



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

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***Izwi LabaGcini: Investigating the Relationship Between
Homosexuality and Ubungoma through the Scripting of Ritual
Theatre***

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**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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In the
Discipline of Drama and Performance Studies.

School of Arts, The University of KwaZulu Natal - Howard College, Durban,
South Africa.

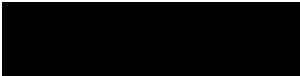
April 2025

Supervised by: Dr. Miranda Young-Jahangeer

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IS'fundo W. Sosibo.....declare that

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Signed:.....

S'fundo W. Sosibo (Candidate)

December 2024

Supervisor's Declaration

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree/do not agree to the submission of this dissertation.

.....

Dr. Miranda Young-Jahangeer (Supervisor)

December 2024

Ethical Clearance Letter



16 November 2021

Mr Sfundo Sosibo (SN 214583622)
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Dear Mr Sosibo

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Izwi LabaGcini: Investigating the relationship between homosexuality and Ubungoma through the scripting of (Afrocentric) Ritual Theatre."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by requesting postgraduate students from the School of Arts to provide feedback on your script at the Howard College Campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

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INSPIRING GREATNESS

*I dedicate this work to my nephew,
The Ngogs,
Who is a redemption I will always be grateful for.*

Acknowledgements

Ngicela ukuqala ngabadala, oThabethe noMnguni, ngoba akutho okungenzeka ngaphandle kwabo. And then I wish to honour the two women who have been the pillars that have held the citadel of thought to be found in the following pages: first my mother, Zinhle G. Sosibo, for inculcating on me the respect for education I have; and then my supervisor, Dr. Miranda Young-Jahangeer, for nurturing and challenging this same education I continue to pursue. I would like to thank the Drama Department of the University of KwaZulu Natal (Howard College), for supporting my academic ambitions always. And to the Almasi African Playwrights Conference, for giving me my first platform and affirming me as a playwright. Patrick Miller for hosting me in his warm home in Harare. I would also like to mention the Critical Friends Protocol, without whom *Izwi LabaGcini* and this study would not have been possible. My Drama friends, Sobz, Ntokozo TK, Kamini, Ongezwa, Mbali, Marcia, Steph, JC, Sizwe, Taf-Bob and Zaza, for the friendships that have grown the artist and thinker in me. I would be remiss if I did not mention the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study (JIAS) and UJ Arts & Culture for providing the means through which this study could be completed. Thank you Nkule, Ayanda, Mcwayi, Nkonzo and Nojenda for being the friends of my mind. To Nosipho and Mah, for adopting me when the time called. My sister Zime, and best friend Linda, for being there for me always. Special bow to the 2024 Jakes Gerwel (Kommadagga) Residency cohort, for arriving at the last leg of this marathon, and providing the final cheers that got me to the finishing point. And finally, my Alice – Dr. Princess Sibanda – for continuing to dream on my behalf, and for not letting this project go, even when it sometimes evaded me.

Abstract

The following study was carried out as an investigation of the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. I used playwriting as an aspect of creative research to inquire on the phenomenon of spirituality influencing sexuality in the African paradigm (Ramsay 2002; Smith and Dean 2009). My own journey as a queer man called to ubungoma was incorporated in this autoethnographic study (Holman Jones 2007; Custer 2014). During a three-month process, I composed a play titled *Izwi LabaGcini* [Word of the Keepers], which was developed under a Critical Friends Protocol of six participants, that met for three feedback sessions between December 2021 and February 2022 (Costa and Kallick 1993; Appleby 1998; Constantino 2010). The Protocol provided critical feedback not only on *Izwi LabaGcini* as a dramatic text, but also as an artefact that interrogates the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. The data for this study was generated through zoom recordings of the Critical Friends Protocol, and the Reflexive Journal I kept as a means to interrogate my creative writing methods throughout the scripting of *Izwi LabaGcini* (Sutherland 2007; Ortlipp 2008). The theories informing this study were that of Afrocentricity (Molefe 1988), Decoloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015), and Ritual Theatre (Soyinka 1976). I have also employed Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa's writings on ubungoma, as a seminal frame of reference, in discussing ubungoma as a phenomenon of exploration (2003). The findings of this qualitative inquiry contribute to discourse pertaining to African sexualities in the context of a continent where LGBTQIA+ rights continue to be a struggle we contend with (Patton 2002; Golafshani 2003; Chilisa and Preece 2005). *Izwi LabaGcini* resulted as a contribution to knowledge around the interlinks between queerness and ubungoma (Dean and Smith 2009); and it has further contributed to South African theatre and literature in what I have coined The Absurd Ritual - a theatre that observes black queer life in the context of African spiritualities.

