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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the discourse strategies used to construct initiation schools in online media and message boards. The focus is on understanding the tensions that come with enacting traditional practices in the face of modernity and its associated cultural expectations. The thesis describes the manner in which these tensions are constructed in text by the media in news reports and participants in discussion forums. While there is still debate around whether the internet will revolutionise public participation and create a digital utopia; the internet is acknowledged as one of the widest reaching sources of information and entertainment. Specifically, the internet provides a platform to challenge the traditionally top-down communication between the elite, who have privileged access to the media, and the general public, who were previously constructed as passive recipients of information. Using the male circumcision initiation rite, this thesis examines how the South African public discursively constructs the epistemic location of African traditions in South Africa. The study drew on a sample of news articles from the News24 site, the largest news site in South Africa, ranging from January 2008 to December 2013. A corpus of 62 articles were analysed using the Critical Discourse Analysis technique described by Teun van Dijk. The findings of the thesis were that the initiation rite is used as a rhetorical tool to argue for the abandonment of African cultural practices in favour of modern, Western influenced beliefs and values. The findings also indicate that the initiation rite is reduced to the act of circumcision in the media by focusing on the injury and deaths of the initiates and excluding the meaning of the rite as a meaningful cultural practice. The conclusion of the thesis challenges the epistemicide committed against the male circumcision initiation rite from within the Decolonial school of thought, which critically examines everyday interaction for universalising, normative

language that aims to commit cultural epistemicide to reinforce the white, male, European, Christian traditions of masculinity.

Key terms: Male circumcision, initiation schools, critical discourse analysis, Decoloniality, virtual ethnography, traditional circumcision, cultural epistemicide, masculinity, netnography.

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### Definition of terms

Aggregation phase	The final phase of the initiation rite according to von Gennep's conceptualisation.
<i>Amakrwala</i>	Xhosa word for initiate graduates (Ubukrwala for singular).
Contralesa	Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa.
Discussion forum/board	Also called an internet forum or online discussion board; discussion forums are space where people hold conversations in the form of posted messages. The term discussion forum, discussion board, internet forum or online discussion are used interchangeably within the text.
<i>Ego conquiro</i>	The certainty of the self as a conqueror, of its tasks and missions, preceded Descartes's certainty about the self as a thinking substance (Maldonado-Torres, 2007a, p. 245).
<i>Hlonipha</i>	Xhosa word for language structures built around verbal rites of respect toward social superiors.
<i>Ikrwala</i>	Xhosa word for an individual who has attained the status of graduate in the initiation rite.
<i>Ingceke</i>	Xhosa word for white ochre used by initiates to smear their bodies during the initiation rite.

<i>Irkwala elidala</i>	Xhosa word for an elder initiate graduate, typically refers to an initiate who has passed a six month period post initiation.
Limin	The second phase of the initiation rite according to von Gennepe's conceptualisation.
LOL	Chat room abbreviation for Laugh Out Loud. Used to express laughter and humour in text.
Separation	The first phase of the initiation rite according to von Gennepe's conceptualisation.
<i>Somagwaza</i>	A traditional song sang by participants in the rite telling the story of Somagwaza.
Pantsula	Refers to a culture associated with gangsters from Soweto in the 1950s who were characterised by their reputation for violent behaviour and sense of style and glamour that set them apart from others (Glaser, 2000).
Prepuce	Also referred to as the foreskin, skin surrounding and protecting the head of the penis.
<i>uBukhwetha</i>	The phase of the Xhosa rite during which an individual is undergoing initiation.
<i>uKukhonya</i>	The preparatory period prior to entering the Xhosa initiation rite.

<i>Umngeno</i>	The Xhosa ritual for entering the initiation phase.
<i>Umphumo</i>	The phase of the Xhosa rite where the initiate prepares to exit the state of initiation and to re-enter society.
<i>WTF</i>	Text abbreviation for the phrase What The Fuck. Used to express outrage or incredulity.

## Conceptual map of thesis and findings

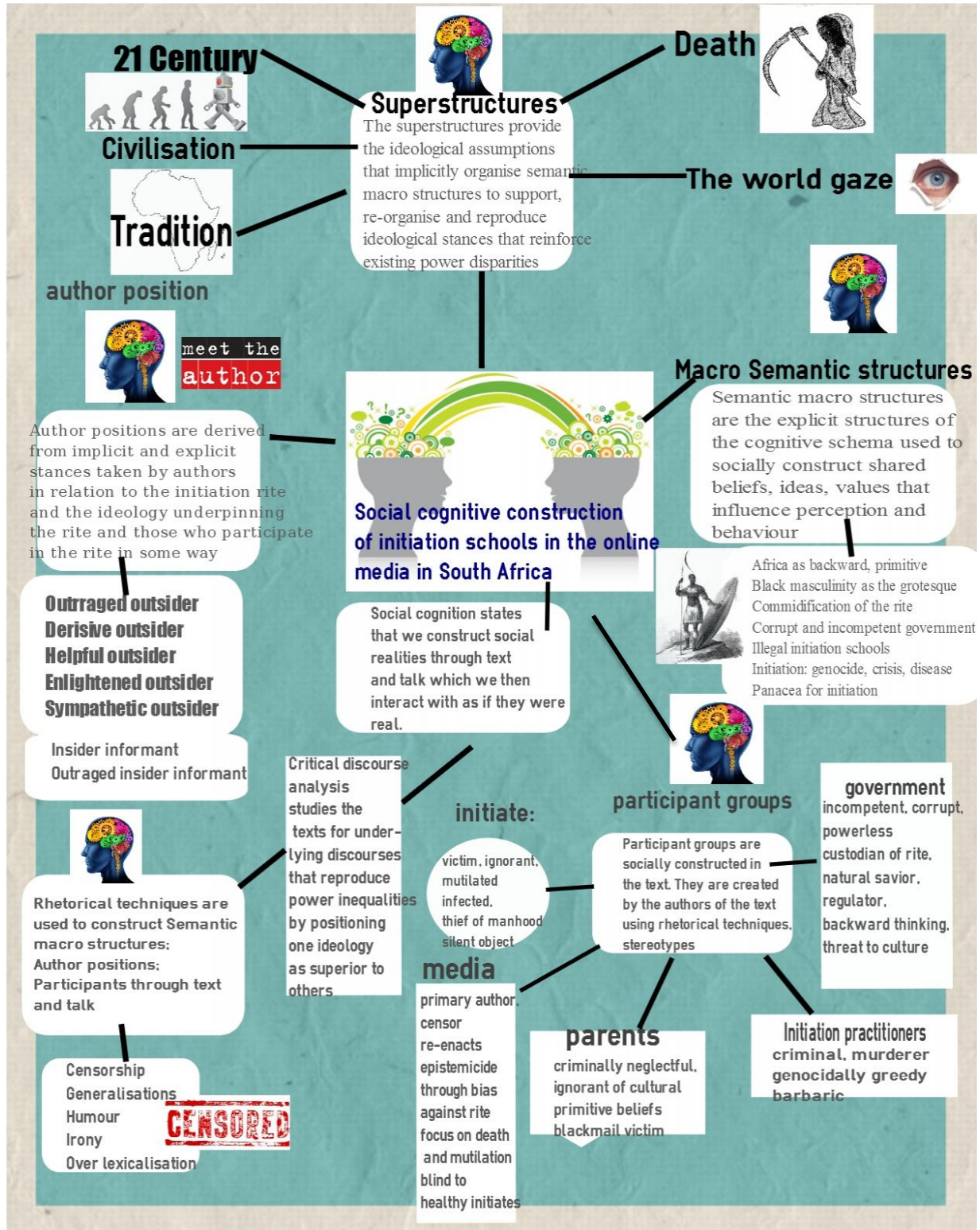


Figure 1 Conceptual map of thesis findings

## **Prelude**

Before entering the performance of the thesis, I would like to provide a brief prelude to set the stage for what will follow.

Writing this thesis was interesting, challenging and provocative for me. Interesting because I was drawn into a world that runs in parallel, right along the uneven edges of what I thought of as my normal world. Learning about the values, beliefs and practices of the initiation rite was both an education and a privilege.

The sense of being allowed into privilege is what brings the challenge. How does one study a space that is sacred without violating (even temporarily) the sanctity of your participants' beliefs? I don't know; which is why I primarily worked on secondary data in literature for information on the rite. I had many advisors who, in the confidence of the temporary bond between researcher and participant, shared their experiences with me to illustrate the extent to which I would invade their cultural space. I soon realised that I cannot write about their experiences without violating their vows and displaying the violation publically for my own gain and collective fascination.

It was provocative because of the social space that the initiation rite occupies within our collective understanding. The literature, discussions and reports on the rite touch on the most sensitive spaces within our collective identity and force us to reveal our ideological stance toward ideas of social hierarchy, race relations, the place of black cultures within the modern South Africa and what it means to achieve manhood.

One of the revelations for me while working on this piece was the idea of using art to redefine existing discourses to upset the social order. I came across the idea while in conversation with

Nelson Maldonado-Torres at a summer school on Decolonialisation. It came at a time when I was frustrated at the uni-dimensional way the media was portraying initiates. It came before I realised that a dead, mutilated initiate makes a stronger call to arms to change the rite than a healthy smiling initiation graduate does.

When I had this particular revelation I started looking for media portrayals of healthy, successful initiation graduates. I figured there should be many out there who are going about their daily lives, performing the roles they were prepared for but who were not newsworthy because they were not deviant or grotesque.

There are many articles in small newspapers and on blogs telling the alternative story of the initiation school: The one where the rite plays the role in shaping healthy, value driven young men who are also part of the modern South Africa. I therefore include the work of Araminta de Clermont and Khanyisa Pinini (aka Baz Bailey) on alternate pages of the chapter headings as the alternative narrative to what you will find within the text.

# Chapter 1: Introduction and study overview





"Party piece" by Araminta de Clermont

# **1. Chapter 1**

## **1.1. Introduction**

The aim of this thesis is to examine the discourse strategies used to construct initiation schools in online news reports and message boards. The focus is on understanding the tensions that come with holding traditional practices in the face of modernity and the associated cultural expectations that come with it. Additionally, the aim is to describe the manner in which these tensions are constructed in text by the media in news reports and participants in discussion forums. The purpose of examining online news reports and discussion forums is to define what Gee (2004) describes as Discourses – those distinctive social groups that communicate across time through the medium of individuals – and what he describes as discourses – which refers to language in use as written or oral texts. The purpose of the discourse analysis is to make visible the Discourses that inform our understandings, beliefs and practices about specific cultural institutions in South African society (Gee, 2004; Wodak & Reisigl, 2001).

Chapter 1, Section 6.1 of the South African Constitution specifies that the eleven official languages of the country and their cultural systems and epistemologies should be elevated in status and their use advanced (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Within the South African constitutional framework various indigenous cultural practices have either survived or been reinvented in contemporary South Africa. Local customs and festivals are demonstrations of indigenous identity because they are well-proven ways of gracing and making bearable the

sombre cutting edges between life and death (Jacobs, 2013). The central problem this thesis aims to address is to understand how these cultural systems and epistemologies are socially constructed within the South African online community and media.

While there are many forms of media that can be examined to study the discourse around initiation schools, this study will examine online media and message boards. The technological advances we face have the potential to extend the role of the public in the social and political arena (Papacharissi, 2002). While there is still debate around whether the internet will "revolutionise public participation; increase understanding, foster tolerance; create a community of informed, interactive and tolerant world citizens; and create a digital utopia" (Curran et al., 2013, p. 881), the internet is acknowledged as one of the widest reaching sources of information and entertainment. The internet is also believed to be a powerful tool of communication in the hands of the people empowering previously excluded groups to participate in public discourse (Curran et al., 2013). Specifically, it may provide a platform to challenge the traditionally top-down communication between the elite, who have privileged access to the media, and the general public, who were previously constructed as passive recipients of information (Curran et al., 2013).

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

Every year news headlines appear marking the death and mutilation of a group of initiates prompting calls for the discontinuation of the practice from some politicians, parents, church leaders and the public (Ntombana, 2011). The calls for the abolishment of the practice is further strengthened by the perception that the behaviour of the initiated young men does not conform to

the expectations carried by the ritual (Ntombana, 2011). The initiation practice is therefore seen to have lost its meaning and, consequently, cannot contribute to building society (Meintjies, 1998). Ntombana (2011) argues that the initiation rite has been under siege from the arrival of the Christian missionaries who referred to the rite as a pagan ritual that is abhorrent within the Westernised Christian culture.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a, 2013b) argues that the systems used to entrench the power hierarchies of colonialisation are still intact and operating to suppress the cultures that exist outside of the Eurocentric network of cultural symbolism. One of the outcomes of these colonial systems, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a), is the objectification and subjugation of African humanity. The current attempts to regulate or abolish the initiation practice are informed by the established systems of colonialisation that aim to negate alternate networks of meaning in favour of the Westernised asymmetrical power structures that maintain white dominance as the norm (Maldonado-Torres, 2006). A possible reason for attempting to control the initiation rite specifically is that manhood is a site of privilege and status within most societies (Ratele & Studies, 2005), the allocation of resources, privilege and status can therefore be controlled by controlling access to the status of manhood. If there are multiple pathways to attaining the privileged status of manhood, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the cultural dominance over a group that is inherently empowered within its own hierarchical system (Grosfoguel, 2013). One of the means through which cultural dominance is enacted is within the media which plays a role in shaping collective perceptions about social issues to govern collective attitudes on social practices (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005a).

Media representation is one of the key sites where the cultural definitions of masculinity take place in post-apartheid South Africa (Ndangam, 2008). The circumcision debate in South Africa,

online media offer an opportunity to explore how Black African masculinity is represented within popular discourse (Ndangam, 2008). According to various authors, gender, in this case masculinity, is located at both the body and at the socially shared spaces of lived experiences (Jacobs, 2013; Ndangam, 2008; Ratele, 2008c).

The role of Black masculinity is frequently problematised and proclaimed as the root cause behind the cycle of violence in South Africa (Ratele, 2010). In a study outlining the key causes behind the high rate of interpersonal violence among young black men, Ratele (2010) describes "successful masculinity" as enacted by males who are able to ignore pain, never show fear and who are always ready for a fight. The portrayal of a successful male as fearless, clever and "pantsula-esque" provides men with the popular cultural indicators for attaining social status, while simultaneously increasing the risk of victimisation (Ratele, 2006, 2010). These cultural indicators have long been represented by cultural sources such as radio, magazines, cinema, advertising, newspapers and television and have become the dominant idea of what manhood appears to be (Ratele, 2010).

Despite being classified as "a sensitive annual debate" (Ndangam, 2008, p. 210), male circumcision and the discourses surrounding it have not received much attention outside of epidemiological or anthropological investigations into the rite. This may be attributed to the shroud of sanctioned secrecy that surrounds the practice in those cultures that practise it. Despite the shroud of secrecy, literary texts and anthropological studies have documented the processes and meanings of these rites (Ndangam, 2008). The specific connotations of the processes and rites are discussed in the next chapter. Here, the focus is to briefly outline the role of initiation and masculinity within the social system.

The initiation rite is an essential cultural asset for those cultures that practise it (Jacobs, 2013; Ndangam, 2008). The removal of the prepuce is part of the rite that comprises a number of rituals (Ndangam, 2008). These rituals are focused on teaching the initiates the values, attitudes and behaviours expected of men within their society (Ndangam, 2008). A point I'd like to make here is that initiation schools are regarded as educational institutions for young boys where they are taught the rules of the society they will enter into as full members on completion of the rituals (Jacobs, 2013).

Ndangam (2005) cites Fayo's 2005 editorial in *The Herald* on the 12 January 2005, in stating that "in South Africa's liberal and non-racial society, black Africans need to decide whether black traditional customs, such as circumcision - and cultural practices as a whole - remain a critical hallmark to being African" (p 209). This quote implies that the African identity is changing and that traditions and customs are not necessarily part of this developing identity. This shift in identity is one of the central debates in the contestation between indigenous knowledge and Westernised knowledge systems (Hoppers, 2009). The importance of identity formation has been established as a key developmental stage for young adults to make as they transition from children to adult status (Van Gennep, 1960; Vincent, 2008). This transformation is acknowledged within both modern ways of thinking and indigenous cultures (Jacobs, 2013; Mhlahlo, 2009).

The current marginalisation of cultural practices within the dominant social system can have the effect of under-emphasising the significance and importance of the traditional rites of passage and their associated values, beliefs and practices. The possible impact of this can be that young men are socialised into two contrasting systems of beliefs that value and acknowledge different cultural indicators which can create confusion, anxiety, and pressure to conform that is coupled with uncertainty of what to conform to.

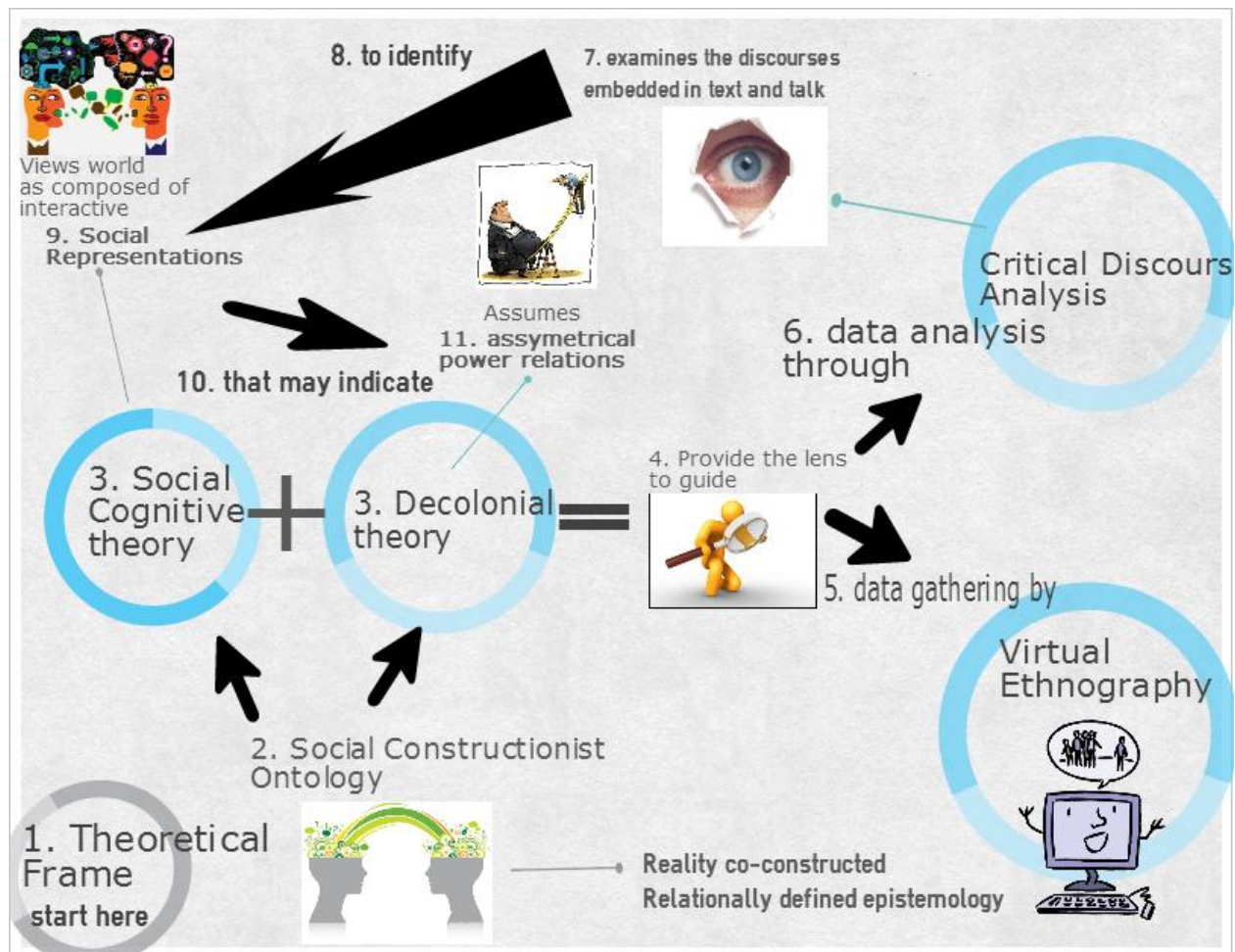
The particular focus of this study, online media, is described as a form of mass education in communication and culture (Kellner & Share, 2005). Online media has the ability to widely, almost instantly transmit a discourse across the globe and to a variety of audiences who have access to the internet. It also has the enhanced ability to provide audience members with the ability to actively participate in these discourses through online message boards and forums – thus shifting them from recipients of a discourse to active participants in the creation and maintenance of the various discursive strategies used in the media (Curran et al., 2013).

When considering the influence and reach of the internet in shaping ideas, beliefs and access to information, it is of crucial importance that we understand the discursive strategies used to co-construct the role of traditional schools in South Africa (Kellner & Share, 2007). The focus on online communities as a mechanism for addressing the marginalisation of initiation schools is based on the sphere of influence that the internet holds in modern society. The internet has drastically shaped cultural practices in various spheres in society (Papacharissi, 2002). This thesis proceeds with the understanding that, in South Africa, internet access and the command of the English language are both symbols of prestige and power that mark the participants of this study as part of the elite within South Africa. This study can be more specifically positioned as the examination of the discursive strategies used to construct initiation schools by the South African elite.

### **1.3. Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is derived from two key theories, namely Social Cognitive theory and Decolonial theory. The methodological base for gathering and analysing

the data is derived from the Cyber-ethnographic approach and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The relationship between the ontological stance, theoretical orientation, data gathering and analysis are depicted in Figure 2. A more detailed discussion of these theories and approaches and their epistemological orientations as well as the specific interpretative function they perform in this thesis will be discussed in Chapter 3.



**Figure 2 Links between theory and method**

What is important to mention here is that the ontological orientation of the theories guiding this study is derived from the Social Constructionist paradigm which views reality as co-constructed and as embedded with power structures that relationally define valid epistemological stances



(Lock & Strong, 2010). The epistemological stance taken in this study is derived from Van Dijk's (1993) approach to social cognition through the application of CDA. Social Cognitive theory underscores the role of social perception of symbolic and self-regulatory processes in human learning and interaction (Bandura, 2001). Social Cognitive theory also takes the position that discourse is a cognitive structure that is socially constructed through the interaction of individuals with texts and the interaction of individuals through speech acts (Van Dijk, 1993a).

Linked to the idea of the socially constructed knowledge system are Decolonial theories that take the stance that we exist within an asymmetrical world order that is sustained by colonial matrices of power which are constructed through pedagogies and epistemologies that legitimate the position of Euro-centric ideals as the norm (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b).

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

The primary research question of this study concerns itself with the study of the construction of the overarching cognitive macro-structures that inform the construction of discourses of privilege and power when discussing initiation schools in online news reports and the accompanying discussion forums. The question is stated as follows:

What are the discourse strategies used in reporting and discussing online news reports about initiation schools?

Sub research questions that inform this study include the following:

- What are the identifiable ideologies that inform news reports and the interactions of individual participants in discussions on articles about initiation schools in online news sites?

The above question seeks to examine the cognitive superstructures that frame the text and speech acts of the data corpus in this study. Cognitive superstructures are comprised of macro-semantic patterns that emerge from the text and talk. macro-semantic patterns are positioned as the content of the socially constructed Social Representations. The cognitive superstructures represent the primary discourses used to position the male circumcision rite in speech acts and news reports (Van Dijk, 1990).

- What are the linguistic patterns utilised to create positions of power and dominance in news reports and accompanying discussion forums on initiation schools in online news sites?

The examination of the specific linguistic patterns examines the rhetorical techniques used in the news reports and discussion forums to create and position discursive positions (Van Dijk, 1987). These techniques privilege or suppress specific discourses within a text and are therefore important markers in studying the construction of various discourses.

- What are the rhetorical techniques used to marginalise the epistemic stance that underpins the cultural symbolic network of the initiation rite in online news reports and accompanying discussion forums?

The examination of the rhetorical techniques focuses on how participants in the discussion forums construct their author positions and, from these self-constructed positions, how they construct the participants involved in the discourses of the male circumcision rite as initiation.

### **1.5. Rationale of the study**

Initiation schools play a crucial role in the socialisation of young South African men. Effective partnerships with these institutions can play a role in developing a male identity that is sensitive to developing healthy relationships, has a healthy orientation to risk (especially sexual risk), understands diversity as strength and that is built on the principles of democratic citizenship (Ratele, 2006, 2008b). The calls for the discontinuation of the initiation rite are drawn from the annual reports on the death and mutilation of initiates in the media; on reports on the degeneration of the moral code underpinning the rite and from the apparent inability of government to regulate the practice safely (Ndangam, 2008; Ntombana, 2011b). Grosfoguel (2012a) cautions that any act of epistemicide must be critically questioned to avoid enacting the systems of colonisation on behalf of the colonising system. Failing to do so, marginalises knowledge and meaning making systems that are embedded within the collective identity of a people and pushes them over the line into the position of the transgressive other (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b).

The findings of this study could contribute to existing knowledge on developing critical media literacy, especially with respect to building a media that is respectful of indigenous cultures while maintaining its critical stance on reported issues.

## **1.6. Structure of subsequent chapters**

This thesis consists of eight chapters, including this one. This chapter provided a brief overview of the study. Chapter 2 aims to describe the underlying cultural symbolic network of meaning of the initiation rite in literature. Chapter 3 discusses the South African media as the context of this study with specific reference to the role of the media in representing male circumcision as an initiation rite. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive description of the theoretical framework guiding this study. Chapter 5 describes the method employed and provides a brief description of key points in the research process. Chapter 6 and 7 present the results of the CDA of the news articles and discussion forums respectively. Chapter 8 draws the thesis to a close by integrating the theoretical framework into the results to provide an interpretation of the data.

## Chapter 2: Initiation rites and masculinity



Photo credit: Baz Bailey

## 2. Chapter 2

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the context of the study. Specifically we discuss initiation rites in general, followed by an exploration of these rights within the South African context. Following this, the construction of manhood in the South African context is described. The male circumcision rite is positioned within its own cultural symbolic network in the discussions that follow. Taking this positioning provides a useful reference point from which to contrast the construction of the rite by those outside of it or who may be straddling the cultural symbolic network that constructs this rite.

### 2.2. Initiation rites

"Social science must take account of the symbolic efficacy of rites of institution, that is, the power they possess to act on reality by acting on its representations." (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 119)
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For this thesis the following interpretation, based on the analysis of Arnold van Gennep (1960) is taken as the departure point for constructing the role of initiation. Initiation is a rite of passage in

which a group sharing a common status within a society is temporarily exiled and subjected to grotesque or sacred normative representations during the initiation process (Hocart, 1924; Jacobs, 2013; Van Gennep, 1960). These individuals are then re-integrated into society as members holding a new status, a new identity, and authorised to perform new roles (Van Gennep, 1960). Initiation is understood as a means to achieve the change of an individual's status within a community, in which the confrontation of the initiate with the radically other aspects of the cultural symbolic network is an integral part (McDonough, 2011).

The status change is from that of one who did not have a certain level of authority to make judgments within the community to a level of authority in which the individual has authority over a particular area of social interaction (Ntombana, 2011). Those who have been initiated are expected to have the skills and knowledge necessary to make decisions on behalf of the community for those areas over which they have been given jurisdiction (McDonough, 2011; Ngxamngxa, 1971).

In defining initiation, McDonough (2011) takes the stance that initiation, from a structuralist and societal perspective, is not merely a stage in individual development, nor is it simply the reinforcement or reproduction and transmission of existing relations to the youth made adult, but it is an education into the management of the norms of a society. The process is described as one through which an individual is given the capacity and authority to manipulate symbolic relations that constitute social norms (Hocart, 1924; McDonough, 2011).

Initiation is a concentrated immersion, and one that takes place within a normally ritualised context; it is meant to prepare individuals to be active agents of cultural maintenance and agents of cultural change in moments of crisis (McDonough, 2011). Some authors (Hocart, 1924;



Ntombana, 2011b; Vincent, 2008) position the notion of initiation as a pedagogy that contributes not only to the perpetuation of a particular form of life or community, but that provides the next generation with means to advance that knowledge beyond its existing boundaries (McDonough, 2011). Initiation is a complex process through which the symbolic repertoire and grammar of a culture are made strange so that the elements of culture can be grasped and fashioned as opposed to simply accepted as a given and fixed set of beliefs (McDonough, 2011). Initiation is also described as an immersion into an existing symbolic system, occurring when the codes and repertoires are already familiar to the initiate (McDonough, 2011). This interpretation of initiation builds upon a structuralist notion of culture as a symbolic system which undergirds the normative beliefs and the judgments of a particular community (McDonough, 2011; Ntombana, 2011b).

McDonough (2011) cites Arnold van Gennep's (1960) three stages of initiation as the process through which the initiate is passed from one state of being to another. These stages are separation, limin and aggregation. The section below draws heavily on the work of Van Gennep (1960) which is acknowledged as a seminal work in structuring the rites of initiation. This is not intended as a comprehensive description of initiation rites, but to provide a point of contrast against which the construction of initiation rites in the online news and discussion forums can be conducted.

### **2.2.1. Separation**

The first stage of initiation is separation and is meant to delineate difference in identity, to disrupt the naive assumptions of the process of the codes underpinning everyday life that the uninitiated may hold (Van Gennep, 1960). This is done to reveal the human mediating factor within the symbolic representation of the culture's world (McDonough, 2011).

Separation is achieved through disruption, differentiation and inversion of those components used to signify aspects of the culture's symbolic representations (Van Gennep, 1960). During this process the logical relation between and rhetoric of symbolic constructions are highlighted by breaking up the components and repositioning these in ways that often break with normative and rhetorical rules (McDonough, 2011).

The purpose of this stage of initiation is to emphasise the logic which underlies the normative significance of the culture's symbolic repertoire by contrasting it against the absence of the symbolic repertoire (Van Gennep, 1960). The displacement of initiates into alterior within the symbolic order of their society serves to introduce the initiate to the normally unspoken possibilities inherent within the system (Ntombana, 2006). The displacement of the initiates into the alterior where they are stripped of all privilege, status and safety exposes them to the possibility of life without the protection of the social system (Ntombana, 2006).

### **2.2.2. Limin**

The second stage of initiation is called the limin and is based on the concept of the liminal space in which initiates no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet transitioned into the status they will hold when they complete their transformation (McDonough, 2011; Mhlahlo, 2009). During this phase the initiate stands at the threshold between their previous identity, position in time and status in the community (Van Gennep, 1960).

During this phase initiates are guided through encounters with grotesque and sacred representations of the culture's symbolic repertoire (Van Gennep, 1960). These encounters are transgressive of the rhetorical code but represent possibilities of meaning-making which are necessary for the maintenance of the system (McDonough, 2011; Mhlahlo, 2009). The symbolic grotesques are drawn from the exaggeration or perversion of the symbolic repertoire to accentuate the lesson of separation by revealing the distinction between the potential for meaning in symbols (logic) and their appropriateness (rhetoric) (Van Gennep, 1960).

In this phase initiates learn that symbolic representations are mediate forms that are constructed to convey a sense of right and wrong, good and evil, but in and of themselves are neither true nor false (McDonough, 2011). The abstraction, separation and recombination of signifying elements allows the initiate to grasp these as relational elements that are subject to the selective and organisational decisions of their articulators (Ramkhota, 2004; Van Gennep, 1960). In learning to manipulate the meaning of the symbolic elements of their culture, initiates learn the underlying logical potential that frames the symbolic system which is their culture (Mavundla, Netswera, Toth, Bottoman, & Tenge, 2010; Van Gennep, 1960). The practical reason for learning to

manipulate cultural symbolic elements is to prepare initiates for the authority that comes with their new status in society and thus enable them to deal with the unavoidable (and necessary) contradictions and conflicts within their cultural system (McDonough, 2011).

This is based on the idea that all systems, when put into the world of human relations, generate contradictions as they encounter the multiplicity of empirical facts or alternative demands of competing subsystems (Mhlahlo, 2009). Initiates must learn to meet such conflicts and contradictions not only as empirical realities but as symbolic phenomena that are subject to articulatory practices (Van Gennep, 1960). Through confrontation with these contradictions, initiates learn that the symbolic logic of their culture does not abhor but incorporates contradiction and reversal as a means of making the system of normative signification sufficient to meet the dynamic needs of their society (Hocart, 1924; McDonough, 2011). Initiates then learn to rely on their own powers to deal with these symbolic “cultural others” within the system of relations that constitute their “normal world” and thus become active agents of cultural maintenance or, in moments of crisis, agents of change (McDonough, 2011; Van Gennep, 1960).

### **2.2.3. Aggregation/Incorporation**

The aggregation or incorporation phase is the third and final phase of the initiation. During this phase the rhetorical code is re-legitimated, in the education of the initiate, as the proper means for resolving the dissonances and problems encountered in the limin period (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2012). The purpose of this stage is the respectful mastery of the culture's code to put right the wrongs highlighted during the limin phase of the initiation (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2012). In this

mastery the initiate comes to recognise the superiority of the cultural code and its value in overcoming the challenges confronted during the limin phase (McDonough, 2011).

The aggregation phase of the initiation is mainly concerned with the conservative and ideologically reinforcing features of the process of cultural education. This is done through what Bourdieu refers to as rites of institution (Bourdieu, 1991). These rites control the transgression of social boundaries by permitting and facilitating the transgression of socially constructed norms with the aim of reinforcing and maintaining distinctions in society (Bourdieu, 1991). Within the educational process of initiation, these rites provide a means of managing the potentially dangerous transfer of power between generations while preserving power structures in the face of social challenges and historical change (Bourdieu, 1991; McDonough, 2011). The outcome of the initiation process is the transfer of authority to manipulate symbolic relations that constitute social norms to new cultural agents within the social structure (Bourdieu, 1991). This is done to preserve the existing order of symbolic networks, but places the culture's system of symbols at risk of being irrevocably altered by an individual who wishes to do so (McDonough, 2011). Therefore this process is well guarded by those in power and access is restricted to preserve the existing normative structure (McDonough, 2011).

#### **2.2.4. Implications for this study**

The conceptual framework for initiation described above provides a tool for understanding the initiation rite from within its own underlying network of cultural symbolism. Within this conceptual framework, we can contrast the intended effects of the initiation rite with the

constructions of the rite in online news reports and discussion forums. A further consideration is derived from the understanding that individuals who undergo initiation are equipped with the ability to understand the underlying links between cultural elements that constitute a symbolic network. Discursive practices that relegate initiation rites to sites of obsolete culture also negate the agency of these individuals in determining and developing their lived world. Understanding the effects of the negation on the individual could be an important first step in creating a social system that is open to multiple cultural networks of meaning. This final point is elaborated on in the final chapter of this thesis.

### 2.3. Initiation in South Africa

“In South Africa’s liberal and non-racial society, black Africans need to decide whether black traditional customs, such as circumcision – and cultural practices as a whole – remain a critical hallmark to being African.”

Sicelo Fayo (as cited in Ndangam, 2008, p. 209)

Traditional circumcision as an initiation practice is mainly practised among the Xhosa, Pedi, Sotho and Venda ethnic groups in South Africa (Ndangam, 2008). The discussion of the initiation rite will focus only on the Xhosa as the literature on initiation rites predominantly focuses on this ethnic group; where possible and pertinent, reference will be made to other ethnic groups’ practices. The initiation ritual among the Xhosa consists of four phases: The entering phase (*umngeno*), the initiate phase (*ubukhwetha*), the coming out phase (*umphumo*), and the graduate phase (*ubukrwala*) (Mhlahlo, 2009).

In referring to the Xhosa initiation rite as a whole, Cekiso and Meyiwa (2012) describe it as one of the graduation stages that recognise growth and assign a recognised place in the community. The initiation rite is aimed at introducing a Xhosa male to his counterparts and to the ancestors (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2012).

During the initiation process the initiates are expected to undergo change in lifestyle, attitude, behaviour and, in effect, come out as a new person (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2012). Upon their successful exit from initiation school, *amakrwala* (Xhosa initiate-graduates), are given new names to signify this transition and the accompanying responsibility within the community (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2012).

Within the context of Van Gennep's conceptual structure of initiation above, the Xhosa initiation practice fits the framework of initiation phases (See Table 1).

**Table 1 Cross referencing Van Gennep's phases with the Xhosa initiation rite phases**

Van Gennep's initiation phases	Xhosa initiation practice phases
separation	<i>umngeno</i>
limin	<i>ubukhwetha</i>
aggregation	<i>umphumo</i>
aggregation	<i>ubukrwala</i>

The discussion below primarily sketches the specific process and symbolism of the Xhosa male circumcision rites. This is due to the wealth of research that has focused on this specific cultural group which allows for a detailed discussion of the mechanics and symbolism of the rituals and

their underlying symbolic network (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2012; Mavundla et al., 2010; Mhlahlo, 2009; Ndangam, 2008; Ngxamngxa, 1971; Peltzer, Nqeketo, Petros, & Kanta, 2008a, 2008b). The purpose of this description is not intended to be an exhaustive description of the initiation rites and their symbolism but to provide insight into the emic interpretations of the links between cultural elements within the initiation rites.

### **2.3.1. Separation within South African initiation rites**

The entering phase, *umngeno*, corresponds to Van Gennep's separation phase. The *umngeno* involves the preparatory period of *ukukhonya*, the ritual slaughter of an animal and the period of circumcision (Mhlahlo, 2009). The *ukukhonya* is a period where the boys are given the freedom to release all the boyhood inside of them (Mayatula & Mavundla, 1997). This process must be done without infringing on the rights of others. This freedom to misbehave is given with the understanding that as a man he will never behave like a child again (Mhlahlo, 2009). The boys walk around the village or township with other initiates and boys who are not going to undergo the initiation ritual shouting that they are about to leave boyhood and enter manhood (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ngxamngxa, 1971). This announcement to the community is also a declaration of intent by the initiate and sets the stage for the return during the incorporation phase. The parting memory of the community is of the initiate as a wild, out of control boy walking through the street drunk, mock-violent and dishevelled (Mhlahlo, 2009). Part of the farewell ritual includes the slaughter of animals, usually a sheep or a goat, and traditional beer is served on the day of the circumcision (Mavundla et al., 2010; Mhlahlo, 2009).



During the separation phase the boy is taken away from his village and placed in a secluded area (Mhlahlo, 2009). In this area he is placed into the ritual space where he is moved beyond the daily routine of his life up to that point (Mhlahlo, 2009; Van Gennep, 1960). The initiation rituals are focused on hardship and emphasise fortitude and courage as traits that define a man (Hocart, 1924; Mhlahlo, 2009). The initiation rites are aimed at facilitating the transition from the world of being a boy into the world of being a man (Mhlahlo, 2009). This transition is guided and overseen by older men who have undergone the initiation ritual themselves and who are formally appointed by the village as custodians (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ndangam, 2008). In addition to these custodians, the traditional surgeon is a key role player in the initiation process (Mhlahlo, 2009). It is the traditional surgeon who makes the cut that marks the transition between the death of boyhood and the birth into manhood (Mhlahlo, 2009). This is marked as the moment of crisis in the initiation ritual in literature (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ndangam, 2008; Ngxamngxa, 1971). As this is the moment where the line between boyhood and manhood is drawn in the flesh of the initiate and he takes the first step to becoming a man (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ngxamngxa, 1971). This is also the moment that marks the difference between the successful initiates and those who are labelled as initiation tragedies or hospital men (Mhlahlo, 2009).

As discussed above, the purpose of these acts are to mark a symbolic break from the initiate's previous life in preparation for a new way of being (McDonough, 2011). The separation phase aims to break the habitual thought patterns and behaviours that characterise the role of boyhood within the community in preparation for the learning process that will develop the habits, behaviours, attitudes, thinking patterns and values that distinguish manhood (McDonough, 2011; Mhlahlo, 2009).

### 2.3.2. Limin within South African initiation rites

During the *ubukhwetha* or initiate phase of the Xhosa traditional circumcision the initiate experiences what Van Gennep termed the limin. It is within this phase that the initiate is confronted with the cultural elements that constitute daily life (Hammond-Tooke, 1980; Mhlahlo, 2009). In this phase the ritual removal of the prepuce is conducted without anaesthetic (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ndangam, 2008).

