

**Storying Elderliness in Hangberg: a critical rhizo-linguistic  
narrative journey.**

**By**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that I have composed this thesis myself and that it embodies the results of my own research. Where appropriate, I have acknowledged the nature and extent of work carried out in collaboration with others included in the thesis.

Rayne Stroebel

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## Abstract

The story of Elderliness in Hangberg is a story of deep humanity. We may have heard it before. We may even feel we have recognised it before, but not often. While the story is situated and uniquely localised, it offers deep insights into how we all might otherwise live our lives with others, across linguistic, cultural, and ethnic divides, and beyond the differences of/in lived experiences. The stories from the people of Hangberg come together to curate the story of Elderliness in this historical, mixed-race fishing village on the imposing slopes of the mountain of Hangberg in Hout Bay, in Cape Town, a brooding presence that in silhouette appears ready to fall into the sea of a beautiful bay that has been depleted of fish on which so many livelihoods in this historic fishing village community deeply depend. It is a story that defies conceptualisations of ‘dementia’ and the ‘care’ of ‘seniors’, and particularly of Western biomedical thought and understandings of *aging*. It offers a deeply somatic and resonant range of realisations of what it might mean to live well, meaningfully, ‘in community’, with dignity and grace, and with poignancy of wisdom(s), while ‘growing old’, despite the seemingly simple, humble ways of living and being that might otherwise be constructed, dominantly, in deficit terms and as epitomising ‘dire poverty’. It undoes everything we might have come to understand about how the material world works, of what it means to be human and what it might mean to grow old with others. The play on the word ‘Elderliness’, which I have used to replace ‘old’ and ‘demented’ and ‘senile’ and even ‘vulnerable’, speaks to a process of aging, but also of becoming spiritually wise, of being an ‘Elder’ in the indigenous South African sense of the word. This matters because words matter, and the way we come to interpret, speak of, and think of others, and indeed consequently treat others, counts. This is because the way we speak of, think about, and engage with the people of Hangberg and with Elderliness in Hangberg, counts – and, it concomitantly counts for the world and how we choose to live within it – personally and with others.

The journey into Hangberg changed my life. It forced me to confront the whiteness of my body, the whiteness of my privilege, and my general lack of understanding of *whiteness* as a socio-political construct. In the middle of the night, when I hear the Southeaster wind tear through Hout Bay, I grapple with the realities that racially-constructed binaries, so historically endemic to and recognisable in the South African (post)apartheid context, have exacted on the lives of so many.

The journey I have taken is not an easy one, and the writing will likely not be an easy read. But, I am hoping the reader will feel and see and hear and taste and smell with me on this experiential, narrative journey that I am inviting them into. The stories being journeyed, lived, and curated along the way are neither mine, nor fully the stories of the people of Hangberg. They are relational stories, stories in the *in-between*, stories of connection, interpretation, pain, resignation, contentedness, ‘inter-reliability’, community, possibility, and hope. The rhizomatic threads and tendrils *feel out* the stories and their interconnections with themes of loss, illness, death, grief, dislocation, shared apartheid history, shared material circumstances, but also of a living/lived *Ubuntu*, of shared food, shared language, and the joys and pain of communion with family, neighbours, children, pets, friends.

The storying of Elderliness in Hangberg draws on *critical rhizomatic narrative methodology* (Swanson 2004, 2008), with its ‘*moments of articulation*’, rhizomatic conversations, and highly reflexive engagement with storying lived experiences. But this post-qualitative, post-foundational narrative methodology also offers provocative entryways for grappling with embodied, ethical dilemmas, contradictions, and conundrums in lived context of inquiry and, in this methodological rendering, in my engagement with the people of Hangberg. My journey to and through Hangberg has resulted in peripatetic writing that is as digressive as it is inchoate, transforming me as I go deeper into the unknown. The rhizomatic points of entry and many “moments of articulation” (Swanson, 2004) create ample opportunity for conjunctural analysis as the researcher is thrown from theory to philosophy in being confronted by these many moods.

Alongside the storied entries to ways of being that are not dominantly Western in their assumptions and the ways of life they offer, I have grappled with decolonial thought, drawing also on critical poststructuralism. Decolonising views are important to this inquiry, and offer a unique contribution and crucial intervention to the ‘gerontology’ field, especially in troubling the mindsets, paradigms, and interpretations that give rise to Eurocentred, modernist, biomedical, and deficit views of people, such as the people of Hangberg.

There is a strong linguistic element to the inquiry, and language plays an important role in the narrative renderings of the lives of the people of Hangberg in ways that begin to extend the methodology of *critical rhizomatic narrative* to one that might be considered *critical rhizolinguistic narrative*. If the reader does not know Afrikaans, then I invite them to learn a few

Afrikaans words that I feel, from a deeply ethical place within me, need to stay woven within the text. In the context and places in/of which these words speak, they are untranslatable. Language also offers a deeply creative element, which aligns well with the literary and poetic invitation offered through *critical rhizomatic narrative*. I have embraced this invitation to imbue the thesis with my and others' poetry, and through the effects of literary devices, deepened the meaning, interpretations, emotions, and philosophical mood of this inquiry. It has facilitated understandings of Elderliness and the people of Hangberg in new ways, in ways that foster relational knowing and being.

The structure of this exploration and pilgrimage does not follow the expectations of a conventional social science undertaking, or one that fits the description of a specific paradigmatic category of social science design, for that might pose a further injustice to the people and their stories. As I *kuier en gesels*, a method of engagement relevant to the way of life of the people of Hangberg, a 'method' I embraced for this inquiry, I tally at the meeting point, knowing that much of what I experience in Hangberg remains a mystery. I am part of the expression of the stories being-in-the-world, and can but hope that in the spaces in-between, new stories that give meaning to the experiences I describe and to new understandings of Elderliness through the lived experiences of the people of Hangberg will be brought into being.

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*Hangberg at dawn*  
Photo credit: © Dalene Swanson, 2022

# 1 The Journey into Hangberg

*In die mistroostigheid van die Suidooster se geloei*

*Loop die snoek dik dié seisoen...*

*Som kyk en ander vang*

*Maar almal eet saam keite*

*En smoorsnoek en kerriekoppe*

*Die lewe is mos kwaai*

Rayne Stroebel, 1 February 2022

The journey into Hangberg changed my life. It forced me to confront the whiteness of my body, the whiteness of my privilege, and my general lack of understanding of whiteness<sup>1</sup> as a socio-political construct. In the middle of the night, when I hear the Southeaster<sup>2</sup> tear through Hout Bay, I still grapple with the realities that these racially-constructed binaries have exacted on the lives of so many. I wonder what it must feel like in the informal structures of Hangberg when my home is heaving in the wind. In every face I see on the streets now, I recognise the stories that would be shared with me. I hear the laughter, smell the fish and chips, feel the hardships, the joy of the fishing *dorpie*<sup>3</sup> where people are no longer permitted to fish.

**A caution and invitation:** I need to caution the reader by way of invitation. This is not an easy journey I have undertaken, or, more aptly, ‘taken-under’ the relational stories of the people of Hangberg, and this writing will likely not be an easy read. But, I am hoping you will feel and see and hear and taste and smell with me on this journey that I am inviting you into. In that sense, I am engaging in ‘difficult knowledge’ (Pitt and Britzman, 2003), and in my reflexivity, it is a reflexive journey I invite the reader into as well – to ‘under-take’ for themselves, if so inclined. It is not a journey of confession or of ‘rescue’, for I am not asking the people of Hangberg and their stories to rescue me from my own trauma, through their trauma, or to save me through an attempted rescue of others. It is not intended as an individualistic, retrieving or selfish task, but in the reflexivity I am inviting you into with me – from one human being to

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<sup>1</sup> “Whiteness” will be discussed in more detail later.

<sup>2</sup> The “Southeaster” refers to a particular strong and often destructive wind that blows through most of Cape Town during the spring and summer months.

<sup>3</sup> A small village would be called a *dorpie* in Afrikaans.

another, it is a collective act of seeking a way, together, of becoming more human, of seeking an ethical relation, together, of being in the world with each other, ... together. In this sense, this work is a disruptive text because it moves beyond a delivery of neatly presented stories that have had their anxieties and dilemmas removed, smoothed over, presented as aesthetically-pleasing, already-reconciled, conclusive, and resolved. The writing, and hence invitation, carries with it the ‘sturm und drung’ of my own internal struggles and desires, my loves and pain, my destitution and heartbreak, my hopes and heartfulness. It is an invitation to experience some of this with me, but also *to be moved*. ... ‘Ja-nee’, it is a disruptive text and carries the hallmark of decolonising and resisting, in line with my own personal commitments, but at the same time, it moves beyond the confessional as well as the contestational: Through the writing, the emotion, the thinking, the telling of relational stories – stories of presence, liminality, light, hope and pain - it offers a hand...

If you don’t know Afrikaans, one of the twelve official languages of South Africa, including South African Sign Language, then you are invited to learn a few Afrikaans words that I feel, from a deeply ethical place within me, need to stay woven within the text. In the context and places in/of which these words speak, they are untranslatable. Any attempt to replace them with more generalised English words that have been carried across oceans from more Euro-centralised, dominant places, words that, in Bakhtin’s (Holquist, 1981) terms, carry the vestiges of places in which they have lived, acts to perpetrate cultural, linguistic, colonialist violences (Swanson, 2004) in their wake.

When Tannie Tossie says “*ons moes mos trek*”, the reader would understand the translated statement as “we had to move”. Implied within this, as is pointed out later in the text, is a history so complex, stated with such resignation, that it would be an injustice and indeed violence to simply, directly translate the words of this phrase. The inexplicable hardship of people being forcibly removed from their land that is contained in the sentence is hidden in the nuanced use of the word *mos* (see page 84). I argue that they are untranslatable and in many ways indicative of an inability to truly comprehend the lived reality of this community. There will always be something ungraspable, something that infinitely alludes us, something that is not ever ours to fully know. Every attempt of mine at translation would become an act of transmutation. I may at best try to transcribe, but I am unable to translate. I invite the reader to learn the meaning of some Afrikaans words as they change meaning within contexts. This would not only help to prevent misinterpretation even though the danger of misinterpretation

is always ever present. By so doing, the reader will need to jump back and forth between stories and their transcription. This way, I hope the reader will find the discomfort comforting in the end, after glimpsing the lives of the people of Hangberg through their stories.

The journey to and through Hangberg has resulted in this peripatetic<sup>4</sup> writing that is as digressive as it is inchoate, forming and transforming me as I go deeper and deeper into the unknown. Highmore (2017) notes that peripatetic storied writings “offer readers a plethora of critical moods to inhabit” (p. 3). The rhizomatic points of entry and many “moments of articulation” (Swanson, 2004, p. 15) create ample opportunity for conjunctural analysis (Hall, 2010) as the researcher is thrown from theory to philosophy in being confronted by these many moods, none of which can be inhabited for too long before one is confronted by the next. In the same way, the rhizo-linguistic elements to the narratives throws the reader, and indeed the researcher, from linguistic register to the next, as if from one cultural place of being to another. Behar (1997) states that “...new stories are rushing to be told in languages we’ve never used before, stories that tell truths we once hid, truths we didn’t dare acknowledge, truths that shame us” (p. 33). I find it difficult to deal with the discomfort of my ignorance and focus on the scientific expectations while I still reach for the known theories of Derrida<sup>5</sup> (1968) and Foucault (2002) and other philosophers of the European tradition, seeking clarity outside – where none is to be found. Coming into Hangberg, a place so close to me yet from which I have been so far removed by our political history, I feel like an outsider, almost as if trespassing on ground where I do not belong. How ironic that, despite my embrace of decolonial thought,

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<sup>4</sup> In his cultural studies essay on Birmingham, Highmore (2017) cautions his reader that he will understand if his writing is accused of being “overly meandering, pretentious and self-indulgent” (p. 3), yet he cannot present his work as a neatly structured pattern that fits within the theories and practices of the establishment of academia. Like the rhizome, this writing is a convergence of times and histories, stories and cultures that constantly evolve and erupt into moments of articulation (Swanson, 2004) that I will elaborate upon later.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida (1968) explores the French words *différence* and *différance*, and the impact that the replacement of an *e* with an *a* has on the meaning of the words. This is pertinent in how I inevitably see people of colour as different from me, as if we live not only in different worlds, but also in separate worlds or parallel time zones even. I have been removed from these *different* people all my life, as they were geographically removed from the lives of so-called white people, while at the same time working in our homes as unseen servants (Kruger, 2020). Foucault’s (2002) concept of “othering” explains the positioning of people as lesser and not worthy. Bradley (2016) writes how she is aware of her own difference, and rather than trying to hide or mask this difference, declares her status, making herself vulnerable to her research companions to create an environment in which two-way learning can flourish. “No longer would it be appropriate to label other people as “ready for school learning” or “exhibiting mental illness”; rather, the research focus would be on the underlying assumptions, the will to power, that creates such constructs in the first place. Even our current attempts to recognize, hear, understand and celebrate (and, however unintended, essentialize) Indigenous or Native voices would be examined” (Cannella & Manuelito, in Denzin et al., 2008, p. 50).

I constantly seek refuge in these theories, trying to find solace in some form of Universal Truth, like the childhood truths presented by church and politics. It is now clear, and emphasised by poststructuralism, that truth is socially-constructed and a matter of perspective. I grapple with conceptual constructs that I have never in my past encountered or engaged with, faced with a reality that is near impossible to comprehend because whiteness acts as a filter and, in my lived experience of it, has acted to cloud and distort my perceptions. I cannot be objective nor remove myself from the stories, for I am part of the expression of their being-in-the-world, and can but hope that in the spaces between, new stories that give meaning to the experiences I describe will be brought into being.

The structure of this exploration and pilgrimage cannot follow the expectations of a more conventional social science undertaking, one that reflects inheritances of the ‘scientific method’, which hints at positivist or post-positivist academic legacies, or one that fits the description of a specific paradigmatic category of social science design, such as constructivist or interpretivist, for that might pose a further injustice to the people and their stories, particularly considering the decolonising leanings in which the exploration and writing are contextualised. Decolonial thought and interpretation will be threaded throughout the stories. These glimpses, these moments in time, that I am honoured to have into the lives of the people of Hangberg are exactly that: glimpses, moments in time in a continuum of stories lived now, and fuelled, guided by centuries of a complex and troubled history. I cannot remove nor even distance myself from my history and that of my ancestors; I hear with white ears and see with white eyes that which I am witnessing. The stories are non-linear, circular, and undulating, jumping back and forth through time and history locating different spatialities in any given moment as they weave through and across indigenous and Western epistemologies on the journey (Swanson, 2007). The stories fold and unfold as narratives of the lives of people, an ever-evolving process of becoming through each other, the lived experience and shared journey that takes us like a labyrinth deeper and deeper into our Selves<sup>6</sup>, presenting multiple entryways of poststructural possibilities that provoke a multitude of understandings, locating new imageries that enable a knowing and understanding of each other. The multi-layered texture of stories makes for a challenge to simple analysis and theorising. Highmore (2017) reminds me that, “Perhaps a more peripatetic approach to the study of culture wouldn’t *always* have to explain such juxtapositions, but could still productively tally at their meeting point for a

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<sup>6</sup> I capitalise Self to represent what is sacred for me, the “I am” that is divinely manifested in my Being.

while...” (Highmore, 2017, p. 14). As I *kuier en gesels*<sup>7</sup>, I tally at the meeting point, knowing that much of what I will experience in Hangberg will remain a mystery.

And so it is from the moment I set foot in Hangberg, walking into the enormous community hall perched against the steep hill in all its brutalist blue steel-framed structure. I still see myself standing at the big sliding doors looking into the cavernous hall, its four-story high roof, people moving about like ants with the echo of voices reverberating, feeling completely intimidated by the thought of walking up to the Seniors’ Club meeting in the middle of the wide-open space. That was the moment that I walked into the mystery that would become my transformation. My journey into Hangberg is one of self-discovery, a spiritual journey of awakening that I did not anticipate nor was I prepared for<sup>8</sup>. Listening to and being in the stories of people was transformative on so many levels. I was caught off guard in every reflexive contemplation realising how unprepared I was for this journey, despite almost two years’ worth of preparation. I did not expect that an academic research endeavour would change my life in the way that this experience has. It became a sacred pilgrimage into the Self. With every meeting, a new understanding unfolded. Every time I stepped through the door into the home of someone I have never met before, a new inward journey unfolded that expanded my knowing.

Our history informs our present, it articulates the fabric of our societies. We do not (cannot) stand outside this process as an objective observer; we *are* that articulation. Our lives and our relationality intertwine to weave the richness of the fabric of what we call culture. Our interactions weave a rich tapestry of which every interaction and every situation is unique. The lenses and vantage points through which a reflexive participant researcher observes and engages with the world that is ‘being researched’ is equally unique. As a white, middle-aged, gay man who grew up steeped in apartheid colonialist ideology, who benefitted from white privilege, it would be presumptuous to assume that my upbringing and status would allow me a non-biased, objective engagement with the community that I would seek to learn from. I view my upbringing as much a hindrance as a challenge to embark on a journey that I would never otherwise have contemplated, one which I will need to unpack carefully and learn to unlearn

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<sup>7</sup> I discuss ‘kuier en gesels’ as a method of engagement as part of my methodological use. I discuss it in more detail later in my thesis.

<sup>8</sup> In his book “Doing reflexivity,” John Dean (2017) explores the relationship between researcher and research subjects, and how intricately affected this relationship is by the histories of both researcher and subjects.

in order to do justice to the lives of people in Hangberg. In relation to a concept of ‘objectivity’ or ‘post-objectivity’, this paradigmatic orientation is not relevant to this research project. The people of Hangberg are neither the object nor subject of my reflexive engagement with them in this thesis. The narratives are created in relational spaces, in the ‘in-between’ of their lives and my own in context.

### **My story**

My story begins in a small town on the Garden Route of the Western Cape Province, South Africa, called Heidelberg. I grew up and lived there from 1966 to 1983. It is the place I still call home. My mother was a nurse, my father a mechanic. Heidelberg is a small town, in those days with a mostly farming community. Residential and business areas were separated, as dictated by the Group Areas Act of 1950. White people lived in the main town and coloured<sup>9</sup> people lived in the *lokasie* (location). All of the town’s amenities were segregated along these racial classification lines: the post office, municipal offices, banks, shops, the bioscope (cinema). Each had separate entrances and/or seating arrangements for whites and coloureds. In the bioscope, white people sat downstairs and coloured people sat on the balcony.

Even though my family was regarded as middle class, almost all white people<sup>10</sup> were considerably better off than most coloured people in Heidelberg. Our family had two cars and

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<sup>9</sup> The term ‘coloured’ is the standard term for mixed race people in South Africa. It was an official apartheid category but is still widely used to denote a particular racial, ethnic and linguistic hereditary and cultural context. The people of Hangberg commonly refer to themselves as ‘coloured’, and this is accepted terminology and not considered derogatory in that context.

<sup>10</sup> **Whiteness**

Skin colour (and the labelling of people racially based on the colour of their skin) is at the root of the colonialist/apartheid dilemma. It is this classification system that divided the nation and created a binary view of “us” versus “them”: first created when people from Europe encountered people of colonised African countries. Chen (2017) discusses the academic study of whiteness and the problematic nature of this as a field of study. Whiteness is something that some so-called “white” people academicise (*sic*) to reflect on their own prejudice and privilege. As a social construct, or indeed a social condition, whiteness is attributed to people of European descent, even though geographical location may be blurred somewhat at times. More than a matter of birth and ancestry, whiteness implies and assumes a host of other attributes that has no relevance to the colour or tone of a person’s skin. Whiteness is a construct that connotes race and signals racism and ‘white privilege’. A whiteness mindset perpetuates difference and division on a social and cultural level, normalising conceptions of white superiority and linking to dominant global design projects that permeate all facets of life. The structures of whiteness can include people of all races, perpetuating the hallmarks thereof – senses of superiority, entitlement, hubris, racism, and racialisation and inferiorisation of ‘the other’. While I might be able to change my individual

lived in a three-bedroomed house with a large garden. Both my parents were employed. My sister and I attended the school ‘for whites’. Our family employed a full-time domestic helper, a coloured woman called Barbie. Barbie lived with her extended family in a dilapidated three-roomed house in the location: three children more-or-less the age of my sister and me, her parents, and her brother and sister. The dwelling had no electricity, running water or bathroom. The family collected firewood to prepare their meals on a wood-fired stove.

As a child, I had no notion of what was called apartheid, nor that the way that we were growing up was strange or different to that of the majority of South Africans. We grew up in a Calvinist bubble of conservative nationalism and religious propaganda. So-called ‘censorship’ meant that films, books, and many other art forms were banned in South Africa. Sanctions, which eventually brought the nationalist government to its knees, also meant that many artists would not visit South Africa. We were ignorant and uneducated, politically blindfolded and prevented from seeing the world, literally and figuratively. We all assumed that this was the way the world was, enjoying our privilege yet not recognising it as privilege at all. As a family, we would frequently visit my grandparents at weekends. They lived about four hours away. These weekend visits were spent shopping for my grandparents (who were also regarded as poor, yet

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view of my own whiteness, I am trapped in the structural aspects of it and it is only through collective action that this structural violence can be overcome.

Chen (2017) quotes Miles and Brown (2004): “The European discourse spotlighted African skin colour as the primary basis to signify differences in status, value, and worth” (p. 16). It is upon this basis that my upbringing constructed my understanding that people with a different skin colour from mine are indeed different (as I mentioned earlier) – and lesser beings. It is ironic that not only my perception, but in fact the perceptions of the people all over the world with a different skin colour, were formed not by them, but by ‘us’. White colonisers created this Other through their perceptions, writing and depiction of people whom they encountered on their pillaging missions. The dichotomy underscored by whiteness has at its heart the notion of racial difference as something ‘real’. ‘White’ and ‘black’ constitute each other and are constituted through conditions of whiteness that keep ‘racial difference’ in play as normalised within everyday contexts. The dilemma, however, is that whiteness has been invisibilised, while blackness marks bodies from the perspective of whiteness. Growing up as a white child, I recognise now that I was never fully aware of my privilege, nor did I ever notice the obvious lack of privilege of the people who worked for our family.

Casas-Cortes (2019) coined the term “*Caretizenship*”, which fits suitably within the Hangberg context where, over time, people have been “evolving into a radical awareness of interdependence and leading to informal yet politicised practices of mutual support” (p. 206). The people of Hangberg are not waiting for the government to solve their problems or welfare organisations to provide services<sup>10</sup>. Instead, they have created their own systems of support and inter-reliable *caretizenship* practices that speak to their own identities and imaginations, not that of the prescribed, so-called liberal politics that has little benefit for them. Hangberg is its own (informal) constituency, a place of unique political identity organised around the needs of its people where Elderliness takes centre stage. “In this sense, caretizenship becomes an imminently practical project: it entails putting care, as in practices of mutual support and nurturing the commons, at the center of a political project engaged by any group of people” (p. 20).

in comparison with Barbie and her family, they were anything but poor). We would also go to the beach, go to the bioscope, and enjoy wonderful food prepared by my grandmother.

It was after one of these weekends away that I was especially happy to see Barbie when she came to work on the Monday morning. I rushed outside, embraced her, and kissed her on the mouth, as remains the custom in many Afrikaans families to this day. My mom observed me doing this and called me to her room. She gently explained that I am not to kiss Barbie on her mouth. In fact, I am not to kiss Barbie at all. I was about five years old (1969) and felt extremely confused. As my mother was not someone who took kindly to being questioned (we grew up being told “children should be seen and not heard” and were likely to receive a severe beating for even attempting to question authority), I went to my room, confused and sad.

I loved Barbie. Coming home from school, having walked the distance in the blazing sun, Barbie would help me undress out of my school clothes (my mother would be at work). I would lie on the bed and she would take off my shoes. I would tell her the stories my parents were never interested in. We would laugh and joke. While she served my lunch (she never ate at the dining-room table – she had her own set of enamelware kept under the sink in the kitchen and sat on the outside *stoep* (verandah) eating her meal), she would tell me numerous stories about her own family. These stories often involved heartache and problems but were always told with humour and laughter.

My mother was a District Nurse and spent her days driving a mobile clinic van to remote rural parts of the area to visit people who had no means of getting to town to access health care. (To this day, there is limited public transport in rural South Africa.) Most people working on farms<sup>11</sup> were reliant on the farmer to bring them to town. They would pile onto the back of an open pick-up truck, on the last Friday of the month. (White people avoided going to town on that day because it was ‘too busy’. Of course, this was a feeble excuse to not witness the hardship of families who had been trying to survive on wages that kept them in poverty. On many farms, people were paid with alcohol in what was called ‘the dop system’.) Many farm workers would buy alcohol and get drunk even before leaving town. I would often wander through town and see very small children trying to get their hopelessly drunk parents back onto

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<sup>11</sup> At that time, all farms were owned by white people who used coloured people as cheap labour. More on this later in the writing.

a truck, making sure not to leave behind the bags of flour and sugar and other groceries that their parents would forget in their inebriated state.

I would often accompany my mother on her daily trips to the farms in the big mobile clinic, stacked with all sorts of medication, a bed to do physical examinations, a desk at which to write, and a basin with running water. It was my job to open all the farm gates along the way. It was a wonderful experience for me. On certain farms, we would be invited in by the farmer's wife and served tea and eats in beautiful porcelain cups in the formal lounge. We would hear all the stories about the goings-on between the farm workers: who had been stabbed, who had fallen pregnant without a husband, who had been evicted from the farm, who had been beaten up by the farmer because of insolence.

By the time we finished our tea, the farm workers would have lined up outside the mobile clinic, each with their clinic card (a record of their visits) in hand, babies on hips and toddlers in tow -mostly women. Every now and then a man would need stitches or a bandage for wounds from either being in a fight or being beaten up by the farmer. While I was not allowed inside the mobile van while my mother was attending to a patient, it was my job to fill little plastic containers with tablets, ointment, or syrups. I remember hearing my mother becoming very angry with some of the patients for neglecting a child, for missing a monthly injection, or worst of all, for becoming pregnant<sup>12</sup>.

As the only midwife in the area, my mother would be called out at all hours of the day or night to deliver patients' babies. She would sometimes be away for an entire weekend waiting for a baby to be born. Eavesdropping on the stories of my mother and her colleague, I often heard them discussing another pregnancy, speculating if this might be another child of the white farmer. (It was rumoured that numerous white men would visit the *lokasie* at night; and all sorts of jokes would do the rounds. On asking Barbie whether this was true, she told me, "The white men have so many children up there by us that the small children call them 'Baas Pa'"<sup>13</sup>.)

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<sup>12</sup> 'Family planning' was part of the apartheid healthcare system that 'encouraged' coloured and black people to have fewer children and get sterilised. Many women were coerced into this by nurses and doctors.

<sup>13</sup> The word "baas" is a term that coloured and black people would use, and some farm dwellers still do, to refer to white men as their boss. "Pa" is the Afrikaans for father, or dad. The irony of these words is that children would know who their father was, but still call the white man who made their mother pregnant "baas". Sexual intercourse with a person "across the colour line" was illegal under the Immorality Act of 1927. The act was repealed on 12 April 1958.

In those years, primary health care consisted of dispensing basic medications, an examination to determine pregnancy<sup>14</sup>, and providing milk and supplements for babies. In all the time I would travel with my mother throughout the district, I do not recall ever seeing an older person being brought to the clinic. When we would visit a home where there was someone too ill to be brought to the clinic, I distinctly remember seeing older people<sup>15</sup> sitting outside the small shacks, smiling toothless smiles at “Sister Ann”, a term of endearment that everyone in and around the district to this day calls my mother.

In 1975 my mother became the Matron of the local old age home (the nomenclature for a care home in South Africa) in Heidelberg. My parents moved into the home on the first floor and I went to the school hostel. For about ten years, I spent weekends and holidays with my mother, not knowing that one day I would start my own company providing services to the long-term care sector for older people. GERATEC (an acronym for Gerontological Research, Training, Education and Caring) is now 25 years old, and is the only company in South Africa providing services exclusively to this sector – including catering, caring, housekeeping, management, and training. My interest in ageing grew as I became more and more intrigued by the quality of life, or lack thereof, of older people, their narratives, and the impact of institutionalisation. Over the past 25 years, I have endeavoured to build an awareness of this negative impact through creating several platforms to engage the sector in a discourse on ageing that is not only focused on deficits and decline, but also on creating a life worth living for older people in long-term care, as well as those who work there, which led me to complete a Master’s degree in Dementia Studies. My interest in the narratives on ageing, and specifically that of Elderliness<sup>16</sup> in the South African context, eventually led me to this study.

Very little has changed in the town where I grew up, or indeed in most small *dorpiés* of South Africa. Even though the apartheid laws have been abolished, most residential areas remain mostly segregated, and most people of colour are still dependent on primary health care<sup>17</sup>. The

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<sup>14</sup> A well-structured policy and well-executed national “family planning” programme was in place in the 1980s. However, it later transpired that some people of colour were encouraged after multiple births, anecdotally even compelled, to undergo contraceptive sterilisation, or sterilisation performed without their consent, towards curtailing population growth.

<sup>15</sup> I use the term ‘older people’ not as a reference to chronological age, but rather as a status within this community of people who are given that status, often because they are considered older by years and are grandparents.

<sup>16</sup> The theme of Elderliness begins to emerge here in the thesis, but I address it more substantively later as a key trope of and thematic orientation to this thesis, and it becomes foundational to many of the arguments that emerge within the narratives.

<sup>17</sup> Primary health care refers to healthcare clinics provided by the department of health of the government.

majority of coloured<sup>18</sup> people still live in what we called *die lokasie* (referring to a township), while the majority of white people live in the town. Although there are no longer laws separating people, the legacy of apartheid is still to be found in the socio-economic dispensation and in existing spatial relations – apartheid spatialities are to be found everywhere across South Africa to this day. Although two medical doctors practice in the town where I grew up, the majority of people of colour continue to visit the public health clinic to see a professional nurse for a nominal fee. Pensioners can access these services for free. The same medications as before are still dispensed; the same process is followed of having to wait for hours to be helped. Many educational institutions have ceased training nurses and many nurses have left South Africa for better employment opportunities abroad. With a scarcity of health care resources and a brain-drain of health professionals, those who are poor are no better off in terms of health care than what they were in the days of apartheid<sup>19</sup>.

\* I have been impelled to tell more about myself, about how I came to work with older people, of my ‘positionality’ and ‘standpoint’ (terms redolent with images and inferences of fixedness), of my coming to want to ‘undertake research’ ‘on’ older people. I must be honest that I do so reluctantly. While my research holds commitments to reflexivity and decoloniality close to its heart, I have not wanted to take what may be considered in this context to be a ‘white’, individualistic or solipsistic stance to the work. I have not wanted it to stray into autoethnography, for example. This work is not about me. It is about finding different routes or rhizomes of being in the world through a focus on Elderliness. It is about the stories of the people of Hangberg, and the people themselves. It is about care for others, and it is about ethical relationality – my relational stories with the stories of the people of Hangberg, and the care for those stories and deference to the people themselves. But, I offer the following by way of some gesture to those worldviews and ways of being that may see the storying of ‘my positionality’ as ‘necessary’, although from an Ubuntu perspective, I see it differently perhaps – as something moving toward self-divulgence and confessionality, something that strains indigenous, localising and decolonial interests and desires.

When I think back, I believe I have always been close to older people. My maternal and paternal grandparents embraced me with love, a love that was situated in the fabric of their beings and

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<sup>18</sup> An explanation for using this derogatory term is given in the next section.

<sup>19</sup> The reader is invited on a difficult journey, where insights and understanding will emerge and unfold along the way, piece by piece.

in their home; a love that shimmers recognisably in the homes I visited in Hangberg. I feel the love and presence of my grandparents even now and I feel the spirit of these experiences present in the Hangberg stories. It is in the warm embrace of my grandparents that I learned about the taste of dates, the smell of burnt coffee beans, of *groenboontjebredie* and *mosbeskuit*, of the rituals of *aandgodsdien*s and potatoes freshly dug from the ground. I am captive to their presence, I feel loved. It is this grounding, I think, that made me start GERATEC (Gerontological Research, Training, Education and Catering) in 1996, a company providing support services and training to the long-term care sector for older people in South Africa. Perhaps this interest I later pursued is in part due to the years I spent as a child in the local old age home where my mother was the matron. I never envisaged that I would make it my career, but it feels as if fate took me there. It took me to a place deep inside myself where I know that this is my life. For the past 26 years I have been advocating for change, trying to create a life worth living for older people and those who care for them. I have seen too much to not be an activist for the rights of people living with memory loss or what is from a biomedical perspective termed ‘dementia’. But more than that, it has been a commitment to connecting, truly and deeply, to the abiding place of their very Being, that has moved me to advocate for them, seeing them as people first, not a diagnosis, but a person with agency, personal history and personhood.

Years ago, I presented a workshop on ‘dementia care’ in Iceland. I tell the story here in the present for effect and presence... I am invited to visit a home for people living ‘with dementia’, something I hate passionately. “How is it not the same as visiting a zoo?”, I ask myself. But, I have to be polite. We walk through grey corridors<sup>20</sup> to a room where about fifty people ‘living with dementia’ are parked in wheelchairs against the walls. What should I do? I walk across the length of the room to a lady in one of the far corners. She is old and very frail and can no longer communicate verbally. If she could, I would not understand her Icelandic. I take a chair and sit opposite her, our knees almost touching, asking her if she minds if I sit with her. She looks at me without expression. I notice a beautiful ring on her finger. I reach out and touch the ring. She sees my heavy silver ring, gently moves her hand towards it and touches it. Her

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<sup>20</sup> The colour of the corridor is evocative here. It provokes the question as to why these institutional places are always greys, blues or mostly greens. While it has been argued that these are calming colours that are not ‘loud’, they also symbolise deathliness, silence, madness, institutionality, uniformity, sombreness, and even something disembodied and less-than-human.

hand is covered in blue veins, marked with age. In that moment we have a connection, a moment of communication, we touch each other's souls. ....

I walk away from that moment deeply moved. The staff tell me that she has not spoken to anyone in years, that she shows no emotion. We had a moment of Ubuntu, 'humble togetherness', a profound connection without words. .... I know – quietly and with the humility learned from elders, my grandparents, and my mother, somewhere deep in my soul and in my own Being – that I can hold space, that I can afford someone my presence, perhaps the greatest gift that we can afford another human being.

## 2 Journeying into Hangberg

*My heart is broken, open.*<sup>21</sup>

The Hangberg<sup>22</sup> mountain hangs precariously and leans into the ocean towards the southern tip of Africa – historically known as the Cape of Storms and, later, the Cape of Good Hope<sup>23</sup>. Hangberg is also the name of the *dorpie* settlement clinging precariously to the side of the sloping mountain that gave it its name. It is against this barren slope to which people were forcibly relocated in the 1950s, after being evicted from their farms and properties when the apartheid Group Areas Act was promulgated. Uninhabitable, like many of the other ‘homelands’ that were demarcated for indigenous people, or people who were not white, the people of Hangberg created a unique community.

Racial classification was decreed under the Population Registration Act of 1950. The act was repealed in 1991, but the classification system has been retained for statistical purposes. Initially individuals were assigned to a racial group by the authority based on the colour of their skin, but individuals may now self-identify with the group to which they feel they belong.

The terms *coloured*, *black*, *isiXhosa*, *kleurling* (person of colour in Afrikaans) are used to this day, often by people of colour themselves. The people of Hangberg often refer to themselves as *coloureds*. When referring to me or those carrying the same racial category, they will often use terms like *whites*, *whities* or even *boere* (directly translated, this means farmers). These descriptors are problematic and outside of this context are deemed racist and demeaning. While ‘black’ is now accepted, there were other terms used in the past and sometimes still today that were and still are considered racist. I will use the term ‘coloured people’ throughout, as this is how the people of Hangberg refer to themselves. I am aware of and respect the problematic connotations associated with the term ‘coloured’ but feel that I will be inauthentic if I do not use the words that are used within the community. It is not my intention to replicate existing violences and assumptions through using terms such as ‘coloured’, while at the same time it would be incongruent to not write and use the terms as used in the storying.

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<sup>21</sup> In C. Ingram, *In the footsteps of Ghandi: Conversations with spiritual social activists* (p. xiv). Parallax Press.

<sup>22</sup> “Hang” in Afrikaans means to hang, while “berg” is a mountain. The section of mountain under which the dorpie is built appears to hang over the ocean.

<sup>23</sup> The names were given to this part of the southern African coast by seafarers. The Portuguese called it the Cape of Storms in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century and the name was later changed, to attract more people, to The Cape of Good Hope.

According to national statistics and the perpetuated categories used, the percentage distribution of the total population of these groups in 2021 is: Blacks (79,5%), Whites (9%), Coloureds (people of mixed ancestry) (2%) and Indians (2.5%). The categories, based on skin colour and ethnicity, are indeed crude and rudimentary, but speak directly to South Africa's racialised, colonial history. Within the categories are layers of cultural identity and language.

My research leads me to the older coloured people and their families in Hangberg to listen to their storying of Elderliness through a methodology of *kuier en gesels* (to be discussed later). I grapple with a methodological approach that would allow me an entry into the homes of people that is different, an opening that would be less imbalanced and that would not represent the power base of colonialism. I seek to enter into humble togetherness, to not disrupt or coerce, to gently step into the sacred space of their home without being intrusive. I grapple with holding in a sacred space that which they offer me and dealing with it in a way that honours them and not the academic endeavour of 'research'. Considering all I have read thus far, I wonder if I have the 'right' to do what I am about to do... Martorana (2017) articulates my hesitation:

*Am I actually doing these women a disservice by inviting the mainstream, academic gaze to fall on this community of writers? What does it mean that I am shining an academic light on such personal, intimate experiences?*  
(Martorana, 2017, p. 129).

It is with trepidation that I enter their homes. Why did I think that the stories of older residents of Hangberg would be significant? Somehow, I knew from initial working with this and other indigenous communities when I started to think about a doctoral thesis on Elderliness that the people of Hangberg had knowledge that should be shared. In the beginning, I had a specific interest in their experience of 'cognitive impairment' (dementia), however I realised that very few people in the village would have access to a diagnosis and that I would fall into the trap of labelling people. As soon as I began to engage with older people in the community, I realised this closed and narrow lens would exclude learning of much of their lived experience. I thereupon knew I should enter the dorpie with an open heart, an open mind, and an open page, and ask people to tell their stories of Elderliness that we may learn – together – from them. Knowing that these stories have seldom, perhaps never, been told outside of their homes makes me realise how important this work is, and what an onus will rest upon me to tell the stories

with utmost integrity, not censoring or editing, just telling them 'as they are', recognising too that all telling is an interpretation, one which bares the soul of the teller and gives a piece of them away. So, I will tell the relational stories willingly with my body, soul and heart. All of it!

### 3 Our colonial history<sup>24</sup>

Hangberg is not a problem that needs to be solved. From my perspective, I see the need for infrastructure and support, the lack of services, and the hardship, which only serves to activate my own sense of superiority and a charitable attitude of *how I can help them*. To understand the history of Hangberg's people, one needs to explore the impact of colonisation and how it shaped knowledge formation. Such an understanding is also needed to identify an appropriate research methodology for my journey into Hangberg. Previously, I was of the impression that the experience of ageing of people who live in this type of community would likely be affected by a number of factors, some of which older people may have little grasp of or no control over. From my perspective, the labels (Bradley, 2016) of 'poverty' and 'low education level' effectually lead to disease and hardship that *will* impact the way people experience ageing. Food insecurity, marginalisation, and social exclusion across the life course are likely to be exacerbated by a quadruple jeopardy for women (being old, poor, unhealthy, and female) and triple for men (Ferreira & Makoni, 2002) of the ageing population. My perception has been that such factors may have been affected directly through displacement and dispossession. This thinking was part of the original direction of the research, yet with more exposure to decolonial theories and narrative methodology, the thesis and its arguments became reoriented through an emergent process that eventually formed both my personal and intellectual journey.

Bulhan (2015, p. 242) writes of the consequences of colonisation thus: "The first assault was on the world of things, particularly the land of conquered non-European peoples to exploit gold, silver, and other commodities. The second assault was on the world of people for obtaining free labor and carrying out sexual exploitation. The third assault was the world of meaning by changing indigenous religions, knowledge, and identities" (Bulhan, 2015, p. 242). Bringing together these three prongs of colonisation, I propose that while ageing is universal, the way in which it is experienced will differ depending on the lived experience of individuals. Living is a complex, multi-faceted interaction between people, culture, and their environment.

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<sup>24</sup> I have used the word 'our' here deliberately, because it provokes the reader and myself to understand our connections, whether that reader is inside or outside of the context of South Africa, that whether victim or coloniser, even from a distance, we are all implicated in colonialism and, following many decolonial thinkers, in coloniality as a wider power structure that regulates, in one way or another, the very systems in society by which we live. See Quijano (2000) on 'coloniality of power'.

Imperialism (as expressed through colonialism) is not only linked to a defined period in global history. The impact of Euro-American expansion through imperialism in this sense could be tied to a chronology of events related to ‘discovery’, conquest, exploitation, distribution and appropriation of the majority world. Even though formal colonisation ended in India in 1947 and in Africa in 1957 (Saunders, 2017), it has continued to reverberate through numerous countries, the impact of which has been wounding and lasting. Indeed, new waves of colonisation have begun, such as Asian imperialism into Africa in recent decades. These waves of invasion, starting around the 15th century, had the following aims in mind: to create wealth for the Euro-American nations and a world dominated by a global economic design project of capitalism, to take control of those considered ‘lesser, savage, other’ beings, as a new form of ideology, and to explore new knowledge (Smith, 2012).

South Africa’s colonialist history is no exception to that which exists elsewhere in the world, except that it had its own unique racialised constitution. While the notion of decolonisation in South Africa now is often confused with transformation, a far deeper analysis is needed, according to Saunders (2017), quoting the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1998) in his *Decolonizing the Mind*. It would be naive to assume that the formal end of colonial rule would be the starting point of decolonisation as colonialism constantly transmutes and re-emerges. It remains a complex, painful process of trying to regain a sense of Self, unpacking the process of knowledge production when colonialism takes on new forms and guises all the time. It becomes a challenge to find new, authentic voices that speak not like those of a ventriloquist, leaving very little trace of the authentic voice of the indigenous – if this is even possible after so much destruction and epistemicide. Hearing and understanding the stories of those who lived under colonial rule and apartheid for many years will be unavoidably challenging. Overcoming language barriers and connecting in a place where race and history do not collide seems like a utopian dream. I hope to find a place of being where the stories will transcend history, culture, and even language, a liminal space of togetherness.

The ‘decolonisation’, or ‘transformation process’ in South Africa is particularly complex and remains problematic in all sections of society and in all daily experiences of it. When the Dutch (and a few years before them the Portuguese) arrived at the southern tip of Africa in 1652, *en route* to the east to set up a halfway station for their ships, Jan van Riebeeck, regional administrator of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, VOC, and his entourage colonised the Cape, took land from and enslaved indigenous people, and formed the Cape of Good Hope.

Hout Bay, which literally translated means “wood bay”, was used as a site to load ships with wood from the local forests. The decimation of the indigenous forests and the impact on the ecology is as long lasting as the decimation of indigenous people. In 1795, the British took control of the Cape, with the Dutch re-taking the colony in 1803, only for it to be taken back yet again by the British in 1806. The successive colonisation was carried out with fierce warfare and culminated in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, after gold was discovered in what would become the *Transvaal* province. The Anglo-Boer War had devastating consequences for the populace and the country. The outcome of that war was the formation of the British Union of South Africa in 1910. In 1948, the Nationalists took power and D.F. Malan became prime minister, marking the triumph of Afrikanerdom over British colonial rule. Soon after, in 1961, the Republic of South Africa was formed as a sovereign state. In a short period of time, British colonial/imperialist racism was swapped for home-grown nationalist racism, and apartheid started to become instituted in the laws of the constitution and was witnessed in *Christian National Education (CNE)*, influencing every aspect of the South African way of life.

A second wave of entrenched colonialism came into being with the introduction of apartheid in 1948, whereby people of different ethnic, or racial, groups were legally separated based on the colour of their skin. Racial categorisation and segregation deeply affected people classified as black, coloured, and Indian. In 1994, after the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, who was held as a political prisoner on Robben Island for 27 years, the first democratic election in South Africa was held and a new majority-rule government was formed, paving the way to a new democratic era when healing and decolonisation could begin in earnest. The bloodshed, trauma, humiliation, and decades of Eurocentric abuse of power, along with the pillaging of natural resources, left a “permanent wound” (Smith, 2012, p. 22), however, in the hearts and minds of the people, which speaks to the damaging effects of apartheid spatialities. “The resulting repercussions ... continue [...] generation after generation and [are] manifested in the high suicide rates, violent deaths, and even the low academic achievement of our precious youth” (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 48).

As has been a precedent in Africa, the transfer of power from one elite group to another in South Africa in recent years has brought about a wave of neo-colonialism in each case (Saunders, 2017). It is argued by many who fought for the liberation of the majority that, in the evolutionary process of transfer of power, they were ‘sold out’ by the liberators (Saunders, 2017). Three hundred and sixty-six years after the first colonisers set foot in South Africa, the

plight of the majority of the country's people remains dire – particularly from an economic and social point of view. Saunders (2017) states that “from this perspective, political emancipation was little more than a sham; true liberation is still not in sight” (p. 106). South Africa was only partially decolonised (in terms of acquiring true independence), it may be argued, when majority rule came into being in 1994. However, “it can be formulated in this way: it is as difficult to imagine the end of colonialism as it is to imagine that colonialism has no end. Postcolonial or decolonial studies and struggles in the past three decades have shown how entrenched colonialism is in both private and public life, even many decades after the end of historical colonialism” (de Sousa Santos, 2015, p. 26).

Bulhan (2015) distinguishes between colonisation and coloniality, explaining that the former refers to one nation forcefully dominating and exploiting another. The latter is the long-lasting result of this violent assault on the way that people would live in society, see themselves, and act. The effect of this domination and exploitation has an impact on almost all aspects of everyday life and may be felt for several generations, as indeed is the case in multiple African countries where, after independence, it might take decades before stability, be it political, social, or financial, could be achieved. As Bulhan reminds us: “Classical colonialism in Africa started in the nineteenth century. Like the colonisation of the Americas and the Atlantic slave trade, it was systemic violence—organised, continuous, methodic, and willful. It was not only integral to capitalism, but also coexistent with racism, cultural domination, and European self-aggrandizement” (2015, p. 242). This invasion, it is argued, not only took away land from those who lived on it for generations, as indeed is the case with people in Hangberg, it took away their lives as well, making slaves out of proud people, using them as cheap labour, or selling them off as commodities. With the invasion of land though domination came the appropriation of riches of the land, cattle, riches of the oceans, crops, and mineral riches such as gold, diamonds, and platinum. The long-term effects of such invasion include the slow eradication of a sense of self and the making of colonial meaning as embodied in cultural practices, and a slow but sure erosion of identity.

The period of post-colonialism that followed the end of colonialism in many African countries was often hardly better than the colonialist period itself. The power that was exerted by former colonial powers was enormous, and they often put puppets and regimes loyal to their former masters in place that would ensure their ongoing economic colonisation, serving the interests of the colonisers. New African leaders had little freedom and independence in real terms. When

African people realised they could claim back their land from the colonialist powers, in many historical instances they simply replaced the foreign regime with a regime that was in hock to their colonisers and serving particular global economic interests, consequently with little to no benefits to their own people's situation. The post-colonial era proved to be simply about power and economic prosperity for those who benefitted from the new governance arrangement (Bulhan, 2015).

Bulhan (2015) contends that we have entered yet another phase of colonialism, which he refers to as the "latest stage of colonialism" (p. 244): meta-colonialism, more commonly known as globalisation. According to Bulhan, this phase is simply another, more sophisticated, masked form of colonisation, now taking on the world as a whole and infiltrating every sphere of society. Global economic powers – symbolised by the dollar, euro, and renminbi – are taking over where the Euro-American colonisers left off, often under the guise of international regulation. A new wave of information technology has created a *lingua franca* that further marginalises poor people living in the majority world: scientific efforts to fit the entire world into a single global *dorpie* where all people are similar, categorised under a single universal knowledge set. Since Bulhan wrote the above, even newer forms of colonisation can be seen in the Asian colonisation of the African continent in what seems to be a war between East and West for domination of resources, ideology and spaces.

An aim of this new wave of palimpsestic colonialism may be to erase memory that will otherwise inform the reality of previously disadvantaged nations. It is within memory that indigenous knowledge is situated and from which indigenous epistemology arises (Meyer, 2003). The experience of the world differs profoundly from east to west and south to north, each producing uniquely situated epistemologies that need to be honoured. Global reprogramming is taking place in cyberspace, which, although it may proclaim equality, might be viewed as an attempt to erase the history and reality of marginalised people who lack access to, or are not part of, this information technology war. Through the creation of a new history, lifetimes of endogenous knowledge is obliterated, particularly knowledge expressed through oral traditions and cultural expressions, passed down from one generation to the next, and embedded in the DNA of people of the majority world. This new language and culture are even more intrusive and powerful in that they manipulate the "socio-political, economic, cultural and psychological system" (Bulhan, 2015, p. 244; de Sousa Santos, 2007, 2015; Mignolo, 1999, 2011).

### **Ageing, Elderliness, and globalisation: The constitution of the elderly as ‘human waste’**

Sagner (1999) and Makoni and Stroeken (2002) describe Elderliness as pertaining to the social and personal experience of ‘being old’, in particular the meaning of being old, as ascribed to those who are viewed as old – or as older. I ask myself if the meaning that older people themselves ascribe to being old is influenced by colonisation and apartheid in a way that through quiet resistance could present a different way of being-in-the-world, and if so, how could this change be more widely effected? Moreover, how do memories of an apartheid upbringing affect Elderliness? Where is the meeting place between how older people view themselves and how they are viewed by others, be it family, friends, or lived-in community? Ageism and ageist projections are encouraged within the frame of the Euromodernist globalising project, which promulgates a notion that the only value to be found is in ‘the new’, that young people count and not older people. Thus, ‘the old’ is dispensable, relegated to the margins of society, much like ‘the prison’ is a spatial and ideological marker of the outliers of society. In these terms, ‘being old’ justifies the reconstitution of older people into waste – human waste – and this reassignment justifies the movement of old people to wastelands, out of the sight of mainstream, modern society. It allies in some ways with Joseph Schumpeter’s (Schumpeter & Backhaus, 2003) description of the underlying modus operandi of capitalism being premised on a process of constant renewal and change, of ‘creative destruction’, in order for capitalism to survive.

It is my understanding also that Western societies typically focus on the biomedicalisation and physiological traits of the ageing body, and that should this body no longer function optimally in terms of being productive, the individual has ‘failed’ to age successfully. This Euromodernist capitalist viewpoint of ageing is that ageing is commonly viewed as something to be defied – and that independence and perceived successful, healthy and active participation and contribution should define ageing (Lamb, 2013, in Twigg and Martin, 2015). As a result, many older people have been infantilised, rendered a burden or annoyance, and their knowledge and experience rendered as waste and to be dispensed with because they do not fit the mould. The lived experience of ageing differs from culture to culture and cannot be perceived as homogeneous, nor can the criteria for comprehending ageing be viewed in

universal terms. Information technology, social media, mainline media, and global organisations create a standardised reality, proposing that everyone across the globe will experience ageing in the same manner. Yaylagul and Seedsman (2012) point out that “while ageing is a common phenomenon across all world societies it nevertheless remains a unique personal experience” (p. 257).

World domination occurs at present through international laws, major currencies, the dominance of English as the *lingua franca* of neoliberal globalisation, the new focus of research institutions, cloning, DNA manipulation, and powerful media portrayals of what is regarded and projected as “normal” and “beautiful”. Bulhan (2015) refers, for example, to cyber espionage on users of information technology communication systems, the manipulation of global time zones, and the creation of universal value systems that promote the superiority of Western ideas, morality, and the notion of individuation and self-actualisation. In the process of globalisation and the “epistemology of universality” (Le Roux & Swanson, 2021), the heritage of those who are not European is often diluted, destroyed, and relegated to a status of ‘inferior other’. With English fast becoming the *lingua franca* of Euromodernist globalisation, the expression of the self in a mother tongue has been colonised and subordinated, especially as reflected in the paucity of research in indigenous languages (Bulhan, 2015). The language and sociocultural complexity of Hangberg, as explained in section 4, entitled “The violence in translation”, should not be relegated to English academic textbooks as foreign or exotic. This focus on globalisation could lead to a socio-gerontological view of ageing as a homogenous representation of a global phenomenon – that we all age the same way, regardless of where we live or who we are.

It is my thinking that the Western<sup>25</sup> biomedical construction (Lamb, 2013, in Twigg and Martin, 2015) of ageing as a disease to be conquered may exacerbate desperation, helplessness, and stigma experienced by numerous older persons globally. Perhaps the time has come for us to raise an important question around the lived experiences of older people, and take their voices and views into account, especially those in the majority world, before creating global standards and assumptions on ageing. I premise there is much to offer, and even more to learn, from the older people in this “different spatial imaginary” (Le Roux & Swanson, 2021, p. 608)

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<sup>25</sup> I use Western, European, Euro-American, and indeed Euromodernism, interchangeably here. This is intentional. From my perspective, they all refer to the same orientation and are intimately interconnected to the same dominant global design project.

that is Hangberg, learning from and with them, getting to know *their* ways of being-in-the-world through relational togetherness<sup>26</sup>.

