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# The F Word: An analysis of the perceptions and performance of feminisms amongst five Black, Xhosa women living in Langa

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The F Word:  
An analysis of the perceptions and performance of feminisms  
amongst five Black, Xhosa women living in Langa

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### **Abstract**

This independent study project analyzes the perceptions and practice of feminisms amongst female township residents through a small-scale research project that involved interviewing a group of five women living in Langa as well as research on the development of feminist thought on the African continent and in South Africa. Some might say that the South African constitution is decidedly feminist with Section 9 of its constitution guaranteeing equality for all, regardless of gender or sex. Despite the development of feminist thought in South Africa, especially in “the Academy”, articles often hint at the skepticism feminism receives in Black, female spaces and how the latter group often views feminism as a White, middle-class pursuit. Moreover, certain patriarchal practices in Xhosa communities are either deemed wholly sexist or protected under the guise of culture. However, few articles include in depth interviews of Black, Xhosa South African women who supposedly reject feminism and feminist thoughts so adamantly. Through my interviews, I examined my interviewees’ perceptions of feminisms through an, empirical, generational and linguistic lens. Although these interviews are hardly representative of the vastly different experiences of Black, Xhosa women living in Langa, let alone Black women living in other townships throughout South Africa, they do provide specific insight into how feminist thoughts and practices may or may not function in the domestic lives of five Xhosa women. In summation, the insights that can be taken away from this independent study project include, but are not limited to, the difficulties of using Western terminology to gauge equity in the interviewees’ domestic lives, the potential of a generational shift in attitudes about gender equity, and the real words and lived experiences of five Xhosa women living in Langa.

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## Introduction

### **Statement of Intent:**

In my ISP, I looked at the perceptions and performance of feminisms amongst five Black, female, Xhosa Langa residents through three lenses. The first lens is the empirical lens. This refers to unearthing feminist acts/thoughts the women may agree with or perform in their daily lives, regardless of whether they self-identify as feminists. The second aspect is a generational lens, which will briefly examine how practice and views of feminisms may have changed or stayed the same across generations. As I only interviewed one younger woman, I was limited in my ability to engage with this lens. Nevertheless, the inter-generational differences that did arise from the interviews were worth analyzing. The third and final lens is the linguistic lens, specifically the participants' familiarity with the word feminism and how they define it.

The goals of this research project include adding to the discourse on feminisms in South Africa, the Third World and communities of color, diversifying the definition of what it means to be feminist, and examining how feminisms may operate in domestic spheres outside a Western context. Through this research, I also hope that I gave a sufficient platform to the small group of Black Xhosa women I interviewed to voice their opinions and examine their lived experiences.

### **Structure of Paper**

This paper begins with an analysis of the implications of studying and writing about feminisms in the Third World, the development of South African feminisms, and an overview of African feminisms. Through the analysis of this literature, one will acquire a better (though still incomplete) foundation for understanding the multiplicity of feminisms and the importance of proceeding conscientiously when applying its principles to any group. This foundation provides an academic basis for the feminisms that I reference throughout the paper and offers partial insight into the host of sources that inform 'my feminism'.

The paper then examines certain Xhosa cultural practices, the societal position of Xhosa women and a brief history of Langa township. Here, it is important to note that there is no singular Xhosa culture in South Africa. Rather, there are Xhosa *cultures* that ebb and change based on factors such as income and geographical location. Through this brief introduction to particular Xhosa customs and Langa, one will gain some insight into the unique histories and cultural context of this project's participants.

Equipped with both a feminist and cultural framework, the paper ends with a discussion of my methodology and interview findings. Through my interviews, I attempted to answer several questions. These included "Do the interviewees believe women and men have unequal status in Langa homes?", "Do the participants recognize gender-based injustices in their daily lives?", "Is feminism a familiar concept to the interviewees" and "Has expectations about gender-based treatment altered in any way between generations amongst the participants?". For the sake of clear writing, I will often resort to using "women" as a

descriptive category when discussing the participants' interviews. It should be noted that when I use "women", I am referring to Black, Xhosa women living in Langa.

## Literature Review

### *Studying African Feminisms*

Studying feminism<sup>1</sup> in the 'Global South' comes with a host of ethical issues that are outlined by Mohanty (1991). Mohanty outlines how U.S. women of color frequently use colonization to describe their struggle against appropriation by white feminist movements. Broadly, colonization can be used in situations where a marginalized group or person is subjugated by an oppressive, dominant power. From this definition of colonization, Mohanty concerns herself with the monolithic production of "Third World Women" in Western, feminist discourse. She seeks to unpack how othering in Western feminist discourse marks the 'other' as non-Western and the writer as Western, thereby shifting power dynamics. Thus, Western feminists construct a list of issues that they deem necessary for all women to support and champion. This ignores the different framework faced by lower class and/or women of color who are oppressed by other systems and structures.

The assumption of 'ethnocentric universality' and lack of self-consciousness about how Western viewpoints dominate feminist discourse in the third world taint the way Western authors write about third world women (p. 335). Writers, subsequently, rely on the faulty 'Third World Difference'. This is the notion that a singular distinction in the third world's 'culture' oppresses most women in a homogenous way. This ignores the heterogeneity of cultures throughout the third world and the ways in which women of different origins suffer in different ways (p. 335). In short, there is no "universal patriarchal framework" (p. 335).

Mohanty maintains that not all Western writing on third world women is questionable. There is work that examines how first world and third world economies interact in a way that effects third world women and takes into account the heterogeneity of third world women's experiences in general.

Nevertheless, Mohanty critiques Western feminist discourse on third world women on three principles:

- The use of 'women' to imply a coherent group on which 'sexual difference' or patriarchy is applied universally'
- Attempting to provide evidence of universality or 'cross-cultural' validity through the use of uncritical methodologies
- The creation of the 'average Third World Woman' who is victimized and has no agency over her body as opposed to the average Western woman who has the freedom of self-determination; this is a move that creates a false binary that denies the complexities of women operating in first world and third world contexts (p. 336)

Faulty feminist discourse therefore focuses on trying to construct women as a powerless group rather than how women are powerless in particular contexts. Specifically, "third world women" are constructed as implicit victims (p. 338). Women are thus cast into perpetual objects defending themselves and men are perpetual subjects who affect violence. This robs women of their agency and humanity, even in feminist discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> French socialist Charles Fourier created the word *féminisme* in 1837. The word "feminist" spread to the Netherlands by 1872, Great Britain by the 1890s and to the United States by 1910. The word "feminism" or "feminist" does not exist in isiXhosa.

For Mohanty, “Sisterhood can not be assumed on the basis of gender”. The issue is not with using ‘groupings for descriptive purposes’ but with creating ahistorical, homogenous groups that ignore complexities of different experiences (p. 340). Some cross-cultural studies of women, collapse, “all ideological specificities into economic relations, and universaliz[e] on the basis of this comparison” (p. 343). For example, Islam in feminist discourse is often collapsed into one set of ideologies that either affects or does not affect women (thereby ignoring the interpretation of Islam by men who hold economic power in various societies) and creates a false basis for comparing groups of Muslim women.

In development writings, it’s often assumed that all third world women have ‘similar problems and needs’ with ‘similar interests and goals’. But this ignores the class, cultural, educational and other divisions that exist amongst women living in the third world. For example, Mohanty points out how the veil in Iran has functioned differently based on history. During the 1979 revolution, Iranian women veiled to show solidarity with each other against the West and the Shah. Today, Iranian women wear the veil because the law mandates it.

Mohanty concludes her article with a caution against defining relations of power and oppression in binary ways of women as the oppressed and men as the oppressors. In Western feminist literature on third world women, such binaries then cast Western feminists as subjects and third world women as objects. Archetypes like ‘the veiled woman’ and ‘the powerful mother’ creates a ‘colonial discourse, which exercises a very specific power in defining, coding and maintaining existing first/third world connections’ (p. 352).

In an answer to some of Mohanty’s concerns about development writings, Wittmann (2012) discusses the Gender and Development (GAD) approach to viewing women in South African society. GAD views women as ‘active agents’ and not simply passive object of oppression. GAD also maintains that women may “be aware of their subordinate position” without understanding the “structural causes of their discrimination and subordination” (251). Similarly, Wittmann cites empowerment as a method for women to create self-organization and consciousness in order to ‘challenge unequal power relations’. She claims that this form of empowerment takes into account how “women’s experience of oppression differs according to their ethnicity, class, colonial history and current position in the international economic order” (250).

Ortega (2006) echoes some of Mohanty’s concerns about complicating the unique experiences faced by women of color. Ortega talks about “loving, knowing ignorance”, an outlook held by many White feminists, which “produces ignorance about women of color and their work at the same time that it proclaims knowledge about and loving perception toward them” (p. 56). This often results in White feminists who produce false work on women of color without taking the time to fully engage with the group they claim to speak for.

Ortega notes that some women believe that there must be agreement on how to achieve gender equity and therefore view women who think differently as a threat to their community. It comes as little surprise that white feminists often exclude feminists of color. With this in mind, loving, knowing ignorance is not about love. Rather, it’s about the ‘perceiver’ trying to craft and use an image of women of color to their own ends. White feminists look and listen to women of color but they do not check and question themselves on their production of women of color or their ulterior motives (hidden or unhidden) (p. 60). These ulterior consequences/motives include legitimating the words of women of color feminists (in a world where a white voice is needed to make the thoughts of people of color valid) and protecting their status as Third Wave feminists. The result is that women of color continue to be homogenized in the name of ‘universal sisterhood’ as “feminism claims to be more concerned and more enlightened about the relations between white women and women of color” (p. 61)

Ortega also critiques motives behind traveling in order to learn about ‘the other’. She writes that loving, playful ‘world’-traveling also exists. Feminists encourage travel in order to understand other cultures

and transcend racial and ethnic boundaries. However, Ortega believes that travel usually involves the marginalized traveling to the dominant (read Western) world and being forced to adapt to dominant standards (p. 69). Conscious traveling by White and/or Western feminists therefore involves seeking out experiences similar to the people that they seek to learn about, to learn their language in order to best understand their story, and to see people as humans with agency rather than hopeless objects.