Note on Images

Note: For aesthetic purposes, the images dividing the three parts of this work will be referenced in the Reference List.

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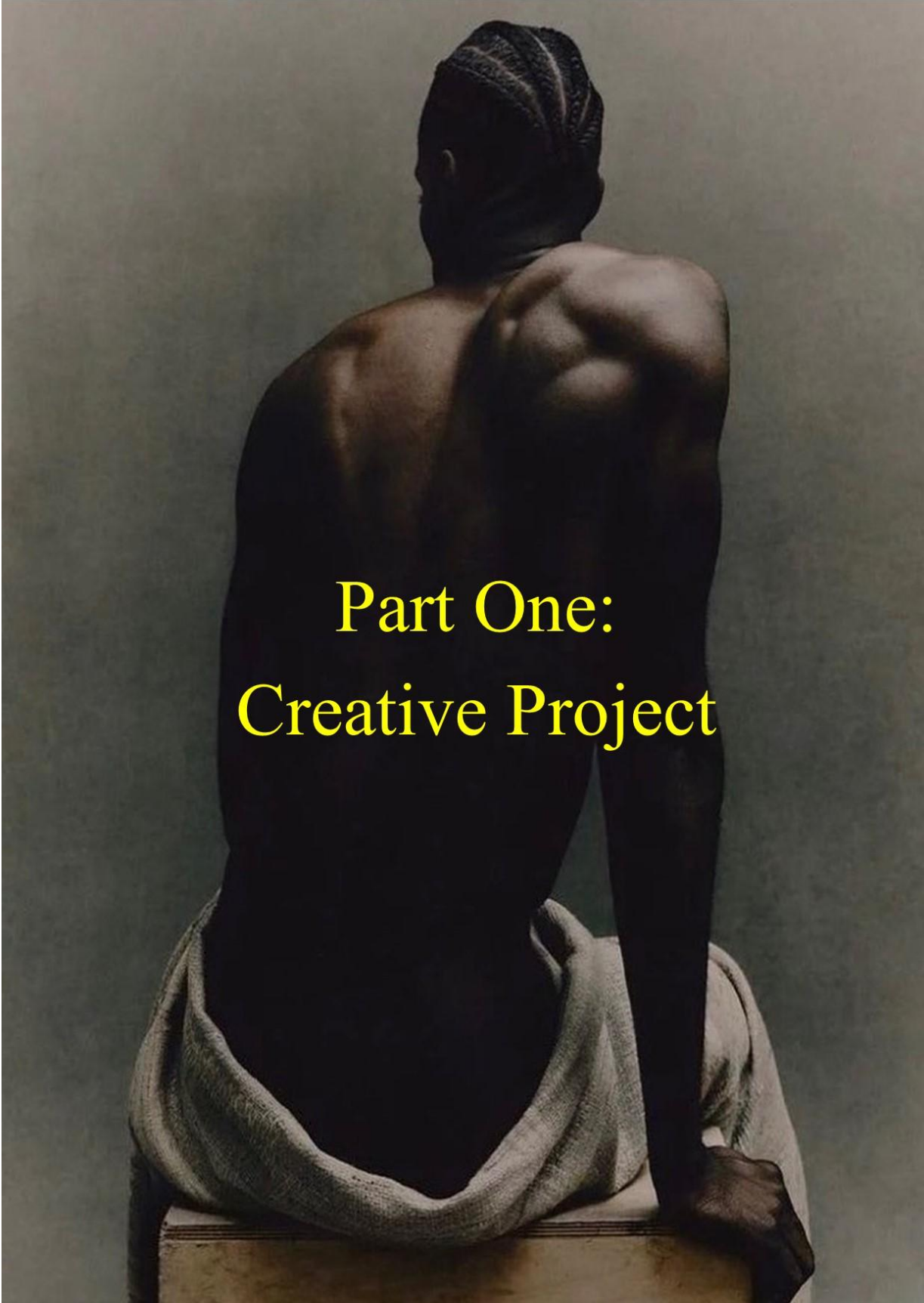
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Part One:
Creative Project

Izwi LabaGcini

An Ancient Epic

Characters

Heru, *Prince of Kemet. Divine Son to Aset and Ausir (uMgcini – Gatekeeper)*

Smeshi, *Set's son, Heru's cousin (Queer)*

Maat, *Heru's Ancestor. Goddess of Order, Truth and Balance*

Ausir, *Pharaoh of Kemet, Heru's father. God of the Underworld*

Aset, *Queen of Kemet, Heru's mother. Goddess of the Moon and Magic*

Set, *Ausir's brother, Heru's uncle, Smeshi's father. God of Chaos*

Tehuti, *God of Wisdom*

Ra, *God of the Sun*

Man 1

Man 2

Woman 1

Woman 2

Drummer 1

Drummer 2

Scene First

An ancient kingdom – Kemet.