### **Local Knowledges**

It was my premise that the local knowledge and meaning ascribed to ageing will reflect the impact of colonisation and apartheid in the lived experience of older people in Hangberg. I envisaged that through the narratives I would get a clearer understanding of a very specific articulation of Elderliness as formed and shaped by coloniality, and that I would be able to trace this impact in the stories. Decolonising the mind (wa Thiong'o, 1998) is aimed at understanding the formation of knowledge, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of being. Adams et al. (2017) edited a special section for the *South African Journal of Psychology* for which contributions were invited on “Decolonising Psychological Science”. The authors were asked to question ways of being that have been imposed and accepted as the so-called norm in what might only be regarded as a homogeneous world. These impositions held and promoted as norms and standards create a dominant knowledge base that considers any other knowledge held by local or indigenous ecologies as being from the dark side: somehow mysterious and unscientific, often even barbarous. (See p. 48 of *Handbook of Indigenous Methodologies*.) It was my intention to investigate these taken-as-real norms and standards in contrast to that of the majority world, and to find ways of articulating the knowledge of older people within this specific context.

The Euro-American ethnocentric, hegemonic standard of being is that of individualism, personal growth, privacy, aspiring to wealth, and individual standing, most of which were achieved through colonial force and power (Bhatia, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). This construct is viewed as the gold standard of modernity – the ultimate achievement of individual freedom being measured by monetary success and societal standing, regardless of the (often violent) methods used to obtain such status. The Western individualistic approach often disregards the socio-centric culture of indigenous peoples and the intersection of history, culture and community that may lead to a sense of “alterity, inequality and exclusion” (Seedat & Sufia, 2017, p. 423) and ultimately an altered identity. I am reminded of the words of Bulhan (2015, p. 250) when they say, “Establishment psychology rooted to capitalism and the resulting

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<sup>26</sup> I expand on the notion of Elderliness on page 29.

culture of misanthropy gives priority to the fetish of individualism instead of advancing collective wellbeing”. I am struck by the impossibility of disentanglement in trying to find a segue into understanding the impact of Euro-American capitalism, colonialism, apartheid, and neoliberal globalisation on the stories of the people of Hangberg. I find myself usurped by a belief that I am personally responsible for decolonisation, that I cannot ignore the existence of this in our *kuier en gesels*. I know that it is presumptuous to think that my interaction with the people in Hangberg would make amends, yet I do hope that it would not perpetuate the violence. I know that “the task of decolonization requires more than the production of local psychologies attuned to the conditions of particular communities. In addition, it requires decolonial versions of global psychology that are conducive to the wellness of all humanity beyond a dominant Eurocentric subset” (Adams et al., 2017, Abstract), and that perhaps this work in some way would contribute towards that lofty goal. I hope that I would find a different vantage point from the colonialist ontologies that advocate for “the promotion-oriented pursuit of growth” (Adams et al., 2017, p. 533), which is steeped in the ongoing violence of the colonialist past, whereby the consciousness around the greater good is outweighed by the social Darwinist idea of survival of the fittest and underscores the principles of capitalism. It is here that the root of colonialism is seated: one of dominance, violence, exploitation and plunder, and eradication of the “weaker”, especially in the positioning of older people or people socially-constructed as having different abilities.

In reaction, Adams et al. (2017) write of an emergence of what they refer to as an “indigenous resistance” (p. 534). It is no longer enough, they argue, to simply include people from colonised backgrounds in academic studies or institutions, or to conduct greater amounts of research about or with marginalised groups. True transformation will only happen when the very approach to research methodologies starts to change, and research is done ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ people, needing constant horizontal engagement at every stage of the research process. The formerly colonised, as research leaders and participants, share an insight into their reality and knowledge, teaching the world a new way of seeing and experiencing indigenous knowledge. Bulhan (2015) notes that “a broad consideration of colonialism suggests that this system of domination entails a contestation of reality in three worlds: *the world of things, of people, and of meaning*” (p. 252). Illuminating meaning and processes of meaning making would contribute to a fresh understanding of inclusively diverse cohesiveness. It is proposed that the acceptance of a plurality of epistemologies and giving voice to ‘the local’ is attuned with this decolonising writing process.

The impact of colonialism remains tangible to this day in, among others, the economic and social disparity in South Africa where the majority live in poverty and have limited access to appropriate healthcare services, education, and social support structures. Adams et al. (2017) refer to this disparity as the “dark side” of modernity, which is a direct result of the country’s colonial past. This dark side, however, goes much deeper than mere living conditions, to ongoing multiple other manifestations of power imbalance. A lack of understanding of indigenous knowledge systems and the constant buttressing of a particular dominant reality, aptly referred to by Adams et al. (2017) as “habits of mind and ways of being” (p. 14), should be held up for interrogation, as is envisaged in this project. These “habits” and “ways” however seem continuously disregarded. This “cognitive injustice” (de Sousa Santos, 2015, p. 24) may be a relic of past colonial juxtapositioning between ‘black’ and ‘white’ in South Africa, which perpetuates colonialist attitudes at the cost of most people’s wellbeing. Failure to observe and acknowledge how some individuals express and live their lives differently to others, and by which knowledge perspective this is powered, engenders more disparity, poverty, ill health, and possibly injustice in how people are labelled, marginalised, and stigmatised for their difference. How individuals view themselves, express their being, formulate their knowledge, and live their lives is culturally bound and constructed.

Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010), cited in Adams et al. (2017), coined the (rather ironic) acronym WEIRD, which refers to **W**estern, **E**ducated, **I**ndustrial, **R**ich and so-called **D**emocratic countries and their promotion of individualism as the benchmark of global knowledge production and standards of being. Often, the absence of such knowledge production is argued to bear testimony to the deviant, immature, and backward local ecology of knowledge. This striving towards modernity places the individual at the epicentre, with little or no regard for the social context. This individual is not affected by others in *their* striving towards personal growth, excellence, and independence from others or outside influences. This kind of independent ‘selfway’ is often achieved at the cost of others and focuses the attention purely on self as a free agent. Markus et al. (1997) are quoted in Adams et al. (2017) for the antithesis of these selfways, which put every individual within a context of community, culture, and greater awareness of the interconnectedness of people. Opposed to a linear rise to individualism, this growth of the self in interdependent ways is circular, connected to the epicentre of cultural connectedness, rooted in the Earth and in tune with spiritual awareness. It

can be argued that, for the most part, the cohesion witnessed in the Hangberg community is rooted in culture, history and belief systems, and their dependence on the ocean and each other.

The storying<sup>27</sup> of Elderliness in Hangberg is not only unique in terms of method, content, and context, but will also, I expect, be another contribution to an alternative knowledge system that will enhance an understanding of and respect for the lives of marginalised individuals and communities. As an academic endeavour, the stories will contribute to an expanded discourse on ageing, enhancing different perspectives and creating insights into different possibilities of ageing. My interest and intention are to co-create new relational knowledge – less through “exploration” and more through engagement with people and their stories. I am reminded here of the words of Phillips et al.: “Stories are embodied acts of intertextualised, transgenerational law and life spoken across and through time and place” (Phillips et al., 2018, p. 8).

I lean toward embracing the word “storying” (interchangeably with ‘narrative’, as I attempt not to dichotomise the two terms) to avoid a power positionality and place the knowledge with those who tell the story as an open invitation to engage in the here and now of a lived experience. Stories are the relationality, the place, the connections created, the caring, the catharsis, the bearing witness to another person’s lived experience, told by ordinary people in *their* language, from *their* perspective, giving insight into *their reality*, making it accessible to all (Phillips et al., 2018). Moreover, these stories do not present global truths, but are renderings of localised, situated truths that are unquestionable. These stories are not verifiable, they are not there to be labelled, categorised, interrogated or judged. Nor are they ‘material’ or ‘data’ to synthesise in order to form theories, but are renderings of lived realities that should inform from different perspectives. Stories open new worlds, creating new understandings of what constitutes our identity and ultimately our humanity. As Phillips et al. remind us: “Stories tell of rich complexities, layered with symbolic meaning. Truth does not matter. Rather it is the gifting of new insights that matter” (2018, p. 6), or as the same authors so aptly note: “We hold that truth is a contested site. We are not simple folk who tell simple tales. We hold to a truth

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<sup>27</sup> “We define *storying* as the act of making and remaking meaning through stories. The anthimeria (verbification) of *story* is purposeful to reflect that it is living and active rather than fixed, archived products. Stories are in constant unfolding” (Phillips et al., 2018, p. 7).

that stories and storying forms are created in sites of sophisticated knowledge, sites of higher knowledge” (Phillips et al., 2018, p. 9). It now becomes clear to me that the higher knowledge is contained within the stories, not the academic pursuit of them.

Within a ‘methodology’ of *critical rhizomatic narrative*, or *critical rhizo-linguistic narrative* in the instance of its embrace in this coming-in-to-storying, while my ‘method’ of *kuier en gesels* within that suggested that I would visit conversants and have conversations in their homes with them, it quickly became clear that there was not much room for extended conversations and multiple visits as much as people perhaps felt they needed. The urge for the people of Hangberg to tell their stories was great. This ‘need’, as I witnessed it, perhaps reflects a wider political need for the people of Hangberg to have their voices heard, a broader political discourse into which my *kuier en gesels* and story-sharing became entangled. Threads of power are infused within all relations, and attempts to overcome potential harms that could be done through such relations become continuously thwarted by their own limitations. As noted in footnote 27 on page 33, I hardly managed to respond with much more than a *sjoe!* It is through the awareness of the power of the nuanced, rhizomatic nature of the storying that I understand the concept of ‘narrative’, following Swanson (2004), as a relational, co-constructed, affective, and evocative form of storying, and one which fits with a more decolonial framing. While ‘narrative inquiry’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and narrative methodologies have for the most part passed the test of critique and are now settled and generally accepted by more critical, decolonial, and creative scholars in qualitative research, some critiques still remain.

Phillips et al. (2018) make a strong point for the distinction between “narrative” and “storying”, creating an unfortunate, false binary that contributes to modernist thinking rather than reflecting an attempt, through a storying methodology, to divest of nihilistic critiques found within Western Critical Theory. By creating a strawman of “narrative”, they participate in a process of essentialism, singularism, and dismissal in order to replace “narrative” with a triumphant view of “story” in which their version of a methodology fits. For Phillips et al., “narrative” is an ‘academic term’, which speaks of differing power dynamics, while “story” is purportedly not academic and therefore escapes relations of power, something which is not possible as investments in power relations are inescapable, ever present, and everywhere. This reductive caricature of narrative doesn’t hold up. It is also dishonest to argue that story in academic research is not academic, and this is more an attempt at escaping populist critiques of academic life than genuinely seeking to address some of the complex, legitimate, troubling

legacies of the Western academy. It is also an anti-intellectual stance within the academy that plays to populist views rather than aiming to help qualitative research scholarship find a ‘third way’. Also, words themselves do not carry contained, singularised meanings. They have situated meanings that are always available to spilling over in polyphony into other words and other meanings (Holquist, 1981). It is true that I could not have asked the people of Hangberg to engage in a “narrative”, but rather to “tell me your story”, which evoked a lively rendering of “what it means to be human, that tells of emplaced, relational tragedies, challenges and joys of living” (Phillips et al., 2018, p. 3). Yet, this very dialogue was an act of critical rhizomatic narrative rendering, or indeed, of critical rhizo-linguistic narrative rendering, of narratising, story, storying, storytelling, but also of relational being in all its richness and breadth. By creating false categories, Phillips et al. not only participate in essentialist, reductionist discourses, but their critiques reflect a lack of recognition of the full breadth of narrative scholarship within the field, with some scholars’ work conforming to very conventional modes, while others push boundaries beyond restricted modes in ways that bring together the intellectual, the affective, the human, the relational, the reflexive, and serve to decolonise research itself, without trying to escape the very real truth that power relations are omnipresent.

I argue, after hearing the life stories in Hangberg, that the lived experience of older people in that community is qualitatively, indeed palpably ‘different’, a difference not as something marked, homogenising, separational, and divisional, but as something felt, visceral, attuned; something in the in-between of things, in the ether, in liminal ways of being, something which may well have to do with a lived experience of the indigenous ethico-onto-epistemology of Ubuntu (Swanson, 2007; 2009; 2015) in its situatedness and ‘livedness’ in locales of South Africa. The construction of ageing, the roles of older people, and the physical ageing process might just present, in nuanced ways, a somewhat different view, a somewhat hauntingly different expression of what matters in life and in the world. Even though the people of Hangberg live in (what I would consider to be) a somewhat ‘harsh reality’ resulting from a violent past, through their particular, yet relational, linguistic-historical-cultural experiences, they may be expected to have a different view of constructs and ideas pertaining to Elderliness, not in a homogenising sense, but in nuanced ways, carrying different emphases and priorities, but collectively situated too. ‘Being open’ to these different views is crucial to the understanding of Elderliness within this context. I argue that the ‘inter-reliability’ and connectedness of community is what gives the authentic sense of agency in Hangberg, rather than gesturing toward an individualistic notion of ‘interdependence’, one that is prevalent in

‘dementia literature’ (Hughes, 2019; Keyes et al., 2019) and which hints at self-interestedness, self-preservation and exchange relations. In these ways, it is through “storying” that meaning is created and communities become connected (Phillips et al., 2018). These stories are the legacy of those who tell them, but they are also relational – told in a way that recognises the ‘who’ to which they are being told – thus drawing me into their world to identify my life with theirs.

I stop for a moment in this journey and give pause to the ‘methodology’ I embrace – *critical rhizomatic narrative*. I will return to it again later in more depth as if circling in a rhizomatic dance. I do this purposefully because I wish to repulse the idea that I need to ‘lay out’ a ‘methodology’ before embarking further on my travels of research; that I need to ‘declare’ myself or my intentions fully before I can enter through the door of accepted research. In this sense, I am reminded of Glissant (2010) in his ‘poetics of relation’ who, as a form of decolonial resistance, legitimises the right to opacity against the violence of transparencies, against the expectation to make oneself fully comprehensible, fully intelligible to the other and lay bare oneself and one’s intentions. So, I pause to give thought on *critical rhizomatic narrative* here, for a moment, before returning to the homeliness of the relational stories of the people of Hangberg.

*Critical rhizomatic narrative* is drawn, as I will discuss later, from Dalene Swanson’s methodological development of the term given to it and the work it seeks to enact. In this, *the rhizome* plays an important, yet not ‘central’ role. Both the metaphorical application and its enactment in critical rhizomatic narrative is diffuse, purposefully intangible, purposefully enmeshed, refusing centrality and restriction. It gives ‘shape’ to the methodology and its intentionally-decolonising effect on conventional research methodologies rather than being based substantively on any metaphorical tradition of theorists who might draw on it, underscore it, deploy it. In this sense, it draws loosely on Deleuze and Guattari’s (2013) work in so far as it has enabled critical rhizomatic narrative to take ‘shape’ and present itself as a ‘methodology’. Yet, the use of ‘rhizome’ evokes ‘Deleuze and Guattari’ and demands engagement with their work, by way of some explanation, although this assumption of automatic inheritance in itself begs the question of who now ‘owns’ ‘the rhizome’. It is true that Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘rhizome’ evokes many themes and ideas that may at face value have relevance to the lives of the people of Hangberg or to the methodology I embrace to engage with the stories of their lives, and of my life in relationship. It also offers metaphorical entryways to the means in which

this methodology serves to decolonise what ‘research’ even is. These synergies could be expressed through a number of ‘refusals’ – refusing hierarchies, refusing beginnings and endings, refusing fixedness of maps, in refusing unifications, singularities and transparencies (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013) .... But it is also true that Deleuze and Guattari’s work still operates within the Western canon and speaks to the ideas and understandings as situated within and in response to a Euro-dominant worldview. Rather than being drawn down a rhizome, indeed a rabbit hole, that expects of me to genuflect to the ‘great thinkers’ of Western thought, by steeping my own thinking and the methodological work of critical rhizomatic narrative in this body of theoretical knowledge, thus disembodimenting the narrative lives of the people of Hangberg in the process, I am choosing to cut off this rhizome. I am cutting it off wilfully, disruptively, in the interests of maintaining a commitment to decoloniality in this work, and in the interests of an authentic commitment to the lives of the people of Hangberg and their stories. Precarity, ‘inter-reliability’, care, humanity, community, as I engage in the storying of them later, are palpably present in the *voorkamers* or lounges of people’s homes in Hangberg. They may even be in their *vertoonkaste* or display cabinets, behind the plastic Flamenco dancer doll and other precious nick-nacks, ... but in this context, from my own relational experiences with the people of Hangberg – I assert that Deleuze and Guattari’s extensive conceptual tropes will not be found there. They are unlikely to be welcome.

#### **4 The violence in translation**

Hier vat julle alles, julle kry mos alles lekker, verniet, ek wil mos name lekkers en ek wil die en ek wil daai, gaan nou bietjie daar kan julle sien hoe lewe daai kinders. My storie is altyd vir hulle, ons Kapenaars is so, ons het mos alles... ons is mos lekker gespoil. (Tannie Violet)

It is within the densely woven narratives with which I engage in this thesis that the story unfolds of the people of Hangberg, their history, and their identity preservation. Tannie Violet describes how the children of Hangberg are privileged compared to the children who live further north in South Africa. I think deeply about what this would mean, how this would translate, and realise again that it is impossible to dissect the nuances of what is implied, what is conveyed, and what is left unsaid. Children aspire to brand names, wanting their parents to buy branded clothes for them. Tannie Violet sees this as privilege, comparing their lives with others who

are really poor. I also know that this might be relayed in context and in relation to me, perhaps because of her perception of me. She might mention this to position herself and her community in relation for me not to see them in deficit terms, which she most probably knows most white people tend to do. I wonder if there might be a small inkling of fear that I might see them as poor.

South Africa's socio-political landscape is deeply complex. A more nuanced approach to how language and expression influence and are influenced by that complexity may be necessary to engage with in this thesis, alongside the relationality that is invested in power relations – always, but especially in South Africa where certain positionalities are provoked/evoked in relational context. The conversations in Hangberg were all conducted in Afrikaans, which is also my mother tongue. However, to fully appreciate not only the language but the context in which it is spoken, one needs to understand the complex history of the language within the colonial and apartheid context. Indeed, the social and cultural complexity, and densely textured historical, political, apartheid and sociological montage of the Hangberg community are mirrored in the diversity of greater South Africa, and expressed in the particular version of the Afrikaans language dominantly spoken in Hangberg. It is important to note that it is not a 'standard' Afrikaans that is spoken, but a particular register, which recently acquired its own authority and distinction as a separate indigenous language in South Africa – Afrikaaps. Living in Hout Bay and having grown up among people speaking both standard Afrikaans as well as Afrikaaps, I am familiar with and have a deep appreciation of this linguistic register.

As a result of the socio-economic impact of apartheid, the construct of "retirement" is not necessarily relevant to older members of communities such as Hangberg. Although all South Africans aged 60 years and over are eligible, subject to a means test, to receive social old-age grants, becoming a beneficiary of the grant does not necessarily signify one 'retires' upon receipt of the grant, in the commonly understood sense of this change of income status. For one, those who were employed, but did not contribute to a pension fund at their workplace, will likely be unable to afford to retire. Numerous others may not have been formally employed and thus will have had no job to retire from anyway. Local understanding (and therefore experience) of being old (Lamb, in Twigg and Martin, 2015) will thus likely mean something quite different to residents of the Hangberg community, to what it means to their predominantly white neighbours in the nearby valley where I live. The people of Hangberg do not have the privilege of accepting the status of 'old' or of 'retiring' and being financially secure through

pension fund. Throughout my narrative-sharing and engagement with the people of Hangberg, I found myself increasingly confronted with a disjuncture in the understanding of words and constructs from my upbringing, such as education, retirement, wealth, poverty, and ageing.

Gemignani (2017) advocates for “a more radical reflexivity that calls researchers to embrace the negotiated, relational, and socially constructed nature of the research experience” (p. 186), and Denzin (2001), when referring to the notion of reflexivity as a key ethical approach to critical and post-foundational qualitative research, points to the importance of words in shaping understanding, and expressing meaning and inner thoughts. I wonder to what extent my presence becomes a catalyst for certain things to be said and for others not. Would certain things be said that implied something totally different? Linguistic, cultural, physical, and temporal context shapes what is possible for people to say on any issue. How questions are asked, when, where, with whom, and in what context affects responses. Expression, through the words that are selected, deployed, and to which emphasis is afforded, operates to continuously constitute and reconstitute the world that we live in and our identities that we form. When formal apartheid was abolished, several words that had been used freely during apartheid to describe people who were not white became regarded as hate speech. I assert that changing the words, or lexicon, became part of changing the way that white people engaged with brown or black people, as a first-round effort to change the social climate in which we live. Dean (2017) quotes Denzin (2001) when pointing out that “words matter because of the effects they have on people, materially changing the world” (p. 113). It is through a constant, reflexive grappling with my own social background that I see layer upon layer of nuanced unfolding happening in the conversations, the stories told as being so complex and multi-layered that it seems impossible to get to any given point of understanding.

Jon Dean (2017) urges the researcher to consider “thinking through who we are” (p. 114), interrogating our own subjective, internal narrative and social conditioning, and how these will affect the formation of trust relationships, the quality of interactions, and the willingness of participants to engage with a researcher. It also calls to attention the issue of power relations and positionalities between researcher and participants of research. By emphasising our identities in research, Dean is referring to reflexivity as self-reflexivity. While this hasn’t always been the case and I have to some degree had many personal struggles and journeys to get to this place in my life, my status today as a white, affluent male, living “across the valley” on a 2-acre plot with a large house, swimming pool, car, university education, and everything

else that my white privilege has come to afford me, is, materially, performatively and at face-value, in stark contrast to the living conditions and life history of the majority of the residents of Hangberg. I am markedly implicated in the severe socio-historical and material power differentials at play. It forces me to do more critical self-reflection than I might otherwise be impelled to do under less blatant material differences (although self-reflection around our ongoing, inescapable implicatedness in local and global systems of oppression is always necessary), making the understanding of the social constructionism deeply introspective, cathartic and emotionally challenging. The inequality in the conversational dyad of these two different worlds materialises in the spaces of the ‘in-between’, or liminality (Aoki, 1999). In this writing and in the in-betweenness of relations in the storying, I enter these liminal spaces to grapple with dilemmas, contrasts, contradictions, conflicts, but also moments of resonance and possibility. I sense my own subjective understandings of myself through listening to the stories over and over again, rewinding, and then writing. It is in the writing that I delete and rewrite, weighing every word with caution and continuous reflection, an inquiry method in itself, as writing itself is a method of inquiry (St Pierre, 2007). As I work through this process, I realise that there is so much I take for granted, so much I have never reflected on before. And now I grapple with the reader’s engagement and subjectivities, of my responsibilities as ‘story-teller’, knowing that I can never do justice to the world of Hangberg and its people. Yet, I hope that I can somewhat relationally and reflexively convey – through perhaps a simplicity in writing – the deeply reflexive blossoming of new understandings of the social world constituted by these relational stories. Gemignani (2017) refers to “the impossibilities of a dialogue” (p. 195), which becomes more and more apparent as I write and reflect, wondering if ever I can do justice to the “multiple realities of the subject of concern” (p. 195). With respectful humility, and understanding of the responsibilities of relationality and reflexivity, with caution and conviction, I try.

### **Afrikaans as the vernacular language of Hangberg**

The language and dialect spoken by the residents of Hangberg is a rich, expressive narrative register, in some respects, especially through delivery and expression in context, it could be perceived as qualitatively different from the form of Afrikaans spoken in other communities in South Africa. ‘Coloured people’, as a distinct, mixed-race, cultural and linguistic group, are renowned for their atypical use of the Afrikaans language. Afrikaans was, and still is, regarded by a large section of the population, particularly among black Africans, to be “the language of

the oppressor” (Le Cordeur, 2017, p. 44). As a result, the majority of ‘coloured people’ in the Western Cape Province speak Afrikaans or Afrikaaps at home but often choose to speak English outside their community. The day-to-day spoken Afrikaans or Afrikaaps is full of neologisms and sayings that express a unique view and experience of daily life in a convivial manner. There is a strong juxtaposition of humour and seriousness in the use of the language that often creates a sense of bathos, which at times leaves me speechless and deeply emotional during conversations, often not knowing if I should laugh or cry. Sagner (2002), in Makoni and Stroeken (2002), quotes Giddens (1991) when pointing to the notion of the narrative that we use to give expression to our own identity, and how this narrative is formed through constantly reflecting on where we are, how we deal with where we are, and how we make sense of our lives. It offers a place of convergence between geopolitical specialities and socio-psychological positionalities, creating a stormy sea, not dissimilar to the storms out at sea where the Atlantic and Indian oceans meet not far from Hangberg. It is through the narratives of Elderliness in Hangberg that I journey into a world of immense introspection and self-transformation, this world being a place in which ‘I become’ and which marks the identity I become through the process of grappling with ambiguity (Aoki, 1999).

The social, political, and cultural expression of Elderliness (Makoni & Stroeken, 2002) in the narratives of Hangberg present as a unique identity concept (Hyvärinen, 2010). This approach may be viewed as part of both the ‘ethical’ and ‘narrative turn’ (Denzin et al., 2008), which urges social researchers to see context rather than simply statistical data and/or conventional, objectivist, social scientific research, and to immerse themselves in the rich narrative that gives expression to the human condition through words that are spoken and performed by individuals. The asserted ‘narrative turn’ moves towards imbuing the research with a depth of multi-layered nuances, in some realisations of it, rhizomatic<sup>28</sup> ones, sharply moving away from the distant, objective, and disconnected stance of quantitative or conventional social science (Plummer, 2001). *Critical rhizomatic narrative* (Swanson, 2004) as a methodology is different and more complex than narrative inquiry and engages with greater criticality, eliciting deeper conversations that through narrative and rhizo-linguistic threads seek out connections to a multiplicity of structures, constructs, and conversations. It is within these structures that different knowledges reside, and in the knowledges that a multitude of structures are embedded. These discourses take place both *vertically* and *horizontally*, as described by

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<sup>28</sup> Critical rhizomatic narrative methodology will be expanded on later in the thesis.

Swanson (2004) who refers to Bernstein (2000) in this regard in developing a methodology of *critical rhizomatic narrative*. It is in the everyday stories that we learn about the day-to-day happenings. The horizontal story lines tell of the “human experience” (p. 51), the lived lives and being-in-the-world. It is through the complexity of the vertical lines (of flight) that new knowledge, embedded histories, nuanced knowingness are abstracted for deeper and deeper understandings. Within these rhizomatic complexities, the storyteller, listener, writer, and reader communicate new meanings, many of which are reproduced or recreated and woven intralogically. With every reading, my understanding became more nuanced, often leaving long silences of perplexity or contemplating possibilities of knowingness. The possible meanings unfold and weave through histories, materialities, and situatedness to ever-evolving potentialities of meaning. Language, and its potential (un)translatableness, play an important part in my embrace of *critical rhizomatic narrative*, in a way that might begin to extend this methodology, or situate it in my specific use of it in this project. In my deployment of it, the storying becomes more of *critical rhizo-linguistic narrative* renderings, so central has been the rhythmical interplay of polyphonic voices and differing linguistic registers to the narrativity of this inquiry.

The specificity of understanding elicited from the Hangberg community’s narratives of Elderliness required more than merely recording words and stories. The stories related were not simply a reflection of what it is that people experience, but a performative act of (re)shaping those experiences to create meaning through this uncharted journey called ‘ageing’. In writing up these stories, new relational realities and shared stories are (re)created, dwelling in the discomfort of humbly sharing these relational stories in which I am, as a white South African male, inextricably tied and implicated. I am deeply touched by their acceptance of my invitation to participate in the process, and for the opportunity afforded me to bear witness to their sharing of life stories. I am intimately aware of the complex sociomateriality and relationality of this journey I have embarked on as I grapple with my own identity transmutation. The more I hear, the more aware I am that there is no escape, no place of safety for me. The best I seem to be able to do during *kuier en gesels* occasions is to sit, listen deeply, absorb, and respond in awe with *sjoe!*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Sjoe* is an Afrikaans expression used in many different situations to express surprise, exhaustion, expiration, disbelief, and discomfort, among other emotions. When listening to the audio-recordings of our conversations, I find that I use the word *sjoe* repeatedly. In many instances I am rendered speechless, and am only able to verbalise this speechlessness through my use of the word *sjoe*.

Frank (1995) and Linde (1993), in Denzin et al. (2008), caution the researcher against confusing life stories, as told by research participants, with life histories. Life histories are based on a researcher's understanding, interpretation, and construction, informed by and based on the researcher's reality. Life stories are 'renderings of being' as told by individuals: a living script, unfiltered and unedited, as much as this can ever be possible. Hearing and writing these renderings in a respectful manner honours the stories and informs relational ways of knowing through the research. Every life story in this instance is as unique as the fingerprints of that individual, shaped and formed through history to create a narrative that expresses itself in response to and with their community. These stories are, however, never independent of the context within which they are told. In another context, they might well be told differently, with different emphases and nuances, never divorced from the context in which they are elaborated. The contextual realisations of story allow them to offer potentially multiple expressions of themselves. Life history is inscribed by the researcher; life stories are narrated and performed by the individual *with* rather than *to* a listener. I come to my *kuier en gesels* visits in Hangberg laden with my own history which, hard as I try, I cannot erase from my being, and yet this research process has nevertheless changed me. I constantly question, and grapple and battle with my filters and the socialised biases of my history in contrast with other histories – one country, many histories. I do not know to what extent I will be able to hear the stories from Hangberg without mediating them through my own lived experience. My knowledge of Afrikaans is as much a blessing as a burden.

### **Ubuntu<sup>30</sup>**

Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. (Mbiti, 1969, p. 106, quoted in Khupe and Keane, 2017, p. 27)

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<sup>30</sup> "Ubuntu is short for an isiXhosa proverb in Southern Africa. It comes from Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu: a person is a person through their relationship with others" (Swanson, 2007, p. 55).

It is through listening to the stories of the people of Hangberg that I became more and more aware of who I am, who I was, and who I might live to become. Their stories of lives lived, memories and reflections, situated realities and nuanced silences brought me into a world that was always distant from and somehow parallel to mine. I never ventured close enough to feel part of the greater knowingness of living in South Africa. Ubuntu is part of the Southern African landscape, an indigenous philosophy as old as the African continent. Deeply contemplating the meaning of Ubuntu, I can only testify to the power of listening to stories that perhaps have never been told quite in this way, sitting at kitchen tables where few white men have ever sat, and being invited to an inner sanctum that hitherto has been cautiously guarded through a history of separateness.

Swanson (2007) reflects on how “post-modernity and post-colonial discourses have afforded new insights and recognition into how the interrelated concepts of identity, ideology, knowledge and context operate discursively and subjectively to construct and position indigenous peoples and ‘indigenous ways of knowing’ in particular ways that are invested in power” (p. 54). Moving from my position of an assumed ‘knowing’ that inevitably assumed ‘power’, new possibilities of understanding challenge every aspect of my socially-constructed ‘white’ world and hegemonic assumptions. While it is almost impossible to not be caught in the “minefield of misinterpretations”, the “African epistemology of Ubuntu” (p. 54) prizes wide open the vestiges of power and hegemony towards a more reflexive journey of narrative relationality in research engagement. Swanson (2007) concludes that, “as a philosophical thread or African epistemology, Ubuntu focuses on human relations, attending to the moral and spiritual consciousness of what it means to be human and to be in relationship with an-Other” (p. 55).

### **A brief historiography of Afrikaans as a language in South Africa**

My Land

My land, my land  
my land se voete brand

My land eens wild  
Gemaal tussen roer en skild

My land getem

met swaard se lem

My land verkrag  
siel gestroop met myn se skag

My land verdeel met byl se smart  
Langs naat van wit en swart

My land tot snik versmoor  
Onreg skree in slawe koor

My land het swaar gely  
Deur gister se bandiet bevry

Hy word president van presidente  
Lei ons land na swaarverdiende lente

My land staan op  
Lig sy kop

Maar ... , my land se voet haak vas  
In sy aar dra hy sware las

My land baklei met virus  
Wat sy mense uitdroog soos papyris

My land het nuwe stryd gevind  
Vyand wat almal vir eens saam bind

Gesiglose soldate  
Veg stryd in die strate

Halfhartige pogings laat nie vyand wyk  
Moet ons nog verder wag en kyk?

Vat voor vat vas  
Skud af hierdie las

Wat sy vra is nie veel  
Al wat sy vra is doen jou deel

CJ Langenhoven

The many different renderings of the history of South Africa makes for complex readings, full of ambiguities, pathos, and contradictions. For centuries, a dominant history of South Africa was actively promulgated that slanted interpretations towards colonial and apartheid

interpretations of events, performing many silences and selectivities in its wake that suited the oppressors. At school, during apartheid, under a policy of *Christian National Education* (CNE), one was taught that South Africa's history began with Dutch and Portuguese settlers. These settlers came to the Cape of Good Hope in the 1600s to establish refreshment posts for, among others, the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) fleets carrying produce from the East Indies back to Europe. Anthropological references at the time, (by European anthropologists), labelled the local population as "primitive" and "savage" hunter-gatherer people, yet this attitude was no different with the arrival of the colonial British two hundred years later who further entrenched such attitudes. As one of South Africa's 12 official languages, Afrikaans is woven into this complexity, and depending on the writers of the historical texts, vastly different historical versions of its formation and use are presented, and change over time.

Willemse (2018) presents a version of the history of Afrikaans that is different from the version that I was taught at school during apartheid<sup>31</sup>. According to Willemse, Afrikaans is spoken by almost 7 million South Africans, and about six in 10 Afrikaans speakers are not white. Afrikaans is spoken across all sections of South African society, and is used in business, education, and entertainment, as well as in science and technology (Giliomee, 2003). Hendricks (2016) quotes Ponelis (1996, p. 130) who "points out that during the formative phase of Afrikaans it was especially the influence of Malay and Low Portuguese (the dominant languages of slave communication) which caused the transformation of Dutch to Afrikaansdutch, through language influence (borrowing) and language interference" (p. 9).

The hegemonic version of how Afrikaans came to be is that it is closely related to Dutch, and was somehow created and subsequently appropriated by white Afrikaans people. As Willemse (2018) relates: "While our recent sociopolitical history often casts Afrikaans as the language of racists, oppressors and unreconstructed nationalists, the language also bears the imprint of a fierce tradition of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, of an all-embracing humanism and anti-apartheid activism" (p. 1). Willemse presents an historical angle on Afrikaans, where the slaves brought to the Cape from Java used a version of what is now known as Afrikaans as early as 1840 in their learning of the Quran. Cape Muslims used this earlier, yet still clearly recognisable version of Afrikaans in a guidebook to the Islamic faith, which in itself speaks of

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<sup>31</sup> A more 'triumphantist' view of Afrikaans was taught to me in my schooling. This is relevant because it becomes an important critical consciousness on which my reflexive engagement in this thesis hinges.

a high regard for the language, using it as a guide to Islamic holy scripture. According to Giliomee (2003), there is a strong argument to be made for an even earlier foundation of the language, as local Khoisan people created a creoloid *lingua franca* to communicate with the traders who landed at the Cape of Good Hope before 1652.

This Cape Dutch language was recognised by the so-called intelligentsia of the time, used by “the Bastards born and bred at Moravian mission stations where Cape Dutch forms the only medium of expression” (Willemsse, 2018, quoting Elffers, quoted in Davids, 2011, p. 86-87). For many, coloured people were viewed as “bastards”: a mixed race of Dutch, English and French settlers intermingling with Cape Malay slaves and indigenous Khoi/San. “Bastards” became “bastards”, and as Tannie Violet and Tannie Fameeda, two storytellers in Hangberg, told me, they had “voorkinders”, children born pre-maritally, with white men. It is important to recognise the significance of the linguistic choice being made by the storytellers in Hangberg, who of their own accord speak to me in Afrikaans from the outset. I wonder about this. Is it a form of recruitment, friendliness, or inclusion? Is it a way of saying, “we accept you as one of us”, that “we have some sort of shared history”? Whatever it is, it makes for a gentle segue into our conversations, but does not answer the question of power relations that consistently come up for me in the dialogical relationships (Loots et al., 2013). As much as I feel myself ‘at home’ at their kitchen table and consider myself a part of the “construction and creation” (p. 3) of new narratives, the question of power remains at the table as well, mostly unanswered for me.

Afrikaans<sup>32</sup> was the home language of each family I visited, which would seem to be the case throughout the community. While the level of formal schooling among Hangberg residents that I spoke to is considered relatively low, most residents appear fluent in both Afrikaans and English. Many Afrikaans speaking people, myself included, would start a conversation in English with strangers. This has often been remarked upon, almost as if we are ashamed to admit that we are Afrikaans speaking in a country where English is often seen as the dominant *lingua franca*. Interestingly this was not the case in Hangberg. People spontaneously started their conversations in Afrikaans, and interspersed them with a lot of English, which is commonplace for most Afrikaans speaking people today.

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<sup>32</sup> Afrikaans and Afrikaaps are intimately tied together and at times not very distinctive, so that they can often be used interchangeably depending on the context.

Afrikaans speakers have never been shy to create their own unique neologisms to describe that which often cannot be easily narrated. I notice this tendency throughout the conversations I have in Hangberg, wondering why this is the case. Some would argue that there is a tendency for Afrikaans people to be outspoken and expressive, not shy away from a more ‘earthy’ linguistic delivery. This could well be a result of being oppressed in such brutal ways by the British during their colonisation, not least of all for speaking Afrikaans. I was told by my grandmother that children in schools had to wear a placard around their necks saying ‘I am a donkey’ if caught speaking Afrikaans. There is an expressive assertiveness in the way that the language is formed and used, as if nothing will go unspoken or unnamed, and if there is no name for a given object or a descriptor for an emotion, as Afrikaans speakers, we will not hesitate to make one up on the spot. Many Afrikaans words and expressions are entirely untranslatable, giving a situated ‘fullness’ to the language of Afrikaans not readily available in English.

### **Afrikaans in the ‘coloured communities’**

From the beginning, the new language spoken by ‘coloured people’ in the Western Cape, which became known as Afrikaans, was viewed as inferior by purists, often in that it was used in a way that undermined the authority of the white, European masters, because it was a way of speaking in a tongue that was not easily understood by them. It is worth noting here that Afrikaans became an official language in 2021 (Sunday Times, September 19, 2021), almost 27 years after the first democratically elected government came into power. Evolving from Cape Dutch, to Cape Malay, to Hotnotstaal, Hottentots-Hollands, kitchen Dutch, and “mongrel Dutch,” Afrikaans was controversial from its inception, making it even more so when it became a political tool and symbol for Cape Dutch speakers in what was known as the first language movement of 1874 to 1890. Ironically, this movement was to be a political tool for white Dutch and Portuguese descendant settlers at the Cape, who simply disregarded the origins of the language and speakers who were not white. While the *imams* of the Cape and the people of the Northern Cape who adopted Afrikaans were simply using the language to facilitate communication, a group calling itself the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaanders (Society of True Afrikaners) appropriated Afrikaans as *their* language and proceeded to make it a language of white people. As Willemsse asserts: “Through a web of actions and policies that influenced

education, cultural and economic policies well into the 20th century, Afrikaans was constructed as a ‘white language’ with a ‘white history’ and ‘white faces’” (2018, p. 5).

### **Language of the oppressors**

Denial of the ‘creole’ roots of Afrikaans became an important tool in the creation of the (white) Afrikaner national identity (Willemse, quoting Esterhuyse, 1986; Giliomee, 2003). From the outset, the language was viewed as a language used by slaves and the uneducated, and looked down upon by people in the upper classes, in this case white people intent on keeping their race pure<sup>33</sup>. When the Christians sought to convert more indigenous people to their faith, Afrikaans became the written language for the Bible translation, as the Hoog Hollands (High Dutch) was incomprehensible to many readers who still needed to be converted. Afrikaans became an even stronger political tool after the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902, when Afrikaner patriotism was fuelled by the devastation<sup>34</sup> caused by British imperialism in South Africa. Harnessing people for votes meant that Afrikaans needed to become part of everyday life, which is what many wanted.

All these developments were entangled with questions of race and economic power, the British ensuring that they maintained economic power over the Afrikaans population. Political policies ensured that Afrikaners were now being educated in their own language instead of English, which meant that they became eligible civil servants. To win more votes from the white-only electorate, a decision was made that all “black” children must be educated in Afrikaans in certain subjects, especially mathematics<sup>35</sup>, which led to the bloody uprising on 16 June 1976 (Giliomee, 2003) when thousands of youth from Soweto, a township settlement outside of Johannesburg, protested this change of law, with between six and seven hundred youths, adults, and children being killed in the protest. By now, apartheid was deeply entrenched in the country

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<sup>33</sup> While I was a student at the University of Stellenbosch studying Afrikaans, Dutch was a compulsory part of the curriculum, most probably with the intention to create a sense of origin and heritage with students.

<sup>34</sup> The British at the Cape banned the speaking and teaching of Afrikaans as it created a means of communication that excluded the British. The Anglo-Boer War was a brutal devastation of people and land; the ‘scorched earth’ policy of the British ensured that farms were burned to the ground with homes and crops, animals were brutally slaughtered, and women and children were interned in concentration camps that saw the deaths of almost 28000 people, of which 12000 were children. The conditions in these camps left a lasting impression on Afrikaners, with stories told for generations after the war ended.

<sup>35</sup> Teaching “black” children mathematics in Afrikaans created a double layer of dissatisfaction.

and Afrikaans<sup>36</sup> was viewed as the language of the oppressor. Afrikaans as a symbol of white supremacy and political and economic power is for many people as contentious today as it was in 1948 when apartheid came into law. In the meantime, the language flourishes in communities outside of academic institutions, of which Hangberg is a prime example where people creatively engage the language as part of the fabric of community and to give expression to life. Listening to the nuances, witty idiosyncrasies, neologisms, jokes, and jabs, it is clear that Afrikaans is not only used here, but also formed and transformed through the lived experience of a multifaceted life. Like with life in the village where the rules are made by people as they go along with their lives, the rules and words used in Afrikaans are made up as people go along. The creativity and expressiveness of the language is testimony to the spirit of the people.

### **The subtext, unexpressed, nuanced Knowing**

The version of Afrikaans spoken in Hangberg may be regarded as a dialect typically found among so-called working-class and ‘coloured people’ of the Cape Peninsula (Hendricks, 2016), with its own use of intonation and accent. As Hendricks informs us:

Kaaps is presented as a variety of the dialect group Southwestern Afrikaans which as a form of colloquial Afrikaans refers back historically to the seventeenth century influence of slaves on the formation of Afrikaans and which is currently chiefly manifested as a sociolect associated with the working class of the Cape Peninsula (p. 6).

Hendricks takes the standpoint that Kaaps should be viewed as an equal language alongside Afrikaans, as they are interwoven with one another and as such should be viewed as “equally valid codes of communication” (p. 7). Today, Afrikaans has been recognised officially in South Africa as its own distinct language, while others still view it as a register of Afrikaans. While

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<sup>36</sup> When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, it had a population of 41 million. According to Giliomee (2003, p. 18), some 5.8 million people at that time spoke Afrikaans at home, constituting 14.4 per cent of the population. At the time, it was the home language of 58.5 per cent of whites and 82 per cent of coloureds. After *isiZulu* (22,9%) and *isiXhosa* (17,9%) speakers, Afrikaans was the third largest speech community. In 2020, Afrikaans is the dominant language in two of the country’s nine provinces: in the Western Cape (41%) and in the Northern Cape (68%), followed by Gauteng (21%) and the Eastern Cape (10%).

Afrikaans is my first language, and I understand Afrikaaps perfectly, I am conscious that one should never underestimate the rhizomatic nature of the language, its multivocality, or its ability to have hidden meanings that are created as people speak.

### **Translating the ineffable**

The history of Afrikaaps is embedded within race, politics, slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and economic disenfranchisement. It is the language of ‘coloured people’ who experienced this violence in their mother tongue, and as the ‘working class’ they still do (Hendricks, 2016, p. 7). As such, the dialect is laced with subtle and not-so-subtle nuances that might easily be missed outside of the context of South African politics and allied cultural linguistic performances. As a native Afrikaans speaker and one who identifies as white, it is likely that even I would miss some of the layers and textures of what is said and, perhaps more importantly, what is not said. As much as we share some history and a language, I know that Afrikaaps is embedded within a context to which I have some knowledge, but for which my ‘positionality’ in relation to such ‘knowing’ is materially different from other traditional Afrikaaps speakers.

It is within this embeddedness that conversations unfold within the situated spaces, new stories are created in the liminality between lives and histories, around the kitchen table and through the distinctiveness of smells and sounds. These overtures to grasp authentically at meaning translate into new relationalities woven through shared histories and enmeshed realities. This is where linguistic and cultural differences are infused with new cultural understandings and linguistic idiosyncrasies of the language and cultural settings in which they are lived and through which they are (re)formulated.

Venuti (2000) reminds us that: “The foreign text, then, is not so much communicated as inscribed<sup>37</sup> with domestic intelligibilities and interests...” (p. 468). Value judgements are inherent in our reading of texts as we filter everything through our understanding of the world. I am obliged to “restore or preserve the foreignness of the foreign text” (Viljoen, 2006, p. 34), to bring forth the densely articulated social constructs, political nuances, cultural textures, and

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<sup>37</sup> The notion of “inscriptions” is expanded on, on p.136.

unspoken, assumed or hinted at subtexts of the dialogue. In sharing their stories, the people of Hangberg not only narrate their truth, but present it in a way that they believe I will understand, reaffirming the relationality of story – I am positioned as much as they are anticipating being positioned by me and others. I have recorded the stories to the best of my ability, considering the many instances of possible misunderstanding or mishearing of words and phrases similarly altering the relational narrative. Yet, the narrative does not sit neatly within the context. It is expressed through a presumed shared understanding of codes and constructs, but becomes something quite different altogether. I recognise this narrative now, not as their story, nor my story, but as a relational story in the in-between, a contingently abstracted space<sup>38</sup> where it now resides and bears new meanings. The unfolding methodology unveils narratives as reflexive, relational, created in the in-between. It is something owned neither by me nor the speaker. It is shared, non-representational, sitting in another, reflexive relational space.

At the outset, I grapple with presenting the unseen that I sense, the smells and sounds, without the labels of “poverty,” “criminality”, and “illiteracy” that automatically “other” participants. As the *kuier en gesels* unfolds, I start finding my way through Hangberg’s streets and eventually through the stories. Something new and relational is created in the betweenness, just as I recognise streets and alleys without names or signposts, being guided by other markers of space and place. Spaces open up, and I start seeing things differently and think differently as I let go of the need to translate. New worlds of understanding open up as issues arise differently. Immersing myself through walking the streets of Hangberg, smelling the air, hearing the sounds, sitting in storytellers’ homes, and experiencing *kuier en gesels*, is the only way to come close to recognising the mood and place that is Hangberg.

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<sup>38</sup> I talk about an ‘abstracted space’ meaningfully. By doing so, it draws attention to the place of *critical rhizomatic narrative* in this inquiry and of the way that ‘moments of articulation’ are effected and embodied in complex story-telling. ‘Abstracted’ is not intended to imply a positivist, disembodied orientation. Abstracted does not mean to distract the narratives away from their evocative, affective, visceral generativity in the places of inquiry, but it hints instead at the fact that narrative of this kind, one that makes us think and feel anew and more deeply, does not collapse into a flatline of situatedness only. It does something more. It acts instead and intentionally as an undulating landscape (Swanson, 2004), with light and dark, troughs and peaks, shadows and effulgence, absence and presence, and many shades in between. ‘Moments of articulation’ are moments of embodied dilemma and contradiction, of visceral shock, that demand of us at a deeply ethical level that we step away from continuance of narrative-telling for a moment and seek verticality, depth and height. It is a moment of pause, of verticality, which gives way to reimagining how we might be otherwise in the world. Reimagining is a contingent, temporarily abstracted space that permits us to grapple with possibility and, rhizomatically, seek viable alternative ways of knowing and being before bringing us back into the visceral presence of narrative-telling, of storying. Time is not linear here. There are pauses and stops, and circling back and storying forward. Abstracted reimagining shimmers and flickers for a moment. There are moments of contingency: moments of deep visceral connection and situatedness, and moments of thought, introspection, and necessarily abstracted reimagining, all while being simultaneously called to account, compelled to witness the story itself in a deeply ethical and affective way.

To endeavour to translate Afrikaans into English might be viewed as another form of ‘slow violence’<sup>39</sup> (Nixon, 2011) that would flatten richly textured expression. Social constructs such as poverty, illiteracy, hunger, and child labour may be metaphors of objectified descriptions of Hangberg, while nothing could be further removed from the reality as I experienced it. Yet, to this day, some people would refer to the people of Hangberg in terms of these constructs, deploying labels such as ‘poachers’, ‘drunkards’ (equivalent to the Afrikaans ‘dronkgat’ or ‘suiplap’), ‘uneducated’, ‘lazy’<sup>40</sup>, ‘tsotsies’<sup>41</sup>, or ‘criminals’. A particular scathing reference is that of ‘skepsel’, an Afrikaans word that is still used to refer to a person of low education, often doing occasional work in the gardens of white people. Referring to people who are ‘unemployed’ is imbued with inferiorising and a normalised assumption of othering and derogation. These all form part of the perpetuation of slow violence. There can be no way of articulating the circumstances of people in Hangberg without easily falling into the trap of perpetuating the entire history of oppression, slavery, colonialism, and apartheid, which in turn will taint every story. Forcing a direct translation of the narrative into English is impossible, and such attempts would inevitably “...split(s) the subject into experience and articulation” (Lacan, 2006, as quoted in Canter, 2019). By wording the ineffable, the storytellers become trapped in an experience that has never served them, nor should be perpetuated by translating or articulating that which cannot be translated. It is that which is not articulated in the relational and the in-between that carries the seeds of possibility for understanding otherwise, which for this moment is ‘language’. Direct translation would force meanings into concepts and (pre)conceptions of categorisation (Said, 2004). Categories created within Western theoretical frameworks neither know nor understand the complexity of ‘difference’ in their creation of a

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<sup>39</sup> “Slow violence” (Nixon, 2011) refers to harm that slowly unfolds over a period of time, in a manner that is often obscured in terms of who is to blame for the harm. This violence can be structural (Galtung, 1969), such as the lack of healthcare in previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa, or the poor system of providing education or basic services such as running water and sanitation that keep people in poor health and unable to make a decent living. It is a different take on what causes and affects harm. As Nixon (2011) asserts: “Simply put, structural violence is a theory that entails rethinking different notions of causation and agency with respect to violent effects. Slow violence, by contrast, might well include forms of structural violence, but has a wider descriptive range in calling attention, not simply to questions of agency, but to broader, more complex descriptive categories of violence enacted slowly over time” (p. 11). The Hangberg residents are caught in the slow violence of a system that not only does not support them, but actively excludes them on so many levels: Fishing rights that have been taken away from them, not owning their land or property after 72 years of being promised such, the psychological impact of denied schooling, child labour practices...the list is extensive.

<sup>40</sup> In many conversations with my clients in the Aged Care Sector where I do extensive training and development work, there is a standard rhetoric around ‘coloured’ and ‘black’ people being ‘lazy’, often sarcastically referring to ‘African time’ as a dismissive insult.

<sup>41</sup> A name for a “Black street thug or gangster”, according to Collins Dictionary (2020), referring to the Nguni term for someone who dresses flashily.

mono-language (Sexton, as quoted in Canter, 2019). I am compelled by the desire to articulate what I think is thought or meant, and to interpret what I think is not said. I know I need to move to a new relational, reflexive space of authentic listening and sharing that is relational in order to not perpetuate violences. In this sense, Canter (2019), like Swanson (2004), alludes to the relational spaces in between, referring to Spivak's interest "in what emerges between language and understanding" (2019, p. 18).

Thinking through the role of narrative as relational, and language as untranslatable, brings one to another, connected, rhizomatic or rhizo-linguistic thread. It is a thread that provokes one to consider what might be meant by 'decolonising approaches to qualitative research', to rethink what it might mean to decolonise research *itself*. In this sense, following Smith (2012), decolonialising methodologies are less concerned with the actual selection of a research method, and more with the context in which a research project is conceptualised and a research design arrived at, as well as the possible implications that the research will have for the participants and their communities. In these terms, decolonising methodologies can be viewed as a reaction to Euro-American methodologies in 'Global North' research institutions whose arguably colonial approaches claim superiority of knowledge. The Majority World (Adams et al., 2017) is often framed through hegemonic constructions of knowledge, disregarding the fact that many indigenous people today do not want to be 'included' in this process of Western knowledge production, but wish that their own local knowledges be recognised and agentified within societal structures and everyday life. Thus, this recognition permits an ontological shift, one that moves past universals and singularities to pluralities and diversities. At the start of my project, I realised that I would have to find a methodology and way of engaging with 'community' that would be inclusive, investing in a plurality of different knowledge forms that counter hegemonic whiteness and forefront alternative ways of knowing, being and seeing. Yet, I realised that it would need to go further than this too. As Swanson (2004) invites us to consider, decolonising research methodologically means embracing relationality and reflexivity in research, but also in the approach to writing research too. The genre, mode, and mood of writing narratively counts. It is a form of storied, lived writing that evokes a visceral and emotional response to narrative encounters. Without such emotive, relational engagement, detachment and dehumanisation would creep into the fabric of research, marking it as colonialist and rendering it irrelevant.

