned around to me and said, 'Sy sê die wit kind het met 'n kar gekom.' ('She says the white child came with a car.')

Whenever Ouma and I had to travel to a welfare office (such as the DSD, CWP [Child Welfare Potchefstroom] or Childline) or a department office (e.g. the DHA), Ouma would call me and say that we needed to go '*innie dorp in*' ('into town'). Once she called me to say that she had purchased bags of crisps and sweets to sell from her *makhukhu* in Marikana in a small spaza shop, and she was *innie dorp in* ('in town') and had no way of getting out of town back to Marikana, as she had no money left for a taxi.³⁴ She wanted me to pick her up *innie dorp in* and drive her back to Marikana. I elaborate on this incident below.

The dual meaning of the phrase *innie dorp in* indicates the limits of translation. In formal Afrikaans, there is a difference between '*in die dorp*' (assimilated to '*innie dorp*'), which means to be *in* town, and to go '*in die dorp in*' ('*innie dorp in*'; *into* town). In Ouma's home language, Setswana, one phrase can describe both situations and the difference in meaning would be determined by what stands before the phrase in the sentence. For the purposes of this chapter, I would, however, like to focus on the act of going *into* town and to reflect on what this phrase reveals about Ouma's historical and current socio-economic position.³⁵

Ouma's frequent use of the phrase made apparent her perceived boundary between where she lived and which spaces she regarded to be 'in town'. The fact that we had to travel, in her words, *innie dorp in* every time we needed to access offices or resources showed that Ouma did not

³⁴ Spiegel (2003:211) defines spaza shops as small 'house-shops'. Items that are usually for sale include cheap candy, crisps, cooldrinks, sugar, paraffin and cigarettes. Yose (1999:65-73) has also noted how spaza shops are a flexible use of space and can be meaningful sources of income for township or informal settlement residents. Ouma displayed the goods for sale in a small cabinet in their shack in Marikana (see Figure 3-1), but she never sold many of the goods and did not obtain a large income from sales. In fact, she and her household ate much of the stock themselves, often offering me candy as well.

³⁵ The phrase *innie dorp in* is commonly used by Tswana home language speakers in Potchefstroom to refer to both going into town and being in town. I recognise the limits of interpretation of using a concept from Ouma's second language, but still argue that it is useful to make my argument about access to resources and historical exclusion in this chapter.

experience Marikana, or Ikageng, as places that qualified as towns. Secondly, it showed that the places and information Ouma needed to access were removed from her physical environment and her everyday reality. Ouma could only access town and its resources if she had the means to travel *innie dorp in*, and in most cases, my car served as the means thereto.

In this chapter, I use Ouma's phrase *innie dorp in* to argue that the structural inequalities of the homeland system and apartheid urban planning persist. I draw on Victor Turner's (1967) concept of liminality to show that the poor are still betwixt and between towns (and the resources they offer) and village-type spaces such as informal settlements that are not easily accessible without a vehicle.

I then return to the vignette above to reflect on my own car, how it positioned me in the South African history of spatial exclusion and what it made possible for our research making and for *lang moete* to emerge. Using the ethnographies of Gudeman and Rivera (2007), Henderson (2012) and Weston (2008), I conclude that a car can make apparent and dissolve spatial boundaries and is simultaneously a useful methodological tool, a space for improvising life and a site of *lang moete*, as it makes going *innie dorp in* possible.

In the final sections of the chapter, I once again use Povinelli's (2011) concept of eventfulness to argue that being on the move is a way to counter the violence of enervation that characterises life in a *donker, swart plek*. Expanding this argument, I then draw on Ferguson's critique of modernity to bring into question the promise of development that 'the good life' exists somewhere in the future if one has patience. Instead, I show that Ouma's adamance to remain on the move is a scathing rejection of the focus of development on patience and sustained perseverance.

I also extend Ferguson's work on and my discussion of the erosion of relationships in the previous chapter to maintain that mobility not only capacitates new living conditions but also enables new relationships on which one can draw for survival. Answering my question of what mobility means for a geography of *lang moete*, I then conclude that *lang moete* become possible in the car, in the liminal, on the road. The aim of Ouma's mobility was not a new destination but remaining on the move. For Ouma and me to go *innie dorp in*, we, however, had to encounter and cross the markers of spatial inequality that apartheid urban planning had left in its aftermath.

Going *innie dorp in*: mobility, space and the location of *lang moete*

The drive from my home in the suburbs of Potchefstroom to Marikana takes approximately twenty minutes. One must drive through the industrial area of Potchefstroom and dodge various potholes (or, as the joke would have it, the pieces of road between the potholes). The patchwork road leads one through a piece of veld and a small strip of wetland, past a gypsum quarry. Some days, if the

wind blows in just the wrong direction, it is impossible to drive on the road, as the small white gypsum particles inhibited sight. It gets so bad that houses in the nearby former coloured group area of Promosa are completely covered in fine white dust.

There is another, shorter road from the city centre of Potchefstroom, but it was so damaged that it was closed for various months and only recently repaired and reopened. It too leads through a ten-minute drive worth of veld. When one eventually reaches the end of either of these two tarred roads, there is a red clay gravel road that leads into Marikana past a Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) neighbourhood called Bram Fischer.³⁶ The gravel road is equally eroded by rainwater, and my small Polo Vivo often struggled to navigate its uneven contours. With time, I learnt to drive the road by following the tracks of other local vehicles as they lead across the red dust.

In a paper titled 'Getting around town: transportation and the built environment in post-apartheid South Africa', André Czeglédy (2008:66) shows that apartheid urban planning was cunning in that it deliberately excluded non-whites from the city and its resources by dividing city centres from non-white residential areas with a piece of veld or a wilderness zone.³⁷ He writes that 'under apartheid, bounded roads ... used to ... sharpen divisive spatial effects of natural geographic features ... [and] strips of undeveloped land or veld, reinforced the boundaries of spatial demarcation' (Czeglédy, 2008:66). These strips of undeveloped land, such as the veld and wetland separating Marikana and the former group areas Promosa and Ikageng from the city centre of Potchefstroom, served to physically divide the city based on race. Expanding on Goode and Schneider's term of the 'divided city', Setha Low (1996:388) writes that '[w]ithin anthropology [the divided city] evokes hidden barriers of race and class encoded in metaphors of uptown and downtown, upscale and ghetto, and particularly in the United States, of black and white'.

As in Low's argument about American cities, there has historically been (and continues to be) a correlation between race, class and space in South African cities. Since the legal demise of apartheid segregation laws, there has yet been little change in who gets to live where in South African cities, despite the implementation of policies and programmes such as the RDP (Makhulu, 2010). Except for a growing black, coloured and Indian middle class, most black, coloured and

³⁶ The ANC has provided government subsidised housing under the RDP, but this programme was abolished in 1999 (Makhulu, 2010:569, 570) and replaced with GEAR (Growth Employment and Redistribution). Many South Africans still refer to government housing as 'RDP houses'.

³⁷ The term 'non-white' was used by the apartheid government and included all black, coloured and Indian populations.

Indian South Africans still live in townships, former group areas or informal settlements, such as Marikana.³⁸

Another spatial division that has had a lasting impact on residence and urban access in South Africa is the homeland system. Scher (2012:332-334) explains that, under the leadership of Hendrik Verwoerd, the apartheid government (ruled by the National Party) passed the Bantu Authorities Act (1951) and the Law on Bantu Self-government (1959), which restricted all African populations to designated ethnic native homelands, which comprised only 13% of mostly rural South African land. Black South Africans who wanted to enter urban areas were required to provide identification and a passbook.

Ouma was born in 1959, during the establishment of the Bantustan (homeland) system. Having lived on a farm and later moved to the city to work as a domestic worker, she would have needed a passbook to show her place of employment and to enter an urban area. Her personal history of urban exclusion also explains why she does not regard Marikana or Ikageng to be 'in town' and why she places such emphasis on the act of going *innie dorp in* to access resources – an act that would have required much effort throughout her life.

While Low (1996:388) uses the terms 'uptown' and 'downtown' to illustrate the distinction between various spaces within cities and their associations with class and race, in Ouma's phrase *innie dorp in*, she distinguished clearly between what counts as '*dorp*' and '*nie dorp nie*' (town and not town) rather than spaces within the city itself. Furthermore, Ouma's phrase not only reveals spatial demarcations and her historical and current exclusion from resources but also emphasises mobility and the act of traveling from places that she does not regard as *dorp* to *innie dorp in*.

Czeglédy (2008:66) argues that under apartheid, the strips of veld dividing town from homelands, townships and informal settlements functioned not only to physically exclude non-whites from city centres, jobs and resources but also to control urban movement and keep mobilisation at bay. He therefore shows that physical mobility has historically been, and continues to be, imperative for political life in South Africa (Czeglédy, 2008:69).

Ouma's ability to travel *innie dorp in* not only links her to resources but is a political move and a claim to political life and the right to the city. Purcell (2003) shows that Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city allows us to challenge notions of citizenship that extend the normative idea of citizen only as national citizen. Lefebvre's (1996) argument is that everyone who lives in the city should be a citizen of the city and has the right to what it has to offer. He defines the right to the

³⁸ Many white South Africans also live in informal settlements or are homeless; yet they are in the minority compared to black and coloured South Africans who live in informal settlements.

city thus: '[it] cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right ... It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*' (Lefebvre, 1996:158; emphasis in original).

Ouma, who for long was excluded from all the privileges that a full South African citizen enjoyed, including the right to urban life, uses her adamance to keep going *innie dorp in* (and her ability to do so) to produce herself as a full citizen and a worthy person, not someone without rights. She once again refuses to be reduced to 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998, 2005) or to accept and endure the social and economic exclusion that her historical and current spatial exclusion engenders. In Salo's (2004:187) terms, going *innie dorp in* is a claim to *ordentlikheid* and an attempt to overcome the wilderness. In this case, the wilderness is not only social or figurative but physical and spatial.

In order to go *innie dorp in*, one, however, needs a mode of transport with which to cross the strip of veld or wilderness keeping one out of town. Ouma often *chupa'd* (hitchhiked) when she did not have transport money and took a taxi when she did, but for the time of my fieldwork, my car served as Ouma's mode of transport *innie dorp in* and back.³⁹

Czeglédy (2008:67) comments that '[g]etting around town for the poor majority is thus often difficult without a personal vehicle that can quickly circumvent the obstacles that have been literally designed into the built environment and remain in place well after 1994'. Circumventing these obstacles to mobility became possible (and simple) for Ouma through my car. Here I would like to return to the vignette at the beginning of this chapter to introduce my car as a tool of research and a location in Ouma's making (and my metaphorical geography) of *lang moete*.

'The white child came with a car': positioning my car in a geography of *lang moete*

At the beginning of my fieldwork in September 2018, I was still hopeful that I could gain access to various households in Marikana to study the relationship between infrastructure and childcare practices. As I have mentioned previously, I was not able to gain access to more households, as the Marikana residents feared that I was a state official or social worker who surveyed households and removed children.

Ouma's partner, Madala, did, however, introduce me to a young mother I called Lebo. Lebo was a single mother in her late twenties and lived with her children in a small *makhukhu* just around

³⁹ Ouma's use of hitchhiking as a mode of getting around was not necessarily always cheaper than using a taxi. She explained to me that some drivers charged a R15 fee to transport one from Marikana or Promosa into town, roughly the same fee as a taxi. If one was lucky and the driver was gratuitous, such short trips were free of charge. Historically, hitchhiking is a free-of-charge mode of mobility. This phenomenon of charging for trips in private vehicles mirrors middleclass lift clubs where fuel and vehicle maintenance costs are shared. Such systems only work when everyone can contribute equally. The emergence of this practice may also be a form of hustling and enabling diverse income streams and could be a possible topic for prospective research.

the corner from Ouma and Madala. Madala knew Lebo, as her children often played with Ouma's boys. Lebo's four-year-old daughter took a liking in me.

At first, she hid behind the coach in her mother's living room, but later she sat on my lap as Lebo and I chatted about childcare in Marikana on the tattered, upholstered couch in her living room. I asked Lebo if she would mind if I visited again, but she said that she had already told me everything I needed to know. She wanted to visit Ouma and agreed to walk back with me to Ouma and Madala's *makhukhu*.

Her young daughter accompanied us, holding her mother's hand all the way. As we came around a bend, nearing Ouma's *makhukhu*, my car became visible where I had parked it under a tree in the street. Lebo's daughter turned to her mother and whispered to her in Setswana, giggling. Lebo started laughing, turned around and said to me, '*Sy sê die wit kind het met 'n kar gekom*' ('She says the white child came with a car').⁴⁰

I was amazed at how poignantly this young girl summarised a longstanding historical relationship between race, class and mobility in South Africa, and how she immediately positioned me within this history using one object – my car. I then realised that my car was something that I would need to reflect on as I wrote my dissertation. I did not, however, predict that it would come to play such an important role in our research making.

The comment of the young girl in Marikana reminded me of a conversation I had had with another young girl in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2015 while on tour with the North-West University choir. When we toured, it was customary to stay with host families. A friend and I stayed with a white, Afrikaans-speaking middleclass family who had a young daughter of about eight years old. One evening as we drove to a concert, the girl asked me if I had a car. I said that I did, and she responded that I probably had a Volkswagen Polo Vivo. I was stunned, as she was correct. When I asked her how she knew, she shrugged her shoulders and said that it was the car all women who looked like me drove.

Although she was overgeneralising, her observation was as accurate and insightful as that of the young girl in Marikana. Both girls positioned me firmly as a white, middleclass young woman based, firstly, on the fact that I had a car, and secondly, on the type of car I owned. My car came to position me as someone who had easy access to 'town' and everything it had to offer and made

⁴⁰ I wondered why the little girl referred to me as a child, as her mother and I were about the same age. I am short and small-built; therefore, my physical appearance might account for her description. Ouma too was surprised once she learnt my true age, as she said I looked much younger. I also am neither married yet nor a mother, which could also explain the girl's comment.

the spatial, material and social boundaries between Ouma's everyday life and my everyday life clear.

A car in post-apartheid South Africa (especially a reliable one) is a luxury and an indicator of middleclass status. Uri Dadush and Shimelse Ali, the authors of *In search of a global middleclass: a new index*, developed their concept of the 'car index'. They explain that globally, 'ownership of a car, a big-ticket item, is an unambiguous indication of the ability to purchase other high-ticket consumer items—a sign that a household has reached middle-class status' (Dadush & Ali, 2012:6; see also Holmes, 2016).⁴¹ This is the case in South Africa as well. Czeglédý (2008:78) supports this position and argues that a car in South Africa carries immense symbolic weight as an indicator and symbol of wealth and an object of aspiration, since it makes movement within the city possible, something that (as I have shown above) historically has been, and still is, not possible for everyone.

Writing about middleclass life in Angola, Jess Auerbach (2020) similarly notes that cars carry cultural capital, as they represent freedom of time and control over one's environment. Apart from wealth and mobility, cars thus represent two aspects of everyday life that the poor do not have easy access to: the ability to manage one's time and bodily distribution across space and the ability to control external conditions such as smell, sounds and temperatures (Auerbach, 2020:18).

In addition, Auerbach (2020:18) argues that cars not only are markers of social capital and social position, but also that social life takes place within them. In the next section, I provide a few accounts of where and how my car participated in Ouma's social life and of how my car accordingly became a site of research and knowledge production.

Conversations on the move: my car as methodological tool

Most of the conversations that Ouma and I had about childcare, her foster care application and everyday life in general happened in my car. Ouma and I spent most of our time driving between welfare offices, particularly those of SASSA (the South African Social Security Agency, which is responsible for distributing grants), CWP, the DSD and Childline. We also often drove to other state departments, such as Home Affairs and the police station in Ikageng to obtain affidavits for her application. I also drove Ouma to the hospital and back once when she was ill.

⁴¹ Dadush and Ali recognise that this index is not all-encompassing but argue that it is still a good indicator of when a household has reached middleclass status.

Apart from driving between offices, it was also in my car that Ouma and the children loaded their belongings on the day that they moved from Marikana to Ikageng and on subsequent visits to collect more household goods. We have also driven to multiple schools in Ikageng and Promosa to ensure school placement for Ouma's children and, on later visits, to attend school meetings, pick up children, and so forth. We also drove to the mall and to shopping streets in Potchefstroom in search of a matric farewell dress for Ouma's granddaughter. Furthermore, my car was the vehicle with which Ouma transported the food parcels she received from CWP, the DSD and Childline (see Chapter 4). She called me whenever she needed me to drive her somewhere.