A queer act on stage.

Drums. A spotlight, a throne, a prince.

Heru struggles to assume his seat of state upstage centre. He is in a fracas with the royal chair that seems to deny his blood. He attempts the throne, slips, falls. A Gregorian chant scores this trial. Melancholy. A purple hue as **Maat** enters, seriously celestial in feathers, a staff and a divine mask; with a naked **Smeshi** that she leads centre-stage right. **Smeshi** is covered in ibomvu and adorning umqhele. **Maat** bangs her staff and **Smeshi** moves in exotic choreography, making his way to circle **Heru** on the throne, teasing him sexually.

Maat (under a spot. To audience)

INkonkoni siyilanda emandulo!
Yathi kuMvelinqangi izobamba bobubili
Ubulili ibhule amaphupho abadala ngobuzwilili.
IDlozi lesalukazi lidlinza emzimbeni wenkosana,
Naye wagqoza njengogogo bogogo bakhe.
Uphahla ukujula kwamajuba asemkhathini,
Ephethe ishoba leNkonkoni ethungathwe
UMndawe, uMndiki, Isithunywa, Abalozi, noMnguni.
Unyathela okwenziswa okwentombi kuhlanguene
Ubulili, kuhlanguene imimoya emzimbeni munye.
Uvula amasango onke eZulu, isanusi sakwaZulu,
Insizwa yesalukazi, intombi yekhehla, kuhlanguene
Ubulili nemimoya. Thokoza Mgcini, ombethe
Imfihlakalo yesiGodlo sikaTehuti. Wena obhula
Ngeshoba leNkonkoni kuhle komhlaba otusa ilanga
Nenyaga. Hamba-ke, bamba-ke amahubo eziThixo
NamaKhosi okhokho-khokho. Nyathela Mgcini,
Siyakulandela.*

Lights. Four transvestite figures, in traditional Nguni clothing, are seen seated in a line downstage left. Holding nooses in raised (right) arms around their necks, they stroke their genitalia with their left hands and all chorus a climactic opera, taking over from the Gregorian chant. Heru falls off the throne into Smeshi's arms, who places him centre stage and returns to Maat; Community arms also fall. Stop drums. Lights fade.

Maat Siyavuma! [We agree!] (Exits with **Smeshi**.)

Silence. Lights up.

Man 2 dips a finger in **Man 1**'s privates, licks, beings.

Man 2 The Prince. (Drums.)

Woman 1 The Prince. (Drums.)

Man 1 & Woman 2 INkosana. [The Prince] (Drums.)

Woman 1 The Prince! (*Drums.*)

All (*shout*) The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru! (*Drums as they all rise to dance in a circle. Chanting. Ululating. Singing.*) The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru! The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru! The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru! The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru! (*Stop drums. To audience.*)

Man 1 iNkosana is in trouble. With himself, namaDlozi [and the Ancestors].

Woman 2 The visions of dawn are a frightening pleasure.

Man 2 How would he rule with disgrace in his loins?

Woman 1 How would he rule with a limp wrist? (*Bends her wrist.*)

They all snigger.

All (*chanting, clapping*) The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru! The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru! The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru! (*Shouting.*) The Prince, iNkosana, the Prince, Heru!

Man 1 The king is now dead; his brother did him in just this night.

Woman 2 And so Heru must prepare to carry the sceptre.

Woman 1 Yet here we are lamenting his laundry.

Man 2 Here he is, dreaming of boys. (*Spits.*)

Woman 2 (*rising*) Ay phela it's not that much of a big deal.

Woman 1 (*confrontational*) Yeyi, wena! [Hey, you!] If it's no such a big deal, then why is he having nightmares about it?

Woman 2 It wasn't a nightmare! It was a visit from iDlozi [an Ancestor].

Woman 1 iDlozi lobutabane? [An Ancestor of homosexuality?]

Woman 2 His father just died. He is confused. He is haunted by the spirit of shame.

Man 2 (*excited*) And what does he have to be ashamed about?

Woman 2 Of people like you.

Woman 1 Fuseg wena [Piss off] man –

Woman 1 and Man 2 begin to argue with **Woman 2**. **Heru** stirs.