To return to the first layer of understanding an approach to decolonising research methodologies as framed by Smith (2012), we invoke the work of de Sousa Santos (2015) who poses a pivotal question that shapes the methodological challenge of this research project: “How can we identify the perspective of the oppressed in cognitive terms?” (p. 213). I argue that this quest is doomed to failure, and that the methodological principles of this research project need to move past the limitations and impossibilities of de Sousa Santos’s challenge. In a community of people who have been oppressed for centuries, whose lived realities are shaped by marginalisation, extremely challenging living conditions and struggle, I envisage that it would be problematic, indeed disingenuous, to assert that I had found a straightforward way in. Like any research endeavour, the methodological approach underpins the process. To share stories in a “humble togetherness” (Swanson, 2007) and with a consciousness of not falling back on the common assumption – that the taintedness of my own perceptions, preconceived ideas, judgements, or colonialist methodologies can be overcome simply through ‘an open mind’ – becomes materially important to the aims of this research. Instead, in opposition, this study aims to recognise the impossibility of the assumption of ‘open-mindedness’, and to move to a reflexive, relational narrativity that acknowledges that impossibility as a starting point. The methodological approach – or the methodology I am seeking to embrace – is crucial for the ethical tenure of this study. I recognise the importance of my comportment in this encounter, and that it is crucial for me to enter into a shared liminal space where a new way of knowing, neither fully mine nor of the people of Hangberg, comes into being in the (in)betweenness within the relational narratives. As such, I recognise that I should not only concern myself with the method that I will embrace for this project, but question the very “institution of research” (Smith, 2012, Foreword) in the process. The power that the institution of research has wielded, the underlying values that produced its “facts,” and the claims that historically have shaped conventional positivist and post-positivist social sciences, ones that sought to maintain hegemony through claims to producing epistemological ‘truths’, are all embedded in and affected by the choice of methodology and engagement with community. I recognise that I would be perpetuating the slow violences to which I have alluded if I were to deploy a methodology based on dominant paradigms that assert hegemonic truths and knowledge (Wilson, 2001), as “method” is also a political tool (Lather, 2013).

Janesick (1994), in Denzin et al. (2008), adopts the metaphor of a choreographer in a performative dance, where researcher and participant move together, creating shared experiences within a given social context of meaning creation through the actual writing

process. It is not a linear process, but a circular one, spiralling deeper and deeper into the unfolding of new spaces. This dance requires a researcher to be intimately performing with those with whom we engage in research, "...being in the midst requires wide-awakeness to our Selves and the Other – it is a space of fluidity and possibility" (Guyotte, 2015, p. 71). It begs a deep, reflexive introspection of the researcher in their relationship with those with whom they engage in research, creating an "in-process critique" (Guyotte, 2015 p. 71), rather than a separate analysis that objectifies those with whom we engage and their stories and identities as objectified 'data'. This 'in-process critique', much like what occurs through 'moments of articulation' (Swanson, 2004), reaches deep and far beyond the surface contours of this journey. The rhizomatic intertwined and convoluted texture of connections (Swanson, 2004) are our "storied lives" (p. 72) and the "co-constructed narratives of experience" (p. 72), playing themselves out in our lived realities, diverse as they might be, but in a constant ontology of becoming.

For Lather (2013), "becoming ... is an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (p. 635). Here, methodology is not a neatly theorised practice, dictating the approach or framing a process. It is a becoming that germinates through and by the circumstances of people sharing experiences and perspectives, leading the researcher away from problematic constructs of research that have gone before. Research in a more positivist or post-positivist vein is no longer merely an exercise in rigorously finding data or statistics, 'evidence-based' or generalisable facts that in neoliberal mood inform policy or 'global standards'. Even constructivist or interpretivist research, research that pushes against objectivist or extractivist research approaches, can sometimes fall short of its aims and fall back into modes that serve to reproduce colonial elements of research with 'others'. This research can contribute to misrecognition and reproduce deficit views of 'the other' inadvertently, and of their lived experiences. "Contextual knowledge" (Lather, 2013, p. 637) is more relevant than global "facts". The terms of debate are fuelled by the question, "How does it work?" (p. 637). In this case, I am left with many instances of asking myself "How does it work?" How does it work that people can be so certain of the fruitfulness and flourishing of the reality in which they live, given the slow lived violence of poverty and oppression they have grown up with? How does it work that, considering our knowledge of ageing and age-related diseases, people can be so healthy and fit, that there are apparently hardly any older people living with 'dementia' in the *dorpie*? How does it work that older people are so active and engaged and connected in this community as opposed to the community that I live in?

Finding an entryway into Hangberg took me years, even though I drive past the *dorpie* almost daily. I could not reconcile myself with the stated ‘research ethics’ imperative of going into people’s homes armed with consent forms to be signed and research questions, formal or informal, to be posed. I spent months carefully and meticulously scrutinising textbooks, theoretical frameworks, institutional ethics requirements, and different methodological approaches. I grappled with styles of writing and modes of analysis (Smith et al., 1999). While what Smith et al. (1999) refer to as “indigenous research methodology” does not imply a complete dismissal of all Western thought, it urges a sound and in-depth discernment for and acknowledgement of the perceptions of those involved in sharing their stories, as only they would know and understand their lived experience. Whilst there is recognition in this study that such lived experiences are linguistically, culturally, politically, and materially untranslatable, there are resonances in the relationality of sharing story and in the human encounters that give honesty and integrity to those experiences and to the relational meanings of those experiences.

The reading of decolonial texts warned me that a relationship and interaction between myself and the people of Hangberg might pose many challenges. In fact, after reading extensively on decolonisation, I realised that there is merit in what Smith argues, that “the term ‘research’ is not only inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism but that the word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith 2012, p. 1). There was seemingly no comfortable way to enter and engage with the community that did not represent and constitute “research” and everything associated with it. The research institution itself, within which I am a student, is invested in a long history of European colonialism, fuelled through the European Enlightenment project. Any approach from an institutional research position holds a historic power imbalance that I need to be constantly alert to and to counter when it reveals itself. At the same time, I need to recognise that such power imbalances and their effects are ever present as shadows cast over the process of research.

The more I have tried to steer away from politics, the more I have become aware that inquiry of any nature into the lived experience of people is always political and always has moral implications (Denzin & Lincoln, in Denzin et al., 2008). I knew that it would be no different within this community. I could not ignore the fact that the word “inquiry” poses thoughts of

unilateralism, and that I could not enter Hangberg with forms or documents that needed signing as the first encounter with ‘participants’, especially in such a community, where official-looking forms requiring signatures elicited from white men at the front door could be intimidating and provoke suspicion, given the many historical ways in which apartheid and indeed post-apartheid acted to govern ‘the other’. Denzin (2017) holds that indigenous methodology is shaped not by a theoretical approach that is chosen by the researcher, but one that it is defined by those whose lives are the subject of inquiry, focusing the research on what is important to them and how they see fit to tell their stories or share their knowledge, if at all. I knew that I needed to steer away from any formal approach that typically constitutes an interview, focuses on what could be constituted as ‘data collection’, or requires a formal process to gain consent. I needed to do what the people of Hangberg do and understand as their own lived experience: *kuier en gesels*, literally translated to mean ‘visit and chat’, and yet – in the Afrikaans – it evokes a communion and lived joyousness, a human togetherness, less evident in the English expression.

The reading took me even deeper into the political, at times leaving me thinking that it would be impossible to carry out this work without adding insult to injury in a moral conundrum from which I could not escape, yet which I recognised later as being an important identification process of humanising research. Denzin (2017) confirms that this approach constitutes "critical methodology" in that it is informed by overtly political and moral considerations, as well as ethical and justice-oriented purposes. Its aim is to critically consider the political, social, and economic spheres of daily life, to reconsider and critique practices that are oppressive, to engage in introspective and reflexive ways of considering alternative outcomes, and to ultimately reflect new relational knowledge that is based on the lived experience narrated by those at the heart of the project. I had hoped to enter relationships in this inquiry in a way that would be mindful of power structures, focused on foregrounding local knowledges in a way that created new knowledge, new stories, new ontologies, and new relationalities. Within these liminal spaces, my hope has been to experience the wisdom of the older people of Hangberg in a way that is elucidatory and educational, and possibly introduces a new and different understanding of Elderliness and gerontology in Majority World environments: an epistemology that is not framed by Western social constructs and “neocolonial paradigms” (Denzin, 2017, p. 2), but one that will ultimately reflect hybridity<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> More on *hybridity* to follow.

As the research journey continued, I realised that my approach, and indeed my writing, needed to be more thoughtful, situated, and nuanced, avoiding essentialisms, binaries, and oppositions, and claims beyond what could be claimed. The moral challenges of decolonial writing bring layers of anger, disbelief at my own ignorance, and other extreme emotional charges to the fore, emotional responses that would also not serve the research process well but could contribute to stereotypes and reductive assertions rather than undo them. I argue that Elderliness needs to be viewed as a perspective narrated by residents of Hangberg, as people living and interacting, and that it is contextual, intersecting, and in parallel spaces to my own in real time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2013). It is the disposition with which these stories are received and shared that counts as well. Such a disposition also implies being mindful of the ever-present ‘political’ operating in the background. Even as I witness the stories and lived experiences of the people of Hangberg, I recognise that ‘the political’ is everywhere and in everything, even that which is hidden, such as the effects of slow violence. I can only seek, through a disposition of humility required of me, to be in “humble togetherness” (Swanson, 2007) with the people of Hangberg, as an ally, but I can never escape the political of that being-in-relation. The narrated lived experience paints and sculpts the landscape of being-in-the-world, right here and now. It is this co-constructing through narrative and being-in-togetherness that connects and interweaves history with the relational situatedness that contextually creates an unfolding of nuanced meaning, one which gives over to complex knowledge, layers of knowing, practical wisdoms or *phronesis*, and a different being-in-the-world relationally.

In community life where Afrikaans is dominantly spoken, the terms *kuier* (to visit) and *gesels* (to chat) embody far more than simply paying someone a visit and chatting. Particularly within this community, *kuier en gesels* offers an opportunity for such being-in-relationship to become an event, to become part of a family narrative, to be a special guest, to honour people by sitting at their table: a performance in-and-of-itself where every individual is an integral part of the whole. I know that I am required to explain a methodology and the methods I employ for my research project for the sake of academic rigour. I came to the realisation that to be honest to the research process I am undertaking, my coming to *kuier en gesels* would be both an entryway and method. This method fits appropriately alongside and in relation to a broader methodology of critical rhizomatic narrative.

Swanson (2004), in articulating and developing *critical rhizomatic narrative methodology*, described this method of knowledge formation as “rhizomatic”<sup>43</sup> (p. 51). The methodology acts as both “vertical and horizontal” (p. 51), weaving an intricate, dispersed root structure embedded in history, narrating and constructing a rhizo-linguistic dance of Self with Other. Such relational dancing through my encounter with the people of Hangberg would necessarily incorporate ways of knowing and being that draw on Southern African indigenous onto-epistemologies, and in this sense, most appropriately that would mean drawing on Ubuntu. Despite the slow, harsh effects of poverty and apartheid on the people of Hangberg, there are still many vivid examples of relationalities and resonances that could be described as lived examples of Ubuntu. Through the *kuier en gesels* interactions, I not only listen to or *record* stories, but become part of the performative event as an insider, “no longer listening from a distance” (p. 632) as a researcher who then at a later point “represents” (p. 632) these stories. I, along with the others around the table, will be “part of the rhizome” (p. 632), articulating my own narrative expression of Self with and around theirs. The stories follow rhizomes and produce rhizomes. This is not a linear interview, or an uninterrupted, structured monologue where one talks and the other listen. Sermijn et al. (2008) quote Denzin (2008) who quotes Marcus (1994) in referring to this recording of stories as “messy texts” (p. 647). These texts are interwoven narrative constructions of selfhood, history, contextual situations that are far more than the subjective recording of facts or words that require later, deferred analysis or eventual framing. Guyotte (2015) finds that in the “messy, ambiguous, and unresolved” (p. 76) rendering, the process is far ‘clearer’ than when structured into apparent academic conclusions.

In her article “Writing a rhizome: an (im)plausible methodology”, Eileen Honan (2007) refers to Foucault’s term “governmentality” as discourses of “control and authority” (p. 543) and an impulse to instil factual certainty. The critical, post-qualitative narrative approach of *critical rhizomatic narrative methodology* stands in stark contrast to the performance of governmentality, in the Foucauldian sense, and is infused with and informed by a variety of

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<sup>43</sup> “Deleuze and Guattari define a rhizome as an underground root system, an open decentralised network, which branches out to all sides, unpredictably and horizontally, according to principles as: multiple entryways, multiplicity, a-signifying ruptures, and cartography” (Loots et al., 2013, p. 112).

subjective narratives, also referred to as *bricolage*<sup>44</sup> (Honan, 2007; Li, 2007) or *métissage*<sup>45</sup> (Blood et al., 2012; Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2008), constructed by and through “alternative agentic and powerful positions” (Honan, 2007, p. 543), bringing connectedness into the stories through shared contexts and realities, while at the same time being cognisant of differences. *Bricolage* and *métissage* were also used to underscore *critical rhizomatic narrative* (Swanson, 2004) in its original framing and articulations. This connectedness can span across histories and memories while “challenging certain assumptions pertaining to race, gender, language and other social constructs” (Swanson, 2004, p. 179). It contrasts with the straightjacketing of research approaches often represented in conventional social science, and the insistent exploration of what is regarded as ‘validity’ that could constitute further forms of symbolic or representational violence. As Honan reminds us through the work of Scheurich (2014): “Validity is the determination of whether the Other has been acceptably converted into the Same, according to a particular epistemology” (2007, p. 544). Lather (1993) holds that a new endeavour in research takes away methodology as “the hiding place” of “legitimate knowledge” and instead provokes a reflexive discourse that within itself is not representational but is in a constant ebb and flow of relational construction. It is through the listening, hearing, thinking, and writing that the self-other relationship unfolds into new ways of knowing and becoming, (re)imagining the human condition through reflexive togetherness.

The performative nature of ‘kuiering’ informs the structure of the ‘gesels’ through storying. The relationality of the rhizomes, like contrapuntal or polyphonic lines, densely scattered with varied tones, each with its own harmony, forms a symphonic whole that is complexly intertwined and interwoven, constantly moving and flowing as melody without a necessary beginning or end. While on first impression it would seem messy, it is the very messiness that creates new ‘moments of articulation’ (Swanson, 2004; 2008), or shoots of knowledge, defined by embodied moments of dilemma, contradiction, or possibility. Herein lies the

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<sup>44</sup> The position of *bricoleur* is drawn from Levi-Strauss as well as Derrida’s deconstructive work on this position. According to Derrida: “The bricoleur, says Levi-Strauss, is someone who uses ‘the means at hand’, that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous (1978, p. 285)”.

<sup>45</sup> *Métissage* (derived from the Latin *mixticius*) “means to braid together different fibres to create a single strand” (Swanson, 2004, p. 179). The Canadian word Métis, referring to people of mixed origin or ‘half-breeds’, is in this instance re-appropriated into the neologism *métissage*.

poststructuralist nature of the project in that it is “shifting, becoming, incessantly...” (Guyotte, 2015, p. 73), as is my *kuier en gesels*, unfolding into thinking, feeling, writing, and becoming.

“Narrative selfhood” (Loots et al., 2013, p. 109) gives expression through performance of the way in which we choose to express our identity at any given moment. It does not and should not necessarily imply coherence. Even within the narrated self, there is a polyphonic “dynamic multiplicity of (voiced) positions” (Loots et al., 2013, p. 109; Gemignani, 2017). The choreographed dance might be experimental, atonal, seemingly unchoreographed, but it is a dance nonetheless, and an expression of narrative belonging. The researcher in this case does not record and collect stories, but becomes the dance partner, co-creating through interaction and dialogue, grappling while moving between shadows and insights, writing for readers who will expand on this process or interpret it as an ongoing co-construction.

In listening to the recording of our conversations, I became aware of times that the conversations could be labelled as ‘incoherent’. I listened to these over and over, realising that in the moment that we were together I did not notice this, as the conversation was simply flowing, undulating, perhaps with moments of atonality, yet all part of a cohesive whole in that liminal space. Stories cannot be unravelled by their writing. They become more entangled and rhizomatic with the interrelated writing. I am not the father or the owner of the stories of the people of Hangberg, yet I am writing myself into their stories, finding a history in the presence of their being-in-the-world, and recognising that the stories become something else, something relational, something in the in-between, belonging to no one fully but rather to the world. I cannot relate nor adhere to the academic traditions of interpreting or dissecting a text in a detached, objectivist fashion, for the telling of a story is not only text, but also context, and also pretext. It is a life, many lives, many lifetimes woven into densely rhizomed situatedness (Maheux et al., 2012).

Interrelated, interdependent, interwoven are the rhizomes. The Hangberg community lives within the intersectionality of oppressions forced on it through the historical circumstances in which community members find themselves: people forced into cohesion through their displacement, their disconnection from and by a system that neither supports nor values their identity or needs. The community is built upon mutuality and ‘inter-reliability’, notwithstanding, or perhaps as a result of, the harsh realities of the individuals’ everyday lives, which stands in stark contrast to the residents’ perceptions of their own being-in-the-world.

The rhizomatic, or indeed rhizo-linguistic, nature of our conversations in Hangberg, the way in which stories are constructed, indicates there is no linear relationship between sentences and paragraphs. Words weave texts that are too dense to stay within the confines of the page. There are notes in the margins, parallel voices and understandings that erupt in ‘moments of articulation’. This text burdens the reader with its multiplicity. To simplify it would be an injustice to the stories and the people telling the stories. It is complex, an ecosystem so unique it will lose its power if pulled apart. The reader should lose themselves, should think that they fail to understand, for these stories are to be felt more than what they are to be understood, for one cannot understand that which one cannot feel.

The rhizomatic/rhizo-linguistic text has multiple entry-points, can start and finish at several points as discussions overlap, are interrupted, or veer off into unexpected rhizomatic alleyways as demonstrated by every story that follows. The narrative then weaves the text, the text being true to more than the words, incorporating the reflexive thoughts/emotions of the researcher<sup>46</sup>. The way in which people express and construct the narrative of their identities is by itself rhizomatic, non-linear, often messy, and will differ depending on the context, at what point it is narrated, and to whom. There is no one truth. We narrate and construct our being-together-with-others depending on a multiplicity of stories that define and construct who we are, or which part of us we feel comfortable or compelled to share at any given point to and with a given person. Had I commented on the *samosa* (in footnote 43) further, chances are that the story would have veered in a completely different direction, taking on new meaning through different *moments of articulation*. These stories can and do run parallel and alongside, across, over, and under each other to form the complexity of our expression and experience of being-in-the-world, together (Sermijn et al., 2008). Like looking at life through a prism, we constantly experience different (re)/(de)lections, and as the prism is shifted, there are different hues of colour fused together that present themselves only ever as a diffraction (Gemignani, 2017) of what we think of or experience as reality. This diffraction allows for a study of the nature of

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<sup>46</sup> In one of the meetings of the Seniors’ Club, the chairperson informed me that the group has been meeting for almost 38 years, and only recently “allowed” four Muslim women to join it. Later in the morning, I chatted to a 93-year-old woman, who told me about the history of the dorpie and how they ended up living in Hangberg. As we spoke, her tea arrived. She reached for her handbag, took out a plastic bag in which was a warm *samosa* (a typical Malay deep-fried pastry snack). I could not help think of the significance of this bit of cultural history. Only after 38 years Malay/Muslim members were allowed to join the club, yet the Malay/Muslim *samosa* is an intrinsic part of the history of most South Africans. This moment of articulation, the act of the *samosa*, hangs between us in the air, suspended for me to make what I can of it, not articulated through words but through a shared history of knowing.

the study itself as much as it does for the relation between the researcher and the people of the community, moving away from objectified individualism and essentialism.

The storying of Elderliness of older people and community members living within the very particular socio-cultural and political context of Hangberg, whether considered coherent storying or not, creates or reinforces particular discursive performances that have social effect. Labels such as uneducated, poor, criminal, elderly, demented, or forgetful, all create established mechanisms of recognition by which Elderliness in Hangberg and the people become understood, seeping into accepted everyday life. The fact that these labels are socially-constructed, deficit, and often derogatory becomes unnoticed. An active process of undoing the effects of these labels and becoming otherwise is necessary. It is the power of this process of becoming that should be of interest in a new discourse on ageing. It is in the narrated identities of people who are living their situated, meaningful reality in which there is an “inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994, p.38) that we need to focus our attention. This hybridity, or third space, is where the knowledge of living and becoming relationally resides. Rather than trying to find similarities, it is the unpredictable as opposed to the predictable, it is the polyphonic multiplicity that signifies the stories in these hybrid spaces.

### **Critical rhizomatic narrative methodology**

I posit that the rhizomatic nature of stories and fluidity of knowledge within contexts such as Hangberg grow through what Swanson (2004), through her *critical rhizomatic narrative methodology*<sup>47</sup>, refers to as “moments of articulation”, where stories become relational as

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<sup>47</sup> The use of ‘critical’ in *critical rhizomatic narrative* is crucial to the way in which this methodology acts as a form of resistance, of critique, of contestation of power and oppression, of a mode of writing that attempts to decolonise what has been taken as ‘accepted’ research, while simultaneously committing to decolonising the ways of thinking and being that have brought us into the oppressive society we live in. A key feature of this methodology is ‘reflexivity’, and while, like relational, this may gesture toward a post-critical, more affective way of being otherwise in the world and with research, it is also a critically-important and central feature of critical research. While distancing myself from Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, while at the same time recognising its inheritances in critical research, and distinguishing my use of critical from some Critical Pedagogy, which tends to be primarily contestational without necessarily offering options of how we may be otherwise in the world with others in order to transcend humanly-constructed barriers, I am embracing ‘critical’ purposefully to legitimise the work it does within this inquiry. This work is a process of seeking to overcome oppression and the effects of power, while also reflexively seeking a transcendent path beyond. I am reminded of Lather’s words in her underscoring of critical research: “*Critical methodology* may be defined as scholarship done for explicit political, utopian purposes, a discourse of critique and criticism, a politics of liberation, a reflexive discourse constantly in search of an open-ended, subversive, multivoiced, participatory epistemology” (Lather, 2007, pp. x-xi).

expressed through narratives, bouncing back and forth in the space between us while drinking tea (or Fanta Grape) and eating biscuits. It is within the iterativity of narrating – writing, thinking, feeling, sharing, caring – that relational ways of being are found, beyond racial barriers and discursive limitations. It is through story, storying, and storytelling that such places and liminal spaces become possible. Creating and holding spaces go beyond research methodology. They enshrine sacred spaces within language that seek to empower through relational discourses, materialities, and ways of being. It is within these relational, sacred spaces that fluidity of knowledge is articulated, understanding fostered, and new, possible ways of being-in-the-world explored, articulated, and shared through narrativity as the act and praxis of narrating. In their narrative instantiations in Hangberg, language and register play such a foundational part of lived experiences of Elderliness and being that one might see the threadedness, knottedness, and entanglements as rhizo-linguistic, influencing even the ways in which the ‘moments of articulation’ unfold.

Swanson (2004) holds that “...narrative is rooted in social and personal history” (p. 35), and that it is through storying that we make meaning of not only our own lives, but also in the ways in which we connect through meaning-making of our situatedness as social beings, our histories and presence in the spaces that we inhabit. Narrative is the performance of the script that is inscribed in and through our cultures and histories, the lives of our ancestors and the politics of our landscapes. Narratives create liminal spaces that transcend the materiality, breaking the concrete into multi-dimensional and often imaginative spheres that sprout from the roots of everyday living and being. Storytelling as an indigenous practice could be viewed as the origins of narrative research and should be considered in its full ambit of fables, folktale or fairytale, deepening the nuanced expression beyond ‘fact’ and ‘data’. It challenges the researcher to not seek or question validity or measurability, but to rather imagine and accept that narrative itself holds its own powerful meanings embedded in the storying. Indeed, “narrative permits nuance, contingency, paralogism and ambiguity. It permits the sensate, spiritual, mythological and emotional domains of human experience, while valuing the aesthetic, literary/oral, intuitive and interpretative dimensions that would honour lived experiences and explanations of the human condition” (Swanson, 2004, p. 37).

The ways in which we story our histories, be it personal or social, and make meaning of these stories, is arguably through narrative. “Narrative is the performative expression of those experiences in the act of creating identity and defining, or attempting to define, what it means

to be human, and what it means to know” (Swanson, 2004, p. 35). Swanson (2004, 2008) refers to ‘moments of articulation’ as those moments in the stories that present with a critical, ethical embodied dilemma, when one encounters relational situations that have been provoked (sometimes by one’s mere presence in a situation) as ethically dilemmatic. Rhizomatic, relational, reflexive narrative methodology incorporates the theoretical threads informed by engagement with the narratives and through these moments:

Moments of articulation within fieldwork define utterances and somatic performances embedded within narrative contexts and their attending discourses, and instigate investigation, deliberation and engagement in analyzing the multiple ways in which disadvantage takes root/route. These signpost where 'voices in the silence', in discourse, context, and the subjectivities they (re)produce, may be recognized, problematized and rearticulated through narrative. (Swanson, 2008, Abstract)

Lesutis (2018) points out that “narratives that emerge in fieldwork encounters are contingent articulations of oneself that unfold through the implicit negotiation process between researcher and research participant” (p. 509). Swanson (2004) refers to *moments of articulation* as not just any moments. They are specific. They are moments of deep, ethical, embodied contradiction and dilemma. They are incitements to engage in a new, deeper dimensionality of the story that takes the discussion and debates elsewhere – as we trouble that which incited the dilemma/moment of articulation in the first place. They are numerous, so choices are made, but they are not just any moment either.

My method of *kuier en gesels* in the homes of Hangberg are filled with these moments of profound insight that challenge my sense of self and standing in relation to the person I am, the person I am listening to, and the situation that I/we find myself/ourselves in. These moments transform the ordinary *kuier en gesels* into deep thinking, contemplating self-observations that question everything I thought I knew before I had this conversation, like a blinding searchlight shining into the darkest crevices of my mind. Even in the silent moments, a screaming discourse races through my thoughts, illuminating that which I thought I knew/saw/heard/thought/pondered, provoking a new gaze and possible discourse around every aspect of our togetherness (Swanson, 2004, 2008). As new meanings emerge, new understandings of knowing unfold through the writing, weaving sights and sounds and smells into the space of togetherness.

The stories are imbued with these moments where I was literally holding my breath, caught midsentence, not knowing which way to turn or think, like a stone shattering a glass window, knocking the proverbial stuffing out of me. Holding my breath for a few seconds created, woven into the moment of articulation, a moment of silence (Swanson, 2004) which holds the voices of all the women who never dared to speak, the injustices that are still unspoken, the silence around the slow violence. I am aware of how ‘silence’ and ‘violence’ sound similar, the silence “living and operating within the interstices and intertextuality of discourse, agents, and ideologies of power within the social domain...” (p. viii). These moments of silence are so intricately woven into the stories, constantly undulating in and out between the bantering and laughter. They could be easily missed by ears who did not grow up in this country, ears that might not want to, or cannot, hear the silences. But they were there, earth shattering silences that threatened to burst my eardrums, the silences on which this country was built and to which Hangberg bears testimony. The silences create “fertile moments to foster new thought” (Swanson, 2004, p. 10). Sometimes the silences are only a brief second of hesitation, sometimes they are on my part not knowing how to take the conversation further or not knowing what to do with what I have just been told. Sometimes they are silences from outside – when for a split second the noise from the outside world would subside, abruptly, shortly, sharply. And sometimes the silences are in my head, in the moments that I block out what I perhaps do not want to hear.

During my two years of compulsory military service, I once had to drive through a group of protestors. I was wearing a military uniform, which in the 80s in South Africa made me a target for protestors. A young man hurled a brick at my car, shattering the window of the door. The impact of the brick and the shattering glass burst my eardrum. Some of the *moments of articulation* reminded me of this moment.

## STILTE

Grense is lyne op padkaarte en breine  
mense is gedagtes met gesigsuitdrukkinge  
jou taal is klanke wat jou vriende maak

Waar jy grootgeword het bestaan nie meer nie  
verlore kinders moet loop en leer en werk om van

verlede en ontdekkingslus  
te bekeer

grense verdedig hart en land  
maar hart is hart  
en  
land is land  
en  
Afrikaans is Afrikaans  
maak nie saak waar in die wêreld jy jousef bevind nie

orals op die verkeerde paaie  
ry duur motors  
met moeë gesigte in  
onderdeur bang lamppale  
wat op frustreerde doodloop strate skyn

met hartseer bankkaarte  
wat by leë bank tellers na genade vry

en deurmekaar selfone wat langdradig kopsere  
wakker lui

lewe ons verby sinister advertensie borde  
en senutergende koerant opskrifte  
en mekaar

oral  
verveelde TV's  
wat hartseer bangmaak-beelde flikker  
Op oorgewig sitkamerstelle  
bou ons verleë aan hoop

om eendag hier iewers  
'n prentjie-mooi huis by die bank te kan koop

in die druk verkeer  
en die briesende wind  
wat die diepsee wolke se moordneigende reën  
oor die kendse skiereiland se versadigde lokasies spoeg

besef ek dat ons net sotte in 'n resies is  
wat versot verby mekaar spronge tree  
Ons is maar pens en pootjies

en ons maak net meer

oor die lang termyn stel ons net teleur  
Ons is maar wild  
verwilderde goed  
wat die waarheid  
in die wildernis soek

wat ek soek  
kan nie aan my verkoop word nie  
Wat ek soek is verniet

Dis om huis toe te wil kom  
dis om 'n koue bier te geniet  
en die mooi dag in sy moer te stuur

dis om veilig binne te kan wees as die wind hard huil  
en die koue reën daar buite is

dis om te weet dat daar mense is wat jou sal afhulp  
as jy op jou perdjie spring  
en jou sal ophelp as jy aanjaag  
en uitlaat as jy wil verken

dis om uit jou buik uit te kan lag en dit te bedoel  
dis om te weet wat jy soek  
dis om te sing tot dit pyn  
en te kan huil voor jou vriende

dis om te dink jy weet wie jy is  
en te aanvaar dat jy meeste van die tyd  
die pot mis sit

jou land is waar die son opkom en weer gaan sak

Ons is ruimtevaarders, automechanics, dropouts en  
dokters  
Ons is strokiesprentelike, boggerops, seuns en  
dogters  
Ons is miljoenêrs en presidente, rockers en  
rugbyspelers, gelowiges en besetenes

Ons almal is  
mense het hul grense self uitgedink

(Written by the South African band *Die Heuwels Fantasties*).

Language breaks borders, provides access to places where people often fear to cross, yet language can also be a means of socially constructing borders and barriers too. In reading and exploring possible entryways, it becomes clear that many forms of “methodolatry”<sup>48</sup> exist (Janesick, 2000, as quoted in Cheek, 2007). Such methodolotries can, amongst other orthodoxies, rest on statistical ‘evidence’, objectifications, and ‘certainties’ of outcomes. I have, however, realised along the way, through academic influence arising from poststructural thought, specifically in reading Foucault, but also through my own life histories and experiences and influence from others, that there is not one truth but only a complicated, never-ending search for justice. Being where stories are lived, where lives are stories performed/storied performances, becomes a sacred space, a place that should be respected for its significance, for the battles that were fought there and the lives sacrificed.

Critical Personal Narratives (CPN) as methodology, according to Chapman (2004) in Quigley (2019), “consciously uses story form to be accessible to a wider audience, so there are characters, context, plot” (p. 72). With *critical rhizomatic narrative methodology* however, and through the provocative embrace of *moments of articulation*, which increases the dimensionality of the narrative research, storying moves beyond plot, character, and the personal, to the critical, post-critical and at the level of structures. It seeks justice against lived oppressions at a structural level. Within some indigenous (anti-)methodology, there is a “relational framework” and “relational accountability” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177) that no longer views people as objects and their opinions as either valid or not valid statistical data, “coding and categorizing” them (Lather, 2013). It is herein that the moral imperative of my study is highlighted, while asking myself how this relationship will contribute to knowledge co-production (Wilson, 2001, Chalmers, 2017) with the residents of Hangberg. In a way, I will become part of their story as they narrate it to me, weaving my self into a “Third Space of

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<sup>48</sup> According to Chamberlain (2000), the term ‘methodolatry’ was used as early as 1971 by Romanyshyn who pointed out that meaning should be more important than methodology when researching psychology. Koch (1981) referred to the strong focus on methodology as verging on fetishism, while Danziger (1990) used the word methodolatry in referring to a purist focus on method, making a case for it being just another type of quantitative methodology. Janesick (1994) defined the word methodolatry as a combination of method and idolatry, where the dominant focus on method can obscure the heart of the actual story being researched. With an aim to be objective and to measure/quantify outcomes, method was essential to the research process in Psychology, in particular. Chamberlain (2000) blames the fact that Psychology has always operated within the field of medical sciences where body and mind have to be separated, and the influence of socio-cultural contexts is not adequately contemplated.

Enunciation” (Bhabha, 1993, p. 37). Once we have entered this space, I am part of the future, part of creating change, and as such, I am hopeful that I am not an encumbrance to that change, and that I do not keep colonial processes in play. I hope to be the change that privileges the oppressed, not the already privileged. Lewis (2011) states that, “It is in the stories of our everyday being, in our trying to live well with the challenges of being that we may engender some insight or percipience” (p. 506).

### **Difficult knowledge**

How this often “difficult knowledge” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756) is narrated adds to the rhizomatic/rhizo-linguistic complexity of representation or verisimilitude ascribed to older people who narrate their stories in ways that are incongruent. “Poststructuralist method heightens the problem of the verisimilitude embedded in such foundational concepts in qualitative studies as voice, identity, agency, and experience while still expecting to offer some contingent observations about how individuals – including the researcher – make knowledge in and of the world” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756). Pitt and Britzman (2003) ask, “What makes knowledge difficult, and what is it to represent and narrate ‘difficult knowledge’? Whereas the first question resides in the content of knowledge, the second foregrounds issues of encountering the self through the otherness of knowledge” (p. 755).

As Lesutis (2018, p. 509) reminds us: “These narratives are embedded in broader socio-material relationalities” of language, ecology, politics, social hierarchies, and power structures that make the writing thereof more than just a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973), a messy text, or an analysis *per se*. The rhizomatic/rhizo-linguistic nature of this type of relationality cannot be ordered and structured for easy reading. Analysis seems arbitrary considering the complexity. It now becomes impossible “simply to write *about* these interrelations. This sense of vastness and vibrancy and generativity and ambiguity and multivocality and interwovenness must somehow inform the character of writing itself” (Jardine, 1992, Introduction). The writing weaves together lines of thought with sociomateriality, politics and history, sounds and sights of situatedness. When sitting with Oupa Petrus and Oom Basie, there are many conversations happening at the same time – I struggle to know which one to follow. On top of that, there is a child crying in the back room, the television is on for the children in the room, and someone is

talking on their mobile phone. The smell of fish frying, the sounds of cars racing below Hangberg, all converge and intersect in *moments of articulated togetherness*. Any one of these lines might take flight in creating a new story (Honan & Sellers, 2011), yet it is the rhizomatic weaving of these enmeshed lines that suspends itself between us, all of us, in the room.

### **A guide to the reader**

This all then informs and guides the becoming-of-narratives created through the writing. The writing makes them something else, the method becoming *kuier en gesels*, and the writing/thinking/interpreting/writing/rewriting all intertwined as one process, as methodological approach. The narratives perform a pedagogy of precarity in the writing/reading process, as the ‘international reader’ embraces the text. This is intentional, not a ‘flaw’ of the research, but a purposeful, intended experience of reading this narrative research. The ‘international reader’ will be thrown between Afrikaans/Afrikaaps and English, perhaps frustrated at not fully comprehending certain expressions, intonations, or articulations. This provides an embodied experience of the violence of translation, of the inescapable inescapability of language and its socio-historical and cultural situatedness. This may be disconcerting, but such deprivileging of the reader likely will have ‘an effect’. I am aware of and have grappled with these long tracks of Afrikaans or Afrikaaps text, left purposefully as a way of not wanting to corrupt by too quickly fragmenting these lengths of script. This then becomes a purposeful strategy as part of the awareness of the violence of translation. I am leaving the text suspended, holding it precariously in my hands, acutely aware of the discomfort of this suspension. With the Afrikaans text suspended, another liminal space is created, asking ‘what do I do with it?’, while at the same time giving it prominence, the majority of space, and textural dominance. I do this to not drown the Afrikaans or Afrikaaps voices, but more than that to make them live on the page and to not dissect or sterilise them.

Footnotes and endnotes, asides on asides, different fonts and margin settings might act to decentre meaning and hopefully engage the reader on a deep emotional level. If that is the case, the reader will be deprivileged in order to be privileged to gain a sense of living in Hangberg. And, if there is a hint of emotion, be it frustration or sadness or irritation, know that what I have written is by no means representative of any truth or a complete picture of Hangberg and its people, perhaps at the very least a semblance. For the reader, writer, and storytellers, “it is

through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities” (Somers, 1992, quoted in Lesutis, 2018, p. 512) in the stories in between, never mere representations or strawmen. It is in the expression of these stories, the telling, recording, writing, listening, being seated in the *voorhuis* (front room), ‘geselsing’ with the hosts, the smell of tripe pervading the *huisie*, and the noise of the street outside that the palpability of life in Hangberg becomes apparent. In the abstract to his thesis, Buhler (2014) holds that “their smiling can be framed through the notion of agency and aspirations, and their suffering can be framed with the concept of precarity” (Abstract). It is the intersectionality of these two framings that begs engagement.

The way in which the people tell their stories, the people I converse with in Hangberg, may often be incongruent with the content of the story. This matters. I found it difficult to reconcile facial expressions, the softness of tone (except for Oom Coenie – I explain later) with which stories of (what I perceive as) violence, abuse, hardship, and suffering would be told. Every face, I observed, had a soft smile, a gentleness. Perhaps I was hoping for anger, even hatred, towards apartheid, towards me, perhaps even something to salve my conscience. Numerous contradictions abounded between what I expected, what I assumed, and what I heard, highlighting again and again the broad contextual and situational possibilities that can only be imagined by the listener. Paradoxes and ambiguities abound in the stories, pointing to the multiplicity of possible understandings and articulations and “pluralized perspectives” (Swanson, 2004, p. 40). I expected animosity where none was to be found, that I would feel unsafe and unwelcome, that I would find it difficult to get stories from people, that there would be a discomfort in my presence. The humble togetherness released all borders between us to create a space of inclusion and trust, honesty and vulnerability around the kitchen table. The tension between hearing, listening again to the recording, and writing, became the thread that would weave all of this together. It was in the writing that it would all start to take shape, but only because of the sounds, sights, smells, clicks, and intonations of language, and deep emotions that all these evoked. Every house, every street scene, contextualised and contributed to the richness and situatedness of stories that the storytellers shared with me in a generosity of spirit. I had to delve deeply into my country’s history and my own upbringing to fully appreciate the context of Hangberg and its people.

## 5 Finding ways of knowing

### Going into Hangberg to *kuier en gesels*

I enter my third year of this journey knowing that I *have* to find my way into Hangberg, despite my reluctance and sense of trepidation. I have posters to put up in the library and make an appointment to visit the Seniors' Club in the community hall one Wednesday morning. I have run out of excuses for not starting my fieldwork, realising that my extensive reading on decolonisation had created a sense of dread. I vacillate between not being ready and waiting for the weather to improve. I am by nature a confident person. I make a living from public speaking and conducting training workshops, yet something inside causes me to hesitate. On the morning of the appointment at the Seniors Centre, I realise how nervous I am. But, after years of reading and writing, it is now time.

The community hall is a blue steel construction between the library and the school at the entrance to Hangberg. The parking area is annexed by the local minibus taxis as their taxi rank. I am not sure if I can park my car between all the taxis. I carefully wedge it between two taxis and make sure it is locked and that there is nothing visible on the seats that might tempt a break-in. I do this instinctively, thinking how in South Africa we have become used to crime, and how often we do not see that it is a result of an ever-deepening inequality. Walking towards the hall, I am acutely aware of this inequality. The hall feels like an aircraft hangar: it is massive, the ceiling is about four stories high, pigeons and birds flutter in the open rafters. There are open mezzanine offices along the side walls, but for the rest it is a cavernous, noisy, and busy space. Sound travels from the different open areas where people meet. Near the entrance are a number of trestle tables and chairs where I assume the Seniors' Club will gather. Other meetings are being held across the hall. The floor is marked for netball or volleyball games, the paint scuffed and old.

Inside the hall, it is noisy like in an open market. Among the older persons there, there is lively chatter, with loud greetings each time a member enters from outside. In the small kitchen, there is a hive of activity with pots and pans, cups and saucers, and kettles clattering. I make my way to the group, being aware of the fact that I am the only white person in the hall, suddenly being

aware of my bushy white beard that flows to my chest. I wish I could know what they think – who is this white man coming towards them? Perhaps the man from the funeral parlour about their funeral insurance policy<sup>49</sup>? I feel completely out of place and awkward. I ask the people at the first table who Tannie<sup>50</sup> Violet is. Someone calls across the noise: “Violet, die man soek vir jou!” There is spontaneous laughter as the *double entendre*<sup>51</sup> is not missed by a single person. Tannie Violet waves me over from where she is busy with what looks like the attendance register.

She tells me to wait a while, as not all the members are there yet. She shouts to the kitchen, “Girlie, bring vir die meneer ’n koppie tee!” [Girlie, bring the man a cup of tea!] I decide to sit at one of the tables and introduce myself to everyone at that table. They all greet me with open (sometimes toothless) smiles and soft handshakes. I tell them about my study and why I am there. Tannie Fameeda immediately takes centre position at the table and invites me to come and visit her at her home. She says to the others, “Toe, moenie nou kom skaam wiesie, invite die man!” [Come on, don’t be shy now, invite the man!] I realise that there is a flirtatious bantering going on around my presence, that they are teasing me, using the opportunity in the kindest of ways to make me feel a bit uncomfortable. I wondered how often they had to walk into situations with white people where they were made to feel really uncomfortable. I take them up on it and reciprocate with my own flirtatious and playful chatting.

Tannie Violet draws everyone’s attention with a knife being tapped against a water glass. The noise at the tables of the Senior Club dies down, the remainder of the hall carries on talking and laughing. Tannie Fameeda is asked to open the proceedings with a prayer. A solemn and passionate prayer is said in Arabic, which is then repeated as passionately in English. A choir of “amen” sets off the lively chatter again among and across the tables. Tannie Fameeda is

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<sup>49</sup> Historically, funeral parlours owned by white people would sell funeral policies to coloured and black people, making huge profits from the dead and dying.

<sup>50</sup> Tannie is a term that refers to an older woman, loosely translated as “auntie”. The terms are often used interchangeably. Afrikaans white people would use the word ‘tannie’, while coloured people more often used the word ‘auntie’, even in Afrikaans, shortened to ‘antie’.

<sup>51</sup> There is an edged intention in the shouting across the room that I am looking for Tannie Violet, a playfulness of innuendo with the emphasis on this ‘man’ that is looking for her. Everyone knows that the speaker intended the innuendo, everyone understands the pun intended – he is looking not only for you but at you, wanting you. Of course, this is all in jest, but it is also textured and layered within the history of South Africa – she might as well have said “there is a white man who is looking for you...” As mentioned previously in footnote 14, sexual intercourse with a person “across the colour line” was illegal under the Immorality Act of 1927, even though this law was repealed in 1985. The innuendo would refer to this, and the fact that it often happened that people had relationships across the ‘colour line’.

proud of her prayer and her mastery of English, telling me that her son lives in England and that she visited him *en route* to Mecca. She now carries the status of a Muslim woman who has been to Mecca, colloquially known as a “motjie”. There is now even playful teasing and bantering among and across the tables. I realise that I am perhaps a novelty to them – this tall white man with a massive white beard and long hair, not trying to sell them insurance but interested in their stories. They love the interaction as much as I do. At my table, there are a number of Muslim women. I cannot guess their ages. They carry on with their conversation as if they have known me for years. A meal is served, consisting of what looks like an Irish stew. (I am vegetarian, so I do not partake of the meal.) I am told that these meals are provided by the local Muslim community. I see small plastic containers coming out of handbags into which half or more of the food servings is transferred. I feel sure these are not intended as “doggy bags<sup>52</sup>”. Perhaps for a family member at home?

Tea is served with cake brought by the daughter of one of the members who has a birthday. It is a large cake with thick, brightly coloured icing. Tannie Violet introduces me to the club members, saying that I will explain why I am there. I tell them about my study and that I would like to converse with anyone who is willing to invite me to their home. Tannie Fameeda shouts: “And I am number one?” Laughter erupts from all the tables. Five members put up their hands to indicate they are prepared to participate in my research. I am delighted at the response and make sure that I get their details. By now I feel completely at home with the group, I am called from one to the other, and jokes are made about my beard and the fact that I am so tall. A sense of connectedness, taking me back to my childhood interactions with Barbie who worked in our home, envelops me as I move among them. I am so touched by their generosity of spirit, their wide-open hearts, and their ability to just be in that moment with me, regardless of our histories. In that moment, a new story starts unfolding, a new togetherness that starts to transcend much of what has gone before, a moment of pure presence. I feel deeply honoured by their generous inclusion.

Back at the table where I started, I am offered more tea and cake by Tannie Girlie, which I gladly accept. After more lively conversation, I make my way around the corner to the library to ask if I may put up a poster advertising for more study participants. The librarian and both

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<sup>52</sup> A ‘doggy bag’ is a polite phrase for taking away food left over from the table for the family dog. It is often the case that food – especially left-over food from the tables of white people where coloured people would work – would be given ‘for the dogs’, knowing full well that it will be shared among a family at home.

her assistants are eager to learn more about my research and promise to not only put up the poster but to tell people about the study.

### **Entryways**

I have crossed the rubicon. All my fears and trepidation are dissolved by the time I leave the hall. Somehow, I cannot believe why I had been so hesitant and why it took me so long to take this step. Driving home I know that something has shifted within me, that I have been accepted in a manner that opens the door for me to look deeper into myself, to understand my own conditioning better, and to be more open to the stories I am about to hear. *They* put *me* at ease; they took control of my visit through their bantering and flirting with me, almost cutting me down to size before I could even consider a position of power. They created a humble togetherness through their spontaneity before I could even think of an approach that would open the door for a connection. I have now experienced a glimpse of the context in which I have to do my research, as much as this first interaction felt nothing like ‘research’ and more like a visit to a group of people I have known for many years, a real *kuier en gesels*.

## 6 The stories

I have been overwhelmed by the spirit of hope and courage displayed by those who seem to have no cause for it. (Swanson, 2008, p. 1)

*I am like the traveller  
who reaches the port and no one awaits him;  
I am the timid traveller who walks  
among strangers embracing and smiles  
not meant for him...  
Like the lone traveller  
who raises his overcoat collar  
on the great, cold wharf...*

Dulce María Loynaz in Behar (1997)

After months of deliberation and postponement, I have made appointments to visit the people who invited me to their home. It now feels real, that I will actually *do* the research, I am thinking. Despite almost three years of preparation for this moment, I am overwhelmed and anxious. My extensive reading of the impact of colonisation and apartheid, coupled with the anxiety brought on by my newfound awareness of my white history, means that I have no idea what to expect.

My first visit – suddenly the recording device does not work, as I fumble with notebook and pen. I will spend almost two hours with each family I visit. I realise that this experience might be as overwhelming for the participants as it is for me, having no idea what to expect or how I would respond. In retrospect, nothing could really prepare me for the journey I am embarking upon. I would have no control over the flow of the stories, the number of people who would walk in and out of the room, and everyone talking at the same time. I would lose count of who came and went, only realising after a *kuier en gesels* that I hardly asked any of the guideline questions<sup>53</sup>. But then, the people of Hangberg whom I visited would take me on their journey,

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<sup>53</sup> In earlier thinking and preparation, I compiled a set of questions that would guide me through the conversations. With more reading on decolonial theory, my thinking developed, and the idea of having a set of pre-prepared questions began to change with shifts in my own personal ontology. The emergent nature of this undertaking and the journey on which it took me led to many incremental shifts and changes along the way.

far wider and deeper than my research questions would have. While I tried to be at ease, and at no point was I made not to feel at ease, I was acutely aware of my whiteness, the way I was dressed, and that I was really standing out as the only white person on the street. I had lived in Hout Bay for four years by then, and apart from dropping someone off who had been hitchhiking from Cape Town, I had never been inside Hangberg until I went to meet the older people at the Seniors' Club. It had been raining and cold when I gave a lift to the hitchhiker, and I could see that she was exhausted. She lived in the upper, more informal part of Hangberg, which was inaccessible by car and would have had to walk the final distance.<sup>54</sup>

### *Oom<sup>55</sup> Basie and Tannie Mavis*

Oom Basie and Tannie Mavis live in a row of semi-detached houses. The front garden is barren, and a wire fence and a squeaky gate demarcate their property. I am escorted by Vanessa, a caregiver who lives in Hangberg, who I met through my volunteer engagements in the *dorpie*. Judging by the smiles of Hangberg residents when they see her, Vanessa is well loved. We are to sit in the *voorhuis*, with the same multi-coloured, plastic strip curtains that I would see in almost every home I visit. The curtain keeps the remainder of the house from sight. Referred to as “fly curtains,” they supposedly keep flies from entering a room.

I am welcomed like a friend and invited to take a seat. There is a couch and two chairs in the *voorhuis* and a *vertoonkas*<sup>56</sup>. A small coffee table in the middle of the room has a white crocheted doily and a vase with an arrangement of red plastic roses in it. The floor tiles attest to heavy traffic and a strip of carpet leads to one of the back rooms. It is dark through the strip plastic curtains. There is a clock on the wall and a photograph of two women in pink nylon housecoats typically worn by domestic workers in South Africa at their place of work. Oom Basie is wearing a “Jack Daniels” tee-shirt and shorts with no shoes, his brilliant white hair, goatee beard, and moustache unkempt. Tannie Mavis has short hair greying at the sides.

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<sup>54</sup> Numerous residents of Hangberg work in other parts of Cape Town. Public transport is often not affordable for them so they will hitch a lift back home in the evening.

<sup>55</sup> Oom is the Afrikaans word for “uncle” used as a sign of respect for an older man.

<sup>56</sup> A “voorhuis” is usually referred to as the first room of the house, literally translated as the front (of the) house. A “vertoonkas” is a display cabinet.

He calls me *die grootman* (the big man) from the minute I walk in, even though Oom Basie is taller than I am. I know that it is a term of respect for me. Ironically, Oom Basie is white, hence his nickname *Oom Basie*. Years of working on boats, day and night, are imprinted on his face. He tells his story with pride. I find it ironic to be conversing with Oom Basie, a white man, this being my first *kuier en gesels* in Hangberg – where I thought all the inhabitants were coloured (mixed-race). He has a loud, booming voice. Perhaps he is hard of hearing? He speaks as if he is out at sea commanding the team to pull in the nets or hoist the crayfish cages. I expect a loud “ahoy” any minute. I am struck by the contrast between his voice and the story he tells. He spent his childhood in the Marsh Memorial Homes, an orphanage in Rondebosch in Cape Town. When he turned 18, he had to leave the home and went to the army, where he transported Angolan prisoners of war between South Africa and Angola. After his national service, he asked himself:

Waarheen nou? Waarheen nou? Waarheen nou?

(Wheret to now? Wheret to now? Wheret to now?)

With nowhere to go, he wandered around Cape Town harbour where he found a job on one of the fishing boats, the William Gaggins.

Ek het my lewe gebly in die see.

(I lived my life in the sea.)

With a job, Oom Basie now had to find a home and food to eat. When the boats came to dock, the crew had to disembark for the duration of the stay. He had nowhere to go, so wandered up into Hangberg and was taken in by Tannie Mavis. Tannie Mavis is dwarfed by Oom Basie, hardly reaching his chest when they stand next to one another. She is quiet, and smiles a lot at his stories. When she laughs at one of his jokes, I see she has no teeth. There is a quiet, gentle adoration in her expression as she strokes a small white dog nestled gently between them on the couch.

When they met, Tannie Mavis had three children. Oom Basie took them in as his own, brought them up with his *chokka*<sup>57</sup> money.

‘n Harde lewe, (a hard life) he tells me, working non-stop, as *chokka* is only caught at night. During the day there was little time to sleep as the boat had to be chipped and painted. He made a lot of money, he tells me (although I do not see any sign of money in their home). Tannie Mavis says that Oom Basie is diabetic so when they have food, he must eat first. Today she ate half a bread roll that someone gave her a few days ago. Oom Basie shares how he loves eating mackerel tails. Many people in Hangberg lived from fish off-cuts from the fish factory when it was still operating. Oom Basie says:

Ou grote, jy het nog nie iets lekker ge-eet as jy nog nie daai makrielsterte met ‘n wit brood ge-eet het nie.