In the instance (briefly mentioned earlier) that Ouma purchased spaza shop goods and asked me to pick her up *innie dorp in*, she instructed me to drive through the industrial area on our way back to Marikana. She asked if we could stop at a petrol station to buy paraffin. I agreed and she asked the attendant for twenty litres of paraffin. She did not, however, have a *scoop* (colloquial term for an empty plastic container), and the attendant told her to ask at the shop next door, which produced cleaning supplies in bulk and often had empty containers. The shop was next to the station, but located a few hundred metres away, so we drove there as we did not know what size container she would receive. The shop assistant gave her an empty twenty-litre plastic container resembling a paint bucket, which she had to purchase for R20.

She rinsed the bucket at a nearby tap on the shop's yard, and we drove with the *scoop* back to the station. The attendant poured the paraffin from a large fuel pump into the container, which we loaded into a black refuse bag in the boot of my car. Ouma reached her hand into her blouse and removed a packet of notes. She carefully counted them out loud and had exactly the right amount of money left for the paraffin, which she handed to the station attendant – R180 on the dot.

On the way home, Ouma admitted to me that she did, in fact, have transport money to return home, but not enough for both a large *scoop* of paraffin and taxi fees and, as the situation would have it, a new *scoop*. She told me that buying paraffin was one of the main objectives of her trip and that she was grateful to me for letting us use my car to transport it, since she would have been discouraged to return home without cooking fuel. If she were to take a taxi from the city centre to the petrol station and then from the station to Marikana, she would need to pay taxi fares twice. The drive from the station to Marikana only took about five minutes; thus, Ouma's paying the full fare was not a good financial decision, and walking all the way with the heavy bucket was not an option at her age and with callouses on the soles of her feet. Besides, she had just spent all the money she had with her on paraffin and a *scoop*.

My car became part of Ouma's everyday life. It became part of her shopping trips, economic ventures, healthcare and the mundane rituals of driving from school to school and office to office,

as well as part of her ability to secure food parcels, documentation and, eventually, grants. Ouma's candour in asking me to drive her around also once again illustrates that she was able to claim agency in the research process and to use me and my car tactically to get everyday necessities done and to ensure that I reciprocated for using our data.

It was also in the car driving home every day that I began to reflect on what I had observed and experienced and what it meant. Some days, I cried as I drove home because I was sad or frustrated about the difficulties of securing grants. Some days, I laughed out loud by myself as I drove back because of something Ouma had said or something I saw. Some days, I just sat quietly, with no radio sound in the background, thinking frantically about how I would turn my observations into arguments. Most of my learning and reflection happened on the road, in the liminal spaces between Marikana and the *dorp*. It was also in these in-between spaces that I came to a deep, personal understanding of the realities of post-apartheid South Africa and how the veld has persisted, both physically and figuratively.

Writing about another mode of mobility, Sarah Pink (2008:9) argues that walking is learning to see and that walking in the city, in particular, teaches one to see the city as it is made up of unequal relations. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (2008:2) similarly write that 'careful, ethnographic analysis of walking ... can help us rethink what being social actually means'. I argue that, although driving largely isolates one from the sensory experiences that walking provokes, it has also taught me to see the city as a set of relations (both historical and current) and has helped me reflect on my and Ouma's positions in those relations. Driving with Ouma made me reflect on what it meant to live in post-apartheid South Africa and what social life and being human looked like here.

In *A kinship of bones*, Henderson (2012:111) tells about one of her HIV-positive participants who put specific emphasis on learning to survive and live life 'on the way' in post-apartheid South Africa. She argues that here, learning 'on the way' does not necessarily refer only to physical mobility but also to the ability to improvise life as one goes along (Henderson, 2012:111). She writes, 'Learning on the road implied learning between places, learning on the move, suggesting that one is both outside conventional sites of learning and that one brings an improvisatory quality to the process of learning' (Henderson, 2012:110).

Henderson's (2012) perspective on learning on the move is useful methodologically in two ways. Firstly, it is useful to reflect on how my own learning happened as I travelled alone and with Ouma through the deliberate strips of veld between Marikana and the *dorp*. Secondly, it is useful to make sense of how Ouma learnt to make life on the way and to improvise survival, utilising my car to 'do' social life. As Henderson suggests above, moving around allows researchers and research

companions the opportunity to go outside the conventional sites of learning. This was the case for both Ouma and me. Not only did my car allow us to travel to unexpected sites of learning, such as offices, departments, schools and petrol stations, but it also became an unexpected site of learning itself. When I started my fieldwork, I imagined that the fieldwork (and Ouma's everyday practices) would be limited to Marikana, but driving with Ouma revealed that no sites were bounded and how everyday life from an informal settlement was dispersed across and between interconnected sites.

In their ethnography about domestic economies in Columbia, Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Riviera (2007) also reflect on the centrality and methodological importance of a car in their research. They too found that the car was a tool that allowed them to travel to more research sites than travelling by foot would allow, thereby granting them access to a wide variety of sites and information they might never have accessed without a car (Gudeman & Rivera, 2007:5-6). Furthermore, they argue that the car was a valuable space of reflection, review and even note taking (2007:6), a space of conversation with each other and with research companions. They describe the car in their research as an object that created what they call a 'conversational community' (Gudeman & Rivera, 2007:5).

This is in stark contrast to Stuart Hall's (in Czeglédy, 2008:80) argument that cars function as insulation from people and environments and serve to protect automobile owners from unwanted social and environmental contact. Although this is certainly the case as well, in my research, I found that my car served various social functions and exposed Ouma and me to more environments than would otherwise have been possible. As Auerbach (2020:18) argues, much of social life happens in cars.

Furthermore, Gudeman and Rivera (2007:9) describe the power of a car as making the 'voices on the ground' in their conversational community audible. They mean that having access to a car during their fieldwork allowed them to speak to various people, not only at the destinations to which the car brought them but also by giving people lifts and driving around with research participants (Gudeman & Rivera, 2007:9). This, in turn, ensured that the data they were able to produce were locally bound, contextual and a representation of what domestic economic relations in Columbia actually looked like ('voices on the ground') – not only what the 'voices in the air' (meaning policy and government officials) assumed (Gudeman & Rivera, 2009:9).

To Gudeman and Rivera (2007:9), the car also questions the idea of bounded communities, complete conversations and can make apparent or dissolve boundaries between people and places (2007:7). My car allowed Ouma and me to access the full ambit of spaces in which everyday lives were lived. It also allowed us to travel from a micro household setting, through

pieces of wilderness, past industrialised spaces and into the macro institutions (e.g. state departments) that shaped and produced her everyday life, once again revealing that everyday life and practices were dispersed.

This reminds of George Marcus's (1995:95) definition of multi-sited ethnography, which he defines as 'ethnography [that] moves from its conventional single-site location, contextualised by macro-constructions of a larger social order'. To Marcus (1995:95), multi-sited ethnography enables the blurring (or at least crossing) of boundaries between local and global and makes apparent the relationships between domestic life and its position within larger social systems. Ouma's life was not only positioned in these micro-macro relations, but she used them as resources to craft moments of liveability, a point I expand on in Chapter 4.

My car was a space where many of the conversations between Ouma and me took place, a space that made possible much of Ouma's everyday labour and was a site of research making. In driving in my car, the spatial and social boundaries between us not only became apparent but were dissolved as the car became what Victor Turner (1967) calls a liminal space – a space 'betwixt and between' apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, Ouma and myself, and Marikana and *innie dorp in*.

I would therefore not describe my and Ouma's research making as multi-sited but rather as liminal and mobile. Ouma's aim was not to reach different sites but to remain on the move, once again indicating how problematic it is to think of bounded sites in the context of survival in post-apartheid South Africa. Welfare offices and state departments were not completely separated from Ouma's household space, but instead permeated and merged with her everyday life. Instead of multi-sited, our research site consisted of a dispersed set of routes, and my car, always taking Ouma back to a *donker, swart plek*, bringing the food parcels, paperwork and paraffin of other, larger places with us.

I realised that had it not been for me and my car, the chances of Ouma successfully completing her foster care application were slim. Knowing Ouma, I nevertheless do acknowledge that she would have found another means of accessing these resources and will not flatter myself by thinking that I was her only assistance. Nevertheless, my car and the road became our main research site as well as a space where Ouma experienced belonging and where she crafted moments of liveable life.

Mobility, eventfulness and occupying liminal space

You got a fast car;
I want a ticket to anywhere.

Maybe we can make a deal,
Maybe together we can get somewhere.
Anyplace is better,
Starting from zero, got nothing to lose.
Maybe we'll make something.
Me, myself, I got nothing to prove.

You got a fast car,
I got a plan to get us outta here.
I've been working at the convenience store.
Managed to save just a little bit of money.
Won't have to drive too far,
Just 'cross the border and into the city.
You and I can both get jobs,
Finally see what it means to be living.

So I remember we were driving, driving in your car
Speed so fast it felt like I was drunk
City lights lay out before us
And your arm felt nice wrapped 'round my shoulder
And I had a feeling that I belonged,
I had a feeling I could be someone.

You got a fast car;
Is it fast enough so we can fly away.
We gotta make a decision:
Leave tonight, or live and die this way.

These are the lyrics to Tracy Chapman's 1988 song 'Fast car'. In the song, the narrator describes her precarious economic position and her dissatisfaction with her current life. She asks a man who has a fast car to take her away to a different place and expresses her desire to get away quickly. She does not have a final or specific destination in mind. Instead, she says that 'anyplace is better'. In the middle of the song, she tells him that she has managed to get a job and secure some income to get them to somewhere else, but later (in a verse that I have not included above) he disappoints her when he starts to drink, takes his car and leaves her and her children, and she is back in the precarious position she started.

The storyline of the song feels eerily similar to the description I have thus far provided of Ouma's life. The woman in the song wants to know how it feels to have financial security and longs to drive 'just across the border and into the city'. She reasons that life in the city, or in Ouma's terms *innie dorp in*, will be better and offer possibilities, but later in the song, she describes how her urban life too has fallen apart. She then finds possibility in the mobility that the car makes possible. She emphasises that it was in the car while '[she was] driving, driving in [the] car' that she felt like she belonged and like she 'could be someone'.

The refrain conveys nostalgia for the sense of belonging the narrator experienced in the car. Once she gets out of the car, life crumbles and erodes, and she longs to get back into the car where she felt like she 'could be someone'. Where she first hints that 'anyplace is better', 'anyplace' later becomes the space of the car rather than a different destination. I argue that Ouma also found belonging in the liminal space in the car between Marikana, Ikageng and 'town'.

Kath Weston (2008) writes about traveling on the bus system with poor Americans. Weston, who grew up poor herself, reflects on the freedom she experienced when she was first able to travel. She, however, comes to realise that for most poor Americans traveling the bus, the road becomes a form of home (Weston, 2008:232). She shows that the bus becomes a good space to study 'poverty in motion' (Weston, 2008:xii) and writes about the mobility of the bus that 'wasn't class mobility, not yet, but it was mobility of a sort that made the humiliations of scrambling for money recede. For a time' (2008:x).

In order to do what Das and Randeria (2015:S8) call life-affirmative work from poverty, Weston writes the following:

With humor, imagination, cleverness, and more than a little luck, the balls stay up in the air, at least for a time. It's also a continuing education in the skills required to hustle possibilities, forge connections, engage in give-and-take, cultivate resilience, keep your balance, and live to tell your story. Diverse tactics, multiple 'holes', allow people to pursue their own visions of living well, in ways that exceed raw purchasing power. Often enough, these stratagems involve travel. (Weston, 2008:xiv)

Weston (2008) too recognises the temporality of making life coherent and keeping life intact and acknowledges that multiple 'holes' are necessary to do this, and that travel makes the multiplicity of these opportunities possible. I argue that multiple moments of liveability are necessary to keep life intact and that travelling made these moments possible. Like the bus in Weston's work, my car, therefore, became a location or site for *lang moete* to emerge.

Ouma knew that social mobility was structurally unlikely and that life in Marikana was dark, black and raw. She therefore found possibility and respectability in remaining mobile. I argue that Ouma made moments of liveability by moving and (more importantly) remaining on the move. Ouma

longed to get back into the car and remain there for as long as possible. Ouma had learnt to dwell very effectively in the liminal – in moving between a *donker, swart plek* and *innie dorp in*. In the act of remaining on the move, she had come to inhabit and tactically use her liminal social and spatial position to refuse political and social death.

In Chapter 2, I argued that Povinelli's concept of eventfulness was useful for speaking about how Ouma made things happen to foster moments of liveability. I used Povinelli's argument that it was not events that caused people to become exhausted, but the non-eventfulness of life, or what she calls the 'violence of enervation' (Povinelli, 2011:132).

I contend that moving was Ouma's way to produce eventfulness from and within spatial marginalisation and liminality that countered the violence of enervation (cf. Povinelli, 2011:132) and allowed her to reproduce *lang moete*. It was therefore not the hope of arriving at a new, better destination but the act of going somewhere else that was eventful. I therefore argue that my car (and other cars Ouma occupied when she *chupa'd*) is a space that cultivates *lang moete* and makes *lang moete* last for as long as they remain on the road. Expanding now on moving as a form of eventfulness, I will show how remaining on the road was also a way for Ouma to counteract the violence of waiting for the progress and development that modernity promised.

Dislocating stability from 'one day' to 'on the road'

In 2005, Ferguson wrote a chapter 'Decomposing modernity: history and hierarchy after development' published in an edited volume. In this chapter, he argues that during the colonial conquest of the nineteenth century and the rise of independence in various post-colonial countries in the twentieth century, the West considered modernity to be closely related to linear time and progress (Ferguson, 2005:2-3).⁴² Progress (and by implication modernity) meant having industrialisation, employment opportunities and a decrease in poverty (Ferguson, 2005:2-3).

The implication of this narrative was that the poor were regarded to not only be poor but also be 'backward' and 'at the beginning' of developmental time (Ferguson, 2005:3).⁴³ In this logic, the persistence of poverty was, therefore, the consequence of development that had not yet happened and that would be solved if the poor, firstly, worked hard and secondly, waited patiently

⁴² The term 'the West', as Ferguson uses it here, refers to the main nineteenth-century colonial forces, namely Europe and North America. I recognise that the term is contested (cf. Latour, 2007:22) and do not wish to reproduce normative, racist and oversimplified definitions of the West or divisions between the West, the East and the South. I use the term here as Ferguson uses it.

⁴³ Later, in the twentieth century, the colonists used this narrative to justify colonial conquest and to address the legacy of colonialism of rife poverty in the post-colonies. It was from this need for justification that poverty became not a political or social problem but a matter of having patience and engaging in individual hard work (Ferguson, 2005:15-16; see also discussion of the deserving poor in Chapter 4).

for modernity to run its course and spread progress as it went along. Ferguson (2005:14) summarises it as follows: if things are bad, 'just wait' – they will get better.

Instead, Bruno Latour (2007:28) uses the image of a 'juvenile giant' running backwards towards the future, destroying everything in its wake without cognition, to describe modernity. Instead of development and progress (in the form of employment and a decrease in poverty), modernity has brought only destruction (Latour, 2007:28) in the form of displacement (Escobar, 2003), extractive industries (Escobar, 2003), unemployment due to an oversupply of cheap labour (Ferguson, 2003) and what Mignolo (2011:6) calls the overall 'expendability of human life'.

Weston (2008) mirrors Ferguson's sentiment about patience in her concept of 'wait training'. She contends that poor Americans need to train themselves in the arts of waiting in order to get by and writes, 'Frustrated job seekers receive advice to wait for "the economy" to get better. A very simple equation governs all this wait training: The less money you have, the longer you tend to wait' (Weston, 2008:39). This observation rings true for Ouma's life. She had to wait for various months for the DSD strike to end and for her application to be processed; then she had to wait several more months for the money to be paid out. In Marikana, she had to wait for DIY formalisation to pay off and for the municipality to recognise the residents' efforts. In summary, her life consisted of waiting for the progress and financial security that development, and later post-apartheid liberation, had promised.

Ouma's notion of *lang moete* and her efforts to move as often as possible show that she was tired of 'just waiting' and that she no longer believed in the power of patience. Ferguson (2005:15) also argues that patience is 'outdated'. Drawing from fieldwork in post-colonial Southern Africa, he argues that his research participants did not believe in the power of development to ensure them social mobility (Ferguson, 2005:16). Rather, he argues that they regarded a change in social position to be the outcome of luck, not hard work, patience or successful development policy outcomes (Ferguson, 2005:16). Both Ferguson (2005:16) and Povinelli (2011:32-33) are critical of the notion that having the *will* to change one's life is a guaranteed road to successful social mobility.