Man 1 Bakwethu . . . Bakwethu! [People . . . people!] Look, uyavuka [he is waking].

Heru rises from his defeat, fatigue.

Heru I – I've been having dreams . . . Who is she?

Man 1 & Woman 2 Who is she?

Woman 1 & Man 2 Who is she?

Heru (*desperate*) Who is she?

Man 1 & Woman 2 Who is she?

Woman 1 & Man 2 Who is she?

Heru (*shouting*) Who is she?

Man 1 & Woman 2 Who is she?

Woman 1 & Man 2 Who is she?

Heru (*agony*) Who is she?!

Man 1 & Woman 2 Who is she?!

Woman 1 & Man 2 Who is she?!

Drums. Heru does umgido on the spot. The Community chants and claps. Stop all!

Heru (*grunts in trance, to the heavens*) I saw the crown sparkle before my childhood.

Before I knew it was polished by the spite of the Gods before me.

Woman 1 (*bored*) Nango-ke. [There he goes]

Heru To inherit an infertile purse. To plough a graveyard.

Man 2 (*irritated*) Saze savelewa . . . [We are burdened . . .]

Man 1 Shhhhh! UMakhosi uyakhuluma. [The Diviner is speaking.]

Heru Where are the Ancestors of a profane heir? Sit on which throne must the sodomite Prince? (*Looks at throne.*) There is no redemption for this filth. I am Apep's egg. (*Breaking.*) And who is she?!

Woman 2 Kodwa Heru [But Heru] . . .

Heru: To rule the kingdom from . . . from a closet? (*Grunt.*) Oh father, why forsake me now? Oh old Gods. How I mourn your fate, Kemet, I mourn your –

Man 2 Zihlupha la iy'tabane, azikwazi uku [Faggots are troublesome, they don't know how to] –

Heru (*panicked*) She is coming! She is coming! Who is she? Who is she?!

Heru falls, grunting, possessed. *Drums. Smoke. A red wash over the stage. Enter Maat. Her journey is from one wing to the opposite. The Community kneels.*

Maat (*hissing, like a snake*) You sleep on such a night, of flight or fight?

Heru (*on his knees, trance, grunts*) Who are you?

Maat Silence, child! (**Heru stills.**) You dare question the wisdom of the ages? The words of the sages. The maker of the creating hand?

Heru Who are you?

Maat I am the principle of eternity. The Ancestor of Royalty!

Heru (*desperate*) Who are you?

Maat I am truth. I am balance. I am order.

Heru (*in anguish*) Who are you?!

Maat NgiyiDlozi langunaphakade! [I am the Ancestor of eternity!] Ukhokho kayihlo! [Your father's grandmother!] (*She bangs her staff.*)

Drums. A wild Heru does umgido on the spot. The Community chants and claps. He falls! Stop all!

Heru (*possessed. Uncertain*) Gogo? [Grandmother?]

Man 2 Gogo? [Grandmother?] (*The Community smothers him.*)

Maat Mntanami. [My child]

Heru I – I am not worthy.

Maat You have been selected by the might that crafted Jupiter's eye and here you guilt like in crime, doubting the prophetic sight of we who have seen before time. Have you no respect for the Ancestry of this kingdom and my bosom?

Heru (*clapping in possession*) Dlozi [Ancestor] I do, but –

Maat I said silence! (*Pause. Hissing.*) I forged your crown from dreams beyond and now I charge thee to wear it as it has been paid for. Ungena entwaseni namhlanje, manje, Nkosana. [You enter initiation today, now, Prince]

Heru Kodwa Thongo lami [But my Ancestor], I must make you aware of something before I adorn my temple with the future of Kemet.

Maat And what is that young prince?

Heru Camagu, [Ancestor] my . . . My . . . My . . .

Woman 1 Ubindwe isende. [He is gagging over dick]

Maat *looks at the Community. Wrath. With exaggerated bows they make a desperate exit.*

Maat Speak, my son.

Heru My parents.

Maat Your parents.

Heru My parents. They would never allow me –

Maat Do you serve your parents, or do you serve Kemet?

Heru But I am –

Maat You are royalty. ISangoma. In all your make. The dreams you have are our future. I want a groom to expel our doom, and with him you shall jump over the broom.

Heru No, I –

Maat You are Pharaoh and he the Consort of Kemet.

Heru More like the filth of Kemet.

Maat Is this to suggest that we have selected filth to rule this land?

