
Childhood memories that matter: a reflexive analysis of a gender study in Lesotho

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Abstract

This article gives prominence to the resourcefulness of childhood memories in shaping a doctoral study of gender in Lesotho schools. Recent feminist scholarship foregrounds memory as a subject of research, thus duly placing research as a personalised and value laden process. This scholarship represents a vital stride in acknowledging the complex relationships between human experience and knowledge production. The article provides insights into how the paradoxes of masculinities, as part of the researcher's childhood memories, were useful in conceptualising a study aimed at addressing gender inequalities. The usefulness of memory (and positionality) was evident in articulating an epistemological stance of the study. Some nostalgic dynamics related to undertaking research in rural contexts that mirrored the researcher's childhood memories are also discussed. The paper contributes to ongoing feminist debates on how productive remembering could be a useful pedagogical and research strategy.

Introducing memory and childhood experiences

Using past memories positively, what Moletsane (2011, p.2004) calls, “productive nostalgia”, is part of a feminist social constructionist (Gergen, 2001) approach that tries to break down the barriers between the subject and object of research (Onyx and Small, 2001). Although memory work could be a very useful pedagogical and epistemological strategy (Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane, 2009), we need to differentiate between remembering that is unproductive and that which is productive. In this regard, Moletsane (2011, pp.194–195) cautions against the silencing and hegemonic impact of the “getting back to our roots” – “a longing for life that no longer exists” sometimes referred to as ‘restorative nostalgia’ (Boym, 2001). Instead she calls for ‘reflexive nostalgia’, focusing on productive remembering of the past. Moorosi (2011) has illustrated how productive remembering was such a liberating practice for women principals in her study.

With memory work being potentially such a useful pedagogical and research strategy (Mitchell, Strong-Wilson, Pithouse, K. and Allnutt, 2011), questions remain as to how exactly the concept of ‘productive nostalgia’ could be employed in real life educational and research contexts. What are the benefits of ‘reflexive nostalgia’ in research? In trying to address these questions, the excerpt below illustrates my childhood memories which foreground the focus of this paper.

The first wife of my father died after they had six daughters. Due to the minority cultural status of females in Basotho communities there were worries that all the cattle, sheep and fields that belonged to my family would be inherited by other Morojele families who had boys who were entitled by law to own property. Consequently, my father married (albeit, as I was informed, with much contempt from extended family members) a second wife (my mother) at the age of 60, with whom they were blessed with a first born (an heir) boy (myself). I was named (Pholoho) (which means salvation/redemption) denoting that my birth rescued my family from losing all its property to extended family members upon the death of my father. From a very early age I was socialised to be protective of my sisters against the social ills to which the patriarchal Basotho society relegated girls and women. To grow up quickly so I could protect my sisters (girls and women) was part of my earliest consciousness of being (Morojele, 2011a, pp.690–691).

Drawing on dynamics of masculinities (Kimmel, 2006) in Basotho communities, this article discusses how reflexive nostalgia (Moletsane, 2011) related to the above childhood memories played a role in my doctoral study of gender equality. The paper provides a reflexive analysis of how my childhood memories featured in the conceptualisation (of the study focus and methodology) and in the practical processes of carrying out my doctoral research (Morojele, 2011b, for details about the study). It denotes how, as a man (and the researcher), I was intricately entangled in undertaking a sensitive study of gender, involving young girls and boys in three rural Lesotho schools ravaged by gender inequalities, poverty, and HIV and AIDS. Indeed, my childhood (and often nostalgic) memories, as a child who was also schooled in rural Lesotho schools heavily inflected the processes of undertaking this research study.

Childhood memories: in the conceptualisation of a research of gender equality

In African societies men (and boys) are expected to take leadership of the household financially and to make decisions (Morrell, 2001). As highlighted

in my childhood memory excerpt above, what it meant for me as a boy growing up in a family headed by an old father, was to take on leadership responsibilities, albeit at a much younger age, in place of an aging father who could no longer provide subsistence and protection to the family. Thus, I was socialised to perform forms of masculinities that were thought to prepare me to undertake these responsibilities. These included being tough, displaying emotional and physical endurance (Anderson, 2008), as they say in Sesotho '*monna ke nku ha a lle*', meaning 'a man is a sheep, doesn't cry'. From a very early age, I used oxen to plough huge hectares of fields, looking after cattle (poorly clad) in very cold or stormy weathers, harvesting cattle fodder, maize, sorghum and so forth. These activities were part of the Basotho way of socialising boys to be warriors and conquerors of the hardships of survival in these rural communities.