(Old big one, you have not eaten a *lekker* meal if you have not eaten mackerel tails with white bread.)

I am reminded in this telling how I often buy peppered mackerel from Woolworths, the upmarket food store chain in South Africa. Those have had their tails cut off. Now I know what happens to those tails. While I memorise these anecdotes, the couple carries on their own conversation. Later I realise there will be multiple stories woven throughout *kuier en gesels* occasions, and that I need to keep up. Stories of violence, sadness, loss, trauma, heartache, and abuse are layered in dense, rhizomatic/rhizo-linguistic complexities. Contradictions of emotions – laughing when storytellers relate their hardship with humour injected – confuse my assumptions and interpretation. I am struck by the way stories of incredible hardship are told with a smile. The stories are never linear. They jump from the present to the past, I find, leaving out details that sometimes make them seem incoherent. Then suddenly they revert to the earlier storyline. The stories flow. I do not need to ask many questions. I get the feeling the storytellers really enjoy telling their stories. It strikes me that it is probable, by the way they tell their stories with such enthusiasm and eagerness, that it is likely that few, not of Hangberg, have ever really asked them about their lives, certainly not with an authentic interest, certainly not now that

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<sup>57</sup> “Chokka,” used as bait, includes squid, cuttlefish, and calamari, and is harvested off the coast of South Africa.

they are older. They seem to appreciate the time and space of deep listening I am giving to them and their stories. I see how they tell their stories with pride and dignity.

Oom Basie and Tannie Mavis sit together on the couch. There are crocheted *doilies* over the back – and arm rests of the chairs and sofa. Chloe, the brilliant-white scruffy dog, has a flea allergy which is evident in her constant scratching. The couple stroke her all the time while Tannie Mavis and I listen to Oom Basie’s stories. They are waiting for the dog truck to come, I am told, to give Chloe some anti-flea drops that will be put on her neck. It is obvious the dog is loved dearly. When I leave, Tannie Mavis tells me that Chloe sleeps between them in the bed every night. The love and comfort Chloe enjoys is no doubt in stark contrast to the other dogs that scavenge through the streets. Without thinking, I ask them how they keep her coat so white.

Ons was haar,

(we wash her) Tannie Mavis replies.

Oom Basie tells of crime that is new in Hangberg and that they no longer feel safe. I notice there are no burglar bars or security measures in the dwelling. (The majority of wealthy people in South Africa live behind burglar bars, high walls, and electric fences. Only when writing this do I realise that my storytellers probably cannot afford such measures. I am relieved that I did not ask why they did not have them.) The whiteness of my thoughts about security, it strikes me, are only toppled by my thoughts about the massive flat screen television set against the wall. I wonder how they can afford that, when they say that they sometimes do not have food to eat. I shudder at the thought and must quickly bring myself back into the room. How I see this reality is creating tension for me, as I try to navigate away from my “subjugated projection of assumptions” (Swanson, in conversation). I come to these conversations with 55 years of assumptions, a product of my upbringing and privilege. I realise it is not only Oom Basie, Tannie Mavis, Vanessa, and me in this room, but multiple identities creating contingent perspectives through which I must navigate to find any one of the multitude points of entry.

The furniture is old. A young woman who I am introduced to as their daughter (M) suddenly appears at the door. She goes through to the bedroom to fetch a chair – a green canvas camping

chair, the seat of which has disintegrated. M takes a cushion from behind her mother and precariously perches on the frame of the chair. (Of course, I cannot help but think the chair may be another hand-me-down or throw-away from a white household.) I introduce myself and invite her to be part of the *kuier en gesels*. She tells me her story. Her 15-year-old son has ADHD. Later she says it is thought he may be living with autism. Tannie Mavis takes over, telling me that she (the daughter) was a ballroom dancer and danced at Sun City<sup>58</sup> before there was even the Lost City. (She had aspirations and achievements.) Her dresses cost up to R4000.00 each, which her father paid for. (Oom Basie is not her biological father, but it is clear that he is a father to her.) Now she has no work and tries to keep away from her son whose behaviour she finds challenging. The teacher at school told him to *Kom drink jou mal pille* (Come drink your crazy pills), so now he refuses to take the medication for his ADHD, and he refuses to go to school because he was spending more time in the headmaster's office than in class.

“What is it like to be an old person in Hangberg? ” I ask. Without hesitation, Tannie Mavis says “it is good! We have a good life. We will not go anywhere else”. Oom Basie says:

Julle whities dink julle wat daar oorkant bly is ryk? Ek is die rykste man in Houtbaai!

(You *whities* think you who live there on the other side are rich? I am the richest man in Hout Bay!)

Again, I stagger, aware of my own perception of their ‘poverty’. I find it difficult to place his comment. I assume he is referring to his life now that is no longer as harsh as earlier, and to his family. He explains that there is a bond of trust between him and his wife. She may go dancing, he trusts her. And he can walk out the door and she will never ask him where he is going. And when he receives his pay, she will tell him, “I am taking two thousand rand”. He trusts her and will never check how much money she took from his wallet. There is something deeply moving, I witness, about their relationship. People whom I spend time with would unlikely have found the time to sit in this *voorhuis* or listen to these stories. I sense that I am starting to find a different perspective as I become more open and vulnerable to this journey.

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<sup>58</sup> Sun City is a hotel in the Northern Province of South Africa with an extension called The Lost City.

I ask what will happen to them when they become older? I look at M, who, without being asked, says:

Ons sal agter hulle kyk.

(We will look after them.)

She explains how her (M's) own children left school to take care of their great-grandmother, how they showed her love and respect. A beautiful young girl of five – framed photographs of her hang on the wall – comes in with a brightly coloured ragdoll. She is shy, but obviously at home in what I assume is her great-grandparents' home. Her mother comes in with a smaller baby on her hip. There are now four generations in the *voorhuis*. This seems to be the norm with the storytellers that generations live together, mostly grandchildren with grandparents. Everyone talks at the same time. M has another conversation going with someone outside the house in the street. (I shall soon observe that this is not unusual. Oupa Petrus, whom I conversed with on a later occasion, sitting at the window of his first-floor flat, has a long conversation with a person standing in the street below while he is talking to me.) M explains how her children looked after their great-grandmother. All the while she is carrying on multiple conversations: one with me, one with her grandchild with the ragdoll, one with the person in the street. Eventually she shouts to the person outside:

Ek is besig!

(I am busy!)

Oom Basie says:

As ek dié regering was, het ek doodstraf terug gebring. Ek sal hulle hang – as hulle 'n vrou 'rape' of moor, sal ek hulle van hoog af hang.

(If I was *this* government, I would have brought back the death penalty. I would hang them – If they raped a woman or murdered, I will hang them from high up.)

His wife agrees with him. She listens intently to and affirms everything he says.

Mense dink apartheid was sleg? Nie vir ons mense nie. Nou is ons niks!

(People think apartheid was bad? Not for our people. Now we are nothing!)

I remember the words of the ‘coloured’ housekeeper who worked for us when I was growing up:

Ons is nie wit genoeg om wit te wees nie en nie swart genoeg om swart te wees nie.

(We are not white enough to be white nor black enough to be black.)

Again, I sense the precarity of people living in Hangberg, the in-betweenness of their situation, and how, in spite of this precarity, they seem to have created a strong sense of an integrated and supportive community.

According to Oom Basie, the fish factories were closed because white people across the valley complained of the stench. I know this. When I moved to Hout Bay four years ago, I became aware of how numerous white people were buying land adjacent to Hangberg, from where the view is spectacular. The buyers did not know about the fish factory, no doubt, that produced an unbearable smell when the fish season began. Fish off-cuts were used to produce dog and cat food and fish oil at the factories. The stench would hang in the air, making it almost impossible to breathe. But for the people of Hangberg, it was the smell of food on their table.

Vir hulle het die ‘factory’ gestink, vir ons was daai die ruik van geld!

(For them (white people) the factory stank, for us that was the smell of money!)

Tannie Mavis was made redundant when the factory she worked at closed, with no pension or retrenchment package. Now, both she and Oom Basie receive a social pension, which, I glean, is the sole income of the entire extended family.

Tannie Mavis tells of her ex-husband who was born with one leg and how he qualified as a motor mechanic.

Nie 'n backyard mechanic nie, 'n proper mechanic! Jy kan hom google dan sien jy sy garage.

(Not a backyard mechanic, a proper mechanic. You can google him, and you will see his garage.)

When the room becomes too full of people, I realise I must leave as I will no longer be able to record any of the discussion. Oom Basie looks disappointed; I am sure he had several more stories to tell. As we stand in the doorway, he says:

Ou grote, ek is jammer ons kon jou nie eers tee aanbied nie maar hier is nie suiker in die huis nie.

(*Ou grote*, I am sorry we could not offer you tea but there is no sugar in the house.)

Tonight, the Southeaster wind is howling through Hout Bay again, and I cannot sleep. My thoughts keep returning to Hangberg. Chloe is snuggled between Oom Basie and Tannie Mavis, no doubt. The friendly faces of the conversant looking with curious inquisitiveness at this white man getting out of his fancy car. And I wonder what Oom Basie and Tannie Mavis had for supper.

I make sure I am better prepared for my second visit with recording device, pen and paper, questions. Oom Basie and Tannie Mavis's *kuier en gesels* already provided so much insight into the family constellation of Hangberg, their perceptions of their own lived reality, and their views of politics and social conditions in their community.

### ***Tannie Tossie***

Tannie Tossie and her husband live in a wood and corrugated iron dwelling in one of Hangberg's small alleys. The alley in which they live is more like a winding pedestrian

walkway between houses which seem to have no boundaries as they spill into the alley. There are no street names and very few houses are numbered. Some have high fences; others open onto the alley. Indeed, life spills over into the alley: discarded furniture, old car parts, abandoned toys, rubble, and rubbish. Dogs laze in the afternoon sun, looking at me with weary eyes while they shake their heads to chase away flies. I cannot help wondering if the dogs are hungry. Some show signs of recently having given birth, teats sucked dry, flapping as they walk, foraging for food scraps. I feel like an intruder who does not belong here. I am not sure if the air is hostile or if I am imagining things. I know that this is my imagination and become more and more aware of the total acceptance of my presence in Hangberg by everyone that I encounter. In my neighbourhood that is 'protected' by high security gates, cameras, and armed patrolling, the presence of a coloured or black man would be reported to the Neighbourhood Watch as a 'slbm' (suspicious looking black man).

The view across the harbour to the beach and the valley where I live – and where many of the people of Hangberg themselves used to live – is beautiful. With my back to Hangberg, it seems the perfect position for a *dorpie*. (I am reminded here of the motto often promoted by estate agents/realtors of high-end properties: "Position, position, position!") Yet, I cannot turn my back on the harsh reality of Hangberg as I walk through the alleys looking for Tannie Tossie's house. She was one of the first club members to invite me to her home.

I see the house number painted on the side of the door. This must be it – a double-storied structure that looks like the treehouse we constructed in the big willow tree on my grandparents' farm when I was a child. The house is literally put together with pieces of corrugated iron and plywood. The windows and doors were obviously collected from a scrap yard or another building site. They are made from a variety of materials and look as if they were added as an afterthought. I open the wooden gate hanging from a single, rusted hinge and go down the few steps to the front door. The small backyard is neat, with more pieces of building material stacked in the corner. I knock. The door is opened by a younger man, impeccably dressed in a tie and crisp white shirt. I introduce myself. He is soft spoken with an even softer, gentle hand grip. The look in his eyes is as soft and gentle as his handshake. He invites me inside. Inside, the house looks even more like the tree house of my childhood: wood-framed with small windows. I am surprised at how spacious it is inside, and as impeccable as the man who opened the door. I assume this must be Tannie Tossie's son. He calls to someone in the room leading off the *voorhuis*. I hear Tannie Tossie getting up out of bed, complaining

that she is not feeling well. I immediately ask if I should come another day. She assures me that she is fine.

Tannie Tossie is 72. The man who met me at the door is her husband and is markedly younger than her. I am shown to an oval table with a crocheted tablecloth, exactly the same as the one I grew up with. There is a plate of lemon cream biscuits and a two-litre bottle of Fanta Grape set out for the visit. I am touched by the effort made to make me feel welcome. We sit down and Tannie Tossie's husband makes an excuse to leave us alone. I ask him to please join us. He is really gentle, sits down, and offers me some Fanta, which I gladly accept. I have not drunk Fanta Grape and eaten lemon cream biscuits since I was a child. Somehow, the scene reminds me of my own childhood. If I closed my eyes, I could be visiting my grandmother.

The house is filled with memorabilia, photographs, and prints of beautiful scenes, places that Tannie Tossie and her husband will never visit. The Swiss Alps and the Rocky Mountains, among others. I wonder about these pictures: Are they aspirational, or simply decorative objects, or are they representing both dreams and aspirations, maybe knowing full well they will never see those places? I remember looking at the pictures on chocolate boxes that my family would receive at Christmas time. The scenes of the Swiss Alps always made me long for another childhood, one in which there were overseas holidays. It was always no more than a dream – I am surprised to find my childhood dreams replicated right here. As with every home I visit in Hangberg, the *vertoonkas* in the *voorhuis* is filled with memorabilia. These alone hold many stories. I suddenly think I should be focusing more attention on *vertoonkaste* and the materialities of their storied contents. A very steep flight of wooden stairs leads to an upstairs room. The contrast between inside and outside cannot be starker. This home is gentle, serene, protected, and tranquil, the patterned lace curtains protecting the inside from the harshness of outside, filtering patterns on the walls. Outside, the smell of urine and human and dog faeces hangs thick in the sea air. Drunk people laze on the steps outside the *shebeen*.

Tannie Tossie tells me that she was born daai kant (that side). Her setting the scene this way falls into our conversation like a rock would fall from the sky. Of course, I know exactly where and what she means. And of course, she knows that I know exactly what she means. Daai kant. Over there. The other side. The scene is set, within the first sentence: subtly, implied, understood, *our* history. We are two of the many parts of the competing histories of this

country, and I know that I have not really been exposed to many of the other parts of these histories. Somehow, I already know that this *kuier en gesels* will bring me into another side of our country's history. I already felt it with my first visit to Oom Basie and Tannie Mavis, an almost immediate sense of proximalism, a sense of 'being with', or even to some degree 'being in-community with', the people from Hangberg. I know that I can never claim to be in their shoes, or to 'understand' or 'know' what life is like for them. The ontological starting points and the long history into particular socialisations and ways of being/knowing completely prevents it – at least – as an entirety. I know that I can only ever gain partial glimpses. I also feel that Tannie Tossie has set the scene, perhaps even unknowingly, of the entire sociopolitical, historical context, which perhaps says more about my white guilt than anything else. I will never know fully what this history really did to her, or what she felt when she uttered that short sentence, but I know I am about to experience at least some of the hitherto disguised historical facts. Perhaps we do not share a history at all, but have lived in two parallel universes all along? I do not yet know. She explains:

Bruinmense moet mos nou hier bly.

(Coloured people must *mos* now live here.)

The word *mos* appears four times in the first five opening sentences of our conversation. It implies an assumption that something is self-evident, an acceptance of something that is assumed (yet often not necessarily generally accepted). It is often problematic as a word, as it should rather be considered an expression which could have a variety of meanings. The use of the word *mos* can present a form of sarcasm: "Ek is mos geleerd" (I am *mos* (actually) educated), as if it dares not be questioned. *Mos* is often jokingly used to imply something that is not really what it seems to be. "Ek is mos nie bang vir honde nie" (I am *mos* not scared of dogs) could be a statement of fact, yet when adding *mos* it could mean the exact opposite. It may also denote a kind of superiority: "Ek drink mos nie juis wyn nie" (I do not *mos* (actually) drink wine). Not drinking wine may be an explanation of moral rectitude, or simply not having a taste for it. *Mos* is moreover an indicator of shared knowledge. First, *mos* appears to share similar (literal) meanings with the English "y'know," which functions as a marker of mutual knowledge shared by the speaker and hearer, or as a marker of knowledge that is generally known (Schiffrin, 1987, p.268, in Jantjies & Van Dulm, 2012, p. 8). Macaulay (2002, p.755)

mentions this use of “y’know, where it serves to signal new information in a narrative that is essential in order for the hearer to follow” (Jantjies & Van Dulm, 2012, p. 11). I retain the word *mos* in the majority of English sentences as it presents an intonation that is lost without it. “Fraser (1993, p. 3) further regards the word *mos* as not only a discourse marker, but as commentary markers. These markers occur optionally within the utterance, but signal an entire message separate from the propositional content of the utterance, and provide a comment on this propositional content. Thus, discourse markers can be said to have a ‘core meaning’ that steers the hearer to an interpretation of the proposition presented in the segments where the discourse marker occurs, or serves to comment on the proposition” (Jantjies & Van Dulm, 2012, p. 5).

I cannot translate nor explain the intonation of this sentence, for it is in the inflection that lies the (unintended?) infliction of shared knowing. As with many residents of Hout Bay, Tannie Tossie was born on a farm in the Hout Bay Valley across from Hangberg, where I now live. Hearing this creates a certain tension for me, as I am to hear over and over in the conversations: that I now live where *they*, my storytellers, used to live.

En toe kom hulle *mos*<sup>59</sup> nou harbour toe.

(And then they came *mos* to the harbour.)

I did not know at the time of buying my home that this land was previously owned by the people of Hangberg. It is clear that Tannie Tossie implies that this needs no explanation from her side, that I (should) know the history of South Africa. I should know that people of colour were forcibly removed from their land under the Group Areas Act. *Moet mos nou* (must *mos* now) is laden with meaning. It implies that Tannie Tossie knows that I know that she does not have to explain, but that it is also a contradiction, an assumption that should not really be assumed. In it is buried the history of Hangberg, apartheid, the Group Areas Act, and everything else that we share about this history, as well as that which starkly denotes a difference between us.

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<sup>59</sup> Here, again, *mos* is used to infer that I know what this entails, the entire history of the people of Hangberg, of apartheid, of South Africa.

The introduction to this story seems simple enough, yet I am immediately recruited in, hooked by the word *mos*, feeling slightly rapped over the knuckles, tested, brought right into the crux of the reality of how almost every story in this *dorpie* is framed. Yet, there is no mention of apartheid, of the Group Areas Act, of being forcibly removed. An entire chapter of history is encapsulated in the most understated sentence, again with *mos*: *En toe kom hulle mos harbour toe* (And then they came *mos* to the harbour). Encapsulated in the word *mos* is also resignation; it is what it is, or was. It is done. You understand *mos*... I hear the resignation in her voice, evocatively expressed in *mos*. In fact, she could have added *ja. Ja mos*...

How else could Tannie Tossie have told this to me? Perhaps: “And then our family was forcibly removed from our farm because of the colour of our skin and put in an area where there was no shelter, no running water, no services.” Instead, she presents the facts as gently as her husband’s handshake, describing the first place given to her family as *die eerste plekkie* (the first small place). I know that the diminutive use of the word *plekkie*<sup>60</sup> (place) does not necessarily refer to the size of it only. I wonder if Tannie Tossie is attempting to soften the harshness of what was most probably a *hok*<sup>61</sup>, or even a sense of affection. I do not understand what is implied by her diminutive. I would never know the meaning of *plekkie* and the reason for the diminutive. Perhaps she has fond memories of this home that had nothing to do with the size or shape of the structure. It could be a term of endearment or fondness perhaps for this little home, contradictory as it might seem. The irony of the area being called “Lily Valley” is striking: a beautiful name for a place that represents a harsh reality and divested of the vestiges of its even harder history.

As with many residents of Hangberg, Tannie Tossie’s deceased father was employed at the fish factory, whereas when they lived on the farm, he delivered milk to earn income. He also cleaned toilets<sup>62</sup>, working seven days a week.

Dan vat hy maar sy doppie oek.

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<sup>60</sup> Afrikaans has a way of using the diminutive almost as a sign of fondness.

<sup>61</sup> Several residents refer to the informal zinc structures that people live in as a *hok*. Most informal structures that might be referred to as a *hok* are built with corrugated iron, held together by a wooden frame. They become unbearably hot in summer and equally cold in winter. Open fires are used to warm the interior, posing a great risk of fire from overturned or unattended paraffin lamps or stoves, often leading to devastating fires which spread to neighbouring structures.

<sup>62</sup> Many homes do not have toilets inside but shared toilets outside.

(Then he also takes a drink.)

Tannie Tossie's description of her father is done with grace and empathy. A hard-working man who delivered milk on his bicycle, worked at the fish factory, cleaned toilets (which she describes in detail) seven days a week. A hard life, rewarding himself with a drink<sup>63</sup>. Tannie Tossie presents this fact, rewarding himself with a drink, with the same empathy with which she describes the forced removal, laughing as she tells of the many times they had to move. She again uses the diminutive, this time for a *dop* – a *doppie* (a drink) – in the same way one would describe a small or a “wee drinkie.”

The first death<sup>64</sup> in the family occurs when Tannie Tossie is ten years old. Her aunt is run over by a bus. Tannie Tossie is then sent to live with her grandmother. Grandchildren living with grandparents is a recurring theme in the stories. This was a very hard time for Tannie Tossie. She recollects how there was no time for school, or anything that a child would want or need. She had to work hard to forage food and gather firewood. Her step-grandfather treated her badly. Her real grandfather was murdered, another theme running through many of the stories. She explains the reasons for going to live with her grandmother:

Om winkel toe te gaan. ...Toe moet ek by my ouma bly want haar kind is mos nou oorlede. Maar ek het nie baie skool gehad nie. Ek moet maar vir my ouma gejelp het. Eendag is daar nie kos nie, gat ek en 'n ouvrou oor Duikersklip toe, gaan haal ons pêregoedjies. Maar my stief oupa het baie, baie sleg gewerk met my. Het my baie geslaan en ek moet die hond vat dan moet ek bos toe, berg toe gaan, gaan hout haal. 'n Spesifieke hout moet wies, rooikrans. ...En ek het gegaan met die hond en die saag en

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<sup>63</sup> The use of alcohol was introduced to local people by the Dutch settlers who established the first vineyards at the Cape. For centuries, farm workers' wages were paid partially with alcohol, usually the first run of a season's wine, the quality of which made it unsuitable for selling. This practice became known as the “dop system”, *dop* being an Afrikaans slang word for an alcoholic drink. The practice is now illegal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the sale of alcohol has been intermittently banned in South Africa. Alcohol-related accidents and trauma put a strain on hospital emergency wards, which need to be kept open to treat COVID-19 patients. A high percentage of children of coloured parents in South Africa are born with foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). The disease is viewed as a legacy of the *dop* system and resultant imbibement practices which became entrenched in social life.

<sup>64</sup> I am to learn that as in the rest of South Africa, death in Hangberg is an ever present theme indicative of another ‘slow violence’ – death as a result of crime, mothers dying in child birth due to a lack of healthcare support, accidents with paraffin stoves where many homes do not have electricity, children shocked to death by electric cables used to steal power, gender based violence, and alcohol- or drug-related deaths, to name but a few.

die byl. Dan kry ek 'n stukkie brood, dan gaan ek heeldag in die berg dan dra ek die hout af en as die hout klaar is vir huis dan moet ek dit nou opsaag en kloof.

Hy't met my gewerk soos 'n jong seun... ek moet soos 'n seun werk. Ek moet drie uur in die oggend opstaan om koffie of tee vir hom te maak, dan moet ek afhardloop hawe toe terwyl die water kook om die crew te sê hy drink eers sy tee of koffie. En as ek nie dit wil doen nie dan kry ek pak.

Hy slat my sommer moed 'n tou oek. My eendag geslat moet die sagie deur my gesig dat 'n merk lê. Slat my sommer blou oeg en ag dit wassie lekker tyd nie maar ek het maar uitgehou. Dan moet ek skool toe gaan, dan sê my ouma, 'Nee jy kan nie vandag skooltoe gaan nie want djy moet vir my dogter wasgoed gat was.' Dan staan ek heeldag en was van vanoggend tot vanaand. ...Dan daar kom alweer 'n dag dan sê sy, 'Moet jy vir jou antie nou wasgoed gat stryk.' ...Dan stryk ek heel nag deur tot more oggend toe. Maar ek het in, en toe verhuur sy mos, wat ek 'n bietjie ouer is dan sê sy ek moet gaan werk. Ek het net tot standerd drie gegaan.

(To go to the shops... Then I had to go and live with my grandmother because her child is *mos* now dead. But I did not have much schooling. I had to help my grandmother. One day there is no food, I and an old woman go over to Duikersklip, we go fetch *pêregoedjies* (periwinkles). But my step grandfather treated me very, very badly. He hit me a lot and I must take the dog then I must go to the bush, go to the mountain, go fetch wood. A specific type of wood it must be, *rooikrans*. And I went with the dog and the saw and the axe. Then I get a piece of bread, then I go the whole day in the mountain then I carry all the wood down and if the wood is finished for the house, I have to now saw it and chop it.

He worked me like a young boy... I must work like a boy. I have to wake up at three in the morning to make coffee or tea for him, then I must run down to the harbour while the water is boiling to tell the crew that he is first drinking his tea or coffee. And if I did not want to do this then I get a hiding.

He just hits me with a rope too. One day he hit me through my face with a saw that left a mark. He hit me that I had a blue eye, and oh it was not a good time but I held out. Then I have to go to school, and then my grandmother says ‘No, you cannot go to school today because you must wash my daughter’s washing.’ Then I stand the whole day and wash from morning to evening... Then there came another day and then she says, ‘Now you must go iron the washing for your auntie...’ Then I iron the whole night through till the morning. But I had in (cannot make out what she said), and then she rented me out *mos*, when I was a bit older and then she says I must go and work. I only went to standard three.)

Again, *mos*. Tannie Tossie casually adds that she was “rented out” to other people as a means of income for her grandmother. As she only completed five years of schooling, she would have been 11 years old then. She finds casual work, on and off, she says. When there is no work, she works for her grandmother, *potte skuur en soe..* (scouring pots and so on...). It does not help that she cries to her mother, she is sent back to her grandmother. ...*Toe verhuur sy my by miesies*<sup>65</sup> *Gluk* (then she rents me out to missus Gluk) where she worked for two years, earning five pounds<sup>66</sup> a month, working seven days a week. Almost all the money went to her grandmother. When she needs new shoes, her grandmother tells her to put pieces of cardboard in her shoes.

After two years of working as a domestic worker<sup>67</sup>, she finds work at the fish factory. After just three weeks of working at the factory, she is summoned to her mother’s home one Friday evening where she finds her mother is very ill. Her mother calls out to her, asking her to open

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<sup>65</sup> Coloured people commonly addressed white people previously with titles like *mies* (short for ‘miss’ or ‘mistress’) and *baas* (boss). I observe in all the conversations how difficult it appears for people in Hangberg to call me by my first name. The term *meneer* (sir, mister) is used throughout, even though I ask them to please call me by my first name. It seems difficult for them to overcome this habit. Growing up in apartheid South Africa, I would always address a person of colour by their first name. Now, I address the storytellers as *oom* (uncle) and *tannie* (auntie), which is the way Afrikaans children were brought up to address older Afrikaans-speaking (white) people.

<sup>66</sup> South Africa was still using the British currency at that time.

<sup>67</sup> For most women in Hangberg at the time, employment comprised either working in the fish factory or as a domestic worker for white people across the valley. Jansen (2019) traces the history of coloured women working for white people back to the first settlement of Dutch in the Cape, around 1652. Now, 26 years after the end of apartheid, this labour arrangement is still common practice. In 2019, an estimated 1.3 million people in South Africa were employed as domestic workers. (<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/you-cant-just-fire-your-domestic-worker-at-will-sa-still-hobbled-by-abusive-legacy-of-domestic-work-20191219#:~:text=South%20Africa%20has%20about%201.3,slightly%20lower%2C%20at%20one%20million>)

the windows. Her last words are *My kind, kyk na my kinnars* (My child, look after my children). As she says “Yes”, her mother passes away.

Weg. Ek het amper mal geraak daai aand. En die babatjie lê maar daar. Daai was die babatjie gewies. Drie maande oud.

(Gone. I almost went mad that evening. And the baby just lying there. That was the baby. Three months old).

Tannie Tossie sketched a profile of her father as a man who worked seven days a week. Her depiction of him is sympathetic. In comparison to her step-grandfather, the picture of her father is very different. Not knowing about the promise Tannie Tossie made to her mother, she describes the scene that ensues after her mother’s passing.

Ek het nou nie gewiet vir wat het ek nou ja gesê nie. Ek kom uit ‘n swaare lewe uit by ouma. Nou hier is een is drie maande, een is twee, een is vier, een is ses, een is nege, een is elf en ek is neentien. En ek’s, en ek is, en my pa sit in die kombuis. Hy’t ‘n lekker doppie in. Oe my hart was so seer. Ek sê ek is amper mal geraak daai aand. En toe word sy mos nou begrawe. My ouma sê, ‘Wiet jy moet nou huistoe kom want jy moet gaan werk.’ En jy moet weer gaan werk en sy wil een van die kinnars hê wat bietjie groot is wat agter ek kan as sy moet kan gaan werk. En sê die een wat elf is en bietjie groot is en een antie sê, ‘Ek wil die ene hê.’ En die ander een sê, ‘Ek wil die.’ En die anders moet by my pa bly. My pa het hulle so gesit en kyk. Toe sê my pa vir hulle, ‘Uh, uh. Dis nie bokke en skape om uit te deel nie. Dit is my kinnars en my kind kom kyk na my kinnars’. En my pa wiet nie eers ek het ‘n belofte gaan maak nie. En ek sit, kyk dit het baie swaar gegaan het...

(I did not know for what I had said yes. I come from a difficult life from my grandmother. Now here is one of three months, one is two, one is four, one is six, one is nine, one is eleven and I am nineteen. And I’m, and I am, and my father sits in the kitchen. He had a nice drink in him. Oh, my heart was so sore. I tell you I almost went mad that evening. And then she was buried. My grandmother says, ‘Know you must now come home because you must go and work.’ And you must again go work and she wants one of the

children who was bigger who can step in for me when I must go work. And says, 'the one who is eleven and bigger' and one auntie says, 'I want this one.' And the other says 'I want this (one).' And the others must stay with my father. My father sat looking at them like this. Then my father said to them 'Uh-uh. These are not goats and sheep to be handed out. These are my children, and my child comes to look after my children.' And my father did not even know that I had made a promise. And I sit, look it was very difficult...)

Tannie Tossie is now in charge of a family of nine, taking care of all of them on her father's wages, which she says were thirty rand a month, even in those days hardly a living wage. When the youngest child is two years old, Tannie Tossie finds a job as a char (domestic worker) for which she earns fifteen rand a month, half of what her father earns. There is no support from any of her family members. Tannie Tossie tells of sending the children to buy two sheep's heads, and how that would feed a family of nine. Her suffering has no end, and her grandmother seems to become more and more beastly towards her.

En ek was toe baie kwaad vir my ouma. My ouma vat my klere, wat ek voor gewerk het, sy gee dit vir my antie. Ek het nie klere. Ek trek sommer my ma se groot rokke aan met 'n band om.

(And I was then very cross with my grandmother. My grandmother takes my clothes, which I had worked for, she gives them to my auntie. I then wear my mother's big dresses with a belt around.)

From not having shoes, to being beaten by her step-grandfather who treated her like a labourer, and now being the head of a household, shunned by her family, Tannie Tossie's life seems to have been unbearably hard:

Want ons was te arm mos. Ons was mos arm. Ons het niks gehad nie.

(Because we were too poor *mos*. We were *mos* poor. We had nothing.)

A neighbour tries to teach Tannie Tossie how to prepare food, but since they hardly have any ingredients, it is difficult to do much cooking. The neighbour teaches Tannie Tossie to be creative with the primus<sup>68</sup>, baking bread and cakes on the small stove. She says this with much pride. Some days they hardly had any food, they just ate maize. Her father loses his job because of his drinking, so at times the family lived only on her wages. With a smile, she says:

Maar dan kry ek vis by die mense. Vanaand bak ek hom. Môre sit ek 'n artappel in. Oormôre sit ek 'n tamatie in (giggel). Eenkeer dan gooi ek 'n bietjie kerrie in. RS: 'En dan word hy kerrie vis. Dan's hy op sy lekkerste.' Hy word sommer van (cannot make out the words.) Ja, gerek. Dan's dit 'n hotnot. Dan's dit snoek koppe. Maar ons gaan aan. Ons eet. Eendag sê my broer, 'Ek is nou moeg van vis frikkadelle.' Hy sê 'n mens eet dan nou net brood (lag). Toe sê ek, 'Ek moet hom nou rek dat julle almal kan eet.' Dan't ons mielierys en regte rys gekook. En nou maak ek groot pot sop. Dan kom my vriende daar verby my. Dan sê hulle vir my, 'Ek wil al dji wees wat so met 'n groot pot staan en kos kook en wat.' Dan sê hulle, 'Nee man, wanneer gaan geniet dji vir jou?' Toe sê ek, 'Daar's nie tyd nie.' Ek moet na die kinnars kyk. En dan staan ek, dan ons het nie water gehad nie. Die kinnars moet vir my water gedra het.

(But then I get fish from people. Tonight I fry it. Tomorrow I put a potato in. Day after tomorrow I put a tomato in. One time I add some curry. Then it becomes curry fish. Then it is the tastiest. I stretch it. Then its a hotnot<sup>69</sup>. Then its snoek heads. But we go on. We eat. One day my brother says I am now tired of fish *frikadelle*<sup>70</sup>. He says, 'a person must now only eat bread.' Then I said, 'I must stretch it so that all of you can eat.' Then we cooked mealie rice and real rice. And now I also make a big pot of soup. Then my friends come by. Then they say to me, 'I want to be you who can stand and cook food with a big pot and what.' Then they say, 'No man, when do you go and enjoy yourself?' Then I say, 'There's no time. I must look after the children.' And then I stand, then we had no water. The children had to carry water for me.)

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<sup>68</sup> The Primus stove, the first pressurised-burner kerosene (paraffin) stove, was developed in 1892 by Frans Wilhelm Lindqvist, a factory mechanic in Stockholm. (Wikipedia)

<sup>69</sup> The word 'hotnot' is a derogatory word used for coloured people, coming from the original Dutch descriptor *hottentot*. It is also a name used for a particular fish species found along the South African coast.

<sup>70</sup> A 'frikadel' is usually a meat ball, but fish offcuts are often used to make these rissole-like balls.

The children carry water to fill a big drum that Tannie Tossie uses for washing clothes. There is no electricity, no washing machine. There is no money for candles. A friendly neighbour shows Tannie Tossie how to make a little lamp from a peanut butter jar: a hole in the lid through which a piece of cloth is strung like a wick, hanging into paraffin. The children find this funny as the smoke of the little lamps make their nostrils black.

The contrast between Hangberg and (white) Hout Bay remains problematic to this day as the disparity increases with wealthy homes owned by foreigners with little understanding of the history. In Hangberg, streets are not maintained and basic infrastructure is lacking. Many of the informal houses have no running water, electricity, or toilets. Many of the streets are not kept clean in the way streets in the white neighbourhoods across the valley are. The *dorpie* is troubled by constant protests and clashes between residents, police, and the local council.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout her story, Tannie Tossie weaves in the death of close family members. Four members of her family were murdered, two died of natural causes (her mother and her father), her one sister and her aunt were run over by a bus, and another sister died in a fire:

Want ma se pa was oek\*<sup>72</sup> vermoor toe ma hulle jonk gewies het.

Maar toe, toe my ouma se dogter het toe 'n bus ongeluk gehad.

...my ma laat roep my en sy's siek, baie siek...Ek kan net vir haar ja gesê het toe sterwe sy.

...ek het neentien jaar na my pa gekyk en toe raak hy mos siek. Hospital toe, toe sterwe hy...

Een broer was vermoor...

...my een suster het uitgebrand,...

...die ander broer wat nege was hy't oek hy's vermoor...

...stief oupa... Toe het hulle hom vermoor...

Toe ry die bus hom ook dood (lag). Dis my ma se broer gewies.

(Because (my) mother's father was also murdered when mother was still young.

But then, then my grandmother's daughter had a bus accident.

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<sup>71</sup> Hangberg police recently clashed with employees of the local clinic over safety issues in the community.

<sup>72</sup> I use a \* to indicate points of iterative reflexive moments. These are not footnotes explaining a word or concept, but more part of my dwelling on thoughts or ideas.

...my mother had someone call me and she's sick, very sick... I could only say 'yes' to her and then she died.

...I looked after my father for nineteen years and then he mos got sick. To the hospital, then he died.

One brother was murdered.

...my one sister died from burns...

...the other brother who was nine, he also was murdered.

...the step-grandfather. Then they murdered him.

Then the bus ran over him and also killed him. That was my mother's brother.)

\* The word 'oek' is highly symbolic here, literally translated meaning "also". Within this context, however, it indicates how death is but a continuation of everyday life, of murder and heartbreak as normalised, as being part of the quotidian and the fabric of the everyday in Hangberg, mingling among the smell of fish and tripe. The matter-of-factness of this telling is heart wrenching and hard to believe. Tannie Tossie grew up in the time of apartheid and was directly affected by, among other things, the Group Areas Act promulgated in 1950. At the time of their forced removal to Hangberg, residents were promised that the properties they were allocated would be registered in their names. For most, this never happened. Hence, when Tannie Tossie's father died, they had to vacate their home. The house had been given to her father, with no right of inheritance or transfer to his heirs. She describes their enforced nomadic lifestyle, although she never mentions that they were forcibly moved. She eventually gets her house after having her name on "the list" for ten years. Apartheid was not just an ideology, but a material, spatial, and bureaucratic manifestation of race and inequality.

The moves are described as a matter of course, never once with resentment or any hint of an indication that it was unusual to be moved. Only twice does Tannie Tossie refer to apartheid and the Group Areas Act, again with the qualifying *mos* – inferring, rightly so, that I would know exactly what she is referring to, but also resignation to it. I cannot help but wonder to what extent Tannie Tossie assumes, and to what extent she narrates this story for me in particular. I am after all an older white man, I was subject to the apartheid regime and benefitted from it – of course I should know. Well, somehow, I did not know. I grew up in a typical white, Afrikaans middle-class home where apartheid was not questioned, mostly because it benefitted whites. It was not strange for me that coloured people lived outside of town in the *lokasie*, that

they did not go to school with us or were not allowed on “our” side of the post office, the bank, or shops. They had their place and we had ours. This had been so normalised as to be completely taken-for-granted. As a young person, I simply accepted this system. As Tannie Tossie expresses:

Toe moet ons mos nou vir die group, group aerial, toe moet ons nou daar padgee van daar oorkant Mariners want ons mag toe mos nie meer daar bly nie.

(Then we must *mos* now for the group, group areas, then we must give way there from opposite Mariners because we are *mos* no longer allowed to stay there.)

She refers not only to coloured people being removed, but also to *bantoes*<sup>73</sup> (black people = *bantu*). The Hout Bay beach was divided for different races, she says, with the estuary as a marker separating the “whites only” beach from “coloured sections” of the beach. Black people were always given the worst section of the beach, often without sand and mostly covered with rocks. In her last reference to being moved, she qualifies: *Ja, wat hulle geskuiwe is want, want toe’t ons mos die apartheid* (Yes, that they were moved because, because then we had *mos apartheid*).<sup>74</sup>

Apartheid is seldom referred to by name, yet every story is infused with its legacy. Tannie Tossie uses the definite article, *the*, before apartheid, giving it extra emphasis, without being

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Bantu people’ was never intentionally derogatory. It was a descriptor of an ethnic group of people in Southern Africa. It still is the correct term according to ‘anthropological categorisations’, but in South Africa under apartheid, like everything else, it became a derogatory word.

<sup>74</sup> “Narratives that emerge in fieldwork encounters are contingent articulations of oneself that unfold through the implicit negotiation process between a researcher and a research participant. On the other hand, these narratives are embedded in broader socio-material relationalities” (Lesutis, 2018, p. 509). Lesutis refers to a “disquieting encounter”. The way the conversation delves deeper into the sociopolitical reality narrated by Tannie Tossie is more than just disquieting; it is deeply disturbing for me to hear. In this moment of articulation (Swanson, 2004), there is also a “contingent articulation” (Lesutis, 2018, p. 509), where history stands before us, where the power relationship is exposed in a narrative performance so powerful that it leaves me speechless. I find myself repeating the word *sjoie*, the Afrikaans expression usually uttered in extreme heat – “Sjoe, dit is warm” (Sjoe it is hot) – or in extremely difficult circumstances, when *sjoie* would suffice for an inability to respond meaningfully. *Sjoe*, like *mos*, as a modal particle does not necessarily carry semantic value, but among Afrikaans-speaking people, in certain contexts, it carries tremendous power as an utterance of disbelief, incredulity. (The word is similar to the English word “wow”.) I have no other words with which to respond. Tannie Tossie’s story is so deeply “embedded in socio-material realities” (Lesutis, 2018, p. 509) of our country that it literally leaves me searching for words.

overtly critical of it. She tells her story in the gentlest way, without a hint of emotion showing on the surface. I am the one overcome with emotion when listening to her rendition of a life of suffering. I cannot help but ask what happened to the emotion in recounting her story. How does one forgive, how does she manage to tell this story with such calm? In fact, why does she even bother telling me her story? I am an outsider, and I am the embodiment of everything that apartheid did to her and every other person in Hangberg. I grapple with her kindness, wondering how she sees me, as there is not the slightest indication of resentment, anger, bitterness in her storying. Could it be that I am the first white man to set foot in her house, sit at her table, and listen to her story? What would her encounters have been with white men in the past? We hold each other with a gentle gaze of understanding and deep gratitude, what for I am not sure yet.

There is an immensely stark contrast between the narratives of Tannie Tossie, and of politics that is filled with anger and resentment. Rightly so. It is as if I find her narrative unacceptable, as if I *want* her to be angry to assuage some of my guilt or redeem my ignorance. The family was evicted from their property, the farm Duikersdam, between 1950 and 1958. From there, they are given shelter in Lily Valley, where the nine children shared one bed. They are then moved to Mariner's, which not long after is also declared a "white area". From here, they are evicted and moved to the "vaalblokke" – blocks of small apartments with no inside bathroom or toilet. From here, the family is evicted after Tannie Tossie's father dies and she is taken in by an "auntie" in Hungry Hills. The "poor" live higher up behind the apartment blocks. When eventually they have to leave here, Tannie Tossie finds a toolshed which she erects in someone's backyard<sup>75</sup>. She is evicted after what sounds like a time of being threatened by one of the younger women in the house:

Maar ek het maar, sien ek daar by die werk hulle het 'n klein toolshed...Ja en ek vra vir hulle of ek dit kan kry. Hulle sê vir my, 'Ja djy kan dit kry.' Iemand het ook en ek sit dit by iemand se jaard. Toe het ek 'n boksie daarin. As iemand kom kan hy sit en ek moet staan (lag). En ek gebruik mos nou hulle toilets daar. En maar dis nie lekker gewies nie. As dit reën, daai damp coat wat op die dak is dan waai die wind dit op. Dan klim ek oppie dak dan gat sit ek klippe daar op en as dit winter is dan lê ek, dan vat ek

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<sup>75</sup> Backyard dwellers are a common feature in densely populated settlements on the Cape Flats. Typically, a backyard dwelling is a shack erected behind a landlord's house, who then rents the dwelling to tenants.

‘n groot plestiek. Dan sê ek vir my suster, ‘Djy lê met jou een kind bo.’ Ek lê met jou ander kind bo. Dan gooi ons plestiek oor ons. Ons lê op die kooi goed, maar ons gooi plestiek oor. En een nag toe sê ek, ‘Oh jitte, ek moet nou toilet toe gaan en toe ek my voete afsit toe loep die water en ek trek my voete en ek skud my voete.’ Toe sê ek, ‘Nee nou gaan ek nie pee.’ (Lag.) Oe en. Dit was hard times. Just imagine wat djy moet deurmaak in jou jong lewe.

(But I had to (leave), so I saw there at work they have a small tool shed...Yes and I ask them if I can have it. They say to me, ‘Yes you can have it.’ Someone has as well and I put it in someone’s yard. Then I have a little box in it. If someone comes, he can sit and I must stand (she laughs). And I use mos now their toilets there. And but it was not nice. When it rains, that damp coat that is on the roof then the wind blows it off. Then I climb onto the roof and I pack stones on it and when it is winter I lie down, then I take a big plastic. Then I say to my sister, ‘You lie with your one child on top. I lie with your other child on top.’ Then we throw plastic over us. We lie on the bedding, but we throw plastic over. And one night I say, ‘Oh goodness, I must now go to the toilet and when I put my feet down the water runs and I pull up my feet and I shake my feet.’ Then I say ‘No, now I am not going to pee.’ (Laughs) Oh and. Those were hard times. Just imagine what you must go through in your young life.)

As I listen to her story, eating all the biscuits on the plate, drinking the sweet Fanta Grape, I find myself wanting to soothe the pain of the story. It is hard to bear witness to this story. Tannie Tossie applies for a council house and waits almost ten years for the house. In the meantime, she moves in with a friend where fourteen people live in two rooms. Eventually she gets her own apartment, but with an outside toilet. Tannie Tossie describes the toilet:

Daar’s anner mense oek. Almal moet weg harbour toe kom. Toe’s ons in die harbour kom, toe kry ons nou ‘n plekkie hier by die vaalblokke. Daai was ‘n twee slaapkamers en ‘n kombuis en ‘n voorhuis. Ons het nie, ons moet vir ons die toilet was oek toegewaaai van die sand. Ek en daai vrou het altwee gegaan toe maak ons dit skoon, ek en sy sukkel so ons kan ‘n toilet het.

Rayne: Maar dis toe nou buite die huis, die toilet?

Ja, jy kyk so oor dan sien djy daar’s die toilet.

En dan maak ons, ek en daai vrou, dan maak 'n groot gat en dan nou een tyd is dit my beurt om 'n groot gat te maak, grawe en een tyd as daai gat vol is dan gooi ons dit toe vir die vullis en so.

En dan's dit weer my beurt dan maak ek 'n groot gat dan gooi ons die vullis daar in en dan maak ons dit toe. So't ons aangegaan in die lewe. Daar was nie toilets om te chain te trek nie.

En toe ons in die vaalblok kom toe't daai houtjie toilets was buite gewies, daai staan goeters. Wat my pa so met die stok stiek (lag). En uh later aan toe sit hulle toe mos nou lektriëk in daar en toilets gechain en so aan.

(There are other people as well. Everyone must go to the harbour. When we get to the harbour, we get a little place here in the *vaalblokke*<sup>76</sup>. That was two bedrooms and a kitchen and a lounge. We don't have, we have to for us the toilet was also covered with sand because of the wind. I and that woman, we both went to clean it, I and she struggle so, so we can have a toilet.

Rayne: But this is outside the house, the toilet?

Yes, you look across and then you see there is the toilet. And then we make, I and that woman, then we make a big hole and then one time it is my turn to make the big hole, dig and once that hole is full then we throw the rubbish in it and then we throw it full with refuse and so on.

And then it is my turn again then I make a big hole then we throw the rubbish in there and we close it up. So we went on in life. There were no toilets where you pulled the chain.

And when we got to the 'vaal block' then those wooden toilets were outside, those standing things. The ones that my father used to poke with the stick. (Laughs) And uh later on they mos put in electricity in there and toilets with chains and so on.)

For Tannie Tossie, growing up was not easy. Those were very hard times. In spite of this, she managed to support two of her sisters to become nurses and two brothers to obtain teaching

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<sup>76</sup> The *vaalblokke* (literally translated, grey blocks) are apartment blocks owned by the Cape Town City Council. They are grim in appearance, hence the name *vaalblokke*. The Afrikaans word *vaal* is used to describe something that is dull, often used in reference to food or a person: *vaal afval* (grey or dull tripe) or a *vaalmannetjie* (a dull small man).

diplomas. I have no idea how Tannie Tossie managed all this, considering her situation and the cost of education. Yet, this is something I hear over and over again in the stories: parents, grandparents, and siblings helping family members to get an education. An investment of hope, it would seem, to create a better future for the next generation: to invest in others, towards building a different future. Young boys earn money helping fishermen pull nets ashore. They are called at three in the morning to do so:

...dan vat hy sy boek saam in die middag dan gat leg hy vir trek en dan eet hy 'n stukkie brood en dan vat hy sy boek saam en so leer hy en as hulle roep, afdra dan sit hy die boek eenkant en dan hardloop hy gat... Nou sit, dan moet hulle mos onner insit. Maar dan gaan hy, hy sê hy't geld nodig. En soe't hy maar getrek. Natuurlik het hulle mooi getrek. Klomp geld verdien en dan kom hy dan seg hy, 'My T hierso is nou my geld.' Dan vat ek die helfde. Nou sê ek vir hom 'bêre dji daai vir jou en ek vat die helfde, help met die kos koop in die huis.' Want dis mos kos (lag).

En hy het soe um, maar ek is vir die Here dankbaar en die anner ene het oek matriek gedoen en hy.

(...then he takes his book with him in the afternoon and then he goes to wait for pulling (in the nets) and then he eats a piece of bread and then he takes his book with him and so he studies and if they call "Carry off" then he puts his book aside and he runs *gat* (fast)... Now sit, then they must sit below. But then he goes, he says he needs money. And so he pulled (fish nets). Of course they pulled well. Lots of money earned and then he comes and says, 'My T<sup>77</sup> here is now my money.' Then I take half. Now I tell him 'save that for you and I take half, helps with buying food for the house.' Because it is mos food (laughs) And he so um, but I am grateful to the Lord, and the other one also did matric and he<sup>78</sup>.)

After all the hardship she has recounted, of which I know I have only heard snippets, Tannie Tossie maintains: *Maar die Here was vir my goed.* (But the Lord was good to me.) Tannie Tossie tells her story without a trace of hatred, resentment, or bitterness. As with many of the

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<sup>77</sup> Muslim children will refer to an older auntie as "T" – a term used in this community by both Muslim and non-Muslim people for grandmothers and aunties. It is thought the word is derived from the "-tie" in "auntie".

<sup>78</sup> Matric is the final year of school in South Africa, now also known as grade 12.

other people I meet in the *dorpie*, there is an overwhelming sense of gratitude towards God. At no point do I get the sense that Tannie Tossie is overtly religious, strange as that may seem. As with other residents, Christian or Muslim, who are immensely grateful: They thank God or Allah, and acknowledge that without God or Allah they would not have survived. As I get into my car and drive home, I wonder what it is that enabled them to survive. Indeed, more than survive; as it appears from my perspective – thrive. I am conscious of the deep sense of gratitude.

Maar die Here was vir my goed. Die Heer het my deurgedra.

Maar ek het gesurvive moet alles het die Here vir my gejjelp. Ek sê die Here was vir my goed gewies in daai tyd.

En hy het soe um, maar ek is vir die Here dankbaar en die anner ene het oek matriek ....gedoen en hy.

En ek is vir die Here dankbaar.

En die Here het my so deurgedra.

En ek het altyd, wie, ek het vir die Here gevra, ek sê, 'Here. Ek willie 'n visserman hê nie.'

Dan is dit, daarom sê ek vir die Here dankie wat ek kon gegee het vir my susters en vir my broers. Ek het hulle skool gegee.

Nou moet ek na, op hierdie ouderdom moet ek maar vir my geniet, my lewe geniet. En ek sê vir die Here dankie vir 'n man wat besorg is oor my. Hy's altyd daar vir my. Hy willie hê ek moet kaalvoet loep nie (lag).

Ek is vir die Here dankbaar van die lewe wat ek nou het.

Maar ek meen as, daarom sê ek vir die mense, ek kon baie sê wat die Here vir my doen en hoe laat Hy vir my deurgekom het.

Dis die genade van die Here.

Dan sê ek, 'Here, U het mos vir my deurgekom.

U het 'n behae in my lewe gehad.'

Dan sê ek, 'Here baie dankie.'

(But the Lord was good to me. The Lord carried me through.

But I survived with everything the Lord helped me. I say the Lord was good to me in that time.

And he so um, but I am thankful to the Lord and the other one also did matric and he.  
And I am grateful to the Lord.  
And the Lord carried me through.  
And I have always, who, I have asked the Lord, I say 'Lord. I do not want a fisherman.'  
Then is it, therefore I say to the Lord thank you for what I could give my sisters and my  
brothers. I gave them schooling.  
Now I must after, at this age I must enjoy myself, enjoy my life. And I say to the Lord  
thank you for a man who cares for me. He's always there for me. He doesn't want me  
to walk barefoot (laughs)  
I am grateful to the Lord for the life I now have.  
But I mean as, that is why I say to people, I could say a lot of what the Lord does for me  
and how He came through for me.  
It is the grace of the Lord.  
Then I say, 'Lord, you mos came through for me.  
Lord, you delighted in my life.'  
Then I say, 'Lord, thank you very much.'

It is clear throughout the conversations that faith plays an immensely important role in the lives of the Hangberg community. The temptation to consider the role religion plays in the lives of people who have been marginalised is there, yet it is my sense that what has been storied here goes much deeper than that, as neither a "blind faith" nor a resignation to "God's will". Tannie Tossie packages her life's suffering in touchingly beautiful archaic (biblical) Afrikaans words that are almost impossible to translate. The sentence *U het 'n behae in my lewe gehad*, translated as "Lord, in my life, Thou delight"<sup>79</sup>, encapsulates much of the deep internalisation of her own suffering, as if to say yes, it was bad, but it was good in the eyes of the Lord. Now, looking back, for Tannie Tossie, it all makes perfect sense. She accepts it, it is good. How, I ask myself, can Tannie Tossie, given what she has endured, reach a point where she is able to say "Lord, thank You very much"?