Lewis (1993) tries to reconcile Mohanty and Ortega's call for more responsible feminist discourse. Rather than homogenize the experiences of all women, Lewis insists that gendered experience does not and cannot exist separately from racial and class existence. Feminists should therefore consider the effects of racial oppression. Too often, first world scenarios are seen as the norm for conceptualizing gender politics in a way that effectively silences a large swath of women living outside of the first world. To combat this injustice, Lewis envisions a world where feminist discourse can "substantively accommodate the different interests, levels and concerns of a diversity of women" (p. 4).

Lewis focuses in on the history of protest within Black female spaces in South Africa. She cites the 1950s as the rough beginning of Black women's racial- and class-consciousness. Black women's politicized behavior tended to lack an explicit feminist consciousness. In fact, Black women's movements in SA, "rarely evolved independently of race and class mobilization" (p. 6). This is a trend that is typical of Third World and African contexts dealing with a complex mixture of colonial, racial and class oppression. However this does not mean that the political mobilization of Black women focused solely on race or class oppression. Black women, whether willingly or unwillingly, challenged the role of men as breadwinners or activists over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today in female-headed households, Black women continue to straddle lines between conventionally masculine duties and conventionally female duties like motherhood.

Wittmann further unpacks the past and present state of women in South Africa. Wittmann acknowledges that apartheid affected Black women in distinct ways from their White counterparts. While white women received the right to vote in 1931, Black men and women did not receive this right until the 1990s with the onset of a new South African democracy. Black women were forced into heading households and raising children on their own due to apartheid legislation. For example, during apartheid, Black men working on contract were delegated to townships and informal settlements while Black women were often denied the right to live in those urban areas. Accordingly, while women in the global North originally identified the family as a site of women's oppression, black women in South Africa attempted to protect the family from the encroachments of capital and the state and point to the weakening of black family life as one of the most grievous crimes of apartheid. This shows that, "current gender issues in South Africa result from that historical context" (p. 249).

Arndt (2000) has found that Africans tend to shy away from the feminist label, in spite of some Africans' beliefs in persistent, gender-based inequities in their societies. She therefore concludes that, "anti-feminist positions are widespread in Africa" (p. 709). Arndt says that across the continent, feminism is often synonymous with "hatred of men, penis envy, non-acceptance of African traditions, a fundamental rejection of marriage and motherhood, a favoring of lesbian love, and an endeavor to invert the power relationship of the genders" (p. 710). Arguably, the most persistent critique is that feminism is a white, Western, middle-class endeavor that does make room for the specific needs of women who fall out of this description. Still another critique is that Western feminism focuses solely on gender while African women must focus on gender in the context of "other political, economic, cultural and social forms" which include issues like racism, neo-colonialism, religious fundamentalism and capitalism (p. 711). Arndt believes that this perception of feminism ignores the plurality of feminism, which includes Marxist feminists, who are concerned with a more intersectional feminism that includes notions of race, class and gender. This

perception of feminism also ignores African-based “organizations, persons and writers” that focus solely on issues surrounding gender (p. 711).

In any case, this discontent has led Black-American and African women to craft feminisms specific for their experiences. Alice Walker’s womanism is arguably the most well known “alternative concept”. The Black-American writer states that a womanist is a, “black feminist or feminist of color [who is] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (p. 711). A womanist is therefore concerned with tackling both racial and gender based oppression. Maduka (n.d.) discusses the evolution of African feminisms since the 1980s. African feminisms encompass the “domesticated version” of feminism (p. 6). It takes into account the primacy of marriage in the “African philosophy of life” while simultaneously condemning the ways in which patriarchy dehumanizes women and relegates them to second-class citizenry (p. 6). On a larger scale, African feminisms also differ from White feminism in that it must always contend with the forces that oppress African men even as African men turn around and oppress African women.

Chikwenye Ogunyemi, a Nigerian feminist writer, “arrived at the term womanism independently” and later began using the modifier *African* womanism (p. 712). Ogunyemi’s African womanism shares some parallels with Walker’s womanism, but it ultimately seeks to create an ideology that, “clearly demarcates and emancipates African womanism from both white feminism and African-American womanism/feminism” because feminism and African-American womanism “overlook African peculiarities” (p. 712). These ‘African peculiarities’ include issues such as an obsession with having children and highly dependent relationships between older and younger women within families. African womanism also differs from Walker’s womanism because it rejects “lesbian love” because of “African silence or intolerance of lesbianism” (p. 712).

Ogunyemi speaks of a power in re-naming and re-contextualizing feminism on the African continent. In order to ‘expose’ ideas like feminism, it must be re-named because the word feminism itself is alienating (p. 717). She states that, “you begin to name your own activity yourself, there is power in that naming” (p. 717). Ogunyemi’s womanism does not reject collaboration with Western feminists. Her womanism asks Western feminisms to be more cognizant of the specific circumstances faced by African women and Third World women at large. She gives an example of a White Western feminist who talked about the ethicality of organ transplants while Ogunyemi insists that African women must deal with more “practical problems” such as malaria (p. 718).

Beyond womanism, Alkali (2013) discusses several other African feminisms. One of these feminisms is stiwanism. Pioneered by Nigerian activist Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, stiwanism stems from the acronym STIWA, which stands for “Social Transformation Including Women in Africa” (p. 242). Stiwanism differs from Western feminism and African womanism because its Marxist “transformation agenda” promotes “strategic equal partnering” with men (p. 242). Another African feminism is the motherism described by Nigerian poet Catherine Obianuju Acholonu. Motherism emphasizes the “impossibility of severance of issues of motherhood from the African woman” as opposed to White women who “have little or no space for motherhood” (p. 244). Consequently, motherism maintains that the mother-child relationship “holds the African woman back every inch in her decision on the uncomfortable patriarchal home” (p. 245). Motherism deems the terms patriarchy and matriarchy too Western-centric and instead opts for the words patrifocality and matrifocality (Maduka, n.d., p. 20). Acholonu views men and women as holding complementary roles in traditional African society “such that no gender dominates the totality of the social life of the people” (p. 22). In this vein, men tend to dominate “socio-political spheres of life” while women dominate the “spiritual and metaphysical” realms (p. 22).

Indeed, it is partially because of apartheid’s history that Black women as mothers “have tended to assume the positions of authority conventionally held by patriarchs” (Lewis, 1993, p. 8). However, Lewis

concludes that this power and authority (and the reverence that comes with it) does not extend to women outside the home. Furthermore, it does not “radically challenge conventional patriarchal relations and ideology” (p. 8). Lewis puts ‘womanism’ and motherism at odds with her skeptical view of radical motherhood. According to Lewis, motherism promotes motherhood as a radical role and questions the need for women to assist men in male-centric racial and class struggles while womanism “extols the image of the strong and active female figure” (p. 12). Moreover, womanism promotes racial solidarity over gender solidarity, calling on women of color (usually Black women) to “assist men’s struggles against White oppression” (p. 12). Lewis critiques this definition of womanism, saying that it does not give women the space to define themselves outside of their relationship to men. Nevertheless, the Black Consciousness Movement adopted a form of womanism in the 1970s by advocating motherhood as a means to effect “Black people’s social, cultural, economic and political aspirations” (p. 14).

Lewis does not reserve her criticisms of women of color centered feminist ideologies. She also critiques mainstream feminism for designating a normative (i.e. White, middle class) group that excludes women who fall out of this category. She ends the article by outlining the intersected space Black South African women hold in society. Lewis states that Black women have “consistently accepted entrenched male-dominated spaces” but they have also shown that they have “distinct agendas that are not reconcilable with men’s” (p. 16).

As stressed before by Mohanty and Ortega, a call to complicating women’s experience is especially pertinent in the South African context as women in the country have starkly divergent interests. Wittmann notes that the history of apartheid has created a “structural imbalance” amongst women in the new South Africa (p. 251). The most obvious example is, again, the difference in experiences between White women and Black women, the former of whom still belong to a privileged minority despite facing gender-based oppression. On a broader note, Wittmann concedes that a lot has changed for the better for South African women as a whole. A constitutional provision like the Employment Equity Act has created more obligations for employers to hire women and Black people. Nevertheless, women still face a myriad of obstacles on their path to self-empowerment. These include, difficulties receiving bank loans, lack of housing, and familial responsibilities that prevent women from challenging sexist workspaces for fear of losing their livelihood. Although this is a grim view of the present state of women, Wittmann concludes that South Africa, in spite of its flaws, is still on the path of a “gender-sensitive society” (p. 257).

Like Wittmann, Hendricks (1996) addresses the gap between constitutional protections and reality for women in South Africa. In her article “Gender Politics in Post-Apartheid South Africa” she discusses South Africa’s progress two years after democracy. Hendricks commends the legal protections that women gained in 1994 but laments that these provisions mean next to nothing if they are not translated into the social sphere. In the public sphere this means advances like gender equity in employment and access to education, while in the private sphere this means advances like drafting legislation against domestic violence and reproductive coercion.

Before further discussing the modern state of South African women, Hendricks discusses the evolution of women’s protest throughout history. Like Lewis, Hendricks notes that Black South African women in particular have a long history of challenging patriarchal systems, especially in context of the apartheid state. Black women were protesting as early as the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and were at the forefront of anti-pass campaigns in 1913 and the 1950s. Such protests were supplemented by organizations like the ANC Women’s League and the Federation of South African Women. However, some South African feminists say that ‘women’s struggles’ before the 1980s were not characterized by an explicitly feminist consciousness and that the women’s struggle was subordinate to the nationalist struggle. Hendricks contends

that “many forms of consciousness [operated] simultaneously” and Black Women consciously worked on women’s struggles in the context of the nationalist movement (p. 28).

In the 1990s, the Women’s Movement pressured government to raise gender consciousness and incorporate a “gendered perspective into their policy formations”. Launched in April 1992, the Women’s National Coalition had a goal of ensuring “women participate in the constitution-making process and help formulate a Women’s Charter that will be part of the new constitution” and consisted of a wide range of women’s organizations across ideological, racial and class spectrums (p. 30).

By 1996, despite South Africa being seventh in the world for representation of women in political office, men still held the most “influential positions, both nationally and regionally” (p. 34). Furthermore, the economic position of women remained static. However, the public sector has embraced affirmative action plans that promote women of all races. The private sector has followed suit although more modestly and often in the interest of superficial political correctness. These changes have primarily benefited middle class women, once again demonstrating the need to consider gender and class issues intersectionally. While African women are still concentrated in low skill and low paid work, the new South Africa offers them more economic independence. Still, the history of migrant labor amongst black communities “undermined the male-dominant household patterns that nationalist movements in other places have reinforced” (p. 39). Thus, the ANC of the 1990s only enacted policy reforms “sufficient to maintain the support of the women but which would not directly threaten the old boys network” (p. 41).