Weston (2008) too is sceptical of the centrality of individual will in this equation and observes that employment does not necessarily mean an escape from poverty. She explains how this economy works:

To work yet remain poor is to live out a topsy-turvy version of trickle-down economics. In the standard version, government promises that income returned to the pockets of the wealthy will work its way down through the economic system eventually, creating employment and improving the lives of people dwelling at the bottom. In the updated version, the sweat of the working poor trickles down to water the pleasures of the relatively wealthy. So much for the time-honored advice of

working parents to their ambitious youngsters: keep your head down, work hard, and you'll be all right. The very phrase 'working poor' flies in the face of the individualist creed that a person who applies herself can make something of herself. (Weston, 2008:53)

The reason for Povinelli's, Weston's and Ferguson's scepticism is that poverty (in the aftershocks of colonialism and development) is a structural problem, not a personal one. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, Ross (2010, 2015) and Salo (2004) both show how difficult it is for individuals to turn precarious circumstances, or what Ross calls 'raw life', into respectable life. Both authors argue that achieving coherence in raw life requires massive effort and is largely reliant upon one's ability to maintain social relationships.

The paradox of mobility and stability

When Ouma told me that she planned to move to Johannesburg, I asked her why she had chosen that specific city and where she planned to stay. She said that her '*sustertjie*' ('little sister') lived in an informal settlement in Protea Glen and that she and the children planned to stay with her for a while and then will decide where to stay next. In a later phone call between Ouma and myself, she said that she and the children were living in her '*eie stand*' ('own stand', meaning own shack) then, next to her sister's *makhukhu* in Protea Glen, and she was doing well.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, Ouma's relationships in Marikana slowly eroded and her accommodation arrangements in Ikageng did not last, as she could not afford rent. With the erosion of meaningful relationships, Ouma's ability to draw on these relations for resources and survival similarly eroded.

Thinking further about the question of which tactics people devise to secure futures when development fails, Ferguson (2005) too found that his research participants in Southern Africa moved as a strategy of survival. Ferguson (2005:21) specifically speaks about migration and moving to other family members and maintains that moving is not only a way of escaping undesirable conditions but also of making 'a new reliance on individual and familial strategies of spatial mobility'.

Ten years later, in his controversial book *Give a man a fish: reflections on the new politics of distribution* (2015), Ferguson further shows the importance of moving for extending networks of distribution and resources.⁴⁴ Moving is good not only for escaping but also for forging new relationships of care that can be used to access resources or be incorporated into networks of people to depend on (Ferguson, 2015:108). Weston (2008:7) supports this position and says that

⁴⁴ This book was controversial because Ferguson propagates direct cash transfers rather than skills-based developments or job creation as the solution to global poverty (Castro, 2015).

for poor Americans, what she calls 'real security' often comes from relationships with neighbours and relationships forged on the bus, not from employment. This is part of what Ferguson (2015:94) calls making 'distributed livelihoods'. I would like to expand on this notion and say that the term 'dispersed livelihood' describes Ouma's life even better, as she did not only aim to enter networks of distribution but also deliberately dispersed her life and her body over various spaces and various vehicles.

Ouma deliberately and tactically choreographed opportunities to place her body in a car as often as possible, because it was not a different destination that made *lang moete* possible, but her ability to keep moving. In Henderson's terms, the car created a sense of 'spacious sociality', which she defines as spaces where care and relationship make hardship bearable 'if only for a time' (Henderson, 2012:175). Even Henderson recognises the temporariness of bearable life but foregrounds that these moments of liveability are significant. The fact that Ouma's life and livelihood were dispersed does not, however, mean that they were unstable.

In her master's degree dissertation, Ross writes about fieldwork she did in the same informal settlement (The Park, at the time of her fieldwork called Die Bos) on household fuel use. In this dissertation, titled *Houses without doors: diffusing domesticity in Die Bos* (1993), Ross shows how fluid domestic life in this informal settlement was. Although she had conducted her fieldwork during apartheid South Africa, I observed similar fluidity in Marikana when I conducted my honours degree research and when I returned for further fieldwork. Ouma's children did not all live with her at any given time, and even after Ouma and the children had moved to Ikageng, the two eldest children moved between her household and two other households where they often stayed for several weeks.

There was one instance when the youngest boy did not return home for a few days. At first, Ouma was worried, but when I proposed that we report him as missing at the police station, she said, '*Hy sal weer uitsteek*' ('He will pop up again', meaning he will appear or return). A few days later, a woman in Marikana informed Ouma that she had seen him at another family's *makhukhu* and assumed that he had been staying there. Ouma was satisfied, and he later returned.

As is evident from the data I have provided previously, intra-household fluidity was not the only fluidity that characterised Ouma's life, although it was an important part of her survival. Letting the children stay with other families lightened her financial load as well as her emotional load, as she often complained about the stress that caring for them caused her. In the same breath, Ouma also often fed other families' children at 'the project' and thus reciprocated.

Where Ross (1993) writes about the coherence that relationship and fluidity can bring amidst ugliness, Ouma too draws on relationships, networks of exchange and tactical mobility to make steadfast life from the margins and the in-betweens. For Ouma, moving around was not an act of pleasure but hard, necessary and tactical work to extend her networks of distribution and to multiply and keep open the possible conditions in which *lang moete* could emerge.

As I have shown in this chapter, the conditions for *lang moete* to exist are in the liminal space of the car, on the way somewhere else. Throughout her life, Ouma has moved from the farm, the native homeland, to the figurative liminal wasteland, always on her way *innie dorp in* and back, betwixt and between the settler town (*dorp*) and places that are not *dorp*. Occupying liminality is not what progress, modernity or post-apartheid liberation promised but is indeed what it left in its wake.

Being on the move created moments of liveability – moments of eventfulness – thereby counteracting the ‘violence of enervation’ (Povinelli, 2011). In my geography of *lang moete*, it was being on the move and occupying liminal spaces that made *lang moete* possible and strengthened *lang moete* as a political refusal of death by waiting or enervation. Remaining on the move, however, still implies that there might be a different ‘somewhere’, which might be better than the current ‘here’, and this keeps the possibilities for more moments of liveability and more *lang moete* open. In the next chapter, I provide a few accounts of the encounters with welfare and state departments Ouma and I had once we reached *innie dorp in* and stepped out of the car.



Figure 3-1: Ouma's spaza shop in her *makhukhu* in Marikana

CHAPTER 4: MAKING *LANG MOETE* ON A ROAD TO NOWHERE: RE-POLITICISING AND RE-SOCIALISING WELFARE

Notes from a moment in the field, 7 January 2019.

Ouma vra toe vir iets te ete. Sy trek haar skouers in, verhoog haar stem, praat sag, wys met haar vingers na haar mond en vra: 'Het jy nie vir my ietsietjie nie?' [Marie] vra toe: 'iets om te eet? 'n Broodjie of so?' en staan op ... Toe Marie opstaan, knipoog Ouma vir my en gee my 'n 'high five'. [Marie] gaan haal 'n kospakkie. 'n Sak met Rama en meel (ek kan nie die res sien nie) en twee gevriesde brode.

Own translation: Ouma then asked for something to eat. She pulled in her shoulders, increased the pitch of her voice, spoke softly, used her fingers to point to her mouth and asked, 'Don't you have a little something for me?' [Marie] then asked, 'Something to eat? A little bread or so?' and got to her feet ... When Marie got up, Ouma winked at me and gave me a high five. [Marie] then fetched a food parcel. A bag with Rama and flour (I could not see the rest) and two frozen loaves of bread.

In Chapter 1, I mentioned my first encounter with Ouma under the tree in her garden where she was distressed about '*die geld wat nou nie weer uitsteek nie*' ('the money that is not sticking out', meaning not being paid). She said that she had visited the DSD offices multiple times to enquire about the renewal of the foster care grants that she had acquired from a previous application but that the staff were striking.

The strike meant that for five months, no one in Potchefstroom could apply for any social support services, and Ouma's paperwork lay unattended at the department. Ouma was disgusted by the situation and a few months into the strike remarked, '*Nou hulle pay verniet; hulle sit net en eet*' ['Now they are paying for free (meaning, they are receiving compensation for no work); they just sit and eat']. Ouma's remark was particularly poignant seeing that due to the strike, she could not get paid (in the form of her grants) or receive a food parcel so that she and her household could eat.⁴⁵

At the time, she had no other income (she was still 59 years old and did not yet qualify for the state pension grant) and could not afford to buy airtime for her cell phone or go *innie dorp* in unnecessarily. I offered to call the DSD on her behalf and she agreed. The next Monday morning, I looked up the department's number and called the only number I could find. Frustratingly, my

⁴⁵ Ouma's remark also conjures up images of greed, overindulgence and extraction – characteristics of the capitalist economy that she is largely excluded from. Therefore, her comment is a scathing critique of these systems.

call was only answered by the monotonous voice of a woman informing me that ‘the number you have dialled does not exist’.

After calling a friend who worked as a social worker at a local hospital, as well as a contact at the Children’s Court, I finally learnt that the organisation I needed to call was a private welfare organisation called Child Welfare Potchefstroom (CWP). I looked up its number, but to my surprise, my call was met with the same monotonous female voice.

After further calls and various WhatsApp voice notes between my social worker friend and me, I managed to obtain an office address for CWP and drove to the office to make an appointment for Ouma. The office was located *innie dorp in*, just around the corner from the public hospital. The receptionist at the office informed me that all children’s welfare cases in Marikana and Promosa had to go through CWP before being referred to DSD, as if it were general knowledge. I made an appointment, and a few days later, Ouma and I sat in their offices initiating the paperwork for her renewed application. Ouma was dressed smartly in a long black dress with bright, graphic floral print and clutched her black A4 file containing all her documents firmly under her arm. She always carried it with her when we went *innie dorp in* and stored it in a small silver cabinet in their *makhukhu*.

The office was decorated with bright pink ottomans, fluffy throws, a piano and stuffed animals. On our first visit, Ouma smiled in approval as she brushed her fingers across the ottomans. Over the course of the next two months, Ouma and I made several visits to the CWP office for submitting relevant paperwork, talks with the social worker and three foster care training sessions that Ouma had to attend as part of the application requirements. After CWP had completed Ouma’s file and Ouma had attended all the necessary training sessions, her application was sent to the DSD for completion and approval. The employees at the DSD were still striking.

The excerpt from my fieldnotes at the beginning of this chapter was from a day Ouma and I once again visited the CWP offices to submit paperwork. As the social worker, a middle-aged white woman whose pseudonym is Marie, left Ouma and me in the room with the pink ottomans to go file the documents, Ouma leaned over to me and whispered, asking if I thought she could ask for a food parcel. I told her that I believed she could ask for one, seeing that Marie knew she had no income. I was, however, not expecting Ouma’s drastic change in posture, tone and conduct.

As Marie returned to the room, Ouma’s usually self-assured demeanour changed to pitiful as she asked Marie for a food parcel, indicating with her hand to her mouth and speaking in the diminutive form. I remember feeling deeply uncomfortable and embarrassed at the time, not knowing how to respond. I sat completely still, smiling shyly, pretending not to take cognition of what was

happening. When Marie, however, left to fetch the Rama and frozen bread loaves from a room in the back, Ouma sat up straight, winked at me and gave me a high five, signalling that her tactics bore fruit, or frozen bread loaves in this case.

In this moment, the performative discourses of post-apartheid South Africa became visible. While Ouma was usually self-assured (even feisty), experience had taught her that to obtain resources from a white middleclass woman, such as Marie, a pitiful demeanour was a more effective tactic than confidence. As a white middleclass woman, in the past, I have myself experienced women using the same code of behaviour with me, and I therefore was discomforted to see its performativity in action here.

In this chapter, I use this uncomfortable moment in the field together with my own frustrations to question where welfare is situated in a geography of *lang moete*, and where and how it capacitates or hinders *lang moete* to exist. In the next section of this chapter, I provide more examples of Ouma's encounters with welfare and then take a brief journey through the historical logic and policy documents of social support in South Africa to show that welfare is, in fact, keeping what Ross (2010, 2015) calls 'raw life' neatly intact. One of the reasons for this is that welfare is still located *innie dorp in* and therefore perpetuates the spatial exclusion of apartheid urban planning. Another reason is that it provides enough material means to keep its recipients alive but not enough to thrive.

I contend that, in this argument, it is simple to understand Ouma's performance of pity as a reduction to bare life (Agamben, 1998, 2005), but this performance was rather exactly a refusal of bare life and a claim to political life and resources. I then provide an example of Ouma introducing me as her lawyer in a performance of legitimacy to similarly claim political life. I show that Ouma successfully utilised the notions of bare life, deserving poor *and* legitimacy in different contexts to access food parcels and documents and to claim personhood. Adding on to my arguments about the centrality of relationship in previous chapters, I show that Ouma used relationships across multiple welfare organisations to counteract the abrasion of her relationships in Marikana.

Ferguson (2013:235) argues that social grants may address material needs (even if partially), but that they do not address social needs and are therefore not an ideal form of social support in Southern Africa. Although I agree with his position, I show that Ouma used not the grants themselves but her ability to make connections across welfare organisations to bring sociality back into her encounters with welfare. She was, therefore, able to use her networks with welfare as social capital with which she made claims to economic capital and, therefore, was able to produce moments of liveability and cultivate contexts for *lang moete* to emerge.

Ouma's tactics, practices and performances brought the notion of failed welfare into question. I thus argue that using welfare tactically was a way for Ouma to turn raw life into respectable life on her own terms and to refuse the slow everyday erosion of life in a post-apartheid informal settlement that welfare kept in place.

Frustrations, fears, food parcels and photocopy machines: the bumpy road to welfare

During the time that Ouma was waiting for the DSD to complete her foster care application, she managed to form a relationship with a social worker from another private welfare organisation, Childline. I will call her Bontle. Although I never learnt exactly how Ouma met Bontle, they often corresponded via cell phone. Ouma liked Bontle and often spoke about how helpful she was.

Ouma once told me that Bontle had advised her that if the boys were giving Ouma trouble, Bontle would arrange for them to be placed in a reformatory. As the boys were becoming teenagers, Ouma was anxious about the possibility of their joining a local gang and for a while seriously considered Bontle's offer.⁴⁶ This offer notwithstanding, Bontle did manage to secure a food parcel for Ouma, which Ouma, her granddaughter and I picked up from the Childline offices one morning. Like the CWP offices, the Childline offices were situated in an old, renovated house *innie dorp in*, and we drove there in my car.

Bontle had put together a substantial food parcel for Ouma, consisting of maize meal, rice, samp (dried corn kernels that are cooked like one would cook rice), sugar, canned foods, coffee, tea, creamer, yeast and soy mince. When we arrived in Marikana with the parcel, Ouma instructed the two youngest boys to unpack everything on the table so that I could take a picture. Firstly, Ouma was proud of how she had managed to secure a parcel from an organisation that was not formally involved with her foster care application and had no formal obligation towards her.

Secondly, she wanted evidence of what a complete and proper food parcel looked like. Ouma told me that she had previously received a food parcel from SASSA that contained half-empty foodstuffs and said that the picture could serve as leverage whenever someone tried to disadvantage her again. She had the two boys pose with the contents of the parcel (see Figures 4-1 and 4-2).

⁴⁶ Young teenage boys in both Marikana and Ikageng were often recruited into gangs. In the first few months of my fieldwork, the young brother of one of Ouma's friends was stabbed in a gang-related dispute. Luckily, he survived. This caused Ouma much anxiety, and when her eldest boy started leaving her home during the night, she seriously considered Bontle's offer. Ouma was, however, able to use Bontle's offer as a threat to keep her boys in line.

On 1 April 2019, Ouma learnt that the strike at the DSD was coming to end and called me to take her and her granddaughter to the department buildings, or 'social develop' as she called it, to look for the social worker who was to complete her foster care application. She knew that her application would not have been processed yet but assumed that the food parcel she had qualified for months before would finally be ready for collection. We arrived at the offices during the morning. There were a few cars parked in the parking area and guards at the front gate.

At first, Ouma was scared to enter, as she feared that the guards were really police officers deployed to contain violence. Wage and labour strikes in South Africa are often accompanied by violence and are also often characterised by police violence (Safer Spaces, 2020). I walked in front, and the guards opened the gate and greeted us friendly. Ouma smiled in relief. We entered the building. There was no receptionist in sight, and we checked the information boards to see where the offices of the social workers were. It was eerily quiet. As we wandered around the building, an administrative staff member informed us that the employees were in a meeting and that we had to wait.

We sat down on a bench in a dusty corridor. Judging by the dry leaves strewn throughout the building, it was clear that no one had been there for months. We waited for over an hour. During the wait, Ouma and I both had to use the lavatory. I got up from the bench and walked with Ouma down one of the passages on the lookout for a restroom. Even though it was early autumn, the corridors felt particularly cold. We finally found a bathroom that was unlocked, but Ouma was scared to enter. She asked me if I thought it was appropriate for her to urinate in a government building.⁴⁷ I reassured her that it was.