The conversation with Oom Basie and Tannie Mavis focused primarily on Oom Basie's entry into Hangberg, his life, and his political views, while the one with Tannie Tossie, although

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<sup>79</sup> Psalm 37 verse 4

dwelling on her childhood, included reflections on Elderliness, the presence of death in her family, immense hardships in her youth, and the central role of her faith. Indeed, Tannie Tossie shared a poignant story of what life as a child after the evictions was like. Now, the conversation with Oupa Petrus and Ouma Tienie, specifically on the part of Ouma Tienie, delved into Elderliness and her experience of being an older person in Hangberg. Oupa Petrus on the other hand related his continuing involvement in the community as a caregiver and the satisfaction that this calling had brought him in life. He praises the Lord for enabling him to carry out this role as an upstanding community member.

### *Oupa<sup>80</sup> Petrus and Ouma<sup>76</sup> Tienie*

Oupa Petrus and Ouma Tienie, 72, live upstairs on the first floor of the *vaalblokke*. The entrance to their flat is around the back. An old dog lies at the entrance. Inside there is lively chatter. Oupa Petrus sits regally in his armchair looking out the window, participating in two conversations at the same time. He waves at a couple of youngsters outside, mouthing and showing with his hands: *Ek gesels nou net eers hier* (I am busy talking here now). The house is filled to capacity with furniture and the walls are covered with photographs. People come and go. The television is on for one of the great-grandchildren to watch.

Oupa Petrus had a brain operation on December 31 to remove a blood clot. After he resigned from his job at the Council, he became a volunteer caregiver in the Hangberg community. He did a course at Groote Schuur Hospital to “do diabetic feet”: *Mens moet weet wat jy doen as jy aan diabetics se voete sny* (One must know what you are doing if you are cutting diabetics’ feet), he tells me. He does everything as a caregiver, he says, from bathing people to cutting their toenails.

Both Ouma Tienie and Oupa Petrus are caregivers: Ouma Tienie for white people and Oupa Petrus for coloured people in Hangberg. Ouma gets paid, Oupa does it as a volunteer. Oupa tells me that people in the *dorpie* also call him *oupa*, some even call him “doctor”. It is clear that he is revered for his role. Testimony to that is the “audience” he has outside the window.

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<sup>80</sup> The terms Oupa and Ouma are Afrikaans for grandfather and grandmother, often used as an endearing (yet in some cases patronising, depending on the context) term for an older person who is not necessarily a grandparent.

People come and chat to him to see how he is doing. He tells me that the new nurse at the clinic did not like him, she accused him of selling medicine to the people in the dorpie, so he stopped his caregiving. (I hear from the members of the Hangberg Sewing Club that this nurse is not well liked.) Oupa Petrus' narrative is one of gratitude: *Ek is dankbaar, ek was nooit ontevrede gewees nie* (I am grateful, I was never dissatisfied).

Oupa Petrus and Ouma Tienie have six children, one of whom died. Their five grandchildren live in the house with them. I ask the children and the grandchildren who looks after whom. The one granddaughter tells *Ek kyk na oupa* (I look after grandfather). The others confirm *Ons is hier vir hulle* (We are here for them). She continues:

Oumense is daar om gerespekteer te word, om na gekyk te word, en als te doen wat ons om vir hulle 'n rustige lewe te gee, hulle is nie bevoorreg om soos ander mense te gaan en af te tree en alleen te is nie, en daarom is ons daar is om seker te maak hulle het, hoe sê mens, wat hulle makeer dit het hulle, as daar nie is hulle is ook verstaanbare mense...

(Old people are there to be respected, to be looked after, and (we should) do everything for them that we can to give them a peaceful life, they are not privileged to retire like other people and be alone, that is why we are there to make sure that they, how would one say, what they need that they have, and is not, they are also reasonable people (they will understand).)

I ask if in their view old people should be sent to a long-term care facility. Spontaneous laughter breaks out: *Nooit! Ons glo nie daarin nie* (Never! We do not believe in that). Ouma Tienie adds: *Ons spring maar almal in saam* (We all jump in together). The daughter adds: *Ons sal ook swaarkry as hulle nie hier by ons moet is nie* (We will also have difficulties should they not be here with us). I ask them to explain. She states: *Meeste van die tyd is my ouma altyd daar, as ons miskien uit lyn uit trek, ouma en oupa sal vir ons weer in lyn in sit* (Most of the time my ouma is always there (for us), if we perhaps step out of line, ouma and oupa will bring us back in line). She explains:

Wat hulle vir ons gedoen het kan ons vir hulle terug doen, ons glo daaraan, hulle is onse blessing. Ons was hulle blessing gewees, ek is die dogter, ek was hulle blessing wat ek

gebore geword het, en nou is hulle ons blessing met ons kinders se blessing en klein kinders se blessing. Soooo, ons moet kyk na onse blessings, ons moet kan alles gee wat ons kan, en ek as 'n dogter, probeer my beste, as ek klaar uit my werk uit kom ek hientoe, voordat ek by my huis kom, kyk ek dat hy, dat al kleinkinders reg is ek kom altyd, dit is die rede waarom ek persoonlik nie glo aan ouetehuis nie, ek glo, jy moet self kyk. Kan nie sê dis 'n burden nie, want dis net blessings. En dit is hoe ek my kinders leer, en hoe ek vir hulle geleer het want ek het meerderheid van hulle groot gemaak. So hulle is onse blessing en jy moet nie vir hulle... Ok jy voel somtyds moeg, maar nie so moeg dat jy kan opgee nie. Jy kom moeg dat jy kan nog aangaan, die Here gee ons krag dat jy kan kyk na onse blessing.

(What they have done for us we can do in return for them, we believe in that, they are our blessing. We were their blessing, I am the daughter, I was their blessing when I was born, and now they are our blessing with our children's blessing and grandchildren's blessing. Soooo, we have to look after our blessings, we have to give everything that we can, and I as a daughter try my best, when I leave work then I come here, before I go to my home, I see that he, that all the grandchildren are right and I always come, that is the reason why I personally do not believe in old age homes, I believe, you must look after them yourself. Cannot say it is a burden because it is only blessings. And that is how I teach my children, and how I taught them because I brought most of them up. So, they are our blessing and you must not...ok at times you feel tired, but not so tired that you can give up. You arrive tired that you can still go on, but the Lord gives us strength (so that) you can take care of our blessings).

The blessings that Ouma Tienie's daughter perceived the Lord had bestowed on them, through the love and care they received from their children and more in their life, are poignant and were recounted spontaneously. What then, I asked the daughter, had the children learned from Oupa Petrus?

Respek nommer een. Respek, never mind wat daai grootmens doen, jy gaan hom respek. Daais nommer een wat ek geleer het by my pa en my ma. En soos ons in nou se lewe sien moet jy maar dankie se vir die Here daar is kinders wat respek nog het. Dis wat ek geleer het nommer een. Nommer twee is never mind hoe groot ek is, ma van

vyfkinders, ek, of 'n grootmens vir my winkel toe stuur ek moet gaan, en ons gaan sonder om te moan. En ekke is ene by my huis, toe my ma bel toe moet ek hier wees, moet my huis maar net so los, ek moet hier wees. So daai is die main goed wat hulle my geleer het. En wat ek vir my kinders leer. Ek vir jou bel moenie se ek kom nou en dan kom jy more nie. Jy gaan nou kom. En dit is wat ek geleer het van hulle twee in my kinderdae so ek moet dit oordra.

(Respect number one. Respect never mind what that adult does, you are going to respect him. That's number one that I learned from my mother and father. And as we see in life of today, you have to say thank you to the Lord that there are still children with respect. That is what I learned number one. Number two is never mind how grown-up I am, mother of five children, I, if an adult sends me to the shops I must go, and we go without moaning. And I am alone at my home, when my mother phones, I have to be there, must leave my house as it is, I must be there. So those are the main things they taught me. And what I teach my children. I phone you, don't say you come now and then you come tomorrow. You are going to come now. And that is what I learned from them in my childhood days, so I have to transfer that.)

Ouma Tienie:

Dit is nie maklik om te gedra het nie, dis die genade van die Here.

(It is not easy to have carried, it is the grace of God).

She continues:

So groot as wat ons is, moet ons mekaar respect. My ma moet elke maand Groote Schuur toe vir 'n injection in haar oog. Ek moet uit my werk uitbly dat ek haar kan hospitaal toe neem. My pa is ook nou onder Groote Schuur, ons moet alles. Ek se altyd 'lead by example'. Hulle het vir ons die pad oopgetrap, so hulle kan die results kry.

(As grownup as we are, we must respect one another. My mother must go to Groote Schuur (hospital) each month for an injection in her eye. I must stay away from work

so that I can take her to hospital. My father is also now under Groote Schuur, we must (do) everything. I always say, "lead by example." They walked the road open for us, so they can get the results).

Ouma Tienie:

Ons baklei heen en weer oor mekaar maar ons verstaan mekaar, ons kom uit op 'n verstaan oor ons respek het. Ons kom op daai dinges wat ons mekaar tog verstaan.

(We fight to and fro with each other, but we understand each other, we reach an understanding because we respect one another. We arrive at that thing where we understand each other).

What is it like to be an older person in Hangberg, I ask? Ouma responds first:

Is nogal vir my, ek dra dit seker maar goed want ek is nou 72, so ek dra dit seker maar goed, een van die gelukkige mense in die Here.

(Is somehow for me, I suppose I carry it well because I am now 72, so I suppose I carry it well, one of the fortunate ones in the Lord).

Ouma Tienie's daughter addresses her grandmother: *Hoe voel Mammie daaroor?* (How does mammie feel about that?). Ouma replies:

Ek voel alright, ek voel really alright, ek kan niks daaraan verander nie, maar ek voel nogal nie teleurgesteld nie. En Houtbaai se mense, ek waardeer nogal van hulle ook en ek het hulle lief kom kry. Ek weet nou nie of hulle vir my so lief het nie, maar ek het hulle darem nou verskriklik lief.

(I feel all right, I feel really all right, I cannot change anything about it, but I do not feel disappointed. And the people of Hout Bay, I appreciate from them also and I came to love them. I am not so sure if they love me as much, but I love them terribly much).

I press on: *Hoe sien mense in Houtbaai ouer mense?* (How do people in Hout Bay view older people?). Ouma Tienie replies:

Weet jy daar is nogal baie wat ek al tegemoet gekom het wat hartseer is moontlik oor hulle huise, en daar is ook wat ek baie baie teëgekome het wat baie baie gelukkig is soos wat ek nou miskien gelukkig is. So kan ek dit stel, ek het ook 'n vriend wat ook nou diep in die sewentigs loop, sy is geskei en by haar kinders aan die onderkant. Dit gaan glad nie lekker daar nie maar sy druk maar deur en die wind waai so dat ons nooit eers by mekaar uitkom nie. En haar man is mos in die home maar hulle is al jare geskei. So daai part kan ek nou uitdraai dat daar is ook maar oumense wat nie baie gelukkig is nie. En ek is seker maar van die gelukkiges as mens seker maar aan die Here is dan kyk jy seker maar anderster. Met Hom help. Sonder Hom sou ek dit nie gemaak het nie.

(You know, there are many whom I have come across who are possibly sad about their houses, and there are also many, many who I came across who are very very happy like perhaps like I am happy now. So, I can put it this way, I also have a friend who is now deep in the seventies, she is divorced and with her children at the bottom. It is not going at all well there, but she perseveres, and the wind blows so that we never get to be with one another. And her husband is *mos* in the home but they have been divorced for years. So that part I can now turn out that there are also old people who are not all that happy. And I am probably one of the happy ones if one is close to the Lord then you probably see differently. With His help. Without Him I would not have made it).

I ask Oupa Petrus what he would ascribe the success of his and Ouma Tienie's ageing to, and what it is like being old in Hangberg:

Wel, soos die Here jou dra, soos die Here jou dra, dit maak dit suksesvol, verkeerde dinge wegkyk. So wanneer jy van die verkeerde dinge af weg kyk sal dit 'n sukses wees.

(Well, as the Lord carries you, as the Lord carries you, that makes it successful, one looks away from wrong things. So when you look away from the wrong things it will be a success.)

Ouma elaborates:

Ek verkies nogal Houtbaai. Ek dink Houtbaai is vir ouer mense nog bietjie veilig. Daar's 'n concern van my broers wat nou voorbly (Retreat, Wynberg), drie van hul, en my dogter bly in Delft, hulle sal aanmekaar van skietery praat, en my skoonsuster sal praat toe dit weer geskiet was. Hulle is op 'n goeie plek, maar daar rondom hulle is mos waar die skietery is. Dan bly die ander familie mos so 'n gat van skietery dat hulle amper nie kan loop nie. Nee nee dan verkies ek seker vir oumense Houtbaai.

(I prefer *nogal* Hout Bay. I think for older people Hout Bay is still fairly safe. There is a concern from my brothers who live in front (Retreat, Wynberg), three of them, and my daughter lives in Delft, they will talk all the time about shootings, and my sister-in-law will talk about when there were shootings again. They are in a good place, but there around them is where the shootings are. Then the other family lives in a hole of shootings that they almost cannot walk. No no then I prefer mos Hout Bay for older people).

Oupa:

My ma het gewerk by die boere. Ek was nooit ontevrede gewees nie, nooit ontevrede gewees nie, ek is dankbaar daarvoor.

(My mother worked for the *boere*. I was never unhappy, never unhappy, I am grateful for that.)

Three grandchildren and two grandchildren live with Oupa Petrus and Ouma Tienie. There is a constant movement of children coming and going, sounds of laughter and crying, a television on a cartoon network, a radio playing competing with sounds from outside. People, cars, dogs... I ask the children:

Kyk ouma en oupa na jou of kyk jy na ouma en oupa?

I address a grandson directly, still draped on the sofa listening to our conversation, whether his ouma and oupa look after him or he looks after them. Ouma Tienie answers:

Ouma kyk na haarself

(Ouma looks after herself).

The grandson explains:

Ons is ook hier vir hulle

(We are also here for them).

Ouma Tienie, at 72, is still a caregiver for *white* people in the *berg*<sup>81</sup>, she says. Both she and Oom Basie tell of their medical experiences in minute detail. Ouma Tienie is “under” Groote Schuur with an eye problem. Oupa Petrus had a brain haemorrhage which was operated on two months earlier. In spite of their medical problems, the conversation is all about gratitude.

His daughter points out:

Hy’s a blessing vir almal gewees in die Houtbaai, en vir ons as kinders

(He’s been a blessing for everyone in Hout Bay, and for us as children).

The daughter affirms how loved Oupa Petrus is and how people reacted when he was in hospital:

Die mense, die public wat ingebel het, jo! Hulle was baie bekommerd, vir my gese hulle bel, hulle bid vir ons, bid vir hom, auntie J van die creche het R50 se airtime gestuur want ek moet nou rondbel vir mense... en ek is so bly vir die Here vir Houtbaai se community wat vir ons as ‘n familie daai dag gebewys het. Jo, hoe waardeer hulle my pa.

(The people, the public who phoned, yo! They were very worried, told me they phoned, they prayed for us, prayed for him, auntie J from the creche sent R50 to buy airtime

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<sup>81</sup> “The berg” is short for Constantiaberg, an affluent white suburb close to Hout Bay.

(for Ouma Tienie's mobile phone) because I had to phone people all around... and I am so grateful to the Lord for the Hout Bay community who showed us as a family that day. Yo, how they appreciate my father).

Oupa Petrus worked in Hangberg as a caregiver, Ouma Tienie in Chapman's Peak. She says: *Ek kyk nie na die bruinmense nie* (I do not look after the coloured people). Everyone bursts out laughing. I ask her why not, to which she replies: *Hulle kan maar baie problems wees* (They can give lots of problems). She laughs at her own joke. Oupa Petrus was the only male caregiver working in Hangberg. He always worked as a volunteer. *Alles wat jy doen moet jy doen uit liefde uit* (Everything you do you must do out of love). Right until the time of his operation in December 2019, Oupa Petrus worked in the community. When his family tried to stop him, he went out and worked without their knowing. I ask him how his care working began:

“Meneer, dis nie ‘n maklike storie daai nie.” In the background, his wife says, “hy was gebore daarmee.” He continues: “wel, baie kyk ek, kyk ek so, evens die nurste, die dokters het ek ook gesê by die hospitaal, gesejulle, menskansienjulle is aangeplak, want julle het nie die passion, het julle nie, wat die Here vir julle gegee het nie het julle nie. Jy moet iets het wat die Here vir jou gegee het. Die ding van hoe dit begint het, ek het ‘n droom gehad meneer, en ekt het hom gehad, ek het driemaal die droom gehad. Ek droom hoe die Here daar op die berg kom, net die parte steek uit. Hy se vir my die eerste maal - dit is jou werk. Jy moet die dinges gaan doen. Ek se wie ekke? Hy sê ja jy! Ek sê maar ek is mos nou nie geleer vir dit nie. Die Here sê ek sê vir jou hierdie werk moet jy gaan doen. En, uh, ek skrik wakker en ek bid. My tweede droom wat ek weer had, het is ‘n wit vrou daar reg oor Kronendal skool, dinges, sy het ‘n kruppel kind wat ek moet dinges, ek moet kyk agter hierdie kind. Ek moet slap ook daar en whatever. Ek is die een wat die kind moet droog maak en whatever dinges in die aande, maar dit was nie vir my ‘n problem gewees nou nie. So het ek gekyk. My derde droom wat ek het is die kind wat ek in die middag moet op die beach sit. Dan sit ek en koop ek vir hom ‘n ice cream en vir my ‘n ice cream dan sit ek en hy nou daar so en kyk nou die weer en whatever. Toe kom daar ‘n helicopter en kom sak daar by ons. Die dinges sê hulle kom nou vir my en vir hom optel. Ek het gebid ek het gebid ek het gebid en so het ek begin te werke daar. Soos ek vir u sê, ek kan sien dokters baie. Die dokters by die hospital wanneer hulle sê nai man broe, professor man nai man broe, dinges want

hulle se op my kan hulle staatmaak, hulle kan vir my stuur en whatever.... As ek nie 'n ding verstaan nie dan vra ek, en so het ek baie geleer.

(Meneer, that is not an easy story. In the background, his wife says, he was born with that. He says, well, I look at many of them, I look at them, even the nurses, the doctors also said at the hospital, said you, one can see that it is fake, because you do not have passion, you have not, what the Lord gave you you have not. You must have something that the Lord gave you. The thing about how it started, I had a dream, meneer, and I had it, I had this dream three times. I dream how the Lord comes there on the mountain, only parts are visible. He says to me the first time – this is your work. You must go and do this. I say, Who me? He says Yes, you! I say but I am now *mos* not trained for this. The Lord says I say to you that this is the work that you must go and do. And, uhm, I wake up and I pray. My second dream I had, there is a white woman there opposite Kronendal school, *dinges*, she has a cripple child that I must *dinges*, I must look after this child. I must sleep there as well and whatever. I am the one who must dry the child (his nappy) and whatever *dinges* in the evenings, but that was not a problem for me. So I looked. My third dream I had was the child I had to take to the beach in the afternoon. Then I sit and I buy him an ice cream and for me an ice cream, then we sit, me and him, and we watch the weather and whatever. Then a helicopter came and sat there near us. The *dinges* say they are now coming to pick up me and him. I prayed, I prayed, I prayed and so I started working there. As I tell you, I can see doctors a lot. The doctors at the hospital when they say now man brother, professor man, noy man brother, *dinges* because they say they can rely on me, and they can send me and whatever. If I do not understand something I ask, and so I learned a lot).

Oupa Petrus also coached the *Kaapse Klopse* (Cape Minstrels), an historical Cape Town event that takes place every year on January 2nd (*tweede nuwejaar* = second new year's). Groups of coloured people who belong to bands dress in brightly coloured costumes and sing and dance through the streets of Cape Town to celebrate the Malay singing tradition. The bands compete against one another as well. It is clear that Oupa Petrus is revered by the locals for his generosity and caring. His children affirm this adoration in their stories of him. The couple has lived in their two-bedroom apartment for 25 years. Children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren were

born in this home. The two had lived in their previous apartment for 18 years. It had two rooms, a kitchen and a lounge, but no bathroom, only an outside toilet. Ouma Tienie applied for a dwelling with a bathroom and was then allocated this apartment.

By now several people have entered the *voorhuis*. Three daughters who came from work and several grandchildren. In the bedrooms I hear talking, a baby crying. I ask about the baby that sounds unhappy. It is a great-grandchild, three months old, I am told. The baby cries bitterly. Someone jokes that it sounds as if the child is being murdered. A young man enters, a look of surprise on his face when he sees me. Everyone greets him, he looks shy. He has the lanky body of a teenager. I shake his hand as everyone tells him to *groet die unkle* (greet the uncle). I remark that it seems to be a really happy home where everyone wants to spend time. Ouma Tienie laughs and says: “*Hulle moet net in die aande huistoe gaan*” (They must just go home in the evenings). I ask what time they all go home. Ouma Tienie laughs and says *hulle gaan somtyds laat huistoe* (they sometimes go home late).

K is the grandchild who entered last. I ask, *Wat kom maak jy hier?* (What do you come and do here?). Ouma Tienie is quick to answer: *Eet en drink!* (Eat and drink!). K repeats after her, affirming *Eet en drink!* Everyone laughs. I ask him, *Wat maak ouma wat lekker is vir jou?* (What food does ouma make that is nice for you?). To which he replies: *Vis* (fish). Ouma chuckles and I feel the couch moving with the rhythm of her chuckle. I ask him what else brings him to his grandparents. *Om die familie altyd saam te smee en so* (To always keep the family together and so). I ask K if he will look after them when they are old one day. *Hulle wil nie glo hulle is al klaar oud nie!* (They do not want to believe they are already old!), he replies. Everyone laughs.

Oupa Petrus changes the mood of the conversation to continue with his story of how he cared for people when they were dying. He would never take his eyes off his patient, he says. He would hold their hand, wash them, put on some roll-on (deodorant), and sit with them while they drank something. Many people, even doctors, would comment on how respectful Oupa Petrus’ caring for his patients was.

The apartment is on the first floor. Oupa Petrus and Ouma Tienie are more affluent perhaps, judging by the interior of their home and their furniture, than occupants of adjacent apartments. All the walls and the display cabinet bear photographs. Wedding photographs of Oupa Petrus

and Ouma Tienie, children at school, weddings of children, photographs of posed moments to remember. There are several photographs of the *Kaapse Klopse*. Oupa Petrus sits alongside the window. I notice that he is distracted. Someone points out how popular Oupa Petrus is in the community, and my attention is drawn to visitors standing outside in the street next to a car. I look out the window to see a group of young men looking up at us. They have come to visit Oupa Petrus. Two parallel conversations begin between the young men and Oupa Petrus, and Oupa Petrus and me. I try to keep up, but soon give up trying to figure out who is speaking to whom. This is a community, a family. Well-loved and well respected. Clayton remarks: *Die kleinkinders is hier soos kinders* (The grandchildren are like children here).

I ask if I may visit the family again. Ouma Tienie says, *Ja, ek gaan vis bak daai dag. En tee maak* (Yes, I am going to fry fish that day and make tea). We were talking so much that tea was forgotten. Clayton laughs when he says that the security guard at Constantia Dorpie shopping mall had told him when Clayton wanted to enter the mall that “This mall is only for rich people.” *Ja*, says Ouma Tienie, *it has changed a lot... al daai plekke word gastehuse. Al die werkers gaan nou verskuif. Groot Constantia* (Yes, it has changed a lot...all those places are becoming guesthouses now. All the workers must now move<sup>82</sup>. Groot Constantia).

It is almost impossible to bring the conversation to a polite closure. There is a convivial mood of conversations crisscrossing the room, even with the group of young people downstairs in the street. I eventually depart, with a feeling that for the time I was there, I was completely taken up in their world. I am aware I should not make assumptions about a family and its dynamics from a single visit, yet there seems to be a deep sense of inter-reliability and reciprocity holding this family together and ensuring their prominent role in their community.

### ***Tannie Fameeda, who went to Mecca***

The woman seated opposite me at the Seniors’ Club during my first visit to Hangberg is Tannie Fameeda. With her *hijab* and commanding voice, I can see she commands respect (and attention). She speaks with authority and holds everyone at the table to attention. She is

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<sup>82</sup> A number of coloured people escaped the evictions and forced relocation under apartheid (in the 1950s) and continue to live on tiny smallholdings in Constantia, an affluent white suburb where the first Dutch settlers established a wine farm, Groot Constantia, in the 1600s.

amusing and was not shy to be one of the first persons to invite me to visit her at home. She scolds others who are hesitant to invite me. She has a plastic container in her bag in which she deposits half her lunch. Her slice of the birthday cake is folded in a paper serviette and is put into her bag as well. Her stories make us all laugh. She speaks mostly in Afrikaans, but when she tells us about her son who lives in England and her journey to Mecca, she switches to English. She makes sure that I understand that she is a *modji* – an honorary title for a woman who has undertaken a pilgrimage to Mecca – and that she is actually “quite grand.” Everyone at the table laughs at her outrageousness, but it is clear she is well loved.

Tannie Fameeda tells us that because she is so “grand”, she only eats butter (this she says in English), but she always served her husband margarine. A woman at the table says, *dis van botter iet lat die Ingels so lekker gly* (it is from eating butter that the English glides so well). Everyone at the table laughs and jokes about her grandiose, theatrical stories. I looked forward to visiting her at her home.

The address is marked clearly in white paint on the outside wall of the dwelling. Tannie Fameeda opens the door. This time her *hijab* is not tied in the usual manner, it hangs loose over her head with the ends on her shoulders. She is wearing a caftan-like dress. The door to her home is below street level and opens into a kitchen. The room has only one small window and is dark. There is a long wooden kitchen table, now white from years of scrubbing, and a small bench and a chair for each of us. The kitchen looks bare in the dark, even though it is 11h00. There is a smell that turns my stomach, which I try hard to ignore. Several flies hang lazily in the air.

Tannie Fameeda is 72 years old and tells me that she was brought up by her grandmother after her mother died when Tannie Fameeda was four years old: *My granny het my baie mooi groot gemaak, maar ook baie bederf. Want toe ek sewentien is, toe kon ek nog nie eers 'n bondel wasgoed was nie, want sy het my baie bederf.* (My granny brought me up very well, but she also spoiled me. Because when I was seventeen, I could not even wash a bundle of washing, because she spoiled me.)

At the age of 17, Tannie Fameeda’s grandmother died. She moved in with her uncle and his wife. He was Muslim, she was a Methodist and “a beautiful lady” who taught Tannie Fameeda how to do housework. At the age of 25, Tannie Fameeda fell pregnant with her first son, whose

father is the Portuguese owner of the cafe where Tannie Fameeda worked. She eventually had seven children with her husband. I wonder at this... My mind is racing: yes, but when did she marry? Who was he?

Tannie Fameeda worked at the fish factory for six years, and then in restaurants, including Kronendal Restaurant in Hout Bay, where she baked her famous scones. (I remember frequenting the restaurant years ago for the wonderful scones.) She weaves her story through years of working in restaurants and baking scones, for which people came from far and wide. Food is her passion:

Ek was die beste skons bakker in Houtbaai, laat ek dit noem vir jou. I love cooking, ja. Mense kom moan nog hier. Maar dan soos die latest gaan werk vir ons 'n pot breyani maak, 'n pot kerrie maak, ons gaan vir jou die rys kook, of hulle kom koop um ses, of tien of twintig rotis. Hulle het guests, hulle gaan hulle eie kerrie maak maar hulle wil bak en hulle kan nog die vulsels vat en dit gaan oorslaan. Ek maak so bietjie, so as ek nie het nie dan maak ek, daar het ek alweer gister vir die biduur skons gemaak. Maar weet nie wat toe gebeur die skons nie wil geruis het nie. Maar het geeet né, dit was nie doughy of so nie.

(I was the best scones baker in Hout Bay, let me tell you. I love cooking, yes. People still come and moan here. But then as the latest go can I make a pot of breyani, a pot of curry, and we will cook the rice, or they come and buy uhm six or ten rotis. They have guests, they are going to make their own curry but they want to bake and want to make the fillings and see that over. I make a little, so if I don't have then I make, there I made scones again yesterday for the prayer meeting. But I don't know what happened, the scones did not prove. But they ate it, it was not doughy or so.)

I ask Tannie Fameeda what it is like to be an older person living in Hangberg.

Nee, ek moet sê baie het verander. Die mense is baie caring nou. Want hoe sê die Government. I'm sure this is the Government that put these carers on the road. Because hulle kom. Hulle is gestig by die clinic nê. En dan kom hulle met hulle naelgoedjies en goeden die mense wat nog pyn het, wat bedlêend is kom hulle met hulle waslappies en

goete en dan was hulle en maak daai persoon comfortable. Hulle was by my ook die tyd wat my bene so gepyn het. Dan sit ek dan rasper hulle nou die hardegoed van my voete af en maak vir my lekker comfortable en dan toe het hulle 'n contract. Ek dink daaityd het hulle contracts gehad. As hulle contract klaar is dan sien djy hulle mos nie weer nie. Maar as jy wil weet, gat vra ek net, gat se by die clinic of die kinders gat sê, 'My ma soek 'n ietse, baksmeer,' of whatever dit is. Maar ek moet sê dit het baie verander. Ja, baie ondersteuning en ek gat sê die kerkmense ook maar en die Muslims ook, alle gelowe, waa rhulle kan. Kyk hoe staan ons gelyk. Ek het gaan sing in die kerk. Ek het Woensdag is my vrind oorlede. Tamala man.

(No, I must say a lot has changed. The people are very caring now. Because what does the government say? I am sure this is the government that puts these carers in the road. Because they come. They are based at the clinic, hey? And then they come with the nail goodies and things and then they wash them (patients) and make that person comfortable. They were here with me as well the time that my legs ached so much. Then I sit and they grate the hard stuff off my feet and make me nice and comfortable and then they had a contract. I think that time they had contracts. If their contract is finished, then you don't see them again. But if you want to know, you just go and ask, go tell them at the clinic or the children go and tell them, "my mother is looking for something, for rubbing her back" or whatever it is. But I have to say it has changed a lot. Yes, a lot of support and I can say that the church people also and the Muslims also, all religions, where they can. Look how we stand as equals. I go and sing in the church. On Wednesday my friend died. Tamala, man.)

I met Tamala at the club and remember her well. She was the one teasing Tannie Fameeda about the butter that makes spoken English glide so easily from her mouth. Tamala was 75 years old. Tannie Fameeda says it is hard for people to believe that she herself is already 72:

Toe sê ek maar nee ek wil staatmaak ook nou. Ek kan nie so baie ver dink van daai jare nie ek moet lank sit voor ek bykom. Ouderdom het my.

(Then I say I also want to rely on others now. I cannot remember so well from those years and I have to sit a long time before I catch up. Age has gotten to me.)

It is clear that Tannie Fameeda frequently loses track of her storyline. Yet, as the matriarch in the house, a singer in the mosque and a church, and a baker and a cook for the community to make extra pocket money for her holidays, Tannie Fameeda lives a full life. And she feels that her life is good, surrounded by people who like and support her.

I ask Tannie Fameeda who lives in the house with her:

By my bly A, die meisietjie wat op tik vir jare gewies het, wat ek die kindjie groot gemaak het. Maar sy's nie nou op tik weer nie of op drugs nie maar sy rafel 'n bietjie uit want sy drink 'n bier maar iemand, baie mense sê vir my, 'Antie, los vir haar. Die wyn is nie so erg nie, maar die drugs.' Maar ek wil vir u dit sê, my dogter, toe sy weg is van die huis waar ons party aand en nie geweet waar sy slap nie, het opgedoen HIV, HIV positive. Daarom het ek vir haar gesê van my vroeër man poging, 'Fameeda, die meisiekind is nou pregnant, jy weet. Wat gaan ons maak met die kindjie?' Want toe sy by Groote Schuur (hospital) is om die baby te geboorte te gee toe wandel sy sommer daar by Groote Schuur af in die pad daar waar die denne is van drugs. So meaning of die dokters en security het haar genotice sy's maar al daar. Toe roep hulle my man in, toe praat my man met my. Toe sê hy, 'Fameeda, wat gat ons maak? Dis maar onse kleinkind. Ons gat nounie die kind vir die honde gee nie of begrawe nie, dis 'n mens. Ons gaan bymekaarkom met ons ou pensioentjies dan gaan ons die kind grootmaak.' En so in 2013 he died. Where he worked at Sandy Bay het hy geval en ek dink hy was mos diabetic, toe 'n heart attack miskien gekry.

(With me lives A, the young girl who was on tik<sup>83</sup> for many years, whose child I brought up. But she is no longer on tik or on drugs, but she does misbehave a bit because she drinks beer but someone, many people said to me 'Auntie, leave her. The wine is not so bad, but the drugs.' But I want to tell you, my daughter, when she was away from home where some evenings we did not know where she was sleeping, she contracted HIV, HIV positive. That is why I told her about my earlier man attempt. 'Fameeda, the girlchild is now pregnant, you know. What are we going to do with the baby?' Because

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<sup>83</sup> Crystal meth

when she went to Groote Schuur<sup>84</sup> to give birth to the child, she wandered down there by Groote Schuur down the road where all the drug dens are. So meaning that perhaps the doctors or the security guards saw her, but she was there already. Then they called in my husband, then my husband spoke to me. Then he said 'Fameeda, what are we going to do? This is our grandchild. We are not going to give the child to the dogs or bury it, it is a human being. We are going to put together our pension money then we are going to bring up this child.' And so in 2013 he (the husband) died. Where he worked at Sandy Bay he fell and I think, he was *mos* diabetic, then a heart attack maybe.)

I realise, as I listen, that I recognise A, as I often see her at Sandy Bay beach when I take my dogs for a walk. Her son is in his first year at school. Tannie Fameeda tells me that the father of A's child is from Burundi or Kenya, she is not sure, but *his* father is from Kenya and his mother from Burundi. She goes on:

Ja, nou hy't gekom Suid-Afrika toe om te kom study. Maar ek moet sê hy het baie mooi groot geword maar ek dink so meer mense struggle so mooier maniere het die kinders né. Nou hy, sy raak partykeer met hom onbeskof dan sê ek, 'Nee, uhuh, sorry!'

(Yes, now he came to South Africa to study. But I must say he was brought up very well, but I do think the more people struggle, the better manners their children will have. Now he, she sometimes becomes rude to him then I say 'No, uhuh, sorry!')

I ask who else lives in the house. Although I asked this question a few minutes ago, she lost track. She tells me that S lives there as well, and that he will inherit the house<sup>85</sup>. She makes me laugh when I ask her if S is her oldest child:

Nee, hy's nie die oudste nie. Die oudste seun wat is my voorkind. Ek het mos met die Portugees geslaap. Toe't ek nou die voorkind, ja en uh ek weet nie waar's die oom nie want ek het maar sommer gelos met hom want baie possessive, blou oë. Ek's nie lus vir

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<sup>84</sup> A state hospital in Cape Town

<sup>85</sup> The house is most probably not officially registered in her name.

dit nie en toe meet ek die oumannetjie, maar hy was ook ‘n dronkie, maar ook lekker outjie.

(No, he’s not the oldest. The oldest is my *voorkind*<sup>86</sup>. I slept *mos* with the Portuguese. Then I have the *voorkind* and yes I don’t know where the *oom* is because I just left the *oumannetjie* (diminutive of old man), but he was also a *dronkie* (drunkard) but a nice chap.)

Four of the children live with her, Tannie Fameeda tells me later, when I ask her for the third time.

Tannie Fameeda’s story is a mix of pathos and humour, sadness and joy, evident in numerous stories I was told in Hangberg. The stories are layered with a complex mix of emotions, which makes me want to cry and laugh at the same time. Yet, the storytellers often show little attachment to the content. The heartache and suffering must go back many generations. And yet, one feels there is hope. I become increasingly aware of hope vested by the storytellers in their children and grandchildren. Investment in their offspring and *their* offspring is surely not a burden to the parents and grandparents, but as much an investment in their own old age. Perhaps it is a remedy for what went wrong in their past? I observe there is fighting between the children about paying rent. Tannie Fameeda talks at a speed I find difficult to follow. I realise that she improvises as she goes along; once she loses track of one train of thought she simply carries on with another. Every now and then she will ask me *waasonsnu?* (where are we now?), and I will try to pull together the strands of her stories for her. She makes me laugh when she talks about her daughter-in-law:

My skoondogter gesê, ‘Look at the house! Look at your kitchen! The flies, ooh the flies!’ Toe sê ek, ‘Ai Jirre, die swart meisie wil net wit wies.’ [Lag]. Maar anyway ek sê vir haar, sy vat die Jik, die Handy Andy en ‘n kan of iets daar en sy skrop die pad. Sy mop daar in die toilet. Toe sê ek, ‘My darling, jy maar ophou vir my iets doen wat dji wil doen, want jy laaik so my en dan wie wil my inse my eie huis. As die kokkerotte en die goed hier loep, laat hulle loep, hulle is part van die familie.’

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<sup>86</sup> A *voorkind* is a child born before marriage.

(My daughter-in-law said, 'Look at the house! Look at your kitchen! The flies, ooh the flies!' Then I said, 'Oh Lord, this black girl just wants to be white.' But anyway I said to her, she takes the Jik (bleach) and Handy Andy (cleaning agent) and a can of something and she scrubs all the way. She mops the toilet. Then I said, 'My darling, you must stop doing something for me that you actually do for yourself, because you like me so much but then you want to tell me in my own house. If the cockroaches and the things walk here, let them walk, they are part of the family.')

I learn Tannie Fameeda keeps her money for herself: both her pension money and the money she earns from cooking. She becomes animated when she tells me about her finances:

Maar daar moet ek vir meneer sê, 'Ek worrie nie oor my kinders se geld, ek gaan kyk vir my vir 'n lewe. Die kosmakery, want die skons wat mense order en pizzas. Ek maak lekker pizza oek. Dis die ding wat gaan red. En dan kom hulle agterna met 'n stukkie dan sit ek daai ook in 'n plek. Dan eet ons almal daarmee saam. Maar hulle vra mos vir my, 'Wat maak mammie met mammie se geld?' Toe sê ek, "Daai question moet julle nie vra nie.' Want die een, die meisietjie wil sê, my pension, 'Wat maak mammie met mammie se pension en met Ysuf se geld?' Toe sê ek, 'Woed, jy sê hulle het net so magic groot geword?' 'Of course, eet en dokter, hulle kort alles.

(But then I must tell you sir, I don't worry about my children's money, I go and look for a life for me. The making of food, because the scones that people order and pizzas. I make delicious pizza as well. That is the thing that is going to save. And then they come afterwards with a piece and then I put that in place as well. Then we all eat together with that. But they asked me *mos* 'What does mommy do with mommy's money?' Then I said 'That question you must not ask!' Because the one, the daughter will say, my pension. 'What does mommy do with mommy's pension and with the money that Yusuf gives?' Then I said 'What? You say you grew up by magic? Of course, eat and doctor, you needed all that'.)

Tannie Fameeda laughs as she spits out the word. Sorry, she says.

The children paid for Tannie Fameeda's pilgrimage to Mecca. She first stayed with her third son in England who has been living there for six years. He and his wife worked hard to be able to afford to emigrate. They asked Tannie Fameeda to move with them. "Mammie, we need to go to England. We are very sorry, we cannot, but you must come and stay with us."

Toe wil hulle eintlik weet daai dag, wat ons hier afskeid maak, ek moet saamgegaan het. Toe sê ek, 'Nee my kind. Ek is gebore in Houtbaai en ek sal nie, al gat ek waar. In my jong dae ook het ek holiday gaan hou het saam met my antie hulle, Houtbaai is my place I must come back to.

(Then they wanted to know, that day that we say farewell, I should have gone with them. Then I said 'No my child. I am born in Hout Bay and I will not, even if I go wherever. In my young days I went on holiday with my auntie and them, Hout Bay is my place I must come back to.)

Tannie Fameeda thoroughly enjoyed her visit to England, but found the winter harsh. After four months staying overseas, her daughter in Hout Bay threatened that if she did not come back home, she would start using drugs again:

Oe daai aand toe wil ek nou nie daai gesê het nie, toe sit ek heel nag, praying and asking for help, but it did not come. Toe sê die kind, 'Haai, mammie bly weg van die kind want die kind willie hoor nie.' Maar ons wie's is 'n ma nou ma as sy.'

(Oh, that night I did not want to say that, I sat praying through the night and asking for help, but it did not come. Then my son said 'Really mommy, stay away from that child because she does not want to listen.' But we who are mothers, mothers we will be.)

I ask Tannie Fameeda whether she enjoyed her visit to England. She laughs and becomes animated:

Weet jy wat het ek baie geniet daar? Hulle salmon, smoked salmon on my brown toast. Ek wil nou soos witmense lewe.

(Do you know what I really enjoyed there? Their salmon, smoked salmon on my brown toast. I now want to live like white people!).

Her answer is filled with reference to food:

Maar ek gat soek 'n slaggie vir Muslime wat pens en pootjies verkoop. Toe kry ek. Ons loop, J is mos nou al vyf jaar in Engeland. Hy gat elke Vrydag gaan hy Masjid toe as hy in daai area werk. Hy bly mos in Leeds, ja. Nou gaan hy verby die swartes maar hy weet nie waar's die slaghuis nie. Eendag toe kom ek op van die Masjid af. Ons het nog lekker gesels en ek sê, 'J wat se bruin mense daar? Wat verkoop hulle daar?' Hy sê, 'Nee mammie, kom ons gaan,' nou weet ek nie waarntoe nie. Daar's 'n winkel, daar's net Indians gewies het, maar hulle verkoop als wat Halaal is, oulik. Toe sê ek, 'Man, ons gaan gou kyk wat is daai.' Hy sê, 'Haai mammie, ek het nooit gewiet hier's 'n slaghuis nie.' Toe sê ek, 'Djy kan maar nou sê wat jy wil jy't gese jy gaan vandag daai vleis koop vir my né. Koep vir eers vir my pens en pootjies.' Ja, maar wat van N? Ek sê 'man, N se stert! Ek gooi mos naeltjies, pepper corns en bay leaves dan val dit deur. Maar die pepper corns en bay leaves het weggeval party. Maar ek het pootjies gemaak en pens, baie lekker.. Oe maar ons het dit lekker gekook. Hy gee mos so 'n ruik.

(Then I went to try and find some Muslims who sell stomach and trotters for a change. Then I found it! We walk, J is now five years already in England. He goes to mosque every Friday if he works in that area. He lives *mos* in Leeds, yes. Now he goes past the blacks but he does not know where the butchery is. One day I come across one near the mosque. We are still having chat when I said 'J what coloured people are (those) there? What are they selling there?' He says 'No mommy, let's go.' Now I don't know where to. There is a shop, there are a lot of Indians, but they sell everything that is Halaal, too grand. Then I said, 'Man, let's go and see what that is.' He says, 'My goodness mommy, I never knew there is a butchery here.' Then I said, 'You can now say what you want but you said you were going to buy meat for me today. Buy me some stomach and trotters.' 'Yes, but what about N?' 'N's backside', I said. I add *mos* cloves, peppercorns and bay leaves then it (the smell) falls away. But the peppercorns and bay leaves took away some of it. But I made the trotters and stomach, very nice. Oh, but we cooked it very nicely. He (the tripe) gives *mos* such a smell.)

And suddenly I realised that what I smelled when I arrived at the house was tripe. And that would explain the flies...

Tannie Fameeda then shares about her pilgrimage to Mecca and how scared she was of flying:

Maar ek gaan meneer sê ook nog, wee jy toe ek in daai plane klim. Ek was so bang man. Ek het so'n, ek wiet nie hoekom is ek so nie, wat het gebeur nie. Ek is 'n sterkmens, hoor.

(But I am telling you meneer so, do you know when I got into that plane. I was so scared man. I have such a – I don't know why I am like this – what happened. I am a strong person, hear me)

Tannie Fameeda is indeed strong, like the majority of the women I meet in Hangberg. They hold the community together, they bring up the children, they create a home for them – seemingly against all odds. They have a presence that holds me captive in their stories. They appear to glide over heart-breaking details of loss, deprivation, suffering, and hardship. Is this what might be referenced as 'resilience'? Is this what 'resilience', from the outside, looks like? Each time, I want to stop them, ask for a moment to absorb the reality of what they have just told me. I find myself listening to audio-recordings of the stories over and over, then transcribing them, always wondering if I am missing something. Am I hearing embedded bitterness or sadness in their voices? I look in their eyes for signs of resentment or anger, expecting it to be there. But, I see or hear naught but gratitude, despite the hardship. I am thinking, feeling, 'how can this be so'? An ever-evolving consciousness, an affect, an ontology within sinks deeper and deeper into my mind...

I ask Tannie Fameeda whether she knows what dementia or Alzheimer's is, and if she knows anyone in the dorpie who is living with dementia. She responds:

Alzheimers weet ek want dis vergeetnis. Ja, hulle is siek ook mos. Nou my kinders het vir my gesê, as ek so vergiet. Dan sê hulle, 'Die vrou het Alzheimers.' Toe gaan ek um kliniek toe eendag om dit te gaan uitcheck. Elke maand dan moet jy jou uitcheck. Toe

sê ek, 'Doctor, tell me, have I got Alzheimers?' 'Why?' sê hy. Toe sê ek, 'My children keep telling me I've got Alzheimers.' Toe sê dokter, 'Tell them I said, a professional doctor, that you are, you don't have Alzheimer's because you wouldn't have looked like this.'

(Alzheimer's I know because it is forgetting. Yes, they are sick also *mos*. Now my children told me, if I forget (so often). Then they say 'This woman has Alzheimer's.' Then I go to uhm the clinic one day to go and check it out. Every month you must go and check yourself out. So I say, "Doctor, tell me, have I got Alzheimer's?" "Why?" he says. "My children keep telling me I've got Alzheimer's." Then the doctor said "Tell them I said, a professional doctor, that you are, you don't have Alzheimer's because you wouldn't have looked like this.")

I ask Tannie Fameeda whether she thinks she has a good life, and whether she thinks other older people in Hangberg have a good life. She replies with a sense of total contentedness:

Ja, ek dink nie enige een kan nou kla nie because soos ek sê dit gat also oor die government. Die 'curriculum' wat hulle inbring om mense meer gerief te maak. Huise wat hulle bou en kan laat bou en almal daai dink ek kan Houtbaai nie sê hulle is nou gestrem of ietsie nie. Maar oraait daar in 'poaching'<sup>87</sup> is nie allowed nie. Maar as jy nie 'n werk kry nie, wat moet jy maak? You understand? Hulle het 'n set ook gehad last week, maar ek het hom nie gekry nie, 'why the people poach. I'd like to read that but I couldn't get the TV on.)

(Yes, I don't think anyone can complain now because as I say it is also about the government. The "curriculum" that they bring in to make people more comfortable. Houses that they build and allow people to build and no one in Hout Bay can now say that they are handicapped or something. But alright there poaching<sup>73</sup> is not allowed. But if you can't get work, what must you do? You understand? They had a programme

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<sup>87</sup> Residents of Hangberg have historically earned a living from the sea. When apartheid officially ended in 1994, the new government changed the fishing quota systems and the majority of small fishermen lost their fishing licences. Many who were dependent on fishing for an income before began to fish illegally (without a licence). The government has a strong clamp-down policy on "poachers", which has led to several intense riots, including what is deemed "arson", in Hangberg and other fishing communities.

(on television) last week, but I could not get it, why the people poach. I'd like to read that but couldn't get the TV on.)

At this point, I ask Tannie Fameeda what her recipe is for growing old as “beautifully” as she is doing. She attributes successful ageing in her case wholly to Allah:

Ek dink om vir Allah eerste in jou lewe te bring want sonder Allah kan jy niks doen. Ek het dit self gesien. My lewe was nie so wonderful in my jongdae nie because ek het nie ouers gehad nie. Ek meen my pa het gebly by himself en was ook 'n stoute kabouter. Hy's dood daar by die hotel van verkluim. Hy's nou nie dood daar nie. Hulle het hom terug gebring hawe toe, na my familie toe en hulle het gesukkel met hom. Bande en goed op sy bene gesit maar hy't verkluim. Hy wou nie gehoor het toe die mense vir hom sê, 'Kom bly by ons in die kamer, dis die koudste aand vanaand.' Toe wil hy nie. Nou ek meen nou maar, so ek kannie sê hierdie ou het hom, kan ek sê ek moet sê ek is goed uit want ek wil, wat ek geleer het maar as jy ongehoorsaam aan God is, jy meen ek praat nou van dans is nou niks, maar die after effects wat dans aan 'n outjie maak, gaan slaap jy. Sulke goete. Ja, so uh I had to bring God in my life first before I could really and God wil nie hê jy moet prag en praal nie. Jy moet hom bedank as jy iets gekry het want dit kom, die gawe wat onskry, klaar ons kan sien. Ons betaal nie daarvoor nie. Ons kan praat, ons praat die taal. Ons kan work. Ons kan loop. Ons kan dinge doen vir onself. Moet ons vir Makkah dankbaar wies? So, ek dink dit is die beste ding wat ek kon gedoen het. Ek het gesukkel om by hom te bly maar ek, ek moet sê.

(I think to bring Allah first into your life, because without Allah you can do nothing. I saw that myself. My life was not so wonderful in my young days because I did not have parents. I mean my father lived by himself and was also a naughty one<sup>88</sup>. He died there at the hotel from exposure. He did not die there. They brought him back to the harbour, to my family and they battled with him. Bandages and things were put on his legs but he died from the cold. He did not want to listen to the people when they said to him “Come stay by us in the room, it is the coldest night tonight.” Then he did not want to. Now I mean, so I cannot say this guy did him, can I say I am good out because I want

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<sup>88</sup> *Stoute kabouter* is an Afrikaans term to refer to a person who, on occasion, exhibits naughty behaviour. The term may be translated literally into ‘naughty dwarf’.

to, what I learned but if you are disobedient to God, I mean I am not talking about dance, that is nothing, but the aftereffects that dance has on one, go to sleep. Such things. So yes uh I had to bring God in my life first before I could really and God does not want you to show off your riches. You must thank Him if you received something because it comes, the grace that we get, already we can see it. We do not pay for it. We can talk, we speak the language. We can work. We can walk. We can do things for ourselves. Must we be grateful to Makkah? So, I think this is the best thing that I could have done. I battled to stay with Him, but, I must say.)

How would she describe her role in the house? I ask Tannie Fameeda:

Ek speel mos maar altyd die rol as 'n ma. Want hoekom, ek maak nog altyd kos. Partykeer dan sê ek oek, 'Man, nei julle kan maar brood eet vanaand. My bene pyn vandag,' en dan gaan lê ek en niemand steur my nie want daar is mos iets om te eet.'

(I *mos* always play the role of a mother. Because why, I always still make food. At times I also say, 'Man, no tonight you can eat bread. My legs are aching today.' And then I go and lie down and no one disturbs me because there is *mos* something to eat.)

The role of mother, not only for her own children, but also for her grandchildren, and adopted and fostered children, plays a major role for many of the storytellers. The *mos* again indicates that it is not debated or questioned, the role is assigned and accepted. Yet, if she does not feel like it, she can also just go and lie down. We end our *kuier en gesels* with Tannie Fameeda telling me about her pilgrimage to Mecca. From the start of the journey in the aeroplane, where she claimed she was overcome with asbestosis (she confused the word with claustrophobia, which made her laugh heartily), to the luxury hotel and buffet breakfast with the selection of fruit juices at her destination. She told the story this way in a mixture of Afrikaans and English:

*So wat hy sê, people hy sê*, People, think, people maybe think. I don't know what you're gonna think after I tell you this, but some people think. 'No Fameeda, *jy praat nonsense*'. Hah, but honestly, from my body, it was an anaesthetic feeling that came on. 'Brother and sisters, come, I'm gonna make a way and you must be quick and you must ask Allah for help because this is dangerous man.' This packing of people,

thousands of them, millions are coming to do the same thing there and it's like a circle going around, going around. So when he did that, he just said, 'Come, I'm gonna give way for you' and he opened and we came in and first I touched it. Hah! Awww, I don't think it from the top, right out, out of my toes and I stood there and then A said, 'Now we're gonna move out again. We are done, whatever.' But then the next time he said, 'We're going there before we leave Makkah for Medina, let's go there for the last time and you speak to Allah and you thank Allah and whatever you and you must believe.' Then I asked Allah to take my children's lives and what I first want to ask, 'Oh Allah, please let the children of Hout Bay, specifically Hout Bay, stop the drugging and the alcohol and the ooh all the *haram*<sup>89</sup> that's going on there,' but I was in a happy mood when I came from the hotel hey, I had no tears but I found myself crying over these children. Reality man, you know, I plead by Allah to forgive these children, that the parents don't need to die and the children don't need to die at this age because of drugs, because it happened, one mother killed her child now recently, because she couldn't take it anymore, he stole everything. *Maar nee* just because A's here, nobody will see her. She still wants *né*. It was uh, he had her safe box in his cupboard and that time she was heavy on drugs and she came and said, 'He forgot the key,' so she opened the jewellery box. Ah, my God, I don't know how much she took. Aw, that day, he hit her *né*, she still came by the window, he grabbed her through the window, gave her another smack, that I had to say, that's enough. And she never ever, although she was here, still today, she says, 'I don't want nobody's money, I work for my money. That day was I so proud, but like I said, *ek het so gehuil*.