Gouws (2012) personalizes the theoretical discussion of the aforementioned articles. Namely, Gouws talks about her experience working as a White feminist academic in a post-colonial context. She admits that she witnessed White feminist academics marginalizing their Black counterparts in a way that is criticized in Mohanty and Ortega’s articles. White feminists would often set agendas that overlooked “Black women’s articulation of their own interests” (p. 528). Like Wittmann, she notes that White women are privileged because of their whiteness but are still oppressed by the patriarchy. Also in the vein of Mohanty, Gouws looks critically at using ‘women’ as an analytical category. Instead, she extols the virtues of using ‘gender’ as it allows for an inclusion of the relationships between women and men in feminist discourse. This also provides a path for dislodging the image of feminism as a Western import. Gouws then discusses how neo-liberal capitalism in the new South Africa has affected her feminist work. The reintroduction of South Africa into western markets, after years of divestment and economic isolation, significantly affected the academy. Universities tend to ignore the needs of local communities in favor of addressing the “demands of the market embedded in the dynamics of greater globalization” (p. 530). This harms communities that depend on the ‘knowledge creation’ of local universities.

Gouws notes how feminist scholars in the global South must demonstrate proficiency in Western history and theory in a way that is unparalleled by expectations for feminist scholars in the North. Furthermore, Gouws states that feminists in the global South produce work that is unfairly seen as irrelevant to Western complexities. Gouws worries about teaching the next generation about infusing feminism into activism, especially in light of the misogynistic, violent elements of current protests (p. 533). Gouws ends her piece by outlining several debates and tensions amongst current South African feminists. These debates include the shift in focus on the study of masculinities, the use of ‘woman’ as an analytical category (that cannot always capture the “intersectionalities of women’s identities” in South Africa) and even the use of the word feminist itself. (p. 535)

### *Ukuthwala, Lobola and the Position of Xhosa Women*

In the vein of Acholonu’s motherism, Rice (2014) describes life in the Xhosa village she studied as much more patrifocal than patriarchal. Granted, men are often accorded higher status, but this is often due to

age as well as gender. Accordingly, “While older men command the greatest authority, older women often command considerably more authority and respect than younger men” (p. 386). For example, older men are fed first at weddings but older women are fed before younger men. Rice’s work found that most Xhosa women she lived amongst went through life events during which their status and influence would change. Rice describes these transitions as follows:

Indeed, a woman’s social standing will be quite low for her early married life, even in relation to younger unmarried sisters-in-law. But as she grows older, bears children, and, ideally, acquires daughters-in-law, she will eventually become a highly influential person in her home, wielding considerable influence over the time and resources of younger members of her household (p. 386).

This primacy of marriage is perverted in the practice of *ukuthwala*. *Ukuthwala* is a Xhosa word that literally translates to “to carry on the head” and refers to a practice within Xhosa culture that takes place primarily in rural areas of the Eastern Cape (p. 381). It is also referred to as “forced marriage” or “abduction marriage” and can take place with or without the woman’s parental consent. While earlier scholars believed that a woman was almost always involved in the production of her kidnapping and that her resistance to *ukuthwala* was an act “performed for the sake of appearances” and modesty, Rice found the exact opposite reaction amongst the women she interviewed (p. 389). *Ukuthwala* is illegal in South Africa as it is seen as a violation of human rights. Rice asserts that most academic literature on *ukuthwala* lacks context and “fails to take into account the complex social field in which these marriages take place” (p. 382).

Contextualizing *ukuthwala* and other seemingly anachronistic cultural practices include noting the ways in which colonialism mobilized “essentialized and inflexible notions of African tradition” (p. 383). Rice insists that by grounding *ukuthwala* in a socio-cultural framework, she does not seek to condone the practice or “belittle” the mostly traumatic experiences of the women she interviewed (p. 384). A decline in marriage rates due to high bridewealth and less parental involvement in romantic relationships in the rural community could be seen as one factor behind why *ukuthwala* persists as an alternative to a more formal means of marriage (p. 388). While the young women Rice spoke with widely opposed *ukuthwala*, some older women (some of whom were in so-called forced marriages) complied with the practice, sympathized with the “men who abduct”, and expressed “bewilderment at these new ‘rights’ young women now possess” (p. 391). Still, the locals she spoke with “were adamant that this practice does not happen in town” (p. 390).

Unlike *ukuthwala*, the practice of *lobola* seems to garner more widespread support. *Lobola* exchange is still widely practiced throughout South Africa as a means to legitimate a marriage and involves the exchange of money (in the past this came in the form of cows) from the husband’s family to the bride’s parents (p.387). *Lobola* enacts several crucial changes. Namely, it

...formally transfers any children born of the union from the bride’s lineage to the groom’s, legitimises the marriage, compensates the bride’s family for the loss of their daughter’s (re)productive labour,<sup>30</sup> and often allows the family to acquire a daughter-in-law of their own by using the daughter’s *lobola* to pay bridewealth for a son (p. 387).

*Lobola* is also seen as a way of uniting the bride and husband’s families with “ties of kinship and obligation” and the mode through which the bride enters full womanhood (p. 387). However, Rice found that the rates of marriage in the Xhosa community she lived in were declining. Moreover, young men often felt discouraged from marriage due to the high cost of bridewealth while most young women looked wearily upon marriage, calling it “unpleasant and intolerably restrictive, owing to the excessive demands of husbands and in-laws” (p. 389). Rice goes on to note that the young women she spoke to were still interested in a romantic relationship marked by “more egalitarian gender relations and more cooperative management of the household” (p. 389).

Mwamwenda and Monyooe (1997) note that some Africans have begun to question the legitimacy of *lobola*. Some of these questions stem from “Western cultural influence” while others call for gender equality and an end to exorbitant bridewealth prices. Despite these concerns, Mwamwenda’s study of Xhosa-speaking graduate students at the University of Transkei found that a vast majority of men and women support *lobola* and that they would seek bridewealth for their own daughters (p. 270). The students supported the continuance of *lobola* because it increased “the husband’s gratitude for a good wife, his appreciation for the wife’s dignity and worth, and the wife’s assurance of her husband’s continued recognition and respect” (p. 270). The students also credited *lobola* with decreasing both divorce and the number of women available for polygamous marriages.

### *Brief Background on Townships and Langa’s Demographics*

Langa literally translates to “sun” in Xhosa. However the township’s name is actually derived from Langelibalele, a chief imprisoned on Robben Island in the 1870s for his opposition to the Natal government. Established in 1927, Langa is one of South Africa’s oldest townships and most vibrant communities. It owes its creation to the 1923 Native (Urban Areas) Act 21, “which allocated the responsibility of housing the city’s African population in urban areas to municipalities” (ALHDC, 2011, p. 1). Langa was “established...as a ‘respectable’ township” and was populated with “‘superior’ housing...for the aspirant black middle class” (Maylam, 1995, p. 30). Its original housing was made up of hostels for migrant workers as well as units for single men and families (p. 3). When the National Party rose to power in the 1940s, “class-differentiated housing was abandoned in favour of...ethnic zoning” (p. 30).

Langa, like other townships, was developed under a racist, sexist and capitalist apartheid government. Bak (2008) states that white rule and Xhosa power structures combined to create “an extreme gender division of labour in the black population in South Africa” where manhood is connected with “formal wage labor” and womanhood is achieved through “informal work and caring” (p. 258). This stark, gender-based division of labor (which was already present to a lesser extent in Xhosa cultures) was solidified by the migrant labor system, which “separated black men from their families for long periods of time” (p. 259). Because Black women were unable to follow men into the townships where men worked in factories and mines, they were left to “take on all the needs of caring and community building in the black rural communities” (p. 259). Bak notes that local chiefs tended to support this migrant labor system as it provided “money to their chiefdoms” (p. 260). Accordingly, “indigenous patriarchs and white oligarchs” united to restrict Black African women’s migration, so that they remained in rural communities as “reproducers of the labour force and carers for children and the elderly” (p. 260).

Wages therefore became the means through which a man could pay *lobola* and assume his role as head of a household. Today, out of the roughly 24,500-50,000 people who live in Langa, 26% of the population is “economically inactive” while 70% are unemployed (ALHDC, 2011, p. 4). Climbing inequality and diminishing wages make it so that marriage seems unattainable for more and more men, leading them to express their manhood in other ways, such as courting several girlfriends (p. 261). This has left an onslaught of single, female-headed households in South African townships (p. 264).

In South Africa, 60% of female teenagers report being physically assaulted by male partners and 30% reported, “forced sexual initiation” (Badstueber, 2008, p. 28). 2002-2003 crime statistics in Langa revealed 117 murders and 99 reported rapes as opposed to 1 murder and 4 rapes in the neighboring (formerly white) Rondebosch suburb (p. 28). Badstueber states that, “Violence towards women is the most frequent kind of violence enacted in [Langa] township” (p. 30). Pervasive domestic violence exemplifies the disconnect between constitutional protection and lived experiences for a great deal of women living in South Africa.

### **Outro**

The above literature examined the cautions one must address when studying feminisms in the Third World. It also briefly discussed the development of South African feminisms and how the anti-apartheid

struggle influenced feminist consciousness. The section ends with a look at Xhosa women and practices as well as Langa itself in order to locate the research in its specific geographical setting and acknowledge the ways this setting may inform the experiences and opinions of the participants. This provides an academic, feminist and cultural background for analyzing the research findings in a critical and contextual manner.

### **Methodology**

In addition to centering the subject matter of my research project in the above literature review, I conducted five, one-on-one interviews with women living in Langa, ages 44 to 66, over the course of two weeks. Records of these interviews were acquired through using both handwritten notes and an audio recorder. Before my interviews, I wrote an in-depth interview schedule for the purposes of conducting a focused interview that stayed on topic. In order to craft an interview schedule that was culturally relevant to the experiences of my interviewees, I conducted preliminary research on topics such as African womanism, *ukuthwala* and *lobola*.