Ouma's anxiety about the propriety of urinating in a government building, asking for a food parcel from a private welfare organisation and her fear of guards all once again reveal her historical spatial exclusion and the policing of everyday life that the pass law system and the Group Areas Act made possible. In apartheid South Africa, it would not have been acceptable for her to use a lavatory inside a government building; therefore, her anxiety was understandable. This incident reminded me of when Ouma had told me that she despised going *innie dorp in* to do grocery shopping, as she always had to urinate in the veld and feared being sexually assaulted. Even though most stores and shopping centres have public bathrooms, her fear of urinating in inappropriate places has persisted, and urination made the wilderness that respectable life attempts to keep at bay (cf. Salo, 2004:187) especially tangible.

⁴⁷ Ouma lived during the apartheid regime in pre-1994 South Africa, when it was illegal for her, as a black woman, to urinate in a government building, especially in a restroom that was not specifically assigned to 'non-whites'.

After returning from the lavatory, we waited on the dusty bench for several minutes more before the meeting was adjourned. As the departmental personnel came walking down the corridor, Ouma quickly found out who her social worker was and confronted him. He was a young, smartly dressed black man. I will call him Thabo. He looked confused to see us but immediately knew about her case and who she was.

In Setswana, Ouma assertively asked him about her foster care application and her food parcel. Initially, he was hesitant but then said that we had to follow him outside to his car. We followed him outside where he, in fact, had Ouma's food parcel in the boot of his hatchback. He said that he had tried to deliver it to her the previous week, but that she was not home. Although it was possible, none of us were convinced, especially not after what he said next. Thabo told Ouma that to give her the food parcel, he needed a copy of her identification document (ID) or smartcard.

Ouma quickly produced her ID smartcard from the black A4 file she carried under her arm. The social worker looked at her and shook his head, repeating that he needed a *copy* of her ID. I asked him what the problem was, since we were outside the department offices and they certainly had a photocopy machine inside the building. He looked at me bluntly and responded that as they had been striking for months, he had forgotten how the machine worked, so making a copy was not possible.

I started laughing. Ouma's granddaughter tried to quiet me in fear that he would refuse to give Ouma the parcel. When I told him that I thought he was ridiculous, he agreed that it would be sufficient to write Ouma's ID number on the beneficiary form. Without further protest, he wrote down the number and gave her the parcel.

It consisted of a large pack of maize meal, sugar, some canned foods, rice, samp, coffee, tea and creamer. It was large and heavy; thus Thabo said that he could not transport it to Ouma's house and that we needed to make a plan ourselves. Luckily, we were driving with my car and were able to easily transport the parcel to Ouma's shack in Ikageng. I wondered how he would have given her the parcel, had he delivered it to her in Ikageng where most certainly neither he nor she would have been able to make a copy of her smartcard.

Between a rock and an abraded place: welfare in or out of context

The prominent emotion that I felt throughout my fieldwork was frustration. It arose when the monotonous female voice repeatedly informed me that 'the number you have dialled does not exist', when Thabo told me that he did not remember how the photocopy machine worked and when I found Ouma sitting under the tree on the broken office chair after, and despite of, eighteen months of hard work on both our parts. Often as Ouma and I drove around, the lyrics of Talking

Heads' 1985 song 'Road to nowhere', which I knew from my childhood, intruded on my thoughts. 'We're on a road to nowhere, come on inside, taking that ride to nowhere, we'll take that ride.'

My frustrations were based on my idea that, since welfare serves poor, often illiterate and economically marginalised South Africans, it should be, firstly, easily accessible and, secondly, compassionate towards everyday struggles, such as transport and accessing photocopies of documents. My frustrations were also rooted in my idea that the aim or function of welfare was to ensure the recipients thereof increased financial stability and a basis from which to build coherent life and to either make poverty more bearable or help recipients escape it. I had stepped into the normative trap of development.

In South Africa, the type of social welfare services that organisations such as CWP, Childline and the DSD offer, is called 'developmental social work'. The *Framework for Social Welfare Services* document (DSD, 2011) outlines the principles of social support services in South Africa and guides the practices of social workers. It states that the aim of developmental social work in South Africa is 'socio-economic development through poverty alleviation' (DSD, 2011:14). The document outlines the principles of this socio-economic development as empowerment, self-reliance and sustainability (DSD, 2011:11).

The document continues to explain the principles and function of social work in South Africa as follows:

Within the social welfare sector, programmes and strategies can be introduced to integrate people ... into the economy through vocational training, job placement, the creation of micro-enterprises, cooperatives and community-based projects which encourage economic self-sufficiency and full integration into society, skills development, public works, self-employment for the poor and marginalised; and ensuring cost-effective services with a high impact. (Department of Social Development, 2011:15)

The ideals and principles of development that social welfare in South Africa are based on, place education, job creation and self-sufficiency at the centre of poverty alleviation. Ferguson (2003:233; 2015:156) agrees that historically, welfare has functioned on the notion that work is central to the economy and survival. He has, however, shown convincingly that globally, and especially in Southern Africa, labour is in oversupply (Ferguson, 2003:227, 230, 234) and that unemployment is a 'more or less permanent' phenomenon (Ferguson, 2015:151). Weston (2008:54) underscores this position when she writes, 'get used to the poor, because they will always be with you' (see also Hanlon *et al.*, 2010; Perlman, 1979:32).

As Low (1996:389) argues for welfare in America, welfare in South Africa provides just enough material means for its recipients to survive, but not enough to overcome the structural relations

that keep poverty in place. David Shipler (2005:26) calls these structural relations the 'interlocking deficits of poverty'. He explains that 'poverty ... is not a problem, it is an array of interlocking problems' (Shipler, 2005:252). In Ouma's case, these include her historical and current exclusion from both the city and its resources, her illiteracy (and with it, her inability to complete English documents, the dominant bureaucratic language in South Africa), the empty promises of municipal development in Marikana, the empty promises of post-apartheid economic liberation, the erosion of her social relationships and the decline of 'the project'.

Welfare depoliticises poverty as something that can be overcome through learning skills and applying them, which imply *individual* will and hard work, not a rethinking of the economic and political relationships that keep poverty in place. Individual hard work also implies that there is somewhere to work and something to work at, and still does not account for the current reality that there simply are not enough jobs (Ferguson, 2015:151). In May 2020, Statistics South Africa (2020:10) released a report in which it stated that during the Covid-19 lockdown, a further 8,1% of employed South Africans lost their jobs, rising the unemployment rate to nearly 40%. With these figures in mind, the reality of invasive unemployment is unlikely to change soon.

In her book *A kinship of bones*, Henderson (2012:182) also maintains that the distribution and logic underpinning of welfare have not changed considerably with the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa. In fact, Henderson (2012:158) clearly shows that in post-apartheid South Africa, her interlocutors perceive welfare as a symbol of both the divisions of the past combined with general dissatisfaction with the current state and that state support in no way equals improvement of life or even the sustenance of everyday life (Henderson, 2012:166). Therefore, she argues that despite receiving financial support from the state, her participants still need to make lives 'despite, beyond and up against' the state (Henderson, 2012:177).

Henderson therefore contends that the narrative of welfare as humanitarian aid renders the poor (and in the case of her fieldwork, the poor and ill) passive victims of the clemency of the state. Furthermore, as Ferguson (2012:83) argues, they are often blamed for their own poverty when they do not fulfil the bureaucratic requirements. This, to Henderson (2012:83), depoliticises poverty by making poverty the poor's problem, or an individual problem rather than a socio-political problem.

Ferguson has also previously argued that development projects pose technical solutions to social or political problems. He calls this 'the anti-politics machine' (Ferguson, 1990). He argues that welfare, as an infrastructure of development, often fails at its claims to alleviate poverty because it offers a predetermined one-size-fits-all solution to poverty. In this solution, the state becomes only the machine that implements the master plan, not an entity of care or where specific political

interests attempt to control the behaviour and interests of others (Ferguson & Lohmann, 1994:178).

Ferguson and Lohmann (1994:180) illustrate that development projects fail because they do not represent realities, only institutional ideals embodied in these one-size-fits-all plans. They thus argue that instead of asking what development projects, such as welfare, do not achieve, the question is rather what they do achieve in their 'side-effects' (Ferguson & Lohmann, 1994:180). They ask, 'what do aid programmes do *besides* fail to help poor people?' (emphasis original) and respond that the side-effects of aid are often not to alleviate poverty but to 'expand ... the exercise of bureaucratic state power which incidentally takes poverty as its point of entry' (Ferguson & Lohmann, 1994:180).

Thabo's comment that he could not give Ouma the parcel because he had forgotten how the photocopy machine worked is an excellent example of this anti-politics machine in action. Social workers in South Africa work on a predetermined checklist plan for how to do welfare, regardless of context (here signified in the requirements for receiving a parcel). In this moment, Thabo also did not consider the implications that the politics of the strike had materially had on Ouma's life, but rather how it was our problem that he no longer remembered the functioning of the machine.

The well-dressed man with his private vehicle, who was one of the officials Ouma had previously described as *vrek gevreet*, failed to recognise that his strike, his forgetfulness and the piece of paper in his hand translated to her and her household's hunger. Here, bureaucratic state power penetrated Ouma's everyday life and her empty stomach to remind her that the state still governed life and that – in post-apartheid South Africa – a paper was more important and carried more political weight than a person or a meal.

As I have shown in Chapter 3, development has left destruction rather than progress in its wake, and it is no different for developmental social work in South Africa. Instead of the job placement, self-sufficiency and 'full integration' that it promises, welfare is still located *innie dorpe in*, still relies on one's ability to successfully acquire and complete heaps of paperwork, is often implemented by state social workers who quickly fail to remember the functioning of office equipment and simply want to meet targets on paper,⁴⁸ and the social support that Ouma did later receive made

⁴⁸ I need to note here that I cannot generalise this statement to all social workers. South Africa does have a shortage of social workers, and most social workers (in both state and private settings) work beyond their capacities and have very high caseloads, which have a significant impact on their abilities to provide proper services (Skhosana, 2020:109). This, I argue, is another working of the anti-politics machine (Ferguson, 1994) in which even the functioning of the state department seems to fall outside the purview of politics and care.

no significant difference in her financial position. It only left her equally dependent on welfare, networks of relationships and my car as before.

In the Sisyphus image, welfare provides just enough means for Ouma to keep pushing the rock, but not enough for her to get the rock to the top of the hill or for it to remain there. It is a road to nowhere. In the logic of developmental social work outlined in the *Framework for Social Welfare Services* document (2011), social support should provide a rock-hard basis from which to build a coherent life. Instead, it has become part of the abrasion of the everyday life from which one must craft moments of liveability, and together with this abrasion, the distance up the metaphorical hill seems to grow ever longer.

In Ross's (2010, 2015) terms, welfare therefore keeps raw life neatly intact, instead of transforming it into the promised 'cooked' life. Still, Ouma was able to craft moments of liveability from within the welfare system. In the instances described above, she obtained various food parcels from various organisations and were eventually able to secure grants and a state pension. I would like to return to the vignette at the beginning of this chapter to ask what making moments of liveability from or with welfare looks like and what a moment like this means for *lang moete*.

Making moments of liveability from or with welfare

In the instance where Ouma asked Marie for the food parcel, and changed her usually confident demeanour to pitiful, I at first, felt discomfort about how it positioned me. Upon further reflection, I also realised that Ouma's change in behaviour made me feel uncomfortable because the strong, outspoken woman I knew was trying to present herself as helpless, playing into the narrative of 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998, 2005) and performing the very denial of personhood that the photocopy machine moment engendered and *lang moete* counteracted.

In Chapter 1, I have written that the criteria of who qualifies as 'poor' are those who cannot sustain their own livelihoods and need to rely on charity to survive (Simmel, as cited in Englund, 2015:S138). The inverse of this argument is the question of who deserves social assistance. Since the establishment of welfare in South Africa in the 1920s, the state has continually redefined its definition of 'deserving poor'. The first forms of welfare in South Africa were the response to what was called the 'poor white problem', and poor whites (at first elderly whites, then the disabled and children, later also elderly people who were classified 'coloured') were the only South Africans who could lay claim to social assistance (Seekings, 2007:378-379).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Two South African wars against the British empire, a rinderpest outbreak during the 1890's, an unexpected drought and the global economic crisis of 1929 left many white South Africans (many of whom

After apartheid, the government addressed these historical inequalities and in the *White paper for social assistance* (Department of Welfare, 1997), redefined those deserving social assistance to include poor women (with a specific focus on black women), children, the elderly and the disabled. Jeremy Seekings (2008:40-41) specifically argues that the post-apartheid definition of deservingness not only relates to material or social needs but to past exclusion and disadvantage.

Bridges (2017:1049) further defines 'deserving poor' as 'those who cannot be blamed for their poverty' and whose poverty is the result of structural inequalities (e.g. past and persistent spatial and economic exclusion), not personal weaknesses (like laziness). Both Seekings (2008:33) and Elizabeth Fouksman (2020:1, 8, 12, 19) show how a moral economy of work is at play in these definitions, meaning that productive work is associated with dignity and personal value. Both authors argue that the definition of who are deserving poor is based on those not able to work and enter the labour market.

The implication of this definition of deservingness is that it excludes all able-bodied men from accessing welfare, since the argument is that able-bodied men should work (not be lazy) and deserve the 'dignity of work' (Seekings, 2008:33, 40). The problem, as Ferguson (2013, 2015), Hanlon *et al.* (2010) and Fouksman (2020:2) have shown, is that there are not enough job opportunities to accommodate all able-bodied men. We live in a post-wage present (Fouksman, 2020:2).

As I have mentioned earlier, Ouma knew that in order to acquire resources from a white, middleclass woman at a private organisation, a performance of pity would be more effective than a performance of confidence, exactly because the welfare system is designed to address pity, not confidence. It is easy to reduce Ouma's actions in that instance to 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998, 2005) and to say that she was reduced to, and embodied, non-personhood.

I, however, argue that Ouma's performance of 'bare life' and non-personhood was a tactical use of these tropes and therefore a political claim to worthy life and personhood. Yielding these tropes, Ouma successfully appealed to the narrative of 'deserving poor' and skilfully navigated the design of developmental social work to access resources. She was working the system and making it work for her. She was bringing politics back into the anti-politics machinery of development and aid.

were uneducated subsistence farmers) impoverished and unable to sustain their livelihoods. The 'crisis' of white impoverishment was dubbed '*die armblanke probleem*' (the poor white problem). White people were, however, not the only ones impoverished by these conditions, but under the Afrikaner Nationalist regime, were the only ones deemed deserving of assistance (Seekings, 2007:282, 391).

There was another instance where Ouma utilised the opposite trope of confidence and legitimacy to access documentation. One of the requirements that Ouma needed for her foster care application was unabridged birth certificates of all the children. Initially, the officials issued her abridged versions, and Ouma and I had to return to the DHA to request new certificates. We queued outside in the scorching sun for over an hour. When we finally entered the building, we received a numbering ticket and were told to sit and wait until our number was called out.

We waited uncomfortably on the slippery silver chairs for almost another hour and just as we reached the front, the cashier closed her desk, sat behind the locked window and ate her lunch. No one came to fill her position and all the other cashiers disappeared outside except for one. When I tried to speak to her through the window to ask if no one was to replace her, she simply stared at me, ate her lunch and ignored my request.

It was around lunch time and from the waiting area, we could see the other office staff walking outside with their bright Tupperware containers filled to the brim with food. Ouma remarked, '*Hulle is vrek gevreet; nou hulle kan nie werk nie*' ('They have died eating; now they can't work'). '*Vrek*' is the Afrikaans word used for the death of animals and '*vreet*' is the word used for animals' eating. Her comment was therefore a scathing reference to the dehumanisation she experienced in being ignored and misrecognised by the cashier. In using the words '*vrek gevreet*' Ouma was referring to both the excess of the contents of the officials' Tupperware containers in comparison to her lack of resources, and to their passivity and apathy toward their jobs. Ouma's disgust was joined by the verbal dissatisfaction of everyone else in the waiting area, and the frustration once again crept in.⁵⁰

I saw a poster against the wall with the numbers of the departmental head office. I decided to call the number and, for effect, made quite the public spectacle of how 'I was calling the *minister's* office'. My call was, not surprisingly, met with the same monotonous female voice I was by now well familiar with in my encounters with bureaucracy. My strategy was, however, effective and within minutes, the cashier had re-opened her desk and helped Ouma. In Setswana, she asked Ouma who I was. Ouma responded that I was her lawyer and 'knew the law'. She winked at me when the cashier turned to finalise the payment and we left with the unabridged certificates seconds later.

In this instance, Ouma relied on the historical relationship between whiteness and power. She did not, in fact, use *our* relationship to make claims on state departments (since I am not actually a

⁵⁰ Note that this statement was very similar to the one Ouma made during the labour strike of the DSD. In a context of precarity where food was not taken for granted, Ouma often used dehumanising language and vulgar images of eating to verbalise her dissatisfaction with state departments.

lawyer) but instead performed this historical association to her own advantage. I argue that Ouma was enacting what Steven Robins (2014:496) calls a 'politics of legibility'. To make legible means to make something clear enough to read. What Robins (2014:496) means with a politics of legibility is actions that lay bare the workings and effects of structural violence in order to access the state.