During this phase, the initiate lives in the liminal space between boyhood and manhood. He is no longer a boy because he has gone through the circumcision but he is not a man as he has not yet undertaken all the steps in becoming a man (Mhlahlo, 2009). In this phase the initiate is structurally dead and the restrictions placed on the initiate reinforce this symbolism. The initiates are stripped of their possessions and made to go naked; they are stripped of their ability to move around freely; they are stripped of their ability to interact with other people in the physical restriction and in the loss of their language (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ngxamngxa, 1971). In the liminal phase the initiate owns nothing, not even their status as they are also stripped of their rank, kinship position and social position (Ngxamngxa, 1971). Initiates are also stripped of their name and simply referred to as *ubukhwetha* (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ngxamngxa, 1971). All of these rites and symbols serve to make the initiate invisible to society and, by implication, they are lost to the society that they have left behind (Ngxamngxa, 1971).

This phase is marked by a distinct break in social order and the initiate is expected to adhere to a set of cultural codes that exist outside of the normative social frameworks (Mhlahlo, 2009). This may involve symbolic violence, exaggerated humour, use of a specific language or dress in a

manner that marks the initiate as outside the normal social order (Mayatula & Mavundla, 1997). The initiate may not leave the ritual space nor may he reveal himself to people in the outside world (Mhlahlo, 2009). The initiates are also restricted from consuming water for the first eight days and may only consume hard foods (Ngxamngxa, 1971). The restriction on water consumption is premised on the belief that it will reduce wound weeping during the healing phase of the circumcision (Peltzer et al., 2008b). Initiates are also forbidden from quarrelling or speaking ill of others and from contacting married women (Ndangam, 2008).

The act of cutting and enforced restrictions are viewed as instilling bravery, discipline and endurance in the initiates, key traits in developing a successful manhood transition (Ndangam, 2008). During this phase the custodians are the only point of interaction for the initiate (Ngxamngxa, 1971). Traditional nurses act as caretaker, guard and educator; they are tasked with overseeing the healing process of the initiate while ensuring that the initiate adheres strictly to the restrictions placed upon them. Simultaneously the custodian provides the initiate with advice and encouragement on how to adapt and cope with the pain and educates the initiate about the new responsibilities and expectations placed upon them (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ngxamngxa, 1971). The initiates are also protected by men from the village who guard them from criminals and witches (Mhlahlo, 2009). The boys from the village act as messengers and bring food to the area where the initiates are (Mayatula & Mavundla, 1997).

The traditional nurse and other men involved in the initiation hold absolute authority over the initiates. The initiates are expected to display absolute submission to the adults which makes it easier to subject them to the teachings of this phase (Mhlahlo, 2009).

All of the rites and symbolic interactions of the liminal phase set the stage for the incorporation of a new being into society. The initiate is constructed as lost, both to himself (by being stripped of ownership, rank, etc.) and to society (as represented by the protracted absence from daily life) (Mhlahlo, 2009).

### **2.3.3. Aggregation/Incorporation within South African initiation rites**

The aggregation or incorporation phase marks the end of the seclusion of the initiate and upon his re-entry into society he is conferred with the title *amakrwala*. The aggregation phase begins with the symbolic immolation of the clothes and other artefacts used during the liminal period (Ndangam, 2008; Ngxamngxa, 1971). This symbolises a permanent break with the past and leaves the initiate unencumbered when he enters the *amakrwala* phase of the initiation rite (Ndangam, 2008). During this phase the identity of the initiate is stable once more in that he once more has rights and obligations that are clearly defined and placed within the societal structure (Mhlahlo, 2009).

In this phase the initiate is introduced to society with new status, new names, new clothes, new rights and duties (Mhlahlo, 2009). From this point onward these individuals are adults and are encumbered with the rights, privileges and duties commensurate with this social status (Mhlahlo, 2009).

As with the previous phases the aggregation phase is marked by symbolic rites, each with its distinctive meaning (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ndangam, 2008). The initiate is met by men from his community who ritually chase him to the nearest river where he cleanses the white ochre from

his body to signify the end of his initiation period (Mhlahlo, 2009). When the initiate washes in the river his status changes from *ubukhwetha* to *ikrwala*, a graduate (Mhlahlo, 2009). He is then smeared with red ochre which is later replaced with black (among the Xhosa); his head is shaved (among the South Sotho, Lobedu, Venda, Tsonga and Pedi). When the initiate returns to the hut where the majority of the initiation rites take place, an appointed elder of high standing smears pig fat, petroleum jelly or butter on his body while the males inspect the condition of his circumcision to verify that he indeed is a man (Hammond-Tooke, 1980). Once the community of men are satisfied that the conditions of manhood are met, the initiate is escorted back to his home in a celebratory parade while the elders of the community set fire to the initiation hut and artefacts (Hocart, 1924; Mhlahlo, 2009). On their return to the community the coming out ceremony begins in earnest where an ox, sheep or goat is slaughtered and prepared along with traditional beer, brandy or bottled beer (Mhlahlo, 2009). As part of their entry into society the initiates are introduced to the men of the village, clan or family where the *amakrwala* are admonished to uphold their higher status as men, their duties reiterated and their behaviour toward wives, in-laws and tribal authorities prescribed (Ndangam, 2008; Ngxamngxa, 1971). Initiates are also given new clothes (among the Tswana, Tsonga, Thembu and Xhosa) (Hammond-Tooke, 1980). The new clothes, new name and new status are all symbolic of the initiates' status as a new being within society (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ndangam, 2008).

For a period of six months after this ceremony the initiate graduate is given a specific code of conduct which marks him as a new man within the community (Mhlahlo, 2009). This period is aimed at proving his commitment to upholding his new status as a man and his respect to upholding the values of manhood as constructed by his community. During this time the *ubukrwala* is expected to avoid shebeens, taverns and parties; expected to return home in the

early evenings to create an awareness of the issues in the home environment; behave with respect and dignity at all times; only enter premises by the official entrance (a real man does not trespass); walk at a dignified pace and not run anywhere; wear a specific dress code (trousers, jacket, shirt, hat and shoes) that are only removed after observing a specific ritual each day (Duka-Ntshweni, 2013; Mhlahlo, 2009). After the six month period he becomes known as a senior graduate (*irkwala elidala*) (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ngxamngxa, 1971).

The interesting feature of these phases is that they are constructed as a state of being, not simply a categorisation. The *amakrwala* are the embodiment of the cultural codes and symbols that codify what a new man in society should be. They embody this aspect of society for those generations who preceded them as a symbol of continuity of the culture and they represent a future aspiration for those who will undergo the ritual after them. In essence, the *amakrwala* become a living embodiment of their culture and it is this that places them as agents of cultural maintenance or change (McDonough, 2011).

This section aimed to briefly describe the mechanics and symbolism of initiation practices within the cultural symbolic network of different South African ethnic groups. The purpose was not to provide an exhaustive description of this process, but to provide insight into the symbolism, purpose and intra-cultural status of traditional circumcision as an initiation rite. In the sections that follow, the discussion is focused on the discursive practices around the initiation rites in South Africa. At this point in this thesis it is appropriate to consider the tension faced by authors such as Mhlahlo (2009) who have undergone the initiation ritual and who, in disclosing their knowledge through research, violate the principles of manhood they promised to uphold on completion of the initiation rite (Ndangam, 2008). In addition to the authors, the participants in these studies are also placed in the contested liminal space between the scientific imperative for

transparent knowledge and the cultural obligation of maintaining the secrecy that surrounds the initiation process.

#### **2.3.4. Evolution of initiation rites**

The description given of the male circumcision initiation rite in the preceding section must be read as a single description of the nuance involved in the ritual. The description above occurs within a rural context where the symbolic network of the cultural system is embodied in everyday practice. Customs and traditional practices evolve over time and adapt to the environment in which they exist (Kepe, 2010; Mavundla et al., 2010; Meintjies, 1998a). These give rise to new cultural elements that contain a symbolic space within the network of meaning within a culture (Kepe, 2010). In this section the discussion focuses on the changes within the custom in the context of the modern shifts in which it exists. This discussion covers the position of the initiation rite as a health crisis in modern society, the contestation for custodianship of the custom and the influence of the modern environment on the practice.

Government's response to the calls for a safer and more humane form of initiation rite was to provide regulatory mechanisms. These include legislation and regulations such as the Traditional Circumcision Act 6 of 2001

“Many women die while giving birth as do initiates at circumcision schools – no problem. After all, circumcision is a custom that introduces boys to manhood. Those who die during circumcision would not have made it in life after all.” - Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima (Meintjes, 1998, p. 50)

which is also referred to as the Application of Health Standards in Traditional Circumcision Act no. 6 of 2001 (Peltzer et al., 2008a, 2008b). While the right to practice individual cultures are protected within Chapter 1, Section 6.1 of the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996), the custodianship of the initiation rites are a deeply contested social sphere.

The central site of this contestation is the ‘initiation tragedies’ that occur during each initiation season. These tragedies refer to the deaths and hospitalisation of initiates as a result of the circumcision rite that they undergo. One of the key issues that traditional leaders are contesting is the provision that states that initiates should undergo an examination before circumcision and that a medical practitioner should be present at the initiation ceremony to provide medical oversight (Kepe, 2010).

The risks that initiates face during the initiation rites include: sepsis of the genitalia, dehydration, severe loss of blood, loss of genitalia to gangrene, complete or partial amputation of the glans or shaft and death (Mhlahlo, 2009; Peltzer et al., 2008b). Peltzer et al (2008a, 2008b) state that reports on the adverse events at initiation rites in scientific literature is generated from hospital reports or circumcision school inspections. The flaw in this method is that the total number of males circumcised is unknown which makes it difficult to determine the rate of adverse initiation events (Peltzer et al., 2008b). Despite this, the information is still crucial to sketching the cost of performing the ritual. The Eastern Cape provincial Department of Health recorded 2262 hospital admissions, 115 deaths and 208 genital amputations for circumcisions between 2001 and 2006



(Peltzer et al., 2008a). In their study of 192 initiates, Peltzer et al. (2008a) found that on the 14<sup>th</sup> day after circumcision 20% had delayed wound healing, 16% had mild wound infections, 10% had mild pain, and 10% had insufficient skin removed. Sepsis occurred in about 10% of patients in this study and varied in severity from mild and local suppuration to septicaemia which may lead to death if not treated early with antibiotics (Peltzer et al., 2008b). In their study of 105 initiates admitted to St Lucy's Hospital in the Eastern Cape, Anike, Govender, Ndimade and Tumbo (2013), found that sepsis was the most common complication that resulted in initiates seeking medical intervention. Of the sample 56% suffered wound sepsis, 26% genital mutilation, 11% suffered from dehydration and 5% had amputation of the glans (Anike, Govender, Ndimade, & Tumbo, 2013). In an article the general secretary of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa estimated that 250 initiates had died throughout the country since 2004 (SAPA, 2013b). In August of 2013 they estimated that 30 initiates died in the Eastern Cape, 30 in Mpumalanga and 7 in Limpopo (SAPA, 2013a) during that year. These statistics must be interpreted with caution because, as stated earlier, reliable statistics on the number of young men and boys who undergo this ritual are not available (Peltzer et al., 2008a, 2008b). The dearth of information is attributed to the sanctioned secrecy that shrouds the initiation rite and the taboo placed on speaking about the initiation to the uninitiated (Ndangam, 2008). In addition to the above, further issues include the transmission of blood borne diseases such as tetanus, hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS through the use of unsterilised surgical instruments or through the use of the same instruments on more than one initiate without sterilisation (Kepe, 2010).

The statistics above sketch the cost of the initiation rites and provide the central argument against the practice of initiation. Kepe (2010) contends that there are three issues at the core of the tensions surrounding custodianship of the rite. The first issue focuses on the disease, injuries and

deaths of initiates (as described above), which is the primary driver of the surge in media coverage, academic and political debates in the last two years (Kepe, 2010). The second issue is the tension between the government and the traditional leaders (Kepe, 2010). With the increase in injuries and death of initiates (and the concomitant public health concerns it raises) the government tries to mediate the risks inherent in the practice through legislation, monitoring programmes, training programmes and regulation (Kepe, 2010; Peltzer et al., 2008b; Peltzer, 2009). Since the early 1990s the government has tried to involve civic organisations, nongovernmental organisations, traditional leaders and traditional circumcision surgeons and nurses in efforts to develop a clearly defined strategy to make the ritual safer (Kepe, 2010). Among these initiatives were medical training for traditional surgeons, the introduction of a disposable, bloodless circumcision instrument (the Tara KLamp) and deploying task teams to consult with stakeholders to fulfil government's goals (Kepe, 2010). The response to the Tara Klamp was mixed with some claiming that it was a step toward colonising and commercialising the custom (Kepe, 2010). The tension between traditional leadership and government revolve around who has the right and authority to decide whether the ritual requires transformation, what form this transformation should take and who should be involved in this transformation (Kepe, 2010; Peltzer et al., 2008b). Government responses to what has been termed the initiation health crisis (Bottoman, Mavundla, & Toth, 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010; Ndangam, 2008; Peltzer et al., 2008b) are often met with resistance by the traditional leadership who claim that these interventions colonise and sanitise the custom by ignoring the underlying symbolism of the rites in favour of modernised standards of acceptable behaviour, values and rituals (Bottoman et al., 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010). The response to government intervention is mixed, with stakeholders who live in the urban areas hailing the changes as timely and necessary, while

traditional leadership has not unanimously supported this intervention (Kepe, 2010). Prominent traditional leaders stated that they were not consulted on the changes made into the standards of what constitutes a successful initiation and they remain the real and sole custodians of the ritual (Kepe, 2010). Traditional leaders claim that, as custodians of the ritual, they should be given the resources and authority to oversee the regulation of practices such as male circumcision (Kepe, 2010; Meintjies, 1998a). Kepe (2010) makes the controversial assertion that traditionally households and clans have acted as custodians of the ritual and, given the number of female-headed households, that neither the government nor the traditional leadership are custodians of the ritual but that individual guardians (who are frequently female) are. This trend could be viewed as a threat to the custom as perceived by traditional leaders, as it shifts the centre of power away from men (as custodians of culture) and because, according to a study by Venter (2011) on the views of 56 Xhosa women, 57% of the respondents wanted the ritual to take place in the hospital setting. This contrasted with the view of the remaining 43% that participants only considered a man respectable after undergoing traditional initiation (Venter, 2011). The findings of the study did reflect the tension between the desire to uphold tradition and the desire to protect their sons (Venter, 2011). Simultaneously, 27% stated that the medical complications and the manner in which they are treated, should be considered child abuse (Venter, 2011). Despite the claims made by Kepe (2010), the status quo is that men remain the dominant authority in the traditional council and therefore claim the right to custody for the rite, a right they claim is being violated by government intervention and the encroaching colonialisation and commercialisation of modernity (Kepe, 2010; Mavundla et al., 2010).

The third issue relates to the context in which the health crisis and tension between government and traditional leadership takes place. This refers to the societal changes that have transformed

the way the ritual is performed; specifically this refers to the urban, education and economic factors that influence the initiation customs from outside its symbolic network (Kepe, 2010). The context in which the ritual circumcision of men takes place in South Africa is dynamic and impacts on the ritual in a number of unforeseen ways (Kepe, 2010). When examining the urban influence on the initiation custom, authors (Kepe, 2010; Mavundla et al., 2010; Meintjies, 1998a; Ndangam, 2008), comment on the idealised or romanticised discourse around the custom. The idealised description of the ritual and its rites show no appreciation of the differences between families, clans, rural or urban environments over time (Kepe, 2010).

With the rapid migration of families into the urban areas of South Africa, a shift has occurred in the way in which the initiation rite is practiced within many family systems (Kepe, 2010). One of the changes is the practice of urban initiations (Kepe, 2010; Peltzer et al., 2008b). The reasons for performing the initiation rite close to urban areas are due to loss of rural ties in a family unit, inability to finance the cost of the initiation in a rural area, schooling or work demands (Kepe, 2010). This places unique demands on the practice of the ritual such as: the use of synthetic materials instead of grass and tree branches in the construction of the initiation hut; the fact that the ritual immolation of the initiation hut is not always performed, due to the risk of runaway fires; access to cell phones during the separation period; increased difficulty in isolating the initiate from friends and sexual partners due to their proximity; and reduced family unit sizes which places increased pressure on the family to care for the initiate during the separation period (Kepe, 2010). In the graduate phase there are also issues arising from the conflict between township culture and its idealised masculinity and traditional African masculinity (Kepe, 2010). The construction and distinctions between these masculinities are discussed in further detail in the section below. One of the sites of conflict between these masculinities within an initiate

graduate is the taboo on being seen at parties, taverns and shebeens (Meintjies, 1998a; Mhlahlo, 2009) which are key sites for asserting masculinity in the streetwise township culture (Ratele, 2008b, 2010). This argument acknowledges the influence of modern practices on the custom; however, it over simplifies the complex interaction between two cultural systems. A further illustration of this point is the influence of the education system on the initiation rite discussed below.

The initiation rite can take between two and six months; however, the modern initiate (typically a high school student) has only six weeks to devote to the ritual before returning to school (Kepe, 2010). This can be reduced to as little as ten days if the initiate has to attend to vacation jobs, internships, supplementary examinations or if school holidays are shortened (Kepe, 2010). The severe reduction in time makes it difficult to effectively conduct the ritual, in particular for the initiate to become immersed in the limin phase of the initiation rite (Kepe, 2010). Formal education, based on Western knowledge systems, is in direct conflict with the traditional knowledge system that encompasses the ritual. This tension is apparent in the trend for initiates to question the manner in which the ritual is conducted and the philosophy behind it (Kepe, 2010). The proscriptions in terms of food and water are contraindicated by medical science and initiates are increasingly ignoring the proscriptions and consuming the foods they believe are necessary (Kepe, 2010).

The tension extends to the treatment of wounds during the initiation rite where initiates question elders on the unhygienic conditions under which the circumcision takes place (Kepe, 2010). This particular expression against the rite is one of the most contentious within the symbolic network of the culture. Some young men and boys opt for what is termed hospital circumcision over the traditional circumcision to avoid the unhygienic conditions and subsequent infections. These

“hospital men” are ostracised and degraded within the cultural hierarchy as incomplete men because the ritual is, in essence, a test of manhood in which pain and bravery are core components (Bottoman et al., 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010). The hospital circumcision, specifically the reason for opting for a hospital circumcision, is seen to violate the purpose of the ritual and is therefore declared as an invalid expression of the ritual (Mavundla et al., 2010). In addition to those who elect hospital circumcision, others may choose to leave the initiation site after they have been circumcised due to concern for their deteriorating health (Bottoman et al., 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010). These individuals are not recognised as adults by the community in which they live and are thus not accorded the respect that the position would normally entail. As discussed above, adulthood within Xhosa culture can only be attained by undergoing the circumcision and not as a function of age (Mavundla et al., 2010; Ndangam, 2008; Ngxamngxa, 1971). Consequently an individual can have the status of a man/child where he is chronologically over the legal age of majority prescribed by the South African legislative system but considered as child within his culture.

Within the modernised social system age is sufficient to confer adult status and thus award the status of manhood; simultaneously, within the Xhosa cultural symbolism this status is negated if the individual has not undergone an accepted initiation and he should thus be treated as a child (Mavundla, Netswera, Bottoman, & Toth, 2009). In their study on the motivation for undergoing initiation, Mavundla et al. (2010) found that the primary motivation for undergoing initiation was fear of social rejection. This rejection takes place at family unit, the peer group and at the community level (Mavundla et al., 2010; Ntombana, 2011b). Uncircumcised men or those who fail the initiation process (such as hospital men) are marginalised from traditional ceremonies (which include coming out ceremonies, weddings, funerals and birthing celebrations) and

community discussions, effectively silencing them on key decisions within the community (Venter, 2011). They are also excluded from certain socialising sites such as taverns which are specifically reserved for men. Children, women and uncircumcised men are specifically excluded from these sites (Mavundla et al., 2010). One of the participants in the Mavundla et al. (2010) study describes the consequences of breaching the social boundary:

“I once broke the rules applying to entrance into a tavern. No boys were allowed entrance. On this day I pretended to be a man and was allowed to join the others inside this tavern. After two to three hours I went to the toilet to relieve myself. I did not notice that the tavern owner followed me. He confronted me and instructed me to produce proof that I am a circumcised man. I tried some delaying tactics but to no avail. He called other men who started kicking and punching me all over my body, and I was dragged outside the tavern yard.” (Mavundla et al., 2010, p. 934)”

At the familial level the pressure to undergo circumcision stems from the taboo on marriage and property inheritance for uninitiated men (Mavundla et al., 2010; Venter, 2011). Not undergoing initiation therefore places the family unit at risk of losing social status (by not having married children), family continuity (legitimate children can only be produced in marriage), and hampers the ability to provide sustainable wealth (inheritance can only pass onto adult men in some cultures) (Bottoman et al., 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010).

The pressure from peers arises in part from the instruction at initiation to only socialise with men and to avoid association with boys (Ntombana, 2009). Failure to comply with this restriction can lead to an individual being punished by the cohort that he was initiated with (Mavundla et al., 2010). An uninitiated male within a social group of circumcised men risks exclusion as they are

not supposed to associate with him (and thereby granting him the same social status as men) (Duka-Ntshweni, 2013). This pressure can take the form of peers checking each other to ascertain whether they were circumcised according to the tradition (Mavundla et al., 2010). Closely linked to rejection by peers, is the rejection by the opposite sex. The reasons for this rejection include the ineligibility for marriage (which makes it pointless to start a relationship with the individual); and the low status of the individual, which makes him an undesirable companion as this may confer low status to the women he associates with (Mavundla et al., 2010; Rankhotha, 2004).

The social pressure often focusses on systematically reducing the uninitiated to the status of sub-human, usually through the use of symbolic labels that have derogatory connotations (Bottoman et al., 2009). These include references to dogs which are described as cowardly and therefore not worthy of respect (Mavundla et al., 2010). The uninitiated are often subjected to public humiliation through naming or ritualistic exclusion from important social events (Bottoman et al., 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010).

This pressure serves the function of maintaining and transmitting traditional customs and their underlying network of meaning (Bottoman et al., 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010). The psychological effects of the social pressure described above include low self-esteem, loneliness, feelings of guilt, and social isolation (Mavundla et al., 2010). The evolution of the hospital man and the subsequent cultural symbolism associated with it is one example of how the rite has evolved over time to adapt to pressures and variations in its environment. The biological imagery of this description fails to capture the complexity of this shift because, from a Social Cognitive perspective, the changes and homeostasis within a cultural network occur at a micro level within



each individual, who in turn influences the macro meaning of the culture that governs how individuals think and interact (Bandura, 1989; Van Dijk, 1990, 2006).

The rite has also evolved to adapt to economic changes within society. Traditionally the key role players in the initiation process were granted tokens of appreciation, often in the form of alcohol and food, for the role they play in the society (Mavundla et al., 2010). These individuals all had to be individuals of good standing and their participation in the initiation rite was out of a sense of service to the community (Kepe, 2010; Mhlahlo, 2009; Ngxamngxa, 1971). The current trend is that traditional surgeons and nurses charge from R100 to R300 or more per initiate (Kepe, 2010). The commercialisation of the practice in this manner is blamed for the many injuries and deaths that initiates suffer (Kepe, 2010; Mavundla et al., 2010; Meintjies, 1998b).

### **2.3.5. Implications for this study**

This section sketched the changes in the initiation rite in South Africa. It also focused on the dynamics that arise when the symbolic network of meaning around the circumcision rite encounters the symbolic network that permeates modern South Africa. While this should not imply that there is a singular symbolic network for South Africa, or that this section is a comprehensive discussion thereof, it is worth understanding the complex interaction between these systems.

The work of authors on the physical/medical (Peltzer et al., 2008a; Peltzer, 2009), psychological (Bottoman et al., 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010), social (Vincent, 2008) and political aspects (Kepe, 2010) of the initiation rite sketch a complex interaction between the traditional (in this

case Xhosa) cultural network of symbols and the modern cultural network of symbols. This analysis provides a point of reference when studying the discursive strategies employed when reporting on initiation schools in online media, in particular in discussions between readers on the message boards.

### **2.3.6. The multiple states of manhood encompassed in this study**

In studying manhood here, the focus is on the way in which men, young boys and young men negotiate and are positioned within different versions of masculinity. The purpose of including a brief examination of masculinity here is to provide a broader definition of manhood than is given within the cultural symbolism that hosts the male circumcision ritual. In doing so the understandings of manhood described above, which includes the South African definitions of manhood, are integrated into the framework for analysing the discursive strategies used in online news reports on initiation schools. This broader view may lend itself to examining the sites of contestation between what Morrell (1998) defines as African masculinity and Black masculinity. African masculinity is constructed here as the pre-colonial hegemonic gender regime that governed the sexual division of labour; this regime maintained the male-dominated social and political hierarchies and was organised along both gender and generational hierarchies (Morrell, 1998). It was also characterised by: patriarchal control over ritual; respect for male elders built into language structures (such as *hlonipha*); links with tribal identity and respect for tribal authority; association with rural ways of being and the countryside; and the eschewal of violence as a means of social control (Morrell, 1998). As an alternative construction of the Black male,

Black masculinity is associated with resistance to white dominance and authority; adaptation to the quicker pace and dangers of urban living; social distancing from the traditional authorities in favour of autonomy and self-determination; manhood asserted through tough, violent behaviour; and a way of being which is both conscious of exploitation and able to adapt to living within conditions of exploitation (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2010). The contrast between the two masculinities sketched by Morrell (1998) provide a useful starting point for examining the dynamics of contestation between the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as embodied in African masculinity and the colonising influence of modernity embodied in Black masculinity. However, it is important to understand that masculinity, like any other gender identity, is not a static concept but a complex web of inter-related meaning that is constructed through the relationships between social structures (from the individual through the communal into the macro social structures) (Ratele, 2008a, 2008c).

Masculinity not only differs across class, race, socio-economic status and geographic location, but it also changes over time (Morrell, 1998). In his paper reviewing works on Black masculinity, Robert Morell (1998) posits that the military colonisation of African cultures did not destroy African masculinity but merely reshaped it, as did accelerated urbanisation and the creation of an urban proletariat. A key feature of the Black masculinity described by Morrell (1998) was the subordination of women and subordinate men. Rather than simply present African males as heroic victims of racism, Morrell describes an evolving form of hegemonic tradition that pre-dates the colonialisation of Southern Africa but that contested the imposition of white hegemonic power that sought to oppress it (Morrell, 1998). In his attempt to define a salient African or Black masculinity, Morrell discusses four key features of masculinity that are integrated into the working definition of masculinity for this study.

According to Morrell (1998), class and race factors are constitutive of the form that masculinity takes. This means that in any society there are many masculinities, each with a characteristic shape and set of features (Ratele, 2006, 2008c). The contours of these masculinities change over time, being affected by changes elsewhere in society and, at the same time, themselves affecting society itself (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 1998). It is not the case that all masculinities are equally powerful as social forces (Ratele, 2006, 2008c). Subordinate and subversive masculinities exist among marginal or dominated groups and these may be oppositional to the dominant masculinity (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2010).

Hegemonic masculinity silences or subordinates other masculinities, positioning these in relation to itself such that the values expressed by these other masculinities are not those that have currency or legitimacy (Morrell, 1998). Hegemonic masculinity is a key element of patriarchy. Patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity are developed and maintained in particular locations. Hegemonic masculinity must be understood within a social context and as something which is constantly produced and contested (Morrell, 1998). For instance, the use of the word 'boy' by whites (men and women, boys and girls) to refer to black men reflected a workplace reality in which African men did the menial work, requiring strong, energetic and powerful bodies (Morrell, 1998). The use of the diminutive suggests how the relationship between white coloniser and black colonised involved emasculation (Morrell, 1998). The word captured a condescension, a refusal to acknowledge the possibility of growth and the achievement of manhood amongst African men (Morrell, 1998). Servitude was combined with the denial of adulthood and thus became a feature of Black masculinity (Morrell, 1998).

### **2.3.7. Implications for this study**

The labelling of uninitiated men as inferior or sub-human (dogs) (Mavundla et al., 2010) ties into the social pressure exerted by the circumcised men on the uninitiated, which is an expression of a hegemonic masculinity asserting dominance on a subordinate form of masculinity within the cultural symbolic network (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2008a). One way of interpreting the social pressure to conform to the cultural expression of the male ideal as ritually circumcised is that it serves to maintain and preserve the ritual and its cultural symbolism (Bottoman et al., 2009; Mavundla et al., 2010). An alternative interpretation is that this is an expression of hegemonic masculinity that aims to eliminate alternate or subordinate forms of masculinity (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 1998, 2008c). This is done by legitimating those forms of masculinity associated with the dominant form of masculinity while invalidating the alternatives (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2006).

A further layer of analysis exists in the attempts to correct or adapt the rituals to modern standards, whether through legislation or through social sanction (such as negative depictions in the media and research into the injuries and deaths among initiates). The attempt to correct, regulate and control the rite suggests that there is an underlying expression of manhood that the rite is being measured against and is therefore subordinate to. In discussing the evolution of the rite in response to changes in the environment, one of the criticisms raised by modern initiates is the expectation of uncritical submission to authority figures during the initiation rite (Kepe, 2010; Morrell, 1998). The modern initiates challenged the ritual authorities on the mechanics of the initiation rite by contrasting the rite against the standards of good practice in medical science (Kepe, 2010). This suggests that the epistemological framework guiding the rite is considered as

inferior to that of the bio-medical framework and needs to be adapted to meet the standards accepted by this epistemology. The rhetorical defence to this imposition by traditional leaders and surgeons is that of bravery and fortitude as keys for entry into manhood and that these are the principles guiding the rites of the ritual (Kepe, 2010; Mavundla et al., 2010). The authority of the men involved in the initiation ritual is absolute and requires absolute submission from the initiate to the teachings given to them (Mhlahlo, 2009). These tensions between the traditional and modern ideals of manhood provide an interesting analytical lens for understanding the construction of manhood in articles on initiation schools in online media.

#### **2.4. Chapter summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to briefly sketch the context in which the study takes place. It covered the role of initiation rites in society and described the system of symbolism associated with these rites. The initiation rite is divided by Arnold van Gennep (1960) into three distinct phases, namely, the separation, limin and aggregation/incorporation phases. The underlying network of cultural symbolism behind these rites can be described by using the metaphor of the phoenix where the death of the old form is required to create the space in the psyche, social support network and symbolic order of the individual undergoing initiation. The symbolic death of the initiate and their eventual rebirth as a new, adult individual within the social system is the central objective of the initiation rite.

The initiation rite within the South African context has undergone a number of changes in response to the changing context in which it is practised. Drawing from the work of Mhlahlo

(2009) and Ngxamngxa (1971), the rite was described in this chapter in detail, with specific reference to rituals practised to mark each phase by specific ethnic groups.

This chapter also highlighted some of the key tensions in the constructions of manhood in the South African context with specific reference to the changing definitions of manhood within township culture.

The descriptions of the rite in this chapter also serve as a point of contrast against which the constructions of those outside of the rite's underlying network of cultural symbolism can be compared.

## Chapter 3 The South African media as context and the internet as a cultural medium





Thabo, Thabiso and Blackx, bus stop (Araminta de Clermont)

### **3. Chapter 3**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter describes the composition of South African media, its structure and the role it has played in South African society. The purpose of this discussion is to position the online news reports that are the subject of this study within a broader context that gives insight into the dynamics that give rise to the news reports and discussion forums.

South Africa's media is largely based on the British-American concept of a democratic-libertarian system (Merrett, 2001; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005b). The first newspaper appeared in 1800 and the first legislation guaranteeing press freedom was passed in 1820 (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005b). However, under the apartheid regime an extensive legal framework, colloquially referred to as the 100 laws, were put in place with the aim of repressing and controlling media freedom (Merrett, 2001).

The media are not neutral, objective, passive reporters of facts, but play a role in actively constructing and transmitting public discourse (Van Dijk, 1987, 2006). The media also play a central role in setting the public agenda by deciding what is newsworthy and, by implication, what becomes widely known (Durrheim, Quayle, Whitehead, & Kriel, 2005). The media played a central role in the politics of division that characterised the apartheid regime (Merrett, 2001).

The information that reached the public under this media administration was consequently permeated with racial stereotypes which legitimated the apartheid regime (Durrheim et al., 2005).

In justifying state violence, the media crafted the image of black protesters as primitive, mindless stone-throwing mobs that exhibited savage tribal behaviour which could only be contained by the civilised violence of the police force (Durrheim et al., 2005). With the legislative and moral shift away from explicit racism as an accepted cultural norm, South African media have been the subject of scrutiny for latent forms of racism (Tomaselli, 2000). These take the form of the ownership of media in South Africa, the construction of black people as corrupt and criminal, the unfair discrimination against black journalists, the trivialisation of the deaths of black people as statistics (in contrast with detailed biographies and descriptions of the deaths of white people) and the publication of what amounts to hate speech (Tomaselli, 1997).

The relationship between the post-apartheid government and the media has been described as fragile, contentious and symbiotic (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005b). The contention arises in part from the history of the relationship between the apartheid government and the media (characterised by government control and intimidation of the media) as well as from an ideological split centred on the concepts of national interest and the public interest (Tomaselli, 2000). One direct expression of the tension between these concepts is the shift away from a government controlled media, often in the name of the national interest, to the development of a self-regulated media, which is deemed to be in the public interest (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005b). The shift to professionalisation and self-regulation leaves decisions regarding the media's role in society to market forces rather than a dialectical engagement with other role players such the government, civic institutions, non-governmental organisations and members of the public (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005b).

Positioning the contention for control over the media as a battle between the government and the media regulatory bodies would not only be an oversimplification, but misleading. In a detailed analysis of the ownership of media holdings, Tomaselli (1997) describes the influence and power of corporations as hegemonic and predominantly white. Ostensibly, the ideological drive behind the corporate owned media is to serve markets in pursuit of profit (Tomaselli, 1997). This, however, cannot be separated from the ideological agenda of class interests as the capitalists who invest in the media use these organisations to further their own interests (Jackson, 2009; Tomaselli, 1997). The racial transformation of the media largely consisted of replacing white journalists with black ones in the corporate press, while retaining a predominantly white editor and ownership cohort (Tomaselli, 1997, 2000). While the controlling interests of the media remain in the hands of a predominantly Western-centric, white elite, the construction of South African identity in the media will not likely be derived from Africanised values (Tomaselli, 1997, 2000; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005a). A further twist in the exploration of who directs the media gaze lies in the ownership conundrum, which states that while increasing black ownership may lead to an Africanisation of values in the media, financial survival drives the structure and content of the artefacts produced by the media (Tomaselli, 1997; Wasserman & de Beer, 2009; Wasserman, 2008). Financial survivability of a media outlet is determined by readers and advertisers who, historically speaking, are the silent partners and passive recipients of the artefacts produced by the media (Jackson, 2009; Tomaselli, 1997).

Although many of the debates on the role of the media focus on the contestation for media control between the government and the media regulatory bodies, it is also important to consider the media's responsibility to the public who they ostensibly claim to serve (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005b). As a point of departure in examining the role of the media, it is important to

examine what the media seek to achieve, namely, the public interest. Christians (1999) presents two contrasting schools of thought in answer to the question of the public interest. Liberal democracy with its emphasis on individual freedom and rights forms one end of this spectrum and holds the principle that the public interest is what aims to protect individual rights for the man on the street (Christians, 1999). The alternative view is communitarianism which claims that individual rights ought not to exist separately of communally shared conceptions of good (Christians, 1999). The central tenet of this stance is that the individual is inseparable from their relationship with others and therefore cannot precede the interests of the commonality (Christians, 1999). Wasserman and de Beer (2005) offer a corroborating interpretation to the debate of the greater good. On the one hand they position the public interest as a libertarian, individualist democratic framework which positions the public interest as the collective of individual rights entrenched in the constitution and informed by international neo-liberal consensus (Hofmeyr, 2001; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005b). On the other hand they position ethical media actions that work toward the national interest as linking media agenda closely to that of the post-apartheid government and is informed by Black nationalist thought; it is also positioned as striving to redress of previous imbalances in the interests of equality that defines rights in terms of socioeconomic terms and political terms (Hofmeyr, 2001; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005b). The concepts of national interest and public interest are therefore rhetorical positions that alternatively place the power to censor in the hands of politicians (in the national interest) or in the hands of the media (in the public interest). These rhetorical positions are examined (in Chapter 6 and 7) in relation to online reports on initiation schools to trace whether the tension between the public interest and the national interest emerges within these reports.

The purpose of the discussion above is to shift the perception of the media from the position of the neutral observer and consumer of public discourse, to an active agent in the construction of public discourse with its own agenda, allegiances and hegemonic orders.

### **3.1.1. Shifting trends in South African media**

This section aims to provide insight into the patterns of dissemination through the various forms of media. The current trend in media is that all forms of media, but the newspaper industry in particular, had to radically change to adapt to new technology as well as to the convergence culture in order to maintain their relevance (Wasserman, 2008). Convergence culture describes a trend within the media toward a convergence of information sources such as opinions in blogs, news reports and multimedia (Thurman & Walters, 2013). This represents a shift away from conventional journalism to networked journalism (Wasserman, 2008). Conventional journalism is positioned as hierarchical, professionalised and formulaic, is characterised by deadlines, and is packaged as messages to its passive consumers (Wasserman, 2008). Networked journalism is positioned as a non-linear process with networked interactivity and is characterised by constant communication and information exchange between journalists and society (Thurman & Walters, 2013). This interactivity is often brought about through a combination of various forms of digital media such as radio phone-ins, SMSes to television shows, comments on blogs and sharing reported stories on social media (Fourie, 2010; Wasserman, 2008). The shift to networked journalism has blurred the lines between media genres (Thurman & Walters, 2013). Infotainment, as a function of networked journalism, blends high journalism (and its aspirations

for factually accurate reporting) and tabloid reporting (and its emphasis on sensationalist reporting) as well as a mix of formats (Fourie, 2010). Magazines and newspapers are increasingly incorporating elements from television; television and radio are increasingly adopting characteristics of internet forums (Fourie, 2010).

The shift to networked journalism has also blurred the lines between the public and private as well as between lay reporting and professional journalism (Fourie, 2010). The use of user generated content (UGC) in the news has increased, but is a contentious issue within the media (Harrison, 2010; Thurman, 2008). UGC refers to the publication of comments, photos, videos, blogs reported on news sites by the public (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Hermida, 2013). On the one hand UGC is positioned as a complementary form of journalism where the “ordinary people” partner with the professional journalists to make or break a news story (Harrison, 2010). Within this orientation, UGC allows citizens to become active participants in the creation and maintenance of the media landscape (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Hermida, 2013). Numerous examples are given by authors where journalists are supported by emails, text messages, photos, videos taken on cell phones to construct news items that were central to the public awareness at the time (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). UGC provides insights into areas where journalists cannot typically access, such as from inside an oppressive regime that excludes all media coverage, inside active disaster areas where physical access is restricted or at spontaneous events (Harrison, 2010). Harrison (2010) positions UGC in four categories, namely, UGC as a form of unsolicited news story, UGC as a form of solicited content for specific extant news stories, UGC as a form of expeditious content for specific items and features, and UGC as a form of audience watchdog content.

UGC as a form of unsolicited content can help to create a news story by granting the journalists access to insights and evidence that they may not be aware of (Harrison, 2010). In this form of UGC, the audience is pro-active and participatory while journalists are reactive recipients of the information generated (Harrison, 2010).

UGC as a form of solicited content for specific extant news stories is universally sought by journalists to help enhance, deepen and broaden an existing news story (Harrison, 2010). In this case the journalists routinely seek sources to provide additional insights into news stories and the public are the reactive participants who generate additional content (Harrison, 2010).

UGC as a form of expeditious content for specific items and features is part of forward planning routines to enhance future stories (Engesser, 2013; Harrison, 2010). In this form of UGC content is fed into running features both as advertising for the future story as well as a strategy to cultivate sources for when the story breaks (Harrison, 2010).

UGC as a form of audience watchdog content refers to the audience playing the role of media regulator to complain about a drop in standards, biased reporting, factually incorrect reporting or reporting which violates journalistic ethical standards (Engesser, 2013; Harrison, 2010). This is one of the oldest forms of audience interaction with the media and can be traced back to letters to the editor (Engesser, 2013). The advent of UGC has made it possible for this interaction to take place in real time with a lower likelihood of censorship of views that do not align with editorial policy (Engesser, 2013).