I vividly remember the inspiring popular utterance that we used to bet with as young herd boys, '*ngoana moshemane ke kabeloa manong, kabeloa bo mohakajoane thoteng*' (literally meaning – a boy child is ordained for the vultures of distant valleys). The local meaning for this saying is that a boy child is born for hardships, normally endured outside the home, out there in distant valleys, where if he dies no one would see until his body gets eaten by vultures. Indeed, this utterance is reflective of my childhood experiences. In a sense, it also represents what my present day life has become – living far away from the mountain valleys of Lesotho (home) in the coastal valleys of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. This could likely be an indirect consequence of the pressure that I was perpetually put under to display courage, which included venturing in unknown (and sometimes dangerous territories) as a sign of real manhood. As the Basotho say, '*lebitla la ngoana moshemane le ka thoko ho tsela*' – a boy child's grave is on the side of a road. During my childhood years, these utterances were popular and they inculcated the spirit of perseverance and hardship endurance, in conformity to the Basotho proverb that '*monna ke tšepe e ntšo*' – literally meaning that a (first) boy child is a black iron, physically strong, and able to endure suffering without breaking or complaining (Machobane, 1996). However, the sheer anguish of being trapped in a snow storm out there in a distant valley as a herd boy, slowly freezing by the moment, prepared me to conclude that these utterances are sometimes very regrettable.

The values of toughness and pain enduring are closely related to what Connell (2000) calls hegemonic masculinities – that which is 'culturally exalted' or 'idealised'. Hegemonic masculinities present an idealised version of how real

men should behave, and boys who uphold this dominant version of masculinity enjoy power and privilege. Morojele (2011a) has indicated how boys' investment in hegemonic masculinities is the source of power and social approval. However, some researchers (for instance, Field, 2001) have found that the exaltation of hegemonic masculinities and pressuring boys to attain these is a functional source of many social ills in society. For example, Morrell (2002), Prinsloo (2006) and De Wet (2007) have related cases of gender-based violence to the hegemonic masculinities encouraged and upheld in schools.

As a boy heir child, I was constantly pressured to attain hegemonic masculinities in order to demonstrate my readiness to assume my aging fathers' responsibilities. But my age was such a deterrent to this. On the contrary, I felt that I needed an older brother or not too old a father to protect me against some of the hardships. The absolute pressure and desperation from my family for me to attain hegemonic masculinities were probably a source of liberation on my part. Somewhat ironically, this imbued a negative conception in my mind regarding patriarchy and gender inequality. Especially so given the stigma and embarrassment that was associated with my inability to perform some of these masculinities (Field, 2001). Here goes the paradox: Clearly had there been no patriarchy in Basotho society, I would probably not be so much pressured to grow up quickly so I could protect my sisters. Yet I might not have been born if there was no patriarchy in Basotho society, since my father would probably not marry at such a late age in order to have a son who would protect his cattle from being inherited by other Morojele families. Undeniably, my childhood memories are caught in such complex paradoxes.

These paradoxes culminated in my commitment to gender equality. I focused my doctoral research on how to address gender inequality, in part to continue what I was socialised to believe as my purpose in life – to protect my sisters (and women) from patriarchy in Lesotho communities. As my childhood memories testify, boys (and men) too are equally compromised by the scourge of gender inequalities. Therefore, teachers (female and male) and girls and boys were included in this study as the main participants. The study drew on social constructionism (Gergen, 2001), to examine how teachers and children in three Lesotho rural primary schools made meaning of gender. It foregrounded my childhood memories, as the researcher, as crucial in the development of methodological strategies and data collection processes (Morojele, 2011b). In line with some feminist scholars (Mitchell *et al.*, 2011) and critical men's studies (Gibson and Hardon, 2005), social constructionism

construes embracing reflexive capacity, what Moletsane (2011, pp.204–206) calls “productive nostalgia” and plurality of gender identities as a basis for social change.