Tannie Fameeda related how she had touched the grave of Allah and poured out to Allah her prayers and fears and hopes for her children, the children of Hout Bay, their parents, and the Hout Bay community's hope for the future. This is where hope resides, where there is a future invested, possibilities. Caring for and supporting the children is a way of creating a new future and perhaps redeeming the past. Their children can have what they never had, and as parents and grandparents they now have the power to create a different future. Nothing she asked for, she points out, is or was for her. Could it be that older people are living vicariously through the hope of their children having better lives than what they had, more opportunities and less

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<sup>89</sup> *Haram* is an Arabic term for that which is forbidden.

trauma? So much of Tannie Fameeda's story revolves around her children, it is clear how proud she is of them, and how she protects the ones that are committing *haraam*. Grandparents find ways to provide educational opportunities that they themselves never had, looking after grandchildren so that their children can pursue careers and put food on the table for their families.

I am moved by Tannie Fameeda's story. I am swept up in her recalling of the pilgrimage, with the thousands of people circling around and around, a meditative circling to the Core. I have journeyed with Tannie Fameeda from her scone baking days at Kronendal Restaurant to her pilgrimage to Mecca. Tannie Fameeda's deep faith in Allah and the Muslim cultural connection with food continues this line of connectedness in the storying of Elderliness here in Hangberg, creating a world that stands starkly against the perceived notion of poverty and despair. The deep wisdom speaks to what Meyer (in Denzin et al., 2008) refers to as "triangulating our way to meaning" (p. 224), the art of finding one's way through the triangulation of body, mind, and spirit. This triangulation is woven through all the stories to elucidate the finding of meaning. Conventional social science research usually focuses on only one of the three points, the body as "a synonym for external, objective, literal, sensual, empirical" (p. 225). What the stories of Hangberg teach is that the storytellers' world is not binary, not composed of opposites, not defined by black and white. Life in Hangberg "moves within a context of dynamic consciousness" (p. 225). The particular triangulation (there are many others) of Hangberg as a place, religion, and family embodies this epistemology, the rendering of knowledge.

### ***Oom Coenie and Tannie Joyce***

Oom Coenie and Tannie Joyce's house is perched against a steep slope reached by precariously placed retainer-wall bricks that serve as steps. On the way up, you pass the *stoep* of the neighbour. There is washing hanging on the *stoep*, a friendly dog lies in the sun, and the neighbour is sitting in the front room of his house. I ask him if he knows where Oom Coenie lives. He laughs and points to the steep steps. I climb to the top to what looks like a building site. I wonder how older people manage these steps daily. There are two dogs there. Oom Coenie is standing outside, and he opens the gate for me. I can see on his face that he has spent his life on the ocean, in the sun and wind. He offers me his hand in greeting. I feel the roughness of his leathered skin. Hands that line-fished, hands that pulled in fishing nets (*treknet*), hands

calloused from years and years of manual labour. I notice later that the tips of two of his fingers are missing.

There is a small patch of garden in which I notice a few scraggly vegetables – cabbage and spinach that survived the Southeaster wind. A makeshift gate keeps the two dogs inside. I see they sleep under the building material that is stacked against the front of the house. The house looks as if it is a work in progress, built of cement bricks. No plaster, no paint. The building material is covered with a plastic sheet which also doubles as a shelter for the dogs. They cower into their bed under the rubble when Oom Coenie shouts at them. To me this looks like rubble. Oom Coenie explains that he plans to build a *stoep* and another storey on top of the existing one. However, the house is still not in his name, and he does not want to do anything until the Council can show him the papers that the house is in his name. I am aware of the two dogs. Many mixed heritage and indigenous people in South Africa fear dogs, as during the apartheid years they were often chased by the dogs of white people, or dogs were set upon them deliberately. The police used Alsatians to chase after ‘black’ and ‘coloured’ people, all those that had been inferiorised, indeed criminalised, under apartheid. I suddenly realise I am unsure how the dogs will react to me. In that moment, I realise I could never fully understand the full weight and effect of that in their daily lives. The fear of being chased and bitten by a dog that was set upon you by another person is unfathomable. It is in these moments of tiny glimpses that I am struck by how such knowing of experience would escape me – as a white man, I have hardly ever had reason to be scared to walk anywhere. To have moments of insight into the lives of people who are deeply, structurally oppressed makes me stagger at the slow violence of the quotidian, knowing how much of this remains in place to this day...

The *voorhuis* tells a story of the socio-material and how it shapes family in Hangberg. The walls are covered in photographs, photographs of weddings, parties, beach visits, family outings. The *vertoonkas* has a collection of glass and porcelain. It is an exact replica of the *vertoonkas* my grandmother had, complete with Spanish dolls in a flamenco pose, a Hummel doll, Dutch *klompe* (wooden clogs), and fine-bone China cups in different pastel colours. On the shelf above the display cabinet, I notice the clay hut from the Clay Cafe, a popular Hout Bay ceramics studio where patrons decorate their own clay objects. A wooden African mask hangs on the wall. Yet again, I wonder how many of these objects were discarded or handed down as ‘gifts’ from homes of whites in which Tannie Joyce worked as a char.

I quickly realise why the members of the Sewing Club giggled when they said I should visit Oom Coenie. At 84 years, he is a legend in the Valley. He is neither shy to assume nor to show off this role. His spectacles, broken, are taped together, his trousers are patched, and the remnants of his last paint job are clearly visible on him. He talks in a loud raspy voice with the timbre of being a lifelong smoker. Tannie Joyce listens with a gentle presence. She has the softness of a mother, grandmother and wife who has seen life in all its facets. She busies herself in the kitchen until I invite her to come and sit with us. On the opposite wall, the radio is on RSG, an Afrikaans radio station. I am reminded of my mother's house, where the radio is permanently on RSG<sup>90</sup>.

Oom Coenie is an orator, but I miss much of what he says as he is missing several teeth. He has difficulty walking, like many older people in Hangberg, which he ascribes to the "gum boots" (gum boots in SA has resonances of the mines and the location system, which the British introduced) that they wore for many years: either while fishing, or in the case of women, working in the fish factory:

Want jy's heeldag met daai bleddie goed in jou voete. Hulle kry nie lug nie.

(Because you are the whole day with those bloody things on your feet. They don't get air.)

He tells of an overweight woman who worked in the factory whose feet became so swollen, the boots had to be cut off her feet:

Dan loop sy hier af na daai fabriek toe, en weer op en sy was net so gebou. Net so dik vrou. Dan moet sy haar boots laat afsny. Daai boots was so, haar bene, die kuite was so dik, haar bene so dik.

(Then she walks down here to that factory, and back up again and she was built just like this (he indicates how large a woman she was). Just such a fat woman. Then she had to have those boots cut off. Those boots were so, her legs, the calves were so thick, her legs so thick.)

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<sup>90</sup> *Radio Sonder Grense* = Radio Without Borders

The women worked long shifts in the fish factory wearing rubber boots, standing on cement floors in cold rooms. To be warm they would stand at the fire in the stove at night. Oom Coenie holds that his mother stood too close to the fire when she was pregnant with him, that is why his skin burns easily. I look at his skin, burned within the womb already, he says, which now has the texture of old leather through not being treated well. His mother's eldest son, he was not born a healthy child, he says:

Hulle kon my guts gesien draai hier in my maag.

(They could see my guts turning here in my stomach.)

Years later, he visited his mother's doctor who could not believe that he survived:

Hy sê vir my, 'Jy was so siek dan. Lewe jy nog? Jou ma het elke dag hier ingekom, elke dag ten minste elke middag drie uur, vier uur het jou ma hier by my met die siek, dooie kind.'

(He says to me, 'You were so ill then. Are you still alive? Your mother came in here every day, every day at least every afternoon three o'clock, four o'clock your mother came here to me with the sick, dead child.')

The tenacity and care and hardship and intertwined community is evident in the coarseness of Oom Coenie's hands, his voice, the way that he and Tannie Joyce look at each other. Oom Coenie is 84 and Tannie Joyce is 78. Tannie Joyce has a back problem. Oom Coenie feels, '*sy woel te veel met die rug*' (she does too much with (for the good of) her back). His concern is real and heartfelt. There is a softness between them that is tangible. Tannie Joyce lets Oom Coenie talk. She never interrupts, nods her head gently to affirm his stories. There is mutual respect and kindness in the way they cross reference one other. I ask them both what it is like to be seen as old. Oom Coenie says:

'I believe, ek glo daaraan, ek is nie oud nie. Oud goed gaan vullis blik toe of graveyard toe. Ek dink wat ek is, ek is groot in ouderdom. Hulle sê my golden years wat hier is'.

(I believe, I believe in that, I am not old. Old things go to the rubbish bin or to the graveyard. I think what I am, I am big in age. They say (it is) my golden years that are here.)

Oom Coenie remembers Hout Bay beach from before the days of apartheid (up to 1948) when the beach was open to all races. Then it was divided: that side of the river mouth for white people, this side for coloured people:

Maar hulle kom hang maar ook by ons uit. So was dit eers those days want daar was borde gewies daar op die strand. Daai dae was. Ons was nie, die was nie ons nie. Wiet ons is nie so hard up as Houtbaai uitvoel nie. In my jare nou nie. Soos ander plekke nie. Because die Kleurlinge wat hiergebly het. Daar was nie baie Bantoes hiernie, raait. Die majority was Kleurlinge. En hulle het was ook 'n unity. Even die tyd wat apartheid inkom ons mense bly unity. Jy weet soos hulle gesê het, baas en so... Baas het gesê, nee ons is skippers, ons sê op sy van. Of sê op sy naam. Jy wiet ons het baie respectful vir hulle en hulle het baie respect vir ons ook. En weet as jy, as jy vol nonsens is, jy gaan pak kry saam met daai ou wie jy 'n problem het. Want ewen hierdie vroumense by buite plekke wat hy, wat die vrou hard gewies het, wat die, wat die vrou sommer, wat die noi die meid slat in die kombuis en die sulke dinge. Want hierdie dinge, ewen daai ding wat ek gehoor het baie nie.

(But they come to hang out with us as well. So was it at first those days, because there were signs there on the beach. Those days were. We were not, that was not us. You know, we were not so hard up here in Hout Bay that we felt out. Not in my years. Not like other places. Because the coloureds who lived here. There were not many *bantu* (black people), right? The majority were coloureds. And they were also a unity. Even the time when apartheid came in, our people stayed united. You know like they said 'boss' and so... (Our) boss said, now, we are skippers, we call him by his surname. Or call him by his name. You know, we were very respectful towards them, and they had respect for us as well. And know when you, when you are full of nonsense, you are going to get a hiding from that guy with whom you have a problem. And even these women who were at outside places, where the woman was hard, where the woman,

the *noi* would hit the *meid*<sup>91</sup> in the kitchen and such things. Because these things, even those things I did not hear often.)

This is a moment of tension, of textual change to a reflexive/heart-felt/spiritual commentary. I am not able to respond in any way; in fact I am holding my breath, too scared to break the moment. There is no response that would do justice to this moment of articulation, it deserves silence, a moment of silence to honour and mourn so many losses.

Oom Coenie tells of his relationship with Mr D, one of two brothers who are wealthy, white landowners in Hout Bay, for whom many people in Hangberg used to work on their farms and in their businesses. Oom Coenie has an interesting view of the community and people of the *dorpie*: that they are “broken” because they have lost their religion. Oom Coenie talks of children that have no respect. The way that he talks about children’s behaviour and ‘brokenness’ is part of the nostalgia of older people harkening back to days that were ‘better’, even under apartheid, where we commonly assume things were worse, and in many respects, they were – but who are we to comment on others’ experiences? What happens when memory filters out the very worst and reconstitutes those memories to privilege only ‘the good’? Or what is it for us to even make such analyses when we never experienced the nuances of these historical transitions? What will others say of our experiences of ‘today’, and will they interpret them in simplistic terms? And who is even the ‘our’ in this anyway? It is Tannie Joyce who now paints a picture of ageing in Hangberg:

Ek dink ons ouer mense, ons het oud hier geraak. Ek was 23 toe ek hier kom bly het. So nouja, nou’s ek alweer 78. So, die groot verskil, jy wiet, ek dink dit, ons het respek vir mekaar. Ons, uh, as daai een nou bietjie te deurmekaar is dan worry ons nie met daai ene nie. You know, maar verder meen ons ken mekaar. Ons groet mekaar. Die wat wil groet, groet ek. Daaie een wat ouer is as ek, as ek vir hom iets kan doen, dan doen ek dit. You know, vir my is dit nie ouderdom om te telery nie. So, ek dink dis ook ek dink ons verstaan mekaar. Dis ons bejaardes is nou al, ons verstaan mekaar, ek dink nie ons het baie uitgehaal met oumense hier nie nê. Ons worrie nie wie hulle is nie.

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<sup>91</sup> “Meid” is a derogatory word used for a coloured or black woman, derived from the English word maid.

(I think our older people, we became old here. I was 23 when I came to live here. So now yes, now I'm already 78. So, the big difference, you know, I think this, we have respect for each other. We, uh, if that one is now a little too confused then we don't mind that one. You know, but further I mean we know each other. We greet each other. Those that want to greet, I greet. That one that is older than me, if I can do something for him, then him I do it. You know, for me it is not about age or counting. So, I think it is also that we understand each other. It is our older people now, we understand each other. We are not selective. We don't worry who they are.)

Tannie Joyce tells of her mother and stepfather who lived with them for many years until they died. She recalls how she grew up with white people on the other side of Hout Bay:

Van tien af het ek by hulle in die huis gewerk. En hulle kinders groot gemaak. Hulle seun se kinders is almal groot nou al. Oumense ook al.

(From the age of ten I worked for them. And brought up their children. Their son's children are all grown up now already. Old people also now)

I think of Barbie who brought me up while my parents were both working, leaving her own children with their grandparents while she was looking after me. Oppressed people make it possible for the privileged to be (more) privileged, helping to reproduce an unequal status quo. Often done with love and affection, the dreadful contradictions are impossible to grapple with and hard to 'accept'. I find it hard to swallow, my throat is dry. I find it hard to speak again...

I ask Tannie Joyce:

Tannie sê dit so, jy weet 'van tien af het ek by hulle gewerk' as of dit die normale ding is. Was jy rêrig tien jaar oud?

(Auntie says it like, you know, 'from (the age of) ten I worked for them,' as if it is a normal thing. Were you really ten years old?)

Tannie Joyce replies:

Maar dit was ja, dit was normal. My 21ste verjaarsdag het Miss H vir my gegie en vir my het dit nooit gevoel, apartheid nie. Vir my was dit nie, ek dink ek het seker nog, die enigste tyd wat ek apartheid gevoel het, hulle gaan elke jaar op Durban toe op vakansie ja.

(But it was yes. Miss H gave me my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday (party) and for me it never felt like apartheid. It was not for me, I think I probably still, the only time I felt apartheid, every year they went to Durban on vacation yes.)

I am taken aback by the almost glib way in which she affirms that she started working at the age of ten – and assures me that was normal. Tannie Joyce explains why, when accompanying the family she worked with when they went on vacation once, it felt like apartheid for the first time:

Op vakansie en dan't ek saam gegaan. Port Lisabeth, hulle het familie in Port Lisabeth gehad dan verby Port Lisabeth. East London. East London. Nou die eerstemaal wat ek beseft daarvan toe was apartheid al lankal in, was die dag toe ek in die kèffie gaan daar in Oos London en toe loop ek mos nou deur, toe stop hulle my. Toe sê hulle vir my coloureds gaan nie daar nie. Coloureds moet hier voor. That was the first time, solank ek vir daai mense gewerk het. Ek het nooit gevoel, ek het nooit gewiet nie want ons was 'n normale familie. No, dit was net normal, ja.

(On vacation and then I went with. Port Elizabeth, they had family in Port Elizabeth and then past Port Elizabeth. East London. East London. Now the first time I realised it, apartheid had been around a long time, was the day that I went into a cafe there in East London and then *mos* I walked in, they stopped me. Then they said to me coloureds don't go there. Coloureds must go in front. That was the first time, as long as I worked for those people. I never felt, I never knew, because we were a normal family. No, it was just normal, yes.)

The word, or rather expression, 'ja' is not just 'yes', but a 'verbal crutch', or a signifier of culture and informality in speech, a South Africanism, used across the population groups. It

puts people at ease, recruits cultural familiarity (similar to *mos*), but also ends a sentence that cannot really be completed, or ends a story that should in fact be continued, often as a sigh of resignation. It is somehow not directly translatable and can change the mood and meaning depending on the intonation.

Tannie Joyce continues recounting what life was like for her working for a white family during apartheid:

En soe't dinge net aangegaan. Daar was nooit, ek kannie sê daar was apartheid nie. Ek wiet die ou man het my eendag 'n pak gegee. Ek wiet nie wat het ek gedoen het nie. Ou Doepie. Dit was Doepie ja. Ek wiet nie wat ek gedoen het nie. Maar any case my 'n paar houe gegee and that. Dit was asof hulle my ma en my pa is.

(And so things just went on. There was never, I cannot say that there was apartheid. I know the old man gave me a hiding one day. I don't know what I did. Old Doepie. It was Doepie, yes. I don't know what I did. But in any case he gave me a few smacks. It was as if they were my mother and father.)

I ask Tannie Joyce, no doubt preposterously, whether she also felt they were living a “good life” in the time of apartheid. I somehow felt the need to check this with her as I have heard this so often now, knowing that in standard ‘objective’ interviewing, this might seem like a leading question. She replies thoughtfully:

Ek sê ons het daar 'n goeie lewe gehad. Daar't ons goeie lewe gehad because daar was tuine\*. Ons kon tamaties gaan pluk soos ons wil, was groot vyebome, ons kon vye gaan pluk. You know dit was net 'n normale ding. Dit was nie dat jy kan sê hulle is wit nie. Of ons is swart of so nie. Dit het nooit by hulle opgekom nie. Miskien by hulle opgekom maar nie by ons nie. Ja daar was nooit kleur gewees nie.

(I say we had a good life there. There we had a good life because there were gardens\*. We could go pick tomatoes as we wanted, were big fig trees, we could go and pick figs. You know it was just a normal thing. It was not that you could say they were white. Or

we are black or so. It never came up with them. Maybe it came up with them but not with us. Yes, there was never colour.)

\*I am surprised at her response and have to think why it surprises me. I also love my garden, and especially my vegetable garden. Why would this surprise me that we both love gardens – do I see it as something only white people would enjoy? I am so aware of the materiality of experience; does it surprise me to find the same in Hangberg? Considering the yard of their home that I noticed when I walked in, her connotation between a garden and my question about a good life during apartheid puzzles me. The influence and impact of socio-materiality and how it influences this experience – food, environment, gardens, community, and their proximity – stand in stark contrast to their present situation. Oom Coenie gives his perspective on quality of life.

I ask Oom Coenie what it is like to be old in Hangberg. He sums it up:

Vandag sê ek vandag nog, solank ek die dak oor my kop het, en my pot koek hier binne en lap aan my stêre is ek tevrede\* met die lewe.

(Today I say today still, as long as I have the roof over my head, and my pot boils here inside and cloth on my backside, I am satisfied\* with life.)

\*The three things that matter: a home, food, being clothed. The stories of Elderliness present a distinct sense of the older individuals' subjective wellbeing – despite definitions of wellbeing and quality of life invariably include having financial resources and paid work (Robertson et al., 2020). Hangberg's older residents had few opportunities to secure financial resources, or indeed engage in (decent) paid work over the life course. Yet, what exists for them now is a host of contingent articulations – like the rhizomes – of densely woven contributions to wellbeing.

*Together, this demonstrates that subjective wellbeing serves an incremental role beyond objective quality of life indicators and is useful for policy purposes (Tay et al., 2015, p. 840).*

*Narrative is the performative expression of those experiences in the act of creating identity and defining, or attempting to define, what it means to be human, and it means to know* (Swanson, 2004, p. 35).

The sense of dignity I encountered flies in the face of how, or the way in which, some people view coloured people. At times, white residents of Hout Bay may be scathing about the inhabitants of Hangberg, disapproving of their *perceived* alcohol and drug abuse habits, laziness, and lack of moral standards. The dignity I observed was expressed in multiple ways: an intense sense of gratitude (for the little they have), their religiosity, and their comfortable family home that portrays a sense of love and care. Oom Coenie, Oupa Petrus, and Oom Basie each referred to law and order in their community, and held strong opinions of how this should be adhered to. The women invariably referred to the role of religion in their life, and shared how they are guided by their faith, about their roles as mothers and grandmothers, and of the ways, although not verbalised as such, in which they contribute to building and maintaining a *ordentlike* (respectable) community. While I often grappled with my own discomfort, I was acutely aware of not wanting to replicate existing violences and assumptions through using terms such as “respectable”.

After Miss H died, Tannie Joyce and her family are relocated to Hangberg. She works as a domestic worker for many years before starting to learn to become a caregiver. She then works at one of the local retirement homes for white people:

My enigste groot probleem was, ek kon lees, maar ek kannie skryf nie en dis nog vandag nog altyd my groot probleem.

(My only big problem was, I could read, but I could not write and that is today still my biggest problem.)

The slow violence again – sitting across from a woman in her seventies who is a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother who carries the loss of an education, admitting that it is “her biggest problem”. I cannot imagine her humiliation over years of not being able to write a note or a letter. In spite of this, she manages to share her notes with the senior nursing sister in charge, although she is too shy to show her the notes she made in her own style. And today she

shares her story with me. The irony of it is not lost on me – the white man doing research for my PhD, while she had to leave school at the age of ten. Tannie Joyce sits with her hands folded in her lap, the hands that cared for old white people, brought up the children of white people, washed their clothes, cleaned up after them, the hands that were never taught to write. I stagger at the thought.

I ask Tannie Joyce what the difference is between the white old people who live in the retirement village and the coloured old people who live in Hout Bay:

Hier in Hangberg is die kinners antwoordelik vir hulle ouers te kyk want ek dink nie van ons ek het nog nie in die hawe namens ege kyk nie. Ek het by die blankes gekyk maar ek het nie die kant kom werk nie omdat ons sieker maar gevoel het dat die kinners van die mense moet na hulle kyk. So dis die groot verskil tussen dit, ja.

(Here, in Hangberg, the children are responsible for looking after their parents because I do not think I have cared for people here in the harbour. I look after the white people, but I did not come work this side because I suppose we felt that the children of the people must look after them. So that is the big difference between it, yes.)

Here in Hangberg the children must look after their own parents. Children who have to leave school and stay unemployed so that there is care and support for their parents. I regularly hear this in my own business when wonderful employees have to resign because they have to go and care for an ageing parent with very little – if any – structural support. That is why Tannie Joyce refers to ‘community’, this place where the residents create their own support structures. And within this lies the dichotomy and precarity – older people who age differently because they live in intergenerational households where they have a sense of purpose, while it costs children and grandchildren to be unemployed in order to provide this care and support. I ask whether she thinks people age differently in the two communities.

Nee, maar hierso is maar meer ‘n gemeenskap. Kyk by die Spinney was daar baie oumense wat hulle kinners kom hulle nie kyk nie. You know, hulle kry nie besoeker nie en goed soos dit. Maar hier gaan die kinners daam na hulle ouers se huise toe. Hulle gaan daam vir hulle ouers sien.

(No, but here is more of a community. Look at the Spinney there were many old people whose children do not come to see them. You know, they do not get visitors and things like that. But here the children go to their parents' homes. They do go and see their parents.)

Tannie Joyce brings the conversation back to 'being-in-community', a place and space created with its own moral codes and rules, family dynamics, informal reciprocal support structures. Where government fails, the people of Hangberg create their own governmentality (Dreyfus et al., 1982), where this governing does not only have a political meaning, but that it "also signified problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul, etc." (Lemke, 2002, p. 4). It is clear from all the conversations that there is a distinct will to improve the welfare of especially the future generations of Hangberg, keeping families together in their intergenerational households, children coming back home to care for and support parents, grandparents investing in the future of their grandchildren (Li, 2007). This informal accretion of rules, understandings, habits of culture, norms of different faiths, together with a shared history of hardships, all folds and unfolds in a bricolage (Honan, 2007; Li, 2007) or *métissage* (Blood et al., 2012) of 'being-in-community'. Writing the lives and stories becomes the bricolage and *métissage*.

Oom Coenie takes up the conversation once more:

Nou kan ek jou so sê jy sien in ons tyd. Ons kom uit dronklap huise uit. Ons mense kan baie drink. Haar kant en my kant. Ja. Nie my ma nie. My ma het glad nie gedrink en roek nie. Haar ma het oek nie geworrie met drink en roek nie. Maar waar dit kom by die mans en die ooms jy wiet en die susters, drink, drink but hulle was nie geraas met hulle kinnars nie, by the way. Maar ek meen, so ek was nooit sensitive vir liquor nie. Ek meen ons drink ons party en ons drink. Ek koop 'n bottel whiskey, dan drink ons. Ek worrie nie, om te control die kinnars. Nee dad kom drink, gooi. Ek hoor nie daarvan nie, dan drink ons 'n dop. Ek kon baie dagga geroek ja, daar met die pille oek en so aan maar in die huis Krismis time, you won't get liquor here. Nee Krismis sal ek nie. My familie sê come visit, baie mense gaan by die mense se huise om dan weet hulle hulle kan dop score daar. Hulle kom nie hier nie.

(Now I can tell you this, you see in our time. We come from drunken homes. Our people can drink a lot. Her side and my side. Yes. Not my mother. My mother did not drink or smoke. Her mother also did not worry with drinking and smoking. But where it comes to the men and the uncles you know and the sisters, drink, drink, but they did not shout at their children, by the way. But I mean, so I was never sensitive to liquor. I mean we drink we party and we drink. I buy a bottle of whisky, then we drink. I don't worry, to control the children. No dad comes, drink, pour. I don't hear from that, then we have a drink. I smoked a lot of marijuana yes, but with the pills also and so on, but at Christmas time, in this house you won't get liquor here. No Christmas I will not. My family says come visit, many people go to other people's homes in the hope that they will score a drink (*dop*) there. They do not come here.)

There is so much honesty in his sharing his life of misusing alcohol and drugs with me which I am not used to, and I do not really know what to do with this information. His humorous rendering helps to make me feel less uncomfortable, yet I sit with so many thoughts around what he told me. Saying that they come from *dronklap huise* (drunken homes) is laden with images of abuse and generational trauma. Tannie Joyce lightens the mood and makes me laugh from my belly when she shares how she used to bake cakes for Oom Coenie when he went to sea. Sometimes, their fishing vessel would pass Hout Bay en route to the West Coast. She would learn of this and would bake him a chocolate cake with the bottom of the cake being a layer of marijuana. She would send this cake to him delivered in a small rowing boat. The image of most probably a young boy rowing out to sea to deliver a beautifully decorated chocolate cake to one of the crew on a fishing boat makes me roar with laughter. Tannie Joyce says this with a straight face as if she had toothpaste delivered to the boat, as a good wife does for her beloved husband.

How is it possible to look so well at their age, I ask, considering the hard life they have lived? Tannie Joyce echoes what every person has told me thus far:

Ek dink dis die genade van die Here. Seker geduld en uithouvermoë help jou deur.

(I think it is the grace of God. Probably patience and perseverance help you through.)

Oom Coenie adds:

En ek reik uit tot God, dankie dat Hy vir my gespaar het tot nou toe. Many days het ek baie gedink ek sal nie hier sit meer nie, gaan ek eendag daar sit? Sal ek hier kan wies. Dis dan U wil lat ek hier sit nounog vandag.

(And I reach out to God, thank Him that He saved me up to now. Many days I often thought I will no longer sit here, will I sit there one day? Will I be able to be here? It is Your will that I still sit here until today.)

The sudden switch in tone is marked – from telling me about a life of alcohol and drug abuse to praising God for His grace in one conversation. Oom Coenie and Tannie Joyce take pride in their role as older people in the community upholding the moral codes. Oom Coenie would like children to behave according to his own set of moral standards that he adheres to. He prides himself on the fact that, in spite of coming from *dronklap huise*, they live their lives with dignity. Like so many others, they feel strongly about their community. Tannie Joyce's stories about growing up in the time of apartheid are particularly interesting in that she considered it "normal". They worked around the system, it would seem, finding their own way through a collage of humour and spirituality, a strong sense of inter-reliability and connectedness, creating their own version of community in spite of challenges such as a lack of schooling or coming from homes where alcohol was abused. Their home could not be more simple, their garden among the rubble and the incompleteness of Oom Coenie's dream to add a second story to it. There is a tangible love and respect between them – not once did the one interrupt the other or disagree with the other. Tannie Joyce has a softness that surrounds her that is so attractive and endearing. I give her a warm hug as I leave, hoping that our paths will cross again.

### ***Tannie Fatima***

I get totally lost trying to find Tannie Fatima's house. I must telephone her a few times. Eventually she walks down the street to come and find me. The lay-out of houses, house numbers, and street names obviously makes sense only to the people living in Hangberg and is

symbolic of the complexity of the *dorpie*. This *dorpie* does not ascribe to the rules made by white people. They have their own rules. And they make sure that people adhere to those rules, as Oom Coenie pointed out to me in no uncertain terms. Compared to how and where I grew up, Hangberg has an internal system that is vastly different from the ‘white’ community. There is very little pretence – the way Oom Coenie and Tannie Joyce talk about drinking habits and her baking a cake with a layer of marijuana in it will *never* come into a conversation in my family. The juxtaposing of this with a staunch faith in God and religiosity that anchors them in difficult times and the strong intergenerational bonds and interconnectedness creates what seems to be a different moral coding where people are truly bound by inter-reliability and reciprocity.

I see Tannie Fatima standing in a small slip-road. She is small in stature, wearing her hijab and traditional Muslim attire. She is softly spoken, shy. The front door to her small cottage is low and I have to bend down to enter. Her *voorhuis* is a haven of calm against the noisy outside world of Hangberg where a harshness of history and material deprivation is softened by humanity and community and mutual care. There is no mistaking that this is a Muslim home: the walls are adorned with Muslim art and the *vertoonkas* is filled with artefacts of the Islamic faith. Tannie Fatima is a seemingly ageless 72 years: neither young nor old. Serene. I am once again aware of how religions blend together in Hangberg in complete harmony. This seems to be part of the inscriptions of Hangberg. I am more and more aware of the nuanced inscriptions (Coe, 2018) and slow violence of apartheid and its ongoing impact and presentations, the hybridity and complexity of interwoven textural contrasts and contradictions in how this community has structured itself in the face of precarity. These (re)inscriptions are fluid, weaving relational narratives in between the different registers or systems (micro-, meso-, exo and macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1986 as quoted in Burholt et al., 2020). The complexities of these inscriptions are rooted in the stories in between, the silences, the furniture, street scenes, kitchen smells, and shebeen sounds, the dog walking away from a pile of rubbish, the children playing with bicycle rims. The social contexts go beyond that of Hangberg; they are imbued with the discarded household goods from the white madams in Hout Bay where ‘maids’ and ‘garden boys’ are given the unwanted, broken goods that no longer serve a purpose or fit the latest decor.

We sit in the *voorhuis* which is comfortable, and extremely neat and tidy. A door with a plastic, multi-coloured fly curtain leads off the *voorhuis*. It is obviously an old and tiny dwelling. As

much as I am curious to see the rest of the house, it does not feel appropriate to ask her to show me her home. I sense she is a private person, but more than I know that I am not to know or see everything, that some doors must remained closed, that there are many things I will never know.

I ask her whether she was born in Hangberg:

Ja, ek is hier gebore. Ons was, my ma en pa het in, ons het in die dorp gebly. Daar by Mainstream. Daar'ons gebly as kinner en toe die apartheid, nie wat nou, ek wiet nou nie hoe om te sê nie. Maar toe word ons daar uitgesit\*. Toe't ons hier in die Houthawe kom bly. Seker 1960. Ek het nou gemeen ek wil uitwerk hoe oud is my broer dan kan ek nou dink hoe lank is ons hierso [lag]. Hy's 72, nee 73, en ons het, hy was 21 toe ons soontoe gekom.

(Yes, I was born here. We were, my mother and father, we lived in the *dorp* (dorpie). There by Mainstream. There we lived as children and then when apartheid, not what it is now, I don't know now how to say this... But then we were evicted from there. Then we came to live here in the Hout harbour. Must be 1960. I now meant I want to work out how old my brother is then I can think how long we have lived here. (Laughs.) He's 72, no 73, and we did, he was 21 when we came here. Yes, that can be. For 50 years we lived here. Yes, it can be about 52 years ago.)

She continues with her remembering of the history of how they ended up in Hangberg:

Toe kom ons was toe's ek nou al nou 'n meisie van 16 jaar oud. Ons was agt kinner bymekaar. Drie susters en vyf broers by mekaar gewies en toe't ons, ja toe't ons, my pa was 'n visserman. My ma het maar soe um huiswerk gedoen, service werk en daai het my ma gedoen. Toe ons nou groot word toe moet ons ook maar, toe gat ek ook by die fabriek werk en my broer het in die winkels gewerk. Twee broers het by die winkels gewerk nog en toe naderhand toe hy nou ouer word toe word hy ook 'n visserman, my broer. Maar my pa was al die jare visserman tot hy nou siek geword het, toe kan hy nie meer op die see gaan werk nie en toe't hy ook maar nou vir hom 'n walwerklike gekry.

Toe't ons nou hier kom bly. Die is ons eerste huis wat my ma gekry het van sy uit die dorp uit, van ons uit die dorp uitgesit\* is.

(Then we came, I was then a girl of 16 years old. We were eight children together. Three sisters and five brothers all together and then we, yes then we, my father was a fisherman. My mother did uhm housework, service work and that my mother did. When we grew up we also had to, then I went to work in the factory and my brother worked in the shops. Two brothers worked in the shops and then later when they were older, he also works as a fisherman, my brother. But my dad was a fisherman all the years until he got sick, and then he could no longer go to sea and then he got himself an on-shore job. Then we came to live here. This is our first home that my mother had when she left the *dorp*, since we were moved out\* of the *dorp*.)

\*The word *uitgesit* strikes hard in its polysemy. Dismissive, deadly, discarded. In Afrikaans, we would say *die veearts het my hond uitgesit* (the vet euthanised my dog). Somehow the less nuanced referral to forced removals sits hard with me.

It is hard for me to imagine that a family of eight lived in this tiny dwelling. I sense a hesitation on the part of Tannie Fatima, telling me about apartheid and the impact it had on their being moved from Hout Bay to Hangberg. When Tannie Fatima's mother died, the controversy around home ownership carried on: to this day the house is still not in her name. The City Council allowed Tannie Fatima to remain living in the house as she is the oldest daughter, but it seems it was simply an act of someone turning a blind eye, not an official statement of ownership.

As was the case with many other inhabitants of Hangberg, Tannie Fatima's mother worked in the fish factory for the greater part of her life. She suffered terrible arthritis as a result. Her mother died at age 86 from a stroke, but according to Tannie Fatima, *sy was gesond* (she was healthy). It strikes me that arthritis may not count for the people of Hangberg as being sick. I wonder whether this is so because people did not know or believe that arthritis could result from working in the fish factory, and whether, indeed, this belief may simply be another way of accepting the *status quo* of apartheid:

Sy was gesond. Foeitog<sup>92</sup>, sy't al die... hulle het ook al die jare het my ma in die fabriek gewerk. Eers in die huis, toe ons in die dorp gebly het, het sy nou huiswerk gedoen. Maar toe ons nou hier kom, kom bly in die harbour, toe gaan werk sy in die fabriek en toe't sy arthritis gekry. Toe kan sy later nie lekker loep nie. Maar sy was gesond en als. Dit was nou net die knieë en die biene. Daai was nou haar probleem gewies maar sy was gesond tot op die dag wat sy, toe't sy net 'n stroke gekry en. En toe's sy weg.

(She was healthy. Shame, she'd all the... they had all the years worked with my mother in the factory. First at the house, when we lived in the *dorp*, she did housework. But when we came here, came to live in the harbour, she went to work in the factory and then she got arthritis. Then she could later no longer walk so well. But she was healthy and all. It was just the knees and the legs. That was now her problem, but she was healthy until the day that she, then she just had a stroke. And then she was gone.)

I pause, feeling the weight and sacredness of the moment, how gently she relays a life of hard manual labour and the toll that it eventually took. I ask about her husband's death seven months earlier.

Nee, hy was 'n 'diabetic' en hy't ook mos al die jare, vir 50 jaar was hy op die see gewies. En toe't hy nou 'retired', afgegaan van die see, 20 jaar gelede het hy opgehou met die see werk en toe word hy 'n diabetic en hulle wil mos nie reg eet nie. Net verkeerde kosse en toe't hy beginne siek word. Hy was naderhand op insulin en wil nie sy insulin gebruik nie toe't hy siek geword. Maar toe was hy nou sommer nou skielike. Ons het nou nie verwag hy sal so gou gaan nie. Want hy was nie bedlêend of niks nie. Hy was nog op en 'about' gewies en toe't hy, toe gaan hy in 'n 'coma.' Van die diabetic, toe kan hulle nie nou vir hom by kry nie. Oe dit was 'n groot skok gewies. Ek kan nou nog nie oor dit kom nie. Ons het 46 jaar getroud gewies. Nou sê ek, dit lyk nou van die man nie meer daar is nie gaan alles verkeerd (lag). Alles loep nou verkeerd.

(No, he was a diabetic and he'd also *mos* all the years, for 50 years he was on the sea. And then he retired, left the sea, 20 years ago he stopped working at sea and then he

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<sup>92</sup> *Foeitog* is a very typical South African cultural linguistic expression used in various contexts, mostly denoting sympathy.

became diabetic and they *mos* don't want to eat right. Only wrong food and then he started to get sick. He was later on insulin and doesn't want to use his insulin and then he got sick. But then he was *sommer* suddenly. We did not expect he will go so suddenly. Because he was not bedridden or nothing. He was still up and about and then he, then he went into a coma. From the diabetes, then they could not bring him to again. Oh, it was a big shock. I still cannot get over it. We were married for 46 years. Now I say, it seems that now since the man is no longer there everything goes wrong. (Laughs.) Everything goes wrong now.)\*

She laughs softly. Then she says: *Ons moet maar tevrede wees*. (We have to be content.)<sup>93</sup> Tannie Fatima has one daughter and one grandson. The grandson lives with Tannie Fatima. He is in the back room. I ask Tannie Fatima about living in Hangberg, and if she would ever move elsewhere. I tell her about what Tannie Fameeda said about moving to England, that Hangberg is her place.

\*I sense that Tannie Fatima could still be mourning the loss of her husband. His memory is fresh in the house and in her thoughts, her heartache. I feel that it would not be appropriate to ask about her feelings of loss. Her silent resignation of 'Ons moet maar tevrede wees' tells me that she does not really want to follow this line of conversation. Or, perhaps, I do not feel comfortable to follow this line of conversation with her...

I ask Tannie Fatima whether she feels that at the age of 73 she is living a good life:

Ja ek is nog sover gesond. Ek het net die hart probleempie. Ek kan dan, ek gaan op 'n Dinsdag het na die Masjid toe gegaan, na 'n skool toe daar en op 'n Woensdag is ek by die 'Old Age Club' en op 'n Donderdag is ek by die Naaldwerk Klub. Ja nou en ek kan darem nog alles doen. By die ouderdom.

(Yes I am healthy so far. I only have a small heart problem. I can then, on a Tuesday I go to the Masjid, to a school there and then on a Wednesday I am at the Old Age Club and on a Thursday I am at the Sewing Club. Yes and I can still do everything. At this age.)

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<sup>93</sup> The Afrikaans word "*tevrede*" is a mix of being at peace (*vrede* = peace) and being satisfied with what one has. Content does not adequately describe *tevrede*.

Tannie Fatima does not feel she has had a hard life. She never had to work either because her husband earned good money. I ask her if she feels that she has a good life now:

Ja, ja, ja. Ja, ek voel ek meen ons lewe lekker hierso in Houtbaai. Jy kan loep, stap waar jy wil. En djy kan jou huis los. Dis maar nou wat dit begin te deurmekaar raak met die jongspannetjies wat nou, maar verder wat ons, ons het 'n baie lekker lewe gehad. As kinders oek. Ons het baie rustig gebly en ek meen hier'te kook lekker<sup>94</sup> kom bly.

(Yes, yes, yes. Yes, I feel, I mean, we live nicely here in Hout Bay. You can walk, walk where you want. And you can leave your home. It's only now that things are becoming a bit messy with the youngsters that now, but further with us, we had a very good life. As children also. We lived very peacefully, and I mean here I also came to stay nicely.)

Tannie Fatima says she wants to grow old in Hangberg.

My plekkie wat ek verder wil oud word as die Here my nog 'n paar jare spaar dan sal ek like om hier oud te word.

(My little place where I want to grow old if the Lord spares me for another few years, then I will like to grow old here.)

I ask her what the secret is to growing old in the way that she is managing to do. She giggles.

Ek seker ek het nooit gedrink nie en ek roek nie en ek het nogal nie baie swaargekry in die lewe nie. Dis daarom wat ek seker maar nou nog bietjie sterk is.

(I am sure (it is because) I never drank and I don't smoke and I did not suffer much in life. That is probably why I am still a little strong.)

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<sup>94</sup> *Lekker* = nice, enjoyable. The word is used extensively in Afrikaans.

One of eight children, Tannie Fatima's father was a fisherman all his life. She has only one daughter who is disabled by arthritis. (The daughter is 46 years old and has had both hips replaced.) The daughter's son lives with Tannie Fatima since his grandfather died. Having him live with her makes it easier for Tannie Fatima's daughter. I ask how she is able to help her daughter and whether her grandson helps his grandmother. Who actually helps whom? She laughs:

Ons moet maar mieste vir hulle help dan hulle vir ons help

(We help them more than they help us.)

Tannie Fatima fostered a daughter and took care of the foster child's child. They are all part of her family, she explains. However, Tannie Fatima says the foster child must now go back to her own mother to have her baby as she, Tannie Fatima, is not willing to look after another baby at her age.

I comment on the fact that Tannie Fatima's home is peaceful and quiet. She laughs:

Oeja, die kinners het altyd so, my dogter hulle het so baie vrinne gehad. Daar was altyd kinners by ons gewies en nou't, nou my man was ook baie lief vir kinners en goeden. En ons het, daar was nooit stilte in die huis soos hulle sê dis net man en vrou wat in die huis is. Daar was altyd 'n klomp kinners.

(Oh yes, the children always did so, my daughter had so many friends. There were always children with us and then, then my husband was also very fond of children and so. And we had, there was never silence in the house as they say (when) it is just husband and wife in the home. There was always a lot of children.)

I interject. *Kinners, ja. Maar dit moes seker lekker gewees het vir hulle om hier te kuier?* (Children, yes. But it must have been nice for the children to visit here?) Tannie Fatima replies:

Ja, ja, jy wiet. Foeitog, as hy so, daai tyd het hy twee vêne gehad. Eers die een vên, dan vat hy die klomp kinnners, as ons nou êrens na toe gaan dan vat hy die klomp kinnners saam uit en hy sal nooit snaaks gewies het met anner mense se kinnners nie. Baie lief vir kinnners.

(Yes, yes, you know. Shame, when he, that time he had two vans. First the one van, then he takes the lot of children, if we now go somewhere then he takes the lot of children with and he will never be funny<sup>95</sup> with other people's children. Loved children.)

Tannie Fatima says she grew up Catholic, but her husband was Muslim. She converted to Islam after her daughter's birth, as she realised that it was difficult for her husband to be "outside his faith." She talks about internal strife in the Muslim community around the Imam, who, according to the mosque committee, is "not educated enough." The community wants someone who studied abroad, even though they love this person who now performs all the duties of the Imam. This binary comparison of 'the local' as opposed to 'what comes from outside' is remnant of the colonisation inferiorisation – white is better than black, English better than Afrikaans, Europe superior to South Africa.

I ask Tannie Fatima if she knows what dementia and Alzheimer's are. Yes, she replies: *Ja ek ken Alzheimer's*. (Yes I know Alzheimer's.) She does not know anyone in Hangberg who is living with dementia. She speaks of her mother who, at age 86, *haar kop was helder gewees* (her head was clear). I ask her why it may be that someone of her mother's age has aged so well:

Ek dink dis die Here se genade wat ons, sy was nou nie, my ma was 'n goeie vrou. En sy't op anner mense kon gehelp het waar sy gekan het, dan. Nou somtyds hulle sê mos as jy goed lewe dan sal die Here vir jou 'n lang lewe gee. Of as jy, die Bybel beskryf as jy jou ouers. Uh, hoe sê mens nou? Eer jou vader en jou moeder en jou dae sal verleng word. Is maar dit. My ouma hulle het ook oumense geword. Die een tannie, my ouma se suster het, was in die nientags gewies toe sy gesterf het. En my oupa het ook baie

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<sup>95</sup> This is a nuanced Afrikaans expression – 'om snaaks te wees' – meaning that he will never be rude or harsh towards children.

oud geword. Ek dink daaityd se mense het meer, die oumense is nou meer gesond as vandag se jong, jongspan.

(I think it is the grace of God that we, she was not, my mother was a good woman. And she would help other people where she could, then. Now sometimes they say that if you live a good life then God will give you a long life. Or if you, as the Bible describes if you your parents - uhm how does one say - honour your father and mother and your days will be lengthened. It is that. My grandmother and them also became old people. The one aunt, my grandmother's sister, was in her nineties when she passed away. And my grandfather also became very old. I think people of that time did more, the old people are healthier than the young, the youngsters.)

Elderliness seems to evolve from the lives that we have led, a culmination of times and ages and experiences, heartaches and joys, all the rhizomes and point of entry, the moments of articulation, woven together in this later phase of life. I point out that only a small number of the people I met at the club appeared to be sickly:

Nee, nee. Hulle is so gesond, so gesond. Die een tannie wat om onse tafel sit, sy's, is sy nou 93 or 92 en sy is, sy stap nog na haar kerk toe. En sy stap nog na die klub toe en nog gesond vir haar ouderdom. Ek kannie glo dat sy so oud is nie. Ek meen sy doen daai vir, en daai is oek 'n vrou wat 'n klomp kinnners gehad het. En 'n visserman gehad het, maar sy is so.

(No, no. They are so healthy, so healthy. The one auntie that sits at our table, she's, is she now 93 or 92 and she is, she still walks to her church. And she walks to the club and is still healthy for her age. I cannot believe that she is so old. I mean she does that for, and that is also a woman who had a lot of children. And she had a fisherman (for a husband), but she is like that.)

I ask Tannie Fatima how she would feel about moving to an old age home one day:

Nee, ek sal nie daai laaik nie. Ja jy moet kyk dat jou neighbours stel belang. Is jy darem nog gesond of hoe. Ek wiet toe my ma hier kom bly het toe was hier 'n vrou tjie wat,

haar man het kort na hulle hier kom bly het, toe sterf haar man. I mean foeitog sy het elke dag gaan luister is sy darem oraait. Toe sy dan mos alleen my ma se neighbour. Toe't sy darem gekyk hoe, of sy kom kyk of my ma oraait is en soe. Maar djy sien om na mekaar. As djy nou nie daai ene gesien het vir 'n tydjie, dan wiet daar's fout daar jy moet gat te loer. Almal ken vir almal. Ons kannie geheime het vir mekaar nie want almal ken almal se geheime.

(No, I will not like that. Yes, you must see that your neighbours are interested. If you are you still healthy or what. I know when my mother came to live here there was a woman that, her husband died shortly after they moved in here, her husband died. I mean shame, she went every day to hear if she was ok. Then she was *mos* alone as my mother's neighbour. Then she went to see how, or she came to see if my mother was ok and so. But you look out for each other. If you have not seen that one for a while, then you know there is something wrong and you must go and look. Everyone knows everyone. We cannot have secrets from one another because everyone knows everyone's secrets.)

The powerful connectedness of community makes it almost unthinkable that older people should be institutionalised. Apart from the fact that there are very few possibilities of formal care, it simply does not feature as an option that the family unit should not take care of young and old, regardless of their circumstances. Families not only support one another, but also look out for neighbours.

After her husband's death, Tannie Fatima had to remain in her house for four months and ten days, according to Islamic faith:

Maar foeitog, hulle het, hulle het darem vir my kom visit. Daar is van hulle wat my kom visit het en as hulleou die end van die jaar ry hulle mos nou parties en goed. En as daar iets aangegaan het dan het hulle nou vir my gestier. So hulle het darem nie vir my vergiet nie, hulledarem (laughs) ja, hulle sien darem nog om.

(But shame, they did, they did come and visit me. There are some of them who came to visit me and then at the end of the year they had parties and things. And if there was

something going on they would send to me (gifts and food). So they did not forget about me, yes they still look out.)

I cannot help but ask her how old she thinks she will become and how old she wants to be:

Uh, uh as ek beginner siek word dan wil ek nie meer. Ek meen ek willie 'n las wies vir anner mense nie. Nou while ek nounog gesond is en so. My man het altyd gesê as hy doodgaan voor my dan gaan hy my kom haal as hy drie maande, as hy drie maande dood is gat hy vir my kom haal. Toe sê ek, 'Nee jissie, hoekom wild jy vir my so gou kontak?' Daaityd toe's my pa al dertig jaar oorlede en my ma lewe nog. Toe sê ek, 'Kyk my pa het my ma dertig jaar gegee. Djy wil my drie maande gee.' [Lag] Nou maak ons nou, nou sê die kinnere, die dogter, 'Ouma die driemaande is om né. Die driemaande is op.' [Lag] Dan sê ek, 'Ag man.' Gat hy my los 'n bietjie [lag]. Ons moet maar almal daai padjie gaan. Ons moet gaan. Ons moet net um gereed wies om te gaan. Mooi doodgaan. Mens wil nie kwaai vriende lewe moet die, onse mense nie. Party mense nie en ons glo in die geloof en ons probeer maar om ons egebede te hou en elke dag vir die Here te dankie, bedank vir wat ons nog ons oë kon oep maak en dit. As ek moet gaan dan moet ons maar gaan.

(Uh uh when I start getting sick then I don't want anymore. I mean I don't want to be a burden for other people. Now while I am still healthy and so on... My husband always said when he dies before me then he will come and fetch if he was three months, if he was dead for three months then he will come and fetch me. Then I said 'No jissie, why do you want to contact me so quickly?' That time my father was already dead for 30 years already and my mother was still alive. (She laughs.) Then I said 'Look my father gave my mother 30 years. You want to give me three months?' (She laughs again.) Now we do now, now the children say, the daughter, 'Ouma, the three months are over ne? The three months are over! (She laughs.) Then I say 'Ag man! He's gonna leave me for a while.' We all have to walk that (little) road. We have to go. We must just be uhm ready to go. Die beautifully. One does not want to live with bad friends, our people. Some people not and we believe in our faith and we try to keep our prayers and thank the Lord daily, thank Him for that we can still open our eyes to and that. If I have to go then we *maar* must go.)

Tannie Fatima is heartsore that at the time her husband died she was busy making *koesters*<sup>96</sup> and was not with him:

Nou daai was vir my die hartseer pad om ek nou nie by hom gewies het nie, gesien het hoe hy nou uitgaan en soe nie. Toe't hy nou heeltemal, toe gat hy in 'n, toe't hy in a coma gegaan. Nou daai was vir my so hartseer dinge, nou net my nie gelos het die koesters en by hom binne gewies het en daai een en soe.

(Now that was for me the heartsore path that I was not with him, that I did not see him go and so. Then he totally, he went in, then he went into a coma. Now that was for me such a heartsore thing, that I did not leave the *koesters* and be inside with him and that and so...)

A young boy comes running into the *voorhuis* with a playful dog that runs through the striped plastic curtains. (Dogs are not usually allowed in the homes of Muslims.) Tannie Fatima shouts:

Hey hey hey, kom hier! Kom hier!

(Hey hey hey, come here! Come here!).

The young boy is introduced to me as her grandson. He is shy, and she introduces him as Josef. The dog is called Chicco. I ask if the dog is allowed inside. She laughs and says:

Oe maar hy will net binne wees.

(Oh but he only wants to be inside.)

I prepare to leave and ask whether I will see her at the club on Wednesday:

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<sup>96</sup> Both within the Afrikaans and Malay tradition, there is a 'koe(k)sister', the second k being added for the Afrikaans version. The Malay *koester* is a doughnut type sweet that is fried in oil and then rolled in dessicated coconut. The Afrikaans *koeksister* is also a deep-fried dough, which is submerged in an ice cold sugar syrup the minute it comes out of the hot oil.

Ja. Woensdag. Ja eks al Woensdag. As iets nie voorval...

(Yes. Wednesday. Yes I will on Wednesday. If nothing unforeseen happens...)