All of the above forms of UGC position it as an ally and resource to the journalistic process. However, this is simply one half of the debate surrounding UGC. UGC is also seen as corrosive to the journalistic standards of impartiality and accuracy (Harrison, 2010). Consequently,



traditional journalism is positioned as the gatekeeper for UGC and only allows content that has been corroborated using traditional journalistic methods (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Hermida, 2010, 2013; Rebillard & Touboul, 2010; Whitehouse, 2012). According to a study conducted by Thurman (2008) most editors held the belief that there was a need to control, moderate, and sub-edit user submissions so that they met the standards of professionally produced outputs (Singer & Ashman, 2009; Thurman, 2008). Some of the participants in this study held the belief that editorial authority extended to the selection of what should be published in the first place (Thurman, 2008). This is based on the premise that most people are making the same point and that by condensing the content into a more manageable form, the reader is granted greater access to the content (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Thurman & Walters, 2013; Thurman, 2008). It is also supported by the belief that the reason people buy magazines and newspapers is to read well-crafted stories that meet professional standards and are newsworthy (Thurman, 2008).

The APTIQuant hoax is held up as an example of the dangers of UGC and the subsequent erosion of journalistic standards it brings with it (Lowe, 2012). The APTIQuant hoax was the result of an elaborate joke that presented a fictitious study of 100,000 anonymous volunteers' results on their IQ tests and choice of internet browser (Whitehouse, 2012). The test results from this fictitious study showed that those with the lowest IQ used Internet Explorer, while those of average intelligence used Chrome, Safari and Firefox, while the exceptionally intelligent used Camino, Opera and Internet Explorer with Chrome Frame (Whitehouse, 2012). The findings of this fake study were first posted on 26 July 2011 and quickly made the rounds through websites, blogs and news organisations over the course of ten days (Lowe, 2012; Whitehouse, 2012). The creator of the hoax, Tarandeep Gill, says that he created the hoax to vent his frustration about the incompatibility of early versions of Internet Explorer with his online business (Whitehouse,

2012). The story was published by reputable media outlets such as the BBC, CNN, NPR, *The Daily Mail*, *HuffPost Tech* and *Forbes* (Whitehouse, 2012). Authors on media ethics maintain that, had the traditional journalistic principles been honoured, crucial questions would have been asked that would have revealed this story as a hoax before it was widely disseminated (Lowe, 2012; Millner, 2012; Whitehouse, 2012). Reasons for the widespread dissemination of this story are that it fit into an existing world view of those redistributing the story (Whitehouse, 2012); an assumption that major media players get their stories right (Whitehouse, 2012); and that fears of becoming redundant in the fast paced new media environment promotes a culture of viral news over accurate news (Millner, 2012).

The stance that UGC is a crucial element of media that act in the interests of the public, places a degree of power in the hands of the public who have access to the technology and language necessary to communicate in these forums (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Hermida, 2013; Millner, 2012; Thurman & Walters, 2013; Thurman, 2008). It gives the public the authority to decide what is newsworthy and, by extension, what enters into the public discourse (Engesser, 2013). The stance that UGC poses a risk to journalistic integrity and exposes the public to content that is factually incorrect, biased and potentially harmful, relegates the public to interested outsiders who need to attain validation from the media gatekeepers to gain access to the public discourse (Hermida, 2010; Murthy, 2011).

### **3.1.2. Media reports on initiation rites**

Media reports on initiation rites in South Africa are the most public site of the contention around the custodianship of the initiation rite, as well as the public need for information and the sacred taboo of secrecy (Kepe, 2010; Peltzer, 2009). The main protagonists here are the media, government (provincial and national) and traditional leaders. First, judging by the glut of media reports, compared to organized and sustained research, on the deaths and injuries of initiates during the ritual, the media, sections of which are understandably biased, act as both the source of information on, as well as instigators of the public tension between traditional leaders and the state on this issue (Kepe, 2010). The media has in fact helped to fuel the conflict through sensational reporting of the health crisis and statements from the opposing sides, but have largely been silent on how government, traditional leaders and ordinary people deal with day to day issues concerning the ritual (Kepe, 2010) .

The media coverage of initiations in South Africa has been described as a sensitive annual media exposition and focuses primarily on reports of deaths in initiation schools, forced and botched circumcisions, kidnapping as part of forced circumcisions and efforts to regulate the practice (Ndangam, 2008). Every circumcison season there are articles in national and local newspapers depicting in words and pictures cases of advanced infection, severe loss of blood, mutilation, and even deaths due to events attributable to male circumcison (Peltzer et al., 2008b).

In a post-apartheid multiracial South Africa, the discourse of initiation takes an additional racialised dimension given that it is mainly practised by black African ethnic groups (Ndangam, 2008). Ndangam (2008) points to a particular discursive repertoire where Western is modern and

non-Western is the primitive and barbaric Other. The subtext here is that the position of circumcision in modern and Westernised Soweto (used as a metaphor for Black South Africa) is questionable (Ndangam, 2008; Ratele, 2006). This is based on the assumption that Modern and Westernised (African) people do not undergo such a rite (Ndangam, 2008). From this discursive position, the hegemony of white masculinity evident under apartheid is articulated, reaffirmed and naturalized by constructing traditional, black or African masculinity as deviant and barbaric (Ndangam, 2008). By bringing attention to black African men and problematising the specific cultural practices that shape some black male bodies, hegemonic masculinity is reinforced as the dominant masculinity (Boyle, Svoboda, Price, & Turner, 2000; IJzerman & Koole, 2011; Mavundla et al., 2010; Ndangam, 2008).

### **3.1.3. Implications for this study**

The tensions that underpin the positioning of UGC are core to this study as the data corpus for this study draws from both formal news articles and the UGC that accompany them. The user comments on the stories are UGC and the rhetorical positioning of these comments represents a discursive relationship between the South African online media and the general public. These comments and their moderation could point to the tensions between the principles of the public interest or the national interest. In particular, it will be of interest to study how the public interest is discursively constructed between the media and the interactive readership.

Furthermore, the representation of the initiation schools can be discursively constructed as the media gaze on Black masculinity. The ideological contrasts between the Westernised

government and medical systems and the rhetorical defence of cultural networks of meaning can reveal the precise sites of contestation or convergence between the different meaning systems (i.e. the scientific, Western view in contrast with the indigenous, cultural constructions of acceptable norms).

### **3.2. The internet as a cultural medium**

Web 2.0 is the popular term used to describe the ideas, behaviours, technologies and ideals that encompass a series of changes to the internet since the early 21st century (Allen, 2008). It acts as a conceptual framework that allows us to correlate and make sense of the various changes in approaches to the design, functionality and user philosophy behind websites (Allen, 2008; Zimmer, 2008). Allen (2008) constructs this framework out of four elements: technology, economy, users and philosophy.

Applied to the design and functionality of websites, Web 2.0 describes technological implementations that prioritise the manipulation and presentation of data through the interaction of both human and computer agents (Allen, 2008). These implementations allow users to control how and what combinations of data occur across a number of websites through a single interface (such as a cell phone or news website) (Albrechtslund, 2008; Allen, 2008; Zimmer, 2008).

Web 2.0 also refers to a business model which uses the internet to put data and people together in

Read about how retail giant Target knew that a teen girl was pregnant before her father did by [clicking here](#). Alternatively you can enter this url into any internet browser <http://tinyurl.com/7jbntx3>

meaningful exchanges (Allen, 2008). This approach focuses on services that allow advertisers to reach consumers with marketing communications that are precisely targeted at those users most likely to engage with the content at the moment of making a purchasing decision (Allen, 2008).

Web 2.0 describes services and activities that create a new kind of user or media consumer that is more engaged and active and who participates in creating, maintaining and expanding the content which forms the basis for using the internet (Allen, 2008).

Web 2.0 also represents a political ideology based on libertarian capitalism that emphasises freedom of choice and the empowerment of individuals through the architecture of participation (Allen, 2008; Goldberg, 2010). The democratising potential of the internet has been a subject of study for years and is premised on the claim that it equalises access to public discourse by compensating for structural inequalities (Allen, 2008; Curran et al., 2013; Papacharissi, 2002).

The four components described by Allen (2008) provide an ideal description of what Web 2.0 is supposed to be and accomplish in the modern social system. However, the true impact of the internet as a Habermasian public space that encourages rational discourse is questionable (Curran et al., 2013; Papacharissi, 2002). The advent of Web 2.0 promised greater access to information, access to the ability to disseminate information, to reduce the power distance between individuals and critical decision makers, and the development of wider social networks that are based on commonality and not merely proximity (Goldberg, 2010; Petersen, 2008). The rhetorical structure that lauded this advent included social media, participatory media, citizen journalism, user generated content, user driven innovation and social software (Petersen, 2008). These words hold positive connotations of enlightenment, empowerment, intellectual freedom and equal opportunity (Curran et al., 2013; Papacharissi, 2002; Petersen, 2008). The counter

current within this rhetorical structure are exploitation, mutual surveillance, free labour, enclosure and infringement of privacy (Albrechtslund, 2008; Curran et al., 2013; Jarrett, 2008; Papacharissi, 2002; Petersen, 2008). These rhetorical structures are discussed in greater detail below as we examine the typology of internet users, and the contention for labour and knowledge on the internet.

### **3.2.1. Typology of internet users**

The internet as a social equaliser is hampered by the digital divide which creates a social hierarchy among internet users based on quality of access (Meyen, Pfaff-Rudiger, Dudenhoffer, & Huss, 2010). The digital divide is defined as inequalities in access to the internet as a result of varying socio-economic, cultural and cognitive resources (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). The definition of the digital divide has been expanded to contain the idea of quality of access (Meyen et al., 2010).

The access debate mentioned above applies to a smaller percentage of the total population in South Africa. The best connected country in Africa was South Africa in 2001 which had only 4% of its population online (Crampton, 2001). In the 2011/12 financial year a study by Calandro, Stork and Gillwald (2013) found that 18.2% of South African households had internet access through fixed lines, while 19.7% had a working internet connection across all methods of connection (Calandro, Stork, & Gillwald, 2013). 51% of the population sampled in this study had a mobile capable of browsing the internet and 71% of this sample primarily accesses the internet through their mobile (Calandro et al., 2013). The implication of this is that the sample of

individuals participating in the online debates under study in this thesis comprises a small elite within the country who have privileged access to the site on which the discourses are (re)produced.

In a study on the use patterns among a cohort of internet users, Meyen et al. (2010) sought to develop a typology of internet users based on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus' – the system of predispositions, tastes, judgements and behaviours geared toward realising status by gaining social capital. Similar studies were undertaken by Roe (2006) and Lægran and Stewart (2003). The assumption underpinning Meyen et al.'s study was that access to the internet was not the primary determinant of whether individuals engaged with the online environment. Rather, the utilisation of the internet depends on the needs of the user that derive from social and psychological situations (Meyen et al., 2010). The needs of the participants were primarily constructed in terms of capital enhancement (defined here as cultural and social capital) (Lægran & Stewart, 2003; Meyen et al., 2010). The more frequently participants used the internet and the more emotionally they were involved with their usage, the greater the relevance of the internet to their lived worlds (Meyen et al., 2010; Roe, 2006). Seven types of internet users could be identified based on the relevance they attribute to the internet and the type of capital they accumulate through internet usage. The categories are the virtuosi, professionals, addicts, aficionados, companions, the cautious and the affiliated (Meyen et al., 2010).

The virtuosi draw both cultural and social capital from their internet use and construct it as vital to their daily routine. These participants use a broad range of web applications to satisfy real needs such as instrumental knowledge (linked to employment), socialisation and entertainment (Meyen et al., 2010). The professionals predominantly use the internet for work (Lægran & Stewart, 2003; Meyen et al., 2010). They construct the internet as a tool to achieve distinct aims



that will ensure a special position in society through the accumulation of social capital (Meyen et al., 2010). The addicts focus on social capital and use the internet to stay connected or to develop both strong and weak connections with others online (Meyen et al., 2010; Roe, 2006). These users construct the internet as an important place to be and as a best friend and often have few social connections in real life (Meyen et al., 2010). The aficionados are drawn to the internet by a special interest and accumulate cultural capital linked to special interests (Meyen et al., 2010). They are not dependent on the internet for their livelihood or social status but would be reluctant to abandon it (Meyen et al., 2010). The companions also draw social capital from the internet but primarily use it to maintain contact with social networks that they interact with offline (Lægran & Stewart, 2003; Meyen et al., 2010). The cautious use the internet as a means to an end in their daily routine to acquire cultural capital but do not define it as central to their life (Meyen et al., 2010). These users typically access the internet several times a week (in contrast to several times a day as with the virtuosos) and only search for information immediately relevant to their situation (Meyen et al., 2010). The affiliated rarely use the internet and only do so to maintain contact with a small group of friends and relatives (Meyen et al., 2010). They distrust the internet but find it useful in maintaining their bonding relationships to their families (Meyen et al., 2010; Stevenson & Peck, 2011).

Following the typology provided above, the typical commenters on the online news sites are virtuosos and professionals. Commenters on news sites play the role of allowing an individual to mark their presence on the internet within a specific community (social capital) while demonstrating their values, attitudes and knowledge in a public forum (cultural capital) (Meyen et al., 2010; Murthy, 2011; Stevenson & Peck, 2011).

### **3.2.2. The battle for knowledge: access to information versus intellectual property rights**

One of the principle tenets underpinning the transformation to Web 2.0 was the idea of collaborative creation of content that was freely accessible. The early versions of the internet are replete with examples of internet users collaborating on projects of mutual interest and the shared desire to disseminate this content freely (Petersen, 2008). The development of the user generated forum Usenet is one example of a collaborative project undertaken by a loose amalgamation of individuals (Petersen, 2008). In 2001 Google purchased the Usenet database from Deja News and closed the architecture by requiring a user to sign up for an account with Google (Petersen, 2008). While the act of creating an account is free, at least in terms of money, it gives google access to user information in addition to the free labour represented by the Usenet archives (which can now be mined for user data to sell to advertisers) (Petersen, 2008). Similar financial models are followed by corporations such as Facebook, and AOL which share the basic design principle that any content uploaded by users to the internet through their interface are owned by the company (Albrecht, 2008; Petersen, 2008). Claiming ownership over content produced by users is a very explicit form of exploitation of the free labour pool that are the interactive internet users (Curran et al., 2013; Petersen, 2008).

One of the primary areas of user content generation, blogging, is a means of decentralising the free labour pool represented by these users. Through technologies such as Google analytics and Google AdSense, an impressive surveillance system is put in place to gather information on individual user preferences, thoughts, attitudes and behaviour (Albrecht, 2006; Petersen, 2008). Similarly, the user generated content on sites such as Flickr are tied to the site (Petersen, 2008).

Social networking sites create a space where users can post mixed media (pictures, music, videos) that they have produced or found interesting; in addition users are encouraged to link to each other, effectively mapping out your social network online (Albrechtslund, 2008; Jarrett, 2008; Petersen, 2008). The longer you stay connected to these sites and the more time you spend uploading content, the more valuable your profile becomes to both you and the corporation (Petersen, 2008). The time spent personalising the online space by uploading content and generating notes that provide context of personal significance, users are emotionally tied to particular websites as personal spaces (Petersen, 2008). The network of social connections and the personification of the online space give corporations important information about the user that can be utilised to target personalised marketing campaigns (Albrechtslund, 2008).

The low cost of the publishing and the ease of violating copyright (or legitimately sharing intellectual property) creates a space where subversive thought and creativity can prosper and break free of the system of wealth and oppression within the entertainment industry (Petersen, 2008). While there are zones of autonomy and piracy online, it is important to be aware that the internet largely operates within the confines of capitalism (Curran et al., 2013; Petersen, 2008).

### **3.2.3. Implications for this study**

Understanding the usage patterns of individuals delineates the participant base of this study by providing a conceptual map of who the participant on the online message boards is likely to be. Furthermore, understanding the ideological battles for intellectual property ownership and individual privacy, the comments made by users on news sites can be discursively analysed in a

context that may be censorious. It is therefore one of the assumptions of this study that, while actively contributing to online message boards, some users may be conforming to the regulations of the online forum through forms of self-censorship in an attempt to make their voice heard while avoiding moderation or peer-censorship.

### **3.3. Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the media as a context of this study. It described the role of the media in setting the public agenda in the changing media environment. Specifically the idea of networked journalism was brought into context by exploring the influence of technology in shifting the boundaries of journalistic tradition. The idea of the audience as producer of news content challenges traditional understandings of the role of the journalist in setting the public agenda. The rapid progress of technology has provided most people with access to the means to produce content that is widely accessible at low cost. Within this context the discourse of UGC emerges to draw the distinction between what is considered as genuine news which is considered as accurate, objective and reliable; and User Generated Content which is not.

The role of the media in the construction of the initiation rite in the public eye is to act as the public site of the contention around the custodianship of the initiation rite as well as the public need for information and the sacred taboo of secrecy. The media is positioned by some authors as the instigator of the tensions between traditional authorities and the government over custodianship of the rite. The role of the media also takes on racial overtones as it reports on rites

mainly practised by black South Africans and positions these rites for public criticism and scrutiny.

The tension between the concepts of the public and national interests which centre on the debate about who sets the agenda for public discourse was also discussed with reference to the role of the media. On the one hand the media positions itself as the champion of the public by pushing for greater transparency into all aspects of society that is of interest. On the other there is the government which positions itself as the protector of the public by controlling the amount of information that is available for public scrutiny to maintain the national interests. The discussion then focused on the internet as a cultural medium where it explored the potential for the internet to democratise access to information. The next chapter describes the theoretical framework that guides this study.

# Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework



Photo credit: Baz Bailey

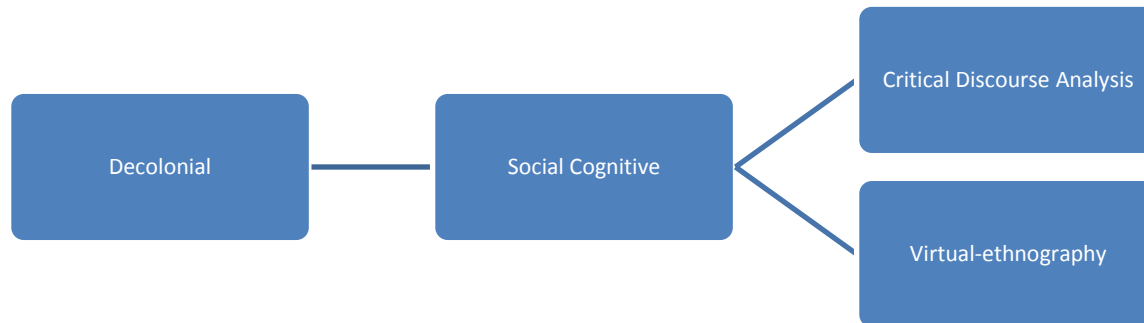
## **4. Chapter 4**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that guides this study. It provides the analytical lens that will shape the interpretation of the results that will emerge from the critical discourse analysis of online news reports on initiation schools and the discussion boards.

The theoretical frameworks governing this study are the Social Cognitive and Decolonial theories which are enacted through the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Virtual Ethnography. This chapter begins with the Decolonial theories which form an important theoretical lens for this study. We then discuss the Social Cognitive theory which forms part of the foundation of the guiding theoretical framework of this study along with the Decolonial theories. We then go on to discuss CDA as an approach. Finally, it discusses Virtual Ethnography (see Figure 3). The CDA and Virtual Ethnography approaches are not theories but methodological approaches that underpin this study. Their position in this chapter is to discuss how the analytical frameworks embedded within them link into and influence the theoretical framework of this study.





**Figure 3 Conceptual hierarchy of theoretical framework**

#### **4.2. Paradigm**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the ontological stance of this study is based on the Social Constructionist paradigm (Sfard, 2011). The Decolonial theories take the stance that knowledge is co-constructed and is invested with socially constructed, asymmetrical power hierarchies that subjugate epistemologies outside of the Euro-centric, heterosexual, white, Christian male epistemological system (Grosfoguel, 1999). The adaptation of Social Cognitive theory by Van Dijk (1993) to focus on the discourses that construct Social Representations that comprise knowledge systems also derives its ontological stance from the Social Constructionist paradigm.

The Decolonial theories are discussed next where the statements made above are described within the epistemological basis of this theoretical framework. The Social Cognitive framework follows this section before the data gathering and analytical approaches are described.

### **4.3. Decoloniality**

"Education is that whole system of human training within and without the school house walls, which moulds and develops men." - (Du Bois, 1903, p. 86)

This section briefly discusses the influence of the Decolonial movement/approach on this thesis. This section begins with a description of the Decolonial theories. It then outlines the primary assumptions of Decoloniality. The criticisms of the Decolonial theories are then highlighted before describing the implications of this approach for this study.

#### **4.3.1. Describing Decolonial**

Decolonialisation is born out of a realisation that we exist within an asymmetrical world order that is sustained by colonial matrices of power, pedagogies and epistemologies of equilibrium that continue to (re)produce these matrices (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a). One of the central areas of study in this thesis is the debate around legitimate knowledge. In chapter two we discussed the cultural symbolic network of the initiation school within African cosmology. This thesis takes the stance that any discussion of initiation schools will inevitably be confronted with the discourses of epistemic privilege (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). This ties in with one of the fundamental questions facing the Third World as an epistemic site that experienced the dark

sides of modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, 2013b). This question revolves around how to extricate formerly colonised people from the effects of coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). Coloniality must be separated from colonialism, where the latter is the policy of conquest that the colonial powers espoused and the former is a system of processes that constitute and sustain an asymmetrical power-relationship between the Euro-American World and the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). Colonialism is further described as a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of one country is built on the domination of another (Maldonado-Torres, 2006). Gatsheni (2013b) positions coloniality as the leitmotif of global imperial designs that have been in place for centuries and emerged as a result of colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). In developing and sustaining the system of domination, colonialism defines culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge productions in structures that supersede colonial administrations (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). In Decolonial approaches, research methods are never accepted as neutral but are considered technologies of subjectivisation that potentially prevent the emergence of alternative ontologies and epistemologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b).

The prevalence of objectivist forms of research have produced a range of reductionist and dominant ideology based epistemological practices that dominate research practice as the normative framework for research (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). The criticism levelled against CDA, that it imposes a normative framework as opposed to a decontextualized focus on the facts (Haig, 2001), is flawed in the assumption that the positivist paradigm is universal, objective and therefore a superior normative framework. The scholars of the Frankfurt school consider the objectivist notion of neutral knowledge as a mechanism that serves to limit the ability of researchers to discern the nature and impact of their own philosophical and socio-political assumptions on the knowledge they produce (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). Ignorance of the

normalised values and epistemologies embedded in research exerts a profound influence on what passes as objective, rigorous knowledge and therefore accepted, valuable knowledge (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). This “validated knowledge” operates to then maintain the status quo and the structural inequalities inherent in it (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009, p. 517).

#### **4.3.2. Foundational thinking in Decolonial work**

The work of Aimé Césaire is crucial to understanding the foundations of the Decolonial approach. Césaire, acknowledged as one of the eminent anti-colonialist thinkers, outlined the discourses of colonisation in a seminal work. In the excerpt below he outlines one of his central theses of the colonial process:

“Pursuing my analysis, I find that hypocrisy is of recent date; that neither Cortez discovering Mexico from the top of the great teocalli, nor Pizzaro before Cuzco (much less Marco Polo before Cambaluc), claims that he is the harbinger of a superior order; that they kill; that they plunder; that they have helmets, lances, cupidities; that the slaving apologists came later; that the chief culprit in this domain is Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations Christianity=civilization, paganism=savagery, from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the yellow peoples, and the Negroes.” (Césaire, 1972, p. 2)

The quote by Césaire quite bluntly places the first paradigm of political-economy that forms the frame of analysis of this study, which is the Christian centric discourse that civilisation is

embedded only within Christianity and that any form of thought or belief outside of this epistemology is savage. Césaire further deconstructs this power order by describing civilisation as the proxy for humanity, what Fanon (1952) refers to as the zone of being. The zone of being is the socially constructed space in which an individual is given status as human which comes with the privilege of rights, resources and the attribution of agency (Fanon, 1952; Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The savage, by contrast, is non-human and is consequently denied rights and status and is relegated to being an object in the social order (Césaire, 1972). In the zone of non-being (which is diametrically opposite to the zone of being) all laws and rights collapse and social order serves to justify forms of metaphorical and physical violence against the non-human (Grosfoguel, 2004b). The line between these two zones was defined by W.E.B. Du Bois as the colour line (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The colour line also represents a psychic split within the non-human, the non-European as a twin knowledge of self (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). This schism within the self is addressed by W.E.B. Du Bois as double-consciousness (1903).

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” (Du Bois, 1903, p. 3)

### **4.3.3. Three core concepts within Decoloniality**

Decoloniality is based on three concepts that provide the analytical tools for the Decolonial approach. The first is the coloniality of power, the second is the coloniality of knowledge and the third is the coloniality of being (Maldonado-torres, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b).

The coloniality of power helps to investigate how the current global political order was constructed and constituted (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). It examines how the world was bifurcated into the zone of being and zone of non-being described in the work of Fanon above, and maintained by abyssal lines (Grosfoguel, 2011; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). The coloniality of power refers to the interrelation of power in different areas of society such as culture, knowledge, economy, gender, religion and explains an exploitative and dominant relationship between those located at each end of bifurcated social institutions (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The analytical lens of the coloniality of power allows the analyst to transcend the surface markers (race, gender, ethnicity, religion, ideology) of asymmetrical power relations and to examine and locate the power structures that perpetuate the oppression of those below the line of the human (Grosfoguel, 2011).

The coloniality of knowledge focuses on making explicit the epistemological issues and the politics of knowledge, and how knowledge is used to perpetuate the power structures that maintain the coloniality power structure (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). The term cultural epistemicide explains the extermination of non-Western spirituality and ways of knowledge that was not implemented as part of Western colonial expansion (Grosfoguel, 2012). The extermination of these alternative ways of knowing eliminates alternative possibilities for lived experience which places the Western knowledge systems as the normative, universal truth (Grosfoguel, 2012). On commenting on the consequences of the colonisation of knowledge, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b), states that:

“Endogenous and indigenous knowledges have been pushed to the margins of society. Africa is today saddled with irrelevant knowledge that disempowers rather than empowers individuals and communities" (p. 11)

The epistemic universalism underpinning coloniality also serves to locate the world in two asymmetrical halves where absolute knowledge is assumed to originate from Western cosmology and philosophy which was derived from Christian-heterosexual-European men (Grosfoguel, 2012). Grosfoguel (2012) labels this process as epistemic racism and sexism.

The emergence of the coloniality of being arose out of the need to thematise the effects of coloniality in lived experience and the mind (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The colonialisation of being takes place in three social dimensions, namely, time, space and subjectivity (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The colonisation of subjectivity is expressed in the *ego conquiro* derived from Manichean misanthropic scepticism which, in contrast to Descartes's methodical doubt about the existence of the world, doubts the existence of the humanity of colonised people (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). Manichean misanthropic scepticism provides the basis for the preferential option of the *ego conquiro* which allows the possibility for security to be achieved at the expense of the lives of others (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The colonialisation of the subject culminates in the "objectification/thingification/commodification" of non-Western peoples (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). The enactment of this process is the representation of black people (non-Western people) as a catalogue of deficits and lacks. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b) quotes Grosfoguel's summary of this process across time:

"We went from the sixteenth century characterization of 'people without writing' to the eighteenth and nineteenth century characterization of 'people without history,' to the twentieth century characterization of 'people without development' and more recently, to the early twenty first century of 'people without democracy'." (p. 13)

Within the coloniality of being is the coloniality of space which refers to the myth of a self-generated subject with access to a universal truth beyond space and time (Grosfoguel, 2012b). Within this frame of thought, space is empty and only given meaning in relation to the Western subject (Grosfoguel, 2011). A common example given of this is the “discovery” of the new world which, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b), was new and discovered in relation to the European colonial powers. It also demonstrates that the existence of indigenous people was not considered because they were considered as non-being (which means that this space was indeed empty). The colonisation of time in this framework is the perception of time as linear, commodifiable and hierarchical (Grosfoguel, 2012b). It is linear in its progression from the past into the future; hierarchical in its progression from pre-history, through ancient history into modern history (each stage a step closer to humanity); and commodifiable in terms of the socially necessary labour for the production of a commodity (Grosfoguel, 2011, 2012; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a).

#### **4.3.4. Implications for this study**

The Decolonial school of thought provides a crucial tool for delineating the power dynamics that exist in the interplay of text online. It acts as a framework for the detailed analysis of the texts this study will examine, but also provides a meta theoretical perspective for explaining the interpretations under the Social Cognitive Discourse model this study adopts.

In particular, the Decolonial approach will allow for the examination of the processes of cultural epistemicide against the cultural network of symbolism of the Xhosa initiation practice. This



examination will not be a naïve narrative of the West dominating the non-Western Xhosa practice, but will incorporate a further critical lens for the markers of domination that Grosfoguel (2012) describes. It will also consider the insights of Fanon (1955) as an interpretative lens by examining texts for the construction of the black soul as Western artefact. This statement is derived from a quote by Maldonado-Torres (2014), who explained the Decolonial tools provided by Fanon as follows:

“The work of Fanon is crucial because, in fighting the effects of colonialism, the black man believed that, as a last refuge, he had himself as a refuge. In black skin, white mask, Fanon points out that the black soul is a white artefact and the last refuge is an illusion. That is why the first foundation of Fanon’s resistance effort is love. Love for self and, through that, love for the other. There is no decolonisation without building a community that trusts each other to resist the effects of colonisation. This makes the process of decolonisation personal and interpersonal, and [only by] going through the negotiation of a trust based relationship with each other do we reconstruct a new identity without the colonial artefact of race at its core.” (Maldonado-Torres, Personal communication, 15 January 2014)

He provides a further framework for intervening in the Decolonial project, using the analytical tools outlined in the section above. Table 1 shows a simple matrix of intervention for work in the Decolonial process. Art is positioned as the activity that can most contribute to reconstituting the being of the non-Western individual through creatively authoring new, positive possibilities of being. Power can be challenged through critical activism that understands the paradigms of political economy described by Grosfoguel (2011, 2012) among others. The colonisation of knowledge can be undermined through intellectual work that is critically aware of the means by

which paradigms, epistemologies and research methodologies maintain and reproduce the asymmetrical view of the world as Eurocentric through insidious normative and routine practices (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a).

**Table 2 Possible intervention matrix for Decolonial studies**

<b>Analytical tools</b> (reveal the means through which aspects of living are colonised)	<b>Forms of activity</b> (concretely change what tools reveal)
Being	Art
Power	Activism
Knowledge	Intellectual work

(Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Personal communication on the 15/01/2014)

This study will primarily undertake work at the level of analysing the colonisation of knowledge in the online news reports and discussion forums on initiation schools in the South African media. It takes the explicit socio-political stance that media discourses maintain the marginalisation of African cosmological and epistemological systems through discourses of development and modernity. This declaration is made with the understanding that the analysis may be blinded to alternative narratives of the discourses but that, in making this declaration explicit, the reader of this text can enter into the analysis with an eye for alternative frames of discourse.

#### **4.4. Social Cognitive Theory**

This section discusses the Social Cognitive theory as it applies to this study. It begins with a brief definition of Social Cognitive theory before describing how Critical Discourse analysis links to Social Cognitive theory. It then discusses the specific iteration of Social Cognitive theory that this study follows, namely, the integration of Social Cognitive theory and discourse.

#### **4.4.1. Defining Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognition, which first developed as a branch of social psychology in the early 1970s, represents the application of central concepts from cognitive psychology to the question of how individuals make sense of themselves and others (Koller, 2005). The Social Cognitive approach focuses on the processes used by all social animals that include language, institutionalised teaching and behavioural, attitudinal and cognitive features of individuals that are generally labelled as culture (Frith & Frith, 2007). The key to the Social Cognitive approach is that it takes the individual in context (Bandura, 1989). In a seminal paper on the theory Bandura (1989) stated that "persons are neither autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyers of animating environmental influences" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). This statement implies an interaction between environment and individual that he termed triadic reciprocal causation which examined the links between action, personal factors (i.e. affect, cognitions) and the environment (Bandura, 1989).

This thesis follows a variation on Bandura's Social Cognitive theory which is based on the concepts of reciprocal, triadic interaction between personal, behavioural and environmental/social factors (Bandura, 1989, 2001). Under this theory agency is a key concept

which explains that individuals use various vicarious, symbolic and self-regulatory processes to direct their lives (Bandura, 1989). Another key concept under Social Cognitive theory is the idea of directed behaviour which takes the position that all behaviour is goal directed and behaviour is shaped by a combination of environmental/social factors, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, values and social comparisons (Bandura, 1989). This theory underscores the key role of vicarious, symbolic and self-regulatory processes in human learning (Bandura, 1989, 2001).

#### **4.4.2. Social cognition and discourse analysis**

The integration of Social Cognitive theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is not new and has been pioneered by Van Dijk (1990, 1993). According to Van Dijk (1990), the meaning of discourse is a cognitive structure; it therefore makes sense to include in the concept of discourse. Van Dijk (1990) defines the role of discourse in social psychology essentially in terms of the interplay between social cognition and situated interaction in processes of societal reproduction. This inclusion is not only limited to the observable verbal or non-verbal features, or social interaction and speech acts, but also the cognitive representations and strategies involved during the production or comprehension of discourse (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Van Dijk, 1990). Specifically, CDA accounts for the contextual relationships between discourse and ideology in terms of social cognition through shared mental models (Van Dijk, 2006).

Social Cognition studies the development of and interaction with socially shared knowledge that is labelled Social Representations (SRs), but also emphasises the role of impression management,

attitude change, persuasion, attribution, categorisation, inter group relations, social perception and interaction (Van Dijk, 1990). Within each of these fields of social psychology, discourses are seen to play an important, if disguised role (Haig, 2006; Stewart, 2008; Van Dijk, 1990).

Within this thesis we will primarily focus on the development of SRs, represented in discursive strategies, about initiation schools in online media and message boards. SRs such as stereotypes or ethnic prejudices, just like socially shared knowledge, are essentially reproduced in society through discourse (Van Dijk, 1990). Social Representations (SRs) are largely acquired, used and changed, through text and talk. (Van Dijk, 1990) Therefore, discourse analysis may be used as a powerful instrument to reveal the underlying contents, structures and strategies of SRs (Van Dijk, 1990).

SRs may be conceptualised as hierarchical networks, organized by a limited set of relevant node-categories (Van Dijk, 1990). Social representations of groups, for instance, may feature nodes such as Appearance, Origin, Socio-economic goals, Personality Cultural dimensions (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). These categories organise the propositional contents of SRs, which not only embody shared social knowledge, but also evaluative information, such as general opinions about other people as group members (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). The social dimension of SRs not only resides in the fact that these cognitions are about social groups, classes, structures or social issues (Van Dijk, 1990). SRs are also social because they are acquired, changed and used in social situations; that is, they are cognitions that are shared by all or most members of a group (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).

Socially shared SRs are located in social memory, in the form of models. Models are cognitive representations of personal experiences and interpretations, including personal knowledge and

opinions, and are located in episodic memory (Van Dijk, 1990). Models represent the interpretations individuals make of other persons, of specific events and actions, and essentially are the cognitive counterpart of situations (Van Dijk, 1990). When people witness a scene or an action, or read or hear about such events, they construct a unique model of that situation or update an old model (Van Dijk, 1990). Personal models explain individual variation in the application of general knowledge and attitudes (Van Dijk, 1990). People may have personal opinions that may be at variance with the general opinions of their group, for example because of their own personal experiences (Van Dijk, 1990). On the other hand, models are also the basis of general knowledge and other SRs (Van Dijk, 1990). Models, thus, are also the referential basis of text understanding. They are organised by a fixed schema, featuring such well-known categories as Setting (Time, Location), Circumstances, Participants and Event/Action, each possibly accompanied by an evaluative modifier (Van Dijk, 1990).

Cognitively monitored interactions are linked to other important social dimensions, such as those of group dominance and social structure (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). This link is necessary in an adequate explanation of the functions of group prejudices and ideologies, as well as of their discursive reproduction in society (Van Dijk, 1990). The constitution and reproduction of in-group and out-group discourse is developed through a reciprocal relation between the self- and group schemata and expressed in the statement that the social is forever and always reproduced within the individual (Koller, 2005). SRs, which refer to the cognitive structures jointly held by members of a particular group, are theorized to be the subject of “continual renegotiation during the course of social interaction and communication” (Koller, 2005, p. 204).

From a cognitive, discourse analytical viewpoint, such renegotiation is effected through intertextual interactions between individuals, in which the respective representations are re-

contextualised and possibly enforced in discourse (Koller, 2005; Van Dijk, 2006). SRs play a crucial role in human interaction because they provide a shared frame of reference so that communication can take place by making available assumed, shared background knowledge about lifeworlds that tends to become naturalised as ‘common sense’ in hegemonic discourses (Koller, 2005).

Assuming that hegemonic power often takes the form of controlling people’s minds (Van Dijk, 1987, 1993a, 2006) social cognition here refers to the mental models structuring ideologies (Koller, 2005). These models are acquired and reproduced through social practices and interact with the personal cognition of group members (Koller, 2005; Van Dijk, 1993a, 2006). Cognitively structured ideologies provide group cohesion by defining membership in a group as well as its tasks/activities, goals, norms/values, position and resources (Koller, 2005).

Since, empirically speaking, the meaning of discourse is a cognitive structure, it makes sense to include in the concept of discourse not only observable verbal or non-verbal features, or social interaction and speech acts, but also the cognitive representations and strategies involved during the production or comprehension of discourse (Van Dijk, 1990). Processes of social perception, communication, attribution, attraction, impression management and intergroup contact, among many others, are also to be defined in such a conceptual framework (Van Dijk, 1990).

#### **4.4.3. Implications for this study**

This theory lends itself to interpreting the text under study at three distinct but interrelated levels, namely, the text as text, text as social practices and text as social events. These levels are discussed in greater detail in the conceptual framework section which follows.

According to Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000), future work in this area thus could pay closer attention to the precise contents and structures of SRs, their relations with models, and the relations of models with persuasive discourse structures as well as social dimensions of persuasive interactions and situations. This thesis aims to focus on the precise content and structures of the SRs that emerge during the analysis of the online news articles, as well as the discussions on the article held by the individual readers.

What makes this context of further relevance to addressing Blommaert and Bulcaen's suggestion above (2000) is the heterogeneous composition of the online groups found online. One of the assumptions guiding this thesis is that the individuals interacting online, while co-creating a SR on the articles they are commenting on, come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds that will hopefully emerge in their interaction with the texts.



## 4.5. Critical Discourse Analysis

This section describes the Critical Discourse Analytic (CDA) approach that will guide the analysis of data in this study. This section starts with the definitions of CDA in recent literature before discussing the key features of CDA that guide this study. It then discusses the criticism of the CDA approach before outlining the implications of this approach for this study.

### 4.5.1. Defining Critical Discourse Analysis

“To speak means to be in a position to use certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation.” – (Fanon, 1952, p. 417)

In discussing CDA, the definition of Discourse Analysis (DA) must first be addressed as CDA is defined in relation to this approach. DA, briefly speaking, aims to describe discourse practices of dominance and power embedded in language (Fairclough, 1992a; Maingueneau & O’Regan, 2006). Ontologically, discourse analysis positions reality as co-constructed and defined relationally (Sfard, 2011). Epistemologically, knowledge is constructed as social and is constructed as shared, justified beliefs held by the members of an epistemic community (Sfard, 2011).

CDA adds a critical dimension to DA by considering social phenomena from an explicit ethical or political orientation (Haig, 2006; Maingueneau & O’Regan, 2006; Van Dijk, 1987, 1992). The

purpose of CDA is to analyse "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448).

"CDA studies real, and often extended, instances of social interaction which take (partially) linguistic form. The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). The above quote on CDA implies that the object of analysis is the tangible – read as visible – social interactions that are, in part, enacted as language in writing or verbal conversation. Furthermore, CDA views the use of language as a form of social practice. This builds on the notion that all social practices are tied to specific historical and ideological contexts in which social relations are reproduced and contested (Janks, 1997; Van Dijk, 2006).

CDA examines not only the relationship between language and society (as is the case in DA) but also incorporates a reflexive aspect that examines the relationship between the analysis and the practices analysed. The inclusion of the reflexive focus of CDA is to avoid the logical flaw inherent in DA of claiming a fictional neutrality toward the data during the analysis process (Haig, 2007; Van Dijk, 2006). To overcome this, CDA practitioners are required to take an explicit political or ethical stance from the outset and to then conduct the analysis from this discursive position. This relationship between the analyst's discursive position and the data is subjected to examination during the analysis process (Haig, 2007; Janks, 1997; Van Dijk, 1993b). This is in line with the aim of CDA to effect change through critical understanding (Van Dijk, 1990). The next section describes the key principles of CDA and sketches the framework for analysis from a theoretical standpoint.