Social constructionism does not deny socially constructed categories allocated to males (boys and men) and females (girls and women) and the concomitant gender inequalities that arise from this categorisation. Yet it challenges the taken-for-granted meanings attached to these socially constructed realities as if they were fact, static and inevitable (Gergen, 1999). It does not prohibit taking a political standpoint or position, but entails recognition that this is a position and that there are other positions. Since positions are mobile, social constructionism anticipates greater potential for change:

For many people this supposition is deeply threatening, for it suggests there is nothing we can hold onto, nothing solid on which we can rest our beliefs, nothing secure. Yet, for others this dark night of insecurity gives way to an enormous sense of liberation. In daily life, so many of our categories of understanding – of age, gender, race, intelligence, emotion, reason and the like – seem to create untold suffering. And in the world more generally, so many common understandings – religion, nationality, ethnicity, economics and the like – seem to generate conflict, alienation, injustice, and even genocide. From social constructionism standpoint we are not locked within any convention of understanding (Gergen, 1999, pp.47–48).

Linking this analysis to my childhood memories, it could be noted how the patriarchal imperative to rigidly identify myself as a man (a boy heir), brought about much suffering and pressure to have to grow up quickly and take on my father’s responsibilities. Another paradox related to my childhood memories is that as a young boy I was socialised to benefit from a patriarchal system (for example, inheriting my family’s property). In some cases, men uphold hegemonic masculinities because they give them access to resources and privileges that women and men who perform alternative masculinities do not enjoy (Coetzee, 2001). Conversely, the pressure of having to uphold the mostly idealised (and impossible) hegemonic masculinities that went with being a privileged boy heir was unbearable, particularly due to my age. The equation of simultaneously becoming a benefactor of patriarchy and a protector of my sisters and family against the ills of patriarchy brought so much pressure and darkness to my life. Yet this sense of insecurity brought about an enormous sense of liberation – a commitment to undertake a study of gender equality, which aimed to contribute knowledge on how to address gender inequality in rural Lesotho schools.

Memory and researcher's identities: in the articulation of an epistemological stance

Feminist theories (Griffiths, 1998, pp.130–134) have advanced arguments that the “politics of the researcher” are a central issue in the production of knowledge. With such power, it was important to examine how my childhood memories and identities (as the researcher) have inflected the methodological processes of this research project. My identity in this study was an ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’. I was an ‘outsider’ in that I was studying gender equality in Lesotho rural primary schools as a research student from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. To some degree this positioned me within the tradition of 19th century Anglo-American researchers studying distant, exotic and developing communities (Banks, 2001). As a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I was exposed to various concepts and theories that explained the role of macro and structural dynamics in gender relationships. This exposure bolstered to some degree my critical consciousness and thinking about the gendering processes and concomitant social and gender inequalities in our society. For instance, the theoretical insights I gained as a student enabled me to relate how the currency of male supremacy cut across most Basotho communities – the home, school, church and in societal norms and rituals in ways that are pervasive and endemic.

But I was also an ‘insider’ in that I am a Lesotho citizen, a man who was born, grew up and schooled in Lesotho rural primary schools – studying gender in Lesotho rural primary schools. This perspective of examining one’s own society has currency in post-modern ethnography where the familiar is made strange (Marcus, 1998). The situatedness of my insider experiences inculcated the relevance of understanding the local meanings that individual (especially young) people make about their lives as a valid means of knowledge production. My childhood memories were more personal, nuanced and localised. I could not easily relate them to broader dynamics of gender within Basotho communities. I grew up believing that the adult world is void of the nuanced memories of childhood (Renold, 2005) and that this might compromise their knowledge of society. This insider identity enabled me to gain access to the cultural nuances of Basotho language and its discourse and to mediate this with my own experiences, in ways that enhanced the depth and overall quality of my engagement with this study.

By and large, my identity in this study involved a hybrid of insider-outsider position. This position conjoined the outsider's critical theoretical perspective and insider's knowledge of the politics and dynamics of gender inequalities in Lesotho primary schooling. My hybrid position in this research situated me beyond the "binary of insider/outsider polarity and familiarity and strangeness" (Atkinson and Hamersley, 1998, pp.110–111). Consequently, my critical stance to education and gender was bolstered, and this (together with my childhood experiences, as discussed earlier) culminated in a political conviction to promote gender equality in Lesotho primary schooling. This had significant implications for my study. I believed that focusing overly on the wider theoretical and structural dynamics of gender inequalities has a danger of reproducing micro/macro binaries and producing notions of ordinary people as powerless. Social constructionism also resists this view of the inevitability of given forms of power:

One of the explicit aims of much social constructionism research is to analyse the [gendered] power relations within which people live their lives and thus within which their [gender] experience is framed, and to offer an analysis which allows the person to facilitate change [in gender relations] (Burr, 1995, p.111).