In-between the cashier who ignored me and the other officials who left the room, all of us who were waiting became misrecognised by, or not legible to, the state. Ouma calling me a lawyer, my not correcting her and my calling the '*minister's* office' were all performances of legibility – we made sure that we were seen and heard. Appadurai (2004:66) argues that in development, 'the poor are recognised, but in ways that ensure minimum change in the terms of redistribution'. In performing both pity and legibility, Ouma momentarily changed the terms of recognition precisely because these performances were contextually bound.

Although these two instances were very different from each other, both were claims to recognition and respectability. A few frozen loaves of bread and Rama not only ensured her household's survival but signified social capital and Ouma's savvy ability to use it. Her usage of the image of a lawyer in the context of an incompetent state department similarly illustrated her contextual knowledge and ability to use social capital (even if it meant faking it). In these moments, *lang moete* were cultivated and nurtured. The food parcels did not, however, last and exposed the non-sustainable nature of social support and once again reinforces my argument that *lang moete* need to be repeatedly crafted and fostered in moments of liveability, like these. What is central to all these accounts above, is relationship, social capital and sociality.

Re-socialising welfare: relationships and recognition

From all the accounts in this chapter, the popular saying that 'it is really all about who you know' rings true. Relationship is central to each of these accounts, not only in terms of who Ouma knew but also in terms of how she used who she knew. In Chapter 2, I have argued that Ouma's relationships in Marikana eroded for various reasons. She did not have many friendships that lasted after she had quit her gambling group; Skhokhorito's and Rasta's leaving left a void in her meaningful political connections; the other residents became jealous after Madala had built his house, which further implicated her relationships with neighbours.

Welfare thus offered Ouma the opportunity to tactically forge new social connections. She befriended the social worker from Childline and through this relationship acquired a food parcel. She sought out and confronted Thabo at the DSD to ensure that he did not forget her or neglect her case. She drew on very specific narratives of pity to successfully appeal to Marie at CWP and

she used me, not only for the purposes of mobility, but as a white, educated woman to accompany her physically and in a politics of legibility (cf. Robins, 2014).

In crafting connections through, beyond and between organisations, myself and state departments, Ouma did what Jess Auerbach (2020:20) calls 'traffic in influence'. Auerbach (2020:17, 20) extends Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital as the mannerisms and knowledge that we use to 'show belonging in a given space' to argue that cultural capital is also about knowing how to work the system and how to draw on specific people in specific ways to access specific things. Ouma's ability to read context and to craft different kinds of relationships for specific purposes in these contexts made her especially good at this. It also meant that she was able to momentarily bring the person back into the paper-centred system of aid.

Ferguson (2013:235) argues that social grants may address material needs (even if partially), but they do not address social needs and are, therefore, not an ideal form of social support in Southern Africa. From my discussion above about welfare as an infrastructure that misrecognised Ouma and often placed papers over persons, I argue that welfare was not particularly social or attuned to social needs. Although I thus agree with Ferguson's position, Ouma did not use the grants themselves but her ability to make connections across welfare organisations to bring sociality back into her dehumanising encounters with welfare.

Ouma's use of relationships was not only political but also a necessary practice for everyday survival. The argument that relationship is central to survival is not novel in anthropology. In 1975, Carol Stack published her now seminal monograph titled *All our kin: strategies for survival in a black community*. In this book, she argues that poor black families living in The Flats housing project in New York, America, made and drew on kin and kin-like relationships with neighbours in order to survive and ensure stability to their everyday lives.⁵¹ She argues that not only were relationships in The Flats central to social stability, but they also ensured financial and material support.

Stack (1975:33) specifically makes note of swapping as a way of distributing goods and money perpetually, ensuring that everyone could continually 'obtain daily necessities'. The connection between relationship and exchange in anthropological writing dates to Bronislaw Malinowski's (1922) writing on the *kula* ring and Marcel Mauss's *Essay on the gift* (originally published in French in 1950, 1990). More recently, Henderson (2012), Ross (2010), Povinelli (2011) and Auerbach

⁵¹ Although Stack (1975:34-41) also pays attention to the importance of biological kinship in systems of exchange, she argues that extending kin-like networks to neighbours is essential for creating the obligation to share goods, and thus for survival.

(2020) have all argued that the crafting of relationships and networks is imperative to making everyday life liveable.

Henderson (2012:38) recognises that people's ability to craft meaningful and flexible relations has an impact on what she calls their 'capacities for endurance'. Relaying accounts from the everyday lives of her participants, she uses the image of drawing together 'threads' (Henderson, 2012:23, 102). In her field site, threading oneself, so to speak, into as many and varied possible relationships of people who could accompany one physically (to hospitals and government offices) or emotionally (on the path of dying) was integral to the capacity for enduring illness and the state's deliberate forgetfulness (Henderson, 2012:34).

Ross (2010:205) likewise maintains that in The Park, '[m]aintaining relationships is central to survival, to a sense of oneself as a person, and to one's sense of belonging'. Like Ross, Henderson (2012:102) notes the importance for her research companions of being able to draw on what she calls 'local repertoires of relatedness to create new bonds', when kinship networks are compromised and no longer able to capacitate endurance or sustain personhood. With this statement, she illustrates that it was necessary for her interlocutors not only to maintain kinship bonds but also to thread relationships locally outside the family with herself as researcher and with medical workers and government officials (Henderson, 2012:102). The affective bond between Ouma and me enabled her to similarly draw me into her network of threads on which she made claims to resources and legitimacy.

Where Henderson (2012:23) uses the image of 'threading' oneself into a network, Povinelli (2019) uses a similar image when she argues in her talk about the Karrabing Film Collective that enduring precarious life relies on 'the ability to keep oneself knotted'. In Chapter 2, I have mentioned that survival in Ross's field site was about developing what she calls 'durable relationships' (Ross, 2010:6) with as many people as possible. Ouma understood that these knots were not lasting, not always durable (or in Henderson's terms, that threads unravelled), and when they unravelled, she threaded and knotted herself into new networks of relationship and exchange. Ouma relied not only on the durability of relationships but on the multiplicity of relationships.

Having lots of traffic on one's influence trafficking pathways (Auerbach, 2020:20), ensures multiple relations on which one can depend. Ferguson (2013:224; 2015:142-143) argues that development, however, regards independence and autonomy as dignity and freedom (as discussed in the section on productive labour and dignity above), where it regards dependence as personal failure.

In contrast to these claims, Ferguson (2015:117) shows that dependency on social relations and systems of distribution is already a concrete practice in Southern Africa and, in fact, very effective at stabilising household finances (2015:143). Ferguson (2015:90-94, 101, 163) argues that instead of only propagating more employment opportunities, poor South Africans need more opportunities to craft relations on which they can depend and thus can draw on tactical systems of distribution. Hanlon *et al.* (2010:1, 143) likewise show that distribution of wealth in the form of grants is more effective in alleviating intergenerational poverty than development programmes or job creation.⁵²

Furthermore, Ferguson (2015) illustrates that being able to engage in multiple networks of exchange takes hard work and the making and remaking of relationships that are often fraught. He calls this 'distributive labour' (Ferguson, 2015:100) and maintains that it is an active, carefully cultivated (Ferguson, 2015:107-108) and legitimate 'mode of action' against the incoherence of everyday life (Ferguson, 2015:146). In this network of distribution, where making relations of dependency counts as legitimate labour and ensures survival, the recipients of grants themselves become sources of distribution, and a grant can ensure a measure of financial stability for more than one individual or household (Ferguson, 2015:104, 113).

Ouma participated in distributive labour (cf. Ferguson, 2015:100) and included me in this network of distribution. I contend that Ouma's understanding that making relationships of dependency is hard work was one of the reasons she used to say that '*ons het hard gewerk vandag*' ('we worked hard today') on days where we drove around endlessly. Ouma understood that work and successful efforts can not only be defined in the terms of productive labour or development outcomes.

While I felt frustrated with how welfare was not doing what I thought it should have done, Ouma taught me to pay attention to what welfare was doing and what it made possible: both keeping raw life intact *and* simultaneously capacitating possibilities for relationships of dependence. Ouma thereby redefined what successful efforts of making stable life looked like; to her, as to Ferguson, success lies not in autonomy and independence, but in one's ability to traffic in influence

⁵² The strict lockdown regulations of the South African government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic have caused a massive loss of employment. The state seemed to understand that in this time of crisis, cash deposits were necessary and established the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant in April 2020, which pays out a relief grant of R350 per month to unemployed South Africans. Although this grant is only temporary and just enough to cover the most basic of expenses, it has brought some relief. As it is only temporary and very little, in all likelihood, it too simply maintained raw life (cf. Ross, 2010, 2015) and will not ensure self-sufficiency.

(Auerbach, 2020:20) and to make a plurality of opportunities for dependence (Ferguson, 2015:146).

Redefining the road to nowhere

Povinelli (2011, 2019) also interrogates what making successful life in the margins looks like. She argues that in neoliberal terms, failure constitutes anything that does not have a clear market value outcome. She writes that ‘we need to start asking what are the measures of failure, the arts of failure’ (Povinelli, 2011:23). To counteract this neoliberal notion of failure, Povinelli (2019) demonstrates that her Aboriginal Australian interlocutors did not view long-term change as successful life making, but instead, that they measured success by their ability to keep their lives more or less the same and to ‘keep [themselves] knotted’.

For Henderson’s (2012:102) participants, successful life constitutes making ‘local repertoires of relatedness’. I argue that for Ouma, successful life was about creating multiple opportunities for *lang moete* through, firstly, making relationships across as many people and aid organisations as possible, secondly, yielding these relationships tactically to access resources based on her deep contextual knowledge and, thirdly, being able to move around often in order to make new relationships of dependency (see discussion in Chapter 3).

To conclude, the accounts in this chapter show that welfare keeps ‘raw life’ (Ross, 2010, 2015) neatly intact, meaning that it does not enable the self-sufficiency it promises and its recipients are stifled on a road to nowhere. However, I also illustrate how Ouma concurrently managed to make welfare work for her and tactically used it in her networks of exchange, thereby re-politicising aid. In all the accounts in this chapter, Ouma was not the passive victim of welfare. Instead, she was making deeply political claims to resources, recognition and personhood in extremely savvy and strategic ways, using multiple relations and the opportunities for dependence that welfare made possible. In ‘trafficking in influence’ (Auerbach, 2020:20), she brought personhood back into the a-political bureaucratic functioning of aid.

Through crafting relationships across welfare organisations, she also managed to re-socialise an alienating welfare system where grants only address material needs (albeit partially) and not social ones (Ferguson, 2013:235). I thus conclude that *lang moete* became possible where and when Ouma could draw on different kinds of relationships to access resources and work the system. In the next chapter, I describe how Ouma and a group of children in Marikana imagined their possible futures, what aspirations look like and which aspirations become possible from abraded places.



Figure 4-1: Packaged food parcel from Childline



Figure 4-2: Contents of food parcel from Childline that Ouma instructed the boys to unpack on the table

CHAPTER 5: FLOWER VASES, TAXIS AND HOUSES: DRAWING PATHWAYS OF ASPIRATION FROM A *DONKER, SWART PLEK*

When Ouma's partner, Madala, learnt that I was interested in childcare, he said that for my next visit he would '*reël kinnners*' ('arrange children') for me to meet. When I arrived one afternoon, he had indeed arranged a large group of boys and instructed them to perform a gumboot dance for me. When I suggested that I would bring some paper, pencils and paint on my next visit, the boys were all keen. In the few months that followed, even after Ouma and I had started making research about foster care, I spent various afternoons in the settlement drawing pictures with the children. This pleased Ouma, because it meant that the children were staying off the streets.

Most afternoons, there were only boys between the ages of seven and seventeen, but some afternoons, girls joined too. I wanted them to make descriptive drawings of their lives in Marikana, hoping to gain insight into their everyday lives. Susan Levine (1999:140, 147), who studies childhood in South Africa, asserts that children's drawings can illuminate their everyday struggles but may also reveal important insight into the everyday politics of their caregivers or surroundings. She has used drawings extensively in her own research with children to produce descriptions of their lives from their own perspectives. This was the type of data I wanted to produce.

Instead, Madala told the children to draw things they needed in Marikana and how they *wanted* to see Marikana. He hoped to progress the agenda of 'the project' and to use the drawings as data that showed what children in Marikana needed (in order to appeal successfully to aid and sponsorships based on the criteria of need and pity, as I have outlined in the previous chapter), and not descriptions of their everyday lives. This reflected his desire that I should direct my conversations with Marikana residents towards needs. I decided to let Madala's instructions take precedence over my own ideas. I realised that drawings depicting children's aspirations could be good data and that it was important for Madala to have such data for 'the project'.

Aside from one drawing with a tap and the heading '*tsortsor ka metsi Marikana*' (meaning 'we ask water in Marikana', *tsortsor* here is an eight-year-old boy's sounded version of the Setswana word '*tsweetswee*', which means 'to ask nicely'),⁵³ I ended up with lots of drawings of brand name sneakers, taxis and of houses with living room tables. These were luxuries in Marikana and, rather than needs, depicted objects the children aspired to own. The most popular themes for the

⁵³ I wondered to whom the boy directed his request. I contend that he thought (perhaps based on my whiteness and my connection to a university, an official institution) that I would be able to take the drawing outside Marikana and into the municipal offices to demand the municipal infrastructure that Marikana has been denied. His request mirrored the ideals and agendas of DIY formalisation and added to the politics of DIY water infrastructure.

drawings were Nike Aeromax sneakers, striped Adidas sneakers and taxis with the children's names on them. I include some of the drawings at the end of this chapter as reference.

In this chapter, I reflect on these drawings to argue that aspiration is socialised and tethered to context. I use Arjun Appadurai's (2004) notion of the 'capacity to aspire' to show how in post-apartheid South Africa, people's capacity to aspire is unequally distributed across class, race and space. I not only use the children's drawings but also a drawing that Ouma made about her aspirations and an account about the house that Madala built to show how adults learn to aspire from a context of raw life (cf. Ross, 2010; 2015) or the *donker, swart plek* that Ouma described.

I argue that where Ouma's aspirations related to mobility, Madala's aspirations related to remaining in place. On the one hand, Ouma's, Madala's and the children's aspirations all related in some way to middleclass notions of respectability. On the other hand, all their aspirations brought the logic and principles of development and developmental social work into question.

I take a brief tour through Bourdieu's social practice theory to argue that one's capacity to aspire (cf. Appadurai, 2004) is not only produced within context but also serves to keep that context in place. Therefore, learning to aspire from raw life is very different from learning to aspire from middleclass life, and the range of futures that become possible from raw life is limited and serves to keep raw life in place. There are, nevertheless, moments where aspiration, the mere capacity to aspire and successful outcomes of aspiration create moments of liveability, and it is in keeping the pathways of aspiration open that *lang moete* can exist.

Objects of aspiration in a *donker, swart plek*

I quickly noticed that the children mimicked one another's drawings (which resulted in various drawings featuring exactly the same pair of Adidas sneakers from the same angle, for example), but also that they drew the same things even when they were sitting far apart. Their intimate knowledge of what Nike Aeromax sneakers looked like, even though none of them owned any, astounded me. As Ouma once remarked about the drawings, '*hulle het dit nie, maar hulle ken dit*' ('they don't have it, but they know it'), stretching her eyes, indicating that she too was surprised by their observations.

Although the sneakers were insightful objects of aspiration, I argue that they are not exclusive to Marikana, since most teenagers I know aspire to own brand name sneakers. The odds of these boys ever owning a new pair of Nike sneakers were indeed slimmer than those of a middleclass South African teenager, and the boys were deeply aware of this. What I would, however, like to pay more attention to here are the recurrent themes of taxis in the boys' drawings and dining room tables and flower vases in girls' drawings.

As I have mentioned, many of the boys drew taxis, often awarding them their own names or marking them with symbols which they told me represented a fashionable type of wheel rim that indicated prestige. When I noticed that taxis were a recurrent theme in their drawings, I first assumed that these were descriptive drawings, but after asking the boys why they had drawn them, I realised that they were in fact aspirational. The boys told me that they longed to own their own taxi one day, perhaps even their own small taxi company. The names on the drawings reflected prospective business names but also represented pride and their aspirations to claim full ownership of the vehicles.

Almost all of their drawings had stickers with words such as 'peace' and 'love' on the side of the taxi. Such stickers are common taxi decorations. One important element to most of the drawings was that the taxis had bicycle stands on the back (see Figures 5-1, 5-2 and 5-3). The boys explained to me that this was important, as it meant one could transport people and their bicycles for long distances and could thus increase one's clientele. I have not seen many taxis with bicycle stands on the back and wondered if this was not a re-imagination of a minibus taxi towing a trailer – something one sees often in South Africa, especially for long-distance trips – or an idea that the boys had developed based on bicycle stands on private vehicles.