#### 4.5.2. Key principles of Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA's focus is the nexus of language and discourse and social structure (Koller, 2005). It is in uncovering ways in which social structure impinges on discourse patterns, relations, and models which may take the form of power relations, ideological effects, and cultural practices (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Koller, 2005). The critical dimension of CDA work is situated in the function of treating these relations as problematic (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).

In his work outlining the principles of CDA, Van Dijk (1993) highlights five areas or aims of CDA. Ideally, CDA should primarily deal with the discursive dimensions of power abuse and injustice and the inequalities this leads to (Van Dijk, 1993). This should not imply that CDA only aims to study explicitly negative topics; rather, it takes the stance that human and social sciences must take part in a global project of transforming society (Maingueneau & O'Regan, 2006).

Linked to this was the second principle which emphasises a focus on dominance and inequality that is guided by pressing social issues instead of a disciplinary framework (Van Dijk, 1993b). This second point implies that methods, theories and empirical work are chosen as a function of their relevance to the socio-political goal of the research (Van Dijk, 1993). This focus on fundamental issues (through interdisciplinary collaboration) does not preclude a focus on theoretical issues (Van Dijk, 1990). A number of key authors take the stance that, without complex and sophisticated theory, understanding complex social issues as they relate to power and dominance is impossible (Van Dijk, 1993).

The third principle is that CD analysts should take an explicit socio-political stance and elaborate on their perspectives, aims and principles (Van Dijk, 1990). This will not be visible at every level of analysis but contributes to the (ultimately) political outcomes of the study (Van Dijk, 1990). The critique of discourse through CDA implies a political critique of those responsible for the perversion of power in the reproduction of dominance and inequality (Van Dijk, 1990). This critique should not be individual, ad hoc or incidental but must be structural, focused on groups while making explicit power relations between groups (Van Dijk, 1991, 1992).

The fourth principle is a focus on understanding power and dominance (Haig, 2001). For the purposes of this study the approach to power is to focus on social power while ignoring personal power (unless it is enacted as an individual realisation of group power) (Van Dijk, 1993b). Social power is defined as privileged access to socially valued resources such as wealth, income, position, status, force, group membership, education and knowledge (Fairclough, 2009; Prilleltensky, 2012; Van Dijk, 1987, 1993b). This power involves control of one group by another and may pertain to action and cognition (Van Dijk, 1993b). Enactment of this power takes the form of limiting the freedom of others and influencing their minds through persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation in favour of the dominant group's interests (Van Dijk, 1993a, 1993b). Linked to power is the concept of dominance which may be enacted and reproduced by everyday, routine forms of text and talk that legitimate the forms of control and naturalise the unequal social order (Fairclough, 1992a, 2009). Power and dominance are usually institutionalised and the social dominance of groups is not simply an aggregation of individual acts but may also be supported by members of the social group, legitimated by laws, ideologically entrenched and reproduced by the media or textbooks (Fairclough, 2009).

The fifth guiding principle underpinning CDA is the focus on access. As mentioned above, one of the social resources that reinforces power and dominance is privileged access to discourse and communication (Van Dijk, 1991). In practice this means that access, and the active or passive form of this access, is tied to power and dominance (Van Dijk, 1993b). Depending on the degree of access they have, participants may have more or less control over the variable properties of the discourse such as the setting, presence of participants, modes of participants, agenda and style (Fairclough, 2009). A lack of power can be measured by the lack of active or controlled access to discourse which places groups and individuals in the position of the passive recipient with no control of the content, relevance or nature of the discourse they have access to (Van Dijk, 1993a).

#### **4.5.3. Analytic framework for Critical Discourse Analysis**

Fairclough (1992) sketches a three-dimensional framework for conceiving of and analysing discourse. Each of these dimensions requires a different approach to analysis (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b, 2011). The first dimension is discourse-as-text, i.e. the linguistic features and organisation of concrete instances of discourse (Fairclough, 1992a). The analysis of discourse as text focuses primarily on description (Fairclough, 1992a, 2011; Janks, 1997). Choices and patterns in vocabulary (e.g. wording, metaphor), grammar (e.g. transitivity, modality), cohesion (e.g. conjunction, schemata), and text structure (e.g. episoding, turn-taking system) should be systematically analysed (Fairclough, 1992a).

The second dimension is discourse-as-discursive-practice, i.e. discourse as something that is produced, circulated, distributed, consumed in society (Fairclough, 1992a). Analysing the

process through which these texts and practices are produced and disseminated is analysed through interpretation (Fairclough, 1992a, 2011; Janks, 1997).

The third dimension is discourse-as-social-practice and describes the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is a feature. The analysis of discourse as social practice is dealt with during the analysis process through explanation of these practices in terms of theories of human behaviour and cognition (Fairclough, 1992a, 2011; Van Dijk, 2006). According to Fairclough hegemony concerns power that is achieved through constructing alliances and integrating classes and groups through consent (Fairclough, 1992a; Janks, 1997).

Through these dimensions Fairclough successfully identifies large-scale hegemonic processes such as democratisation, commodification, and technologisation and the study of text genres and styles (Fairclough, 2009). The analytical framework described above allows multiple points of entry into the data in that it does not matter which kind of analysis one begins with as long as they are all included and shown as mutually explanatory (Janks, 1997).

#### **4.5.4. Criticisms of Critical Discourse Analysis**

The central focus of critics of CDA is whether the approach produces valid knowledge (Haig, 2001). Martyn Hammersley criticises CDA on being unclear of its philosophical foundations, for lacking an adequately developed sociological theory and for what he considers as an impractical ambition to effect social change which potentially undermines the scholarly integrity of the approach (Haig, 2001, p. 134). Central to his criticism is the focus on the critical which, for some, is a marked (and unacceptable) contrast to the positivist rejection of normative judgements

in favour of a focus on factual inquiry (Haig, 2001). In refuting this criticism, Haig (2001) argues that critical social enquiry cannot derive from the same philosophical base as the physical sciences.

The overtly normative stance of CDA also leads to a dilemma highlighted by Fairclough (1992a) of rejecting some types of normativity while appearing to accept others (Maingueneau & O'Regan, 2006). The issue here is not only the analytical bias that an explicit socio-political stance brings, but also the assumption that the chosen theoretical perspective is the correct one (Maingueneau & O'Regan, 2006).

The adoption of the label "critical" has been the subject of criticism from discourse analysts due to the implication that DA was not critical and, by implication, not capable of understanding power dynamics as they affect the powerless (Haig, 2001; Janks, 1997). Maingueneau, further elaborates on this by distinguishing between "strong" and "weak" DA, where "weak" DA was the simple description of texts and structures and "strong" DA is the systematic connection of text and structures with social structures and places (2006, p. 233). For Maingueneau "strong" DA is innately critical and CDA's claim to the critical space of DA is not a unique one. A possible response to this is the position of Haig (2001) which states that the position of CDA as a critical approach is that it aims to effect social change through critical understanding of discursive processes that shape society as a whole. Over time, this ambition has become more realistic, local and pragmatic but remains a central tenet of CDA.

#### **4.5.5. Implications for this study**

This study focuses on news articles about initiation schools in South Africa and on the discussion forums linked to these articles. The freedom to move between levels of analysis within the CDA analytic framework could allow the researcher to integrate the data into various forms of interpretation, which in turn could provide an alternative method of description (of the text structure) and therefore facilitate multiple explanations of the social practices.

The second reason for choosing this approach is that the critical frame to the discourse analysis (and the concomitant shift away from fictional neutrality) allows for an additional interpretative lens to use on the data. The explicit political position that the initiation school system is pushed to the periphery through acts of cultural epistemicide that are part of the hegemonic dominance of black male identity, is the central assumption informing this study. This position is elaborated on further in the section that follows.

The criticisms of CDA, in particularly those of Hammersley, are important to consider throughout this study. They provide a warning and a duty to both the researcher and the reader of this text on the limits of CDA. Therefore, in analysing and reporting on the discursive strategies of online news reports and discussion boards used to construct initiation schools, a reflexive emphasis will have to be explicitly maintained. The socio-political position of this study is made clear by the end of this chapter and repeated in subsequent chapters. Doing so will, hopefully, provide the reader with the information to critique this analysis in light of these criticisms highlighted.



The nature and scope of the critique of CDA is such that it is positioned as a project for the field of CDA rather than a subject area for this thesis. Therefore, this thesis will not attempt to address the critiques levelled against CDA. Rather, these critiques will serve to provide the limits of the interpretative power of the CDA conducted in this text. This decision is not an acceptance of CDAs flaws but as a result of the limitations placed on this study in its expression as a thesis (as a communicative event) – which has its own structural and ideological (academic) prescriptions on communication.

The next two sections describe the study design where the Virtual Ethnographic approach forms the core of the data gathering processes of this study while CDA forms the foundation of the data analysis processes. The discussion of these approaches in this chapter is premised on the focus on the theory and principles of these processes while the method chapter will focus on the application of these approaches in this study.

#### **4.6. Virtual ethnography approaches**

The Virtual Ethnographic (VE) approach forms part of the methodological approach of this thesis. Where the CDA and Decolonial approaches provide analytic lenses to the data analysis, the VE approach provides the theoretical justification for the data collection used by this study. This section, like the others, starts with a description of the VE approach. It then describes key principles of VE before outlining the criticisms against it. Finally, it discusses the implications this approach holds for this study.

#### **4.6.1. Defining the Virtual ethnographic approach**

Virtual ethnographic theories focus on methods of collecting and analysing data from online communities. These approaches extend the traditional ethnographic concepts of fieldwork as a fixed site of interaction by moving from the observation of face-to-face interactions to technologically mediated interactions (Hine, 2008).

#### **4.6.2. The Virtual Ethnographic approach**

The first studies that focused on the internet as a rich space for data collection arose in the early 1990s and focused on cybersociety and primarily focused on passive, asynchronous data collection methods of observation (Hine, 2008). The later trend within Virtual Ethnography built on ethnographic face-to-face settings and stressed the importance of experiential learning coupled with in-depth engagement with participants (Hine, 2008). They focus on just how rich and socially patterned internet based interactions are and emphasises experiential rather than physical displacement (Hine, 2008). In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly in the online community (Hine, 2008). It is also characterised by progressive collection of data within a focused inquiry (Hine, 2005b, 2008). The approaches within Virtual Ethnography stress the multiple nature of the internet for the communities under study in that it can simultaneously constitute a place, used as a tool and experienced as a way of being by the same community of individuals (Hine, 2008).

The internet is a unique research setting in that it integrates personal and mass media which has given individuals the ability to take part in two-way mass communication (Sade-Beck, 2004). The internet is tightly linked to social change as it facilitates the transmission of social messages (such as emotions, beliefs, values) that develop and reinforce social ties between users, forming a system of relationships without the participants being physically present (Sade-Beck, 2004). From a Social Cognitive perspective, this is a particularly salient point for this study as it affirms the co-construction of SRs that individuals then interact with in their unique way (influenced by personal cognitions, beliefs and behaviours) (Bandura, 2001; Van Dijk, 2006).

The researcher remains at the centre of the research process, regardless of whether the focus is on participant observation or engaged listening (Paechter, 2012). This is consistent with the constructionist orientation of this study and places the researcher in a dialogical position with the research participants (Kivits, 2005; Paechter, 2012; Steinmetz, 2012; Van Dijk, 1993b). The researcher often occupies both the insider and the outsider position within a group (Paechter, 2012). The researcher operates as an insider because they belong to and participate within the group while maintaining a theoretical aloofness that allows for an outsider's critical, analytical perspective on the processes taking place during interactions (Paechter, 2012). The interactions that the virtual ethnographic researcher works with will primarily be text contained in an active archive that can be updated in real time but that remains accessible even after the participants have departed (Hine, 2005a; Paechter, 2012).

What distinguishes Virtual Ethnography from archival research is that, online message boards allow for immediacy, emotions and connections to other users that the researcher can experience in the field site – an experience absent from archival research (Steinmetz, 2012). That said, Virtual Ethnography differs from primary ethnography in that the researcher can have exposure

to social interactions in which they have no stake or participation through an act called lurking (Steinmetz, 2012). Lurking is the act of covertly observing the participant interactions in an online community without a strategy for active participation (Paechter, 2012; Steinmetz, 2012). Lurking is an acceptable and recognised means of participation in an online community, but there are debates about the quality of the interactions and observations derived from this approach (Paechter, 2012). The primary drawback of lurking is that it does not allow for the checking of interpretations on comments made (Paechter, 2012). The benefit of lurking is that it allows the researcher to observe the community without the potential behaviour change that the overt presence of a researcher could bring (Steinmetz, 2012).

Another important feature of the VE approach is its conceptualisation of the community. VE recognises that online communities are asymmetrical, indirect connections that knit individuals together and acknowledges that individuals within any community are simultaneously part of other interacting communities, societies and cultures (Wilson, 2013; Wilson & Peterson, 2002). The reconceptualisation of community as unbounded by space and bounded by interest or practice is core to understanding individual communication online (Hine, 2005a). In studying individual interaction online, offline social roles and existing cultural ideologies are often played out and, sometimes, exaggerated during the communicative event (Hughey & Daniels, 2013; Wilson & Peterson, 2002). Both of these features of online groups make the CDA approach of particular utility to this study. The multiple identities of members of the online communities allows for the opportunity to examine which discourses underpin multiple communities of interest and practice. It also allows for the more explicit expression of discursive strategies as the exaggerated ideologies and social roles are positioned in the various communicative events that take place in the discussion forums.

In their study of racist comments on news sites, Hughey and Daniels (2013) describe the high incidence of explicitly and violently racist comments made by users on discussion forums. They attribute this not to the open discourse of the internet as a public space of free speech (Papacharissi, 2002) but to the perception that anonymity on the internet allows for an escape from accountability of the physical person which frees the cyber personality to realise full ideological release (Hughey & Daniels, 2013). This is an example of the type of analysis that the VE approach allows the CD analyst to conduct in the online space.

#### **4.6.3. Criticisms of Virtual Ethnographic approaches**

One of the main criticisms against the VE approach is the ethical dilemma of covert participant observation (Steinmetz, 2012). The ethics of covert participant observation through the internet has been a subject of debate since the mid-1990s and continues to remain unresolved (Hine, 2005a; Paechter, 2012; Steinmetz, 2012). The benefits and drawbacks of covert observation were highlighted above, but the ethics of doing so remain a contested issue. This is particularly contentious on sites where users have a profile that links to their real identity, effectively making anonymous participation in the study impossible when participants are not aware that they are being observed (Hookway, 2008). The counter-argument to this is that the participation is in a public forum and that participants are aware that their communicative events are being observed by a broader audience than the one they are interacting with (Hine, 2008). By placing their thoughts, ideas and beliefs in the public sphere and linking their real identity to these, participants can be construed as waiving their right to anonymity (Hine, 2005a).

The virtual ethnographic approach has also been criticised for reducing a holistic research method, ethnography, to a limited field of observable behaviour in online groups (Teli, Pisanu, & Hakken, 2007). The critics of this approach argue that online behaviour must be corroborated against observations of offline behaviour to provide a holistic understanding of a group (Teli et al., 2007).

#### **4.6.4. Implications for this study**

The inclusion of the VE approach is to explain cultural phenomena unique to the internet communities under study. The need for this lies in the sub-objective of this study which is to identify discursive strategies used to marginalise and disempower key cultural institutions. To understand which strategies may be transferable beyond online communities, it is important to study the key cultural identifiers of the online communities that this study interacts with.

#### **4.7. Chapter summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the theoretical framework that guides this study. The theories described in this chapter are the various lenses used to inform the interpretation of the data. Each theoretical perspective described in this chapter provides a unique insight into the data corpus described in Chapter five of this thesis.

The Social Cognitive approach has as its focus the aggregation of individual interactions with a socially constructed SRs. These interactions provide insight into the underpinning discourses that

constitute both the SRs and the interaction. To highlight these discourses, the CDA approach was used to critically analyse the SRs of the participants in the study from the explicit socio-political stance that the cultural symbolic network of the initiation rite is systematically marginalised and annihilated through the discourses of power embedded in the colonisation of knowledge.

The Decolonial approach explains this cultural epistemicide in terms of the broader context of coloniality with a special focus on the colonisation of the being, knowledge and power. Decoloniality also studies and makes explicit those systems of domination that suppress knowledge systems that are outside of the Western, Christian, hetero-centric ideological stances. Decoloniality is based on three concepts that provide the analytical tools for the Decolonial approach. The first is the coloniality of power, the second is the coloniality of knowledge and the third is the coloniality of being. Each of these concepts explains how privilege and status are linked to the dominant Western ideology through everyday performances.

To gain access to these discourses and interactions, the observations in this study was done by means of the VE approach that informs online observations of communities of interest and practice. The VE approach draws from the traditions of ethnography. The individual interactions in these communities can be seen as extensions of their offline social roles and cultural ideologies which may be exaggerated in the context of the online space. These explicit expressions of role and ideology may serve to highlight the discourses that underpin them.

# Chapter 5 Method





**Nkosinathi, Anthony and Elias Front room (Araminta de Clermont)**

## **5. Chapter 5**

### **5.1. Introduction**

“There is a point at which methods devour themselves”. – (Fanon, 1952, p. 5)

This chapter describes the method followed in this study. It begins with a re-statement of the research objectives and the research question guiding this study. We then discuss the rationale for the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach for this study. The sample and data collection are described before outlining the data analysis process. The ethical considerations are discussed and the limitations of the study are set out.

### **5.2. Statement of the research objectives**

The purpose of this study is to examine the discursive strategies used in news reports and discussion boards on initiation schools in online media in South Africa. Specifically, this study focuses on the rhetorical and ideological statements made by news articles (collectively referred to here as the media) and by the individual commenters on the discussion forums (referred to here as the public for the sake of reading ease).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, media representation is one of the key sites of reproduction and transmission of ideological discourse and employs various rhetorical techniques to position these discourses as the natural, normal and acceptable discourses (Durrheim et al., 2005; Haig, 2006; Ndangam, 2008; Van Dijk, 1993a, 2012). The literature on the subject of male circumcision as an initiation rite in South Africa primarily focuses on the Xhosa ethnic group with some references to the Pedi, Sotho and Venda ethnic groups (Bottoman et al., 2009; Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2012; Jacobs, 2013; Ndangam, 2008). To ensure an inclusive analytic framework, no distinction was made between ethnic groups except where it is made within the data by the news articles or the commenters in discussion forums. This is to avoid excluding conversations that operate within the discourses on initiation in South Africa on the basis of specific ethnicities.

### **5.3. Research questions**

What are the discourse strategies used in reporting and discussing online news reports about initiation schools?

Sub research questions that inform this study include the following:

- What are the linguistic patterns utilised to create positions of power and dominance in news reports of initiation schools in online news sites?
- What are the linguistic patterns utilised to create positions of power and dominance in discussion forums on articles of initiation schools in online news sites?
- What are the identifiable ideologies that inform the interactions of individual participants in discussions on articles of initiation schools in online news sites?

- What are the rhetorical techniques used to marginalise the epistemic stance that underpins the cultural symbolic network of the initiation rite in online news reports and accompanying discussion forums?

The primary research question is discussed in the section outlining the objectives of this study. The sub research questions are derived from the primary question and aim to address discrete but interlinked aspects of the research question.

The linguistic patterns utilised by the media can be linked to the macro discourses that are transmitted and (re)produced by the media about initiation schools. The linguistic patterns specifically outline the strategies used from a (linguistically oriented) structural perspective. This potentially gives us the tools to identify when the media is positioning a particular orientation to initiation schools as normative. Linked to the discourses (re)produced in the news articles are the macro discourses constructed and transmitted in the discussion forums linked to each news article on initiation schools in South Africa.

The analysis of interactions between commenters in the discussion forums aim to identify which ideologies are dominant or marginalised in the discussion forums. It is of particular interest to understand to what extent the discourses in the online news reports are reproduced in the discussion forums. A further area of analysis is to identify the rhetorical techniques which are used to construct positions of dominance and subjugation for specific ideologies in the discussion forums.

#### 5.4. Sample

The sample of texts drawn for this study comes from the online news site, News24.com. News24, a division of Media24, positions itself as “Southern Africa and Africa’s premier online news resource” (News24, 2014). It provides twenty four hour coverage and is updated through various subsidiary news outlets that belong to the Media24 group. The site is accessible from web browsers, on the DStv network, and cellular phones with internet browsing capabilities (News24, 2014). The DMMA 2013 website rankings place News24 as the largest website in South Africa. The table below shows that news24.com had over five million unique visitors in December 2013. There were also over seventy five million page views for the same period (Digital Media and Marketing Association, 2013).

**Table 3 South African website rankings**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Total unique browsers</b>	<b>Page views</b>
news24.com	5 636 090	75 845 675
msn.com	2 764 323	43 057 083
iol.co.za	2 497 791	19 223 148
dstv.com	1 486 406	12 520 098

channel24.co.za	1 446 346	6 720 567
za.yahoo.com	1 408 118	11 056 112
timeslive.co.za	1 323 916	7 038 556
sport24.co.za	1 273 109	9 812 824
mg.co.za	1 247 390	6 749 394
supersport.com	1 105 196	11 090 597
mybroadband.co.za	1 076 205	5 962 690
sowetanlive.co.za	1 005 797	9 042 525
Health24.com	835 173	2 295 432
citypress.co.za	819 921	4 707 910

The sample of articles used in this study is drawn from the search results page of the news24 website and were retrieved using the search terms: “initiation schools”, “circumcision” and “initiate” using the Boolean operators “AND”, “OR” as well as the double quotation marks to indicate the exact phrase initiation schools.. The simple search terms and the results, while not representing a comprehensive selection of all stories available on the website, provide an indication of the most easily accessible content relating to the topic of this study. The rationale,

therefore, is that these articles are the most widely distributed and accessed on this topic due to the obvious link to the search terms.

The samples of articles range from the 23-01-2008 and include articles up to the end of the 28 December 2013. This represents a period of five years and is a purposive sample of articles which fit within the search terms used above. The media debate on initiation schools precedes the earliest article in this study (Ndangam, 2008), and there are sure to be articles outside of the five year period this study covers. The total number of articles for this study is 68 and includes multimedia reports such as short videos and blogs written by individuals who are not employed as journalists by news24.com.

The articles appear to be published as the news story becomes relevant but are clustered around the months of May, June, July, November and December across the entire timespan. This is consistent with comments referring to the initiation season and the sensitive annual debate in the media by academic authors (Bottoman et al., 2009; Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2012; Mhlahlo, 2009). A list of the articles with the dates and timestamps is attached in Appendix A.

### **5.5. Data collection process**

In addition to the news articles, the data also consist of discussion forums. The data collection process was done through the search engine embedded within the News24 site. The rationale, as explained above, is that these terms are the most commonly associated with the topic of study and are a simple search combination that is most likely to be used by readers on the News24 site.

The collection of content from the discussion forums under each article was automatic as each thread is linked to a specific news article. Both the news article and the discussion forum threads were cut and pasted into the ATLAS.ti programme for processing. ATLAS.ti allows for the analysis of text, graphic and audio data and aids the researcher in managing and retrieving data codes within a corpus of texts (Archer, 2012). The texts was not edited for grammatical correctness nor spelling errors corrected as these in order to preserve the idiom used by commenters on the forum.

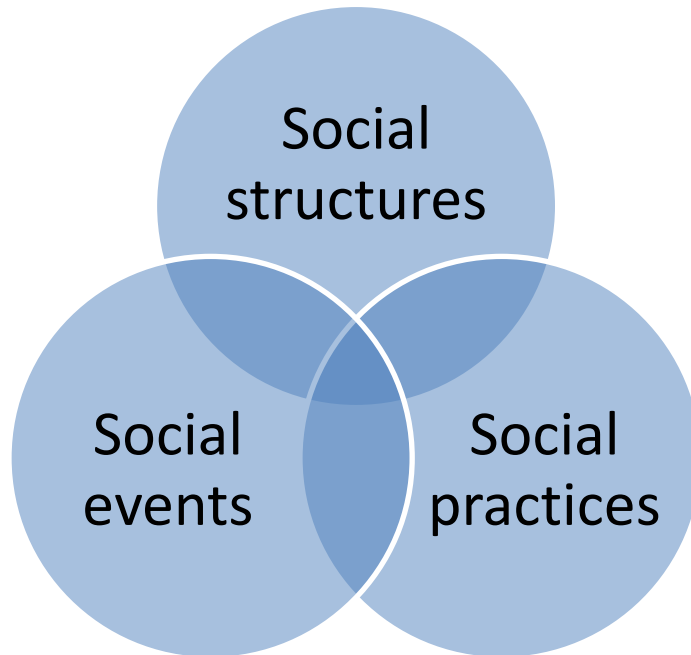
## **5.6. Data analysis**

The data analysis of this study was done through the CDA approach and is described in detail below. This section begins with a conceptual overview of how the analysis was approached before outlining the specific steps through which the analysis took place.

### **5.6.1. Critical Discourse Analysis framework**

According to Fairclough (2011) Critical Discourse analysis focuses on three distinct but inter-related areas, namely Social structures, Social events and Social practices (see Figure 4).





**Figure 4 Conceptual Framework**

Social structures refer to the abstract organising structures that shape the social environment in which we operate. Languages are the most abstract social structures that govern or direct the social environment (Fairclough, 2011). The language we use defines certain potential events in the social environment and in doing so, excludes others (Fairclough, 2011). This aspect of CDA is analysed by the first task that any discourse analysis must undertake. This task is referred to as the utterance-type meaning task by Gee (2004). This involves the study between form and function in language (Gee, 2004).

Function focuses on the communicative purpose of the form carried out (Gee, 2004). This aspect is referred to as orders of discourse by Fairclough (2011). The specific ways of combining linguistic elements are defined as an order of discourse which refers to a network of social practices in its language aspect (Fairclough, 2011). The elements of orders of discourse are not things like nouns or syntactic structures but genres (ways of acting), styles (ways of being) and

discourses (ways of representing). Both function (Gee, 2004) and orders of discourse (Fairclough, 2011) are aimed at articulating social practices. At this level Gee (2004) describes the second task that any form of discourse analysis must undertake, namely the situated meaning task. Situated meanings arise when particular language forms take on specific meanings in specific contexts of use (Gee, 2004).

Social events here are primarily defined through texts (Fairclough, 2011). In moving away from abstract structures toward concrete events, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate language from social events which may lead to language being over-determined by other social events (Fairclough, 2011). What is meant here is that texts are not simply effects of linguistic structures and orders of discourse but are also effects of other social structures and social practices which makes it difficult to separate all the factors shaping a text (Fairclough, 2011). Social events as texts link to what Gee (2004) refers to as the third task of critical discourse analysis. Non-critical discourse analysis tends to treat social practices only in terms of patterns of social interaction (Gee, 2004). CDA treat social practices in terms of their implications for things like status, solidarity, distribution of social goods and power (Gee, 2004).

Taking the stance that all actions we undertake through language build or destroy texts in the world (texts here refer to beliefs, attitudes, history, cultural practices, institutions, moral standards) and that these actions are part of a series of related actions leading to a goal, we must then assume that there are specific steps in the (de)construction our actions aim to achieve (Gee, 2004). With these assumptions in mind, Van Dijk (1993) outlines specific steps in the CDA process. These steps are described in greater detail in the following section but briefly they are:

- Examine the context

- Explore the production process
- Consider the communicative acts and social meaning embedded in text
- Examine participant positions and roles
- Examine the macro-semantics of the text
- Examine the superstructures of the text

These steps provide the primary means of analysis; they will then be examined in terms of the conceptual framework described above to further refine the discursive units identified. Finally, in as much as qualitative analysis can be sequential, the discursive units derived from this analysis were viewed through the conceptual framework described in Chapter 3 to provide insight into the discursive strategies used by online news reports and discussion boards on initiation schools in South African media.

### **5.6.2. Steps in the analysis process**

This section briefly describes what each step in the analysis process entails. The description here is aimed at providing a clear audit trail for the reader to facilitate an informed reading of the results presented here.

### **5.6.2.1. Examine the context**

Van Dijk (1993) positions the context as the entry point to analysis as he views the features of the broader context as salient in the construction of the power and authority of individual speech acts (Wooffitt, 2005). The broader context is concerned with explicitly stating the practices regulating access to the site of discourse (Van Dijk, 1993a, 1993b). It also focuses on the setting of the speech act in which the discourse is constructed as this feeds into access and into deciding specific cultural idiosyncrasies that could entrench power hierarchies (Van Dijk, 1993b). Genre is also a key aspect of the context examination which can influence the validity and import of the speech acts that take place (Wooffitt, 2005).

### **5.6.2.2. Explore the production process**

The production process of a text is another means through which power and authority may be (re)produced as it structurally determines who has access to the production of the discourse and who will be the recipients as well as who will be completely excluded from the process (Van Dijk, 1993b; Wooffitt, 2005). When examining media, it is important to consider the type of media, the focus and discursive position that the publication takes (whether implicit or explicit), the medium of transmission, the length of the source and additional features such as multimedia that are genre-specific mechanisms (Van Dijk, 2012; Wooffitt, 2005).

### **5.6.2.3. Consider the communicative acts and social meaning embedded in text**

This entails examining the text at the level of language for the structural indicators that will guide the analysis to the specific discursive strategies used. This is an iterative process that involves breaking the text into discrete discursive units. This is done through examining the text for features such as word groups, language specific to a specific genre, grammatical features, direct and indirect speech, evidentialities, rhetorical figures of speech and modalities (Gee, 2004; Schneider, 2013; Van Dijk, 2012; Wooffitt, 2005).

### **5.6.2.4. Examine participant position and roles**

Examining the participant rhetorical position and roles serves to identify explicit and implicit goals and identities associated with the ideological position of various groups (Wooffitt, 2005). This phase of analysis also looks at the relationship being constructed with the audience and between the producer of the text and other potential producers (Gee, 2004). It examines which possibilities of discourse the text makes available but also which discourses are explicitly or implicitly excluded (Gee, 2004).

#### **5.6.2.5. Examine the macro-semantics of the text**

In examining the macro-semantics of the text, particular attention is given to intertextuality (Van Dijk, 2006). An examination of the macro-semantics of the text shows how the communicative act is formed around topics and how these topics, collectively, serve to create a particular discursive position within a particular space and time (Wooffitt, 2005).

#### **5.6.2.6. Examine the superstructures of the text**

The superstructures of the text are the text schemata for local meaning and coherence (Wooffitt, 2005). Local meaning focuses on the specificity of the text, the perspective (derived from the earlier forms of analysis), implicitness (Wooffitt, 2005). Coherence studies the cognitive structure or schema to discern how the text can be organised to reproduce ideologically laden assumptions (Wooffitt, 2005). The superstructures are the overarching principle that organises the structure, content and intent of the text to convey a specific ideological stance. In a sense, the superstructures are the sum of the previous steps of analysis in the CDA process of analysis. The superstructures provide a hierarchical structure which encompasses a text from specific local meaning contained in rhetorical techniques, to macro semantic structures that organise the text around specific topics to create global coherence within the text (Van Dijk, 2012). To infer global coherence of a text, one has to have knowledge of the structures of the situation (context), events (production process) and actions (communicative acts) (Van Dijk, 2012).

## 5.7. Trustworthiness

This section briefly outlines the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis of the results of this study. The approach followed to establish trustworthiness and credibility in this study is outlined in the seminal work by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The approach they outline states that trustworthiness involves establishing:

- Credibility – describes the “truth value” of the findings and reflects the confidence that the findings reflect the “truth” in the context of inquiry
- Transferability – provides a chain of reasoning that shows how the findings have applicability in other contexts
- Dependability – describes the processes used to show that the findings are consistent and can be repeated
- Confirmability – aims to demonstrate a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of the study are shaped by the respondents and not the researchers’ interest, bias or motivation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 185).

Each aspect of trustworthiness defined above is comprised of a number of specific activities that indicate to what extent a study achieves overall trustworthiness.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose five techniques to establish Credibility, namely, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checks and referential adequacy. Prolonged engagement refers to remaining immersed in the context of the study over a period of time to test misinformation, build trust and uncover irrelevancies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Peer debriefing involves exposing the chain of reasoning in the study to a disinterested peer to

determine the adequacy of the working hypothesis, the next steps in the study and debriefing on the personal insights gained from the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Negative case analysis entails purposively sampling those cases that do not fit the assumptions of the researcher and research design to determine the extent to which the findings explain these cases and guard against unchecked bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Referential adequacy refers to archiving a portion of the data for analysis after developing preliminary findings to test the validity of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks involves gaining participant feedback on the validity of the interpretations made on the data made by the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Transferability focuses on providing thick descriptions of the data to enable others interested in making a transfer with enough information to reach a conclusion about whether the findings are valid within the alternate context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is attained through the provision of enough information about analytical and conceptual tools to facilitate stepwise replication; triangulation and maintaining an audit trail (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The table below briefly summarises the strategies used to achieve trustworthiness in this study.

**Table 4 Summary of application of trustworthiness in this study**

<b>Trustworthiness construct</b>	<b>Strategy employed</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Credibility	Prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	Prolonged engagement was achieved by drawing articles from 2008 to the end of 2013. This provides insight into the



Trustworthiness construct	Strategy employed	Explanation
		<p>discourses over time.</p> <p>In addition, a detailed literature review was conducted to provide the foundation for the construction of the analytical framework.</p>
	<p>Referential adequacy (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985)</p>	<p>Articles were selected and held in reserve for analysis at the completion of the research process to test the validity of the findings.</p>
	<p>Triangulation (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985)</p>	<p>The findings from the analysis were interpreted in relation to literature published in various journals. The relevant policies dealing with initiation schools were identified as part of the literature review and were used to discuss and interpret the findings.</p>
	<p>Peer debriefing (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985)</p>	<p>Frequent sessions were held with both promoters to check the adequacy of findings. In addition process and reflexive memos were developed as part of the data analysis process.</p>

<b>Trustworthiness construct</b>	<b>Strategy employed</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Transferability	Thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	The analytic constructs were described in detail in Chapter 4 and the application of these constructs was described in this chapter to provide details of the coding process. In addition, the discussion of the findings integrates quotations from the source documents and participants to provide substance to the line of argumentation.
Dependability and Confirmability	Transparent description of research process to facilitate stepwise replication (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)	An audit trail is available as appendices to this study. The audit trail includes the list of the articles sampled with timestamps. It includes the original articles and codes in the form of a webpage and CD attached to this thesis.

The sections that follow specifically describe the data collection, cleaning and analysis procedures followed to address the following aspects of trustworthiness: Referential adequacy, Dependability and Confirmability.

### **5.7.1. Delineating the scope of the data corpus**

The data collected in this study was drawn from the News24 website. The search parameters used to retrieve the articles that comprised the data corpus used the search terms "initiation schools", "circumcision", "circumcision schools". Complex Boolean search parameters were used and these terms were inputted as simple search parameters.

The assumption behind this was that the simpler search terms would be most representative of the main terms associated with the male circumcision initiation rite. The search yielded 68 articles spanning a period of time from 2008 to the end of 2013. Of these 68 articles, six articles were discarded because they specifically dealt with female initiation practices which fall outside of the scope of this study. The final data corpus comprised 62 news articles which were analysed using the structure described above.

Of the 62 articles, 38 had comments included in the associated discussion forums. The articles with discussion forums are all dated post January 2011. The comments and discussion forums on articles earlier than this are simply indicated as closed. This may be due to a policy of the publisher to delete posts in forums older than four years or that the discussion forum was not enabled prior to this period. No information is available on why the older articles do not have discussion forums on the News24 site.

### **5.7.2. Data cleaning**

The news reports and discussions forums were cut and pasted from the website into the data processing programme, ATLAS.ti This was done to preserve access to the data as websites may be taken offline for various reasons (Holtz, Kronberger, & Wagner, 2012; Stewart, 2005). The data was collected and saved during a period of two weeks starting on the 10 January 2014 at which point the links to the various articles used in this study were still active. A list of these article titles are made available in Appendix A.

The data cleaning process typically involves correcting grammatical and spelling errors in the text (Archer, 2012). For the sake of preserving authenticity of the original utterances, the texts from the discussion forums were retained unedited and without any sanitisation.

The news articles and discussion forums were assigned a document number which is used to cross reference all quotations and codes attributed to specific articles and discussion forums. In the next chapter quotes drawn from the text is followed by the document and line numbers to indicate the origin. So (1:1) represents a quotation drawn from document one, which is the earliest article in this study, and is contained in line 1 of the article from which the quote is drawn.

### **5.7.3. Data analysis**

The application of the data analysis process described in the section above involved reading through the entire corpus of texts to gain a sense of familiarity with the structure, style and size of the various texts. One article was then drawn and retained from each year of the study to ensure referential adequacy by checking the validity of the coding at the end of the data analysis process.

The next step in the analysis process involved reading for and developing a code set that detailed the style, genre and main topics within each text. This was followed by reading for specific semantic groupings in the text and for textual markers that denote rhetorical techniques. The textual markers searched for included the use of irony, humour, rhetorical questioning, generalisations, active or passive language, over-lexicalisation and patterns of quotations. These techniques are described in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

The text was then read through to identify author positions constructed through the use of the techniques described above. The author positions were identified by looking for an explicitly stated relationship to the cultural symbolic network that underpins the male circumcision initiation rite. Those who explicitly positioned themselves inside of this network of meaning by declaring their circumcision status, ethnicity or personal experience of undergoing the rite were positioned as insiders. All other author positions were assumed to be rhetorically positioned as outside of the cultural symbolic network. Author positions were constructed by both the media and the participants in the discussion forums and these are presented in the next chapters.

The text was then read to identify the participants who are constructed in the speech acts undertaken in the text. The participants were identified by the explicit mention of specific groups of stakeholders by the authors of the texts. The traits, characteristics, rights, responsibilities and attributed agency (if any) of the participants were derived from the descriptions of these participants by the authors. The use of adjectives in particular relation to specific groups was crucial in constructing a participant identity with a complex set of traits.

The text was then examined for macro-semantic grouping of topics. This was done by coding the text without a preconceived semantic structure and building codes out of the language used by the authors of the text. Once a set of codes was constructed, the text was re-read and the system of coding applied to find patterns of semantic similarity across the various texts. These patterns were then grouped together by clustering the entire meaning unit (which varied in length from a few words to entire sentences) with other units of similar meaning. These meaning units were then labelled using a title derived from the explicit meaning of the various meaning units. Where a sentence or cluster of words did not fit the overarching description of the cluster, it was removed from the cluster and the process of constructing codes would begin anew. This process was repeated iteratively until no further semantic clusters could be identified by the researcher and all clusters were described within an overarching description.

The superstructures were constructed using the process of clustering the topics that comprised the macro-semantics. A code was developed to group a set of topics together and this code was used to work through individual quotes within each topic. If the internal logic of the code did not describe all the codes within a topic, the process began from scratch with a re-reading of the topic description. The process was iteratively repeated until a super code was developed which described the logic underlying the various topics.

Once the data analysis process was completed, the articles held in reserve were then analysed using the coding schemata to test the validity of the findings. During this process no new codes were generated and the coding schema was deemed adequate to analyse all the necessary aspects of the data.

## **5.8. Ethics**

The ethical considerations for an online study pose unique challenges to the research process. The concepts of anonymity, informed consent, privacy and right to participation all take on new dimensions in the online environment. On the one hand the public accessibility of the research data makes it comparatively easy for other researchers to retrace the analysis process and to reappraise the original researchers' conclusions (Holtz et al., 2012). This adds more transparency to analyses than is usually achieved in qualitative research (Holtz et al., 2012).

On the other it is incredibly difficult to draw clear delineations between concepts such as private and public space, to clearly see the boundaries of privacy and to ensure anonymity in a space where search algorithms and the interlinks between social media websites make individual information easily accessible (Steinmetz, 2012; Stewart, 2005).

In the paragraphs that follow, key ethical considerations are briefly discussed in the context of this study and, where possible, solutions are proposed to these issues.

### **5.8.1. Anonymity**

It is common practice for discussion forums to require users to register to be able to post a comment and the News24 forum is no exception (Stewart, 2005). The registration can be linked to a unique News24 username which may not contain any personally identifiable information but can also be linked to a Facebook profile which will contain actual names, friends and family as well as photos of individuals. That said, the socio-demographic information of forum users are difficult to verify and may be part of a cyber-persona that does not actually exist (Holtz et al., 2012).