“If nothing unforeseen happens...” In Hangberg, this clearly has a deeper nuanced meaning. From the stories, it is clear that life is extremely precarious in this little dorpie. Protests, forced eviction, gun fights between gang faction members, fires, accidents, and subsequent deaths are part of daily living, far more so than in any ‘white’ suburb. I leave the peace and serenity of Tannie Fatima’s home and venture back into the bright daylight of Hangberg. People, cars, dogs. Time stood still while we were in conversation. I identify numerous things Tannie Fatima and I have in common. *Voorkamers* with *vertoonkaste* packed with ornaments, for one. In many ways, Tannie Fatima might have been my grandmother.<sup>97</sup> As I bow my head to pass through the low frame of the door of her dwelling, I am struck by how the outside world contrasts with the peace of her dwelling, and leave with a sense of having experienced the true wisdom of Elderliness. The way in which Tannie Fatima considers our mortality, her resignation around having changed her faith and how in the end it all seems the same, and her commitment to community stays with me as I walk back to my car.

### ***The Sewing Club members***

The Hangberg Library is built against the slope of the mountain. The entrance is at street level. A security guard stands at the entrance. Strong burglar bars are fitted to all windows, which tells a part of the story of this community. I walk down the steep stairs into the cool silence of the library interior. The silence is pierced by the screeching metallic sound of an angle grinder.

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<sup>97</sup> I do not make this claim lightly. Throughout the reflexive storying, I have hinted at cultural similarity, while also gesturing toward ‘differences’. It is very difficult therefore, given South Africa’s torrid racialised history to speak of cultural, historical, even linguistic differences, without confusing socially and discursively constituted differences with those that might have emerged in any other possible way in their lived expression of them. Apartheid rhetoric and thinking has constituted every aspect of daily life and has seeped into the fabric of the quotidian. At the same time, this has been one of the greatest contradictions of apartheid: that those separations based on racial lines were ‘real’ in anyway. ‘Coloured’ and ‘white’ Afrikaans culture(s) have for centuries bled into each other. Afrikaans culture has had such a dominating effect on ‘coloured’ Afrikaans ways of life, which has been oppressive and hence often rejected by coloured people in some ways, but also simultaneously accepted, indeed even embraced as a means of survival and as a way of life within that context. This embrace has not necessarily been expressed resignedly but as means of emergence, as a cultural way of life that was affected by apartheid but was also transcendent of it. This complicated relationship of indistinguishableness and ‘difference’ persists, and the contradictions are given expression in many forms and moods of daily life. The religious element to this complicated cultural relationship has played an important role. The contradictions are palpable in Hangberg and emerge throughout my storying. Tannie Fatima and my grandmother viscerally embody such similarities in their ways of being as to be indistinguishable from each other, from my lived experience of them.

It seems more burglar bars are being added to the windows. Perhaps the existing ones are being replaced or reinforced after a break-in.

The library is a haven of gentleness against the January heat, traffic, barking dogs, and endless stream of people on the streets. The librarian and her assistants greet me. They had promised to introduce me to more older people, yet they never did. It is a Thursday, and the Sewing Club meets in the library every Thursday morning. They are all part of the Senior's Club and have met since 1975. I see the members of the club seated at one of the tables. They seem shy as I approach them. Again, I am aware that they might never have had a white man at their table.

Tannie Violet, 72, is the convenor of the Senior's Club. Her initial shyness may be part of her being an introvert, I think. She may be soft spoken, but I soon learn how assertive she is, as she steers the members in conversation. Only four members have come to the Sewing Club today: Tannie Violet, Tannie Ferial (59), Tannie Cassandra (71), and Tannie Girlie (70). Tannie Ferial does not qualify as a member of that club, so she is introduced as a "carer". Tannie Girlie is shy. I noticed her previously at the Senior's Club meetings, keeping herself busy in the kitchen. Today she makes tea for us and takes a long time before joining us at the table.

Tannie Violet explains that the club was started by a *klomp whities uit die dorp* (a group of white people from the town). She looks at me when she says *ons sê whities* (we say whiteys<sup>98</sup>). *Toe kom '76, die 'riots,' en wil die mans nie hê hulle vrouens moet hienatoe kom nie want dis gevaar.* (Then came '76, the riots, and the men didn't want their wives to come here because it is dangerous). Everyone chimes in, in high-pitched voices: *Dit was nie eintlik gevaarlik nie.* (It wasn't really dangerous.) Everyone talks at the same time. It is clear they feel strongly about the subject, almost defending the situation\*: *Die riots het meer gegaan oor 'march,' eintlik nie 'n bakleiery gewees nie.* (The riots were more about marching, there was not really fighting.) Tannie Violet explains that the riots happened regardless, and some of the social workers

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<sup>98</sup> 'Whities' is a colloquialism in South African English.

helped to keep the Club going during that time. She and Cassandra are two of the original members, whom she calls *die ou ape* (the old monkeys)<sup>99</sup>. She continues:

Dit is vir ons 'n afleiding, lekker om by mekaar te kom... ons is nie ekspert nie, ons leer mekaar. Ek hou van lappies aanmekaar sit.... maar ons vat nie orders nie. Ons vat nie eintlik orders nie wat dan moet jy aanjaag.

(It is for us a distraction, *lekker* to come together.... we are not expert, we teach each other. I like putting pieces of fabric together.... but we do not take orders. We do not actually take orders because then you have to hurry).<sup>100</sup>

\* Once again, I wonder if my presence as a white man affects the rendering of the stories. The white husbands of the women who helped them would not allow their wives to enter Hangberg... Do they assume that I might have apartheid sympathies? Do they try and soften things on my behalf to not offend me? There are few signs of any sewing taking place where

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<sup>99</sup> In 1976 the youth of Soweto, a black township outside Johannesburg, staged a protest against changes to the Bantu Education Act, 1953, which forced black and mixed-race children to learn certain subjects, including mathematics, in Afrikaans in their segregated schools. (It is notable that English-speaking white children did not have to do this.) The youth were met by heavily armed police, and an estimated 700 children were killed over a period of several weeks as the uprising spread across the country. This event was a turning point in the political landscape of South Africa, even though it took until 1994, when the African National Congress party came into power and Nelson Mandela became President, for the political and legislative landscape to change. This paragraph, articulated by Tannie Violet, is laden with context. The term “whities”, which refers to white people, may be derogatory or act as counter-labelling. Tannie Violet juxtaposes it by referring to herself and Tannie Cassandra as apes. Within the South African context, as in other parts of the world including Britain, black or mixed-race people have often been compared to apes or baboons by white people. Again, the word *mos* is included repeatedly.

<sup>100</sup> Tannie Violet points out later that their club does not fall under the Department of Social Development, as do the majority of luncheon clubs. She explains they do not want to be told what to do, and that falling under the provincial department involves too much paperwork. Even though they might not be experts at managing their club, she points out, they do not have to “take orders”. Tannie Violet in effect articulates the complexity of the sociopolitical standing of coloured women, during apartheid and for many today still. A sense of community among the women is apparent: “.... it is *lekker* to get together, we like putting things together,” they told me. It is evident that women of this community arguably ‘hold the pieces together’ in many ways, which you can hear when listening to their stories. Perhaps she is telling me that while in the eyes of what is perceived as a ‘white world’ (which would include me), they might not be regarded as expert, but they will not take orders. The statement is both profound and powerful. Historically, coloured women who worked in homes of whites were at the mercy of their white madams and bosses, who gave them orders. Some were treated indifferently, even cruelly (Jansen, 2019). The women lacked agency and power. But now, here within their club in the Hangberg library, they have agency. They do not take orders. If they did take orders, they point out, they would have to be hurried. The observation *Dan moet jy aanjaag* (Then you must hurry) has another layer of meaning as well. *Om aan te jaag* (To hurry) means to herd or chase in a way a sheepdog would herd or chase sheep. In another context, it would mean “to make a mess”, from the Afrikaans saying: *Jy is besig om kak aan te jaag* (You are busy herding crap). The contradictions are indicative of the contradictions of the situations of these coloured women historically. These women are indeed experts in their community but were never considered such outside their community. “We do not take orders” is repeated, the second time the word *eintlik* (actually) is included.

we meet. A small collection of old magazines lies on the table. Tannie Violet explains that they only sew “on order”, on consignment. I wonder if they are particular about whom they sew for. The money they make goes towards funding outings for the members. Last year, the club members undertook a trip to Oudtshoorn. Tannie Violet asks Tannie Girlie to fetch some of the items they make. Bright pink tracksuits for children, all made from donated fabric. Tannie Violet reiterates that they do not belong to a larger organisation, as they do not want to do paperwork. They used to belong to “Age in Action”, a national NGO with provincial branches in the service of older people, but resigned a few years ago as they did not like being told what to do. They have a storeroom in the library where they keep their sewing machines and haberdashery, but it does not seem these will be brought out today. Perhaps it is because I am present and they prefer to converse with me?

I ask the members what it is like being “old” in Hangberg. Tannie Girlie speaks first: *Ek is 'n baie vinnige looper.* (I am a very fast walker.) Perhaps she articulates that although she is “old,” she is still able to walk fast. Another adds: *Sy is 'n vinnige motjie.* (She is a fast motjie). Tannie Girlie was born in Hangberg to a Muslim family and has lived there all her life. I ask Tannie Violet where she was born and she replies, in Hangberg, as well. *Gedruk en getik.* (Printed and typed (what I would assume is a saying among them of being born and bred in Hangberg.))

Do they see themselves as “old people?” I ask. Tannie Cassandra puts it like this: *Dit hang af wat jy maak van jousef en hoe jy met jou lewe voortgaan.* (It depends on what you make of yourself and how you go about your life.) Tannie Violet agrees:

Dit hang af hoe jy maak met jousef. As ek op 60 gaan stil sit het by die huis, kyk by venster dan was ek mos nou al klaar, dan is jy in mekaar. Maar soos ons is, wat nou in die klub is, behalwe die klub ons kan nou baie mense sien hulle, as ek nou, ek sê altyd my oue mense, en ek kyk oumense van ‘n ander plek - julle is 60? Kom na my klub toe. Kom na my klub toe! My oudste persoon is 94 en sy is elke week in die klub. En sy het saam met ons Oudtshoorn toe gegaan.

(It depends on what you do with yourself. If I went and sat quietly at home at 60 then I would have been finished by now, then you are shrivelled up. But the way we are who are now in the club, even besides those in the club, who can see that many people, if I

now, I always talk about my old people, and I see old people from another place – you are 60? Come to my club. Come to my club! My oldest person is 94 and she is in the club every week. And she went with us to Oudtshoorn.)

I ask the group what the difference might be between how *they* experience ageing and being old in this community, compared to older people elsewhere. Tannie Violet gives her opinion first. *Ek dink die verskil is...* (I think the difference is...) Tannie Cassandra interjects: *Die lewenswyse – as hulle aftree, dan dink hulle hulle tree van alles af. Daar is nog wat hulle active, hou nie of wat hulle miskien nog die kan doen nie. Hulle tree af so hulle aftree is aftree. Hulle gaan nie verderder meer nie.* (The lifestyle – if they retire, then they think they retire from everything. There is nothing that keeps them active or what they perhaps cannot still do. They retire so their retiring is retiring. They no longer go any further.) Tannie Violet continues:

Maar dink ook, hoe sal ‘n mens sê, dis innie ‘genes.’ Kan wees, ek het ook antie R van die niggies wat ook nou al daai ouderdom is dan sal ‘n mens nie eers sê dat hulle so oud is nie. Maar ek meen, Rayne het mos nou al gesien ons mense, nê? Ouderdom. J is die jongste, maar ons mense, die wat nou inkom sal in die sestigs wees, maar die anders is almal oor sewentig, oor tagtig, antie R was nou net nie gister daar nie, antie E is ook oor tagtig. Tannie L hulle, die een met die hekel wat so baie praat, hulle is almal, wat ek ook dink dis hoe ‘n mens groot geword het. Ek vat dit van my af, ek kan nou nie praat van die ander mense nie, ek het in die dorp groot geword, daar wat Mainstream is. Ons het swaar groot geword, jy moet uitgegaan het om vir jousef, jou ouers het gewerk, nê, my pa was ‘n visterman, ek was in Sub B - wat is dit nou graad 2 - hy het vir SD of vir sy pa HD gewerk, toe was hy in ‘n ongeluk daar wat die robots nou is soos jy op Suikerbossie toe gaan, die trok het daarom geslaan en my pa het seer gekry, okay toe kan my pa nie meer werk nie. Maar my pa het uitgegaan, hy was ‘n goeie gardener, dit was sy char joppies wat hy gedoen het. My ma het in die fabriek gewerk, maar ons as kind, van agtjaar oud af moet ek en C moet kinders opgepas het, want almal is in die fabriek, en die mans is op die see. Maar nou jy as kind, nou jy begin nou al daaityd, nou is jy al mos soos ‘n ma vir daai kinders.

(But also think, how would one say, it is in the genes. Could be, I also had an auntie R of the cousins who is also now that age and then one would not say that they are that

old. But I mean, Rayne has *mos* now already seen our people, hey? Age. J is the youngest, but our people, these who come in now will be in their sixties, but the others are all over seventy, over eighty, auntie R was not there yesterday, auntie E is over eighty. Tannie L and them, the one with the crochet work who talks so much. They are all what I also think how one grew up. I take it from myself, I cannot talk on behalf of the other people, I grew up in the town, there where Mainstream is (a shopping centre in a part of Hout Bay frequented mainly by whites). We had a difficult upbringing, you had to go out to work for yourself, your parents hey, my father was a fisherman, I was in Sub B which is now grade two (age seven) – my father worked for SD or his brother HD, then he was in an accident there by the traffic lights as you go up Suikerbossie (a road leading out of Hout Bay towards the city), the truck turned over there and my father was injured, okay then my father can no longer work. But my father went out, he was a good gardener, that was his char jobs that he did. My mother worked in the factory, but we as children, from the age of eight years old Cassandra and I must look after children, because everyone is in the factory, and the men at sea. But now you as child, now you start at that time already, now you are *mos* like a mother to those children.)

*Soos 'n grootmens hanteer word*, Tannie Cassandra observes. (Treated as an adult.) Tannie Violet continues: *En as jy nie – daar's mos vier seisoene gewees nê – hotnot, kreef, snoek season. Hottentot.* (And when you don't – there are *mos* four seasons, not so – hotnot, crayfish, snoek season. (A hotnot refers here to the fish with that name. A snoek is a fish commonly found in the seas of the Western Cape.)) *No*, Tannie Violet insists. *Ons sê hotnot, nie hottentot nie, dis hotnot, uh uh hoe't hulle gesê - the Cape, the Cape...?* (We say hotnot, not hottentot, uh uh how did they say – the Cape, the Cape...?) Tannie Cassandra adds “hottentot”. “How did they say?” she asks. “The Cape Coloured?” Tannie Ferial suggests. But Tannie Violet rejects that term. *Hotnot is die vis.* (Hotnot is the fish.) Tannie Violet continues:

Nee, die vis man, hulle het dit 'n ander naam vir die vis gegee, maar dan is dit dan, is dit dan is dit die kwartaal wat daar niks was nie. Nee, hulle het gegaan, dan gaan hulle nou East Coast so uit ver gaan hulle uit maar, nou in daaityd, hulle is geleer gewees, as dit snoek season is, dan maak hulle die mootjie, die mootjie is *mos* die piekelvis, wat

hulle nou sê oliesnoek en al die snaakse goete wat hulle nou praat. Nou as dit kom vir daai kwartaal, dan word daai mootjie mos nou uitgevars, lekker smoorvis maak hulle nou lekker al die honderd en twaalf dinge met hom, maar dit het die kinders het saamgeleer, soos ons as groot mense, oumense van vandag kan praat daaroor, uh uh oor twintig jaar kan Rayne nie die kinders vat wat nou op die ewens hulle sal nie kan praat daaroor nie because why, hulle wiet nie. Ons het gegaan, darem sê ek ek kannie praat van die mense van die hawe en daai nie. As jy wil eet vanaand, dan gaan jy 'n plan gaan maak. Jy't gegaan, jy het lekker alikrukossies ons het so lekker vet ene het ons hier wat hulle nou gebou het Mariners en daai plekke, daai, daai het jy op 'n Sondag ook ge-eet cause why you, jy gaan moet survive.

(No, the fish man they gave it another name. But then it is the quarter, then is it then is it then that there is nothing. No, they went, then they went to the East Coast they go out far, but now in that time, they had learnt, if it is snoek season, then they make the *mootjie*, the *mootjie* is the pickled fish, which they now call *oliesnoek* and all the strange things that they talk now. Now when it comes to that quarter, then that *mootjie* is being salted, *lekker smoorvis* (a type of kedgerree) they make now, *lekker* all those hundred and twelve things with him, but that the children learned as well, so that we as adults, old people can talk about it today, uh uh in twenty years' time Rayne\* will not be able to talk to the children about this, because why they don't know. We went, that is why I say I cannot talk about the people of the harbour and that. If you want to eat tonight, then you go and make a plan. You went, you got *lekker alikrukossies* and we got this *lekker* fat one we get here where they have not built Mariner's and those places, those, those you ate on a Sunday as well because why you had to survive.)

\* Each time I am struck at this formal form of address, and how inevitably it influences the power dynamic and rendering of the story. Instead of using the pronoun 'you', my name is used. It does not go unnoticed that as much as I am now completely immersed in their company and their story, there is still a formal distance.

A long and animated discussion ensues about the difference between *alikeukel* and periwinkles, *perdevoete* (horse feet) and mussels. Foraging was a way for the inhabitants of Hout Bay to survive. Tannie Cassandra adds: *En met swaarky*. (And with suffering.) The women

describe a life of hardship in a way that makes it sound like it was joyous for them. They laugh at my surprise that they caught *duikers* (cormorants) in the river mouth, by hand, which they *braaied* (barbequed). It is hard to imagine that children would catch a bird the size of a cormorant and then barbeque it...

Redirecting the conversation, I ask them to reflect on the notion of retirement, as a phase in life that (we) white people follow. They respond in unison. Tannie Cassandra says: *Hulle het genoeg geld gehad, hulle hoef nie te gekom het oor niks nie. Of ek gaan glad nie eers of pensioen nie, ek werk maar aan want daar is nie veel meer om van te leef nie.* (They had enough money, they did not have to worry about anything. Or I don't go on pension at all, I keep on working as there is not much more to live on.) Tannie Violet adds:

Maar vandag kan hulle nie meer aan werk nie, as jy sestig is moet jy aftree. Behalwe nou, okay die whities, dit sal nou die ryk man wees, wat nou geld het, maar as ons nou gaan by die arme wit man nê, uh uh uh hulle tree af sestig, maar dan kry op sites?? net nie die arme wit man nie vandag, ek praat nou in vandag se lewe, wat hulle hulle is mos nou ge-(experience), nou gaan hulle hulle gaan uit, en hulle verskaf werk vir hulle self. Hulle werk van die huis af hulle vat projects as mens nou mooi nag aan en baie kyk vir almal se electricity en se water wat jy nou om water te spaar en daai, as ons ingaan daarin is dit die mense wat afgetree het. Wat nou probeer om nog 'n lewe vir die inkomste because why die inkomste vorentoe te gaan.

(But today they can no longer carry on, when you are sixty you have to retire. Except, okay the whiteys, that will now be the rich man, who has money, but if we now go by the poor white man, they retire at sixty... they have experience so they go out and find work for themselves. They work from home taking on projects when one looks into it they look at electricity and water... all people who retired. Who now tries to (create) another (life for the income) living because why, to have the income to continue.)

Tannie Cassandra interrupts. (*Die pensioen*) is te min. Tannie Violet agrees that apart from the pension (money) being too little, *Nee, is wat hulle nou agter hulle knieë gaan sit so ons nou praat dit hou vir hulle nog steeds besig, nê, en dan kwyn hulle nie weg nie. Dit hou vir hulle besig, dan kry ons van die...* (No, it is what they now go sit behind their knees, as we talk now

it continues to keep them busy, hey, and then they do not fade away. It keeps them busy. And then you get some...)

Again, Tannie Violet interrupts herself and looks at me sideways. In a far softer voice, she says: *Okay, ek gaan nou sê van die boere nê?* (Okay, I am going to say about the boers<sup>101</sup> now?) Everyone laughs. Tannie Violet protests: *Nee, nee nee, dis nou van dinges nie nie van...* (I reassure her I understand the term *boere* in this context and what she means. And that I take no offence.) She continues: *Ek is 'n boer, ek mag maar bruin wees maar my pa was 'n boer so ek het nie 'n problem nie.* (I am a boer, I may be brown (coloured) but my father was a boer so I do not have a problem.)

Tannie Violet goes on: *Dan kry ons wat as kinders het hulle op die plaas groot geword so hulle kan nog tuinmaak, die vrouens kan die goed inlê, jams en al daai goeters maak.... as jy gaan kyk het ons in Laaiplek was toe ons daar geloep het....* (Then we get those who as children grew up on the farm so they can still garden, the women can bottle, jams and make all those things.... if you go look we are in Laaiplek<sup>102</sup> when we went there...) The women start to giggle while Tannie Violet explains:

... dis actually hartseer as 'n mens mooi nagaan is dit actually hartseer as jy uitgaan en jy kom by sulke plekke om te kyk laat dis oumense wat daar sit wat die goeters moet verkoop om aan die lewe te bly. Because why, hulle sit ook vandag in squatter kampe so so so hulle doen nog altyd as wat hulle gaan sit vir handouts, doen hulle nog iets, probeer hulle iets. En ons kry mense wat... Dit baat nie ons gat skuil agter wat gebeur het nie. Daai is verby. Daai is die verlede. Stel nie belang in die verlede nie. Dis wat ons nou kan maak voerentoe. (She stamps her hand on the table.) Okay, I am going to say then we get some of the boere. (Everyone laughs.)

(... it is actually heartsore if one goes over it carefully it is actually heartsore if you go out and you arrive at such places to see that old people who sit there who must sell things to stay living. Because why, they sit to this day still in squatter camps so, so, so

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<sup>101</sup> The word 'boer' means farmer, but in this context is reference to white Afrikaners. It has resonance with "The Boer War" and has now come to mean Afrikaners more widely, sometimes quite scathingly.

<sup>102</sup> Laaiplek is a village along the west coast of South Africa with a similar demographic to Hangberg.

they continue to do as when they go sit for handouts, they do something else, they try something. And we get people who... It doesn't help us to go hide from what happened. That has passed. That is the past. It is what we can do now, moving forward.)

Tannie Violet is very emotive when she refers to older white people who end up living in informal settlements and having to keep on working to make ends meet. I realise that what she is referring to is that it is not only coloured people who live hard lives. She qualifies that "it does not help to go hide from what happened". I can only assume that she is referring to both apartheid and the failure of the new government to provide for older people of all races. And yet she stoically reminds us that we have to move beyond the past. It is in this moment that I once again shudder, not knowing how it is possible to be so stoic and determined. Is she saying this for me or for herself? I will never know.

Do they feel there is support for older people in Hangberg? I ask. They answer in unison: *Nee, niks, nothing. Niks nie* (No, nothing, nothing. Not a thing.) I ask about the clinic that closed down. Tannie Cassandra speaks: *O, dis 'n groot probleem. Baie groot probleem.* (Oh, it is a big problem. Very big problem.) Will the clinic re-open? I ask. And I mention I saw a group of nurses (they wear a distinctive uniform) on the sidewalk down from the library. They tell me those are the carers who take the older people's blood pressure. On the street. Tannie Violet explains:

Omdat die mense nie wil clinic toe loop nie. Vir my, okay die clinic is toe, was gerieflik vir ons gewees in die hawe, maar nou is onse gerief nou weggevat van ons af, nou wil ons nie daai ag rand betaal nou bly ons, ons is pensioners ons is pensioners maar dis jou gesondheid.

(Because the people do want to walk to the clinic. For me, okay, the clinic is closed, it was convenient for us in the harbour, but now our convenience has been taken away from us, now we don't want to pay that eight rand so now we stay, we are pensioners, we are pensioners but it is your health.)

Tannie Violet continues:

As jy nie die ag rand wil betaal nie stap tot daar bo. (If you do not want to pay the eight rand (then) walk to the top.) But, Tannie Violet explains further: Ons het vergeet van die mense wat daai kant vandaan kom. Hulle het hulle geld, hulle kom sit hieso, die wat gestap het het gestap, dan het ons mense wat oor die berg vandaan gekom het ook om hie, maar nou is onse gerief is mos nou weg gevat nou wil ons nie eers gaan tot daar nie, ons wil nie nou eers stap tot by die clinic nie, nou moet die mense kom, soos hulle moet nou in die pad sit.

(We have forgotten about the people who come from that side. They have their money, they come and sit here, those who walked walked, then our people came from over the mountain also, but now our convenience has *mos* been taken away, now we don't want to go there, we don't now want to walk to the clinic, now the people must come, so now they must sit in the road.)

Tannie Cassandra confirms Tannie Violet's explanation:

Nee, hulle vat die bloeddruk, vat die cholesterol, hulle vat die en daai.

(No, they take the blood pressure, take the cholesterol, they take this and that.)

Tannie Violet continues:

Maar as die clinic daarbo, dit pla nie vir my nie want my storie is die, as ek clinic toe gaan is dit 'day off.' Dan sit ek, dan sien ek alles dan sien ek alles wat aangaan. Jy sien mense wat jy lank laas gesien het, soos my skoonmense woon daarbo on IY die squatter kamp daar bo en baie van daai mense vriende en daai daar sien jy kom kry jy daai mense daar wat jy nou nie, lanklaas gesien het. So vir die ander mense is dit 'n probleem maar vir my is dit nie 'n probleem nie.

(But if the clinic up there it does not bother me because my story is this, if I go to the clinic it is "day off." Then I sit, then I see everything, then I see everything that goes on. You see people whom you have not seen for a long time, like my in-laws live up there in IY the squatter camp up there and many of those people, friends and that you see

come there and those people there who you have not seen for a long time. So for the other people it is a problem but for me it is not a problem.)

Tannie Violet laughs and says:

Net al wat 'n probleem is as die seniors se bloed te hoog is kan hulle maklik hier gegaan het. Ongelukkig kan dit nie dan moet jy nou vir hulle gaan. Daai is, vir die seniors gaan dit regtig 'n probleem wees.

(The only thing that is a problem is that when the seniors' blood is too high then they could easily have gone here. Unfortunately it cannot and then you must go for them. That is, for the seniors it will really be a problem.)

Tannie Cassandra concurs:

Dis 'n ongerief.

(It is an inconvenience.)

I ask the pair what this means for old people, and they explain that it costs eight rand<sup>103</sup> to get a taxi into the main part of Hout Bay to get to the new location of the clinic. Their situation in this regard intrigues me. Yet another service is taken away from the people of Hangberg: in this case, from vulnerable and older people. For many, the clinic is a lifeline, where they obtain their chronic medication and medical support – and no longer having the clinic nearby makes their situation all the more precarious. Whereas previously they were able to walk to the clinic, they now have to hire a private taxi to take them into the “white part” of town, as they describe it.

I ask them about their children. Tannie Cassandra had four children, she says: two died and the other two are both married. One child lives in Hangberg and the other in Ottery. Auntie Violet has three children, two living with her and one who lives in Paarl:

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<sup>103</sup> The South African currency is the rand.

Daar's drie van myself en behalwe die halwe honderd wat ek groot gemaak het.

(There are three of mine apart from the half a hundred that I brought up.)

Again, laughter. Tannie Girlie has three sons:

Twee is uitgetroud, een bly op sy eie en die ander een bly by my met sy vrou en sy kinders en die ander seun bly by my suster. Hy is ongetroud.

(Two are married out<sup>104</sup>, one stays on his own and the other one lives with me with his wife and children and the other lives with my sister. He is unmarried.)

I ask their view on the assumption I have, that children in Hangberg take care of their parents. They all answer:

Ja, som, nie almal nie. Maar hulle kyk nog na hulle ouers ja, die goeie daaruit.

(Yes, some, not everyone. But they still look after their parents yes, the good among them.)

Tannie Cassandra joins the conversation:

Onse kinders kyk mooi na ons.

(Our children look after us well.)

Tannie Violet elaborates:

Hulle abuse ons darem nie.

(They do not abuse us.)

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<sup>104</sup> 'Being married out' means that her children are married and that they have moved out of her house.

Everyone laughs. I am wondering if the thought of children abusing elderly parents would be preposterous to them. Are they discomfited by the notion of parent abuse – or are they comforted in the knowledge rather that this does not happen to them? Domestic violence is one of the many harsh realities in South Africa. I know that it would be naïve of me to think that it is not rife in Hangberg too. Yet I steer away from that, perhaps not wanting to know what they don't want to say. At night I lie awake wondering if I should have asked more about other older people, the ones who did not invite me to visit them, the ones I saw sitting outside their homes when I walked past. I am concerned that I am perhaps only scratching the surface, that I am avoiding the difficult subjects. Yet I want to be guided by them, I do not want to investigate or interrogate.

Are there grandmothers in Hangberg, I ask, who look after children and does that have an influence on the way people age? Tannie Cassandra jumps in first:

Vir my is dit jy het besluit om kinders te het in die lewe. Dit is jou besluit, jy't besluit om te trou of nie te trou nie, maar dis nie die antwoord natuurlik vir oumagrootjie of vir ouma nie, jy moet self daai kind grootmaak. Daar is help, want daar moet gehelp word, maar ek gaan nie my kind kom neerplak by my oumagrootjie nie, ek wil vanaand daar wees of ek wil daar wees ek het nie nou tyd vir daai kind nie dis onregverdig. Dit is wat ek dink. Ek weet nie hoe voel hulle nie, maar dit is wat ek voel.

(For me it is that you decided to have children in life. It is your decision, you decided to get married or not to get married, but it is not the answer of course for great-grandmother or for grandmother, you must bring up that child yourself. There is help, because help there must be, but I am not going to dump my child at my great-grandmother, I want to be there tonight or I want to be there and I now don't have time for that child, that is unfair. That is what I think. I do not know how they feel, but that is what I feel.)

Tannie Violet agrees.

Ja, dit is ons kry 'n ouma bederf sy kind, ouma bederf sy kind maar dit uh uhuh in my opinie ek sal my kinders help met hulle kinders as hulle werk, dis die kinders wat ek

groot gemaak het nê, die ouers werk, hulle werk nie hieruit nie sê maar hulle werk nie in die Houtbaai nie hulle werk uit. Nou, wat ek gedoen het is as jou kinders dan moet jy daai kind in die winter uitbring, daai kindjie, nou bly die kindjie siek. Dan vat ek die kinders, en dan sal ek nou Vrydae reg weer huis toe, kom kom. Daar is nie gaan staan oppie dansbaan moet nie eers waag nie. In onse tyd en dae het my oorle pa-hulle, julle het kinders mos nê, oppie dansbaan, dê. Thank you! Waa's die dans? In die skool. Dê, vat jou kind. Daas julle kinders. Julle dans nog dan sit die kinders by die deur. Dis wat ek het. She says nee, nee ons is mos mooi geleer. In my opinie, ek het gesê ek sal jou kinders grootmaak, maar as jou kinders siek is dan gaan jy jou dag afvat dan gaan jy jou kinders dokter toe neem, self. Want ek sit nie by 'n dokter nie.

(Yes, it is that we find a grandmother spoil their child but it uh uhuh in my opinion I will help my children with their children if they work, that is the children that I brought up, the parents work, they do not work around here in Hout Bay, they work out (elsewhere). Now, what I did was if your children, then that child is brought out in winter, now that child stays sick. Then I take the children, and then on Friday I take them home, come come. There is no standing on the dance floor, don't even dare. In our time and days my departed father and them, you have children, on the dance floor – here! Here, take your child. Where's the dance? In the school? Here, take your child. There are your kids. You are still dancing then your kids are sitting at the door. That is what I have. I say it is clear that you will not mess with Auntie R. No, no, no, we were taught well. In my opinion, I said I will bring up your children, but if your children are sick you will take your day off and then you will take your children to the doctor yourself. Because I do not sit at a doctor.)

Tannie Violet is not done sharing her view. She expresses herself forthrightly:

Oumagrootjie.... ons kry kinders wat mooi na hulle oumagrootjies kyk, want daai klomp, daai generation, daai klompie ek.... Kan dalk wees van die kinders is miskien op drugs, nê, nou bly ons almal saam in een huis ons, lewe van ouma se pension en ons lewe van oumagrootjie se pension en want hulle weet dat ouma en oumagrootjie gaan nie dat die kleinkinders honge lei nie. So waarvoor moet ons gaan werk want julle gaan mos sorg vir ons kinders. En dan op die ou end dan steel ons nog ouma se geld ook om

drugs te gaan koop. En dit baat nie die mense gaan dit wegsteek nie die mense gaan dit weet. Ja, dit gebeur maar nou gaan ons mos sê alles is grand in die hawe alles is grand in die hawe. Uh hu, gaan niks so grand in die hawe nie, daar's 'n klomp gelukkige oumas wat gelukkig is wat uh uhuh en behalwe dit daar's van die oumas wat 'n smile op hulle gesit het, there's nothing wrong with that. Maar as jy mooi ingaan en jy leer hulle ken en daai en jy kom dan sal jy sien daai die ma of die ouma hy steek nog daai weg want hy wil nie he die mense buitekant moet weet wat gaan aan nie, wat in my huis aangaan nie, dis nie hulle besigheid nie. Dis nie hulle besigheid om te dinges nie maar op die ou end nou lê jy vinnig vining – 'n stroke! Nou kry jy daai 'stroke', net so twee dae, of 'n week, dan is jy weg want jy het dit opgekrop. Jy wil na niemand toe gegaan het nie, jy hoef nie om uit te praat met daai mense nie, maar jy het jou predikant, daar's ander mense wat jy so een soos u nou kom en en en dan kan jy mos nou... ja, want ek ken mos nou nie vir u nie maar ek weet ons gaan nie gebroadcast word nie, ons gaan nie Whatsapp nie of ons gaan nie Facebook nie, want dis wat die mense bang is voor om te praat why vandag gaan alles op Facebook of Whatsapp ek weet nie wat se snaaksigheid is dit alles nie maar daar is oumas en goed wat geabuse word.

(Great-grandmother.... we get children who look after great-grandmother very well, because that lot, that generation, that lot I. It can be that some of the children are on drugs, hey, now we all live together in one home we live off grandmother's pension and we live off great-grandmother's pension because they know that grandmother and great-grandmother will not let the children go hungry. So why do we need to work because you will *mos* look after our children. And in the end, we will steal grandmother's money to buy drugs. And it does not pay to hide this away, the people are going to know. Yes, this happens, but now we are going to say everything is *mos* grand in the harbour, everything is grand in the harbour. Uh uh (like oh no), not going so grand in the harbour at all, there are many grandmothers who are happy who, uh uhuh and besides that there are some of the grandmothers who put a smile on themselves, there is nothing wrong with me, but if you go into it nicely and you get to know them and that and you come then you will see that mother or that grandmother they hide this because they do not want the people outside to know what is going on,

what is going on in my house, it is not their business. It is not their business to *dinges*<sup>105</sup> but in the end you quickly, quickly – a stroke! Now you get that stroke, just in two days, because you kept it inside. You do not want to go to anyone, you do not have to talk out to those people, but you have your preacher, there are other people like you who now comes and and and then you kan *mos* now.... yes because I don't know you *mos* (she addresses me), but I know we will not be broadcast and we will not go on Whatsapp and we are not going on Facebook and Whatsapp, because that is why people are scared to talk because why today everything goes on Facebook and Whatsapp I don't know what funny business this is but there are grandmothers and things that are abused.)

I ask Tannie Girlie whether she looks after her grandchildren. Tannie Violet jumps in: *Girlie, wees eerlik, ek het nou gepraat van jy gaan ook in die hospitaal lê dan slaan ek jou!* (Girlie, be honest, I just talked about this, you are also going to end up lying in hospital and then I will hit you!) Everyone worries about Tannie Girlie, I am told. Her daughter-in-law sits at home while Tannie Girlie looks after the children. Tannie Violet observes: *Dan is.... uh uh uh, maar Girlie is ook slim. As Girlie hoor dis 'n toer storie dan 's sy weg!* (Then it is.... uh uh uh, but Girlie is also clever. If Girlie hears there is a tour story then she's gone!) Everyone joins in the laughter. *Sy sit nie, sy sit nie by huis om om.... nee wag ek moet na die kinders kyk nie. Nee, as Girlie hoor dis 'n ons is 'n kamp storie dan is Girlie weg. Dan vat ons haar weg.* (She does not sit, she does not sit at home to to.... no wait I must look after the children. No, when Girlie hears that there is a camp story<sup>106</sup>, then Girlie is gone. Then we take her away.) Everyone affirms that this is how Girlie is. They also affirm that is why Girlie comes to the club, to escape from home.

It becomes clear that some older people in the Hangberg community are taken advantage of by their children and grandchildren. It also appears to be difficult for some older people to access health care, I have learnt, now that the clinic has moved out of the *dorpie*. The stories confirm the inconvenience, yet at no point does anyone blame the government, white people, apartheid,

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<sup>105</sup> *Dinges* is a filler word used when an actual word or name is forgotten.

<sup>106</sup> 'A camp story' refers to when there is talk of the group going camping.

or anyone or anything else for that matter for their lived reality. Again, I am perplexed by the lack of blame, the gentle response to a reality that I simply cannot fathom.

Tannie Violet and Tannie Cassandra are flying buttresses for Tannie Girlie. They prop her up. And in propping her up, they create a sanctuary of stillness, an escape from the harshness of perhaps being or feeling abused (by a daughter whose children Tannie Girlie minds). We have forgotten we are in the library, in what is supposed to be a silent sanctuary. No-one has come to ask us not to speak or laugh so loudly. I realise that there was a chance Tannie Girlie was not going to join us, hiding in the kitchen preparing tea as she did at the luncheon club in the big hall. But today, here, the others narrated her story to me. In confidence, respectfully, with trust. Tannie Violet goes from calling me by my name, Rayne, to using the pronoun *u* in Afrikaans, a formal form of address, a sign of respect, even deference. She points out that they do not know me, but that I (or people like me who come to Hangberg) create opportunities for people to talk. I find this moving, that our togetherness has indeed become a *kuier en gesels*. But more than that, I am pleased we found a space of trust. She confirms that she knows that I will not post their stories on Whatsapp or Facebook. At the beginning of our conversation, I explained that their stories will only be used in my dissertation. I am touched by the trust that they put in this process to tell their stories to me as a total stranger, someone who might represent everything that they should not trust.

I do not want these *kuiers* to end. There does not seem to be a point where a *kuier* should or might come to an end naturally. There is no conclusion to the *kuier* or *gesels*. Our meeting or gathering is not a staged performance, a performance of storying lives. Lives intricately woven within the threads are gentle dances of vulnerability, strength, unspoken histories and spoken futures, monologues and dialogues. Most of all, I find, it is the silences that speak loudest (Swanson, 2004).

I ask the women how they feel about living and their life in Hangberg, specifically at the present time. Once again, Tannie Violet goes first:

Vandag. Houtbaai, Hangberg gaan ons sê dit is 'n lekker plek om in te woon. Is 'n klein gemeente en dit, net die probleem is vandag dat jy eers kan gestap het, eers kan ek gestap het tot two o'clock in die na maar vandag moet jy oor jou skouer kyk whether dit nou in die aand is of in die dag is moet jy kyk want ons weet nie want vandag nie

die kindertjies is so aggressief dat jy niks, jy kan nie moet hulle praat en dit al het probeer jy maar, nee ek dink vir ons ouermense is...

(Today. Hout Bay, Hangberg we are going to say is a *lekker plek* to live. Is a small community and that, the only problem is today that you could once have walked, before I could have walked until two o'clock in the night, but today you must look over your shoulder whether it is in the evening or in the day you must look because we don't know today the small children are so aggressive that you can't even talk to them even if you try, but I think for we older people (it is safe)... )

Tannie Ferial comments here: *Houtbaai is nog 'n safe plek.* (Hout Bay is still a safe place.)

Tannie Violet continues: *Dis nog 'n safe plek, Houtbaai is want hier ken ons mekaar. Dis miskien net die onbeskofte goed wat miskien vir jou wil aanrand of so, maar hier ken ons mekaar nou ken ek nou's jy so onbeskof nou kyk ek o jy's daai een se kind ek gaan nou na jou ma toe of na jou ouma toe...* (it is still a safe place, Hout Bay, because here we know each other. It is perhaps only the unmannered ones who perhaps want to attack you or so, but here we know one another now you are, now so unmannered, now I look and see oh you are that one's child, I am now going to your mother or to your grandmother.) And Tannie Ferial observes: *Dan draai hulle om en sê jy kan maar gaan...* (...then they turn around and say you can go.)

But, Tannie Violet elaborates, *ek meen jy kan, jy kan jy ken hulle, maar nou gaan hulle nee Houtbaai is, ok Houtbaai is deurmekaar, regtig hy's erger as wat hy ander dag was, maar sê ek gaan nou oor die berg, ek gaan nou Lavender Hill toe nê, ek word nou attack in Lavender Hill of so - ek ken niemand daar nie, na wie toe gaan ek hardloop? In die Houtbaai kan jy noggaan, jy kan nog by 'n deur in gaan, jy kan nog by 'n deur ingaan, en wat van Houtbaai wat ek sê, ek gaan na my dogter toe in die Paarl...* (Tannie Violet gives a big sigh.) *...jy sien net 'n gordyntjie oopgaan, daai is al!* (Everyone giggles.) *Maar, ek het nou al in Retreat oo, hier kan jy darm nog gaan sê hoor hie soek gaan gou na daai een toe, ek kan miskien nog virhom 'n aartappel of iets gaan vra, daaikant, hulle wil nie eers vir jou 'n bietjie water gee nie.* (Everyone laughs.)

(– but I mean you can, you can, you know them, but now they are going no Hout Bay is, ok Hout Bay is unsettled, really it is worse than it was the other day, but say I now

go over the mountain, I go to Lavender Hill, I am attacked in Lavender Hill or so – I do not know anyone there, to whom do I run? In the Hout Bay you can still go, you can go into a door, you can still go into a door, and what about Hout Bay what I say, I go to my daughter in Paarl (a big sigh) you only see a little curtain open, that’s all. (Everyone giggles.) But I have already in Retreat, oh, here you can still go and say listen here I am going to that one, I can maybe go and ask for a potato or something, on that side, that side, they don’t even want to give you a bit of water. (Everyone laughs.)

Tannie Violet persists: *No, no, truly! Ek het dit, in Retreat het ek dit experience. Hulle sal vir jou niks gee nie, maar in Houtbaai kan jy, behalwe dat jy nou nie die mense, jy nou nie na die mense toe wil gaan nie, jy kan klippe toe gaan, nê, of jy kan hawe toe gaan, al gaan daai stokvis grate, hulle queue eintlik vir daai stokvis grate. Jy kan da ma daai grate, jy kan hom kook dan haal jy daai vissies af of party mense bak dit...*(No, no, truly! I have, in Retreat I experienced it. Experienced. They will give you nothing, but in Hout Bay you can, apart from that you can go to the people, you can go to the rocks, hey, or you can go to the harbour, those linefish bones, they queue for those linefish bones. You can take those bones, you can boil him then you take off the bits of fish or some people bake it.) Tannie Ferial adds what she does: *Frikkadel maak. Rayne: jy kan frikkadel en ‘n lekker smoortjie maak, en as jy nou ken van seekat gaarmaak – jy kan gaan. Jy, en ek sê elke dag ‘n mens in dié hawe wat vir my sê hy ly honger, hy is sleg! Hy’s lui. Ja, want die mense sal, jy kansien, soos ons sê hulle skarrel, nê om hawe toe te gaan...* (And you can make frikkadel and a lekker smoortjie<sup>107</sup>, and if you know about preparing octopus, you can go. You, and I say everyday a person in this harbour who tells me he is suffering from hunger, he is rotten! He is lazy. Yes, because the people will, you can see, as we say they will scurry to go to the harbour.) She asks the other women whether they have noticed that. Tannie W responds: *Oeeee, die goed wat sy daar by daai factory, dan kyk ek oooooo wat is dit? Maar dis die derm goeters wat hulle ook gaan haal dan verkoop hulle dit aan die poachers om, vir aas..* (Oooooo, the stuff that she gets there from the factory, then I look oooooo what is that? But it is guts stuff which they also go and fetch and then they sell it to the poachers for bait.)

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<sup>107</sup> ‘Smoortjie’ is diminutive for a stew.

“Yes,” Tannie Ferial points out: *Hulle maak moeite, hulle maak moeite!* (They make an effort, they make an effort.)

Tannie Girlie speaks for the first time spontaneously: *My broer, hy is baie lief om mossels nê, baie lief om mossels af te gaan haal.* (My brother, he loves mussels hey, really loves picking mussels.) Tannie Violet asks in jest: *Wanneer kry ek dan my mossels? Waaaaar?* (When do I get my mussels? Where?) Tannie Ferial explains: *Hy gaan somewhere daar anner kant.* (He goes somewhere there on the other side.) Tannie Violet comes in: *Nee, want hulle sê hier gaan niks meer aan nie.* (No, because they say nothing more goes on here.) Everyone at the table now wants to know where the brother finds mussels and speculates where that could be, and all speak at the same time. Tannie Violet thinks: *Hu uh by die ‘white beach,’ soos hulle sê.* (Hu uh at the white beach (beach frequented by whites), as they say.)

I am beginning to understand why Oom Basie, the first conversant, proclaimed that he is the richest man in Hout Bay. The people of the *dorpie* do not engage in a poverty narrative. My first impressions, based on a lifelong perception of coloured people being poor, have now dissipated. In all the *gesels*, only once was there reference to poverty, and then in the past tense: *Want ons was te arm mos. Ons was mos arm. Ons het niks gehad nie.* (Because we were too poor mos. We were mos poor. We had nothing.) The stories about food, from the description of mackerel tails as a delicacy by Oom Basie to the tripe Tannie Fameeda cooked in London, to *ossies* and *perdevoete*, *rootis* and *smoorsnoek*, to octopus and the barbeque of a cormorant, have been told from a sense of the richness these storytellers have, not from deprivation or what they do not have. The closing of the clinic, which I find disturbing, is framed as an opportunity to go and see friends and family whom one has not seen for a while. While some children may indeed take advantage of their parents and grandparents, an infrastructure and network of support within the precarity holding this community together are evident, which ultimately, it seems, shapes the way the older people story their Elderliness.

“Whites only” beaches, imposed by apartheid, are not a border nor a barrier in the minds of the people of Hangberg. Tannie Violet shares how earlier they walked miles and miles to collect shells to make necklaces to sell, perhaps mostly to tourists:

Ooh, ons het darem eers as kinders dan gaan ons daarvoor en skulpies, enige skulpies, skulpies dan tel ons die skulpies en dan maak mos neklusse dan verkoop ons daar by Chapman's Peak. Oe ons het geloep elke dag Chapmans toe, Noordhoek toe, ons het gestap Noordhoek toe dan tel ons die skulpies daar op, net om neklusse te maak. Sandy Bay, daar het 'n slang my kind gepik, my hond gepik, nie my kind nie. Die hond se naam was Kaffir - en toe attack Kaffir, want as die hond nie attack het nie...

(Ooo, we used to go as children then we go over and pick up shells, any shells, shells, then we pick up shells and we make necklaces then we sell there by Chapman's Peak. Oo and we walked to Chapman's every day, Noordhoek, we walked to Noordhoek then we pick up shells there, just to make necklaces. Sandy Bay, there a snake killed my child, my *dog*, not my child! The dog's name was Kaffir, and then Kaffir attacked, because if the dog did not attack, it would have bitten us.)

I comment on the good relationships I have observed between persons of different religions in Hangberg. Tannie Violet goes first:

Die geloofs, daar word niks soos ek gister vir hulle gesê het vir die nuwe dame wat daargekom het, lat ons is, ons Muslims, Anglican, New Apostolic, ek is Catholic, dan is dit - daar is Moravianja Methodist, Ou Apostolic, die Apostolics, Pentacostal - en uhm, as hulle in kom dan moet ek vir hulle voor die tyd gesê het, dit is al die gelowe wat hier is, en **niemand** druk die andereen se geloof af nie, hier is ons een, en as ons saam sing dan moet ons, gister het ons die Muslims eers geluister voor, elkeen kry 'n kans om om.....hulle het eersna my toe gespring...

(The faith, as I said to the new lady who came there yesterday, there is nothing, we Muslims, Anglican, New Apostolic, I am Catholic, then it is there are Moravian yes (the other women confirm this), Old Apostolic, Pentacostal – and uhm, when they come in I will tell them before the time, these are all the religions here, and *no one* dismisses the religion of any other, here we are one, and if we have to sing together we do, yesterday we first listened to the Muslims, everyone gets a chance to... they first jumped at me...)

But, Tannie Violet continues:

...nou wat ek dingies, hulle moet, hulle moet translate, nê, in Engels dingies, want uh uh uhm ek was in ‘n vergadering wat ons ook so gepraat het, Noah House hier in Woodstock, toe praat ek mos nou die van die Moslems, wat ek die Moslems laat bid in **my** groep, toe’s hulle verbaas! Toe sê ek nee, julle moet, en julle het Muslims by die plek, julle moet vir hulle ook ‘n kans gee, want hulle is bietjie skrikkerig gewee, toe sê ek nee, julle vra vir hulle, en as hulle bid dan moet hulle net vir julle vertaal, julle vertaal mos in Engels. Toe sê hulle wel, hulle gaan dit probeer. Dan gee jy dit vir almal, dan is dit nie net my geloof of jou geloof af nie, almal kry ‘n kans om ietste, te doen.

(...but now that I *dingies*, because um umum I was in a meeting that we talked like this, Noah House here in Woodstock, that I made the Muslims pray in *my* group, then they were surprised! Then I said no, you must, and you have Muslims at your place, you must give them a chance as well, and they were a bit scared, then I said no, you ask them, and if they pray they have to translate, you translate *mos* in English. Then they said well, they will try it. Then you give it to everyone, then it is not your religion and my religion, everyone gets a chance to do something.)

I mention that Tannie Fameeda, a Muslim, had said the prayer the previous day when I visited the Senior’s Club. Everyone laughs. Tannie Girlie (who is also Muslim) says: “They first jumped to me.” (They asked me first). Everyone laughs again. Tannie Girlie had opened the day with prayer before I arrived. I tell them how I laughed yesterday when Tannie Violet, seated at the table, referred to Tannie Fameeda and the Muslims as *wortels en ertjies* (carrots and peas). All immediately knew what I was referring to. Girlie says: *Oeja, die fait kos!* (Oh yes, the *fait* food). They see I am puzzled. Tannie Violet laughs and Tannie Girlie repeats: *die fait kos* (the *fait* food). I do know that this food is cooked for a Muslim funeral<sup>108</sup>. Tannie Ferial expands: *...snyboontjies, wortels...* (...cut beans, carrots....).

Tannie Violet speaks once more:

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<sup>108</sup> It is traditional at a Muslim funeral to provide sufficient food for an entire community. Food that is left over is frequently donated to charities.

*Nee, ek meen die twee wat bymekaar jou wortel en kool, en jou dinges as ek vir K kos maak sê ek hou jou mond, jy kom van die plaas af eet, eet so't ek grootgeword, wat jou ma gemaak het is jou probleem nie my probleem nie.* (No, I mean the two that go together your carrot and cabbage, and your dinges if I make food for K (her husband) I say keep quiet, you come from the farm, eat, eat as I have grown up, what your mother made is your problem not my problem.) Everyone talks at the same time about food combinations. Tannie Violet asks: *Okay, oumeid onder die kombers, wat het, baie mense het 'n verskillende manier wat sê dit, my wat oumeid onder die kombers is wat jy nou kos maak, maak jy mos sago, en dan maak jy jou kluitjie, wat jy bo-op sit. Daai is die oumeid onder die kombers. Maar, daarom sê ek, ek het nie op die plaas groot geword nie, maar daai man van my maak my baie kwaad...* (Okay, oumeid<sup>109</sup> under the blanket, what have, many people have a different what of saying this, (for) me what oumeid under the blanket is when you now make food, then you make mos sago, and then you make your dumpling, that you put on top. That is the oumeid under the blanket. But, that is why I say, I did not grow up on the farm, but that husband of mine makes me very cross...) Tannie Ferial says: *Dan is dit die frikkadel...* (Then it is the frikkadel...) Everyone talks loudly at the same time, one over the other.

I tell them how my grandmother made a stew with a runny scone dough over the stew, baked in the oven. Familiar to Tannie Violet, she says: *Daai, daai so't ek mos groot geword en dan het daai ander een gesê die frikkadel met 'n jassie aan...* (That, that is how I mos grew up and then that other one said a frikkadel with a coat on....) Once again, everyone talks – at the same time. *Ek stry nou nog met die mense, ek stry nou nog met hulle!* (I still fight with the people, I still fight with them!)

I ask if they know “angels on horseback.” “Hu uh,” is the response all around. I explain that I know these delicacies as prunes wrapped in bacon. Immediately, I am aware of how extravagant that might seem to the women, the high cost of both ingredients – but neither acceptable to some of them in that two of the storytellers are Muslim. We joke about egg

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<sup>109</sup>*Oumeid* may be translated as “old maid.” Yet, as mentioned earlier, the word *meid* is viewed as derogatory. Nonetheless, like *hotnot*, it continues to be used freely in conversations, as if the terms have been appropriated by coloured people. It struck me there may be a hint of teasing when these terms are used. I notice sideways glances from some women at me on these occasions, to see how I am reacting.

sandwiches. The previous day at the club the Muslim members had made egg sandwiches to bring to the group. I tell them that at white Afrikaans funerals, egg sandwiches are always served, unlike the nice *fait* food served at Muslim funerals. Tannie Violet notes: *Nee, hulle maak ook nou net sandwiches...* (No, they now also just make sandwiches...) I tease, *Hulle het nou by die witmense geleer...* (They have now learned from the white people....) Everyone laughs loudly. Time moreover seems to have flown. Someone says: *Jy moet ook sout en peper, daai kind het niks in gesit nie.* (You must also (add) salt and pepper, that child put none in.)