I conducted the interviews in my interviewees' homes in Langa. This was done so that my interviewees could talk in a space that is both familiar and comfortable to them as well as separate from the judgment of my other interviewees. I hoped that this interview environment would make my participants more open to speaking freely. Moreover, interviewing my participants in their homes lessened the inconvenience of them taking time out of their hectic schedules to speak with me. All interviews were conducted in English. Prior to each interview I acquired written consent for being interviewed and recorded. I also sought out verbal consent multiple times throughout each interview.

In the tradition of Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes", I have tried to represent my participants as carefully as possible. This means that I seek to create an analysis that treats the participants as active agents and avoids deducing broad, universal claims from their answers. The women I interviewed are but a small subset of Black, Xhosa township women and not reflective of an entire race, ethnicity and/or gender. Once again, the goals of my project do not include making sweeping claims about how all Black South African women feel about feminism. It is for these reasons that I only focused on Xhosa women living in Langa rather than interview women across townships or who merely fell under the "Black" moniker. I wanted to avoid ignoring how different cultural/environmental contexts complicated the ability to make broad cross-cultural comparisons, especially given the short time period of this project. Still, I recognize that despite my narrow focus group, my participants do not represent the entirety of experiences amongst female Langa residents. Although my project seeks to examine perceptions of feminisms, the questions I asked my participants are quite open-ended. Moreover, I did not introduce the word feminism until the end of my interview. Hopefully, this allowed my participants to answer in the way they saw fit and not in a way that they thought would satisfy my expectations.

Four out of the five interviews were digitally recorded. As I transcribed the audio files, I made sure to use pseudonyms and deleted any names of the participants' relatives that could have revealed their identity. The audio files will be destroyed after the presentation of this research project.

### **Ethical Reflexivity**

I encountered several ethical issues while conducting this study. I believe the largest issue was the language barrier. I decided to conduct my interviews in English because all of my participants spoke, at least, conversational English and my isiXhosa is not up to par. I decided against using a translator because I was afraid that the nature of my questions and my interviewees' answers might have been lost in translation. This decision may have limited some of my participants from conveying their thoughts as freely as possible. Beyond the issue of language, there was a clearly unbalanced power dynamic. While I attempted to alleviate this power dynamic by conducting all the interviews in my participants' homes, it does not erase the fact that I am a "Western" educated, U.S. college student. This might have influenced the way my interviewees viewed me and could have intimidated them, thereby affecting how open they were to sharing their thoughts with me.

Another ethical concern is my identities as a Black, Nigerian feminist/womanist woman and the implicit biases that can arise therein. While my race, ethnicity/cultures and gender impact me in some similar ways as the women I interviewed, our experiences are not wholly the same, and I strived to make sure I did not make too many assumptions or draw connections in my line of questioning that disregarded the different contexts at play. Furthermore, I recognize that, inevitably, I have used some American barometers of feminism to assess the degree to which I have characterized my interviewees' responses and upbringing as holding 'feminist qualities'. I have also tried to educate myself on African feminisms and womanism to better contextualize my interviews, but I concede that my implicit biases as a Black-American feminist/womanist still exist.

With that said, a final issue I had to deal with was how to define feminism for my participants. I was often asked what I thought feminism is and my questions included a definition I crafted. In reality, I believe in multiple feminisms. When pressed for a ubiquitous definition, I usually offer up bell hooks' definition which is a "movement to end sexual exploitation, sexism and oppression." But I knew I needed to create a less academic, more approachable definition of feminism for this project, because it would be likely that my interview population would have a very limited knowledge of the word and its principles. The definition I used was "a movement to end discrimination against women". This is obviously not an exhaustive definition. Although I still had to reiterate this definition in different ways during my interviews, I believe it was the best way to convey the overall essence of feminisms.

## **Limitations:**

During this four week period, I originally intended to interview six to ten women across a wide age range. I was fortunate enough to be able to interview five Xhosa female Langa residents in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Although I would have liked to interview younger women (e.g. in their 20s and 30s), I was unable to work out scheduling conflicts with the people who fit that description. Moreover, a few of the women I reached out to were only available in the evenings due to work and school, and I wanted to limit my night travel and the expenses of cab fare. At one point I decided to focus only on “mama-aged” women, but I was able to interview one woman who was significantly younger than the other mamas I interviewed. In spite of these minor setbacks, I still enjoyed conducting my interviews and believed that I gathered more than enough interesting information and insights from my participants.

## **Background of Interviewees<sup>2</sup>**

**Mama 1-** is a 62 years old former teacher and widow. She has a daughter as well as several nieces and nephews. She is the last born of two brothers and a sister. She grew up in a two-parent household and was tasked with helping her mother with household chores and cleaning. She does not like the crime in Langa, and thinks the young boys are very cruel. She thinks that while both husbands and wives are equally important, wives do most of the work.

**Mama 2-** is a 52 years old life-long resident of Langa. She is a married stay-at-home mom of four children. Her father passed away when she was young and she was subsequently raised by a single mother.

**Mama 3-** is 57 years old and has lived in Langa for 34 years. Prior to that she lived in Kensington. She has been married before and described the marriage as one where they shared in doing whatever they had to do for their children. She has one daughter, one son and two grandsons. Like Mama 2, her father passed on when she was still an adolescent so she spent most of her life raised by a single mom. She took care of her siblings (two brothers and four sisters) while her mom was at work.

**Mama 4-** is a 66 years old life-long resident of Langa who works in the arts. Before pursuing her passion for the arts, she worked in her family’s business as a block person in a butchery. She says that she loved to read growing up and describes herself as a bit of a nerd and a tomboy. After her father passed away, her mother raised her and her siblings as a single mom. She is a mother of one boy and two girls. She has never been married as she thought it would restrict her career as a writer.

**Sisi 1-** is a 44 years single mother of six children. She is also the daughter of Mama 4. She has lived in Langa for most of her life. She has never been married because of the undesirable behaviors of men she has been with in past relationships. She is the only interviewee to self-identify as a feminist.

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<sup>2</sup> Upon being asked, all interviewees identified as Black, Xhosa women.

## Research Findings and Analysis

### **Introduction**

At the conclusion of my interviews, I made a number of interesting findings, especially concerning the seemingly mundane, domestic elements of the participants' lives. One was the uniquely interdependent relationship between women described by the participants. Amongst the mutually beneficial, supportive relationships that were detailed to me, there seemed to exist a tension between older and younger women about the degree of fairness involved in these interactions. Another finding, which was in line with the literature, was the stark division of labor across gendered lines in most of the participants' upbringing and present-day lives. Despite some participants clearly noting different expectations for the young boys and girls in their family, there was a tendency to not assess the possibility of children being treated in a gendered manner. This response could be due to factors including language (e.g. isiXhosa does not make a distinction between boys and girls before puberty; they are simply children) and my inability to convey the true nature of my question. Beyond the treatment of children, I found that the participants had widely different views on who should be the head of the household. While I expected that everyone would say something to the effect of a male relative, answers ranged from saying a woman should be the head to disliking the concept of a head of the household altogether.

I was a bit taken aback by the degree of unfamiliarity with the word "feminism" amongst my interviewees. While I acknowledged that the word itself is a 'Western' creation, I thought that my interviewees would be opposed to the concept for its radical, anti-male stereotype. Instead, I received a wide variety of answers from complete ignorance about what feminism is to one interviewee proudly claiming an identity as a feminist. Regardless of their reactions to the word feminism itself, all the participants either expressed some acknowledgement of gender-based inequities they've noted in their lives or, at the very least, a belief in equal statuses between husbands and wives. This acknowledgement typically only came with primed questions (i.e. those that asked about the relationship between men and women in their lives and in Langa). Conversely, ostensibly gender-based issues were not among their immediate concerns. The participants also assigned a great degree of responsibility and agency to women, crediting them with the power to do everything from exiting an abusive relationship to ensuring the sexual health of themselves and their partners. Coupled with this is a disregard for the ability of male agency to change undesirable

conditions or behaviors. While the ability for women to shape their worlds on their own terms is a type of feminist practice, I was left wondering if the agency the participants prescribed to women effectively absolved men of any accountability.

Here, I seek to parse through how the interviewees perceive and perform feminisms in their lives. Feminisms refer to the existing literature on African feminisms (which include ideologies such as stiwanism and Ogunyemi's womanism) as well as my own, broad reading of the bell hooks' definition of feminism. This broad reading includes both conscious and unconscious ways the women may subvert perceived oppressions whether through seemingly innocuous actions, such as supporting other women, or more forthright methods such as openly disagreeing with a man. These perceptions and practices will be analyzed through an empirical, inter-generational and linguistic lens. As there exists a bevy of feminisms, this is necessarily a highly subjective analysis. It is for these reasons that I constantly refer to feminism in the plural form. However, the purpose of this research is not to identify these women as wholly feminist or not. Rather, it is to examine how principles within feminisms may have a place in these women's lives, in spite of their unfamiliarity or outright rejection of the word as well as to partially divorce feminisms from a purely academic realm.

### *Empirical Practices*

#### **Relationships Between Women**

As noted by Ogunyemi's womanism, dependent relationships between younger and older women within families are a key component of African women's lives that is not necessarily captured by Western feminisms. This struck me as intriguing as my feminism is one that values positive, re-affirming relationships between women, especially in a framework that often pits women in near constant competition with each other. The interviews revealed examples of the co-dependent relationships Ogunyemi described within the five women's lives. Most interviewees would immediately respond that they have no issues with any women in their family. However, upon further probing, some of the interviewees would offer up grievances they had been harboring.

#### *Strong, mutually beneficial relationships*

Mama 1 described mutually respectful relationships between younger and older women in her family and stated that she expects to be treated with respect by younger women because "that's how it should be". She went on to say that "the old respect the young and the young respect the old". It was not immediately clear to me whether she was still referring to only women or to a general principle of inter-generational respect across genders. Similarly, Mama 2 recounted a belief in respect, unconditional of age. She said,

I'm this kind of a mother or woman, I treat everyone with a good manner. Which I also expect that. I respect, whether you younger than me whether you 10 years younger than me or 20 years, I will respect you. Which I also want that. Whether I'm older or younger than you. You older than me, I will expect the same thing that I'm giving you... That's how I treat the younger women or older than me.

Beyond the realm of respect, Mama 3 characterized a relationship between younger and older women based on support and guidance. She said that, “In my family, the older women always show the younger women the path and how to live their lives to be mature”. Mama 2 echoed this sentiment expressing that she strives to make herself open to other women in her life, both in her family and at work.