The above excerpt affirms my childhood memories which purport exploring the local meanings that individual people make about their lives as a valid means of knowledge production. Only when we could genuinely unveil how individual people experience and make meaning of their lives, could we devise effective strategies of facilitating change in localised communities. This orientation has currency in poststructuralist ethnographies (Brewer, 2000) which emphasise understanding the cultural architecture through which local people make meanings of their lives as a valid means of knowledge production. However, poststructuralism could also paralyse change:

[Poststructuralist] approaches have increasingly become riven by a contradiction: the social referents in the post colonial world call for urgent and clear solutions, but because speaking positions in a poststructural world are thought to be always immanently contaminated by being part of a compromised world, poststructuralism often resort to a sophisticated form of rhetoric whose main aim seem to be to revert attention permanently on the warps and loops of discourse (Quayson, 1999, p.8).

This means that in order to be responsive to the post colonial world which requires urgent and clear solutions to social ills, such as the scourge of gender inequalities, poverty and HIV and AIDS, poststructuralism must both deconstruct or 'look awry' at the phenomenon under analysis and at the same time integrate the analysis into larger affirmative projects.

Epistemologically therefore, I constructed my research to be situated and located, to explore the complex power dynamics in children's relationships – with each other, with teachers and with me – and to interpret these within broader social networks in Basotho communities. I considered how these networks position children in particular ways, and at the same time how children engage and resist that positioning. I employed social constructionism which explores how gender meanings are constructed in multiple and diverse ways, and how these are connected to broader social relations of gender. I adopted a reflexive stance to research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000), and used ethnographic methodologies (observations and informal conversations) (Christensen and James, 2000) to learn about the everyday schooling experiences of children and teachers. Conventional research methodologies (Mouton, 2001) (questionnaire and semi-structured interviews) were used to understand structural patterns of gender relations and the broader social context of my research. Paradigmatically, this approach positioned my study in the borderlands between structuralism and poststructuralism with a critical predisposition to improve gender relations. The study was conducted for a period of nine months (three months in each schooling site) in three rural primary schools with Grade 7 boys and girls and teachers (see Morojele, 2011b, for details).

Researching contexts mirroring my childhood memories: a nostalgic undertaking

The data collection processes in these rural schools gave me a second chance to relive some of my childhood memories, albeit, somewhat in a different persona and for different purposes. My childhood memories gave me a vantage of insight, particularly in engaging and understanding children's constructions and experiences of gender. A nostalgic dimension was indicated when I named the schools under study in the chronology of my childhood memories related to the mountains that surrounded a small village where I was born. As a child, a mountain called Tsuoe-Tsuoe, situated right in front of my home constituted my first sight of an object of wonder in my life's journey of discovery. Then on the far right was a beautiful mountain called Molalana (also a nickname for my small village), followed by another one on the left called Maloaleng. To my original consciousness of being, as a small child, the ability to climb each of these mountains was a symbol of growth and passage into knowledge (and of course manhood). I spent my first childhood years

longing and fantasising, impatiently waiting to grow up so I could climb these mountains. I was told that once on top, one could see far places and have a better view of the world. I named the schools in my study Tsuoe-Tsuoe, Molalana and Maloaleng, exactly in the same chronology of how I learnt to climb these mountains as a child. The data collection processes followed the same order. This memory symbolism related to a sense of apprehension and euphoria that I had regarding these schools. Some degree of longing and fantasising had ensued in my life before I commenced data collection. Just like my village mountains, I earnestly believed that after discovering what dynamics of gender played out in these schools, I would have a better perspective of life and write a PhD thesis.

At Molalana primary school, during lunch time children who sang for the school choir normally gathered in one classroom with all teachers to rehearse as there was going to be a competition in Maseru (capital city of Lesotho) in October that year. The principal, who was the conductor, was responsible for training and preparing the school choir. Below is an illustration of one song that the school choir rehearsed. I became so nostalgic with the song; we also sang the same song in my primary school when I was young. It was interesting how after almost twenty years since I left primary schooling things have remained the same.

*Jesu seli laka u nthuse ka lihloko tsa moea.
Ketle ke tsebe ho loana ntoa e thata ea lefatše.
Oho Jesu ke tšepile uena, ho ntoanela
Hore u nthuse ka lihloko tsa moea
Ha sera se nteka, se nteka ha bohloko-hloko
Oho Jesu ke tšepile uena
Hore u mphe matla. U nthuse ka lihloko tsa moea*

The English translation reads thus;

God my lord and my light, please assist me with spiritual amours
So I could win a hard battle of the earth, when the enemy troubles me
When the enemy troubles me so much. Oh lord I look on to you
Oh lord I trust onto you, to give me strength
To fight for me, to help me with spiritual amours. . .