The ethical consideration of anonymity is balanced against the concept of public data which holds that, by posting in a public forum, forum users are placing their thoughts, ideas and beliefs in the public sphere and expect a degree of scrutiny (Holtz et al., 2012; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012).

### **5.8.2. Privacy**

Internet forums can be viewed as private communications between users with similar interests, especially when the forum is designed as a semi-private communication sphere for a specific group of users (Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004; Holtz et al., 2012; Lasorsa et al., 2012). By subjecting the user's comments and communication to scrutiny, the privacy of this space is transgressed unless this scrutiny is done under informed consent (Holtz et al., 2012). However, in publicly accessible forums such as news websites which allow anyone, even unregistered users,



to observe comments and discussions, the concept of public data becomes salient (Baym et al., 2004).

No user names are retained in the data presented in this thesis. This is done to provide the participants with a limited degree of anonymity. The privacy and anonymity granted to individual commenters in the forums is severely limited in this study as the quotes themselves can potentially be linked to the site through the use of a search query.

## **5.9. Limitations**

One of the primary limitations of this study is that no claim can be made to representativeness for a certain population. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the access to the internet forums are determined by financial considerations (being able to afford internet capable devices and the cost of access), cultural issues (comfort with the internet as a resource), and knowledge (being able to read and understand English as well as knowledge of how to use the discussion forums). This small population is further reduced to those users who take the time to comment on the articles.

The study is also limited to the News24 portal and does not consider the use of alternative news portals such as IOL or individual newspapers' online websites. The choice of News24 as a collection site is due to the position of the News24 site as the largest website based in South Africa which makes it a logical site to study the (re)production of SRs in the online sphere that is assumed to be occupied by South Africans.

Despite the limitations described above, the findings of this study can contribute to the body of knowledge of the social constructions of indigenous cultures in the online news media. The

understanding of the discursive strategies used to marginalise the underlying symbolic networks of a culture can facilitate the development of rhetorical positions where these cultures can resist the epistemicide being perpetrated against them.

#### **5.10. Chapter summary**

This chapter outlined the method that informed the data collection and data analysis strategy that provided the findings in Chapter 6. The chapter started with a restatement of the research objectives and expanded on the research questions listed in Chapter 1. The rationale for the chosen approach was described and the analytic framework that guided the data analysis process was outlined. The Critical Discourse Analysis was described in brief before a detailed explanation of the application of the analytic framework set out by Van Dijk (1993). The CDA framework focuses on the examination of the context as a departure point. Following this, the production process of the text is described and examined for unique contextual markers. The next step in the analysis is to identify the communicative acts used within the text to communicate specific ideological stance. Participant positions and roles were also described to provide an understanding of the various role players present in the text. The process identifying and describing macro-semantics, which provide the cognitive topics linking texts together, was explained. Lastly, the analysis steps leading to the identification of the superstructures of the text were outlined.

Trustworthiness as a concept was described in relation to the data processing approach used to manage the data corpus. The specific application of credibility was obtained by ensuring triangulation, prolonged exposure and referential adequacy. Peer debriefing was obtained by

scheduling regular sessions with promoters to act as constructive critic to the interpretation of the findings. Transferability was obtained through providing thick descriptions with reference to the utterances of the participants.

The unique ethical issues that face online research and described the limitations of the study were described. The complex tension between full description of your participant base and the ethical principle of anonymity was discussed with a reflection on the implications for data presentation and interpretation. The next chapter presents the results of the Critical Discourse Analysis of online news reports and discussion boards on initiation schools in South Africa.

# Chapter 6 Critical discourse analysis of online news reports on initiation schools



Photo credit: Baz Bailey

## **6. Chapter 6**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of online news reports on initiation schools in South Africa. The presentation of the results is split into two chapters. The first chapter is the CDA of the news reports on initiation schools; the second is the CDA of the discussion forums of these news reports. The split is for ease of presentation and to facilitate a global analysis of the various texts as opposed to detailed individual analysis of each news report and its accompanying discussion forum. The analyses of the news articles and discussion forums are then integrated in the final chapter of this thesis.

Both chapters follow a similar structure that is based on the analytic framework presented in the previous chapter and that is based on the work of Van Dijk (1993). The framework begins with an analysis of the context, and then examines the production process. We will then discuss the communicative acts and social meanings embedded within the texts. We then discuss the participant positions and roles before going on to describe the macro-semantics of the texts. Finally, we will describe the superstructures of the text. As we discuss each section, a brief contextualising paragraph will explain how these analytic steps were applied in each specific instance.

## **6.2. Critical Discourse Analysis of online news reports**

This section briefly describes the Critical Discourse Analysis of the online news reports on initiation schools. The description here is aimed at providing a clear audit trail for the reader to facilitate an informed reading of the results presented here. The data corpus for the news reports comprised articles dating from 2008 to 2013 and consists of 62 news reports. The next section examines the context of the news articles. When reading the section below, the context described in Chapter 3 is assumed as co-existing within the same space and as active. Specifically, the role of the media in setting the public agenda by deciding what is newsworthy and, by implication, what becomes widely known (Durrheim et al., 2005). The tensions between User Generated Content (UGC) and reporter generated content (discussed in section 3.1.1.) are also important to recall when reading through the section entitled 'examining the context'.

## **6.3. The context**

The context in which the news articles are positioned is that of online news with a focus on South African news and events. While regional in focus, the News 24 website is internationally accessible and the site can be described as contributing toward the global news from a South African perspective.

The website describing the news provider positions it as Southern Africa and Africa's premier source of news which is provided around the clock to ensure that news is covered as it happens and when it happens (News24, 2014). The site is accessible through desktop browsers as well as

through mobile phone browsers. The context above was described in the previous chapter but bears repeating here to foreground it for the discussion that follows. In chapter three the shifting trend toward increasing interaction between audience and news producers was described in terms of the tensions around User Generated Content (UGC). The tension between what is considered the news reports that are the terrain of journalists and UGC produced by the public highlight the epistemological line of what constitutes valid knowledge in the online news environment (Singer & Ashman, 2009). Papacharissi (2002) expressed the view that the internet holds the potential to increase access for the public to sites of discourse production by removing physical constraints on access to those who have the capacity to produce public discourse. However, when considering how few people in South Africa have access to the internet and possess the requisite skill in the English language that is the norm in discussion forums, the claim of the internet as a medium for promoting open debate is questionable (Calandro et al., 2013; Curran et al., 2013). The points highlighted in the context here are meant to frame the discussion of the production process which follows and provide the key features of the South African media to keep in mind during the reading.

#### **6.4. The production process**

The news articles are presented with the banner of the news24 brand present on all pages across the top of the page with links to the main site areas (A in Figure 5); tabs for sport, business, tech, motoring, lifestyle, multimedia, focus, opinion, language change option, jobs and properties are clearly visible under the banner (see Figure 4). The article itself is positioned on the left hand



side of the screen with any multimedia in a frame to the right of the text (C) with keywords underneath (D). The right hand side of the screen is dedicated to advertising (G) and links to the most read, most commented and 'news in your area' links (E).



**Figure 5 Screenshot of the website**

The article headline is then presented under the banner and typeset in bold, large font to draw the attention of the reader (B). The lead (or lede) is presented under the headline on the left hand side of the screen, above the text of the article body. The lead in is the heading and first paragraph of the article and is described as a brief, sharp statement of the story's essential facts (Teo, 2000). The lead is the first sentence of an article and is typically 20-25 words in length (Teo, 2000). The lead provides the story in brief and must provide the reader with all the information they need to know what the report is about (Teo, 2000; Van Dijk, 1986). The heading provides a "cognitive macro-structure that serves as an important strategic cue to control the way readers process and

make sense of the report" (Teo, 2000, p. 14). The macro-structure that manifests in headlines and leads privilege an ideology that biases the reader toward a particular interpretation of the article which, consequently, subjugates other possible interpretations of the article (Jackson, 2009; Teo, 2000). This assertion is based on the assumption that each word in a headline and lead is carefully chosen and structured to maximise the effect on the reader (Jackson, 2009; Teo, 2000). The intended effect is directly tied to the news producer's ideological values and attitudes (Teo, 2000).

The role and function of the headline is of particular interest when reading the above text within the understanding of the journalistic genre, specifically that of straight news. Straight news is news that contains facts given straight without exaggeration (Teo, 2000; Van Dijk, 1991). Its ostensible main aim is to inform and pass the news (Teo, 2000). In Chapter 3 we briefly reflected on the social structures on which media privilege is constructed, namely, the position of the journalist as the agent for the public interest and the value of objective news information (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005a). The News24 group position themselves as producers of straight news by claiming to report factual events without bias (News24, 2014). This study will not establish whether this is objectively the case, but accepts that the intention of the News24 reporters to position their articles as straight news. By taking the rhetorical position as the objective producer of knowledge, the news site places itself in a position of power relative to the reader by implying that all content produced is a fair, unbiased and accurate reflection of the situation reported on (Jackson, 2009). The onus is on the reader to disprove the statements made by the news provider should they wish to contest the reality constructed within the news articles (Melican & Dixon, 2008). From this position of relative power to the reader, the journalist

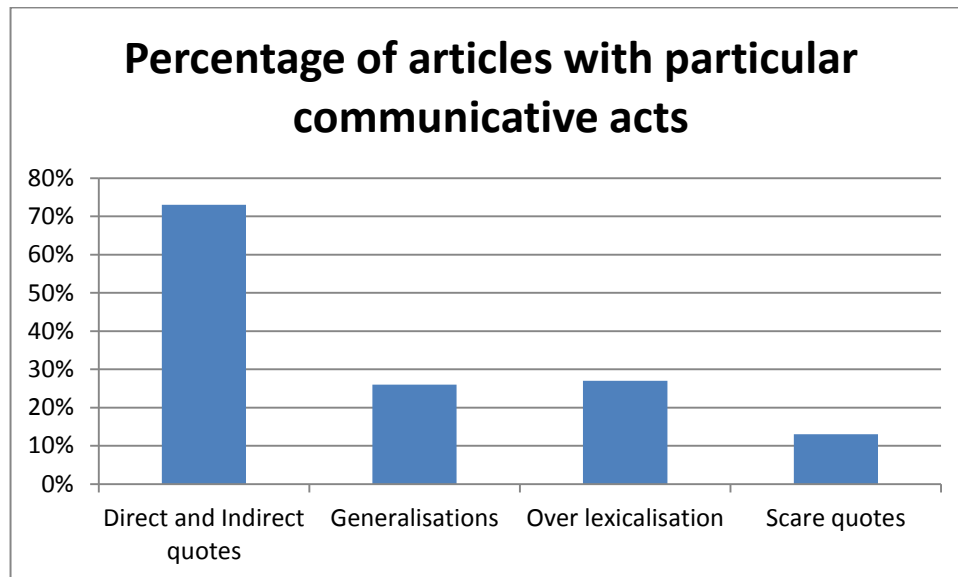
utilises specific communicative acts to construct the participant roles in line with overarching macro-semantics and superstructures.

### **6.5. Communicative acts and social meaning embedded in news reports**

This level of analysis, as mentioned in the previous chapter, entails examining the text at the level of language for the structural indicators that will guide the analysis to the specific discursive strategies used. This process is iterative and involves breaking the text into discrete discursive units by examining the text for features such as word groups, language specific to a particular genre, grammatical features, direct and indirect speech, evidentialities, rhetorical figures of speech and modalities (Gee, 2004; Schneider, 2013; Van Dijk, 2012; Wooffitt, 2005).

Many of the reports used generalisation as a discursive strategy. Reports also used patterns of direct and indirect quotation to lend authenticity to the ideological stance of the news producer while appearing neutral and objective. The ideological stance is set out in the choice of direct and indirect quote. Using these quotes allows the news producer to provide an opinion to the reader while maintaining the façade of objective news reporting. The various communicative acts identified are discussed in more detail below. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the quotes are presented unedited and unaltered. The brackets next to each quote indicate the document number and line within the document that the quote was drawn from. Figure 6 shows the percentage of articles in the sample with the various communicative acts present in them. The purpose of showing this distribution is to provide contextualisation for the results in the sections that follow. The graph shows the communicative acts as separate events; however, the various techniques are

used within the same articles in some instances. The graph shows that 73% of the articles use direct and indirect quotations as a communicative act while generalisations and over lexicalisation were identified in 26% of the articles.



**Figure 6 Percentage of articles with specific communicative acts**

### **6.5.1. Indirect speech and quotation patterns**

Figure 6 above shows that the use of direct and indirect quotations is the most frequently used communicative act within the corpus of texts. The extensive use of this act makes sense within the straight news, journalistic genre which emphasises substantiation of facts with evidence from sources (Teo, 2000).

Quotations from parents in the news reports are typically indirect quotes. The lack of quotation marks and passive phrasing de-emphasise the salience of the parents' point of view. When

contrasted with the active quotations from government officials who are directly quoted the parents of the initiates are relegated to the rhetorical position of commenters on the initiation process instead of active participants in the maintenance and regulation of the practice. A possible explanation for the use of indirect quotations for parents was that they may often speak to the journalist in a language other than English; however this does not explain why the journalist wouldn't simply translate the statement into direct quotations. The end result remains the same, the parents only speak through the journalist and never directly to the reader.

The deaths of initiates are reported in the passive voice which serves to distance the speaker from the death of the initiate. Phrasing such as “the deceased” (2:22) strips the individual identity of the initiate and positions them as an object for investigation as opposed to an individual with family who have lost a loved one.

The passive phrasing is apparent when allocating blame for the deaths of initiates even in direct quotes from sources. In the article discussing the apology from the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa), the spokesperson frames the argument that initiation schools are responsible for the deaths; this shifts the agency from individual practitioners to initiation schools as the responsible stakeholder.

*“initiations schools were responsible for 250 young men's deaths throughout the country since 2004” (4:2)*

This reframe is a contrast to the individual attribution of blame by the media. It also distances Contralesa as responsible for the deaths, in contrast to the headline stating that an apology was delivered by this organisation. By locating the blame within an institution outside of Contralesa, the responsibility shifts to the constructed entity labelled as initiation schools. This avoidance

strategy allows Contralesa to reposition as the agency stepping in to correct issues created by those outside of the organisation.

### **6.5.2. Generalisations**

Generalisation refers to the extension of characteristics from an individual to a group of individuals who share a different characteristic (Teo, 2000). This strategy offers reporters with a convenient means of reporting on key qualities of a group without having to engage in tedious details of individual attributes (Teo, 2000). Simultaneously, it chips away at individual and unique characteristics of the group members until it leaves a common, ideologically constructed template to hold the content of the news story (Van Dijk, 1987).

Generalisations were primarily used to construct initiation schools as sites of death while focussing on a specific incident within the broader context of the male circumcision rite as initiation. This was done through the use of pseudo-synonyms that equate initiation with war and genocide as depicted in the headlines below:

“[headline]*Circumcision battle 'being won'*” (31:1)

“[headline]*Initiation deaths likened to genocide*” (63:3)

In an earlier section of the chapter, the function of the headline and the leads was explained as providing the overarching cognitive schemata that privileges one ideological stance to bias the reader toward a particular interpretation of the article which, consequently, subjugates other possible interpretations of the article (Van Dijk, 1986). Equating initiation with a battle and

genocide entrenches the idea that the initiation rite is associated with atrocity and death. The equivocation is further illustrated in the quotation from a source quoted as a community leader which lends credibility to the assertion of the deaths as genocide:

*'Bizana community leader Ndumiso Hlongwa said the high initiate death rate could be called "genocide as our people are slashed to death in these mountains."' (63:5)*

The association with genocide positions the deaths as widespread and deliberate as well as linking the practice to the systematic slaughter of a people. These images are intended to elicit outrage and act as a call for collective action to protect the victims. The function of generalisations in this context serves to strip away the unique characteristics of each initiation site, practitioner and initiate. In doing so, the botched, illegal and fatal initiations become representative of all initiation rites which has the consequence of suppressing all successful, safe initiations in the shared representations of the society.

### **6.5.3. Over lexicalisation**

Over lexicalisation is when repetitious, quasi-synonymous terms are woven into the body of news discourse, particularly when referring to powerless participants within the discourse (Van Dijk, 1991). The over lexicalisation of the initiates in the news reports analysed in this study show the infantilisation of the initiates in the text. The repetitive emphasis on the initiates as boys and youths orient the readers' perception of the initiates as young and, by implication, innocent with a long life ahead of them. This is further reinforced by choice of quotations by prominent speakers who lament the loss of futures.

*“Minister in the Presidency Collins Chabane was saddened by the deaths of **young people** at initiation schools in South Africa. “The reported loss of several **young lives** in Mpumalanga and elsewhere in the country is regrettable,” he said in a statement. “This has happened to **young people** who were still **at their prime**, looking forward to a brighter future where they could **still reach their potential**.” “He said the **boys** attended initiation schools with the **hope of reaching manhood**.” (22:4) [emphasis added]*

*“It cannot be acceptable that every time **young men** reach this crucial time in their **development**, their lives are culled in the most painful of ways, in the care of circumcision schools” – President Jacob Zuma (37:3) [emphasis added]*

The repeated use of terms that refer to the age and non-adult status of the initiates strips them of agency and positions them as children in need of care and protection. The failure to protect the initiates draws a sense of loss and outrage toward the rite and those who practice it. The assertion in the previous sentence must be viewed from within the frame of reference of the South African legislative framework which positions the initiates reported on as children in the eyes of the law. It is therefore important to realise that the focus of the debate is not whether the use of the age of initiates and the repeated emphasis on their status as children, youth, kids and boys is correct. Rather, it is on the intent behind the rhetorical technique employed by the media producer under study.



#### 6.5.4. Scare quotes

Straight news positions itself as a reporter on primary experience and quotes, both direct and indirect, form part of the fabric of the story reported. This provides the story with authenticity and relevance to a specific context and lends credibility to the claims made without explicitly stating the ideological position of the news producer, allowing them to appear neutral and objective (Van Dijk, 1986).

Scare quotes are the addition of quotation marks to a sentence to isolate a word with the purpose of inverting the valence of the word (Burgers, 2010). The inversion of the valence or meaning typically calls into question the veracity of the status of the object or subject referred to within the sentence. Scare quotes can also be substituted with phrases in the text that perform the same function. An example of phrases that invert valence is the phrase “so called” used in the quote (42:2) below. The use of scare quotes was usually used to emphatically undermine the status of initiation practitioners as health practitioners or experts. The scare quotes specifically draw the metaphorical distinction between real doctors and initiation practitioners. In the examples below the status as a healer and surgeon are highlighted and called into question by the author (the bold emphasis was added to illustrate the scare quotes). The act of questioning the status of the subjects in the sentences below implies that the author occupies a superior position from which the author can legitimately challenge the status of the healer and surgeon.

“[headline]’**Traditional healer**’ kidnaps boys” (44:2)

“A traditional “**healer**” has allegedly held teenage boys to ransom at an initiation school in Duduza, on the East Rand, the *New Age* reported on Tuesday.” (44:3)

*“A traditional "surgeon" briefly appeared in the Molopo Magistrate's Court in Mahikeng in the North West on Monday, SABC news reported.” (7:1)*

The use of the scare quotes also implies that there is an absolute standard of truth against which the status of the healer and surgeon in question are being compared to. The implicit comparison creates a dichotomy within the text with real/genuine healers and surgeons on one end and counterfeit/fraudulent/fake on the other. This dichotomy places initiation practitioners on the counterfeit/fraudulent/fake end of the continuum and, consequently, as inferior, incompetent and potentially criminal.

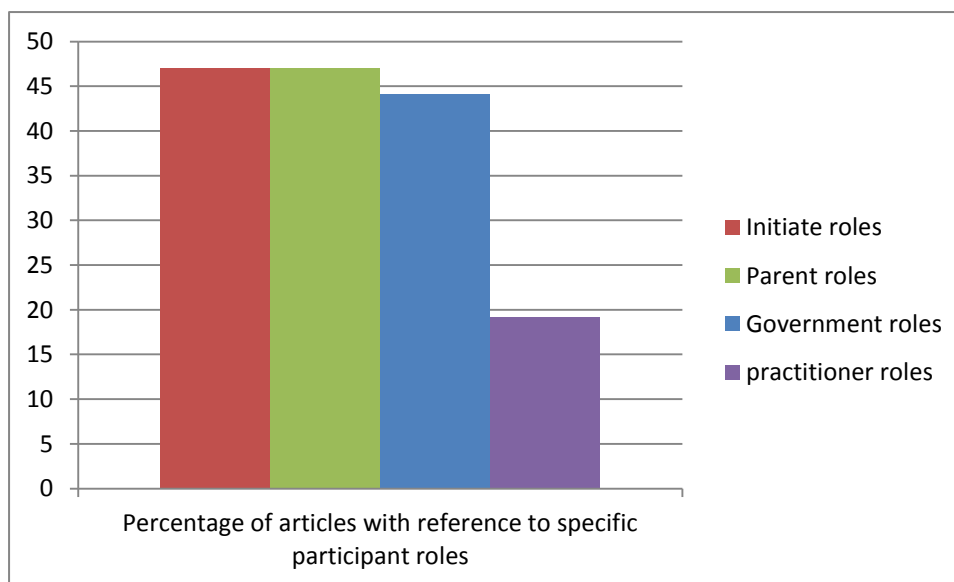
*"We condemn all illegal practices that accompany these bogus initiation schools and ill-disciplined and greedy "traditional surgeons" that put profits before our young men's lives," (64:9)*

*“The Eastern Cape health department and police are hunting at least five so-called traditional surgeons who conducted illegal circumcisions in the Transkei.” (42:2)*

The link to potential criminality lies in the regulation of health care through statutory bodies such as the Health Professionals Council (HPCSA) which criminalises anyone practising medical care outside of its prescriptions. Health practitioners are regulated but also are protected by the procedures and regulations of the HPCSA, protection which is not extended to the initiation practitioners. Consequently, any death or injury experienced during the rite may legitimately be prosecuted by the state against the individual practitioners.

## 6.6. Participant positions and roles

The examination of the constructed participant positions and roles entailed a detailed analysis to identify explicit and implicit goals and identities associated with the ideological position of various groups (Wooffitt, 2005). The participants identified in the production of this text are the media as an industry, government, the initiates, the parents of the initiates, and the initiation practitioners. The author role is described in the production and context of the data analysis and is played by the journalist acting as the media proxy. The construction of participant roles is therefore done from the perspective of the media through the journalist proxy. Figure 7 shows the percentage of articles in which the various role players are constructed as present. More than one role can be present in an article and the graph merely depicts the prevalence of each type of role in the data corpus. The media as the authors and implicit participant are not explicitly referred to in the text and are therefore not part of the codes counted to formulate the graph below.



**Figure 7 Percentage of articles with various participant roles**

The parents, government and initiates are reflected in more than 40% of the articles with the initiation practitioners reflected in 18%. From the graph is clear that multiple participants can be present in the same text, often in relation to the others. The description of the relationships between these roles is given in the sections that follow.

### **6.6.1. The media**

The media are implicitly constructed as the objective observer of the initiation rite and the effects this rite has on the other participants. This implicit position is marked by the media's position as the primary producer of the text. This position is further marked by the absolute authority that the media holds in deciding what is newsworthy and, by implication, worth knowing. This places the media producer's ideological stance as the point of departure into which all other participants must integrate. The apparent discourse from which the media in this study operate is the discourse of straight news which informs the need to construct the objective outsider position.

“[the government spokesperson said that] *the drop in numbers was due to the department's awareness campaign, which included visits to communities by department staff, traditional leaders and police, and the positive role of the media in highlighting the dangers of illegal or badly-managed circumcision schools.*” (31:13)

From within the text the media is constructed as a key partner in the battle for circumcision. Not all of the reports presented the media in a positive light in relation to the reports on initiation

schools. In one of the news reports, a spokesperson is quoted while criticising the media for playing a role in constructing the negative perception of the rite.

*“There is a negative perception of the practice. Initiation has not had a pleasant history. Apartheid forced it to exist in secrecy, Gopane said. Incidents were also badly reported in the media which added to the negativity.” (21:11)*

The quotation above presents a negative case against the construction of the media as a key partner contributing positively toward regulation of the rite. However, the quote above is an exception to the general pattern where the media are constructed as the watchdog against illegal initiation schools which places them in a powerful ideological position. From this position they can direct the gaze of the public and the government toward those schools identified as illegal or transgressive.

### **6.6.2. The initiates**

The primary role that the initiates appear to play within the discourse is as the silent victims of the rite. Initiates are typically referenced as statistics or as an amalgam of medical conditions.

*“14-year-old boy was hospitalised with a rotting penis in the Transkei on Friday after a botched circumcision at an illegal initiation school, the provincial health department said.” (34:1)*

*“The youths, suffering from complaints including dehydration, septicaemia and gangrene, were taken to hospitals in Maclear and Mthatha.” (26:7)*

*“A 13-year-old boy died and three others were injured when they were allegedly assaulted at an initiation school near Mthatha, in the Eastern Cape, on Wednesday, police said.” (20:3)*

The initiates are constructed as victims of the initiation system, which includes parents, initiation practitioners, the traditions associated with the rite and the government, and which robs them of agency through social pressure from parents and friends. This places them in the hands of practitioners who are constructed as criminal, greedy and incompetent (explained below). The quote below describes the experience of an initiate who was forced to undergo initiation by his family. The quote is from an article focusing on the experiences of a 23 year old who escaped from an initiation school he was forced to attend.

*“I told my family that I did not want to undergo initiation, but my mother thought it was a good idea,” he explained, insisting that procedure was not followed and he had not even registered with the Department of Health, nor had he undergone any required physical examination.(58:8)*

The above quote is one of only two instances in the corpus of texts where initiates are actively quoted and given a voice to describe their experience of the process. The other instance of an initiate given voice is where an initiate was taking his parents to court for forcing him to undergo initiation. In all other cases, initiates are reported on but never quoted.

The initiates’ state as victims positions them in relation to other participants as in need of rescue. The texts are therefore filled with references to various examples of the initiates being rescued by other participants. Most frequently, the saviours of the initiates are the police force.

*“Nineteen boys were rescued from an Eastern Cape initiation school on Tuesday, said police.” (3:1)*

*“Five boys were rescued from an illegal initiation school in Mdantsane near East London on Tuesday, the Eastern Cape health department said.” (19:1)*

The constructed identity of initiates as victims in need of rescue is a complex identity that contains paradoxes that point toward a conflict of epistemology. Those initiates who do not wish to leave the initiation site from which they were being “rescued” are constructed as uncooperative.

*“The initiation school principal said that not all initiates wanted to leave. According to some of them, they were there voluntarily and with their family's knowledge.” (16:9)*

*“Kupelo [spokesperson for Department of Health] said some boys were refusing to cooperate, claiming they had circumcised themselves, or that they did not know who circumcised them.” (42:5)*

The quotes above as well as those describing the initiate who seeks to prosecute his family for forcing him to undergo initiation are the only examples in the corpus demonstrating a sense of agency from the initiates. The resistance to being rescued implies that the decision to save the initiates happened from outside of the frame of reference of the initiates and without their permission. The rhetorical positioning of this act is as a refusal to cooperate with the authorities instead of as their right to undergo a cultural practice within their belief system. By the use of markers such as "according to" and "claiming" it is also implied that the initiates may be misguided or lying. The act of resistance is enacted by reconstructing the illegal initiation as self-circumcision or as circumcision by an unknown individual.

The construction of the initiate as a victim of the initiation system is further undermined by the construct of the runaway initiate. These initiates are those individuals who enter into the process without the consent of their parents.

*"Mokoale said the parents had no idea that their son was at the initiation school, as he was last seen on 17 June. They thought he was visiting his grandmother." (48:5)*

The presence of the runaway within the constructed role of initiates in the rite implies a sense of agency within the initiates which is not emphasised or highlighted in the news reports. The denial of agency of the initiates makes it possible to position the initiate as the martyr of the male circumcision as a rite of initiation.

*"Mokoale said the parents had no idea that their son was at the initiation school, as he was last seen on 17 June. They thought he was visiting his grandmother." (48:5)*

*"The teenager from Port St Johns' KwaQubuswayo village died on his way to hospital after his father arranged for him to get treatment. 'His is a sad case because he went for initiation without his parents' permission and because his father was not circumcised, he was not allowed into the initiation school'" (27:8)*

The quotes above are an illustration of initiates who took the decision to undergo the initiation rite without the consent of their parents. The decision to undergo the rite presents a sense of agency that falls outside of the construction of initiates who are passive victims of the cultural system or victims saved by the government system.



### 6.6.3. The parents of the initiates

The parents of the initiates are positioned as silent participants in the process. The parents are only quoted indirectly in the news reports; in contrast with a number of articles where government spokespersons are actively quoted. Parents are positioned as helpless outsiders waiting for the government to intervene to save their children from the initiation school system.

The parents are also positioned as victims of blackmail by the initiation practitioners with reference to incidents where they had to pay in cash or livestock to secure the release of their children.

*“Apparently, the parents were asked for money for the children to graduate or payment of a cow if the child was to be released before completing the initiation.” (16:7)*

The quote above comes from an article describing the rescue of 100 initiates from a school where the police found initiates who were at the school without permission from their parents. An alternative interpretation of the quote above could be that the payment of a cow was a penalty for interrupting the initiation process, which is a violation of the rules of the underlying cultural symbolic network.

Parents are also positioned as non-compliant with government procedures positioned to keep the initiates safe. This rhetorical position places parents as potential criminals because contravention of the Circumcision Act holds legal sanctions which include denial of the right to parenting, fines and jail terms.

*“...the act laid down that a parent or guardian had to take full responsibility for an initiate, and had to co-operate fully with authorities in the interest of the initiate's health.” (1:17)*

*“The deaths are totally unnecessary. Parents need to talk to their children more about the serious risks they subject themselves to when they go to these illegal initiation schools, in the name of a long honoured cultural practice,” said Shiceka.[quoted in an article discussing regulation]’ (55:8)*

The quotes above position the parents between two systems, the cultural symbolic network they live within and the legislative system governing South Africans within the modern democratic system. What is interesting to note about the above quotes is the locus of power and responsibility. The locus of power or authority to punish and control transgressive behaviour is constructed as part of the role of the government. The locus of responsibility, however, lies with the role of the parents who are positioned within the space as potential criminals in relation to the law should they exercise their culturally prescribed duties in relation to the rite.

*“Because of the belief that children must be left at these initiation schools, parents do not report them missing to the police in fear of going against tradition.” (12:13)*

An example of the tension faced by parents is that, legally, they are required to remove their children from illegal initiation schools while, culturally, they are required to respect the process and not intervene once it has begun. Within both systems the parents are constructed as silent participants who are required to comply with the rules set out for them and not as active cultural agents.

#### 6.6.4. The initiation practitioners

The initiation practitioners are constructed as a silent object within the initiation system. The practitioners are primarily positioned as the criminal other within the system. The initiation practitioners are also constructed to embody all of the issues experienced in the male circumcision rite.

The practitioners are constructed as criminals who fail to comply with the regulatory practices put in place by the government to ensure the safety of the rite for the initiate. Traditional healers are present in the text as the focus of police investigation, the subject of arrest, or as a suspected incompetent who could not adhere to the requirements of the government.

*“A traditional healer and a worker at the school were arrested.” (23:6)*

*“The man running the school, who has had previous brushes with the law over illegal circumcisions, was arrested on Thursday.” (34:2)*

*“The 31-year-old traditional surgeon was on the run. Fatyela said police were looking for him to face a charge of contravening the Traditional Circumcision Act.” (61:2)*

Within the media reports, the status of traditional surgeon is not a fixed status but is rescinded as soon as a death of an initiate is reported or alleged. This lexical distancing serves to position agency for the death of the initiate outside of the cultural symbolic network of meaning that underpins the rite and houses it within a criminal outsider who exploits the system for their own benefit.

*“Chancers and those who commit atrocities at initiation schools undermine our tradition and culture and should be brought to book.” (2:15)*

*“Hooligans... tsotsis take advantage and prey on this custom.” (12:15)*

The construction of the initiation practitioners as criminals and cultural predators plays an important role in legitimating government intervention in the rite.

#### **6.6.5. The government**

The government refers to the various departments of government and the role they play within the rite. The government is positioned within the text as the rational centre of power for regulating the initiation rite. The role of the government as the custodian of the rite is vested in the legislation controlling the way in which the rite may be practiced; in the powers invested in the Department of Health to monitor the rite through granting or denying permits to practice; the police who have the power to arrest and raid initiation schools identified as illegal or transgressive and through the power to legitimate Contralesa through legislation.

*“The teacher could not produce legal documentation for the school, although he confirmed that he had authorisation from Lekwa Teemane local municipality to operate the school.” (54:7)*

*“I told my family that I did not want to undergo initiation, but my mother thought it was a good idea,” he explained, insisting that procedure was not followed and he had not even*

*registered with the Department of Health, nor had he undergone any required physical examination. (58:8)*

The quotes above describe how the process of granting permits places the ultimate authority for deciding whether an initiation practitioner is legitimate with the local municipality or the Department of Health. This moves the locus of authority outside of the cultural symbolic network and into the hands of individuals who may not subscribe to the beliefs and epistemology of the cultural symbolic network.

For the purposes of this analysis, traditional leaders are positioned within the government participant group and not as part of the participant groups who arise from the cultural symbolic network. This is done on the assumption that the locus of authority and power of Contralesa is derived from their legitimation by the government. In the text this derivation is seen in textual markers that denote a past authority as is seen in the quote below.

*“Traditional leaders were the custodians of the practice of initiation and had to be directly involved in the starting up of initiation schools.”(21:14)*

It is also seen in the descriptions of the responsibilities of the traditional leaders which are not linked to descriptions of the authority of these leaders to enforce transgressions of the rite. The news reports have numerous references to the fines, jail sentences and other sanctions available to the government to punish transgressions of the various forms of legislation in place to control the rite.

*“We have opened murder cases. No arrests had been made and police were still collecting statements. The information would then be presented to the national director of public prosecutions for a decision on how to proceed” (22:3)*

*“...the department was also seeking meetings with the police, justice department and the National Prosecuting Authority to discuss the prosecution of those contravening the Traditional Circumcision Act, which regulates the custom in the province” (27:14)*

*“It is a responsibility of the traditional leaders to work very hard to ensure that this is done without any incident. People should not do short cuts; nor should they drink first before they go there, so that they cause accidents” (41:11)*

Government legitimation of traditional leaders’ position of power is also presented in implicit appeals to the government by Contralesa for legislation and, by extension, prosecution against transgressions within the rite by organs of government.

*“Traditional leaders in the province have been pressing this year for more control over the traditional circumcision ceremony, and have called for changes to the province's circumcision legislation.” (60:8)*

The various participant roles described above emerged as constructions in the news reports. The construction of the participants’ roles and characteristic markers were all done from within the straight news genre of journalism which implies that these participants are assumed to be factual, credible and, consequently, the real role players in the initiation system.

## **6.7. The macro-semantics of the text**

The macro-semantics of the text look at how the communicative act is formed around topics and how these topics, collectively, serve to create a particular discursive position within a particular

space and time (Wooffitt, 2005). The macro-semantics can be seen as themes that emerge across texts and, in the case of this study, across time because the texts in the sample were drawn across a number of years.

### **6.7.1. Initiation as crisis, disease and genocide**

The rhetorical positioning of the male circumcision initiation rite as a crisis permeates a number of the reports that comprise this data corpus. The construction of this crisis is a crucial departure point for arguments in favour of greater government regulation of the rite. The construction of initiation as a crisis is both a rhetorical technique aimed at eliciting urgency toward a predetermined goal.

One of the means through which the initiation crisis is constructed is through the use of generalisation strategies that imply all initiation schools are sites of deaths while reporting on an incident. In the section on generalisation strategies a quotation was presented that linked the initiation practice to genocide.

*“As we speak, our children are being killed by old people during the circumcision rituals” (41:4)*

*“There will come a time when that line on the sand will be needed. Are we protecting our cultural values or covering up gruesome murders.” (19:5)*

The positioning of illegal initiation schools as the central site for all initiation issues (discussed in detail below) is done in conjunction with metaphors of spreading fungus or, drawing from

epidemiological lexicons, as a disease vector. This construction of initiation as a fungus or disease is done through the use of terms such as “curb the spread” (64:1) and “mushrooming numbers” (64:2) to denote an increase in numbers of illegal initiation schools.

*“The mushrooming of initiation schools is seen every single day in Eastern Cape” (12:6)*

The metaphor is further expanded by referencing the presence of illegal initiation schools as resistant to eradication, a term typically associated with disease or pest control.

*“Three youths have died so far this winter circumcision season in the province, despite the efforts of health authorities to eradicate illegal schools.” (34:13)*

Initiation takes place annually which has been reframed into the description of initiation as a crisis that is resistant to eradication by framing it as a cyclical crisis. The metaphors used to construct this topic lend a sense of continuity to the concept of initiation as a crisis and allow for the construction of the perception of initiation as a large scale, long term problem.

### **6.7.2. Commodification of initiation**

The commodification of initiation schools refers to the construction of initiation schools as businesses oriented toward profit. This construction is in conflict with the position of initiation schools as a site of education aimed at preserving and transferring the culture to newly shaped agents within the system.

In the text the commodification of the rite is present in the use of language drawn from the business genre such as referring to the heads of the initiation schools as owners. In a speech



positioning initiation deaths as murder, Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi presented the following description of the commodification of initiation:

*“The deaths of dozens of boys at initiation schools in Mpumalanga and Limpopo was akin to tenderpreneurship gone wrong... we are mostly dealing with commercial interests here..., with individuals who have decided to hijack certain African cultures to amass wealth, make huge amounts of money in as short a time as possible, under the cloak of culture and tradition... He labelled the practice "culture-trepreneurship"” (59:2)*

Linking the practice to the concept of tenderpreneurship, which denotes the abuse of power to influence and secure lucrative contracts (Walt & Potgieter, 2011), implies an abuse of power within the cultural symbolic network of meaning that exploits the outcomes of the initiation rite for personal gain. The abuse originates from within the network, which implies that it is legitimate power that is subverted to the benefit of a few and that cannot be challenged openly within the system.

### **6.7.3. Illegal initiation schools**

Illegal initiation schools are constructed throughout the text as sites of death and injury as well as rogue cultural agents that undermine the value of an important rite. Illegal initiation schools are defined by whether they are linked to and approved by the Department of Health and their legitimacy does not depend on a history within the rite but on adherence to a set of procedures outlined by the department.

*“Deputy police minister Makhotso Sotyú said on Tuesday that illegal initiation schools were a big problem.” (49:6)*

*‘Traditional leaders should work with the government and treat “rogue” initiation schools as criminal activities, and deal with them accordingly.’ (41:3)*

The legitimization of the initiation schools through association with the Department of Health as an absolute standard is a problematic practice as it makes the assumption that initiations undertaken at a sanctioned school are intrinsically safer. This assumption may ignore the reality of operating within a centralised, bureaucratic system where the presence of a permit legitimates or de-legitimizes an entire practice.

*“Illegal circumcision carried three distinct risks, Kupelo said. Boys risked death from a variety of medical complications, amputation of genitals due to infection or gangrene and HIV infection due to unsanitary circumcision methods.” (47:5)*

*“Illegal initiation schools have turned the circumcision culture into “something criminal” (12:4)*

*“Gopane said the problems emanating from initiation schools were botched circumcisions, penis amputations, the deaths of young boys and illegal schools” (21:6)*

The risks mentioned in the quote above apply to all initiation rites that utilise male circumcision as an initiation right. However, the quote above explicitly positions these risks with illegal initiation schools. Illegal initiation schools are firmly positioned in the centre of the decline in value of initiation schools as a site of a sacred cultural practice.

*“[the government spokesperson] said these illegal schools were diminishing the appreciation of the cultural value of male initiation....There is a negative perception of the practice....Initiation has not had a pleasant history. Apartheid forced it to exist in secrecy...Incidents were also badly reported in the media which added to the negativity.”*  
(21:19)

*“The deaths are totally unnecessary. Parents need to talk to their children more about the serious risks they subject themselves to when they go to these illegal initiation schools, in the name of a long honoured cultural practice.”* (55:8)

This has been linked to the commodification of the rite as described above and is further illustrated in the quote below which positions the corruption of the rite in time:

*“However, over the years some cultures had been corrupted - giving rise to commercial interests.”* (59:8)

The two previous quotes provide a context in which illegal schools operate that take cognisance of the effects of apartheid and commodification on the rite, but the initiation schools are repeatedly positioned as the central cause of death among initiates.