Heru No, I –

Maat Do you wish to offend me, boy? You toy, and annoy! (*Drums.*)

Heru Lutho Gogo [Not at all, Grandmother], it's just that –

Maat Then curtail this folly. When Ra opens the Gates of Dawn moments from now you shall be inaugurated as King of the Nile. Smile. We have no time for such foolishness, this aloofness. Kumele uthwase ilanga lingako vuki. [You must initiate before sunrise] Kumele wenze usiko LabaGcini nesoka lakho. [You must perform the ritual of the Keepers with your boyfriend] Your uncle was thirsty for Ausir's blood as he is for that throne you reject.

Heru But it rejects me. Maybe it's because –

Maat Because what?

Heru (*beat*) Yindaba kumele kube indoda? [Why must it be a man?]

Maat Ngoba, wena Mgcini, uphakathi nendawo. [Because you, Keeper, are in between]

Heru Phakathi kwani Camagu? [In between what, Ancestor?]

Maat Kobudoda nobufazane. [Between manhood and womanhood] Androgynous, anonymous. Sidinga ubisi lwendoda to anoint you Pharaoh, Heru.

Heru Ubisi [milk]? Ngithwase kanjani ngingenaye uGobela? [How should I initiate without an Initiate?]

Maat UTehuti uzokuthwasisa. [Tehuti will initiate you]

Heru Tehuti?

Maat UTehuti. [Tehuti]

Pause.

Heru I . . . Dlozi [Ancestor] there must be some other way, anginalo isoka mina [I don't have a boyfriend].

Maat You do, a boo. But unless your father is resurrected – and that is deep magic known only by Tehuti himself – take the royal seat you must, thyself.

Heru And where is Tehuti?

Maat Preparing to weigh your father's heart. Think not much of that – your mission is ukumbatha ibhayi Labadala [to wear the cloth of the Ancients]. Ingwe! [A leopard!] Right now your concern should be the future of Kemet.

Heru Khokho [Ancient One] I . . . I . . . Kumele ngithwase, khona ngizohlala esihlalweni sobukhosi [I must initiate, so that I may sit on the throne]. (*Grunts, concedes.*) Siyavuma. [We agree]

Maat (*hissing*) Siyavuma. [We agree] Ungubani? [Who are you?] (*Leaving.*)

Normal atmosphere as Woman 1 and Woman 2 return opposite.

Woman 1 & Woman 2 Who are you? Who are you?

Maat Ungubani? [Who are you?]

Woman 1 & Woman 2 Who are you? Who are you?

Maat Ungubani? [Who are you?]

Woman 1 & Woman 2 Who are you? Who are you?

Maat (*exits*) Ungubani?! [Who are you?!]

Woman 1 & Woman 2 Who are you?! Who are you?!

Heru (*calling after her*) Camagu [Ancestor] I . . . I . . . What will my mother think? The people of Kemet?

Enter Aset. Woman 1 and Woman 2 settle in a corner and do each other's hair.

Aset Son?

Heru (*turning at her voice*) Mother. (*They embrace.*) Should you not be with the grieving posy?

Aset I should – (*Wiping his head.*) You're sweating – Yet I thought of you and managed a brief escape . . . Came to see how you're holding up.

Heru I'm fine, Mother. You should not worry about me so –

Aset You lost your father.

Heru And you your husband.

Aset I am old. I have buried many loved ones.

Heru But not your husband.

Aset (*remembering*) Not my husband. Can you believe just hours ago we were strolling the palace gardens, planning your wedding?

Heru My wedding?

Aset Your wedding (*chuckles*) to the girl you've never introduced us to. He was complaining about how you've come of age and still not selected the future queen of these lands. I was telling him he ought to be patient, that you would bring her home when you were ready. (*Tears.*) And now, now –

Heru (*holding her*) I know, Mother.

Woman 1 Akam'tsheli ngani unyoko ukuthi uphuphana namadoda? [Why doesn't he tell his mother that he dreams of men?]

Woman 2 Shhhh wena [you]. They are having a moment.

Heru (*anxious*) Mother, what if it is not a girl?

Aset What?

Heru What if I do not take a queen?

Aset I do not understand . . . You are about to be Pharaoh, Heru. You cannot rule Kemet without a Consort at your side.

Heru Yes but what if it's not a woman?

Beat.

Aset (*realising*) No, Heru, no! We are passed that, you are –

Heru I'm having dreams, Mother.

Aset No, no!

Heru Ndlovukazi [Queen] I –

Aset No! After your cousin, your father wanted to arrange a marriage for you. I convinced him not to. And this is how you repay me?

Heru Mah I don't know what to do, I –

Aset Do what is right! To hell with your dreams! This has never happened before in the history of our people! And now you want to change our ways? At this hour, Heru?