(Fieldnotes: Molalana primary school)

The spiritual inspiration of this song was felt around the school as mostly girls sang and chanted the song and quietly danced to its rhythmic tunes in small groups during lunch, break and playtime. I could easily imagine what the ‘hard battle of the earth’ was for these girls – it was the plight of abject poverty and HIV and AIDS in the context of capitalism (Epprecht, 2000) and alienation from the mainstream economy of these rural communities (Balfour, Mitchell and Moletsane, 2008), the plague of gender inequalities which inflicted forms of gender-based violence particularly on girls (De Wet, 2007), and the school policies that advocated expulsion from school of pregnant girls, as illustrated below. Girls endured so many gender-based hardships in these schools; it was no wonder how much of an inspiration (and consolation) this song was for them.

The song was really fascinating and sometimes I found myself devotedly humming the song as I drove home from this school. I still remembered that in my school days I sang this song with the same fervor, earnestly asking God to sanctify me with spiritual amours to conquer dominant discourses of gender that pressured boys to perform narrowly defined forms of masculinities (Kimmel, 2006), which predisposed boys to danger and even death. Then I sang it for the blessing to become triumphant over the brutal acts that we (boys) were pressured to commit (such as sexual harassment, teasing, insults, malicious jilting of girlfriends etc.) just to prove real manhood (Morojele, 2011a) and to avoid humiliation associated with being seen as effeminate (Skelton, 2001). But this time, as I dedicatedly hum the song, I also had in mind another request, asking God to bless me with spiritual and intellectual amours so I could conquer ‘the hard battle’ for a PhD.

All the three schools did not have electricity. The following data illustrate some dynamics related to the absence of electricity in one school:

When I arrived I was met by the Grade 7 teacher (72 years old Mrs Mantoa) – the oldest teacher in the school. She wanted clarity on the questionnaire. She asked me to explain what I meant by the ‘source of power in the school’. As I explained she laughed at me and dramatically murmured, “Hey your question is so difficult, you know. We don’t have any source of power in this school. When the weather is cloudy or the storm is coming, the classrooms get dark and we just sit down, fold our arms and ask children to narrate fairy tales.

(Fieldnotes: Tsuoe-Tsuoe primary school)

At first, I found this statement a bit paradoxical. From my childhood memories I knew that fairy tales are part of the Basotho culture. They are normally narrated by elderly people to children in the evening (or at night) when they gathered around a glowing fire in a traditional Basotho hut. Children are also asked to narrate these stories in return. This is meant to train and practice their remembering (memory) ability. Such stories are usually based on fictions and imaginary stories of animals impersonated as human beings (like *mutlanyane le tau moholo*, a small rabbit and elderly lion). I also remembered that there was a superstition that if one tells fairy tales during the day she/he would grow horns on the head. This served to discourage narration of these stories at day time (when people are supposed to be busy working etc.). During cloudy weather the classrooms at Tsuoe-Tsuoe primary school became so dark that it really looked like it was at night. I realised that narrating fairy tales during cloudy weather was, indeed, not ironic, as the irony is to expect formal learning to take place in a dark classroom.

This was one specific example of how lack of basic resources affected the quality of education that rural children receive. Chisholm (2004) in her study conducted in South Africa found that education in the rural areas remains beset with problems and challenges simply not considered within policy, theoretical, and pragmatic initiatives. In three months time all Grade 7 children in the country were going to write future determining National School Leaving Certificate examinations, where their performance would decide their progression into secondary schools. The time that these rural children spent discussing aspects of the school curriculum (not narrating fairy tales) would definitely bolster their performance in these examinations.

During data collection some principals seemed to be skeptical about my presence in the schools, especially my insistence on talking with the children in the absence of teachers. I had emphasised to the children that whatever we were discussing should not be told to anyone and promised that I would not divulge our stories to their teachers. I used the expression, 'what we are discussing here is a top secret'. This was in part observing the ethical guarantees that I promised all the participants in the beginning of data collection (see Morojele, 2011b), and to encourage children to share their stories freely without fear. One day three girls came to tell me that a day after I had left, the principal called all Grade 7 children into the classroom and asked them to say what they had been telling me.

I got a bit nervous and asked the girls.