Nevertheless, the boys' logic and business savvy impressed me and illustrated that they knew how the taxi industry worked and had thought about the practicalities of one day owning a taxi. None of the boys could, however, tell me where they would get the capital to procure their first taxi. Mostly, their answers were that they would do *skroppies* (piece jobs) in order to save for it – an endeavour that is often not very profitable.

During all my months of fieldwork in Marikana, I very rarely saw girls. Girls did not play outside as often as boys, as they helped inside the house with domestic labour. However, there were a few instances where girls came to join our drawing sessions. I remember one afternoon, in particular, when we sat outside drawing pictures under the green shading net in Ouma's garden and two girls of about ten years old joined in our drawing session.

Ouma told them what we were doing, saying that they should make drawings of things they needed or wanted. The girls eagerly grabbed the colour pencils and started drawing. Ouma also decided to draw something she wanted. When they returned with their drawings, I was stunned. One of the girls and Ouma had both drawn a house with a dining room set with a vase and flowers on the table. The girl also drew a flower and vegetable garden and a tree in front of her house and said that this was both a reflection of Ouma's garden and how she wanted her house to look one day. The house had big windows; so did the house in Ouma's picture (see Figures 5-4 and

5-5). *Makhukhus* in Marikana did not have many windows (if any) and were dark and musty. In literal terms, Marikana was indeed a *donker, swart plek*.

The other girl too drew a house with big windows, a flower garden and a car in front of the house, but with a tap standing separately on the right side. What specifically caught my attention about this drawing was that the girl had drawn a shack, not a brick house, with a separate tap. It had a flat zinc roof, and when I asked her if it represented her current house or a future house, she responded that it was her dream house. It did not look much different from what her house in Marikana looked like (see Figure 5-6).

The capacity to aspire: making sense of taxis, dining room tables and taps

At first, I thought that I would not be able to use the children's drawings as data because they were too similar (and therefore might be indicative only of their imitations of each other's drawings), but in writing this dissertation and reflecting critically on the notion of making life in abraded places, I realised that these drawings were, in fact, very revealing of how children in Marikana engaged with their futures and of what they regarded as successful life. Their drawings were very different from drawings my middleclass friends' children made as far as content was concerned. Apart from drawings of brand name sneakers and fancy cars, which most children from different backgrounds in South Africa aspire to own, the prevalence of taxis, taps, flower vases and dining room sets was surprising to me.

These objects represent things that are mundane to me, who has always taken mobility, running water and flower vases for granted. I was also surprised that the boys did not aspire to own large businesses or become qualified in a degree or trade. Instead they were satisfied with owning (or driving) a taxi, perhaps two. They were not naïve, and I argue that their aspirations were not only the romantic reminiscing of boys who wanted to drive big cars – after all, some of them were already seventeen years old, had relatives who drove taxis for a living and understood exactly how the business worked. This was evident in their detailed knowledge of fashionable wheel rims and how to increase the clientele of a taxi business. Their aspirations were founded in practical, viable and familiar options for making stable life.

I was also surprised that none of the girls, with the exception of one, aspired to owning a car or qualifying themselves in any form of formal education or training. All they wanted was a house – even a shack – with a flower garden, a tap, a dining room set and a flower vase. The drawing of the *makhukhu* with the tap and the car simply reiterated what an upgrade of a shack in Marikana would look like, instead of a typical suburban house.

Not only were their drawings tailored to the material context, financial possibilities and what they observed in Marikana, but they were also tailored to gender. Their drawings were gendered in the sense that the boys aspired to business and productive labour (which I argue is supported in the developmental notion that able-bodied men should work to achieve personhood; see Chapter 4), while the girls aspired to domestic life and objects typically associated with the household. The fact that none of them aspired to productive labour also revealed that they knew that dependency on welfare was a viable option for women (see also discussion in Chapter 4)

Appadurai (2004:67) defines aspiration as a future-orientated concept that includes 'wants, preferences, choices and calculations'. Although aspirations are individual ideas of successful life, he argues that they are also always social, socially informed and related to contextual norms of social life (Appadurai, 2004:67). Since aspirations are socially informed, he therefore shows that what he calls one's 'capacity to aspire' is unevenly distributed based on social position (Appadurai, 2004:68).

Dating back to the 1950s, various scholars have all shown the relationship between class and aspiration (cf. Keller & Zavalloni, 1971; Mack *et al.*, 1956; Reissman, 1953; Sellar, 2013). Appadurai extends the focus on class to include spatial influences on social position and therefore on the capacity to aspire. To Appadurai (2004:61), aspiration is something that one navigates from a particular space and context and from what that context offers.

Appadurai (2004:69) conceptualises the 'capacity to aspire' as an indicator of how many different possible futures one can viably achieve. He explains that aspiration works like a network of nodes and pathways that make up relationships between ends and means, and calls this a 'map of aspiration' (Appadurai, 2004:69). He argues that the richer one is, the denser the connections on the map become; if one is poor, the abrasion of everyday life means the abrasion of connections on the aspiration map and therefore a decrease in the density of connections between means and ends that become possible from a specific place. One's capacity to aspire is therefore implicated by one's context and the number of possible futures that it allows and encourages (Appadurai, 2004:68-69).

Appadurai (2004, 2015) relates the unequal distribution of aspirational capacity directly to the unequal redistribution of sources and argues that diminished aspirational capacity is not only a symptom of unequal material redistribution but a catalyst for this process to persist. In short, the capacity to aspire is part of the relationship that keeps the poor poor and makes the rich richer (Appadurai, 2004:68).

Appadurai's argument is, in part, informed by Bourdieu's social practice theory and his concept of *habitus*. *Habitus* refers to how an individual's background, history and the social rules governing his or her everyday life determine his or her behaviour in any specific situation. The principle of habitus is that, because behaviour is regulated by social norms, the behaviour reproduces existing social norms. David Swartz (in Rao & Walton, 2015:15) summarises the concept as follows:

Habitus tends to shape individual action so that existing opportunity structures are perpetuated. Chances of success or failure are internalised and then transformed into individual aspirations or expectations; these are then in turn externalised in action that tends to reproduce the objective structure of life chances.⁵⁴

Appadurai (2004, 2015), however, notes the limits of Bourdieu's practice theory to explain aspirational capacity. In my reading of Appadurai, he firstly maintains that Bourdieu's theory cannot account for how collective horizons are shaped or collective aspirations formed (Appadurai, 2004:61). Practice theory can only account for how individuals behave within those collectivities. Secondly, he argues that the unequal distribution of the capacity to aspire is not only rigid and structural (in terms of social norms and regulations) but deeply spatial (Appadurai, 2004:61-98); therefore his proposition of aspiration as a map consisting of interlocking pathways.

I maintain that Bourdieu's concept of field (as a specific economic and social context in which behaviour occurs; Thompson, 2010:67) is still useful to understand the material and social constraints on aspiration. The resources, rules and history of a specific context (field) all determine the possible actions that can exist within it. In a *donker, swart plek* such as Marikana, material precarity, unreliable relationships, poor or limited education, empty promises of infrastructural development, and spatial exclusion all constrain and diminish the pathways of aspiration that the children and Ouma can apply to.

Taking the abrasion of everyday life and DIY formalisation in Marikana into consideration, Appadurai's (2004) 'capacity to aspire' thus becomes a useful concept with which to make sense of the children's and Ouma's aspirations. If one were to draw up an aspirational map for the kind of pathways that emerge from the field of raw life (Ross, 2010, 2015), the means that they had at their disposal, as well as the possible ends, would be determined and confined to the above-mentioned conditions of life in Marikana and kept in place by developmental welfare.

To me, these aspirations seemed mundane, because the space in which I had learnt to aspire took things like flowers, vases and vehicles for granted, and there was no need for me to aspire to these objects. The space in which Ouma and the children had learnt to aspire offered limited pathways, limited means and limited possible ends. The spatial constraints of Marikana also made

⁵⁴ See also Willis (1977) for a similar argument for why working-class boys in London end up doing working-class jobs.

these objects more meaningful for the coherence of social life than they would be in a middleclass aspirational space. Differences in aspiration are therefore socialised, and different kinds of social and cultural capital go into making them.

As was evident from my research making with Ouma, her pathways always led back to a *donker, swart plek*. I argue that she desperately wanted to get out of the *donker, swart plek* and that her aspirations for a flower vase related to typical middleclass notions of respectability. I argue the same for the girls' depictions of dining room sets, gardens and flower vases. I think back to the moment Ouma bent down to the flower and I remarked that it was a houseplant – a very 'middleclass thing' to have. Ouma remarked that it was pretty and, knowing Ouma, she would have loved a houseplant; yet she destroyed it later. Her aspirations were therefore aimed at making this *donker, swart plek* liveable, if only momentarily, because she understood the unequal distribution of pathways on her aspirational map. Ouma knew that the chances of her living a middleclass life were slim, and she therefore tactically used the pathways of aspirations that were possible for her.

In reflecting further upon why Ouma wanted a flower vase, I realised that a flower vase was a mobile object, something that is portable. Mobility was a way for Ouma to navigate her capacity to aspire, and to remain mobile was itself one of her aspirations. As I have shown in Chapter 3, she purposefully choreographed possibilities to be in the car, on the move. Remaining mobile kept the pathways for aspiration open and in this possibility, *lang moete* were tended.

Bunnell *et al.* (2017:3) similarly argue that aspiration in different cities in Asia is often linked to the prospect of going elsewhere, because being able to go elsewhere keeps imagination and aspiration alive. Where their data comment on the prospect of different destinations, my data show that Ouma kept aspiration alive 'on the move'. Weston (2008:160) also writes that growing up in a working-class household, in retrospect, she would have answered the question 'what do you want to be when you grow up, little girl?' with 'moving'. For Weston, as I argue for Ouma, moving made life bearable and kept the possibilities of moments of liveability open.

The taxis in the boys' drawings are also symbols of mobility and stable life on the move. The boys too understood how aspirational pathways work and how to navigate aspiration from the economic, cultural and social capital at their disposal. So did the girl who drew a shack with a garden as her 'dream house'. To her, this option was viable from her context in Marikana. Madala, however, did not aspire to remaining mobile, as Ouma and the children did. Instead, having a house and remaining in place were the objects of his aspirations.

‘This is my culture house’: crafting a base on an abraded place

When I met Madala, ‘the project’ was at its height. He expressed his aspirations to build a ‘hall’ for ‘the project’ and explained that he wanted it to serve as a meeting place, a makeshift care centre and a place where children could do homework. His aspirations were fuelled by the support of our anthropology department at the North-West University, which sponsored him an old computer, provided local internet access and a RaspberryPi onto which they had loaded educational material. The idea was to build a virtual library for residents and to locate it at ‘the project’, in the hall.

As I have mentioned earlier, our anthropology department helped Madala register Kopanang as a non-profit organisation, and my friend and I helped them design the logo. Since I first met Madala, he collected old bricks and building waste from odd construction jobs in the suburbs of Potchefstroom. Some of the rubble he received for free, and for some, he had to pay a minor fee. The heaps grew bigger by the week. When I asked Madala how he managed to get the rubble to Marikana, he responded that the contractors at his piece jobs delivered it for him.

As I have mentioned earlier, ‘the project’, however, stagnated as Ouma became less involved, Rasta and Skhokhorito left and Ouma eventually moved to Ikageng and later to Johannesburg. Madala was nevertheless still optimistic about the restoration of the garden and ‘the project’. He had big plans. Apart from building a hall, his plans included using the empty piece of land adjacent to their *makhukhu* to expand the garden and to erect a soccer field, all to keep boys out of trouble in the name of ‘the project’.⁵⁵ He also cultivated a relationship with a young man in the settlement who attended a local college to help him with administration. Later in that year, Madala made good on some of his plans.

Within a matter of months, their yard was surrounded by massive heaps of building waste that Madala planned to use for his constructions. While Ouma and the children lived in Ikageng, she called me one afternoon and said that we needed to go to Marikana to work. I had drawing with the children in mind but soon learnt that the aim of our visit was to sort through the heaps of bricks and rubble while Madala was attending a *skroppie*. Our job was to find and put aside wooden beams that could still be used. She handed me a pair of what she called ‘softies’ – white latex gloves – which she took from a box that a community care worker had previously handed out in

⁵⁵ Both Madala’s and Ouma’s agendas with ‘the project’ were gendered, and project activities mostly favoured boys. The gumboot dance routines the boys recited in the afternoons and Madala’s aspirations for a soccer field reflected this. The implication is twofold: firstly, boys were the ones that needed to be kept out of trouble, and secondly, play was something only destined for boys. Girls did chores in the house, practised childcare or sometimes played with dolls at home, learning domestic labour.

Marikana. She thought it might prevent me from getting splinters. Not wanting to insult her good intentions, I wore the gloves. Needless to say, they were less than effective.

It must have been quite a sight: Ouma and I on top of a massive heap of rubble, pulling wooden beams from under broken blinds and broken bricks. Other residents stared as they walked past. I imagine that seeing a young white woman doing physical labour was a rare (or non-existent) occurrence in the settlement. By the end of the afternoon, we had put together an entire heap of wooden beams, and Ouma was satisfied. I drove her back to Ikageng. I wondered why Ouma was willing to help with the labour of sorting through the waste even though she no longer lived there or fervently laboured for 'the project'. I contend that she nevertheless hoped that Madala's efforts would reinvigorate 'the project'. Here Ouma also once again used her relationship with me to get her everyday duties done, and her liberty to put me to physical work echoed my previous arguments that she was not a passive informant.

With the help of Ouma's, my and the children's labour in sorting through rubble in the coming weeks, Madala transformed their shack into a brick house, nonetheless still with a zinc roof. He used old bricks, the old wooden beams that Ouma and I had sorted and made concrete from the used rubble, which he crushed, sifted and mixed with water, grass and mud. He installed two windows using old window frames, and the house was much larger than the *makhukhu* it replaced.

After its construction, he painted it a light grey with ash and water. He also started building his hall, and together with Ouma and a few volunteers, they cleared the field adjacent to the house over the December holidays when Ouma and the children returned to Marikana. Madala, however, never managed to finish the hall, and it now stands as an empty witness to the limits of aspiration and persistence in Marikana. During a visit, he instructed me to take pictures of the foundations and the four corner pillars. Each was built using a different brick technique and Madala said that these pictures could serve as marketing material for employers to see that he was skilled in brickwork (see Figures 5-7 and 5-8).

On an excruciatingly hot afternoon in January 2020, I visited Madala and Ouma upon invitation to look at the house. We walked through the house as Madala showed me the rooms, and then we stepped outside through the backdoor. As we stood in the dusty backyard, he gazed at his handiwork with pride and, while pointing with his finger, said that it was his 'culture house' and that he would never leave. Speaking in English, I asked him what he meant, and he continued, smiling, 'You see now, Musa, children can be born in this house.' Madala's adamanance that this was his 'culture house' – a place where children could be born – reminded me strongly of Rasta's claim that there was life in Marikana because children were born there (Victor, 2016, 2019).

Madala continued and explained that his house was better than an RDP.⁵⁶ I asked him why, and he said that RDPs were not 'real houses' because they did not have hallways. Madala crouched down and with his forefinger drew a diagram in the red dust. He drew a long line to resemble a hallway, and six blocks around it to resemble rooms. That, he said, was what a 'real house' looked like. He also maintained that a 'real house' had a separate garage, with space for at least two cars. He had managed to build a small hallway into his house, connecting the kitchen to the living room, a bathroom and an outside door. His house did not yet have a garage, running water or sanitation, but a hall in progress.

In a conversation I had with Madala when I helped them with the logo in 2018, he mentioned that the municipality had previously offered him an RDP, but that he felt insulted by their offer. This time, speaking in Afrikaans, he said that it felt like they were giving him a '*hoenderhok*' ('chicken coop'). He continued, '*Hulle gee vir my die plek om te bly, maar hulle gee nie om waar ek wakker word nie*' ('They give me the place to stay, but they do not care where I wake up', 'they' being the municipality). It was only after the later conversation with Madala when he explained the difference between a 'real house' and an 'RDP' that I understood what Madala had meant that day.

In her field site, The Park, Ross's research participants similarly distinguished between improper or makeshift housing options as '*hokkies*' (small chicken coops) and proper brick houses (Ross, 2010:19-22). Just as Ross's participants described shacks as '*hokkies*', Madala described government-funded houses in the same diminutive terms. To Madala, an RDP did not qualify as a real house because it did not have the features (a hallway and double garage, and from Ouma's and the children's drawings, I would add windows) Madala attributed to real houses. I argue that after years of working in construction and building homes for others in the suburbs, Madala's definition of a real house was based on his observations of typical middleclass house layouts.