## **6.8. The superstructures of the text**

The superstructures of the text specifically focus on the overarching text schemata which act as the cognitive structures that guide the reader toward a specific ideological orientation (Wooffitt, 2005). As described in Chapter 5, the superstructures infer the global coherence behind the texts

and the communicative acts embedded within them (Van Dijk, 2012). The global coherence behind the texts are often ideologically laden assumptions that aim to validate the ideology of the political, socio-economic and cultural elites (Van Dijk, 1986).

### **6.8.1. Initiation as Death**

One of the overarching cognitive schemata in this data corpus is the concept of initiation as death. Within this concept, the entire rite is associated with death and not just the circumcision of the initiates. This is done through conflation of the various aspects of the rite by simply ignoring the rite as a series of activities and reducing it to the act of circumcision. The only acknowledgement of the rite as existing outside of the act of circumcision is linked to images of dehydration, infection and decay as initiates await rescue post-circumcision.

The majority of the headlines referencing initiation report on the number of deaths experienced in various initiation sites, which creates a clear association between the rite and death from the outset. The specific rhetorical technique used to cement this link is the positioning of the deaths as a toll imposed on the rite of male circumcision as an initiation.

*“Circumcision toll tops 40” (13:1)*

*“Four held for initiation deaths” (6:6)*

*“8 die after attending initiation schools” (15:1)*

*“Initiate dies trying to escape school” (23:1)*

*“21 die at initiation schools” (26:1)*

In addition to the headlines, most of the articles draw attention to the cost of the initiation rite in initiates' lives. These descriptions typically describe where the initiates were found, the government officials who reported the deaths and the number of dead.

*“A 17-year-old boy died on Friday on arrival at a local hospital, while three other boys, between the ages of 18 and 19, were found dead at the initiation school on Saturday”*  
(6:1)

*“...the total number of deaths so far, five victims were from the Libode-Nggeleni area, four from Mthatha, three from Cathcart, three at Lusikisiki, two from Butterworth, and one each from Sterkspruit, Gompo, Whittlesea and Ndakana.”* (26:4)

The prominent position of death within the construction of the initiation rite guides the reader toward the ideological stance of the rite as extremely dangerous and shapes the subsequent information within this context. The reader is then led through the rationale of initiation rites as a dangerous activity that requires close regulation and control to preserve human lives. The implicit contrast between the constitutional right to freedom of religion and the right to life are then placed at the centre of the debate on whether the rite should be allowed to continue at all or whether it is justified to violate cultural sanctity in the interests of preserving life.

The repeated generalisation of the rite as a site of death suppresses the various other discourses that interact at the site of the ritual. For instance, the negative influence of the turn toward modernity is rarely referred to outside of direct quotes from individuals who live within the cultural symbolic network. In particular, the commodification of the rite is only addressed through the direct speech acts of prominent individuals such as Dr Motsoaledi who labels the

corruption of the rite as “culturepreneurship”. The exploitation of the rite for personal enrichment is not explicitly interrogated within the various articles. The distinct absence of the voice of the initiation practitioners on the commodification of the rite is notable as it closes off the possibility of an alternative narrative to the construction of the initiation practitioners as corrupt, greedy and criminal. The texts repeatedly take the implicit stance that the initiation practitioners are criminally liable for the injuries and deaths of the initiates by reporting on their involvement in the same syntax, genre and jargon used for criminal suspects.

*“The 31-year-old traditional surgeon was on the run. Fatyela said police were looking for him to face a charge of contravening the Traditional Circumcision Act.” (61:2)*

The quote above describes the initiation practitioner as a fleeing criminal by positioning the subject in contravention of legislation which legitimates his detention and prosecution. This construction can be contrasted with the implicit acceptance of the place of death as a natural part of the rite, but metaphorically and as a physical reality of the passage into manhood (Mhlahlo, 2009). The integration of death as a possibility into the cultural symbolic network of meaning underpinning the rite creates the social space for the initiate, initiation practitioner and parents that is not transgressive of the social norms. In contrast, the default stance that the death of an initiate is a transgression of the social norms requires that someone be made responsible for the death which creates the space for the construction of the initiate as a transgressive victim; the initiation practitioner as the transgressive malpractitioner of culture or the parents as the negligent, transgressive parents who value culture over the lives of their children.

The preservation of life within this cognitive schemata is placed as the higher ideal to which all should strive and the government is positioned as the primary means through which this goal can

be achieved. Chapter 1, Section 6.1 of the South African Constitution specifies that the eleven official languages of the country and their cultural systems and epistemologies should be elevated in status and their use advanced (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Traditional Circumcision Act 6 of 2001 states that the rite will remain in the custody of those who practice it under the guidance of their traditional leaders (Mavundla et al., 2009). Despite these overtly empowering stances toward placing the rite in the hands of the groups who practice it, the legitimacy of initiation schools is defined in relation to a set of government standards that do not necessarily consider the underlying cultural symbolic network of the rite. Schools are awarded a legitimate status through a series of bureaucratic checks and not through the system traditionally practiced by the ethnic groups who observe the rites. Initiation schools are required to allow outsider government employees into the sacred space of the rite for oversight or risk losing their legitimacy by having the permit revoked. Transgressive initiation schools are positioned in the text as the domain for the police services to monitor and punish as opposed to the traditional councils under whom they are supposed to reside.

*“The teacher could not produce legal documentation for the school, although he confirmed that he had authorisation from Lekwa Teemane local municipality to operate the school.”*  
(54:7)

The construction of practitioners as transgressive and the rite as a site of death or even as a form of genocide creates the possibility for the construction of the government as the rational custodian of the rite as the government officials are frequently the saviours of the initiates.

## 6.9. Chapter summary

In this chapter we presented the CDA of the news reports on initiation schools in the South African media. The chapter is the first of two results chapters. The discussion started by examining the context in which the data was first constructed, namely the genre of straight news in the online environment. Straight news was described as a genre of news reporting that emphasises objective reporting that focuses on evidentiary, fact based reporting. The journalist in this genre is a hidden author who ostensibly does not exist in the text and who only reports on the opinions and perceptions of the audience and sources.

The communicative acts and social meaning embedded in text were identified by examining the discourse strategies used, namely, generalisations, indirect speech and quotation patterns and over lexicalisation. The communicative acts represent the rhetorical techniques used by the authors of the texts to privilege certain discourses over others. These techniques can act as linguistic markers for areas where ideological power struggles are taking place within the text.

Participant position and roles were identified by examining the construction of the role of the media, the initiates, the parents of the initiates, the initiation practitioners and the government. Within the news reports, the media are positioned as the implicit author who is objective, factual and representing the public interest by reporting on important news events. This author position provides the media with the authority to decide what is important, relevant and available for public consumption. The initiates are positioned as victims who are mutilated, dying, dead or in need of rescue. The role of the initiate is as the catalyst for the debate on custodianship of the rite. The parents of the initiates are constructed as silent participants in the rite who are



frequently positioned as victims of their own culture who are often in conflict with the laws set to protect their children. The initiation practitioners are presented as criminals who corrupt culture for their own enrichment. Reports on initiation practitioners construct these individuals as fleeing the law or standing as accused in courts, which further entrenches the perception of initiation practitioners as criminal. The government is constructed as the natural authority to regulate and provide oversight on the rite. Reports on government involvement position the government agents as saviours of initiates from certain death.

We then examined the macro-semantics of the text by exploring the topics created in the text. The topics identified in the data corpus were: Initiation as crisis, disease and genocide; Commodification of initiation; and Illegal initiation schools. The initiation rite as a crisis is constructed as an annual crisis where multiple deaths of initiates are reported from across the country. The rhetorical techniques generalise the idea of initiation as a battle to be won, disease to be eradicated, an act of genocide or as an unresolved national crisis. The commodification of the rite explored issues around the financial gains associated with the rite for the practitioners. The commodification topic also explored the role money plays in allowing unprepared initiates from entering into the process, be it willingly or unwillingly. Illegal initiation schools as a topic explored the conditions of legality for an initiation school. The legality of an initiation school is directly linked to the power struggle over the custodianship of the rite between the government and traditional leaders. Illegal initiation schools are further constructed as the sites of death and the implication frequently linked to this topic is that government sanctioned initiation sites are safer and less likely to kill initiates.

Finally the superstructures of the text were examined by discussing how initiation as death defined the cognitive structure of all the news articles examined within the data corpus of this

study. The entire rite is associated with death and not just the circumcision of the initiates. This is done through conflation of the various aspects of the rite by simply ignoring the rite as a series of activities and reducing it to the act of circumcision. The only acknowledgement of the rite as existing outside of the act of circumcision is linked to images of dehydration, infection and decay as initiates await rescue post-circumcision.

Chapter 7 Critical discourse analysis of  
discussion forums on online news reports  
on initiation schools

Bestpfe.com



Xola, Sikhulule, Luyanda, Manelisi and Sipelele, Classroom (Araminta de Clermont)

## **7. Chapter 7**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the results of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of discussion forums on online news reports on initiation schools in South Africa. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this split is for ease of presentation of the results and to facilitate global analysis of the texts.

### **7.2. Critical Discourse Analysis of the online message boards**

This section of the chapter presents the discursive strategies utilised by participants in the discussion forums of the News24 news reports. The discussion forums are separated from the news reports in the presentation of the results for two reasons. First, for ease of reading and understanding, it is simpler to split the context along the lines constructed within the journalistic genre between professionally produced texts and user generated content. Secondly, by separating the discussion forums from the individual news reports it is possible to examine discursive strategies that exist across various forums and among the different participants in these forums.

### **7.2.1. Examining the context**

The discussion forums are positioned at the bottom of the webpage after the news article and the related links. The comments section of the page starts with an open box that allows the reader to comment on the story before displaying the first comment and subsequent comments in chronological order of posting. Each post is date and time stamped. The posts have the user name of the commenter and an avatar. For some posters the user name is one created and linked to the News24 user database, which provides information about the number of news reports viewed and commented on. For others it links to their Facebook profile, and clicking on it redirects the reader to Facebook where further information such as full name, location, place of work, relationship status, friends, relatives and photographs can be available.

### **7.2.2. The production process**

The comments in the forum are also headed by two prominent buttons labelled 'comments policy' and 'report comment'. The comments policy redirects the reader to the News24 comments policy page which outlines, in detail, the rules that govern the comments made on the News24.com website. When linking to this page, the purpose of the comments policy is placed at the top of the page.

The purpose of the comments system is said to be to allow users to assist News24 in moderating comments (News24, 2010). The moderation is intended to weed out trolls and improve the quality of comments made on the system (News24, 2010). Trolling is internet slang for user

behaviour that is intended to anger and frustrate other users on the forum for amusement. Figure 8 depicts the icon used in internet forums to depict an internet troll (Knowyourmeme.com, 2014).



**Figure 8 Internet "troll" for more [click here](#) or type this address into your browser**

<http://tinyurl.com/8aa5uv2>

The moderation process, backed up by mutual surveillance of forum users of each other, has the authority to delete comments without entering into correspondence with the commenter being censored. The moderators may delete comments based on the following basic criteria:

- The relevance of the comment to the topic.
- The extent to which other users understand what has been said.
- The extent of swear words, the degree of insulting language and severity of the tone of the comment towards either a group of people or an individual.
- News24 users who abuse the comments facility by posting under existing aliases or who post simply to incite arguments on the board.
- Spam posts such as advertisements as comments are disabled on the site.
- Duplication of comments.

- Most importantly, racist, sexist, offensive and abusive comments are not tolerated.  
(News24, 2010)

The comments policy is ostensibly aimed at facilitating rational discussion on the forums and to exclude those users who seek to engage destructively. One of the first requirements to maintain the quality of the discourse is that users have to log in using their Facebook or News24 profile to facilitate tracking of user activity on the site and enforcement of policy when contravened (News24, 2010).

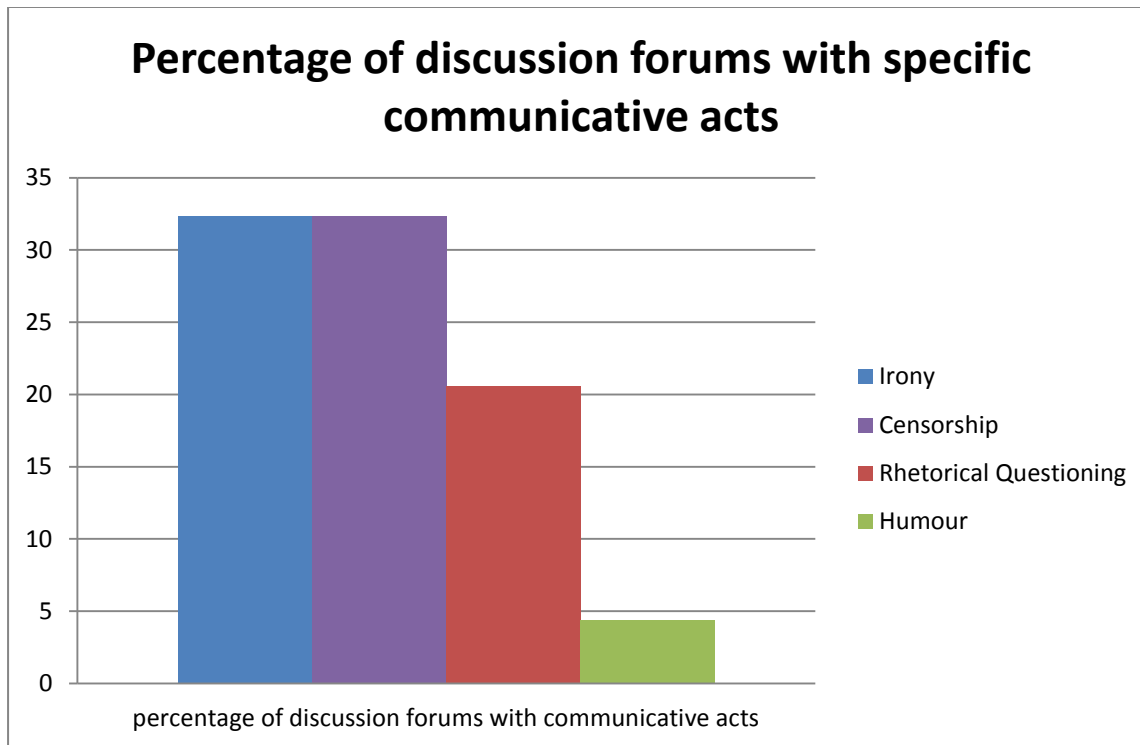
The protection of the forums as a public sphere is linked to the ideal of the internet as a space to transcend physical, social and geographic constraints with the aim of facilitating broad interaction in public discourse (Papacharissi, 2002). The barriers to entry for this genre include the need to log in using a Facebook or News24 profile. Users may not want to link their comments on a news site to a personal online space which is connected to information that can identify the user in real life and thus allow them to be “monitored” by power differentials that the internet as a public sphere is idealised as negating (Goldberg, 2010, p. 752; Papacharissi, 2002).

Moderation of User Generated Content (UGC) is a top-down process which occurs in line with the forum rules of the news website and, like the process described by News24, is a one-sided exercise of power of the news provider over their reader (Harrison, 2010). UGC is positioned as biased, amateur news reporting that cannot be granted the same status and privilege as professionally produced content that is unbiased and accurate (Harrison, 2010). The moderation of news comments on the News24 site is, therefore, in line with the power differentials exercised between the news producers and the audience in the broader context. One of the results of this in this particular study is that some comments are simply removed and the chain of the thread of conversation is disjointed in places.



### **7.2.3. The communicative acts and social meaning embedded in text**

The purpose of this sub-section is to describe the speech acts performed in the forums and the rhetorical techniques that are associated with them. The description here will strive to focus only on the technique and not the content of these speech acts. The quotations provided in this section are a selected sample for explanatory purposes and are not the comprehensive representation of the speech acts contained throughout the data corpus. The speech acts used provide language indicators such as word groups, grammatical features, rhetorical figures of speech and modalities (Gee, 2004). The speech acts in the discussion forums follow a turn based, hierarchical structure that progress in chronological order. The communicative acts described in this sub-section refer to the rhetorical techniques used by commenters in the discussion forums. Figure 9 below graphically depicts the percentage of discussion forum with particular communicative acts present.



**Figure 9 Communicative acts in discussion forums**

The most common speech acts performed within the forums were irony, censorship, rhetorical questioning and humour. Each of these common speech acts are discussed in detail in the section that follows.

### **7.2.3.1. Irony**

Irony is defined here as an evaluative utterance the valence of "which is implicitly reversed between the literal and intended evaluation" (Burgers, 2010, p. 19). In other words, irony is to make a statement that literally evaluates something in a certain way (e.g. positively), while implicitly evaluating it in the opposite way (e.g. negatively). The use of irony in the discussion

forums served to draw attention to the declarative statement made by the commenter (Burgers, 2010). Reversing the valence of the intended and stated meanings creates a sense of dissonance in the reader when the comment is read in the context of preceding and subsequent messages as well as the context of the article.

The reversal of valence was used when positioning value judgement of Africa as primitive and incapable of evolving into behaviours and traditions worthy of praise in a civilised culture.

*“Aaaah good old Africa!” (5:8)*

*“Iron Age mentality...go Africa!” (33:9)*

The use of ironic advice to politicians who are attempting to explain the nature and causes of initiation deaths served to draw attention to the rhetorical positioning of apartheid as the cause of the issues faced when practicing the rite, while simultaneously allowing the commenter to demonstrate their disbelief of the statement and derision for the use of the position.

*“Blame it on APARTHEID” (13:9)*

Ironic praise can also be used to invert the intended message of rewarding a desirable action, behaviour, expressed attitude or value (Burgers, 2010). The use of ironic praise in these messages served the dual purpose of placing the commenter in a superior position from which they could render judgement on the comments made by others, while simultaneously drawing attention to the implied declaration that circumcision is simply a meaningless act of asserting manhood in an immature, naïve, ignorant or stupid manner.

*“You see, you didn't even have to cut a piece off your little one to prove you have some masendas (balls), wink-wink.” (9:31)*

Irony was also used to implicitly position initiates, who are viewed as ignorant savages practising a primitive rite, as future leaders of South Africa and therefore implying that the future leaders of South Africa will be ignorant savages who are not intelligent enough to know not to practice rites that have no space in the modern, civilised republic.

*“Well look at the bright side.. at least they will qualify to become parliamentarians in a few years time.” (4:2)*

The use of irony is also to invert the expression of an idealised state where the examination of the initiation rite by interested outsiders becomes a documentation of the primitive and animalistic nature of the rite. The commenter from the quote below positions the rite as an object of interest for the National Geographic channel which is associated with the examination of strange or primitive cultures as well as the study of animal behaviour.

*“Should make for interesting viewing on a Nat Geo documentary?” (13:67)*

#### **7.2.3.2. Censorship**

The censorship of individuals in the forum drew from the techniques described above but also used a number of rhetorical techniques that did not focus on the content of the message of other users but rather focussed on discrediting the commenter. The ad hominem argument is the most frequently used counter argument in the forums and was premised on a number of rhetorical positions, some of which are discussed here.

One of the statuses used to discredit any criticism against the initiation practice is manhood, or whether the commenter had attended initiation themselves.

*“Its sad when we lose a life but since you never went to the mountain plz us a favour and shut ur f\*\*\*in mouth.” (29:16)*

While infrequent in use across the forums, when this counter argument arises it redirects the focus onto manhood status from the subject of the news reports. The corollary to this argument is discrediting the commenter because they had been through the initiation rite and were therefore constructed as backward, primitive and lucky to have survived.

Forum popularity is another form of censorship in the forums where the number of approving readers (thumbs up) or disapproving readers (thumbs down) is an indication of the relevance of a comment to the audience.

*“yes [name redacted], she is ignorant, that's why she didn't get one thumbs down....Maybe you are the ignorant one?Is cutting your foreskin off really the only way to become a man?” (19:15)*

### **7.2.3.3. Rhetorical questioning**

The act of asking rhetorical questions serves to state a controversial opinion or make a statement of fact while seemingly inviting commentary and discussion from other forum users. These statements are often linked, in the forums, with explicit racist statements that position black people as backward, primitive and as too stupid to accept the opportunities offered by the civilised West.

*“i thought that blacks wanted western democracy and to live in a civilised society? wasn't this what they fought for? why then, do they continue to insist on their horrid backward, filthy customs and show the world that they really are quite simple creatures?” (20:42)*

The rhetorical question is also linked to the construction of the rhetorical position of bestialising black males as rapists who attack farmers and rape virgins in the belief that it will cure their HIV.

*“do they sill teach that raping a white virgin will take you HIV away?” (7:19)*

Rhetorical questioning was also used to refute arguments against the primitive nature of African culture. The commenter can indicate that they challenge the notion of Western superiority without entering into the merits of the cultures in a polemic debate.

*“Western culture so superior is it not!!!!” (7:18)*

The use of rhetorical questions, while frequent, was not pervasive in the text corpus. The use of this technique was often employed by commenters who posted once in a forum and did not return to engage with any users who would respond to the statements (or questions) made by these commenters.

#### **7.2.3.4. Humour**

Humour served as the textual marker for dismantling and destructive strategies which serve to de-mythologise or demolish constructed identities such as author positions (De Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999). It also served as the marker for avoidance strategies where problematic issues are

carefully avoided by reconstructing or reversing polemical elements of the discourse to diminish the intertextual relation to other elements (De Cillia et al., 1999).

Examples of humour from the text is the excerpt below which draws attention away from the killing of an initiation practitioner at an initiation site and refocuses it onto the severed tips of the penises of the initiates which, in this text, are objects of wordplay and amusement.

*“Sounds as if the men weren't happy about the tips they got?” (11:1)*

*“Yeahs. De trick is to nick de prick den fix de prick with de prick lick. Mo peepool dey make de prick sick dan make de prick thick. Me tink dey dick pricks, dose dat pick de prick trick. Dey mas haf dere wick kicked.”(33:1)*

In reference to a story where an initiate's feet were amputated due to abuse by the initiation practitioner, a similar avoidance strategy is used to draw attention away from the assault and to return the forum's collective gaze to the penis of the initiate by implying the incompetent surgeon incised the wrong limb.

*“If he was aiming for his....and amputated part of his foot....that would mean....OMG O\_o” (27:2)*

The use of humour, as stated above, was also employed to demolish authoritative discursive positions taken by insider informants (described below) with the intent of minimising the effect of their contribution to the forum.

*“I played in the bush when i was 14 years old, I am more of a man than you” (14:1)*

Use of derisive humour was also employed by users who were defending the role of initiation and the right to practice the custom. The quote below makes reference to the Christian religion to

point out the hypocrisy of a fellow commenter who stated that the belief in ancestors is a joke in their view.

*“But it is fine to teach your kids to drink wine pretending it is the blood of a bronze age super hero. I think the same comic book says something specks and wooden beams in peoples eyes.” (20:88)*

### **7.3. Examining participant positions and roles**

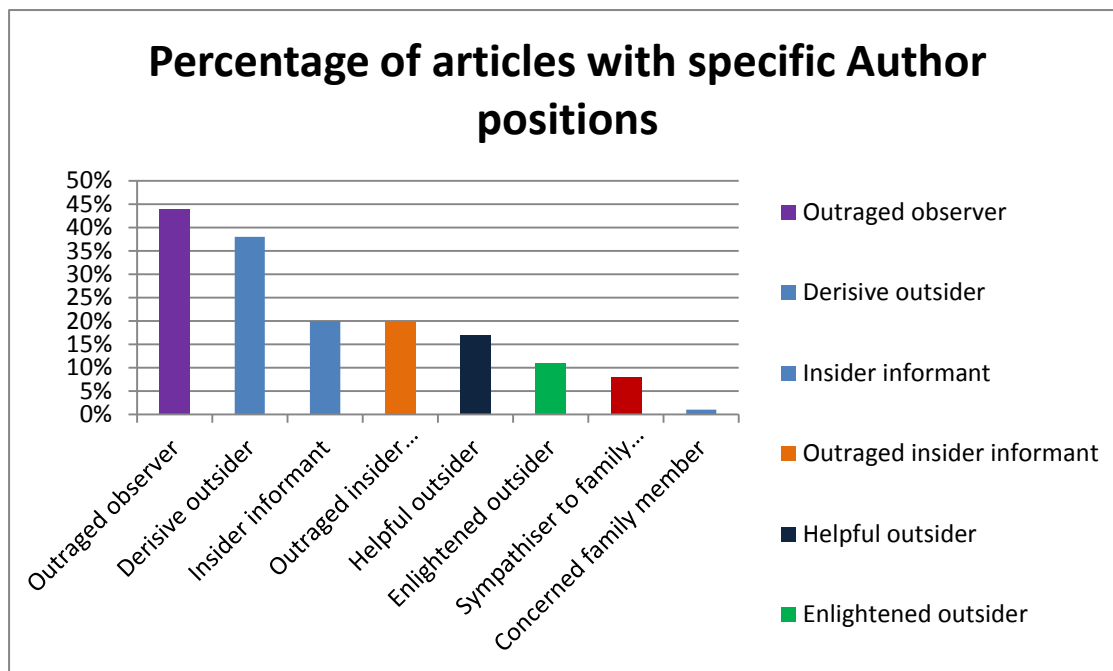
Participant positions in this section of the chapter are split between the authors in the forums, that is the commenters, and the participants in the initiation process as identified and positioned by these authors. The participant positions are the rhetorical positions constructed through the interaction between the commenters and the news article, the commenter and other forum users and the broader political and social context.

#### **7.3.1. Author position**

The author position is the constructed position of the author of the comment made in the forum. The author position was identified by their implicit (sometimes explicit) relationship to the underlying cultural symbolic network that underpins the male circumcision initiation rite. The author position serves to contextualise the content of the comment in relation to the rhetorical position of the author. The author positions identified in this study are the concerned family



member, the derisive outsider, the enlightened outsider, the helpful outsider, the insider informant, the outraged insider informant and the sympathiser to family members of initiates. A brief distribution of the author positions throughout the sample of news reports is shown in Figure 10. The graph below is simply an indication of the pervasiveness of each author position.



**Figure 10 Percentage of news reports with specific author positions**

These author positions are presented in order of magnitude for ease of reference and are not presented in relation to each other. The position of the author is relative to the participant constructed in the content of the comment made and, sometimes, in relation to other authors in the forum. The relation between author positions only occurs when authors comment on each other's posts which did not frequently occur and it thus is difficult to ascertain how these author positions exist in relation to each other.

## *Outraged Outsider*

The outraged outsider was one of the most prominent positions taken in the forums and was characterised by an explicit call for justice on behalf of the dead and mutilated initiates. Justice within this author position resides within the criminal justice system and the punishment for the deaths and injuries of initiates should be prison sentences and fines. Expressions of outrage, typically marked with multiple question or exclamation marks, are common within this author position. Irony is a rhetorical technique applied often from within this position to illustrate the disapproval of the state of affairs by reversing the valence of statements of praise and satisfaction.

*"Charge anyone whose initiation school loses an initiate with schedule 6 murder charge,,ul see all this nonsenses disappearing forever ." (1:59)*

*"I am sure the families will be comforted by your apology. NOT!!!!" (3:13)*

*"Never has the abbreviation WTF had more meaning than now. WTF???" (5:1)*

Linked to this author position is the call for more stringent regulation of the practice that does not consider the underlying cultural symbolic network of meaning. Like the derisive outsider, this author position takes the view that the salvation of the initiates lies in Western culture, specifically modern medicine. Where it differs is that it apparently intends to advocate for safer initiation conditions rather than to deride and demean black cultures or deliver commentaries on the intelligence of black people who practise the rite. Within this author position, the act of circumcision becomes the central focus, placing the initiate's penis at the centre of the debate.

*"The only part that many of us non-participants are concerned about is the cutting of the foreskin because it leads to the death of some initiates. A number of Xhosas told me that it is part of this culture that some people need to die during a season, WTF?? hw about your relative or your son dies then?" (20:4)*

This author position also utilises the rhetorical question technique to demonstrate outrage by equating initiation deaths with the killing of innocent civilians in protests such as the Marikana mines incident.

*"How is the 27 boys dead any different from Marikana ??????" (19:39)*

The onus for protecting the initiates from this author position rests squarely with the government who are expected to regulate the practice to ensure no more deaths without violating the underlying cultural symbolic network. However, the sanctity of the tradition is seen as secondary to the lives of the initiates.

*"What is the lazy inept govt going to DO about it? Otherwise next year it will happen again, and the next year after that again. Govt. can't grasp the concept of prevention is better than to be sorry afterwards - again and again. We all understand it's a tradition, no one disputes that, but it urgently needs to be better managed and supervised." (19:38)*

*"Jip, All in the name of tradition and culture. Wonder how many innocent blood will still be lost, all in the name of tradition and culture" (37:2)*

### *Derisive outsider*

The derisive outsider author takes the position that the initiation rite and those associated with it, are primitive, barbaric, greedy, corrupt, backward, ignorant and are ruled by a culture that exemplifies and nurtures these traits. This author position not only expresses an explicit attitude of superiority over those who believe in the underlying cultural network of symbolism but also uses this belief as a rhetorical device for demonstrating the inferiority of black people.

*“Any circumcision as a religious or cultural rite is offensive. Has always been, will always be. it is a primitive and useless practice which should be called by its real name: ritual genital mutilation.” (13:35)*

*“Here is a thought [name redacted]. Tradition is what uneducated/unthinking people follow regardless of cost and impact. Culture is what politicians use to manipulate worldviews. Well, probably not to useful, but there surely is a difference.” (14:5)*

*“Only an idiot think spending time in the bush and some old fart cutting your foreskin with a Minoror blade makes you a man ...Gone are the Bushman days ...we leaving in sandton and Campsbays where sushi and range rover is the order of the day ....pop a Honey goat weed Tablet if you lack or want to compensate in perfomance .....be a gentlemen "Vuyo style" ....and pls go to the clinick to remove the foreskin its quick an easy and heals fast....” (14:14)*

The authors in this position use the existence of the rite to position South Africa as a banana republic which is a derogatory noun that describes a state that is politically unstable as a result of dependence on the export of a single but limited resource (White, 1984). The quote below makes

the rhetorical link between South Africa as a banana republic and its status as third world, implying that the instability economically and politically can be linked back to the thinking that underpins the cultural symbolic network of male circumcision as initiation.

*“Then they say this is not a banana country... third world then maybe?” (13:48)*

The rhetorical techniques employed by this author position also includes contrasting the state of affairs with an imagined, civilised ideal where the inhabitants share the authors’ insight into the blatant stupidity of those who choose to practice the rite and the incompetence of those who do not take steps to stop it.

*“This is a disgrace. Any where else in the world ,this would be headline news and these schools closed down. The parents and authorities should be standing together to stop this senseless killing. FOR WHAT?.....That they might live to see manhood!!!!.A load of horseSH%T.” (13:50)*

This author position also links this idealised state of being to the idea of the global, civilised audience that is watching the initiation deaths in South Africa.

*“..... and the rest of the planet wonders when SA will promote smart instead of ignorant? ..... Maybe we'll catch up with the 21st century in about 300 years !! ..... Eish” (15:1)*

In the view of the derisive outsider, the cyclical nature of the initiation deaths further demonstrates the inability of those who believe in this system to learn from past mistakes

The derisive outsider position most frequently posted explicitly racist commentary on the intelligence of black people in relation to belief in the rite and positions the European/white

culture as the next evolutionary step for black people to take if they hope to attain civilised status.

*“Every year the same reports appear, Muti..sangomas, initiation..what a load of cr@p! Savages!” (13:42)*

*“Evolution is such a slow process.” (37:5)*

*“If our government wasn't so primitive they would put an end to this barbaric practice and offer these boys a choice of being TOUGH or being SMART” (27:11)*

The derisive outsider position was one of the most prominent positions taken in the discussion forums on news reports reporting male circumcision. The position often dominated discussions and very rarely were the statements made from this position challenged by other users. In cases where these statements were challenged, they were typically challenged using shaming techniques by those who adopt the helpful outsider position (see below) or by the use of irony by the outraged insider.

### ***Insider informant***

The insider informant author position takes an explicitly emic position in relation to the culture. This author position strives for objective discussion of the issues facing the initiation rite and describes their understanding of these issues from personal experience of the rite as well as from an understanding of the underlying cultural symbolic network. These authors engage with fellow

forum users to correct misunderstandings of the rite and to expose issues faced when practicing the rite in their environment.

These authors attribute the death rate to the age of the initiates, taking the stance that the boys are too young physically and psychologically to undergo the rigors of the initiation rite, as well as to the incompetence of the practitioners in the rite.

*“I am a Xhosa man who fully back traditional circumcision. The concern I have is the age. These boys are young. and secondly the people carrying out these practices dont know their job” (14:27)*

The insider informants also take an ethnocentric stance by attributing blame to those ethnic groups they identify as transgressive and ignorant of the correct way to practise the rite. The quote below is for illustrative purposes and does not encompass the full scope of the debate on ownership of the rite. This debate is laid out in the section discussing participant positions under the title 'true custodians of the rite'.

*“All these other tribes (Zulus, Vendas etc) should leave circumcision to Xhosas, they don't know how to do it, they beat and torture their initiates they don't know what they are doin. They are givin our custom a bad name, leave it to Xhosas please and go to hospital if you want to get circumcised.” (9:4)*

The insider informant displays contempt for those who practise the rite ignorantly and who do not seem to understand the significance of the rite as a transformative experience that requires lifelong learning to understand. The insider informant takes particular care to describe the process of undergoing the rite to outsiders with the intent of addressing their ignorance of how to

practise the rite without violating the sacred space around it by revealing intimate details of the process.

*“A lot of you posting here do it out of concern, I get that. You are ignorant though and are making false assumptions:*

*I'm a Xhosa by birth born in Mthatha and had my initiation there in 2006. President Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo among others are men through this custom.*

*Facts:*

*1) In Mthatha you need to have I.D. showing you're 18 and accompanied by elder male over 45 years who represents your family*

*2) You register eBotha Sigcau where your family rep meets the traditional surgeon and gets approval*

*3) You go to the hospital to check health against STI's. If not fit you're advised against it*

*4) In these days it's best to stay at traditional surgeons homestead with traditional nurses up until the duration of your teaching/experience is over*

*5) My family welcomed me back from this rite of passage as a son co-responsible for the development of my homestead.” (19:19)*

In the above quote one can see the key markers of the insider informant, namely, the statement of ignorance of the uninitiated, the explicit declaration of manhood by virtue of the rite, the establishment of further credibility by referencing recognised leaders who have undergone the rite and the statement of fact about the process of undergoing initiation with the aim of preserving life and the correct behaviour expected of all the role-players.



### ***Outraged insider informant***

The outraged insider informant, like the insider informant, takes an explicit stance on their status as an initiate graduate. Where the insider informant attempts to educate and engage in rational discussion, the outraged insider informant aggressively challenges explicit or implied imposition from those outside of the cultural symbolic network. This author position challenges the outsider to prove their knowledge as an insider, failing which, any commentary delivered by the outsider is dismissed as ignorance. One of the hallmarks of this position is the implication of or explicit reference to racist attitudes held by white commenters in the forum.

*“Well said they like to talk about things they know nothing about, and us people who have a culture we love are going to preserve it, who is that thing to tell me my culture is primitive?, if she is on a power trip she can go tell her garden boy to behave.” (9:10)*

*"Great point [name redacted]. White folks pretend us, if they had a choice they'd work with their own. Hence you find such views of calling our customs barbaric. Christianity/missionaries did damage on this continent calling our customs barbaric. The most arrogant ever!" (24:24)*

While the primary stance of this position is to challenge outsider, usually white, culture, it also takes the responsibility to educate fellow forum users to shift their position of ignorance. Where this differs from the helpful outsider is the explicit statement of insider status as well as the challenge to the validity of the outsiders' knowledge base and positions the outraged insider as the more knowledgeable superior.

*"Some of u dont understand, its a tradition and if Zuma were to make it illegal, ppl will start fighting trust me there would be war. Those boys go up there knowing all the risks and its not like they are forced by the government or Zuma to go there. Sometimes we should come u with ideas to solve such matters and not ALWAYS point fingers e.g there should be a law enforcing all those who initiates these young man to be fully trained by health workers to prevent such things from happening. No man should practice such thing witout a certificate indicating that he knows wat he is doing and fully trained"*  
(24:23)

*"[name redacted], with all due respect you're talking nonsense. You can't say people must forget who they are, the families and heritage they are born into because of Jesus. Jesus was a Jew who on the part of circumcision was circumcised according to Jewish tradition. Don't confuse the point. If you choose to remain with your foreskin, that is your culture and preference".* (24:21)

This position takes responsibility for enforcing the role of death, proper procedure and respect for the underlying cultural symbolic network in the face of potential resistance from fellow forum users. One forum user, upon reading about the death of a 13 year old initiate commented that:

*"The price he paid for rushing manhood. Shortcuts to manhood=Death" (34:6)*

### *Helpful outsider*

The helpful outsider author position takes the stance that tradition is valuable and that steps must be taken to preserve it without the cost in life and limb for initiates. This author position, while sympathetic to the cause of the tradition, which is to facilitate the transformation from man to boy, does not identify with the place of death and risk of mutilation within the symbolic network underpinning the rite; instead it argues for safer initiations that are carried out in hospitals and clinics before entering into the rite under the curatorship of the elders.

The position justifies the protection of the rite in the face of cultural colonisation, similar to what is experienced in American settings where a unified culture is promoted and valued over locally relevant and valued ways of knowing:

*“I agree with you. It will be sad if all our cultures disappear as with the Americans. But nothing is worth the life of possibly one of our country's future greats. Its one thing to promise change and medical support, its another thing to enforce and deliver what you promised.” (13:10)*

This author position also argues for changing the standards against which manhood are measured and call for changes in the methods used in the rite but not change in the rite's meaning and intent:

*“Culture has its place but like all else we have all evolved. It is time different methods are used to measure what makes s man a man.” (13:15)*

This position may also hold the paradoxical stance that the rite's association with death is a legitimate aspect of the rite but only construct death as a means of weeding out the weak who would have not contributed meaningfully to the culture.

*“Let the tradition be. This is exactly to show that you are not a man if you don't survive. That is the way it works. What's all the fuss (sic). It's been this way for so many years. Only the toughest survive. Stop interfering.” (19:29)*

This author position will explicitly position the difficulties experienced as the actions of transgressive individuals who do not possess the necessary competence to uphold the tradition. These authors therefore argue in favour of government regulation to ensure an authority capable of bringing the transgressive to punishment and, through this, made the rite safer for those undergoing it.

*“Well said Mr President... culture with tradition must not be condemned due to incompetent individuals and I feel government must step in and work with the communities to make the culture better and eliminate the fatalities.” (24:32)*

### ***Enlightened outsider***

The enlightened outsider takes the position that they are in a position of superior knowledge and are awaiting or facilitating the education of their fellow forum users. The enlightened outsider does not identify with the cultural symbolic network underpinning the rite of male circumcision

as initiation. This author position may incorporate aspects such as irony as is the case in the following quote:

*“Someone is finally waking up!! Eureka!!” (1:42)*

It may also be used in connection with the implication of knowledge that is assumed to be common, widely accessible and understood by those who are enlightened as is the case in the following quotes:

*“The best people to do circumcisions are the Jews, they have had thousands of years experience doing the snip, Ask Moses.” (9:14)*

*“Change with times [name redacted], We both need each other Black nd Whites. Look at countries were the are no whites and see how they butcher one another.” (9:33)*

The enlightened outsider may also take the opportunity to educate their fellow user and encourage them to address their ignorance on specific topics relating to circumcision or initiation as is the case in the following quote:

*“Go do some research my brother. Un-circumcised men are much more likely to transmit a whole host of STDs including causing cervical cancer. Why do you think many Euros have their kids circumcised soon after birth at a hospital. Some men can't keep the snake clean, that's the problem.” (13:61)*

The enlightened outsider may also hold a self-constructed position of higher morality from which they appeal to their fellow forum users in an attempt to help them attain the correct moral standpoint as is the case in the following quote:

*[name redacted], I get what you are saying - but dude, kids are DYING and mutilated...Unfortunately there are an enormous number of blacks (and it is only blacks who hangs on to this tradition with a such a passion)who will never agree with [name redacted]'s suggestion which makes perfect sense to anyone else.” (32:5)*

The enlightened outsider position was one that took an explanatory discursive stance and did not react to nor invite counter arguments made by other forum users. It appears that the intent to educate from this position is a one way process that flows from the more knowledgeable enlightened outsider to the audience.