At work, they would always come to me [saying] “I have this problem with a boyfriend or with my husband or whatever”. I am always sitting with them, like trying to fix the problems. Even with the family I was always like that... Then I was given a certificate of “A Very Good Woman” who would tell the right thing when you share personal things. She will always make you leave with a smile, even if you go to your husband or go to your boyfriend, she will always be there for you. So I’m that kind of person.

The mentor-like relationships described by some of the participants could certainly qualify as feminist work. This does not, however, rule out competition between women. The degree to which these women felt the need to compete with other women in their lives, be it in terms of beauty, male affection or other concerns, was not immediately evident. Such feelings could very well exist in these women’s lives.

#### *Intra-familial tensions between older and younger women*

While competition was not raised as an issue, there was mention of intra-familial tensions between older and younger women, with the women detailing the more tense aspects of their relationships with other women. In these narratives, there potentially exists an age-based divide that reflects the geriarcal principles outlined by Rice (2014). In particular, Mama 2 and 4 noted grievances with their older sisters. To this effect, Mama 2 states,

Honestly, in my family, I have a sister older than me, she always demands “I’m older than you so you don’t talk this and that and that”. I say “no, man”. We don’t need that... I have that sister, older sister of mine. She wants the attention but she can’t give it to someone else.

In Mama 4’s frustration there is an underlying disapproval of what she perceives as perhaps undeserved respect based on age. Despite her frustrations, she insisted that she accepts that geriararchy is simply the status quo in her culture:

One of the things in African societies that tends to irritate me is the aspect of respect. Most of the time, Africans would want you to give respect but not look at what you’re doing. That irritates me, because they’re older. Even my sisters do that. But I’ve come to terms with that. It doesn’t bother me anymore. I just smile when it happens. But if something really serious were to come up, I would discuss it.

Sisi 1, the youngest of the interviewees, more readily aired the more negative aspects with older women in her family. Notably, she spoke in a softer tone than the other interviewees when doing so, perhaps evidence of an unconscious deference to her mother who was in a neighboring room during the interview. When asked about her relationship with older women in her family she said,

I’m gonna say this, but some are big bullies. I think because they grew up in the apartheid era and you know... As I’ve grown up, I’ve come to understand that whether it’s my aunt, the one who only comes on Sundays when she comes to church, she wants us to do everything. That’s how she grew up. She’s 74 and I can never change her. She likes to control, she’s a control freak. And there’s nothing I can do about it... The older women, they sometimes bully us because we’re younger.

Sometimes we'll have an older aunt who'll say, "You're not going anywhere, let's sit down and talk". If my mom says to her, "I'm tired", the older aunt will say, "no no no, we must talk". They [older women] bully us but not in a negative way, but in a loving way"

Thus, Sisi 1 could identify some age-based issues with other women in her family. Nevertheless, she still casts this 'bullying' in a positive light, attempts to partially attribute it to the older women's upbringing during apartheid, and, like her mother, does not challenge her aunt's behavior as her aunt is simply acting in accordance to their culture. It was unclear to me whether this reflected her true feelings or a desire to not come off as disrespectful. While these are only the experiences of a small group of women living in Langa, these narratives demonstrate how issues of age may compound gender in the context of township life.

### **Views Toward Lobola and Ukuthwala**

Lobola (the act of paying a dowry or brideprice) and *ukuthwala* (otherwise known as "forced marriage") are practices that are often denounced in Western feminisms as oppressive and anarchic without recognition of how these practices function in their cultural contexts. Through the interviewees' answers, I found that while *ukuthwala* was denounced as widely intolerable, *lobola* was often characterized as tool for empowering women in their marriages, when applied correctly. Moreover, one could say that the desire to continue *lobola* is connected to a need to preserve culture in light of an oppressive history whereby a white supremacist state deemed all African cultures inferior.

#### *Ukuthwala*

All the women I interviewed were unequivocally opposed to the practice of *ukuthwala* and characterized it as both an archaic and rural practice, as demonstrated by Mama 2 who says "*Ukuthwala* doesn't happen here now, it happens in Eastern Cape. It's totally wrong". Mama 4 speaks forcefully when giving her definition of *ukuthwala*, describing it as "when a man doesn't have the guts to meet the right girl, love and marry her". Some participants' feelings towards *ukuthwala* were influenced by direct experience. For instance, Mama 3's mother escaped an *ukuthwala* attempt by a much older man before marrying the former's father. Mama 1 recounted a harrowing tale of when a man tried to force her into a marriage,

Someone knocked. I was at my mom's. Then this person came in and said "someone wants you from the house opposite my mom's house"...As I was approaching the gate, I felt someone grab me. And I was like screaming. And then he pulled me so bad like straight to this car, you know. I didn't want to get in...I was screaming and screaming. And the husband tried to close my eyes so I don't see where they're going...Then we went to this house. Then everything of my court was there. The girls were there. The clothes were there. There were men sitting in the dining room. My husband and these old men were sitting in the dining room. I was in a room with other women. These women were also in *makhoti* clothes. Then she was told "you don't let her go anywhere". Then I said to her "I wanna go to a toilet". Then she said "no sisi, please don't run away because they said I must look after you. Then I said, "please, do this for me". My husband, I mean my boyfriend cannot do this to me. If you want to marry me, you must come clean. You must go to my mom's and to my family. You cannot do this...So I went out of a window and jumped to another house.

All the interviewees justified their opposition to *ukuthwala* on egalitarian terms. Mama 4 asked “how can you be in a relationship when you have no say?” Sisi 1 equated *ukuthwala* to rape and points out its inequalities by creating a scenario where the roles are swapped and she is the kidnapper:

Because when you *ukuthwala* a person who doesn't love you, it is rape in a way. Because you're forcing a person to fall in love with you. Even if that person is your girlfriend, you don't have the right to do that. *Ukuthwala* isn't right because if I was to *ukuthwala* my boyfriend from his home, his family wouldn't be happy. *Ukuthwala* is taking someone illegally and forcing them into something they don't want to do

Despite the widespread condemnation of *ukuthwala* as unfair towards women, it is worth noting that these are once again only a small group of women and views of *ukuthwala* can change based on the region. For example, Rice (2014) discusses how women sometimes stay in *ukuthwala* marriages out of respect for their parents. Nevertheless, Rice's research also challenges the sentiment that *ukuthwala* involves women as willing and equal participants.

### *Lobola*

The interviewees defined *lobola* as less of a purely financial transaction and more of a ceremony that united two families, planted the seeds of a new, life-long friendship and reaffirmed an essential aspect of being Xhosa. Some of the interviewees noted that *lobola* strengthened a woman's position in her marriage to demand fair treatment from her husband. Mama 1 believed that it is beneficial for a wife to know that her husband paid a significant sum in order to be married. Mama 2 maintains that in the absence of *lobola*, a man is free to mistreat his wife or abandon her at the first sign of conflict. He will say, “I did not even *lobola* you. You can go back home to your family”. However, Mama 2 continued, “When there's *lobola*...then the man will say ‘I must do right, otherwise I've lost my money. I've paid a lot of *lobola*’. The belief that *lobola* holds the husband accountable was also communicated by graduate students in the aforementioned Mwamwenda and Monyooe (1997) study. Conversely, Mama 4 hinted at the tendency for people, namely men, to abuse and skew the true principles of *lobola*. She says that *lobola* should continue

As long as it's not gonna end up when my daughter or my son, when they're having a fight with their husbands and wives, they will think that the *lobola* was payment for her. That needs to be made very clear that you're not *paying* for this girl. You are just thanking her parents for bringing her up.

Because nobody is anybody else's possession.

I found this last statement particularly feminist in nature. The assertion that women are fully-fledged humans, incapable of being owned, is a mainstay tenet of most, if not all, feminisms.

Sisi 1 did not believe that there is anything wrong with *lobola*. However, she found fault in “the way people make *lobola* a tool to restrict their wives”. She went on to say that,

The mistake is that most of the time the men's family think that when they pay *lobola*, it binds that women. It is not like that. That payment is to...seal the friendship between the man and the lady's family...The problem lies when the husband tries to cheat on the wife and ill-treat the wife and keep on saying ‘do not forget I paid *lobola* for you’. But *lobola* was not for him to abuse his wife, cheat on his wife, or to do as he wishes.

It is for these reasons that she felt *lobola* lacks the ability to empower women in marriages. For her, the extent of *lobola*'s reach ends at uniting two families. I found all of the interviewees' arguments about *lobola* to be justifiable. I left the interviews thinking that whether or not one has a wholly positive view about *lobola*, feminists that fail to heed the warnings outlined in Mohanty (1991) erroneously apply Western standards of gender liberation and practice a sort of lazy outrage by characterizing *lobola* as indiscriminately oppressive towards women.

### **Gendered Division of Labor**

As Bak (2008) notes, the migrant labor system exacerbated already existent gendered labor divisions. This was reflected to varying degrees in the women's upbringings and daily lives. For Mama 1, labor in her marriage was divided along more traditional lines. Her husband went to work while she handled matters of the home. She expressed some frustrations with this arrangement saying that "wives do most of the work" and that husbands merely "come from work, sit down and watch TV...that's it". Women, she says, are expected to both work and come home to clean and cook meals. Mama 2 had a similar experience growing up: "At that time our fathers used to come home late and then the moms had to finish everything. So that when the husbands come, then they [the moms] should, like, lay everything on the table for us to eat "

In Mama 3's marriage, there seemed to be a more equal division of work: "Yes we [my husband and I] were both working. We were both sharing whatever we had to do for the children". She goes on to say that she would do all the cooking "because in our culture, the women must do all the cooking" but stressed that she liked doing the cooking because it is her passion. This relatively equal division of labor between women and men extends from her childhood chores with her brother. Of her upbringing, Mama 3 states, "Me and my eldest brother worked. He would scrub the floors on his knees and we would do the work equally; cooking and washing, doing the washing and all that". Similarly, Sisi 1 detailed an equal division of work between her brothers and sisters growing up:

The five of us were brought up by my grandmother. So if I had to sweep the stoop, they[my brothers] had to sweep the stoop. If any of us were not at home by six o'clock to close the curtains, we'd be in big trouble. 6 o'clock, boys, girls we close the curtains.

An equal approach to household labor echoes some of the principles of egalitarian-based strings of feminism, which focus on the politics of the household and values equality between genders above all else. Still, Mama 3 notes an overall gendered divide in labor within Langa (whereby women work in the home and men work outside the home) by observing how "The woman will take care of whatever has to be done in the house and the men will do the garden and the painting".