- PM (Author) : And then what did you say?
- Pulane (girl aged 12) : Yes sir, we didn't know what to say for a moment until. . .until that girl [pointing to another girl who was playing some distance away from us] Lerato stood up and said, 'No madam, sir said it's a top secret what we were talking about', and the whole class laughed, and she left.

I learnt later that the phrase, 'no madam, it's a top secret' became some new discourse through which girls secured their private spaces. In this school (Maloaleng primary) in particular, in the previous year, five girls became pregnant and were thus expelled from the school. Consequently, the school adopted the practice of gathering all girls aged 10 upwards to ask them in front of all the teachers questions like 'who goes out with who after school' (meaning who is in love with who?). Girls only (not boys) who were found to be involved in heterosexual love affairs (locally referred to as *ho tsoa*, to 'go out') were publicly ridiculed during a one hour girls' parade which was held every Friday.

This was a strategy to discourage girls from having sexual relationships with boys and falling pregnant in these rural contexts where the prevalence of HIV and AIDS was high. Since the construction of the discourse 'no madam, it's a top secret', some girls reverted to this discourse to avoid telling stories about their relationships with boys. This strained my relationship with the principal and teachers as they struggled to have girls tell their stories in the Friday parade. Perhaps they regretted why they allowed a 'stranger' man to talk secrets with their little girls. In this context, the principal and teachers were justified to question my secrets with the young school girls. Although this had given girls an alternative narrative to subvert a gender biased school practice, it is against Basotho culture to allow men to have undisclosed secrets with young girls.

However, I knew from my childhood memories that it was grossly unfair to punish girls only for their heterosexual relationships with boys. This was

based on false assumptions about children's relationships. Usually boys are the ones who propose or even extort girls into these relationships.

During my school days there was an older brother (Nkosi) who bullied us (about six younger boys) to repeatedly harass one elder sister (Ntsoaki). He instructed us to surround her, shout, dance and clap hands loudly uttering, 'hey you *Mmofu* (big breasted), hey *Mamolomo* (you big mouthed), hey you *Matlhare* (ugly one)', pulling her by the school uniform every morning and afternoon on our long journey to and from school. As a child I thought brother Nkosi really hated sister Ntsoaki. She used to cry chasing after us, as we dispersed, laughed and regrouped around her. I was surprised later to realise that sister Ntsoaki was in love (going out) with brother Nkosi as they went together almost every day after school, holding each other around the waists – sometimes observing time-honoured moments of privacy behind a big rock.

(Author's childhood memory)

Similar dynamics were observed in this study where even younger boys attempted to coerce girls to behave in particular ways by means of intimidating them, and calling them derogatory names. With these memories in mind, I was very devastated to witness how girls in this school were inequitably subjected to utter disgrace for 'going out' with boys. Not to mention that when pregnancy did occur only girls would be expelled from school. Putting girls under strict surveillance and control was common across the three schools. I was glad that girls took advantage of my small research project to try to secure their private space with the aim to subvert a gender regime (Bhana, 2005) which undermined girls. I was aware of the potentially damaging consequences that might have ensued after I had left, and unfortunately, I did not have any strategies of handling these situations. This was, perhaps one of the limitations of this study. As it is clear that without immediate interventions that protect girls from disgraceful school-based practices, girls' agency in mitigating the harmful experiences of gender inequalities might not last.

Notwithstanding, this denotes young girls' readiness to take advantage of the school-based initiatives meant to address gender inequalities. This generates optimism that, for interventions aimed at addressing gender inequalities in the schools to be effective, they must respect childhood and children's experiences and build on the existing ways in which children actively perceive and engage with the world. With this in mind, schools need to

develop formal and coherent strategies to conceive and support gender discourses and performances that promote equitable gender relations.

Conclusion

The article has discussed how my childhood memories regarding the dominant discourses of what it meant to be a boy heir, and the concomitant contradictory (and often painful) experiences informed my decision to undertake a study of gender equality. It denotes how memory work enabled a trans-generational analysis of gender in Lesotho rural schools. Childhood memories illuminated the need for gender equality initiatives and school reforms to work closely with children, respecting and building on their existing ways of engaging with gender issues. This contributes to the ongoing feminists' debates around the resourcefulness of memory in pedagogy and research as a means to effective social action and change ((Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane, 2009). This study has illustrated how memory work brings human experience at the heart of knowledge production endeavours, thereby evoking notions of research as a personalised and value laden process. Affirming the significance of human experience and the co-existence of multiple social identities has the potential to bolster intellectual transformation in tandem with the principles of social justice, human dignity and equality.

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