Tannie Violet:

Daai kind was te laat. Wat ook lus, oe ek het al so by L gewerk in die.... nou met almal dan het jy die oumense nou by haar huis gehad en daai, nou's dit die blikkies vis, nou haal ek mos nou nog die derms uit en graat uit uh hu los, hu uh hu uh sy vat alles daai sy druk alles fyn!

(That child was too late. What also hungry, oe I have worked at L in the.... now with everyone then you had the old people at her house and that, now it is tinned fish, now I *mos* take out the innards and the bones uh hu out, hu uh hu uh she takes everything and mashes it.)

Everyone laughs as Tannie Violet demonstrates on the table how the tinned fish is mashed with all the bones and innards.

Nee, sy sê nee, dan druk ek alles fyn en dan maak ons die sandwiches - sy't dit eers by haar huis gehad – maak ons die sandwiches dan gat ek na haar huis toe dink ek L ek doen dit by die huis dan haal ek die derms uit, dan sê ek haal dit hu uh nei, wat nou maak ons vir hom in!

(No, she says no then I mash everything fine and then we make sandwiches – she had it at her house first – we make the sandwiches and then I go to her house, then I think L I do it at my house, I take the innards out, then I say take it out oh no, what do we make him in!)

Everyone laughs. Tannie Violet adds: *Ek sê altyd ek eet dit nie.* (I say always I don't eat it.)

I ask about the women's husbands, whether they are still alive. Tannie Violet goes first: *Ja, hy leef nog. Werk nog. Twee en sewentig en...* (Yes, he is still alive. Still works. Seventy-two and ...) I cannot make out what she said, but it causes a huge round of belly laughter. Tannie Violet speaks again: *Hey, sê jou man is dood, man!* (Hey, say your husband is dead, man!\*) The laughter is loud and raucous. I move on and ask Girlie about her husband. He is dead, she says. I ask if he died a long time ago and she nods affirmatively. I ask, perhaps injudiciously, whether she has had another man – to which the group bursts into laughter again. Tannie Violet picks up and says: *Daar is nie 'n Ben Ten nie...* (There is not a Ben Ten....) I know that Ben Ten is a children's cartoon character, but the reference is lost on me. Tannie Girlie feels it incumbent to explain: *Ek bly vêêêr van hulle af...* (I stay faaaaaar away from them (men).)

\* I laugh at the insinuation that she should tell me that her husband is dead, that perhaps as a nice attractive male I might be interested in her. Suddenly I am just a man, and not a white man conducting research, which makes me blush.

In a demure tone, Tannie Ferial shares that: *My man is een en dertig jaar al oorlede...* (My husband died thirty-one years ago already...) Tannie Violet teases her: *Sy't hom abuse, daarom dat hy so gou gegaan het!* (She abused him, that is why he went so quickly!) More laughter, which becomes increasingly louder. I am caught up in this multifarious theatrical performance in the library. Stories are interspersed with tensions of humour and seriousness, obliquely woven in and through storylines, which repeatedly catch me off guard, leave me wondering whether to laugh or cry. So much humour abounds that I must remind myself of the harsh reality of everyday life outside the library. And, the unspoken, implied humour is at times tragic and hard to process.

I ask the women about the “good life.” What is their advice, or their secret, for growing old as well as they do? I know at the outset, when asking the question, that none sees themselves as old. I look at Tannie Girlie for a response. Tannie Violet interrupts: *Girlie is 'n persoon van min woorde...* (Girlie is a person of few words.) Tannie Girlie answers softly: *Ek weet nie wat om te sê nie.* (I don't know what to say.) Tannie Violet takes over: *Ek dink as jy raad moet gee vir die jonger garde, eers moet jy respek het vir jou ouers, behalwe jou ouers moet jy respek*

*het vir grootmense...* (I think if you must give advice for the younger garde, first you must have respect for your parents, apart from your parents, you must have respect for adults.) Tannie Girlie's gentleness and quiet, withdrawn nature stirs something inside me. But Tannie Violet continues:

Probeer om 'n skoon lewe te lei, en los die drugs en al daai goeters uit, ons kan dit maar net vir hulle sê ja, en uh uhm wat gaan ons nou sê, 'active' in Afrikaans doen...?

(Try to live a clean life, and don't touch drugs and those things, we can just tell them yes, and uh uhm what are we going to say now, be "active" in Afrikaans....) (Some of the women help her with translation of the word into *aktief*.)

Doen, neem deel aan sport, uhm, daarom sê ek kannie praat vir vir vir vir ander mense kan ek glad nie praat maar ek praat vir my 'barracks' mense. Ons het groot geword in kamp, stap, bergklim, boemklim al het ek soveel keer uit die boem uitgeval, en uh slang om die tone gedraai alles wat al dinge maar, jy, is hang jou leefwyse wat jy lewe.... as a jonger as hulle vandag met die die kinders dit kan doen nê, om die kinders uit te neem en besig te hou.

(Take part in sport, uhm, that is why I say I cannot speak for others, I cannot talk for them at all but I talk about my barracks people. We grew up with camping, walking, mountaineering, climbing trees, how many times I have fallen out of a tree, and uh curled a snake around my toes and all sorts of things, but, you are, the lifestyle that you lead... when you were younger what they can do the children today, to take the children out and to keep them busy.)

And Tannie Violet continues:

...besig te hou.... Besig te hou, uit die straat uit te hou, probeer om 'n skoon, maar ek sien daar is baie dinge aan nou by die centre, by die harbour market... o ja upstairs, lots of, ek sien die papiertjie, ek het gesien hulle speel die dromme, en music en alles ja en baie baie activities. As jy probeer om die kinders op so 'n leefwyse, as hulle so kan, ek meen vandag, die lewe is deurmekaar maar as as ons as ouer persone ons kleinkinders

probeer om met ons ek klein kinders uit te gaan.... behalwe vir respect, maar ek meen as ons kan onse kinders uitvat en en en my wees is ook so neem die kinders, ek sê altyd hoor hier julle, gat saam met my dan gaan julle kyk hoe lewe daai, daai mense. Hier vat julle alles, julle kry mos alles lekker, verniet, ek wil mos name lekkers en ‘n ek wil die en ek wil daai, gaan nou bietjie daar kan julle sien hoe lewe daai kinders. My storie is altyd vir hulle, ons Kapenaars is so, ons het mos alles... ons is mos lekker gespoil. ...maar gaan jy na die plaaskind toe – okay hulle kom ook nou in die Kaap nou van hulle al die nonsense aan - maar ek meen nou eerstyd, dis die kinders met die gelerentheid, en as jy goed nie wil kerk toe kom nie sê ek weet jy hoe ver loop daai Namakwalanders om kerk uit te kom? Ek sê daai kind, daai mense loop ver, hulle loop ver om by ‘n skool uit te kom, hulle wil daar wees, hiesarol?? hulle, ons het van die predikante gesê ‘julle rol tot in die kerk dan is julle nogal tyd laat’. Maar daai mense stap ver...

(To keep them busy, to keep them off the streets, try to have a clean – but I see there a lot of things now happening at the centre, at the harbour market. Oh, yes, upstairs, lots of, I see the pamphlet, and music and everything yes and lots and lots of activities. If you can try and keep the children in such a lifestyle, life is chaotic but if we as older people try to go out with our grandchildren... Someone talks about respect. Except for respect, I mean if we can take our children out, my wish is also so take the children, I always say to them listen here, come with me then you go and see how those, those people live. Here you take everything, you *mos* always have a *lekker* time, for free, I *mos* want *name lekkers* (brand names) and I want this and I want that, go now there for a bit and you will how those children live. My story is always for them, we Capetonians are so, we have *mos* everything. (Someone adds “We *mos* have everything.”) But if you go to the child on a farm, okay, they are also now coming to the Cape and making all this nonsense, but I mean in earlier times, it is the children with an education, and if you do not want to go to church then I say do you know how far those children in Namakwaland must walk to get to the church? I tell that child, those people walk far, they walk far to get to a school, they want to be there, here they roll, we told some of the preachers “You roll into the church then you are still late.” But those people walk far.)

Tannie Ferial adds: *Hulle loop kaalvoet en hier het onse kinders skoene aan en so aan.* (They walk barefoot and here our children have shoes and so on.) Tannie Violet continues: *En dit moet name lekker wees...* (And it must be “named sweets.”) I ask what *name lekkers* are. They all respond: *Dis Nikes, die klere* (brand name clothes), *dis mos duur goeters so aan.* (It is Nike, the clothes (brand name clothes), it is expensive things and so on.) Tannie Violet says: *Onse prinsipaal het gesê julle is mos teenagers. Julle is mos nou teenagers, julle is mos nou teenagers, is mos by tyd dat julle moet skoene dra.* (Our principal said you are mos teenagers. You are now mos teenagers, you are now mos teenagers, it is mos time that you wear shoes.) Tannie Ferial remarks: *Ons het kaalvoet skool toegegaan.* (We went to school barefoot.) And Tannie Violet confirms: *Ons het kaalvoet skool toegegaan, ons het pak gekry omdat ons nie skoene wou gedra het nie - dan kan ons mos nie in die water loep nie.* (We went to school barefooted; we were given a hiding because we didn’t want to wear shoes – then we couldn’t mos walk in the water.)

Everyone agrees, recollecting not wearing shoes to school when they were young, and about children today wanting brand name clothes. I find myself wanting to relate to their stories. I tell them I know *name lekkers* (nice names – designer clothes), and how my mother would always tell us how poor they were as children, growing up in the Knysna forest. They listen intently. I notice yet again: they do not identify themselves as poor, but refer to others being poor, like the children in Namakwaland<sup>110</sup>. I am curious that the women appear to be as well as they look, despite the hardship they have no doubt been through. Once again, they all talk at the same time. I ask them how it is possible they appear as positive and healthy as they do, despite a difficult childhood and upbringing. Tannie Violet offers answers first:

Ja, dit is, jy kan because... dit het nie jou geaffect, geaffekteer nie, as jy terug dink, na hoe’t jy jou lewe maar dan dink jy jy het nou self daaruit gekom, jy het nie na ‘n ander persoon om... Daar was nie ‘n persoon om jou te help uit jou swaar nie.... Daar was nie handouts nie! Jy het geleer uit jou swaarkry, om iets van jouself te maak...

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<sup>110</sup> Namakwaland is a semi desert region of South Africa located north of Cape Town.

(Yes, it is, you can because.... it did not affect, affect you, if you think back, about how you lived, then you think that you got there by yourself, you didn't have to another person to... There was no person to help you out of your suffering. There were no handouts! You learned from your suffering, to make something of yourself.)

Tannie Ferial relates her experience of growing up and overcoming disadvantage and hardship, and shares her views on raising responsible children these days:

Jy kan vandag en wat jou ouers daar was wil jy ook miskien nie daar wees nie so jy gaan probeer om beter te wees en die ouers sorg dat jy ook iets beter kan wees as wat hulle was... ek kom uit 'n familie van tien uit nê kook. En ons het baie berg geklim en soos bessies gepluk en blomme gaan pluk in die berg en so met my pa en dit was deel van lewensstyl gewees ook en daai maar jy wil beteren so, nou ons wil weer vir ons kinders ook bêter hê, so my kind het sports gedoen in die skool van Maandag tot Vrydag, somtyds Saterdag ook, daai's sy speelyd dat hy nie in die straat toe gaan speel nie, hy was te moeg gewees, sien, so ek meen as jy nou jou kinders besighou, dan hou jy hom van die straat af, dit is wat ons nou sê, as hulle nou die kinders na die (bay harbour) toe neem dat hulle so al die goedjies doen, dan hou dit die kinders van die straat af. En kinders sal wil skool gaan, baie keer wil die kinders ook nie die goed bywoon nie, want hulle wil nie (discipline) leer nie. En dit, nou dan wil hulle, en dis ook wat maak dat kinders van jongs af al uit haak. Dit is belangrik om jou kind besig te hou, van die pad af, dan's hy te moeg om nog te dinges en dan gaan hy...

(You can today and when your parents were there, you also did not maybe want to be there (where they were) so you are going to try to be better and the parents also cared so that you could be better than what they were.... I come from a family of ten. And we climbed the mountain a lot and picked berries and flowers in the mountain so with my father and it was part of our lifestyle and that, but you wanted better and so, so we also want it better for our children, so my child did sport at school Monday to Friday, sometimes Saturdays also, that was his playtime that he did not play in the streets, he was too tired, see, so I mean when you keep your children busy, then you keep him off the street, that is what we now say, if they now take the children to the bay harbour so they can do all those things then it keeps the children off the street. And then children

will want to go to school, many times they also don't want to attend these things, because they do not want to learn discipline. And that, now they want, and that is where they become unhinged. It is important to keep your child busy, off the streets, then he is too tired to *dinges* and then he is to...)

Tannie Girlie comes in here. *Dan kom hulle met baby kinders aan... Dan kom hulle met baby kinders aan van die skoolbank af. Hulle is nog op die skoolbank dan kom hulle aan. Nee, my kinders was karate kinders, dis al.* (Then they come with baby children... Then they come with baby children from the school bench. They are still at their school bench then they come along. No, my children were karate children, that's all.) Tannie Ferial then says: *My oudste seun is nou al 31 en hy't niks kinders nie en die ander een is 42 hy't ook niks kinders nie.* (My oldest son is 31 already and he has no children and the other one is 42 and he neither has any children.) "Yes, but," Tannie Violet cautions... *hulle moenie so lank wag nie.* (... they mustn't wait this long.) Everyone laughs. "For me," Tannie Ferial explains, *is dit hulle moet hulle lewe geniet, hulle moet hulle lewe geniet.* (... it is they must enjoy their life, they must enjoy their life.)

I ask them about adult children looking after older parents. And who, indeed, will look after these women one day? Would they consider relocating to an old age home? Tannie Violet speaks first: *Hu uh, sorry, nee. Sorry!* (hu uh, sorry, no.) The others are in agreement. Tannie Ferial explains: *Ons het 'n, ons kyk na ons eie - my mammie is nou twee jaar gelede oorlede en sy was 88, ons het self na haar gekyk, vir die laaste twee jaar van haar lewe het sy nou agteruit gegaan nê, ons het beurte gemaak...* (We have a, we look after our own – my mommy died two years ago and she was 88, we looked after her ourselves, for the last two years of her life she deteriorated, we took turns.) Tannie Violet contributes her story: *Ek het my ma opgepas, my pa opgepas, vir my broers, ek het 'n antie wat ek verloor het. Okay, daar nie 'n ander uitweg is nie, maar dan kry ons die kinders wat net ons ouers gaan weggooi, en ek hou nie van ouetehuse nie....* (I took care of my mother, took care of my father, for my brothers, I have an aunty that I lost. Okay, if there is no other way, but then we get the children who are simply going to throw our parents away, and I don't like old age homes.)

Tannie Ferial shares how she feels about old age homes. Residents' children seldom or never come to visit them, she contends: *Die ding is en hulle kom jou nooit besoek nie.* (The thing is and they never come to visit you.) Tannie Violet then says: *En dan is dit soos soos soos die een Starck House, dit 'n day care centre, en sê nou maar die kinders gaan werk dan kan hulle hulle ouers daar gaan sit vir die dag, soos 'n crèche, en dan vanaand daar wat ons by die Starck House was dan nou vanaand gaan haal hulle nou net weer. Maar wat van 'n ouetehuis....* (And then it is like like like the one Starck House, that a day care centre (at a care home), and say now the children go to work then they can go put their parents there for the day, like a creche, and then tonight that we were there at the Starck House then tonight we go fetch them again.)

*Waar was daai ouetehuis wat ons gewees het eenkeer...?* Tannie Ferial asks. (Where was that old age home where we were once...?) *Ek praat van die ander keer toe hulle net so gesit het, oooooo....* (I am talking of the other time when they just sat, oooooo.) "But," Tannie Violet explains, *...nee, maar daai is nie die day care centre nie, daai's die frail care centre.* (...no, but that is not the day care centre, that is the frail care centre.) *Ag shame,* Tannie Ferial says. (Oh shame.) *Nou dit.* (Now that.) Then Tannie Violet says, heatedly:

Dit is wat ek nie kan vat nie, ons jy kom in en ek was in Retreat se een ook, nou daa't ek sommer toe't ek net my ma verloor toe gaat ek daar in, ek't net ingegaan toe huil ek want ek kan toe ek kan dit nie vat nie, because why om mens laat die kinders hulle ouers daar kan gaan gooi – hulle moet active wees met die oumense daar, leer vir hulle naald, al die goetertjies of laat hulle puzzles bou.... of games speel of whatever. Ons het mos gegaan in meetings gegaan kom ons die oggend daar, dan sit daai mense het mos daar gesit, lunchtyd kom ons uit dan het hulle nog nie lunch gehad nie dan sit daai mense nog steeds daar...

(That is what I cannot stand, we you come in and I was at the one in Retreat as well, now there I went when I just lost my mom I went in there, I just went in and I cried because I could not stand it, because why are children throwing their parents there – they must be active with the old people there, teach them sewing, all those things or let them build puzzles. Or let them play games or whatever. We went there for

meetings in the morning, then those people sit, they just sat there, lunchtime we come out and they have not had lunch yet, then they still sit there...)

Tannie Ferial agrees: *Hulle sit en slaap daar van die oggend tot die aand en hulle doen absoluut niks.* (They sit and sleep there from the morning until the evening and they do absolutely nothing.) And Tannie Violet points out: *Niemand gesels ook met hulle nie...* (No-one converses with them either....) *Hulle sit net*, Tannie Ferial repeats. (They just sit.) Tannie Violet takes the discussion further.

Are there many frail older people living in Hangberg? I ask. I am told: *Daar is 'n hele paar.... daar is redelik baie...* (There are quite a few, there is fair number.) The information is offered softly and tentatively. Then Tannie Violet relates: *Een van my seniors het nou verlede, twee weke terug 'n stroke gehad en nou het is sy op Kimbies, dan het ons nou vir L wat ook dinges is, maar hulle het, dis nie dat hulle alleen lê nie...* (One of my seniors had a stroke two weeks ago and now she is on Kimbies (incontinence wear), then we have now L who is also dinges, but they have, it is not that they are lying alone.) I say: "So the children and grandchildren?" Tannie Ferial answers: *Ek was gister by haar, die kinders is al om haar...* (I was with her yesterday, the children are all around her....) Tannie Violet remarks: *Sy't maar nou, sy's nie so oud nie...* (She now, she's not that old...) Tannie Ferial continues: *En antie Girlie wat ook nou, sy't ook, sy bly by haar kleindogter so hulle kyk ook na haar.* (And Auntie Girlie who also now, she also has, she stays with her grand-daughter so they look after her.) Tannie Violet comes in: *L daarbo is ook dinges en dan R wat regoor S hulle.....antie R sê ook ek het haar gekry gister toe vra ek vir haar hoekom het sy nie club toe, sy se haar mag is nie lekker gewees nie.... ek dink daar is weer 'n bug in die lug...* (L up there also has, she is also dinges and then R who lives opposite S and them... I came across her yesterday so I asked her why she didn't come to the club. She said her stomach was not well.... I think there is a bug in the air again...) Everyone confirms the possibility of a stomach bug doing the rounds. They all talk at the same time:

Nee, daar is baie, daar is en as daar nie uh uh, ons het mos die carers wat ingaan, daar is net een persoon wat uh, wat die kind niks, die kind wil niks... ek dink sy ontvang net haar ma se pension geld, sy woon nie eers by haar ma nie. Nou ek was al in daai huis

gewees siestog, uh...jammer vir die woord maar, ek sê altyd 'n vark wil nie eens daar ingaan nie. En ek't nou 'n, ek het nou die case oor gegee, ek het al met social workers en alles, ek het al met die carers ook al gepraat al, maar nou omdat nie meer in Age-in-Action is nie, as ons daar was het ek vir HEAL ingekry om daai vrou te verwyder.

(No, there are many, there are and if there is not, uh uh, we have carers that go in, there is just one person who uh, who the child will not, the child wants nothing – I think she only receives her mother's pension money, she doesn't even live with her mother. Now I have been in that house, *siestog* (shame) uh... sorry for the word but, I always say a pig doesn't want to go in there. And I have now, I handed the case over, I have talked with social workers and everything, I have spoken to the carers as well, but now because we are not part of Age-in-Action any longer, if we were there I would have called in HEAL<sup>111</sup> to remove that woman.)

I tell the women HEAL no longer exists, but the information is neither met with surprise nor interest.

I ask the women about the fish factory, as I am unsure whether it has closed permanently. They confirm there is no longer a fish factory (there was previously more than one factory). A conversation ensues about the factory:

Die vis fabriek is almal toe. En want hulle wil mos nou 'n 'n Waterfront bou. Nie hulle wil nie, hulle is klaar biesag om dit te doen. Biesag daarmee. Hulle het dit reg gekry. So al die fabriek is toe daar. Daai stuk De Gama. En al die bote gat nou Saldanha toe. De Gama, die kant hier wat K hulle private. Al die bote wat hier Saldanhabaai. Al die bote is ook alreeds weg al hier. So al die vissermanne moet nou Saldanhabaai toe en terug kom en so. Het jy gesien hulle het drie slabs afgekap. Ja, hoekom? Ek wietie. Ek wietie hoe het hulle dit afgekry het nie. Daar's nou niks werk in die. Die whities wat dit afgepak het. Dis mense wat daar werk wat dit afgehaal het, of ek het gesien hulle staan daar so, ek wietie. Kan nie wiesie want hulle't gesê daai het gebeur deur die nag.

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<sup>111</sup> HEAL (Halt Elder Abuse Line) was a telephonic helpline that has since been made defunct by the Department of Social Development.

Dis al van laas week af. Dis coloureds wat dit gedoen het, sê hulle. Die slabs afgekap. Die toemaak van die hawe. Nee, hulle moet almal afkap.

(The fish factories are all closed. And because they want to *mos* build a a Waterfront<sup>112</sup>. Not they want to, they are already busy doing it. Busy with it. They managed to do it. So all the factories are closed there. That piece Da Gama. And all the boats are now going to Saldanha. Da Gama, this side here where K and them private<sup>113</sup>. All the boats from here (are going to) Saldanha Bay<sup>114</sup>. All the boats are also already gone here. So all the fishermen must now go to Saldanha Bay and come back and so. Did you see how they are breaking down the slabs?<sup>115</sup> Yes, why? I don't know. There is now no work in the... The "whities" that broke it down. It is people who work there who took it down, or I saw them standing there, I don't know. Can't be because they say that happened during the night. It is like that since last week. It is coloureds who did it, they say. Chopped the slabs down. The closure of the harbour. No, they must chop them all down.) Everyone laughs.

Tannie Violet continues:

Ja, want hulle mooi gespan. 'n Mens kan nog glad niks kry nie. Ja, hulle sê die Berlin wall [lag]. Ek het gesê dis Pollsmoor. Ja, nou kan, daar was klaar iemand 'n ou vrou aangeval gewies. Nou as djy in die pad aangeval wat ons nou nog die see tearoom gehad het né. Dan kan ons nou vir jou jelp, of iemand binne. So, die vrou is aangeval dan kan djy darem nog buitekant sien. Maar nou sit hulle hierso met Pollsmoor. No, it doesn't work like that! Want ons het die krans, die krans wat ons sê die Russians. Ons sê sommer, the Russians are coming. The Russians, the Russians are coming. (Laughter.) Daai stuk. Daai stuk is nou wat hulle bou. Wat hulle sê is nou die Russian. Wat hulle so afgekamp het, 'n stuk. Maar nou't hulle die krans, 'n hele stuk. Want hulle gat nou 'n parking lot daar maak.

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<sup>112</sup> The old Cape Town harbour in the city was developed into an upmarket shopping development, called the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, which has become one of Cape Town's, and indeed South Africa's, major tourist attractions. Reference is made here to plans for a similar development in the Hout Bay harbour.

<sup>113</sup> I assume that she refers to her husband fishing in his private capacity, which would be deemed illegal poaching.

<sup>114</sup> Saldanha Bay is a fishing *dorpie* located further up the West Coast, north of Cape Town. The town has a similar history to that of Hout Bay and Hangberg.

<sup>115</sup> The developers of the Waterfront in the Hout Bay harbour have built a long concrete slab wall along the road leading into town. This wall barricades the new development from the road which people use to walk along into the main part of town.

(Yes, because they made it nice. A person cannot get anything. Yes, they say the Berlin Wall. I said it is Pollsmoor<sup>116</sup>. Yes, now already there was an old woman attacked. Now when you are attacked in the road, when there was still the tearoom, then we could have helped, or someone inside. So, the woman was attacked then you would have been able to see outside. But now we sit here with Pollsmoor. No, it doesn't work like that. Because we have what we call the Russians. We say the Russians are coming. The Russians, the Russians are coming. That piece. That piece is what they are building now. What they now say is the Russians. The piece they camped off (cordoned), a piece. But now they have the *krans* (the section against the mountain). A whole piece.)

Tannie Violet continues:

Gat hulle nie meer bou nie? (Are they no longer going to build?) Nee, dis 'n parking lot wat hulle gaan. Nou maak hulle soos Chapmans Peak, darem sal die ape vir hulle ook, maar hier's ook nie ape nie.

(No, it is a parking lot that they are going to. Now they are making like Chapman's Peak, at least the apes (baboons and monkeys) will for them as well, but here are also not apes.)

Ek sal laaik om die Kasteel weer te sien. Dis onregverdig om, ek meen ons bly van soveel jare in die plek en nou wat hier inkom is hulle. Ja maar nou moet die inkom, die foreigners inkom in onse. M hulle sê ons gat betaal een van die dae om in die hawe in te gaan. Ja, ek en djy moet maar. Okay ons sit nou lekke. Ons twee moet nog kinner, ek gat nie nou huistoe nie. Ek en djy kan maar sommer reg.

(I would like to see the Castle<sup>117</sup> again\*. It is unfair, I mean we have lived here for so many years and now what comes in is them. Yes, but they must come in, the foreigners, the foreigners come into our place. M says we will one of these days pay to go into the harbour. Yes, you and I must maar. Okay, we sit (are sitting here) so nicely. We two must still (fetch the) children, I am not going home now. You and I must walk down.)

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<sup>116</sup> Pollsmoor is a large prison in the Cape Town environs.

<sup>117</sup> The Castle of Good Hope was the first bastion built by the Dutch settlers in Cape Town, now a national monument and tourist attraction.

\* I find it ironic that they would like to visit the Castle that is such a symbol of colonisation and apartheid.

The sun is blazing as I leave the cool silence inside the library. Dogs are barking, cars are hooting. I am momentarily blinded by the harshness of being outside again. As with each one of my visits, I have been in an in-between space, tallying between lives and lived realities, dwelling on the situatedness of our shared stories. The Sewing Club *kuier en gesels* was in itself a journey through the many facets of people's lives, those of older people in particular, in Hangberg. I sit in my car for a while. Then I drive down the hill towards the harbour. I see Tannie Violet and Tannie Girlie standing at the school gate, holding the hands of who I assume are their grandchildren. The grandmothers engage in lively conversation and laughter as they make their way up the steep hill in the blazing sun.

I leave thinking I now know that I will never know. Not fully. Not as I want to know. As much as I think I now understand the situation and lived experience of the people I engaged with, I can never know and can never be sure that I have heard the "truth". Yet, I leave them with a sense of hope: a sense of hope, on their part, that devolved upon me through the several *kuier en gesels* meetings. Hope, I sense, as represented by grandchildren running through homes, grown-up children and their children visiting grandparents, great-grandchildren sharing meals at grandparents' tables, grandmothers walking grandchildren to school. Yes, adult children and grandchildren visit and support their parents and grandparents in multiple ways. The lifelong hardship that the older women experienced is transposed, through my witnessing this intergenerational reciprocity, and the roles the women play within their family and community. The storying of Elderliness in Hangberg contradicts the notions and perceptions, or indeed assumptions, I had when I first entered and began my journey in the community. Extensive research I conducted beforehand, into coloniality and my own experience of apartheid, led me, mistakenly perhaps, to assume that the storying of Elderliness should or would be adversely affected through and by these views. I was wrong.

## 7 Reflections

If we as academics wish to truly engage with how we can improve the world that we inhabit, it is important that we are guided by the notion that all people have the capacity to aspire to something better. It is a capacity that is deeply entrenched in notions of personhood and respectability (Buhler, 2014, p.7).

The nature of a journey is that it takes time to prepare and plan before embarking on the actual journey, and that, inevitably, it must come to an end at some destination. Maybe the destination is not necessarily the one envisaged at the initial planning. In my case, I have arrived at a place that I could never have dreamt of, a destination so far away from what I originally envisaged. More than that, I know that this is not a destination, but a mere resting place to recoup and replenish before I move on again. Looking back at this moment of respite, I see how this journey has changed my life, how it has set me on a new course. More than that, I look back at this journey as possibly the darkest period of my life, and at the same time the most transformational. I am not the same person that I was when I started this journey, mostly because the journey became a profoundly sacred pilgrimage. While, as Buhler suggests in the quote above, I may have set out to improve the world, this journey changed me, humbled me, challenged me, transformed me into seeing the world in a different light. Seeing the world not as a place that I can or should improve, as that would be more than arrogant and indeed patronising. I learned more about how I can improve myself, I learned about the power of stories, the dignity of people who have very little in terms of possessions and riches, I learned that we have so much to learn from local people not only about Elderliness, but about life.

Storying Elderliness in the homes of the people of Hangberg created new stories, new spaces, and created the possibility for them to share with me what is important to them in their life, rather than respond purely to what they might consider to be important to me, or what I would want to hear. While I shall be left wondering to what extent their stories were told, or framed, with me in mind, it did appear to happen that the storying took its own time and path, regardless of my being present, a listener often rather than a full participant in the conversation. The intermittent questions I posed neither seemed to inhibit nor sidetrack the storytellers or their

stories. Each story unfolded down a similar path of connectedness, rootedness, purpose, and gratitude – stories of wisdom, creating a humble togetherness that I have never experienced or imagined possible in all my twenty-six years of working with older people.

While my methodology of *kuier en gesels* implied that I would visit people in their homes and have conversations around Elderliness, it soon became much more than just that. It became a journey of storying both their narratives and mine, of deep contemplation, emotional delving, grappling in the middle of the night with the writing of new stories that are more moral and political than I ever would have allowed myself to think possible (Denzin & Lincoln in Denzin et al., 2008). I became the listener, accepting their stories in mostly silent reverence. So many entryways provided the rhizo-linguistic complexity, the critical thinking, transformation, and transmutation of who we are and how we will go forward from here in a deeply reflexive space, oscillating between knowing and not knowing, understanding and not understanding. I hardly managed to respond with much more than a *sjoel!*

But it was through the stories in between, the untold stories, the silences, and the materiality of *vertoonkaste* and *doilies* that a particular socially constructed notion of Elderliness unfolded, negotiated and articulated in terms of agency, precarity, social connectedness, and reciprocal inter-reliability of family and community. The “real” (and perhaps novel) knowledge resided in this hybridity, and in the relationality of storying, created and produced within a contingent space that shapes the telling. While possibly not truth *per se*, certainly new understanding of differences (as opposed to similarities), multiplicities, and intersectional transmutations shaped a new truth so deeply embedded in shared history, a new truth about identities and histories and possible futures. As Loots et al. (2013) note, it is through the storying of how one *might* live, and perhaps not how one *should* live, that new trajectories of personal becoming evolve. I will never know what was *not* said or *not* told to me. I try to imagine what was perhaps not said, knowing that there must be a myriad of underlying, often-hidden structures. Silence speaks of many things (Swanson, 2004), least of all in this context of people who have been silenced in so many ways through a socio-political system that rendered them powerless. And yet, in reflecting on the silences of a wife listening to her husband, I see a strength that needs no words, a voice that speaks in silence of the power of not having to speak. Meaning is found in these silences, a deep knowledge of identity and situatedness that need not be expressed with words but is felt with the heart. The physical posture of every storyteller holds a silent presence that speaks of gravitas, of dignity, of holding space in silence. In contradiction to my

assumptions then, that I would be overwhelmed by signs of hardship and a lack of material resources, the stories were overwhelming instead by their richness in textures of meaning, joy, humour, and creativity, intertwined by stories of family and food. While Oom Basie and Tannie Mavis may not have had sugar in their home to offer me a cup of tea, Oom Basie presented himself as the richest man in Hout Bay. Their stories were rich enough in their telling: mackerel tails and white bread, *rotis*, foraging fresh produce and salvaging discarded remains and off-cuts from the erstwhile fish factory – the ingredients with which they produced tasty and nourishing meals, foods cherished by coloured people with limited means, that attracted family members and friends to share them at the couple’s table. But it is in the silences in between that meaning is fragmented while at the same time creating new possible lines of thinking that contradict my presumptions and challenge my knowing. Somehow, in the silences in between rests everything that contradicts and challenges and refrains (Swanson, 2004).

The performative power of narrative within the context of the Hangberg community meant that by my listening to the stories within the storytellers’ homes, greater colour and texture were given to the words, uttered as they were in a setting such as one with the backdrop of an iconic photograph of a family member taken in a studio in front of a seaside scene hanging on the wall. A person looking at the photograph might think it was taken at the seaside, but only the photographer and those in the photograph would know otherwise. Words do not stand alone. They enhance the descriptiveness of the physical environment, as the physical environment enhances the descriptiveness of the words. Tannie Fameeda’s home smelled of the tripe she was cooking. She talked about her daughter-in-law who had commented disapprovingly about the flies. I was aware of the flies buzzing around, and immediately thought the house was not clean. Yet, she lives according to strict Halaal rules, which presumes a high level of hygiene. The joy she related in finding a Halaal butcher in London when she visited her son brought Tannie Fameeda’s story to life. Suddenly, as she related her story, she was at home, and could give expression to her cultural heritage and religion, and her role as a matriarch.

The Sewing Club members’ stories of foraging and the seasonal abundance of fish, a cormorant barbecued on the beach, and the creative ways they described to ‘stretch’ a meal, gave an added sense of agency to the women: women who hold multigenerational families together and must ‘make do’. While I had assumed that hardship would have deprived the people of Hangberg of leading a good life, virtually every story I was told was imbued with a sense of restoration as opposed to the retribution I had expected. Children and grandchildren congregate in

grandparents' homes around food. Muslim members of the Senior's Club bring food to the club. Some members pack food away to be partaken of at home later. Tannie Fameeda's legacy of being the best scone baker in Hout Bay points to a cultural integration: it expresses a cultural transference and hybrid integration, scones being part of the heritage of British colonisation. The colonial past is woven into the texture of the stories, which, while it might have scarred, was also intertextually integrated, creating a rich, nuanced storying. This hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) lies perhaps at the heart of the gentle storying, the lack of anger or resentment – that a new liminal space is created that is neither the apartheid past or the harsh present, but a space in which there is connection, where *koesister* meets *koeksister*, where the Malay cook bakes English scones, and where within these moments of articulation there is no power struggle nor difference, only a focus on creating a better future.

Oupa Petrus's narrative of his connectedness to his family would have been altogether different if I had not heard him telling it in his own sitting room surrounded by his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and conversing with passers-by in the street below. The framed photographs hanging on the wall added meaningfully to the narrative: they portrayed celebratory occasions with family and community members. The young children who talked to him from across the street are similar evidence of his personhood and acknowledgement as a community member. What was said, what I heard, what I wrote down, what I translated are all intertwined with what was *not* said or implied in the silences in between. Meaning can only be ascribed through what is assumed to be implied, often metaphorically, mediating and negotiating between what I think I heard or know, as opposed to what was truly meant. It is in the spaces in between that we walked through a revolving door, opening up a new way of thinking about Elderliness in South Africa. In spite of a life of hardship and my perceived notions of poverty and deprivation, the people of Hangberg created an architecture of abundance.

Most of the narratives are encrypted in colloquial expressions and non-verbal communication. Meaning is formed and transformed, depending on the context and the filters of experience with which I listen. Words represent concepts that are open to interpretation with each listening, writing, reading, and transcribing. As much as words carry a history within them, their understanding takes place in a present. I detected a distinct tension in the space between perceived suffering and expressed joy (Buhler, 2014). The images and renderings of dignity, hope, and gratitude juxtaposed with what I would otherwise have framed as a state of poverty

generated dichotomous contrasts. Poverty and suffering were never articulated as the focus in the stories, in spite of them being part of the stories. Hard times there were – related but woven into the texture of the stories. The smiling and the suffering were precariously juxtaposed and contrasted as a whole, somehow integrated into the fabric of the community. Gazing out from Hangberg across the bay, to where I live among other white people, the view is breath-taking. Looking down at the streets and the buildings of Hangberg presents an altogether different picture. The contrasts are but one part of a contrasting fabric of light and shade woven into the stories of Elderliness in Hangberg.

I was struck by the precarity of some of the houses that I visited, notably those of Tannie Tossie, Oom Coenie, and Tannie Fameeda, as well as numerous similar structures in the area. The structures are seemingly cobbled together in ways that defy their ability to withstand the slightest wind, and Cape Town is indeed bedevilled by the notorious, destructive Southeaster wind. However, once inside the structures of wood and corrugated iron perched against the mountainside, I realised how solid they were, despite their precarious construction. The structures, I soon realised, are far more than a roof over their heads, more than a shelter for those who inhabit them. They are *home*. I have to think of earlier references to the *hokkie* that they lived in after being moved to Hangberg – even in reference to that, the notion was that it was home. While the roof leaked and there was little comfort, it still represented home. As much as home is an expression of the lives lived by the inhabitants, within this precarity one finds agency and expression of a life that does not simply hang (precariously) from a thread. A sense of agency and power are complexly interwoven with the precarity. Although precarity implies that something is being held together precariously, it is the tension that holds it together that is important and telling. Such tension in the Hangberg setting is the dignity, hope, and agency of the residents.

The homes, both their structure and interiors, are also the canvas of the lives of those who built, decorated, and live in them. Within these structures, lives are played out: families co-reside, supporting one another reciprocally. The homes are a physical expression of the inhabitants' 'being-in-the-world', markers of their existence and that life and community happen here. While some homes are indeed sparse, they exude expression of multigenerational family and community mutualism. Each *voorhuis* I sat in told a story of hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Photographs of graduations, weddings, baptisms, and birthdays, Eids and Christmases, and holidays featuring family adorned the walls. There were also the photographs or laminated

prints of places the inhabitants may have dreamed of visiting one day, the Swiss Alps or the Rocky Mountains, or perhaps they were simply pretty, decorative pictures to be enjoyed and appreciated. Every *vertoonkas* told stories of precious mementos, with memories, displayed in it, and of the precarity of what was cherished and protected. The objects may indeed have been chipped or tarnished, and of little intrinsic value, yet they had been curated and were being kept safe in a way that rendered them precious. Increasingly, I realised how these displays portray lives lived, perceptions and presentations, the hybridity and complexity of interwoven textural contrasts and contradictions. The more time I spent poring over my transcriptions of the narratives, the more immersed I became in the relational knowledge embedded in the narratives: knowledge that was no doubt difficult for the storytellers to impart but was shared and presented with a gentle smile in the stories in between the representation of self and personhood. Yet, there is also the possibility that they may have become so inured to the suffering in those stories as to be able to tell them with a pleasant disposition, even though the hurt no doubt runs deep.

Older people in Hangberg represent this tension of precarity. The laughter and exuberant storytelling lightened what for me were sad stories: with a sense of mutualism and ethics of care for one another, community and neighbourly structures, religion, and intergenerational living in their articulation of Elderliness. The older people find time, space, and resources to foster children, to support homeless children, and to create informal support networks for themselves and others. Each woman I spoke with sells either *rotis* or *samosas* to supplement her income, which in turn enables her to help others. Elderliness for them is rooted within this precarity. Rather than conceptualised as the “third age”, or viewed as a segmented age group, Elderliness is central to and in the Hangberg community. The matriarchal power and strength in the Elderliness shine through in the women moreover, who take centre stage in family and community life. Some of the women build a form of financial independence that enables them to undertake trips and holidays with other older members of their club and community.

Bearing witness to the stories of the people I visited made me grapple with ‘difficult knowledge’ (Pitt & Britzman, 2003) that challenged me on so many levels. It was a difficult knowledge that sometimes made me feel uncomfortable, that moved me, that provoked an ontological shift within me. Nonetheless, I was humbled by the soft and gentle rendering of the narratives and the narrators’ smiles. If there was to be any sign of hostility, anger, or open resentment, I may have found the narratives more congruent and understandable. Instead, there

was a paradox between the distant othering of my own upbringing and the gentleness with which I was welcomed into the storytellers' homes, where this knowledge was now entrusted to me in a relational togetherness. I could no longer rationalise or distance or intellectualise *them* and *their* being. Rather, I was presented with knowledge I had to digest, internalise, fathom out, and then articulate through writing. The *vertoonkas* was being opened, like my grandmother would do with her display cabinet on special occasions to take out precious crystal glasses in which to serve good wine on Christmas day. I was able to drink from those relational stories that we created in the in-between, from a well of humanity and kindness. As much as I found "a kernel of trauma in the very capacity to know" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756), the kernel likewise presented the possibility of a different knowledge.

The storying of Elderliness – both in the acts of storying it and my writing of it – is aimed at an expansion of this knowledge through presentation and interpretation of narratives of trauma and decline beyond conventional analysis of ageing and a state of being old. Far be it for me to minimise or romanticise the consequences of colonialism or apartheid, or the perceived living conditions of the people of Hangberg. Yet, I would do an injustice to the stories of Elderliness to not write about the agency and hope that I found woven throughout. It is this kernel, as part of the essence of Elderliness, that sprouts from the stories. I am in no way avoiding the hardship or attempting to underestimate it, yet I would do an injustice to the stories and perpetuate a slow violence to not put the stories first. These are the stories of tenacity, humanity, human care, and hope.

Older people in Hangberg are not alone in their precarity, nor are they at the mercy thereof. The situation of the community as a whole is precarious in multiple ways. Yet, I learnt how this precarity is held together as a form of tenacity in a large number of ways by this expression of Elderliness and the power of older people within households and the community. The majority of the residents are unable to rely on much support from the government or formal social structures. The public health clinic has been relocated, making it inconvenient for older patients to visit; homes occupied by generations of the same family have still to become their legal property; evictions are common; fishing rights that were inhabitants' livelihood have been removed, forcing a younger generation into informal fishing and a risk of being labelled (and sometimes charged) as poachers, even shot by local police. The *dorpie* is not served by public transport. Nonetheless, a strong sense of community structure, cohesion, and support systems remains evident throughout the stories.

The *kuier en gesels* methodology unfolded complex layers and textures as artfully as the folding and encapsulating flavours of the traditional *samosa* which was brought into conversation during my first visit to the Senior's Club. Delicate in texture, a *samosa* is robust in spicy tones of flavours that can burn the sensitive palette of the uninitiated. The many points of entry into the stories and moments of articulation contributed to the intricate relationality that goes beyond narrative into the multivocality that is interwoven in the lives of the older people of Hangberg.

Chabal (2009) notes the importance of focusing not only on suffering, but on the way people smile as well. The complexity of the term 'precarity' is as indicative of the complexity of precarity as a construct or notion, least of all when the poor person is objectified and in an essentialist way referred to as 'the precariat'. The greater part of research on precarity and the precariousness of the ageing population has been conducted in the Global North (Grenier et al., 2020). Yet, none of these studies identifies a focus on positive elements of precarity. While precarity may be a relatively new field for gerontologists in the North, scholars have long approached ageing in Africa within the context of precarity. Grenier et al. (2017) allude to precarity as "... both a condition and a possible rallying point for resistance" (p.7), but do not elaborate on the nature of the rallying nor the resistance. A pervasive sense of resistance is evident in the majority of the stories I listened to in Hangberg, even while they were presented with gentle persuasiveness. Younger people there may still fish, despite its being illegal. When Tannie Joyce's husband worked on a fishing boat at sea, she would send him a cake with a marijuana inlay. The members of the Sewing Club were reluctant to belong to formal support structures available to older people. Perhaps it is this strong sense of resistance that enhances the tension within the precarity that holds this community together?

Numerous additional ways exist in which the people of Hangberg rally against the precarity of being old in an environment where there is scant or no formal structural support. The most evident way is through mutualism, a powerful collective agency that comes with an interconnected, purpose-driven social situatedness. While the largest part of research on ageing universally focuses on vulnerabilities, risks, insecurity, exclusion, and frailty, scant attention has been paid to "what counts as a valued life" (Grenier et al., 2017, p. 8). I know that in South Africa, the lives of coloured and black people often do not matter. Black and coloured bodies portrayed in newspapers and on social media are often just that – bodies, not people. The

objectification of coloured people during apartheid and beyond left them at such a distance from white people that they are often not seen as human. I live less than five kilometres from Hangberg, and yet I am so far removed from its people. To this day, many servants and gardeners are not allowed to eat from the same plates or use the same bathroom as family members in the household. Butler (2012) questions our ability to see or respond to the suffering of those who are so far removed from ‘us’. The tragic reality is that the people of Hangberg are not far removed from me in distance, yet in history they are so far removed from my knowing and understanding. And then, suddenly I am faced with a proximity and “up againstness” (Butler, 2012, p. 134) that I could never have imagined. Suddenly, through Butler’s trope of ‘grievableness’, as if anew, I see lives that should be valued as worthy and regarded so highly. As if for the first time in my life, in a renewed realisation of what has always been there before me, given a new lexicon to express it introspectively, I see these lives as grievable, and feel the deepest sense of grief for the injustices, while at the same time a sense of celebration of what feels to be triumphant, transcendent, storying. This binary dichotomy pendulums and slows into a liminal space of immeasurable respect.

The older people with whom I interacted had a specific position that was not only valued by their families but had an additional purpose of giving the individuals agency on several levels of their inter-reliability within the community. Within their own household, community, church, mosque and neighbourhood, they were certainly not passive recipients of care and charity. Rather, they are active members and often orchestrators of each of these institutions. The smiles with which they storied their Elderliness was indicative of the stand they take in facing lifelong precarity. The relational nature of the Hangberg community that is organised around their own forced response to a lack of formal support creates mutualism that not only gives purpose, but importantly a strong sense of agency and resistance against the worst consequences of repression as they live in the context of an absent state. Here again, the enmeshed relationships provide insight into the dense root system of human interconnection that not only feeds the community, but holds it together as well. Highlighting a single aspect of the relationality of the Hangberg community in isolation is not possible. The community is African to its core, in the *Ubuntu* construct of such relationality – ‘I am because you are’ (Tutu, 1999; Swanson, 2007) – promoting a collective wellbeing, the desire to create a better future for their children and the children of their community, and advocating for “legitimizing spaces for transcendence of injustice and a more democratic, egalitarian and ethical engagement of human beings in relation with each other” (Swanson, 2007, p. 65).

“*Caretizenship*” (Casas-Cortes, 2019) takes the idea of “humble togetherness” (Swanson, 2007, p. 53) further, to where it becomes an informal politics of the community: one of self-reliant support and awareness of the needs of others, again both inside and outside the family circle. Neighbourliness is expressed in multiple ways in the setting, aimed at enhancing the greater good of everyone. Members of the Sewing Club and the Senior’s Club spoke of informal structures that are positioned for support. It is within the *caretizenship* moreover that Elderliness becomes more than a personal experience of being old. Rather, it is a social expression of citizenship, of embracing response-ability, of being able to contribute to and be an agentic member of the community. Consequently, an outward focus towards community is present, as opposed to a commonly self-focused, individualistic attitude, held by numerous more affluent older white people with whom I have interacted during my career in service provision to communities of older persons over the past 27 years.

Older people in Hangberg, I learnt, have an integrated, relational situatedness that contributes to a strong sense of subjective wellbeing for them and in turn becomes a major social indicator (Tay et al., 2015). Millar (2017) adds that precarity is an experience that includes action to counter precarity. The active engagement of older people in this expression of Elderliness creates a “counter precarity”, rendering the tension of their presence in the community more tangible and significant. During my journey with older people of Hangberg, I certainly witnessed resistance: if only in their rejection of ageing being framed as a social problem to be solved. Here, older people solve the problems of a broken societal system themselves: they contribute to building and sustaining their community and hold together the pieces of a shaky structure that otherwise most probably would collapse without them.

The stories of Elderliness I garnered present a distinct sense of the older individuals’ subjective wellbeing, despite definitions of wellbeing and quality of life invariably including having financial resources and paid work (Robertson et al., 2020). Hangberg’s older residents had few opportunities to secure financial resources, or indeed engage in (decent) paid work over the life course. Yet, what exists for them now is a host of contingent articulations – like the rhizomes – of densely woven contributions to wellbeing. I feel these rhizomes in the words:

Together, this demonstrates that subjective wellbeing serves an incremental role beyond objective quality of life indicators and is useful for policy purposes (Tay et al., 2015, p. 840).

Narrative is the performative expression of those experiences in the act of creating identity and defining, or attempting to define, what it means to be human, and what it means to know (Swanson, 2004, p. 35).

I came to learn and understand how the older people I engaged with in Hangberg live their life from day to day and solve their problems. Grandparents take their grandchildren to school, cook meals for them, and give some of them a roof over their heads. Many have put their own children through school and college and helped them to become nurses and teachers. Some have created additional sources of income through cooking and selling foods, working as domestic workers, and undertaking sewing projects. They also volunteer to care for others, and they are active members of their community, in their church or in their mosque. Not once did I hear that an older person viewed themselves as a burden to their family (or community), or that they blamed the state for inadequate provision for Hangberg's older residents. Instead, each had built and kept a beautiful home in which they treasured what they have, even if Hangberg and their home were not their choice of location or residence, or what they might have hoped for. In each case, moreover, they were sharing their home generously with family members. The reciprocal generosity that evolved from their circumstances may indeed have shifted their focus to one of hope and aspiration, of appreciation and gratitude, with a belief that their situation and the perceived bountifulness they experience lie as much in the will of God as in His grace:

For some, precarity certainly describes an experience of loss. But for others, it might constitute a refusal of waged work, an alternative political subjectivity, or a mode of life that does not conform to liberal ideals (Millar, 2017, p. 16).

The older people of Hangberg whom I met have positioned themselves within a different political subjectivity out of necessity. Although political change has been fairly transformative in South Africa over the past three decades, coloured people are still underrepresented in the country's political arena. Yet, "he transcended disadvantage with his heart. I realized then that

*transformative* pedagogies, in the end, were really about *transcendence* – the capacity to rise above, to find goodness even in the slightest of things, to find the opportunity to turn deficit into human wealth, disadvantage into hope. Yes, it is about pedagogies of hope and the heart” (Swanson, 2008, p. 8). The storying of Elderliness is from the heart, transcending the political landscape, the situatedness of Hangberg and its challenges, creating meaning and presenting relational knowledge on the power of mutualism, inter-reliability, and reciprocity. It also transcends most liberal ideas of ageing by challenging the dominant narrative presented, offering instead a human story(ing) of heart and hope.

Where does the Pilgrim’s journey end? To me, there is no end to this journey. This is merely a point of departure, the beginning is the end, the end is the beginning. There have been moments when I genuinely felt that I did not contribute anything to any academic discipline – as one should eloquently declare at the end of a thesis, for what was given to me was so profound, so intensely meaningful, so humbling, that what I might offer in return would seem miniscule and irrelevant by comparison. Yet, as I am impelled to do, as I shift into academic mode, I recognise that this work does offer a number of definable contributions that would honour the stories and people of Hangberg: a) I had the great honour of being able to be present and bear witness to the abundance of spirit, generosity, dignity, humanity, powerful humility and agency of the Elders of Hangberg; b) I was privileged through the welcoming spirit of the people of Hangberg to be able to articulate what might be possible and necessary in revisioning elderly care, and imagining how this way of knowing and being might be present in our communities more widely; c) I was honoured to be able to offer a meaningful contribution to the praxis and enactment of critical rhizo-linguistic narrative as an ethical inquiry that fosters a particular way of being in research and of being with(in) research; d) This work calls to attention communal, familial, and individual ways of reconsidering aging and elderly care; and finally, e) I am humbled to have had the privilege of engaging in meaningful experiences of living, enacting, inquiring, and writing to the hope, dignity, possibility, and agency that dwells within precarity and abundance of lived experience. For these experiences, I am truly humbled.

Yet, as I stand in Hout Bay Harbour, the smell of *pap snoek* wafting about me and I look up to Hangberg as the crescent moon breaches her flank in silhouette, I contemplate the contribution from a very different perspective: I have journeyed into the heart of a landscape of people. This is their contribution, to my life as much as I hope to yours, the reader. This is a beginning, perhaps of new methods of research on Elderliness, of going back again and again to hear more

stories, to share them within the humble togetherness of being that is this South Africa. Perhaps it is a small step of cleaning up the word 'research' that it is no longer the dirtiest word.

And now I too can grow old. I have learned and witnessed from the true experts what Elderliness means.



*Hangberg at dusk*  
Photo credit: © Dalene Swanson, 2022

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