I also contend that a government-funded house was not a real house to him, because it was of poor quality. Many residents in Marikana told me how their relatives in government housing complained of poor roof tiling and poor sewerage and that sewage often came up in the kitchen sink when one flushed the toilet. An RDP, therefore, resembled a substandard and undignified housing option that, to Madala, was not suitable for human habitation, which meant to him a denial of personhood.

Building his own house with a small hallway, and clearing the veld adjacent to his yard were thus claims to respectability and attempts at keeping the rawness of everyday life and the non-

⁵⁶ Reconstruction and Development Programme housing. Although this term is no longer the official term for government housing, many South Africans still use it to refer to state-funded housing.

personhood engendered by the metaphorical (and physical) surrounding bush at bay (cf. Salo, 2004:134). There is something poetic in how Madala crafted respectability and personhood from the ruins of the suburban houses he had always been excluded from. As he had learnt in the municipal plans and dolomite report that he had received earlier in the year (see Chapter 2), his house was literally built on abraded ground, but to Madala, this was stable life.

During the visit when I went to see the house, Madala said to me, '*Musa, kyk nou hoe oud is ek en dis die eerste keer dat ek my eie grond het. Ek is bly oor die aarde, die grond*' ('Musa, now just look how old I am and it is the first time that I have my own land. I am happy about the earth, about the land'). Madala has never owned land and was a migrant labourer who, at first, worked on different mines and farms, and later, in construction. His statement illuminated his experience of historically not belonging anywhere. His term 'culture house' also powerfully invoked the image of the ethnic homeland, which equated belonging to bounded cultures and justified separate development on these grounds.

Du Pisani (2012:345) explains that the Bantu Authorities Act (1951) and the Law on Bantu Self-government (1959) proposed that each Bantustan (homeland) should be allowed 'separate development' under their own leadership. Separate development was supported by the idea that African ethnic groups were bounded cultures with homogenous practices and beliefs, such as the Tswana, the Zulu, the Xhosa, and so forth (see Van der Waal [2015:221] for a discussion) and that these were incommensurable, especially with white Afrikaner racial ideology (Du Pisani, 2012:345-355; Dunbar Moodie, 2017:157).⁵⁷

Within Afrikaner Nationalist logic, cultural difference meant a difference in civilisation, and therefore the need for spatial and economic separation. It was this narrative of incommensurable cultural difference that allowed H.F. Verwoerd to justify separate development (Dunbar Moodie, 2017:153). Dunbar Moodie (2017:158) explains that '[a]partheid theory in practice sought to maintain tight control of black aspirations perceived to threaten "white civilisation"'.

In building a brick house and assimilating it to cultural belonging indicated that Madala believed he had outwitted apartheid separate development through crafting a culturally meaningful space *in* the city, not in a rural homeland, albeit on the margins of the city.⁵⁸ Madala was asserting the

⁵⁷ Robert Thornton (1988), Terence Turner (1993) and Kees van der Waal (2015:221) have all shown the dangers of conceptualising culture as a noun, merging it with ethnic identity and to assume that these identities are homogenous and averse to change.

⁵⁸ Madala's statement about land could also be understood in the current land debates in South Africa. There is, however, not space to expand on this debate here.

civility, personhood and respectability that the homeland system and migrant labour system had refused him.

Saying that it was his 'culture house' and that children could be born there, was also a claim to futurity and inheritance. Through making these claims, Madala asserted that this land belonged to him because he had domesticated it into respectability. Although the land did not actually belong to him, such a claim and the material existence of the house would make it considerably harder for the municipality to evict or move him and is thus an active refusal of possible future displacement.

The process of building the house furthermore required its own set of relational networks. Just as Ouma drew on and manipulated relationships across welfare organisations, Madala drew on and deployed his own networks of relationship. He convinced his piece job employers to give him building waste and to deliver it to his *makhukhu*. He managed to form a connection with a local young man who could help him with administration, and he drew me into this network, not only for sorting rubble but also for taking pictures and helping him build a photographic record and evidence of his achievements and aspirations.

His relationship with the young man who helped him, however, turned fraught and, like Ouma's relationships, slowly eroded. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, before Madala built his house, the young man moved from Marikana into a backyard shack in Ikageng. Madala gave him all the files and electronic equipment (including the computers, keyboards and a small printer) of 'the project' to store, since Madala could not lock up his *makhukhu* and the backyard shack was a safer option. Months later, Madala complained that the man refused to return the goods and sent me and the boys to pick up the goods in my car one afternoon, since he maintained that the young black man would obey a white woman.

Once again, the historical relationship between whiteness and power, especially the relationship between 'madams' (white female employers) and young black male employees (typically in the role of garden worker) became painfully clear. (See Cock [1980] for a discussion of the exploitative labour relations between white female employers and black female domestic workers in apartheid South Africa.) In this instance, Madala utilised not my real position (since I was not the young man's 'madam'), but the historical relations of power that underpin my race and gender, to get back his goods. In minding Madala's request, I was reproducing these relations of power.

His tactic nevertheless worked, and within minutes of arriving at the young man's shack in Ikageng, we had the goods in the back of my car. Madala, however, maintained that the appliances could still not be returned to his *makhukhu*, as he had not finished building the house

and could not yet lock the door. The result was that the appliances and files lay in my parents' garage in the suburbs for several months before I eventually returned them to Madala after the completion of the house. Just as Ouma used my whiteness to enact a politics of legibility (cf. Robins, 2014) at the DHA, Madala used my whiteness to navigate disputes over possessions.

To get back to the theme of aspiration, Madala's 'culture house' reflected his aspirations for future success of 'the project'. Although Madala expressed his ambitions for a garage to store two vehicles, the garage as a stagnant space reveals that (like Ouma and the children) he wanted to be mobile, *but* that he wanted somewhere to return to. To Madala, remaining in place and having a place to return to were where he felt belonging and what made life bearable.

A base from which to draw pathways of aspiration

In their ethnography about house economies in Columbia, Gudeman and Rivera (2007) note the importance of the house or domestic space as what they call 'the base'. The authors develop the idea of 'the base' as a steady foundation from which to accumulate wealth (Gudeman & Rivera, 2007:54-55). Although they note that the base does not necessarily have to be a material space and can also be a business, an investment or even relationships, the house in their research emerged as a central base for their research participants. They argue that the house is an important site for securing material goods for survival, which are reliant on kinship or other social relations (Gudeman & Rivera, 2007:10). Therefore, the house, if it functions to acquire and maintain the goods necessary for survival *and* can sustain itself, can become a strong and central base from which to not only survive but also to sustain or increase wealth (Gudeman & Rivera, 2007:56, 63).

Using Gudeman and Rivera's idea of the base, I contend that Madala believed in the potential of his 'culture house' to sustain itself through 'the project' and therefore to function as a material base from which he could run Kopanang and from which he could accumulate wealth and obtain stable life. The ability of the house to accumulate wealth remains to be seen, and as Ouma's complaints about jealous residents (see Chapter 2) revealed, the house might have the adverse effect of alienating the other residents for it being too showy and eroding relationships even further, something Ross (2010:49) has similarly experienced in The Park.

The house, nevertheless, functions not only as an outcome of aspiration but as a base from which to craft new possible aspirations. In Appadurai's (2004) aspirational map, the house serves as a literal home base from which pathways of aspiration can be imagined, but where these pathways can be anchored in something that is already aspirationally, practically and socially meaningful.

One danger in writing about Madala's house as a successful conversion of aspiration into reality is that it may defend the very principles of development that enabled its necessity.

One of my criticisms of Appaduria's argument about aspiration relates to his proposition that a possible solution to poverty is to increase the poor's aspirational capacities as a form of *empowerment*. He contends that increasing aspirational capacities should be a tool of development to 'help the poor help themselves' (Appadurai, 2004:64). Raco (2009:436) illustrates that aspirational models of development (based on the logic that if people want improvement for themselves, they can achieve it) can mirror self-reliant developmental welfare ideals.

Raco (2009) writes that welfare in Britain is moving away from an expectational model (in which welfare recipients expect state support as a right and entitlement) to an aspirational model (in which recipients need to take responsibility for their own well-being). When reading Povinelli's and Ferguson's work (discussed in Chapter 3), the problems with this shift in a global context where high rates of unemployment are probably permanent, become clear. Although I agree with Appadurai that an expansion of aspirational capacities, which in my understanding means foundationally changing the contexts from which people aspire, is respectable, Ouma's reality (supported by Ferguson's and Povinelli's data) shows that this venture is unrealistic, at least for now.

In my discussion earlier in this section, I have argued that the four pillars of Madala's hall still stand as reminders of the limits of aspiration and of the material constraints of everyday life in Marikana. Madala's significant efforts notwithstanding, the pillars indicate that the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004) and the capacity to materialise aspirations are still unequally distributed across class, race and space, even in post-apartheid South Africa. Where post-apartheid liberation placed Ouma in-between, it placed Madala and his efforts in a space of 'in-progress', which is also liminal. The unfinished, in-progress pillars also indicate that Madala's achievements (although remarkable in the context) cannot be equated to the empowerment that development promised.

The end of the road of developmental aspirations

The girls, like the boys, did not aspire to education or formal employment (the ideals of developmental social welfare) but rather to craft feasible aspirations that could add coherence to everyday life. In contrast to the promises of development and its employment-based principles, their aspirations did not reflect ambitions to become self-reliant workers but rather reflected the realities and limitations of post-apartheid everyday life. Similarly, both Ouma and Madala were

tired of waiting for development to spread its progress. To counter the violence of waiting, Ouma kept on the move and Madala built his own house.

Madala, however, did not have the option of completely giving up on development and its focus on working as the path to stable life. As an adult male, Madala has always been (and continues to be) excluded from welfare. Ferguson (2013:235; 2015:41) argues that the reason Southern African men are not able to easily access grants is that developmental social work still functions on the notion that those who are able-bodied should work in productive labour (see also Chapter 4).

I argue that where Ouma performed the tropes of helplessness and deserving poor to access welfare and make life bearable, Madala performed the trope of the able-bodied man when he built his house. In building the house, Madala laid claim to the masculinity he perceived to lie in the skills he had acquired throughout his life but never received recognition for nor could use to meaningfully participate in productive labour. Apart from creating stable life by crafting himself a base from the rubble of other houses, in building the house, he also made the same claims to political life that Ouma made when she moved and tactically accessed food parcels.

In conclusion, where Ouma's aspirations were aimed at remaining on the move and keeping the pathways of aspiration open, Madala's aspirations were aimed at having a place to remain from which to anchor pathways of aspiration. Where Ouma's efforts to secure stable life were contingent upon mobility, Madala's efforts were contingent upon a base in Marikana. Ouma experienced belonging when she was in the car, in the taxi, on the move. Madala experienced belonging in his 'culture house' that he had built with his own hands. Although Ouma's and Madala's efforts to make stable life differed considerably, and this, in my understanding, was in part what led to the disintegration of 'the project', both their efforts are equally savvy, equally significant and equally effective for 'making social worlds worth inhabiting' (cf. Ross, 2010:211).

The aspirational pathways for Ouma, Madala and the children still remain open and they make different futures possible, even though these possible futures are more limited than those of most middleclass South Africans. I will therefore not assume that Ouma will never permanently return to Marikana or that Madala will never leave, nor that none of the children will pursue tertiary education or jobs in the formal sector.

Instead, what I show is how aspiration is socialised depending on context, how Madala, Ouma and the children 'did' aspiration differently, how they used what they had at their disposal to imagine possible futures from a very tumultuous post-apartheid South Africa and how the unequal distribution of aspiration often serves to keep raw life intact and often serves to transcend it. In a

geography of *lang moete* then, *lang moete* become possible in imagining a different future and in keeping these possibilities as open as possible, simultaneously recognising that the pathways for aspiration (and the means to achieve them) are limited and need to continuously be redefined, reimagined and tethered to context.



Figure 5-1: A drawing of a taxi with stickers on the side and large speakers in the back



Figure 5-2: Drawing of a taxi with a name and bicycle stand



Figure 5-3: Drawing of a taxi with a bicycle stand and the prestigious wheel rim symbol on the front left



Figure 5-4: One girl's drawing of a house with big windows, a garden and a dining room set with a flower vase



Figure 5-5: Ouma's drawing of a house with a path, windows, a flower garden and a dining room set with a flower vase



Figure 5-6: One girl's drawing of a house resembling a shack but with windows, a garden, a car and a tap close by to the right



Figure 5-7: The house that Madala built and painted with ash and water



Figure 5-8: The pillars of the hall in progress that Madala is building

CHAPTER 6: LONG AFTER THE END: A CONCLUSION

As I was busy finalising and editing this dissertation, Ouma called me on a warm Saturday morning in November 2020. She told me that she was visiting Madala in Marikana because '*ek het kom sentjies vra*' ('I came to ask cents'), she said. She called to let me know that she missed me and that she would like to see me again. When I asked her if she had managed to acquire the *sentjies* she came to collect, she laughed and responded, '*Nee, hier by Oupa is niksie*' ('No, here at Oupa (Grandpa) there's nothing'). I knew that she really wanted to see me, but also that she hoped I would be able to supply her with some *sentjies* or some food.

She said that she would only be visiting for a few days, and early on the Monday morning, I pulled up to their fence in Marikana with two bags of food and fresh herbs I had picked from my garden – one for Madala and one for Ouma to take back to Johannesburg. She said that she had *chupa'd* (hitchhiked) from Johannesburg and planned to use the same mode of transport to get back. During this visit, I also brought with me the Kopanang portfolios Madala had previously requested. He had asked me to print some of the photographs of our drawing activities at 'the project' and pictures of the house with descriptions. He wanted evidence that 'the project' did good work and to have an official document to ask for sponsors. I printed and ringbound two copies. I included a short information section on Kopanang, some pictures of its activities and a page with their registration and banking information so that they could use the document to acquire donations or sponsors.

Both of them were more delighted with the portfolios than with the food. Ouma repeatedly kissed the front page. Madala called it his 'weapon' and his 'ID', because he said that he could use the document to show that 'the project' was legitimate and to refuse a possible eviction from the piece of land where he had built his house and planned to expand 'the project'. See Figure 6-1 where Ouma and Madala are standing with the portfolios in front of the house and the sign with the garden's name – 'Eden Park'.⁵⁹

During my visit, Ouma and I sat on the couch talking about her life in Johannesburg. She said that it was better for her, since '*alles is naby*' ('everything is close by', including schools), her sister and her family lived next-door, she had her own stand and '*ek het bietjie gegroei*' ('I've grown a bit'). She had indeed picked up a bit of weight and no longer looked as frail as before. She was, however, wearing blue overall pants that were too small for her and tearing at the seams, and a pair of old turquoise flipflops.

⁵⁹ Naming the garden 'Eden Park' signified that they hoped it would bring paradise to a *donker, swart plek*.

As we were sitting on the couch, she complained that her new caseworker in Johannesburg had not been able to reach the social worker at the DSD in Potchefstroom and that she was confused about her grants, as they had not been paid out for several months and then suddenly were paid again starting July. She had come to Potchefstroom not only to ask *sentjies* but also to enquire about these instabilities in her grants. Coincidentally, as we were speaking, Thabo, the social worker from the DSD showed up at their house to speak to Ouma, and we went outside to meet him.⁶⁰ Ouma whispered to me to join them and not to leave. He remembered me and asked if I was still busy with my dissertation. We sat under the acacia tree; Ouma sat on an upholstered office chair, while we sat on steel-frame plastic school chairs. The entire happenstance felt symbolic.

Ouma and the social worker spoke in Setswana, translating to English or Afrikaans for me the parts I did not understand. He explained that he had not cut off Ouma's grants as he was legally supposed to do (as she had moved without disclosing or providing her new address). He had decided to extend her an act of kindness, as he knew that Ouma moved regularly. He explained that her caseworker in Johannesburg needed to complete a background report on Ouma's and the children's living conditions in Johannesburg and send it to him so that he could transfer the file and justify why he had not cut off her grants. He also mentioned that, since the foster care grants expired every two years, she needed to appear in court the next year. Here, Thabo placed Ouma above paperwork for an instant, but the purpose of this visit was to get the paperwork back in order so that the bureaucratic machine could be satisfied.

Before he left, he said to me, 'You must tell this Ouma, this Ouma travels too much. Everybody loves traveling, but this Ouma, *jô*.⁶¹ It's not good for children, you know, this *gaan en los* (take up and leave), up and down.' 'It's true,' Ouma said, defeated. After he had left, I asked Ouma whether she truly agreed that moving a lot was bad for children. She shrugged her shoulders and said that sometimes it was worse for them to stay in one place where the conditions were not favourable.