### ***Sympathiser to family members of initiates***

This author position takes an explicitly sympathetic stance toward the families of the initiates. This author position highlights the distress of the family as evidence for the control and regulation of the practice. This author position typically occurs in relation to the concerned family member position and the implied intent is to provide a supportive message while further highlighting the plight of the families of the initiates. It appears that this author position takes on the voice of the silenced families of the initiates within the forum and acts as spokesperson.

*“I hope your family is able to report quickly that your cousins are ok. My heart breaks for these poor boys' families.” (13:12)*

This position also serves to humanise the initiates as individuals within a network of family and friends who care for and fear for their well-being and safety. In response to a report on the death of six initiates, one forum user stated:

*“I am so happy to hear that people are more aware of this situation as one of a close friend of ours son was one of the 6..... tragic.” (13:46)*

This author position also uses the platform to redirect the focus to those who are placed in positions of trust and care of the initiates and challenges the diversion of attention and accountability to the government.

*“It's a right of passage, but there's a huge problem with charlatans or kansvatters (chance takers). It's really sad because I put myself in this situation as a parent. But then you have people with sh@#t ideas of blaming government.” (31:12)*

### ***Concerned family member***

This author position stems from an explicit identification as a family member of an individual currently undergoing initiation. The author expresses concern and fear for the safety of the initiate while describing their belief in the place of the ritual in their cultural symbolic network.

*“my heart sank when i read the story my 2 cousins are at an intiation school at mhlanga i pray they are ok. i love my culture but i think its time to stop sending children to the mountain bcoz this intiation school teacher/owners don't know what they are doing they are killing them.” (13:8)*

The concerned family member expresses concern over the safety of the initiates to illicit expressions of safety, usually forthcoming from those who are positioned as the sympathiser of the family members of initiates (see above).

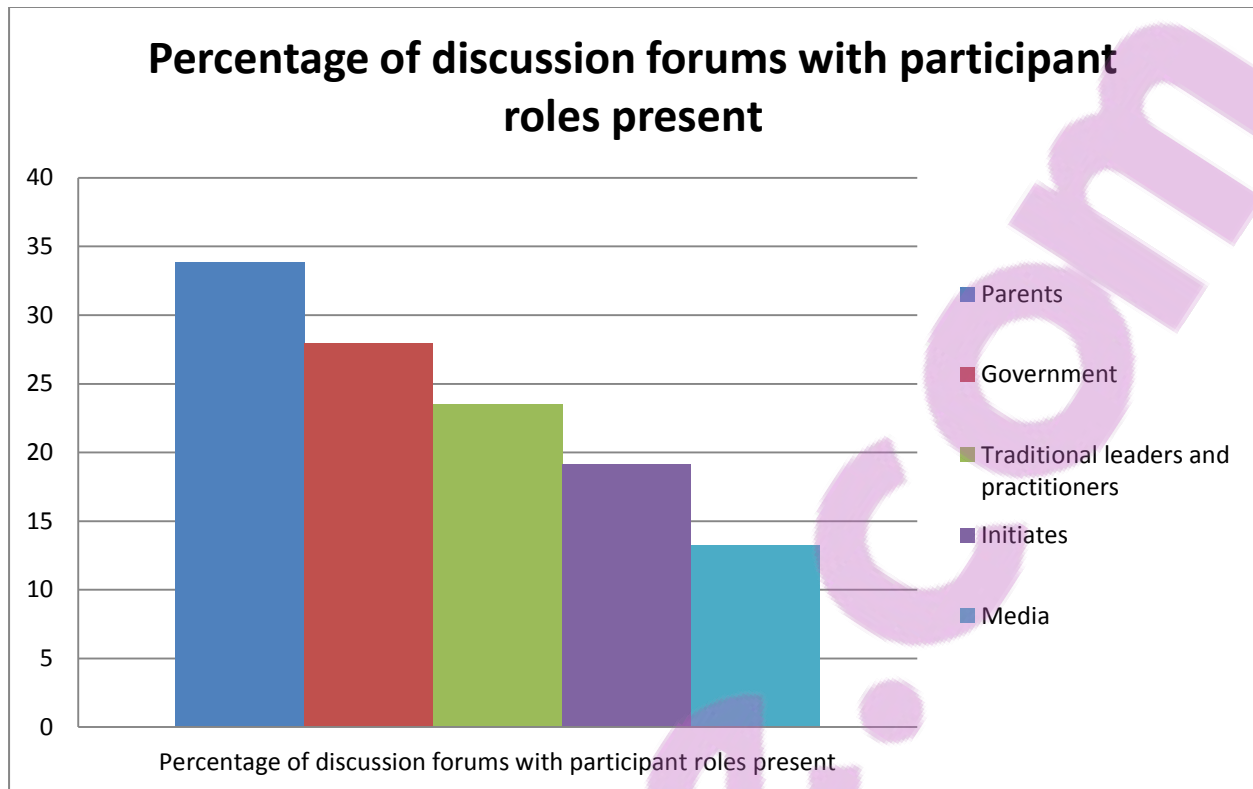
The presentation of the author positions serves to contextualise the utterances of the commenters in the forums. The author position provides the reader with one more analytic lens with which to view the utterances expressed and to position these with reference to intent and the macro-semantics of the text. Another analytic lens required is the participant position which is explained in the section below.

### **7.3.2. Participant position**

The participant positions were derived from explicit rhetorical positioning of the stakeholders listed above. The participant position differs from the author position in that they are the subject of the author's speech act while the author position, as described above, is the rhetorical perspective the author argues from. The analysis stayed with the explicitly constructed participant and avoided inferring any implicit positions as the speech acts in the forum are brief and written in a form of short hand similar to spoken word. This limits the context and subtext of the comment to the other comments on the forum, the news article and the comment analysed.

The participants that emerged from the discussion on the forum included the media, the government as an entity (includes both ruling party and opposition parties), traditional leaders, the parents of initiates and the initiates themselves. Figure 11 depicts the percentage of news reports with each of the roles mentioned above present. The parents and the government are the most frequently constructed positions within the forums, followed by the traditional leaders and practitioners, initiates and the media.





**Figure 11 Percentage of discussion forums with specific participant roles present**

The participant positions constructed in the forums are multi-faceted and, often, paradoxical. This may be attributed to the analytic perspective taken in this study by analysing speech acts across time (from 2008-2013) and individual perspectives which may have changed over time. The assumption behind this analytic perspective is that the socially constructed (and shared) participant identity resides in the intertextual space that exists across these speech acts. The intertextual space is the nexus of perspectives based on multiple, sometimes contradictory ideological stances. In the analysis below, these views were included without any attempt to resolve the contradictions or paradoxes to provide a sense of the fragmented identities that are created between the ideological spaces. Below we discuss the various participant roles, starting with the government and concluding with the initiates themselves.

### *The parents of the initiates*

The parents of the initiates are constructed as a complex and somewhat contradictory identity - both active contributors to the practice of the initiation rite and helpless adherents to a system of beliefs that they cannot control. The parents are described, typically by the derisive outsider, as primitives who cannot engage logically with their culture to spare the lives of their children.

*“that's the thing... the poor boys are being scarred for life (if they survive) because of their parents stupid decisions!” (14:28)*

The parents of the initiates are constructed as active participants in the process who are culpable for the deaths of the initiates by exercising their power over their children to compel them to go to the initiation rite at the risk of death. The parents are therefore constructed as neglectful criminals who failed to place the safety and wellbeing of the child before their culture.

*“Every parent, who sent and paid for their child to go to an initiation school, without verifying the credentials of the school should be charged with child neglect.” (1:53)*

The parents are also constructed as helpless victims of blackmail by the initiation practitioners when initiates are held hostage until payments for the initiation process are received.

*“This is probably what he charges for circumcision. Which would also explain why the mother said she did not give permission for this...” (25:4)*

*“The sheer stupidity, boggles the mind. Not if it were my son. Now it's traditional to be blackmailed? I give up.” (1:20)*

The above quotes also illustrate the construction of the parents as stupid or less intelligent for honouring the traditions embedded within the cultural symbolic network of beliefs they come from. The parents are also positioned as ignorant of the correct way to practice the rite by the insider informants who criticise the parents for allowing children to enter the rite unprepared and underage.

### ***The government***

The government as a participant in the initiation process is one of the more multifaceted and paradoxical participant roles. The government is the participant constructed as responsible for the regulation of the rite for the protection of the initiates. The government is placed, particularly by the outraged observer, as the site of blame for the deaths of the initiates and is therefore responsible for the prosecution of those who are perceived to be culpable for the deaths of the initiates.

*“According to radio news this afternoon, some of the deaths were signed off as 'natural causes'. It is incomprehensible that in 2013 there are still so many dying and mutilated in what must by now be a very ancient and well-understood tradition. If the radio news report is to be believed, there is an underlying conspiracy to cover-up too. And to raise someone else's point, where is the Minister of Children etc in all this? Nothing to say, as usual. I cannot fathom how our govt allows this horror to continue year-after-year, nor do I understand how parents are willing to put their children's lives into the hands of unknowns.” (23:1)*

This participant role is constructed as the ultimate authority in determining the fate of the rite as well as the fate of those perceived to be responsible for transgressive acts. Simultaneously, the government is seen as incompetent in as evidence by continued deaths and malpractices within the rite. The cyclic nature of the initiate deaths is positioned as evidence of the government's inability to learn from past mistakes and evolve as a regulator.

*"Wake up, government, this has been going on for years, and every year hands are thrown up in horror .. and nothing is done about it." (1:26)*

*"What is wrong with these people.? Why does the Government not make it illegal to have these circumcision schools. There State Hospitals isn't there?  
As long as these schools operate boys will die." (11:10)*

*"No arrests had been made" - Shameful. There are numerous people involved in this and NO ONE is arrested... thanks SAPS... :P we love you.' (13:65)*

While constructed as incompetent, the assumption behind the (in)ability of the government to respond to the deaths of initiates is that the government has the power to arbitrarily alter the rite. Part of the network of power of the government is their position as the owners of the legislative system that can be used to punish transgressors; the ownership of the hospitals as sites of safe initiation also consolidates the government's power as the custodian of the rite with the responsibility of protecting the initiates.

While constructed as the regulator and enforcer against transgressions of the initiation process and country's laws, the government is also positioned as complicit in the deaths of the initiates due to their inability to regulate the practice. The government is also constructed as complicit due to the individual affiliation of powerful individuals with the rite and the cultural symbolic

network. The association with the cultural symbolic network often takes racist implications. These statements imply that the government is primitive and backward, which explains their inability to take rational steps to curb the practice and save the lives of the initiates.

*“The government condone these schools and the process. Like tokolosh and mute - its a cultural mindset which is going to take generations to change.....” (16:11)*

*“primitive tradition for a primitive culture. It happens every time but the murder is justified by a primitive government boring repeated story not worthy of making the news!!!!” (9:26)*

The president, as the face and leader of the elected government, is a central object of scorn within the discussion forums. The authority of the president is undermined by linking a number of political scandals that he was implicated in, in the past. In particular, reference is made to the 'Spear of the nation' painting which was the centre of controversy and raised debate about the portrayal of black male sexuality (Murray, 2011). The discursive positioning of the president as a black man is of one who is obsessed with and only commenting on sexual issues to the detriment of the general functioning of the country.

*“Ja he seems obsessed with Pe\*%s issues! Either his own or other peoples! LMAO!” (21:20)*

*“The whole country outraged? I'm not. If you drop your spear for a second you will realise ALL your 'statements' zoomer are worthless, as you are not being taken seriaasly anymore. Not At all” (21:9).*

The role of the government as an authoritative participant is the nexus of the tension between the modern and traditional. One of the visible signs of this nexus is the role of female authority figures in the government who do not have any authority to intervene within the cultural symbolic network which explicitly excludes their participation within the initiation process.

*“And the minister in charge of this portfolio says she can't interfere with what's going on that continues to murder young men because she's a WOMAN under her culture doesn't allow for it!!! This is a good and common example of what SA has got for governance...Oi veh!!!” (21:57)*

The construction of the government participant position is apparently as a powerless incompetent. However, the assumption underpinning the responsibility of the government as the custodian of the individual and the rite is the power of the government as a participant to unilaterally change the rite.

### ***The traditional leaders and initiation practitioners***

The traditional leaders are constructed as complicit in the initiate deaths which are viewed as murder by some and they are seen as the custodians of the rite with the permission of the government. The leaders are seen as complicit in the initiate deaths through the lack of visible action and relative silence around the deaths of the initiates in the rite. They are constructed as culpable for these deaths and should be fined by the legislative arm of the government.

*“There something wrong with a culture that continues in this manner in which hundred die very year. Yet the leaders allow it to continue.” (1:13)*

While the traditional leaders are enshrined in the constitution as the custodians of the rite, they are viewed as serving an administrative function under a corrupt government system which does not facilitate the regulation of the rite.

*“Registered with Contralesa? As if old Patekile and his drinking buddies do anything other than take your money and brandy and sign you off, sight unseen...” (21:22)*

Closely linked to the role of the traditional leaders is the role of the initiation practitioner. The initiation practitioners are positioned as greedy, incompetent, ignorant of the proper practice of the rite and as criminals who deserve prosecution.

*“These guys are none others than criminals! If not, why are the poor boys dying???” (9:28)*

*“Pracitioners are expected to be experts who practise that culture approved by whatever health board relevent to it. All those dangerous and borgous doctors must face the full might of the law. Period” (11:12)*

The initiation practitioners are constructed as the primary perpetrators who harm and kill the initiates. The initiation practitioners are also constructed as the site at which the corruption of the rite takes place and, consequently, diminish the value of the rite within the social system.

### *The initiates*

The initiates are the invisible centre of the discussions on initiation. Initiates are constructed as an agglomeration of medical issues, as nameless and faceless victims of a dysfunctional system, and as the unwilling entrants into manhood through the practice of forced initiations. The initiates are often constructed as ignorant for choosing to undertake a dangerous, primitive rite and that their death is a consequence of this stupidity. The ignorance of the initiates extends to ignorance of the proper ways of practising the rite which, again, results in the death of the initiates due to ignorance.

*“I feel very sorry to those who lost their lives trying to be man. But someone has to face the ramification of being ignorant” (1:30)*

*Only an idiot think spending time in the bush and some old fart cutting your foreskin with a Minoror blade makes you a man (14:14)*

The initiates are also constructed as transgressors of the rite by attempting the attainment of manhood as new status at the expense of the underlying cultural symbolic network. These initiates are held as responsible for their injuries and deaths because they chose to ignore the cultural safety nets in place to “steal manhood”.

The missing link in the constructed identity of the initiate is the healthy, well-adjusted to the experience of the circumcision rite and who re-enter society as whole men who are ready to contribute to the maintenance and transmission of the cultural symbolic network.



## *The media*

The media are participants with multiple roles within the context of this study. It is the context of the study and therefore defines the genre in which the discussions take place. It is also the producer of the primary text through individual journalists, which is another form of control that the media exert over the nature, scope and depth of the discussions in the forum. In addition to this, as the moderator of the forums, the media ultimately hold the key to legitimating or erasing expressed knowledge within the forums. As the primary author of the texts, the media hold the power to decide the amount of information available in the public sphere.

*“@[name redacted] Is there currently any means of stopping the charlatans? Botched circumcisions have been happening a while now. Does the media even report all of the cases?” (25:21)*

The point is further reiterated in the point below where the media are constructed as arbitrarily deciding whether to report on the conviction rates of traditional surgeons who were accused of murder.

*“[responding to a question about whether traditional surgeons have been prosecuted]They did, but the press didn't find it newsworthy enough to report.” (28:5)*

The implication of this statement is that the media, contrary to the stated expressed intention of providing all the facts objectively, can and do withhold information based on the criterion of newsworthy reporting. The one sided flow of information from the media to the public is shifting with the use of discussion forums where readers can at least challenge and name the gaps in knowledge being presented as comprehensive and objective.

*“Kidnapping? Why? Shoddy reporting as usual.” (38:5)*

The media are also constructed as the voice of the nameless, voiceless dead initiates who are silenced within the underlying cultural symbolic network. The initiates, acknowledged mainly as deaths and statistics, are brought back to the collective conscience of the social system by reporting on their deaths.

*“Where else have you heard the voice for the dead and the mutilated? Or is your objection really that this is just part of the accepted risk and we should just ignore it and go on with our lives?”(23:4)*

In the next chapter, this section in particular is linked to the role of death and the fear of death within the underlying cultural symbolic network of the male circumcision initiation rite in relation to the role of the media as the speakers for the dead.

#### **7.4. Examining the macro-semantics of the text**

The macro-semantics of the text look at how the communicative act is formed around topics and how these topics, collectively, serve to create a particular discursive position within a particular space and time which is discussed in the next section. The topics identified in the discussion forums are the panacea to the initiation crisis, the place of African culture in the gaze of the world, black masculinity and the government's role in initiation.

#### **7.4.1. There is clearly a panacea to this problem and it's the....**

The initiation rite is constructed as a crisis experienced at a national level by the country each year. The construction of the rite as a serious problem orients thinking about it to focus on seeking solutions. There are a number of posts within the forums, particularly from the helpful, enlightened and outraged outsiders, that focus on providing the apparent solution to this crisis. These solutions are positioned as the one, true, one-dimensional solution that will permanently address the issue. For this reason, I've termed this topic the panacea for initiation.

One of the most frequently mentioned solutions is the modernisation of the rite. Modernisation is positioned in two ways. First, it is constructed as retaining the symbolism but removing the dangerous aspects of the rite such as the act of cutting and the isolation which is associated with abuse, dehydration and infection. This form of modernisation can be achieved by sending initiates to what is termed actual schools as opposed to being sent to the (primitive) bush. These schools can then ensure that initiates are taught the correct ways of being a man such as basic hygiene, 'sticking around' to raise children, attain an education and to seek employment. The implication behind these statements is that the initiation rite currently does not adequately prepare initiates for manhood.

*“backwards and out-dated , bordering barbaric , we live in the 21st century ffs , we have showers and access to basic needs , there is no reason why you should not live hygienically , if you wash yourself you dont have to get circumcised , but the poor people are soo superstitious that they probably think their ancestors will unleash all hell if they*

*dont abide by the age-old and very out-dated tradition - please be more civilized ffs !!!”*  
(20:37)

*“How about hve all, circumcision done at hospitals and clinics, theafter make it an entry to these initiation, schools. Traditional leaders then create culture handy books for their tribes and boys get educated about their tribes” (1:36)*

The second way modernisation is constructed is through the use of hospitals and clinics with western medicine. These sites are constructed as safer, cleaner, efficient and as the site of the correct way to perform the medical procedure of circumcision. The contrast here is with the unhygienic bush, rusty blades or spears, incompetent surgeons who are ignorant of the correct means of enacting the circumcision procedure and therefore recklessly endanger the initiates. This topic uses other non-western cultures to demonstrate how adaptation to the ways of modern medicine can save the lives of initiates, specifically Judaism and Islam.

*“@[name redacted] as a white person I can say that there's nothing wrong with your culture. It's a custom that's been going on for hundreds of years right? In Muslim and Jewish culture it's also a custom to circumcise, and it's also been so for hundreds of years. I don't know what up with some of these guys here. It's just that people must be careful where they go, and proper medical safety must be observed so that the boys don't die.” (20:27)*

In addition to the modernisation of the rite, outright bans on the rite are advocated as the solution to the crisis. Within this topic the government is positioned as powerless to effectively regulate the rite and the parents and initiates are positioned as ignorant victims of the greedy initiation

practitioners. The system is therefore seen as failing, ineffective in addition to being primitive and barbaric.

*“Over 100 people die from this every year, and there are usually some penile amputations too. The sooner this backwards practice dies out, the better. No-one becomes a man by having part of their manhood cut off.” (24:16)*

The debate on banishment of circumcision as an initiation practice is not one sided and commenters argue that banning the practice will simply push those who practice it further into the periphery and away from the authorities who have the power to regulate the rite and protect the powerless initiates and parents.

*“...it's simply not going anywhere, besides banning it would only make it worse, because that won't stop people doing it hence opening up an opportunity for it to be abused even more, know your place and close that hole.” (9:23)*

Regulation by the government authorities is also a panacea for curbing the deaths and injuries associated with the male circumcision rite as initiation. This topic positions the government as the most natural seat of authority for regulating the practice of the ritual and for enforcing any transgressions made.

*“I understand the importance of these schools, however there has to be rules to regulate this industry, ultimately these people make money from these schools, and completely miss the point and relevance. Regulated they can be monitored by the department of health, and assisted with medical tools and the senseless loss of lives on the hands of these chance takers.” (14:23)*

The regulation of initiation as an idealised state positions the power to define the rite outside of the cultural symbolic network and places it in a centralised authority that acts along the lines of a bureaucracy that ensures conformity to a set of static, pre-negotiated rules. The implications of these statements will be discussed in the next chapter (in section 8.4) in the frame of the Decolonial movement.

#### **7.4.2. African culture as backward and primitive in the eyes of the world**

This topic permeates the text both implicitly and in explicitly racist positions that aim to position Africa as backward, primitive and barbaric through the initiation ritual. The extracts from utterances made in the forums below are illustrative of the implications for the perceived intellectual capacity of the barbarian, who cannot seem to master his own culture nor is capable of learning a superior culture that provides comfort, safety and progress toward a higher state of being.

*“i dont care how many of you guys undergo successful procedures. the action of snipping a boys willie as an initiation ritual is outdated. you guys seem to want the bling, the fancy cars, the tasty food and the comforts of western living. it is time that you decide if you wholeheartedly want to join us in the 21st century, or whether the saying "you can take the monkey out of the bush, but you cant take the bush out of the monkey" is indeed correct?” (20:39)*

The attribution of animal status to those who practice the rite implies a lower state of intelligence and positions the commenter above the line of the human and the initiation participants below it.

The implications of this topic are discussed in the next chapter (in section 8.4 and 8.5) in relation to the zone of being and non-being.

### **7.4.3. Black masculinity as violent and grotesque**

Linked to the topic described above is the topic of black masculinity, specifically black masculinity as the grotesque and violent. The topic positions the intention of the initiation rite – of shaping manhood - against the apparent failure of the rite to produce men who are contributing, respectful members of society. This is typically done through the use of destructive strategies that systematically deconstruct the construct of positive black masculinity through false equation to criminal, morally outrageous behaviour such as murder, baby rape as well as linking it to a general lack of respect for others.

*“Now they go back to their communities, rape little girls, kill for muti, follow a Juju rant and murder a farmer, steal something, break something and then sit back and blame apartheid. Mmmm, you're right... not working at all” (12:8)*

*“A friend is a university lecturer. I'm amazed at the stories she tells me when these "men" come back from god knows where , with an aggressive , disrespectful attitude towards all women. She basically has to say : " get out of my class until you learn some respect ". So tell me .. Is this what you black okes learn out there in the swamp ? How to be a disrespectful coward with no balls ?? Hey ? Big men . So strong , so friken lazy ! So good for nothing.. You call yourselves men?? You're cowards .. No self respect. You all have a lot to learn about being men...” (13:30)*

This topic operates from the assumption that the circumcision act itself, the cutting of the foreskin, bestows the status of manhood and therefore invalidates any claim of transformation and education within the context of the rite. The implication that the rite does not understand what true manhood is and consequently, that no true men have come out of the rite.

*“He said the boys attended initiation schools with the hope of reaching manhood. WTF?? I thought you became a man when you finished school. Studied, worked , married. Had kids, and lead a respectful , peaceful life whilst protecting your family and looking after those you care for.*

The violent, grotesque nature of the black masculinity constructed within this topic is used as an object of fear by the derisive outsider to support the argument for regulation and, eventually, banning of the rite to establish modern masculinity as the only standard for masculinity.

#### **7.4.4. The government...corrupt, complicit, and (in)competent**

The topic of the government as a participant, a context and an author of the discourses of initiation played a key role in shaping the speech acts by commenters in the forums. The government as a topic links to the broader political discourses in South Africa and the metaphorical presence of the government in the forum facilitated the intertextual interaction between the discourses of initiation and the broader political context. Specifically, the presence of the government was associated with corrupt practices in regulation and administration in South Africa and this was seen to manifest in the inability of the government, as a participant in the rite, to regulate the practice in a manner that made it safer and more civilised.



*“Wake up, government, this has been going on for years, and every year hands are thrown up in horror .. and nothing is done about it.” (1:26)*

The government is constructed as complicit in the deaths of the initiates through their implicit stance of condoning the rite by only intervening and regulating as a last resort in an attempt to maintain the sacred space of the rite in the social systems in which it is practised. The individual beliefs and practices of members of government, particularly those of the president, Jacob Zuma, are imposed on the government as an entity which therefore implies that the government as a whole believes in and practises the rite. This is positioned as evidence of condonation by the government of the obvious transgressions made by those who practise male circumcision as initiation.

*“uhm... are we not a "civilised" nation? Should things like this not be done by qualified trained individuals and not some uncle or who ever older person(s) within the community... Also Mr President... Don't bother being outraged now... You practice these same silly rituals and ceremonies, thus you yourself is not putting hope or faith in our Health sector...” (21:49)*

The government as a broader political context is linked to the incorporation of the discourses around farm murders, corrupt labour practices and acts of police brutality. These discourses are incorporated into the discursive construction of the government as incompetent and incapable of dealing with the crisis that the initiation rite poses to the nation.

The topics form the macro-textual structures that underpin the various speech acts that are committed in the discussion forums. That said, the topics cannot be seen to be a comprehensive description of the discursive strategies used to construct male circumcision as an initiation rite in

discussion forums on news reports on initiation schools. Rather, the topics provide an analytical lens that should be used in conjunction with the author positions, participant position, and rhetorical techniques to construct the superstructures of the text

## **7.5. Examining the superstructures of the text**

### **7.5.1. The turn toward civilisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The superstructures of the text in the discussion forum position the time in which discursive positions are constructed as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This time signifier plays a significant role in constructing the polarity between the modern and the primitive. The time signifier, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is positioned as fulcrum point against which the turn toward the modern is expected. The turn toward the modern refers to the expectation held by commenters in the forum for practitioners, parents, initiates and the government to move into the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*“A move into the 21st Century will stop all these deaths!” (1:8)*

*“barbarian acts for barbarians, do it the right and healthy way, this is the 21st century. WAKE UP PEOPLE.” (7:17)*

*“Poor boys. Can you imagine their pain just to prove some ridiculous antiquated manhood ritual from prehistoric times....” (13:24)*

*“Are we living on pre-historic earth??? this is ridiculous !!” (19:40)*

The spatial position constructed within the text is at the focal point of the world as an audience. Specifically, the initiation rite lies under the gaze of the global audience who are watching the rite and those who practice it from within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The excerpt below is a brief exchange between two commenters in a forum on an article discussing the commentary on the rite by a government minister.

*“What about those boys who lost their peni\$ in botch circumcision or those who contracted HIV due to using same instrument without sterilizing? Its probably 2500 and not 250 as claimed. Stop the practice and arrest those fong kong surgeons and please make sure all your traditional leader go to school to obtain at least 2 degrees and stop smoking dagga. The world is watching us” (3:5)*

*“not watching, laughing” (3:9)*

The constructed space and time which frame the discursive construction of the male circumcision rite as initiation is built on the foundation of two core superstructures which weave through multiple internet forum threads. These superstructures are civilisation and tradition/culture. These superstructures exist in a dependent relationship with each other and, despite the presentation below, should not be viewed as discrete meaning units.

Civilisation, and its antonym barbarianism, is a central element in the rhetorical positioning of the male circumcision initiation rite within the discussion forums. Civilisation is positioned as a place of rationality, life preserving and progressive. In contrast barbarianism is positioned as regressive, primitive, emotive, blindly believing, ignorant and as deadly to all (both within its cognitive schema and those around individual adherents).

*“We have evolved far enough in understanding of how to reach our deeper selves without brutality, starvation and physical stress.” (1:39)*

*“I agree, stupidity and backward thinking should be respected. Just like the flat earth society” (14:25)*

*“You have them in government, in all the poor service delivery departments, the police force and in all townships/Squatter camps.*

*They spread HIV aids, act like barbaric cave men, and hate the minority race.*

*But stand with their hands out and take everything for nothing.*

*South Africa will never be a world class country.” (33:10)*

*“i thought that blacks wanted western democracy and to live in a civilised society? wasn't this what they fought for? why then, do they continue to insist on their horrid backward, filthy customs and show the world that they really are quite simple creatures?” (20:42)*

Tradition and culture are used interchangeably within the discussion forums, with little distinction in meaning in the use of the words. The rhetorical position of culture holds the position as ancient, venerated and sacred. The traditions, in particular the male circumcision rite, are positioned by the insider informants as equally sacrosanct and therefore worthy of preservation and adherence to these traditions is constructed as the norm.

*“What confuses me is that Africans claim that this is their culture from time immemorial, yet they still cant master it. Innocent young boys who would have carried the nation forward die unnecessarily. Then again comes the foreign Europeans and invent ways of doing it better than the conventional traditional method and it is successful, how familiar. Still the Africans resist and deny that modern circumcision is still circumcision, they*

*would rather let their precious kids risk death than changing with the times for the better. I really don't understand this tradition, it is confusing me period. We as a nation of all colours have to come together and stop this. Let us not allow another death, enough is enough. Rest in Peace to all the poor young souls, you were in your route to the promised land of so called manhood, whatever that means.” (19:16)*

The perversion of the initiation rite is positioned as a result of the corruption by white settlers and missionaries. The commenters in the forum position the rite as one that existed, both physically and spiritually, at the centre of the community in which it would take place. The persecution of the rite through Christianity and apartheid ideological advancement is seen as the reason for the marginalisation of the cultural symbolic network in which the rite is framed.

The rite is also positioned as a school of thought out of its time and therefore cannot integrate the new grotesque - contradictions between traditional and modern definitions of successful attainment of manhood - which confronts those who live within it. In particular, it leaves adherents within a liminal space which negates both identities of the individual – that is the modern and the traditional – for as long as they remain within the space. In the excerpt below, the commenter reflects on their personal experience of the rite and wrestles with the tension between critiquing the rite while avoiding the critical stance usually occupied by those identified as white colonisers or sympathisers.

*“There is nothing special about what happens there. No instruction on values, humility, service. It is only about enduring the pain, not of circumcision but the healing without western medicine. I did the rite in 2006 in Mthatha. All it's about is egos, defending yourself through words when tested about you proving you were there and if you*

*blunder...guess what? You get up again through a bottle of brandy. Say what you will but there's very little substance just form, we been doing this...blah blah blah. The best values are learnt at home not in that place. But for sake of being accepted in the community you do it and all after that it's about alcohol, drunks, drunks in the name of ancestors. Before I'm accused of appeasing whites or sell out: you often have to go through something/a system to see how futile/valueless it is for you. And this is one of those rituals are used for an agenda of mucho/ego/conflict/drunk/alcoholics.” (1:43)*

The topic of culture is populated with references to the commodification of the rite, also attributed to the advancement of Eurocentric culture within the African school of thought. It makes particular reference to the commodification of the rite at the expense of the initiates, where their lives and manhood are bought and sold outside of the underlying cultural symbolic network of meaning. It is within this that the forced circumcisions are positioned within the forums. The transactional nature of the modern iteration of this rite is also attributed to allowing space for boys to steal manhood by simply visiting an initiation practitioner and purchasing access to the rite outside of his social network's approval.

*“[name redacted]... It wasn't always like that until they started using the modern day tools and medicine... Using traditional herbs and the correct method this would not happen... Besides before all this modern crap they had the Chiefs of the tribes initiate the correct leaders to do the initiation now they just idiots running the joint for a buck....” (7:3)*

Simultaneously culture and tradition are constructed as dependent on their relation to the modern normative standards which are elicited from the European, white cultures and, the closer a

culture fits within this model, the more evolved it is as a knowledge system. The use of dismantling strategies reinforces the European cultures as the ideological centre of evolved and civilised culture.

*“@[name redacted] - you can phrase it however you want, in the end it is a primitive culture that should be abolished!*

*Many years ago Europe used to burn (so called) witches at the stake if they did not understand them. Luckily they have moved on from that tradition, the fact is, some day you will move on from your primitive cultures too.” (9:15)*

By positioning European cultures as once primitive the author creates an instant association between the past state of European culture and the current state of African culture. The description of how Europeans have moved beyond these rites into a state of higher rationality implies that Africans have yet to take this step and are therefore less evolved.

## **7.6. Chapter summary**

This chapter discussed the results of the CDA of the discussion forums on online news reports on initiation schools in South Africa. This chapter, following the structure of analysis provided by Van Dijk (1993), focused on examining the context, the production process, the communicative acts and social meaning embedded in text, participant position and roles, the macro-semantics of the text and the superstructures of the text.

The context described the production process of the forums while the production process described the process through which comments were moderated and how access to forums was attained. The moderation process, as described in the previous chapter, is a form of control exercised by the discussion forum owner to keep content within guidelines posted under the terms and conditions of use for the website. Within the discussion forums, the communicative acts embedded in the text examined the use of irony, rhetorical questioning, humour, and censorship.

The examination of participant position and roles was done in terms of author position and participant positions within the forums. Author positions present in the text included the concerned family member, derisive outsider, enlightened outsider, helpful outsider, outraged outsider, sympathiser to family members, insider informant and outraged insider informant. The author positions were constructed by explicit positioning in relation to the underlying symbolic network of meaning of the rite. Participant roles are constructed from within author roles through the use of specific communicative acts. The participant roles are Social Representations made by individuals commenting in the discussion forums and simultaneously represent underlying ideological positions of the authors. The participant positions identified in the discussion forums include the media, the government, the traditional leaders, the parents of initiates and the initiates. The media are constructed as the primary author of the texts that form the context of the discussions. They are constructed as simultaneously instrumental in giving voice to the suffering experienced by the initiates and complicit in misrepresenting the initiation rite in the media. The government are constructed as the participants who are responsible for the regulation and control of the rite. The government are held responsible for failing to successfully regulate the rite and prevent initiate deaths. The traditional leaders are constructed as complicit in the initiate deaths



which are viewed as murder by some and they are seen as the custodians of the rite with the permission of the government. The parents of the initiates are constructed within the discussion forums as ignorant victims of blackmail by the illegal custodians of the primitive rite that the parents foolishly believe in. The initiates are constructed as the victims of their parents' ignorance. Initiates also constructed as an agglomeration of medical issues, as nameless and faceless victims of a dysfunctional system, as the unwilling entrants into manhood through the practice of forced initiations.

Examination of the macro-semantics of the text focused on apparent panaceas to the initiation crisis, the African culture as backward and primitive in the eyes of the world, black masculinity as violent and grotesque, the government as corrupt, complicit, and (in)competent. The panaceas to the initiation crisis depart from the assumption of the initiation crisis as a chronic problem that requires an urgent solution immediately. The panaceas are often constructed as originating from the Western medical systems and through education in Western education. The macro-semantic structure focusing on Africa as backward and primitive contained both implicitly and in explicitly racist positions that aim to position Africa as backward, primitive and barbaric through the initiation ritual. Linked to the previous macro-semantic structure, the topic of black masculinity as grotesque constructs the initiation rite as the site for production of the violence and rape perpetrated in South Africa. The topic of the government as a participant, a context and an author of the discourses of initiation played a key role in shaping the speech acts by commenters in the forums. The superstructures of the text focused on the time and spatial positioning of the discussion forums and how this shapes the speech acts, author positions, participant positions and the implications of these for discourse strategies utilised to construct initiation schools in the online media in South Africa. The time signifier, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is

positioned as fulcrum point against which the turn toward the modern is expected. The turn toward the modern refers to the expectation held by commenters in the forum for practitioners, parents, initiates and the government to move into the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century. The next chapter discusses the results presented in both Chapter 5 and 6 before concluding with implications for education in South Africa.

# Chapter 8 Interpretation and conclusions



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## **8. Chapter 8**

### **8.1. Introduction**

This chapter is the final chapter in this thesis. It aims to summarise and integrate the findings with the theoretical framework of the study to answer the research questions stated in Chapter 1. The interpretation of the findings presented in the two chapters preceding this one is done using the Decolonial and Social Cognitive theories described in Chapter 4. The specific interpretative lenses of each of these theories are discussed in the section that follows. After we've reoriented to the theories, the discussion moves onto reframing the research questions into points for discussion. The discussion then interprets the Superstructures of the texts and discusses the Macro-semantics in the texts before describing the acts and practices informing interactions in the constructions of initiation schools in online news reports and discussion forums.

### **8.2. Revisiting the theoretical framework**

In this section we briefly revisit the theoretical framework within the structure of this chapter. This is done to provide a clear line of reasoning throughout the chapter and to tie the theories into the interpretation of the results presented in the previous chapters.

The Social Cognitive theory frames its interpretation on the assumption that humans are agentic (Bandura, 1989) and that they actively co-construct socially shared knowledge that is housed in

Social Representations (SRs) (Van Dijk, 1990). Another assumption this theory is premised on is that SRs such as stereotypes and ethnic prejudices are essentially (re)produced in society through discourses in text and talk (Van Dijk, 1987, 2006). This makes discourse analysis, specifically Critical Discourse Analysis, a powerful tool for revealing the underlying contents, structures and strategies of these SRs (Van Dijk, 1990).

SRs can be represented as hierarchical networks that are organised by a limited set of relevant node categories about social groups, classes, structures or social issues that are acquired and altered through social interaction (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Van Dijk, 1990). These representations are located in social memory in the form of models which are positioned here as a referential basis of text understanding based on a relatively fixed schema featuring categories such as setting, time, circumstances, participants and events accompanied by an evaluative qualifier (Van Dijk, 1990; Van Dijk, 2006). SRs in the context of this study can be understood as the Superstructures of the text, which provide the overarching cognitive schema from which the text is interpreted and ideologically laden assumptions are reproduced (Van Dijk, 1993a; Wooffitt, 2005). These Superstructures, as briefly discussed in the previous chapters, are positioned with reference to space and time. The Macro-semantics of the text provide content information for the SRs with respect to setting, circumstances, participants and events. The construction of and interaction with these SRs are done through the use of rhetorical techniques embodied in specific speech acts carried out in the production of the texts.

CDA is criticised for imposing a normative framework as opposed to an apparently decontextualised focus on the facts (Haig, 2001) which is an earmark of the positivist paradigm which assumes a universal, objective and superior normative framework. The assumption underpinning the objectivist notion of neutral knowledge serves a mechanism that aims to limit

researchers to discern the nature and impact of their own socio-political and philosophical assumptions on the knowledge produced (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). The normative framework assumed within CDA aims to guard against the uncritical acceptance of the assumptions embedded within the objectivist notion of neutral knowledge (Lamb, 2013). With the above in mind, the Decolonial theories were selected as the normative framework to guide this study. The integration of the Decolonial theories into this study brings with it the assumption that we exist in an asymmetrical world order that is sustained by colonial matrices of power, pedagogies and epistemologies of equilibrium that continue to reproduce these matrices (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a). The Decolonial theories focus on the study of coloniality which is described as a system of processes that constitute and sustain an asymmetrical power relationship between the Euro-American world and the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a). In developing and sustaining this system, Decolonial theories posit that, colonialism defines culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge production in structures that supersede colonial administrations (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). Drawing on the analytical lenses of the coloniality of power, knowledge and being, Decolonial theories allow the analyst to locate and examine the power structures that perpetuate the oppression of those below the line of the human (Grosfoguel, 2011). The coloniality of power aids the analyst in discovering and examining the power structures that maintain the asymmetrical power relations by providing an analytical lens that transcends surface markers of race, gender, ethnicity, religion and ideology (Grosfoguel, 2011). The coloniality of knowledge focuses on the cultural epistemicide of epistemologies that are of non-Western origin which eliminates alternative ways of knowing and being outside of the Western knowledge systems (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The coloniality of being aims to thematise the effects of coloniality in lived experience and the mind (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b).

Decolonial theory discusses the effects of coloniality in reference to three social domains: time, space and subjectivity (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The Decolonial theories provide an interpretative framework from which we can examine the Superstructures, Macro-semantics embodied in specific speech acts carried out in the production of the texts.

### **8.3. Reframing the research question**

This section briefly reframes the research questions into statements that facilitate the discussion of the findings in the subsequent sections of this chapter. As mentioned above and in previous chapters, this study aimed to describe the discursive strategies used in reporting on and discussing initiation schools in the online news.