The majority of my interviewees were either raised for a portion or all of their lives by single women and/or were single mothers themselves. Subsequently, they were either able to tell stories of women who performed roles of both domestic caretaker and wage earner. For example, Sisi 1 valued her upbringing surrounded by "strong, intelligent women". She especially credits her grandmother who looked after her and her cousins, not because their moms were not around but because their mothers ran businesses. Likewise,

Mama 4's mother raised seven children alone after her husband passed away. Mama 4 spoke reverently of her mother as she explains how

My mom had all of us to bring up; almost 7 kids on her own. And you learn from those women. Because I don't remember growing up in this house, not having a pair of shoes, not having enough to eat, not having clothes on my back. But there was this woman who'd wake up at 4 o'clock, go the market and she would sell fruit.

Mama 4 also grew up working in her family-owned butchery with her brothers doing work that she described as "mostly male stuff", thereby making her "very much like a 'tomboy'". In one story about her work at the butchery during apartheid, she talks about how a white-owned meat company once hired a group of Black men to deliver the meat to her family's butchery in Langa. The Black men did not want to unload the meat once they arrived at the butchery, for fear of backlash from the township residents. Regardless of the men's fears, Mama 3's butchery needed the meat and she was instructed to unload the heavy cow carcasses.

Suddenly, you could see that now the men were being castrated because I was doing their job. I wasn't begging. The guy in the truck said, "But you're a woman". Eventually the men said, "okay fine, we'll help". And I said, "It's too late".

The raw, physicality of Mama 4's story struck me, particularly the idea of her surpassing men by evoking the image of castration. These stories of women who perform(ed) multiple roles challenges the idea of who earns wages, a function that Bak (2008) notes is the primary road to manhood in Xhosa culture by enabling men to pay *lobola*, acquire a wife and become head of a household. This demonstrates how middle class white Western feminisms that are focused on women having the right to work are out of place in circumstances where women are already expected to work both inside and out the home. Conversely, in a sense, women performing dual roles as both caretaker and wage earners are in line with a feminism that advances broader ideas of what women's work and men's work entails. However, this kind of broadening seems to be less of a challenge to entrenched gender roles and more a result of uncontrolled circumstances, be it a father/husband's death, a general absence of men from the family, or a lack of financial opportunities for men that force women to look for wages.

### **Head of the Household**

While I was aware that single, female-headed households are common throughout Langa, I suspected that the women, in accordance with a patrifocal Xhosa background and strong Christian influences, would advocate for a man as head of the household. I was subsequently surprised by the variety of answers from the participants when asked about who should be the head of the household. I have labeled these responses as traditional/patriarchal, matriarchal, optional and egalitarian.

#### *Traditional/Patriarchal*

Mama 2 expressed the traditional belief that the head of the household should always be the man/husband. This belief extends to the family at large. Even in the absence of parents, the eldest son must

take the reigns as the head of the family. In the case of her own family, her eldest brother is designated as the family's head and lives in the family house. Mama 2 explained that,

Whenever something happens we call up a meeting and then he must come. He must be there. Whatever I want to do in the house, I must tell him first. He must be the head. He is the head of the family house.

When asked why she believes that her eldest brother must be the head, rather than, for example, her eldest sister, Mama 2 suggested that the oldest man at the head is simply the way a family should be organized, regardless of the man's ability. It is tradition. I did not probe this question further, but I wonder if the need for a male head of the household and family stemmed from a belief of men and their capabilities to lead as inherently superior to women.

### *Matriarchal*

Mama 3 stated that the mother should be the head of the household "because she is the one who can take care of all the children". In this explanation, Mama 3 suggests that child rearing is a vital aspect of a family. Since Xhosa cultures privilege women as caretakers, women, in Mama 3's mind, would be the most appropriate option for the head of the household. I found this answer to be interesting, as it seems to stem from a more meritocratic conviction. Perhaps this means that neither women nor men are inherently prepared for leading a household in Langa and that they must first acquire the skills to do so. Yet, Mama 3 also suggests that women should be the heads of households because it is already the most common reality when she said, "Most of the time, it's the ladies who are the heads of the households".

It is possible that different definitions of family are at play between the matriarchal and traditional/patriarchal approaches to the head of the household. The patriarchal/traditional approach refers to a wider definition of family that includes extended family members while the matriarchal approach only refers to the 'nuclear' family. Thus, one could say that in daily life, women may run the household completely while wider family issues may be the domain of older men.

### *Optional*

Mama 4 seemed less decisive regarding the head of the household question. She notes that regardless of a family's structure, a head always and necessarily must emerge. She states that, "There's always a head, even if it's a woman. There are many single parent homes that are lead by others. There has to be a head of the household. Otherwise, how could you maintain order in your home?" That she qualifies her argument that there is always a head with 'even if it's a woman' shows that women, in her view, may not be considered the typical or default when one thinks about the head of the family. Still, Mama 4 acknowledged that, "Because I grew up with my mother, I find women are as capable as men or even more capable, because they can do domestic chores, to be heads of the family. I don't see why women shouldn't be the heads of families". This argument differs from Mama 3's matriarchal justification in that it does not suggest that the role of household head be systematically turned over to women because of their skills in the

domestic sphere. Alternatively, it implicitly proposes that because many women have adopted classically male functions as wage earners as well as serving the domestic role that is already expected of them, women should be considered and recognized as credible household heads in their own right. Nevertheless, this recognition does not immediately discount men. It simply means that there is an option between men and women when considering who should lead a family.

### *Egalitarian*

Sisi 1's opinions generally invoked egalitarian principles. Her views on the head of the household were no exception. When I asked her if she thought there should be a head of the household, she gave a frank, simple "No". Upon asking her to elaborate, she stated,

Because I grew up in a house that, until today my mother is the head of the house but she'll say "listen, I have 5 pennies. Here's what I'm going to do with the pennies". It's always been like that. So I think what destroys families is always the fact there is this head of the house. Because even the head is connected to the body, so if the body is not there, where will the head fit? In this house, we have never had this problem where my mom is the head of the house, no. She will run things equally."

Here, Sisi 1's grievance is not with the concept of having a head household. Her grievance is with the notions that because someone is deemed the leader of a family, they should not take into account the thoughts and suggestions of their relatives. A leader of the family may exist. However, just like the head needs the body, so does the leader need the rest of their family to function properly and to, indeed, exist at all.

Ultimately, the women's variety of answers may hint at the potential for changes in the hierarchies and power structures of families within Langa households. This potential change goes hand in hand with the broadening of gender roles described in the aforementioned section and the declining opportunities for men to rise to the head of their own household through wage labor. I certainly cannot read too much into the interviewees' assertions. For example, the suggestions that women can and should be the head of the household could be compounded with geriatric considerations, whereby if the eldest family member is a woman, it is natural for her to be at the head. Nevertheless, I do not find it completely ignorable that only one of the interviewees advocated for unconditional male leadership within her family.

### **Women's Agency vs. Men's Agency**

A constant theme that emerged from the participants' interview answers was the insistence that women are in charge of their own destiny. Any undesirable condition, be it the result of their own doing or a man's shortcomings, could be altered for the better if a woman only put her mind to it. The interviews consequently placed a high premium on women's agency, especially concerning their ability to alter the power dynamics of a romantic relationship, be financially independent, and ensure the sexual health of themselves and their partners.

### *Sexual Health*

Sisi 1 observed that, “we always tend to think that contraception is meant for women only...Because if I fall pregnant, my boyfriend will say, ‘why didn’t you use contraception?’” In the same vein, Mama 2 recounted a story where she tells her son’s girlfriend that she must not become pregnant:

I sat here with the girlfriend and I said to her ‘Listen, I’m not that kind of mom who allows her boy to fall in love with a younger child like you...Your mom loves you. Not this, you don’t want this. You can come and visit. But I don’t want anything. Don’t even think you’ll fall pregnant and come to my house. I don’t want that. I don’t want that because I want my son to finish his studies, to get a job, and then when you’re over 21 or 25, then you can meet. But your mom loves you. First, finish the school. Get the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday for your mom as a virgin.

Sisi 1 and Mama 2 do not speak for all of Langa, but their responses hint at a pervasive culture that assigns all sexual responsibility to women. This diverges from my experiences in the United States, where (when talking about heterosexual relations), women are often taught to trust the man to take precautions during intercourse. Women taking charge of their own sexual health can be deemed in line with most feminisms. However, I am troubled by the absence of male responsibility in the narratives of Mama 2 and Sisi 1. My own feminism is one that entreats everyone to be diligent about their sexual health.

### *Romantic Relationships*

Mama 1 maintained that women in Langa could have a good life if they want their lives to be good. But, if a woman stays in an abusive marriage, it’s her own fault because “life is what you make it”. Mama 1 uses herself as an example, saying that she was divorced because she didn’t want to stay in an abusive marriage. Perhaps recognition of her constitutional protections against domestic violence, as noted by Hendricks, influenced her decision. Mama 4 mentioned that if a woman enters a relationship with “a very patriarchal man who expects you to cook all the time” then “it’s up to the women to change that”. At no point did Mama 1 and 4 explicitly demand men to change their behaviors and be less “abusive” or “patriarchal”. Throughout their interviews, Mama 1 and 4 painted pictures of static men, leaving women to constantly change and adapt.

### *Financial Independence*

Almost all the interviewees put forth an unconditional belief in the right for a woman to work and earn money for herself. Mama 2 suggested it was wise for a woman to have her own funds in order to protect herself from the wayward assertions of her male partner. She said that it is imperative for her daughters to, “Make money. Because you get a man outside there...some of the men say ‘I took you and you never had anything’”, thereby suggesting that the woman is indebted to him. Similarly, Mama 1 hinted at the possibility of infidelity as the justification for a woman’s financial independence because husbands will “entertain” other people “since you know how the husbands are”. This implies that a financially unstable woman is vulnerable to a man who may manipulate her precarious situation to his advantage.