Heru Mother, I was visited by Maat a minute ago?

Aset Maat?

Heru Maat. She wants me to initiate, the old Gods want –

Aset I will hear nothing of it! You shall not surrender to your flesh and hide behind the Gods about it! Repent, Heru!

Heru Mother, I must assume the throne and it will not have me as I am! Intwaso [initiation] may resolve this, so –

Aset What? Heru, listen, you have to –

Suddenly Heru is in deep pain and trance. He grunts and barks in agony.

Aset Heru?

A horn blares.

All (alarmed) Set!

Lights down.

Vignette First

Community's soliloquy.

The Community enters in excitement, playing ushumpu.

Man 1 The Gatekeeper, said healer,

With his magic hands.
Was known as the Shaman of
The people of these lands.

Woman 2 Twin spirits, twin energy –

Masc and feminine.
To act as conduit of
The Children of the soil.

Man 2 Now he is cast away, forgotten

Is his spell.
They say he is rotten

And they do not wish him well.

Woman 1 From Zimbabwe to Kemet,
Azania and Mali, they took away
His herbs and now we're in this folly.

All ISangoma, uMgcini, the keeper of
Secrets. Will rise in the Prince
And his consort coming!

Man 1 Lapho simephi thina? [Where do we stand?]

Other Three Asazi, sobona khona! [We don't know, we'll see!]

They all laugh and exit.

Lights down.

Scene Second

Set's dungeon.

Lights up in the dark cave. Man 2 is blowing a horn. Man 1 on the lookout. Enter Set, black robes, enraged.

Set The fuck is wrong with you two idiots?! What's this insanity about?

Man 1 (*yanking the horn from Man 2's lips*) Sorry, Your Evilness, we saw a figure approaching the borders of Kemet and turning to your path. So –

Set What?! Someone is coming here, and you do not tell me?!

Man 2 Kanti yini le esiyenzayo? [What is it that we're doing?]

Set What did you say?

Man 1 (*kicking Man 2.*) Nothing, my Sinister Lord.

Man 2 Nxay phela akazishayeke owakhe umbhobho. [He should blow his own horn then]

Movement offstage. They all turn.

Set Who goes there? Reveal thyself or suffer the wrath of darkness!

Smeshi (*offstage*) I'd hoped to die in the arms of a lover, not the Prince of Darkness.

All Smeshi?

Enter Smeshi. Handsome in military uniform.

Smeshi (*naughty*) Hello, Daddy.

Set I never liked the way you said that.

Smeshi (*kissing him on the cheek*) Good to see you too, Father.

Set (*wiping it off*) What brings you here?

Smeshi I heard of the king's death.

Set Ah yes that. My brother was growing old on that throne. Something had to be done.

Smeshi So you murdered him?

Set (*smiling*) I didn't quite enjoy it, son, but someone had to do it.

Smeshi And who else but the God of Chaos?

Set Who else . . . What do you want?

Smeshi What do I want?

Set What do you want?

Smeshi I've come to take my place as new heir to the throne.

Set New heir to whose throne?

Smeshi Our throne.

Set Our throne?

Smeshi Our throne!

Man 2 Kwashuba. [Trouble] (**Man 1** *covers his mouth and pulls him to a corner.*)

Set I don't intend on passing it on anytime soon, boy.

Smeshi Yet I'm sure someday you will have to.

Set And what makes you think it would be to you?

Smeshi You have no other offspring but me, Set.

Set Hurray for us all!

Smeshi It thrills me as much as it does you, Daddy.

Set (*annoyed*) I'm sure it does. (*Thinking.*) Except, there is one problem with this equation.

Smeshi *listening.*

Set An unfortunate variable.

Smeshi *silent.*

Set (*condescending*) A remaining beneficiary of the royal bloodline.

Smeshi I know –

Set You know? Oh, I know you know. Your cousin has always been a permanent tenant in the hallow halls of your head.

Smeshi Set, I –

Set Oh spare me the 'converted' speech! You and the little Prince have always been a pair of disgrace. From the moment he was born you latched on to him like he was an oasis and the rest of the world dry sand. Filth. To think – my son and my nephew. Filth! (*Draws dagger and grips*

Smeshi's jaw.) I should have executed you the day you were caught lip-locking Heru. Tell me now, tell me now, son, why I shouldn't drive this right into your useless little heart and end you

right now?

Smeshi (*pulling away*) Because even the God of Chaos could not be so cruel. (*Pleading.*) Set, father, reinstate me home now, please. I have wandered as a nomad for far too long. Fine, I kissed the Prince and was exiled for my sins. But I have paid, father. The wars have been unkind, and I cannot bear to serve as a dog on Kemet's frontline while my family enjoys fellowship at the royal table.