The social worker implied that mobility meant domestic instability and that it confused children. He also implied that Ouma travelled for leisure, not for survival. This is another example of how far removed the state is from poor South Africans' everyday lives. It also shows how the state's idea of stability differs from Ouma's idea of stability and how the laws (and the principles that underly them) are not suited for dealing with the particular challenges that life in post-apartheid informal settlements engenders.

⁶⁰ I am unsure how he knew that Ouma was in Marikana, as Ouma was surprised to see him.

⁶¹ 'Jô' is a popular South African expression often used to express disbelief, joy, exaggeration, sadness and most other emotions vehemently.

During this same conversation with Thabo, Madala (who was sitting on chair a few feet away) stepped in, holding the Kopanang portfolio in his hand. He said that Ouma needed to return to Marikana because if sponsors came to visit 'the project' and saw in the portfolio that Ouma was part of its management and she was not present, it would be bad for 'the project'. To Madala, Ouma's return was imperative for the success of 'the project', but he also used 'the project', and my portfolio, to once again control her movements and try to manipulate her to move back permanently. I felt ashamed that he yielded something I had created to control Ouma, but I cannot condemn his actions, as he felt that keeping Ouma in Marikana was the only way he could ever reach his own aspirations.

Ouma told me that she and the children would be returning '*huis toe*' ('home' to Marikana) when the schools closed for the December holidays and that she wanted me to visit them again. Ouma planned to remain mobile, to return to Marikana, then leave again, and perhaps return again – always back to her spot in the shade of the tree.

A few weeks after my visit, she called me again. I thought that she had returned to Johannesburg, but she told me that she never had transport money to return. She had received the background report form she was to take to the social worker in Johannesburg, but as that social worker has not yet conducted a house visit (as Ouma still had the form with her in Marikana), her grants for November were *afgekap*. She also had left her black file with her ID card in Protea Glen and therefore had not been able to access any other funds while in Marikana.

This time she explicitly asked me if I would be able to help her out with funds to get to Johannesburg. The following morning, I once again made the trip to Marikana with a small amount of cash. I explained that I was not able to visit for very long, but Madala asked me to help him complete forms before I left. He pulled out multiple sponsorship forms from a plastic sleeve and explained that since my last visit, he had used the portfolio to acquire a possible sponsorship from the Shoprite Holdings group, a large grocery store franchise, but that he did not know how to complete the forms, as he too was largely illiterate.

In filling out the forms, I learnt that Madala had another business, a Pty. Ltd. called 'Graceful', and that he wanted Kopanang to fall under this business. At 'type of business', he instructed me to check '*tshisanyama* and cooked food' (*tshisanyama* is a South African slang term for grilled meat) and said that 'the project' was going to sell cooked meat, vegetables and baked goods from the garden in Marikana. In the empty piece of land adjacent to his yard, he had already constructed a new *makhukhu* to ensure that no one else occupied it. Although Ouma still indicated that she planned to move back to Johannesburg after the school holidays, we nevertheless wrote her name down as one of the employees.

Madala explained that the portfolio gave him and ‘the project’ new fervour; ‘*dit stoot my nou bietjie*’ (‘it is pushing me a bit’), he said. His image of being pushed shows that often the energy required to make *lang moete* from the context of abraded places comes externally and is determined by conditions, relationships and help from others, and is deeply connected to paperwork and documents.

After we had completed the forms and I handed Ouma the transport money, both asked me for a lift *innie dorp in*. Madala needed to visit a bank and submit the forms, and Ouma needed to catch the next taxi to Johannesburg. Ouma quickly grabbed her backpack with a few items of clothing, an umbrella and her background report form. Madala took his plastic sleeve with his forms, his hat and locked the door of his house behind him. We drove through the strip of veld, via the newly repaired shorter road between Marikana and the *dorp*, and I dropped them off at the taxi rank in the city centre. They stood smiling on the pavement, waving me off as I drove away.

Mapping *lang moete*: a summary

I started this dissertation with an account from after the end of my official fieldwork where Ouma maintained that what she needed to endure the precarity of everyday life was *lang moete*. I provided ‘An introduction’ to Ouma, to Marikana informal settlement and to Ouma’s concept of *lang moete* to emphasise that this is only one possible introduction to Ouma’s life story. Starting with an account from after the end of my official fieldwork also illustrated that sometimes an insight only emerges after one thinks one’s fieldwork has ended.

In this introduction, I reflected on my affective relationship with Ouma. There is something to say about visiting as research methodology and ethical research conduct. If I had not committed to my personal relationship with Ouma and visited her several times after my fieldwork, I would never have been able to relay this particular account about her life – an account about courage and life making amidst adversity that I maintain is important to tell.

Throughout each chapter, I travelled through the history of Marikana, *innie dorp in* with Ouma in Chapter 3, through her life history and our encounters with welfare and grants in Chapter 4 and into her, Madala’s and the children’s aspirational worlds in Chapter 5 to provide a geography of *lang moete*, or – put simply – a map of where and when *lang moete* became possible and where it existed.

I drew on Tsing’s (2016:14) concept of ‘patches of liveability’ and expanded it to argue that *lang moete* were made in moments of liveability, which meant that the political death assumed for ‘the poor’ is not all-encompassing. Moments of liveable life also indicate the episodic nature of precarious life, and in Chapter 2, I therefore interrogated both Povinelli’s (2011) and Henderson’s

(2012) arguments that enduring incoherent life required a bout of sustained perseverance. Instead, I developed *lang moete* as both a practice of enduring the episodic nature of everyday life in a post-apartheid informal settlement and an analytical concept in arguing that it is an active refusal of what Agamben (1998, 2005) calls 'bare life' – politically unqualified life.

I also developed a vocabulary to talk about life in a post-apartheid informal settlement and argued that Ross's notion of 'raw life' was useful for describing the life that existed in Marikana. My data showed that life in Marikana was not politically unqualified but nevertheless marked by disruption, everyday abrasion and instability, therefore 'raw'. I further proposed the term 'abraded place' to comment on the material abrasion of everyday life as well as the erosion of Ouma's relationships in Marikana that made life bearable, and less so as they eroded.

In 'From Marikana *innie dorp in*', I reflected on mobility and the opportunities for *lang moete* that mobility made possible. I argued that the spatial divisions created by apartheid urban planning (as outlined in Czeglédý, 2007) still limited poor South Africans from going *innie dorp in* and therefore also from overcoming the economic and social inequality that apartheid had left in its wake. To Ouma (and I would argue to most poor South Africans), profound social mobility was an unrealistic aspiration, but moments of liveability where past and present marginalisation does not completely define life are possible if one is able to practise physical mobility. It was only in the car, on the move, that Ouma (who was marginalised under apartheid and has remained so after) felt belonging.

I also reflected on the role my own car had played in our research making and argued that my car was a site of research, an object of positionality and a tool with which Ouma did everyday life. It participated in shopping trips, conversations, errands and welfare. Travelling with Ouma in the car allowed me to dislocate normative ideas of stability as the outcome of development, hard work and patience to show that Ouma made stable life *on the move*.

Travelling in the car also revealed that instead of financial and social freedom, post-apartheid liberation had placed Ouma in a liminal space between abraded places and *innie dorp in*. Learning to occupy these spaces and using them tactically were where *lang moete* emerged. Ouma purposefully choreographed opportunities for being in the car as mobility kept possibilities for moments of liveability open.

Most of the existing literature on apartheid urban planning within anthropology in South Africa centres around big cities such as Johannesburg (as in Czeglédý's work) or Cape Town (such as in Steven Robins' and Anne-Maria Makhulu's work). This dissertation and Ouma's phrase *innie dorp in* therefore contribute to an understanding of life, the making of political life through mobility

and urban dynamics in a small post-apartheid city, a city that has thus far been neglected in urban anthropology.

In Chapter 4, titled 'Making *lang moete* on a road to nowhere', I provided multiple accounts of Ouma's and my encounters with welfare to ask where and how welfare helped or hindered the emergence of *lang moete*. I argued that Ouma used welfare as a part of her network of tactical exchange and that she was not a passive recipient of welfare but an active participant in making welfare work for her. I contrast how Ouma used welfare on an everyday basis with government documents outlining what the South African government thinks welfare should do in its recipients' lives.

In contrast to the developmental social work policy ideals of self-sufficiency and sustainability, I argue rather that welfare kept 'raw life' (Ross, 2010, 2015) intact because it was still largely inaccessible (*innie dorp in*), because it placed papers above people and because it lacked sociality. In using the welfare system tactically as a social network to access resources, Ouma, however, brought the sociality back into welfare, and in these moments of sociality, *lang moete* became possible.

In the final chapter on 'Drawing pathways of aspiration from a donker, swart plek', I turn to Ouma's, Madala's and the children's ideas of future and successful life and show that learning to aspire is tethered to context. Further reflecting on the brick house that Madala built, belonging and remaining feature as central themes to his aspirational project and contrast with the children's and Ouma's aspirations for mobility.

All Ouma's, Madala's and the children's aspirations were, however, related to and aimed towards making respectable life (cf. Salo, 2004), and many of these ideas of respectability emerged from typical middleclass suburban notions. Yet they were also contextual and reliant on the terms and conditions of everyday life in Marikana. Meandering through possible and imagined futures, *lang moete* were cultivated in the possibilities for keeping what Appadurai (2004) calls 'pathways of aspiration' open.

Ouma has become a figure through which to think through the continuities and discontinuities from life in apartheid to life post-apartheid. Instead of economic freedom and social and urban inclusion, the post-apartheid liberation project has placed people and their life-making labour in-between and in-progress. Ouma embodies these liminal positions and shows that it is in learning to navigate and occupy them successfully that one can change the terms of recognition, define successful life on one's own terms and endure the episodic and incoherent nature of life in abraded places.

Possible pathways, possible futures

In concluding this dissertation, *lang moete* do not allow me to end the argument in any definitive way, if at all. Instead of a decisive conclusion, I provide a speculation of possible futures. These afterthoughts, or further-thoughts, thus serve as a gaze on the possible futures Ouma, her children and Madala might achieve and the possible pathways they might follow, especially in the midst and the ruins of Covid-19.

To start with the children, it is possible to argue that the impact that the Covid-19 lockdown regulations have had on education and employment will irrevocably alter their possible futures, as it would for most South African children.⁶² Schools were closed for various months in 2020. Where most middleclass and elite schools resorted to online teaching modalities and home-based schoolwork, children living in townships and informal settlements were, however, largely excluded from these options, as internet access is not readily available. Furthermore, in most middleclass families, parents were able to help their children with schoolwork, but to Ouma, this would not have been possible.

Drawing however on my research with children, most of the children did not regard tertiary education as viable future options. Only Ouma's eldest daughter expressed that she would like to attend a college to receive a teaching diploma, but she eventually did not complete her last year of schooling and had to work a *skroppie* (piece job) as an assistant on a farm.⁶³ The last time I spoke to Ouma about her, Ouma said that she intended to finish her matric year or start a different diploma at a local college, but she had not managed to do it yet, as she has not acquired enough funds. I sincerely hope that she will.

The impact of Covid-19 on the unemployment rate of South Africa also paints a very bleak picture for South Africans who wish to enter the formal employment sector. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, the children I met in Marikana did not aspire to formal employment but rather to small business ventures. Although they might have missed various months of schooling, it is, however, also possible that the children spent the months out of school learning a trade, observing or working

⁶² I can only comment on the South African situation, but it is possibly the case for all children globally.

⁶³ Her failure to complete her matric year exposed an education scandal. I learnt that she and a few other children from her school received letters stating that they could not write their final examinations because they had failed subjects during the year and likely would not pass their examinations. Her particular school had a 100% matric pass rate the previous year and the school therefore eliminated children that could negatively impact this rate. I reported this incident to a local journalist who wanted to investigate it, but due to red tape and checklists at the newspaper, she could not complete the story. This is another example of the anti-politics machine (cf. Ferguson, 1990) in action.

in a business or making and selling goods for an income, which might secure present and future financial security.

I wonder what the children's drawings would have looked like if I could have asked them to draw their aspirations now. Perhaps they still would have aspired to flower vases and taxis, since these were not contingent upon either a good education or the formal employment sector – at least not in any explicit sense. Perhaps they would have come up with new, instrumental and creative solutions to some of the new problems that Covid-19 has created and some of the old ones it has exacerbated.

I would have loved to learn more about children's aspirations and especially about adults in Marikana's aspirations outside of formal education. Most of the existing literature on aspiration applies only to children and students and relates to education and career choices, using typically middleclass qualifiers. I, however, contend that studying aspirations in post-apartheid South Africa only within the scope of education and formal career choices is not in keeping with contemporary South African realities, especially not for poor South Africans. A critical study of the possibilities and limits of aspiration outside the frame of education could therefore be a good possible topic for future research.

As for Madala, he has not yet finished the hall but (as mentioned above) had new motivation for 'the project' and prospective sponsorships. During my last visit to him, I could see that he was getting weaker and very thin, and it is unclear if he will be able to sustain the physical labour needed for 'the project'. Madala was, however, also able to create and maintain relationships with people, just as Ouma was, and making new relationships might enable the sustenance of 'the project'.

One prominent topic that emerged during my conversations with Madala was that poor South African men are excluded from many of the state resources – such as child care grants – and that their ability to secure relationships with people such as social workers was more limited than those of women. This is an important topic and one that I propose needs more attention in ethnography, since poor, and especially older, South African men (most of whom are black and previously worked in migrant labour) are also still marginalised under post-apartheid welfare programmes and economic policy.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I want to reflect on what Ouma's possible futures might look like. I argue that the Covid-19 regulations might have had an impact on her ability to be mobile, yet she still managed to travel between Johannesburg and Marikana. Ouma has learnt to live in the wake of uncertainty and disruption and, despite lockdown restrictions, was able to maintain everyday

life in an entirely new and different place. This once again attests to her remarkable ability to make *lang moete* amidst adversity.

As Ouma, Thabo and I sat under the tree in Marikana, I thought about how Ouma had returned to the tree, despite moving, and how she explained that she would return to Marikana again for the holidays. Using this moment, and the data that I provided in this dissertation as evidence, Ouma will always try to remain on the move where the possibilities for moments of liveability are open and where *lang moete* can therefore exist. Yet she will also always return to abraded places. She will keep pushing the rock, only for it to roll back down, which is both heroic and tragic but attests to remarkable and multiple courages. At least, this is one possible future.

I would like to return to Joao Biehl's (2013:367) assertion that '[l]ife stories do not simply begin and end. They are stories of transformation: they link the present to the past and to a possible future', 'and it is up to us [anthropologists] to think the story through and project it into the future, helping to shape its afterlife' (Biehl, 2013:368). Throughout the contours of Ouma's life story that I relayed in this dissertation, I have shown the moments where life somehow continued despite its abrasion, and what hard work the making of stable life entailed. Now, in not decisively ending the story, I honour its possible futures and its afterlife, as well as Ouma's *lang moete* by keeping the ending mobile, *on the move* and open.

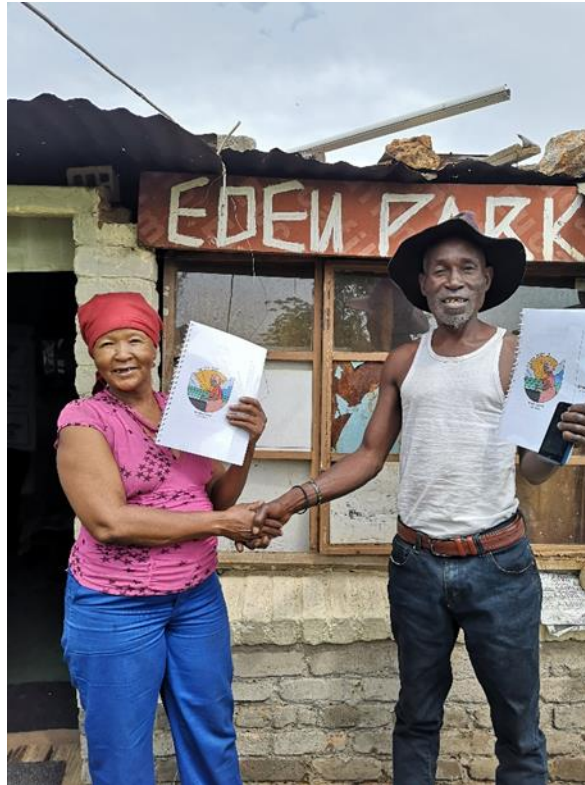


Figure 6-1: Ouma and Madala standing proudly with the Kopanang portfolios in front of the Eden Park sign

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APPENDIX A: DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITOR

PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING

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Kroonstad

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DECLARATION

To whom it may concern

I hereby confirm that I have proofread and edited the following dissertation, including the references.

Title of dissertation

Tenacity and welfare on the road to elsewhere: one woman's efforts to make stable life from Marikana informal settlement, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Candidate

Hestia Victor



Lariza Hoffman
Kroonstad
18 December 2020