Mama 3 reiterated this sentiment, stating that, “with her own money [a woman] won’t be responsible to the man”. Having been raised in a ‘household of strong women’, Sisi 1 is a product of the financial

independence championed by Mamas 2 and 3. She said her value of independence comes from her single mom and aunts who taught her to do everything for herself. They told her, “don’t wait for a man. I’m not against a man, no. But independence is very important to me”. She later noted, in her characteristic egalitarian tone, that a woman sharing finances with a man is fine when there’s “an agreement between you and your husband”. Sisi 1’s mother, Mama 4, surprised me by being a bit of an outlier when talking about a woman’s financial independence. She said if a woman is single with children, then of course she must work for herself and keep her own money. However, Mama 4 concluded that this principle does not apply “if she’s in a relationship with somebody”. Regardless, the pervading sentiment in the interviewees’ responses about financial independence cast women as active subjects arming themselves against the various ways men can restrain them.

### *Disregard for Male Agency*

Men would often be at the center of Langa’s ills, as described by the interviewees. When asked about what she did not like about Langa, Mama 1 responded that she dislikes the crime, citing the young boys as “so cruel”, unlike the girls. She said she does not know why boys commit more crimes than girls, and she maintains that, “girls are harmless”. Mama 4 lays out this view more distinctly, crediting men’s privileged and protected status as the reason “why we have so many problems in society”. She concluded that, “there’s a big tendency in South Africa for men to not take responsibility for their offspring”. Sisi 1 says that in light of what she estimates as 90% of Langa households being led by women, “African men don’t play a big role in bringing up families”. She states that she personally combats this tradition by teaching her son to “be responsible and accountable to your woman and to your children”. Out of this aspect of Sisi 1’s parenting comes the only concrete demand for more male agency in the interviews.

Overall, there seemed to be an implicit disregard for the capability of men to change the less favorable aspects of their lives. On the other hand, that a woman’s image was fashioned as so dynamic, so consequential struck me as particularly liberating. However, I questioned some of the more insidious, structural factors (e.g. apartheid’s ugly legacy, unemployment etc.) that made this image possible. I finished interviews wondering if this almost superhuman rendering of women’s capabilities to change their surroundings for the better, effectively robbed men of any accountability. It leads one to believe that, in the words of Sisi 1, “men in Langa aren’t *there*”.

### *Inter- and Intra-Generational Changes*

For this project, I originally hoped that half of my interviewees would be ‘mama-aged’ (i.e. 50-70s) and the other half would be ‘sisi-aged’ (i.e. 20s-40s). Scheduling conflicts made it difficult for me to find younger participants. Still, I was able to uncover both inter- and intra-generational differences and similarities in expectations regarding: the division of work within the household, appropriate behavior in relationships with men and the desire to get married.

## **Dividing Work in the Household**

As noted in the “Gendered Division of Labor” section, Mama 1 was quick to point out inequalities in the division of work in the household. In her view, “husbands come from work, sit down and watch TV” while wives are expected to not only work, but to also come home and cook meals. She revealed that she is not ok with this seemingly unequal arrangement but she said that there was no choice for her. However, she observed how today’s young couples divide the work more equally amongst themselves. When asked about equal division of work in her generation, she stated, “we were not supposed to do that”. This points to a generational shift in household politics where expectations for equally dividing domestic duties may be on the rise.

Sisi 1’s interview represents the potential *ethos* of this modern, more egalitarian generation. For Sisi 1, politics of fairness inside the household reign supreme. To demonstrate this, she recounted a story of a married couple that used to live next to her. She was shocked by what she deemed unreasonable treatment from the husband. The wife had to get up to iron his shirts every morning because he did not want his shirts ironed the night before. The wife was also expected to walk a young girl who was living with them to school every morning, despite the fact that the husband drove past the very same school every day. On top of what Sisi 1 saw as unnecessary injustices, the wife had to prepare a laborious, home-cooked meal every day, no matter the weather. One day, Sisi 1 confronted the husband:

I said, ‘I know, it’s none of my business but I’m going to say it anyway, you are treating your wife like a donkey’. And he said, ‘Why do you say that?’ And I said, ‘In the morning when you leave, I see you driving away and your wife walking out of the house taking this young girl to school. But you go your own way and drive. That is unfair. She has to come back and clean, cook, watch the kids everyday. Don’t you think that a donkey needs rest as well?’ From that day onward, he never greeted me...That’s why I say marriage equality is very important.

Sisi 1 did not specify the age of this couple, although I inferred that they were most likely younger as she said they also had a baby boy. The couple in Sisi 1’s narrative contrasts with the image of more democratic couples outlined by Mama 1. Although Sisi 1 may simply be an outlier, her outrage may also be indicative of similar feelings amongst women of her generation who believe that traditional gender roles should not remain when the man is perfectly capable of lightening the load in the home.

## **Behaviors in Relationships with Men**

All the interviewees were adamant that when a man says something they do not agree with, they, in the words of Mama 1, “tell him straight”. They insisted that this reaction stays the same, whether they share a romantic, familial or platonic relationship with the man. Everyone defended her right to have an opinion and be heard. This attitude was best communicated by Mama 4, who stated that,

Other men are rarely interested to hear what you say...I’m very sensitive to that kind of stuff. Because I think I have a brain here. And if I have an opinion about something, I’ll say it. And I’m not saying accept it. You can also have your argument.

While all the interviewees were in agreement with this view, Mama 1 and 3 observed that this represents a break from their own parents' generation. Mama 1 stated that her parents told her she must always agree with her husband. However, she considers that to be advice for her parents' time. Likewise, Mama 3 noted, "as a woman, we were told that you're not supposed to tell the man what to do. But in my opinion, I feel that if you don't agree with something, you should tell him". Speaking out with a different opinion sounds simple, but it is often difficult in spaces where women are told to defer to men. For these reasons, feminisms often focus on uplifting women's voices. Therefore, a generational change in women voicing their opinion, as described by the interviewees, can be classified as a change that bend towards feminist principles.

### **Opposition to Marriage**

Although I inquired after all of my interviewees' marriage status, I did not plan on asking them *why* or why not they decided to get married. Mamas 1, 2 and 3 were all either married or widowed. Besides asking about how they divided work with their spouses, I accepted these answers wholesale. I found it a bit unusual (in the context of Langa) that Mama 4 and Sisi 1 had never been married so I probed this decision further. In hindsight, it would have been beneficial to ask the married participants about their mindsets going into their marriages as another point of comparison.

Mama 4 reflected on how at the beginning of her career, she realized she would not be able to travel as frequently if she was married because, "I'm sure my husband would say to me 'are you leaving again?' And I would say 'yes'. And he would say 'what about my shirts?' And I find myself yelling 'Fuck your shirts!' And I thought, 'you're not ready for marriage'". She went on to say that she needs someone who will respect her and her career. Like the concerns of the Xhosa village women in the Rice (2014) paper, Mama 4's story fashions marriage as potentially stifling due to the husband's demands. I wonder whether her career conscious apprehensiveness towards marriage would change if she were a man; would she be more concerned with exorbitant *lobola* prices rather than an impeding spouse?

For Sisi 1, avoiding marriage stemmed from her experience in other relationships. She expressed a zero-tolerance policy towards certain behaviors:

I do not want a man who lifts a hand. If he does it once, he will do it again. He will never stop doing it until he kills me. So if he does it once, I get rid of him. I don't have excuses. I don't need to find an excuse for him. Because no person who loves you can beat you up.

She also doesn't accept burgeoning alcoholics or secret-keepers as acceptable mates, going so far as to leave a man while she was six months pregnant when she found out he had other children and "a lot of skeletons coming out of the cupboards". She decided that, "I still value my life, I value all my children's lives. So let me call it a day". Essentially, Sisi 1 appears to continually prioritize her self-health over a desire to remain in harmful relationships. Although Sisi 1 does not self-identify as a womanist, her actions recall the third

tenet of being a womanist, which Alice Walker partially defines as a woman who “Loves herself. *Regardless*”.<sup>3</sup>

### *Linguistic Considerations*

The participants expressed varying levels of familiarity and understanding of the word feminism and its definition. Only one of the participants identified as a feminist. The rest of the interviewees were either unsure if they identified as a feminist or absolutely rejected the label. With that said, I argue that the interviewees are largely inhibited from engaging formally with feminisms (due to linguistic, academic, ideological, or personal barriers) in spite of the informal ways that they perform and practice some of the principles of feminisms in their everyday lives.

### **Defining Feminisms**

#### *Interviewees' Definitions*

Mama 2 had not heard the word feminist before and, as such, declined to give her own definition. The rest of the interviewees had at least heard of the word feminism and gave their own intuitive answers. Mama 1 said, simply, that feminism means, “being feminine”. Mama 3 suggested that feminism refers to “a man who wants to be a girl”. Mama 4 expressed immediate disapproval when I brought up the word feminism, exclaiming, “I just don’t like it”. When I asked her to give a definition, she said that feminism is, “trying to prove that you’re a woman”. After noting that, “English is not my best [language]”, Sisi 1 stated, “To me, feminism means being aware of who you are as a woman. Also, being aware of other women who are around”. It is important to acknowledge here that this is the only time Sisi 1 highlights her perceived deficiency in the English language. All the interviewees communicated with me relatively freely and fluidly throughout their interviews. However, engaging with an unfamiliar word and coming up with an appropriate definition may have been an intimidating task.

#### *Reaction to My Definition*

After I asked the interviewees to give their definitions of feminism, I gave my definition, (“a movement to end discrimination against women”) and asked if they agreed with it. However, I often had to subtly change the definition. After giving my definition, Mama 2 responded, “There’s too much of that[discrimination] in Langa, but I don’t see myself doing that. Discrimination happens. I’ve seen that”. I received a similar response from Mama 3, who said that she did not like my definition, “because everyone should be treated with respect”. When I tried to clarify her answer by asking, “So you do not like discrimination?” she answered, “No, I don’t like discrimination”. Here, I think that Mama 2 and 3 focused on the word ‘discrimination’ in my definition and wanted to stress their opposition to discrimination in general.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B

My definition also muddled when talking to Sisi 1. After I gave the definition, she responded, “Why do they say that’s feminism? It can’t be. I don’t think it’s right. Can’t they have another name for it?” When I followed up with, “So you don’t think that *ending* discrimination against women is feminism?”, she responded, “Oh yes! I didn’t hear you correctly. That is good. We have to definitely end it”. That no participants gave an initial ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer (potentially followed by an explanation) when asked if they agreed with my definition, revealed the opacity of my streamlined definition of feminisms. As per Mohanty (1991), this demonstrates the trials and difficulties that sometimes come with translating feminisms into different contexts.