Set Fellowship? Ausir would not agree with you.

Smeshi Ausir is dead and you shall be Pharaoh. I deserve my branch on this family tree.

Is exile not penance enough?

Set And what about your cousin.

Smeshi (*hesitant*) Heru? Well, Heru, I –

Set Exactly! So long as he's around you will always be a weakness. Unless – (*Calculating.*)

Man 1 Oh fuck! (**Man 2** *shushes him.*)

Set (*smirk*) Who said I should have all the fun this night. (*Formal.*) You want to be returned to this kingdom and rule under me as the next Pharaoh of Kemet?

Smeshi (*hopeful*) Yes.

Set Then you must fuck Prince Heru.

Silence.

Smeshi Father?

Set Only under such an occasion shall I accept you as a son and heir to the throne.

Smeshi I don't understand.

Set If you seduce him, and your seed is found in his loins, then he shall be disgraced, and forced to forfeit the throne. Won't be so difficult, right?

Smeshi Set I –

Set Don't be so weak, boy! Where is the blood of chaos that runs within you?

Smeshi *silent.*

Set Think about it, son. The two of us – ruling this kingdom side by side. You taking up the crown when my time . . . ends. We'd be a family again.

Smeshi A family?

Set A family. Father and son. (*Presents him a potion.*) Here, this is ubheka mina ngedwa [a love potion]. Drink it together and leave your seed in the Prince's knickers before sunrise. We shall publish his disgrace and see him banished from Kemet. Only then shall you have a place in this monarchy.

Smeshi (*taking the bottle*) Set, I –

Set Go, son. We haven't much time. Ra shall soon steer his boat through the Gates of Dawn.

Smeshi Set –

Set Son! Where do we belong?

Smeshi (*remembering*) On our mountain top.

Set On our mountain top.

Smeshi How will I –

Set Seduce him like before! We all know you are each other's temptation.

Man 2 Bhebha yena! [Fuck him!] (**Man 1** *restrains him.*)

Smeshi (*troubled, thinking*) Then we'll be a family?

Set Yes . . . a family. Hurray. Go! (*Shoving him off.*)

Smeshi *exits.*

Set (*to audience*) Little does he know that I was expecting his return. Came crawling back to papa for affection, to suck my dick! Weak! The potion he holds is no bheka mina ngedwa [Love potion]. It is poison instead. Should they both drink it, they will not last a minute breathing. Two birds, one stone. For once my bet is on my son's softness. And if not (*turning to the two Men*) You! Make sure it's all romance between them both. They must drink the poison before they screw!

Man 1&2 Yes baas. [Yes boss] (*They make a hasty exit after Smeshi.*)

Set (*audience*) I have grown tired of you all. Therefore I must send us all into the darkness. In there perhaps lies the answer to your apathy, your complacency. When I was born, aeons before your kind, the Gods were revered as commanders of the cosmos and the first humans worshiped us as parents.

These days I am not even known in the temples I built. Fine. Time. Thou shalt know my wrath! Then. When teeth are gnashing and bones are grinding, thou shalt remember my name. My brother was old and frail. I had to rid his stale breath. And I shall bury you all if you dare to cross me! I need no human tongues to sing my worship. Set was here before Adam! And he shall be here post Revelations! Shits! Zihlama! [Shits!] Who else is a more fitting ruler for this kingdom? Certainly not my nephew, who plays umas'gcozi [house] with my son!

Filth! Homosexuality is un-Afrikan! A man with another man is a disgrace to our people. Feminine men are no men here, not in these lands. They belong in foreign shores where this anomaly is a game they enjoy. Here, in the first land of the first people, men court and penetrate women! Domination. Procreation.

These are the laws of nature. Maat is a fool to give little Heru the ordainment of Ancestry. Ukunika unqingili umqhele? [To give a moffie the crown?] (*Scoffs.*) Yet it is fine, for I shall reap the spoils of her folly. Anginifuni nonke la, nibabi! [I don't like you all here, you are ugly!] If they don't drink ushevu [the poison] or lie together in sin, then I shall . . . I shall have to rape the Prince myself. Yes, let him fall in disgrace rather than death. He shall be banished and watch me rule his people from the sidelines. (*To the sky.*) I curse you, Ausir! And I shall dishonour your son as a parting gift! (*Recovering.*) I'll probably have to kill that sorry excuse of a son just for measure. Cruel business – this monarchy thing. And with the little shits gone, all of Kemet will

be mine! All will be mine! I shall rule for eternity! (*Laughs.*)

Lights down.