A discussion on initiation schools cannot take place without discussing the male circumcision initiation rite and its underpinning cultural symbolic network of meaning. The cultural symbolic network of meaning was described in Chapter 2 and is drawn on to contrast, where applicable, the discursive constructions of the rite by agents outside of the cultural system. The discussion of the male circumcision rite, in turn, cannot be discussed without reflecting on masculinity and specifically on black masculinity. These topics were discussed in Chapter 3 along with the internet as a cultural medium.

One of the sub questions that informed this study focused on the Social Representations (SRs) that informed the discursive construction of initiation schools. The content of these SRs is equated to the Superstructures of the texts examined in this thesis. The discussion of this sub-question will therefore focus on the interpretation of the Superstructures of the texts.



A second sub question focused on the linguistic patterns utilised to create positions of dominance and power in the news reports and discussion forums. The discussion on the construction of the Macro-semantic positions within the texts which focus on the specific topics constructed within the texts, addresses this question.

When discussing the specific acts or practices that inform the interactions of participants we discuss the specific techniques used by the authors of the texts in this study. The rhetorical techniques, author positions and participant positions were all aspects of the discursive construction of power within the news reports and discussion forums. When discussing these aspects of the research, we are addressing this sub-question.

#### **8.4. Interpreting the Superstructures**

This section of this chapter interprets the Superstructures presented in Chapter 6 and 7 in line with the theoretical framework described above. The Superstructures are drawn from both the discussion forums and the news articles. This section discusses the Superstructures of death and civilisation. The focus on the interpretation of these two Superstructures is premised on the rationale that they integrate the cognitive and ideological assumptions present in the other Superstructures identified in the previous chapters.

### 8.4.1. Death

One of the overarching cognitive schemata in this data corpus is the concept of initiation as death. Death, in this section, refers to both the physical death of the initiates as emphasised by the news reports on initiation schools as well as the metaphorical construction of death within the cultural symbolic network underpinning the rite.

The cultural symbolism of initiation as a rite of transition is signified by the metaphorical death of boyhood and the birth of the initiate into manhood (Mhlahlo, 2009). This metaphorical death is done under the supervision and guidance of older men who have undergone the ritual (Mhlahlo, 2009). The move into the death space of the initiation ritual is one marked by physical and spiritual separation from the daily routine and connections of daily life (Hammond-Tooke, 1980). The initiate then exists within a liminal space in between the death of their boyhood, marked by the cut of the circumcision, and the rebirth into manhood marked by their reintegration into society (Mhlahlo, 2009; Ngxamngxa, 1971). In this space the initiates are stripped of their names, rank, kinship position and social status (Ngxamngxa, 1971). They are also denied freedom of movement, the ability to interact with anyone outside of the rite and they lose their language (Mhlahlo, 2009). The process of rebirth into manhood is marked by learning a new language, set of behaviours and cognitive schema of the social world they come from (Ngxamngxa, 1971). The act of cutting and enforced restrictions are viewed as instilling bravery, discipline and endurance in the initiates, key traits in developing a successful manhood transition (Ndangam, 2008). The aggregation or incorporation phase marks the end of the seclusion of the initiate and upon his re-entry into society the initiates are conferred with the title *amakrwala*. This phase begins with the symbolic immolation of the clothes and other artefacts used during

the liminal period (Ndangam, 2008; Ngxamngxa, 1971). In this phase the initiate is introduced to society with new status, new names, new clothes, new rights and duties (Mhlahlo, 2009). From this point onward these individuals are adults and are encumbered with the rights, privilege and duties requisite with this social status (Mhlahlo, 2009).

The interesting feature of these phases is that they are constructed as a state of being, not simply a categorisation. The *amakrwala* are the embodiment of the cultural codes and symbols that codify what a new man in society should be. They embody this aspect of society for those generations who preceded them as a symbol of continuity of the culture and they represent a future aspiration for those who will undergo the ritual after them. In essence, the *amakrwala* become a living embodiment of their culture and it is this that places them as agents of cultural maintenance or change (McDonough, 2011).

Contrasting the above description of the role of death as part of a process of rebirth is the construction of initiation as a site of death in the news reports and discussion boards. Within this conceptualisation of death, the entire rite is associated with death and not just the metaphorical death of boyhood enacted in the circumcision of the initiates. This is done through conflation of the various aspects of the rite by simply ignoring the rite as a series of activities and reducing it to the act of circumcision. As discussed in Chapter six, this is done through the prominent placement of the death toll associated with the initiation rite in the headlines of the news reports. The function of headlines is to form a "cognitive macro-structure that serves as an important strategic cue to control the way readers process and make sense of the report" (Teo, 2000, p. 14). In addition to the headlines the articles draw focus to the cost of the initiation rite in initiate lives. The positioning of death as the cognitive macro-structure for interpreting the news articles orients the reader to the ideological stance that initiation is a dangerous rite that requires

regulation and oversight from those outside of the cultural symbolic network underpinning male circumcision as an initiation rite.

The coloniality of power refers to the interrelation of power in different areas of society such as culture, knowledge, economy, gender, religion and explains an exploitative and dominant relationship between those located at each end of bifurcated social institutions of privilege and oppressed (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b). The relocation of the power to alter the rite from within those initiated into the cultural symbolic network to individuals who exist outside of this network is examined with reference to the coloniality of power.

This relocation is done through the rhetorical positioning of the rite, and its value to society, against the lives of the initiates. The dichotomy then forces the consideration into two extreme choices where the life of the initiate cannot coexist with the preservation of the rite

*“I agree with you. It will be sad if all our cultures disappear as with the Americans. But nothing is worth the life of possibly one of our country's future greats. Its one thing to promise change and medical support, its another thing to enforce and deliver what you promised.” (13:10)*

The position of the government as the regulator of the rite usurps the role of the traditional leaders as the custodians of the rite and its underpinning cultural symbolic network. This dislocation of power is apparent in the speech acts chosen by the media to represent the Council of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa), the most prominent being the apology of the council for the deaths of the initiates. The government as a role player is not quoted as apologising for any deficit in the corpus analysed but frequently constructed as the active rescuer of the initiates from imminent death brought on by those who practice the rite.

*“a joint operation between the department and Eastern Cape police rescued the boys”*  
(19:2)

*“[headline]Cops rescue 19 initiates”* (3:2)

The construction of the government as actively engaging in the rescue of initiates places them in the position of regulator with the power to determine which acts within the rite are legitimate and who may practice this rite. This is further reinforced through legislation which prescribes the actions of all participants in the rite and carries the implicit threat of legal sanction through fines or jail terms.

*“The African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) calls on government and traditional leaders to develop a national framework to regulate initiation schools,”*  
(14:5)

The legal system the legislation described above is based on the ideals of the Roman-Dutch and British legal systems from which South African law is derived (Bradfield, 2007). The authority of the government derives, in part, from an ideology derived from a Euro-centric epistemology which is positioned to govern the rights and access to privilege of all individuals positioned within the borders of South Africa. The highest law in South Africa is enshrined within the Constitution of South Africa which outlines the rights and responsibilities of all citizens as well as denoting the boundaries of the power of the government in relation to its citizens (Bradfield, 2007). Chapter 1, Section 6.1 of the South African Constitution specifies that the eleven official languages of the country and their cultural systems and epistemologies should be elevated in status and their use advanced (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The protection of cultural systems and epistemologies assumes that the Constitution occupies a rhetorically superior

position from which it can protect these cultures and, by implication, govern the limits in which they may practice. The constitution protects the right to life (Republic of South Africa, 1996), and through this has executive power to intervene in any practice deemed to violate this rite in the balanced consideration of all the other rights (Bradfield, 2007). The rhetorical positioning of death as a superstructure governing the reading into initiation, positions this rite as transgressive of the right to life enshrined in the constitution and, therefore, as an epistemology that needs to be reintegrated into the normative framework prescribed by the constitution which is based on the ideals enshrined in the Roman-Dutch legal systems.

#### **8.4.2. Civilisation**

The time signifier, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is positioned as fulcrum point against which the turn toward the civilised is expected.

*“A move into the 21st Century will stop all these deaths!” (1:8)*

The turn toward the civilised refers to the expectation held by commenters in the forum for practitioners, parents, initiates and the government to move into the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century. The line between human and non-human is at the centre of this superstructure with the time signifier as the rhetorical line that separates those above the line of the human from the non-human who exist below it. This separation is positioned, in this section, as the colonialisation of the subject.

In Chapter 4 we reflected on the work of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b) which describes the colonialisation of the subject. The colonialisation of the subject culminates in the

“objectification/thingification/ commodification” of non-Western peoples (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). The enactment of this process is the representation of black people (non-Western people) as a catalogue of deficits and lacks.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b) quotes Grosfoguel’s summary of this process across time:

"We went from the sixteenth century characterization of ‘people without writing’ to the eighteenth and nineteenth century characterization of ‘people without history,’ to the twentieth century characterization of ‘people without development’ and more recently, to the early twenty first century of ‘people without democracy'" (p. 13).

The striving of the cultural symbolic network through its actors, especially the insider informants acting in the discussion forums, is to acknowledge that the outcome of the initiation rite is the status as fully human. This status is negated through the argument positioning male circumcision as an initiation rite which is primitive and barbaric. This then creates the rhetorical position in which male circumcision is without development and therefore a regressive state of being which is not considered as human. This state of regression is characterised by a series of deficits, frequently described by the derisive outsiders, which positions the individuals who practice this rite as sub-human.

*“What confuses me is that Africans claim that this is their culture from time immemorial, yet they still cant master it. Innocent young boys who would have carried the nation forward die unnecessarily. Then again comes the foreign Europeans and invent ways of doing it better then the conventional traditional method and it is successful, how familiar. Still the Africans resist and deny that modern circumcision is still circumcision, they would rather let their precious kids risk death than changing with the times for the better.*

*I really don't understand this tradition, it is confusing me period. We as a nation of all colours have to come together and stop this. Let us not allow another death, enough is enough. Rest in Peace to all the poor young souls, you were in your route to the promised land of so called manhood, whatever that means.” (19:16)*

*“You have them in government, in all the poor service delivery departments, the police force and in all townships/Squatter camps. They spread HIV aids, act like barbaric cave men, and hate the minority race. But stand with their hands out and take everything for nothing. South Africa will never be a world class country.” (33:10)*

This denial of the status of human is a negation of the value attributed to the male circumcision rite, effectively denying access to the privileged space preserved for those recognised as human. The derisive outsider in the forums is an explicit position of epistemic racism that asserts an overtly Euro-centric orientation toward the right which positions African cultures as inferior and backward. The links between Euro-centrism and African cultures is discussed in greater detail in the section that follows. The point here is that the derisive outsider position is only the explicit expression of this cultural epistemicide. The helpful and enlightened outsider author positions construct civilisation as a rhetorical position that is considerate and tolerant of non-Western practices and aim to appreciate those aspects of these cultures that are valuable.

*“I'm not sure if your question is meant to be rhetorical, since you could have easily googled "why do people get circumcisions". I'm hoping your internet was not to simply raise the ire of Muslims, Jews or Xhosa folk. To answer, the foreskin traps bacteria from body excretions and provides an optimal environment for infection. Removing it also helps prevent STDs. So there you have it. Call me the most primitive neanderthal, but at*



*least I'm clean, unlike your dirty 'bits 'n pieces'. I do agree that the circumcision should be performed by a trained physician with proper equipment. I have no problem with atheists, but don't try to push your agenda or publically insult other faiths. It simply shows that you crave validation and gratification from others, since you are not 100% sure of your lifestyle choices. Faith is something many people hold dear, so be prepared for a backlash if you choose to attack it. That is all.” (32:6)*

The construction of modernity as tolerant in the above quote positions the normative framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as accepting and assimilative. The position is therefore to protect and integrate the culture into the existing normative framework rather than to attack it from a position of power. The assimilative stance taken by the outsiders, while appearing benevolent, also enacts the process of cultural epistemicide on the cultural symbolic network underpinning the rite. In the study of ethnicity in American immigrants, Grosfoguel (2004) reflected on the process of structural assimilation of ethnic identities into the dominant Anglo-American national identity. He describes the process as a gradual acculturation to the dominant norms, values and language of the host society. This process systematically eradicates key cultural markers that make the ethnic identity as unique and irrevocably position the dominant identity as the core identity of the society (Grosfoguel, 2004a).

The assimilative stance taken by the outsiders in the forums construct a civilised culture based on the principles of modern medicine as the normative base to which the initiation rite should conform without appearing to devalue the underlying symbolic network of meaning. The process described above appears to conform to the description of cultural epistemicide. The term cultural epistemicide explains the extermination of non-Western spirituality and ways of knowledge that was not implemented as part of Western colonial expansion (Grosfoguel, 2012c). The

extermination of these alternative ways of knowing eliminates alternative possibilities for lived experience which places the Western knowledge systems as the normative, universal truth (Grosfoguel, 2012c).

## **8.5. Describing the Macro-semantics of the text**

The Macro-semantics of the text are the constructed topics that populate the contents of Social Representations. These topics inform with respect to setting, circumstances, participants and events when individuals interact with socially constructed knowledge. The Macro-semantic topics identified within the text include initiations as a crisis; the rhetorical location of a panacea for the initiation crisis; the reclamation of tradition; and black masculinity as violent and grotesque.

### **8.5.1. Initiation as crisis, genocide and disease**

The Macro-semantic construction of initiation as a crisis, genocide and as a disease focus on orienting the reader to taking a rhetorical position that a solution must be sought at any cost. This construction of the initiation rite is directly drawn out of the cognitive superstructure of Death which sets the rhetorical position for the cultural colonisation of the rite by the legislative system that governs South Africa.

This topic is specifically linked with the quest for a panacea as it opens the discourse within the construction of the rite for the positioning of a solution. The ideology this solution is based on will hold a superior position to the cultural symbolic network underpinning male circumcision as an initiation rite. This is premised on the logic that the solution would be superior to the problem it has solved.

### **8.5.2. Panacea for initiation lies in...**

As mentioned above, the search for a panacea is closely linked to the construction of initiation as a crisis. There are a number of posts within the forums, particularly from the helpful, enlightened and outraged outsiders, that focus on providing the apparent solution to this crisis. These solutions are positioned as the one, true, one-dimensional solution that will permanently address the issue. The location of the panacea for initiation as modernisation was discussed in Chapter seven. The location of modernity within the ideological framework of the Western knowledge systems reinforces the implicit superiority of these systems in relation to the primitive, barbaric African cultures that gave rise to these issues in the first place.

### **8.5.3. Africa as backward and barbaric in the gaze of the world**

The Social Representation of Africa as backward, primitive and barbaric through the initiation ritual permeates the text both implicitly and in explicitly racist positions. In particular, the

initiation deaths are constructed as evidence of the African as unable to evolve and as incapable of mastering primitive cultural practices.

*“The problem is that Africans are ruled instead of guided by their Culture. Time to break free from silly outdated Traditional nonsense, as every other civilization has done.” (13:11)*

*“What confuses me is that Africans claim that this is their culture from time immemorial, yet they still cant master it. Innocent young boys who would have carried the nation forward die unnecessarily. Then again comes the foreign Europeans and invent ways of doing it better then the conventional traditional method and it is successful, how familiar. Still the Africans resist and deny that modern circumcision is still circumcision, they would rather let their precious kids risk death than changing with the times for the better....” (19:16)*

The retention of this tradition in the face of modern advancement is constructed as evidence of the lack of intelligence of Africans. This explicitly racist stance toward Africans positions the practitioners of the initiation rite at the centre of the gaze of the Western world which is constructed as superior and the standard against which evolution and development should be measured (Maldonado-Torres, 2007b).

#### **8.5.4. The reclamation of Tradition within the texts**

Tradition and culture are used interchangeably within the discussion forums, with little distinction in meaning in the use of the words. The rhetorical position of tradition is the point where the resistance of the destructive and assimilative strategies employed by the outsiders stems from. The rhetorical position of culture holds the position as ancient, venerated and sacred. The traditions, in particular the male circumcision rite are positioned by the insider informants, as equally sacrosanct and therefore worthy of preservation and adherence to these traditions is constructed as the norm.

The rhetorical resistance to the destruction or assimilation of the rite takes place in speech acts that reframe the rite within a larger social context, drawing focus away from the rite as the central site in which all the criticisms against initiation are housed. Social power was defined in Chapter Four as privileged access to socially valued resources such as wealth, income, position, status, force, group membership, education and knowledge (Fairclough, 2009; Prilleltensky, 2012; Van Dijk, 1987, 1993b). This power is enacted by limiting or increasing the freedom of others through speech acts that allow or disallow specific discourses. The re-contextualisation of the male circumcision initiation rite opens access to discourses of power beyond the initiator, the initiate, the parents of the initiate and the government. It integrates the social discourses that position these actors within systems of dominance that reinforce acts within a specific context.

A specific example of this re-contextualisation is the discourse of commodification of male circumcision as an initiation rite. The commodification of the rite positions the deaths and injuries of initiates outside of the cultural symbolic network by constructing a participant position

within the initiator group that is transgressive, criminal and that exploits the culture for personal gain. This participant position exists outside of the cultural symbolic network and is the result of modernising influences that promote the objectification of individuals into economic capital.

*“[name redacted]... It wasn't always like that until they started using the modern day tools and medicine... Using traditional herbs and the correct method this would not happen... Besides before all this modern crap they had the Chiefs of the tribes initiate the correct leaders to do the initiation now they just idiots running the joint for a buck....”*  
(7:3)

The rhetorical construction of the transgressive practice of “culture-trepreneurship” places the male circumcision initiation rite outside of the Death superstructure by relocating blame to a participant position that is the product of modern civilisation.

The reconstruction of tradition within the modern social system positions the role of elders and traditions as sacred but problematic. The erosion of ideals and morality is positioned as a result of exposure to the social ills associated with modernity and it is within these social ills that the corruption of the rite resides. The speaker below describes the role of the modern influence as a sudden shift that is anachronous to the moral norm that is culture but simultaneously positions culture as unable to adapt to integrate these new cultural grotesques fast enough to preserve the integrity of the rite.

*“our elders have not familiarised them self with the suddern changes that are tking places in our life. culture is still followed in the right way the problem is that most young people are highly involved with drugs and sexual intercourses, which according to culture one has to abstain from all those this before going to initiation school. the blame*

*still falls to the parents of the upgrowing boys to teach them about the pre-procedures of initiation. our authorities are not to be blamed rather the poor parenting needs to be taken into consideration in this case” (21:88)*

The reclamation of tradition was not only used by insiders to relocate blame but was also utilised as a demythologising strategy by outsiders to reposition the rite as at the cusp of integrating in to civility.

*“@[name redacted] - you can phrase it however you want, in the end it is a primitive culture that should be abolished!*

*Many years ago Europe used to burn (so called) witches at the stake if they did not understand them. Luckily they have moved on from that tradition, the fact is, some day you will move on from your primitive cultures too.” (9:15)*

By positioning European cultures as once primitive the author creates a point of comparison between the past state of European culture and the current state of African culture which clearly depicts African culture as underdeveloped and as inferior to European culture. The description of how Europeans have moved beyond these rites into a state of higher rationality implies that Africans have yet to take this step and are therefore less evolved.

The inclusion of the above example in this discussion is to illustrate that the strategy of reclaiming culture in text is not sufficient in itself because the strategy is simply a tool. The outcome of its use is determined by the intent of the user. The complex local struggles involved in repositioning and reclaiming culture within the texts are as much a product of modernity as the colonialist systems of thought that aim to assimilate it (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a). The rhetorical

site being contested in the acts of resistance by the insiders in the text is the contestation of the status of those who practice initiation as human.

#### **8.5.5. Black masculinity as violent and grotesque**

The epistemic universalism underpinning coloniality also serves to locate the world in two asymmetrical halves where absolute knowledge is assumed to originate from Western cosmology and philosophy which was derived from Christian-heterosexual-European men (Grosfoguel, 2012b). Grosfoguel (2012) labels this process as epistemic racism and sexism. This is the standard against which black masculinity is held up against for examination within the discussion forums and constructed as deficient.

This topic in the text served to reinforce the construction of African culture as backward and barbaric by positioning black masculinity as a site of sexual and physical violence as well as a disease vector.

*“Now they go back to their communities, rape little girls, kill for muti, follow a Juju rant and murder a farmer, steal something, break something and then sit back and blame apartheid. Mmmm, you're right... not working at all” (12:8)*

The implicit contrast in the quote above is of Christian-heterosexual-European men as peaceful, politically rational, constructive and productive members of society. The implication behind this contrast is that black masculinity should strive to attain Christian-heterosexual-European manhood as this is the site of true manhood.



*“He said the boys attended initiation schools with the hope of reaching manhood. WTF?? I thought you became a man when you finished school. Studied, worked , married. Had kids , and lead a respectful , peaceful life whilst protecting your family and looking after those you care for. A friend is a university lecturer. I'm amazed at the stories she tells me when these " men" come back from god knows where , with an aggressive , disrespectful attitude towards all women. She basically has to say : " get out of my class until you learn some respect ". So tell me .. Is this what you black okes learn out there in the swamp ? How to be a disrespectful coward with no balls ?? Hey ? Big men . So strong , so friken lazy ! So good for nothing.. You call yourselves men?? You're cowards .. No self respect. You all have a lot to learn about being men...” (13:30)*

#### **8.6. The linguistic practices used within the texts**

The speech acts and rhetorical techniques used within the texts studied describe the use of author positions, participant positions and rhetorical techniques to create and deny access to specific discourses within a text. The linguistic practices used in this text were the construction of an author position, the construction of participants and the rhetorical techniques used to construct these positions. The use of speech acts, particularly when from an individual who occupies a privileged political and social position, have the capacity to inhibit the rights and choices of those against whom the words are directed (Ratele, 2006).

Within the corpus of texts studied the construction of the author position and its underlying ideology determined the privileged status of the author in relation to the participants it

constructed. The outsider positions were typically constructed from a position superior to those who practised the male circumcision rite. The outsider positions were placed in the privileged position to judge the decision to participate in the rite through their position as outsiders gazing in through the media window. The insider positions were typically constructed as equal to those within the rite, with the exception of the construction of the criminal other described in the section on reclaiming the rite, but as superior to the outsider due to their intimate understanding of the rite.

## **8.7. Conclusions**

In a nutshell the thesis findings describe the epistemological struggle between two systems over the position of the line of humanity. Within the cultural symbolic network underpinning the male circumcision initiation rite, humanity is positioned as a status to be earned by undergoing initiation. Within initiation one is first moved below the line of the human and metaphorically regressed into a liminal space where human rights and privilege do not exist. As the individual attains enlightenment through the education of the rite and its surrounding culture, the status of human is granted. Human status is coupled with the power and privilege to alter one's social environment by influencing culture. The cut in the flesh of the initiate marks the attainment of this power and his return to the community embeds this power within the social context. The overarching metaphor of this process is one of death and rebirth. Death here is positioned as a contrasting line, one which emphasises life by juxtaposing it with the absence of life. Death here is not simply a physical state but a spiritual and metaphorical state in which life is positioned as

the ability to influence and interact with those around you. Within this cultural network of symbolism, death is a natural process of life.

The rite of passage described above denotes a space of privilege accessible to an elite few and explicitly excludes those who are considered children which is not tied to a chronological age but is a status granted to all males who have not undergone a recognised initiation rite. Thus the space of humanity within this rite is a space of privileged power and the rite is a gateway to this power as an empowered cultural agent from which a certain group of males and all females are excluded based on their status. The exercise of power over these men are exhibited in the act of forced circumcision which is enacted as a form of punishment and denotes a sub-human space where the right to decide about the integrity of one's body is denied to the individual by those acknowledged as powerful within the system. Within the rite itself the power disparity between the initiate and the initiator places the initiate at the absolute mercy of the men who oversee their rite of passage.

Within the symbolic network of meaning of the rite, the initiates are considered as non-human and as devoid of rights and privilege. This is the liminal space in which an individual is considered a blank slate to mould into the social ideal of manhood. It can be argued that the violent excesses reported in the media against initiates arise from the construction of initiates as non-human and as at the mercy of the men who oversee the rite. The moral hazard with an absolute power relationship is that the social controls that govern the behaviour of the powerful other do not exist within this sacred space and can be exploited by those who seek to abuse this power. It is not only initiates who are at risk of exploitation by the absolute power of the initiation practitioner but the parents of the initiates who are also placed in a position of relatively less power in relation to the practitioner. Within this power hierarchy, the absolute power vested

in the initiation practitioner within the sacred space of the rite disempowers the parents should they seek to intervene for the safety of their children. This is regardless of whether the children or initiation practitioner violated the cultural network of symbolism prior to the commencement of the ritual by not seeking parental consent or by forcing circumcision on the children through physical force or coercion. The absolute power of the initiation practitioner is constructed as existing only within the rite itself; outside of the rite the power relationships are dynamic. The positioning of initiates as helpless victims or powerless recipients of the initiation process would be incomplete. An example of the dynamic nature of power is what is described as “initiates stealing manhood”. This act implies a level of agency in the initiates that undermines the authority of parents and the broader social system by entering the manhood rite without their approval or control.

Within the modern South African context, the line of the human is positioned within discourses of development, civilisation and modernity. Belief in tradition is positioned as primitive, in the dark ages and barbaric while rational distancing from these beliefs is positioned as intelligent, civilised and signifies development into a human being who may be acknowledged as part of the modern social order. The idealised human being in this system views African tradition as backward, primitive and barbaric and therefore creates semantic and intellectual distance. Any who support the African traditions are regressed below the line of the human and positioned as monkeys in the bush who, despite enjoying the benefits of the civilisation bestowed on them by the West, cling blindly to their roots at the cost of their young. Death is the overarching metaphor in this system, specifically the aversion to it. A rational human being in this system resists death, is averse to it and does not willingly submit to exposure to it. To do so is to risk potential, the future and costs human life. Therefore any who practice any rite which holds death as a natural

outcome cannot be regarded as rational beings. Those who are not rational have not attained the enlightened state that is human. Enlightenment is also marked by the ability to accept the rite as valuable while systematically removing those aspects deemed to be uncivilised and backward. The enlightened human strives to bring others as close as possible into the zone of non-being by providing their thoughts, values and beliefs as benchmarks to strive toward.

### **8.7.1. Limitations and future work**

At this point it is relevant to reorient ourselves to who constructed the above epistemological contestation. The texts in this study were generated by those who have access to the internet which, in South Africa, excludes a large proportion of the population. Furthermore it only included those who could read and write in the English language. In the first chapter of this thesis the population of this study was described as part of the South African elite due to their position of privilege which is constituted on their access to the discourses studied in this thesis. This leads us to the limitation of this study. The construction of initiation schools in the South African media conducted in this thesis is limited to the specific online context described in the various chapters that comprise this study.

The contribution of this thesis is the depiction of the hierarchical cognitive structure constructed out of the semantic and semiotic interactions of the texts in this study. This cognitive structure or Social Representation can be compared to other contexts to determine which aspects of it are transferable to those contexts and to study to what degree it provides a useful analytical lens for uncovering the ideological structures that construct and maintain power asymmetries between the

dominant ideology of the Christian-Eurocentric Heterosexual white male and the local, indigenous epistemologies.

Further work envisioned from this thesis aims to examine the extent to which the cultural epistemicide of African male identity takes place within the classroom setting utilising the cognitive structure constructed in this study with the aim of understanding black male participation and identity construction in mainstream education in South Africa.

### **8.8. A post-script on epistemological entanglement**

The conclusion above marks the epistemological boundary of the study. I mention this to draw your attention to it and to explicitly place what follows outside of that boundary. Here, on the borders of the epistemology which framed our journey through the constructions of initiation schools, I would like to speak to you directly my reader and travelling companion.

Reflexivity is a key principle of qualitative research and aims to provide the reader with an audit trail of the actions, thoughts and decisions of the researcher. Reflexivity within the social constructionist paradigm is a performance enacted for the sake of you, the imagined reader. I say this statement simply and directly as one would to a peer, colleague or learned friend. I can say this now, outside of the boundaries of the text we have created together. For within the boundaries of the text we have just created you are placed as my judge and critic. Within the text I am placed as your researcher, informed, complete and of clear epistemological orientation.

On stage, in the performance of the research act we committed together, my moral and political stance toward the discursive construction of initiation schools was that it forms part of a larger discourse of cultural epistemicide. This moral stance is true from within the epistemological boundaries of our text. I say our text because your imagined presence shaped each conceptual link and turn of phrase as I strove to commit an act of research worthy of your evaluation. My explicitly stated moral stance in the study is therefore not my own but ours. I created it to please you. To pretend otherwise, here on the borders of our epistemology, would be a lie. To declare it boldly from within our epistemology would invalidate the act of the performance and unravel the web of narrative we journeyed within; an act akin to burning a bridge while standing on it.

A more personal truth is that I conducted this study, not out of moral outrage but out of a sense of curiosity. I was curious about how people spoke about such a prominent cultural practice, how they thought about it when speaking to each other. I simply wanted to pull back the corners of my ignorance a little further. Another personal truth is that I feel rather ambivalent about the practice. I see the value of the rite and find the beauty in it but cannot muster the outraged sense of injustice that the Critical Discourse Analysis approach tried to instil in me at the attempts to control and alter the rite. Part of me feels that the rite should be assimilated into popular culture, smoothed and moulded into a neat fit as part of the modern tapestry. Another part of me feels that the integration of this rite would lead to its eventual assimilation and, ultimately, its negation. Negation, the complete whitewash of the rite to conform with the dominant ideology. This, I feel, will contribute to building a bigger social world; one with less in it.

So, here on the borders of our epistemology, I part ways with you having delivered my final act in our collective performance.





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## **Appendix A – List of news articles studied for this thesis**

### 1. Initiate dies in North West - News24

2013-12-28 14:32

North West police are investigating the death of a 17-year-old initiate at an initiation school in Christiana.

### 2. Initiation school refuses medical help - News24

2013-12-27 21:50

The rights of three initiates have been violated in Matatiele in the Eastern Cape, the health department says.

### 3. Modise condemns illegal initiation schools - News24

2013-12-22 22:11

North West Premier Thandi Modise has called for a clamp down on illegal initiation schools following the death of two initiates.

4. Two die at N West initiation school - News24

2013-12-22 21:06

Two youths have died at an initiation school in Makwaneng, Amalia, North West police say.

5. 2 appear for illegal initiation school - News24

2013-08-07 21:05

Two men accused of running an illegal initiation school in Windsorton, Northern Cape, has appeared in the Barkly West Magistrate's Court.

6. Apology for initiation deaths - News24

2013-08-02 21:08

Traditional leaders have apologised to the country for the recent spate of deaths among young men at initiation schools, saying these deaths must be curbed.

7. Leaders sorry for initiates' deaths - News24

2013-08-02 15:23

The Congress of Traditional leaders apologised to the country for the recent spate of deaths among young men at initiation schools. Watch.

8. N Cape initiation bosses appear - News24

2013-07-15 19:26

Two men accused of running an illegal initiation school have been denied bail in the Barkly West Magistrate's Court.

9. ANCYL wants initiation school regulated - News24

2013-07-10 15:47

The ANC Youth League has called for initiation schools to be regulated by government and traditional leaders.

10. 2 held for illegal initiation school - News24

2013-07-08 19:44

Two men accused of running an illegal initiation school have appeared in the Barkley West Magistrate's Court, Northern Cape police say.

11. Motsoaledi slams 'criminal' initiations - News24

2013-07-08 09:03



Illegal initiation schools have turned the circumcision culture into "something criminal", Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi says.

12. Initiate death: Premier wants action - News24

2013-07-01 11:50

Officials should clamp down on initiation schools that operate outside the law, North West Premier Thandi Modise has urged.

13. North West initiate dies - News24

2013-06-30 14:21

A 17-year-old has died at an initiation school at Majemantsho village, in Mahikeng, North West police say.

14. Initiate's feet partially amputated - News24

2013-06-26 08:41

The deputy minister of police has visited a boy whose feet had to be partially amputated after he was burned and beaten at an initiation school in the Northern Cape.

15. Limpopo initiation schools probed - News24

2013-06-18 21:38

Claims of initiation schools operating illegally in Limpopo are being investigated, the traditional affairs department says.

16. Man shot dead at initiation school - News24

2013-06-18 09:56

A circumcision traditional surgeon has been shot dead at an initiation school near Bityi in the Eastern Cape.

17. Initiation schools are not irrelevant - News24

2013-06-17 17:35

Government shouldn't fear upsetting the traditional council or any chief by saving many young men and banning the circumcision of young boys at initiation schools.

18. Initiation deaths are murders - Motsoaledi - News24

2013-05-29 22:03

The deaths of dozens of boys at initiation schools in Mpumalanga and Limpopo is akin to tenderpreneurship gone wrong, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi says.

Subscribe to this search result via RSS

19. ANC: Circumcisions 'a cash cow' - News24

2013-05-29 20:27

Individuals have turned the cultural practice of initiation schools into a cash cow, ANC chief whip Mathole Motshekga says.

20. Zuma wants initiations to be re-examined - News24

2013-05-23 17:00

The deaths of young initiates after circumcision ceremonies cannot be tolerated, President Jacob Zuma says, following the deaths of 30 boys at initiation schools in Mpumalanga.

21. Circumcision deaths outrage Zuma - News24

2013-05-21 12:31

President Jacob Zuma has expressed shock and outrage at the deaths of 27 boys who attended initiation schools in Mpumalanga.

22. Initiation death toll mounts - News24

2013-05-20 21:21

Police are investigating the deaths of 27 boys who attended initiation schools in Mpumalanga, police say.

23. 20 boys die at Mpuma initiation schools - News24

2013-05-14 22:09

At least 20 boys have died in the last six days after attending initiation schools in Mpumalanga, police say.

24. 8 die after attending initiation schools - News24

2013-05-10 14:07

Eight boys have died after attending initiation schools in Mpumalanga.

25. SAHRC to probe initiation school - News24

2013-02-05 21:46

The SA Human Rights Commission is investigating the events which led to the death of a woman at a Northern Cape initiation school, it says.

26. Bail hearing set for initiation school 5 - News24

2013-01-12 18:49

The bail hearing of five people accused of abuse at an initiation school in Hartswater in the Northern Cape will begin on 23 January.

27. Concern over bogus initiation schools - News24

2012-07-12 18:26

The SA Men's Action Group has called on traditional leaders to curb the spread of bogus initiation schools.

28. Skull found near E Cape initiation school - News24

2012-07-06 17:37

A human skull has been found near an initiation school in Butterworth, Eastern Cape police say.

29. Four held for initiation deaths - News24

2012-07-03 19:11

Four men have appeared in the Botshabelo Magistrate's Court in connection with the deaths of four boys at a initiation school, Free State police say.

30. Initiate dies in Free State - News24

2012-06-26 18:42

A 17-year-old boy has died at an initiation school in Thaba 'Nchu in the Free State, police say.

31. Teen dies at FS initiation school - News24

2011-12-25 15:53

A 16-year-old boy has died after falling ill at an initiation school in Ficksburg in the Free State, police say.

32. Initiate dies trying to escape school - News24

2011-12-15 14:42

A teenager has died after being assaulted by workers at a North West initiation school for trying to escape, police say.

33. 56 in hospital after botched circumcisions - News24

2011-12-05 21:17

A traditional "surgeon" has briefly appeared in a North West court on charges of kidnapping and abducting young boys for his initiation school, after 56 initiates were taken to hospital.

34. Initiate dies, 3 hurt after assault - News24

2011-07-13 15:48

A 13-year-old boy has died and three others injured after they were allegedly assaulted at an initiation school near Mthatha in the Eastern Cape, police say.

35. Illegal Limpopo initiation school shut down - News24

2011-07-07 15:35

An illegal initiation school at a village in Limpopo has been shut down and 112 males were rescued from it and taken to a legal institution.

36. '11 days of hell' at initiate school - News24

2011-06-29 11:53

A 23-year-old man, who was pressured by his family to get circumcised, has fled an initiation school in East London, a report has said.

37. Boys rescued from initiation school - News24

2011-06-21 08:52

Twenty one boys have been removed from an illegal initiation school near Port St Johns, Eastern Cape police have said.

38. Legislation wanted for initiation schools - News24

2011-06-14 17:10

There needs to be national legislation on initiation schools as illegal schools are diminishing the appreciation of the cultural value of male initiation, says a cultural group.

39. 'Traditional healer' kidnaps boys - News24

2011-05-24 12:35

A traditional "healer" has reportedly held teenage boys to ransom at an initiation school on the East Rand, demanding money and maize in exchange for their return.

40. Illegal initiation school owner held - News24

2011-04-20 15:30

A man has been arrested in Pretoria for operating an illegal initiation school. It had already performed circumcisions on three males.



41. Initiate stabbed, abducted - News24

2010-12-30 13:36

A youth has been stabbed, apparently with a spear, when he tried to run away from an initiation school in the Lady Frere area of the Eastern Cape.

42. Initiate dies at Joburg school - News24

2010-07-15 11:27

A 21-year-old man has been beaten to death with a stick at an initiation school in Mondeor, south of Johannesburg, Gauteng police say.

43. Two F State initiation schools shut - News24

2010-07-06 19:47

Free State police have closed two illegal initiation schools at Theunissen and arrested their owners following complaints from the public.

44. Initiation schools face regulation - News24

2010-06-28 08:07

The minister of traditional affairs is considering making traditional leaders accountable, after reports of more deaths at initiation schools.

45. Cup threatens ritual - Sport

2010-06-22 18:42

There has been a drop of nearly 75% in boys attending initiation schools in Limpopo during the World Cup.

46. 'Practice culture safely' - News24

2010-06-17 15:40

One News24 was shocked to see that initiation schools are still being run on young Xhosa boys.

47. 13 initiates die in 12 days - News24

2010-06-17 11:50

Two more initiates have died in the Eastern Cape, as provincial health officials raid more illegal initiation schools.

48. Initiates found dead, 3 held - News24

2009-12-27 18:06

Three initiation school teachers have been arrested after two bodies of initiates were found in a school in Dewetsdorp, say Free State police.

49. 21 die at initiation schools - News24

2009-12-17 12:03

The death toll in the Eastern Cape's summer circumcision season now stands at 21, the provincial health department says.

50. Teen dies at initiation school - News24

2009-12-11 09:52

An 18-year-old initiate has died after starting to vomit during a ceremony at an initiation school in Vereeniging, according to Gauteng police.

51. Circumcision toll tops 40 - News24

2009-07-09 15:26

The death toll in the Eastern Cape's winter circumcision season has reached 41.

52. Botched circumcision: boy dies - News24

2009-06-30 16:07

A 15-year-old boy has died after a botched circumcision in Ngqeleni, say Mthatha police.

53. Initiation toll rises to 20 - News24

2009-06-29 22:04

The death toll in the Eastern Cape's winter circumcision season has risen to 20, the provincial health department says.

54. Botched circumcision kills boy - News24

2009-06-25 18:06

Septicaemia has claimed the life of a boy from Bisho after he underwent an illegal circumcision, say the Eastern Cape health department.

55. Boy in hospital over circumcision - News24

2009-06-20 09:19

A 14-year-old boy has been hospitalised with a rotting penis in the Eastern Cape after a botched circumcision at an illegal initiation school.

56. DA: Shut down initiation school - News24

2009-05-28 19:07

The Mpumalanga government should shut down the initiation school where eight initiates died after being circumcised, the Democratic Alliance says.

57. 8 initiates die in Mpuma - News24

2009-05-27 20:12

Eight initiates have died after being circumcised at an initiation school in Mpumalanga, health officials say.

58. Initiation: 15 kids missing - News24

2008-12-02 17:43

Fifteen children are missing in Orange Farm, south of Johannesburg, after some had apparently gone to initiation schools without their parents' consent.

59. 5 rescued from initiation school - News24

2008-11-12 09:15

Five boys have been rescued from an illegal initiation school in the Eastern Cape, in a joint operation between police and the provincial health department.

60. 100 initiates taken from school - News24

2008-07-10 20:06

More than 100 initiates, among them an eight-year-old, have been taken from an initiation school because it failed to comply with by-laws.

61. Cops rescue 19 initiates - News24

2008-04-02 08:02

Nineteen boys have been rescued from an Eastern Cape initiation school where they were found in a serious condition.

62. Circumcision: Son wants apology - News24

2008-01-23 21:17

A young Christian man reportedly is taking his father to court to demand an apology for compelling him to attend an initiation school.