### **Knowing and Visualizing a Feminist**

Asking the participants what they think a feminist looks like and if they knew someone who identified as a feminist yielded varied answers. Mama 1 and 2 were unsure, with the former saying that it is “quite difficult” to know what a feminist looks like and that she “can’t explain that one”. They both said that they did not know any feminists. Mama 3 determined that, in accordance with her definition of feminism (i.e. “a man who wants to be a girl”), a feminist looks like “Somebody who more wants to be a girl in the way they act, the way they want to dress and talk”. She observed that she knew “quite a few” feminists.

Mama 4 said that she did not personally know anyone who identified as a feminist. When visualizing a typical feminist, she offered the following observation:

I think it was a word that was termed by a white woman somewhere, because the movement was very much encouraged by a lot of white women. It was happening over there...in America, which was where most of what was happening at the time when feminism came into the picture.

Mama 4’s observation shows how white “Western” feminisms often dominate the worldview, making people hesitant or resistant to imagining feminists in their own self-image. Conversely, Sisi 1 visualization of a typical feminist hinged on close ties to her own experiences:

A typical feminist is someone like me. I love women. I get so excited when I see a single mom like me who’s got 5 children and who is really making it. Who is not giving in. Who is not saying, “I can’t take it”, who walks tall. I like it when I see women fighting for themselves. That is feminism to me.

Perhaps this is a sign that younger generations of women in Langa might be able to at least conceptualize more diverse, relatable images of feminists, regardless if they identify as one. Naturally, conversations with more young women in Langa are needed to speak more conclusively.

### **Identifying as a Feminist**

When asking the participants if they identified as feminists, I encountered similar issues with describing a feminist as the ones in the “Defining Feminisms” section. Mama 1 was uncertain about whether or not she called herself a feminist. In an attempt to provide a clearer description to Mama 2 when I asked her if she calls herself a feminist, I gave an impromptu definition of a feminist as “A person who doesn’t like treating women badly”. To this definition she replied, “No, I actually don’t treat any women badly”. Once again, I think my definition fell short of comprehension, causing my participant to stress how she

believes in general fair treatment. Perhaps she would have responded more definitively if I provided a more approachable definition.

As noted in her interviewee profile, Sisi 1 was the only one to claim the feminist label, naming herself when asked if she knew someone who identified as feminist. This response is in direct opposition to her mother, Mama 4, who firmly rejected the feminist label. Mama 4 explained that,

I am a feminine. I'm a woman. If something takes my rights away, then I'm gonna have to fight for my rights. I don't need feminism. I grew up in a country of struggle, I am *Black* and I grew up oppressed. So fighting for my rights is in my blood. Burning bras is not gonna change anything. Here, Mama 4 articulates her opposition to the word feminist through a race-conscious framework. By doing so, Mama 4 illustrates the need for intersectionality and the ways in which, as discussed by Lewis (1993), gender consciousness cannot be separated from experiences of raced bodies. Non-intersectional feminisms ignore these complexities when it promotes a blind, uncritical unity solely under gender.

One could dismiss this comment as yet another misconception of feminists as needlessly radical, bra burning, man hating women. However, Mama 4's explanation points out the importance of naming. In the literature, Ogunyemi stresses the importance of re-naming and re-contextualizing the general principles held in feminism because the word itself can be polarizing in countries saddled with histories marked by oppressive, European colonialist regimes. In a way, then, requiring women in Langa who are already aware of their rights to specifically self-identify as feminists is a subtle brand of imperialism. Thus, while Mama 4 believes in fighting for her rights as a Black person and a woman, feminism remains an imported, foreign word that she feels she can never fully own.

### **Conclusion**

When so-called "second-wave" feminists proclaimed, "the personal is the political," they redefined private spheres like the household as legitimate spaces for political debate. It is partly in this spirit that I have analyzed the information provided by my participants and drawn the preceding conclusions.

### **Democratic Viewpoints**

One commonality throughout the findings was a call for egalitarianism. The participants constantly insisted that they wish to treat others fairly (be it their children, female family members, or general relationships with others) and hope for the same treatment in return. As Wittman (2012) outlines, the women were often aware of their subordinate positions in certain contexts but unconscious of the structural factors that sometimes lowered their positions. In any case, this democratic thinking did not always align with the content of the interviewees' responses. For example, Mama 1 would insist that she treats all her nieces and nephews fairly before adamantly opposing her nephew washing dishes because she deemed it a girl's job. Nevertheless, mutual fairness was imperative for the participants, thereby providing space for the possible introduction of equality-based feminisms.

## **Dynamic Motherhood**

All of the participants are mothers and continually referenced their experiences with motherhood as a child and in the present. These experiences revealed stories of seemingly tireless women who played multiple roles as they worked in fruit stands and butcheries, as seamstresses, managers and writers while simultaneously rearing children, tending to the never ending needs of running a household, and championing community improvement projects. If the five narratives presented by the interviewees are at all representative of Langa at large, then one could reasonably deem Langa to be, in the words of Acholonu, a matrifocal community. Contrary to Acholonu, there does not appear to be a clear gendered divide in the immediate lives of the participants, where men dominate the 'socio-political spheres of life' and women operate in the 'spiritual and metaphysical' realms. Rather, women, (that is to say mothers) seem almost omnipresent, the pendulum around which everyone rotates. Still, as Lewis (1993) and Mohanty (1991) warn, it is unclear the extent to which the respect for and power of mothers extends to all women (mothers or not) outside the home.

## **Translating Feminism**

A final commonality throughout the findings and analysis was language both explicit and implicit issues around. These issues ranged from my unclear definitions of feminisms/feminist to my uncertainty if an interviewee's rejection of a certain idea was due to misunderstanding the idea or their true convictions. Another important linguistic issue was a clear recognition and subsequent rejection of the word feminism because of its foreign origins. This highlights the language politics of global feminisms and specifically points to the necessity of more intersectional feminisms that recognize and respect the need for people to have naming power over their own actions.

## **Recommendations for Further Study**

While the information provided by the five participants is invaluable, interviewing more women, especially younger women and women living in informal settlements, throughout Langa would be a great continuation of this research. Cross-geographical comparisons between women living in Langa and another township would also provide another interesting level of analysis. Finally, interviewing Black South African women in rural areas or from a different ethnic group would be a worthwhile addition to this research.

## **Final Thoughts**

Although the word feminism has only existed for less than 200 years, one could argue that the principles of feminisms have been lived, performed and practiced as a means of resistance since the inception of systems of oppression (e.g, capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy etc.). With that said, it is still reckless to force an entire ideology upon women who are unfamiliar with it or even completely uninterested. Nevertheless, I believe that the thoughts and opinions of these five Black, Xhosa women living in Langa demonstrates how feminisms and its principles need not only be for middle class White women,

those privileged enough to walk the hallowed halls of academia, or people who live in the so-called “West”. Feminisms are adaptable and, when given the chance, its principles can transform to fit specific histories, cultures, and contexts. In short, feminisms can, indeed, be for everybody.

## Appendices

### Appendix A - Interview Questions

*\*Subject to change based on the participant*

1. If you feel comfortable telling me, when is your birthday? How old are you?
2. How long have you lived in Langa?
3. What kind of work do you do?
4. Do you call yourself a woman? Why or why not? When people look at you how do you think they categorize you, as a man or a woman or as something else?
5. Do you call yourself Black? Why or why not? When people look at you do you think they would say you are black?
6. Do you call yourself Xhosa? Why or why not?
7. What are some of your favorite aspects of living in Langa? What are some of your least favorite aspects of living in Langa?
8. Have you ever been married?
  - a. If yes, how do/did you divide work in your household? Were you both employed? Who took care of the children? Who cooked the meals? Do you think that the work a husband and wife typically do are both equally important? Is the husband's role more important than the wife's role? Is the wife's role more important than the husband's role? Do you think that a husband and a wife should be equals in a marriage?
9. Do you have children?
  - a. If yes, how many boys and girls? Did you treat your children differently? For example, were there activities that some of your children could do that others couldn't? Do you treat your daughters differently from your sons? Why or why not?
10. What kind of household were you raised in? Were there 2 parents that you saw daily?
11. How did your parents divide the work? Were both parents employed? Who usually took care of the children? Who usually cooked the meals? Was there a head of the household in your home when you were growing up?
12. Should there be a head of the household? Who should it be?
13. Do you have siblings? Do you have brothers?
  - a. Were there ever activities while you were growing up that your brother could do that you couldn't do? If yes, did you think that was ok or fair?
14. Do you get along with other women in your family? How do older women treat younger women in your family or other families in Langa? (If a mama) How do you expect to be treated by younger women in your family? (If a young woman) How do you expect to be treated by older women in your family?
15. Do men and women do different kinds of work in Langa? If yes, what do they do? Do you think that men and women *should* do different kinds of work in Langa?
16. Are there a lot of women in Langa who have children before getting married? Do you think that it's ok to have a child before marriage?
17. Do you think a woman should be able to work for herself and keep her own money? Why or why not?
18. When a man says something you don't agree with, what do you do? Does your reaction change based on your relationship with the man? For example, does your reaction differ between your husband/boyfriend, uncle, father, friend?
19. Have you heard of *Ukuthwala*? What is it (Answer: it literally means "to carry" and refers to abducting a woman and taking her to a man's house for marriage)? Does *ukutwhala* happen in

- Langa? Does it happen in your family? (If yes or no), what do you think about *ukuthwala*? Should it continue? Why or why not?
20. Have you heard of lobola (a.k.a. brideprice)? What is it? Does *lobola* happen in Langa? Does it happen in your family? What do you think about *lobola*? Should the practice continue? Why or why not?
  21. When someone dies, who should inherit the deceased's money and property?
  22. Do you think that women have a good life in Langa?
  23. So, through these questions, I mainly wanted to get to know your thoughts about being a woman living in Langa and South Africa. With that said, have you ever heard of the word "feminism"? What have you heard about feminism? What do you think feminism is? What do you think a typical feminist looks like? Do you know anyone who calls themselves a feminist?
    - a. One definition of feminism is "a movement to end discrimination against women and oppression". Do you think this is a good cause?
  24. Do you identify as a feminist?

### Appendix B – Alice Walker's Definition of Womanism

From *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* Copyright 1983.

#### WOMANIST

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.
2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."
3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.
4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

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