Scene Third

Lights up on a silent palace, alert. Heru is pacing up and down by the throne. Enter Woman 2.

Heru The Queen?

Woman 2 She is in safety. You must also seek refuge, Nkosana [Prince].

Heru I am no coward and Set is not going to run and hide me in my own home.

Woman 2 Kodwa Ndabezitha [But my Lord] –

Heru Cha nkosazane, baleka uma kuphoqa, mina ngeke ngikwazi. [No, woman, run if you must, I cannot]

Woman 2 Kodwa Heru [But Heru] –

Movement offstage.

Heru (*drawing sword*) Run.

Woman 2 Nkosana [Prince].

Heru Run!

Woman 2 *flees.*

Heru Reveal thyself, enemy! Set? Set?! Come to the light and face the judgement of Kemet's rule!

Smeshi (*offstage*) I might as well take my own life at this night's promises of death.

Heru (*pointing sword at voice*) It can't be.

Smeshi (*entering*) Cousin.

Heru (*grunts, weak*) Cousin.

Silence. Heru attacks.

Smeshi (*blocking with his own sword*) You have not changed a bit, Prince.

Heru (*striking*) Except now I am to be Pharaoh, thanks to your father's deeds.

Smeshi (*ducking*) He is the God of Chaos.

Heru You've come to make his excuses?

Smeshi I've come to see how you fair.

Heru As good as any son about to entomb his father.

They cross blades in combat.

Smeshi You've grown stronger over the years. Sharper.

Heru And you, craftier. (*Disarms and trips him.*) Give me one reason why I shouldn't cut your head off here and now?

Smeshi Because I have been ordered by my father to kill you, with this (*showing him the poison*) but I won't.

Pause.

Heru What?

Smeshi (*rising*) My father wishes I poison you. (*To himself – sombre.*) He really thinks of me as a fool. Evil is incredibly predictable. He gave this to me as a love potion to seduce you – to disgrace you and have you banished from Kemet – but I know poison when I see it. (*Recovering.*) So, for now, I think I'll let you live. (*Breast-pocketing the bottle.*)

Heru Let me live?

Smeshi Let you live. Embrace me –

Heru (*dodges embrace*) This is not a game, Smeshi.

Smeshi Who said it was?! I know the penalties of going against the God of Chaos!

Heru Why are you telling me this?

Smeshi Because I missed you.

Silence.

Heru (*grunts*) You missed me.

Smeshi I missed you.

Heru The – the entire time?

Smeshi All eight seasons of my exile.

Heru (*contemplating*) Cousin, I –

Smeshi You need not believe me now, Prince, but trust me, please. We haven't much time. My father is soon to strike whether or not I perform his wishes. He wants that throne and will stop at nothing to sit on it. Help me help you.

Heru Why?

Smeshi That's a stupid question to ask at this point, you know –

Suddenly Heru appears in a trance. A red wash about. Drums. Enter Maat followed by the Community.

Man 2 Ehhe, yibo laba wena Dlozi, balibele ukujola la kufiwa! [Yes, here they are Ancestor, they are courting up here while we're dying!]

Woman 2 Hheyi angishongo njalo mina. [Hey I didn't say that]

Maat stops and turns to look at the four. Rage. They kneel theatrically before her, heads bowed.

Community Camagu! [Ancestor!]

Maat Heru, what are you doing here with the Spawn of Chaos? Pathos?

Heru (*bowing, grunting*) Dlozi. [Ancestor.] I was . . . Besi . . . [We were . . .]

Woman 1 Bayaputaputana. [They're touching each other]

The rest of the Community restrains her.

Smeshi We were –

Maat Silence or else violence!

Man 2 Does she have to rhyme?

The rest of the Community smothers him.

Pause.

Heru Camagu. [Ancestor] We were plotting against Set. Smeshi here was telling me about Set's plan to make his final attack before sunrise. We were strategising on a trap.

Maat Is that so, though?

Heru Kunjalo, Dlozi. [It is so, Ancestor]

Man 2 Banamanga! Bayamuncana la! [They're sucking each other here!]

Maat And what about intwaso yakho [your initiation], Heru?

Beat.

Smeshi It is true, M'toMdala [Elder]. My father has planned to make his final appearance at daybreak. I was here to warn the Prince –

Maat And since when do you trouble yourself with the security of the Prince?

Smeshi I –

Heru He knows the secrets of his father's heart, and therefore yields the sharpest dagger against him . . . (*Desperate.*) In fact, he has offered to pierce the serpent on behalf of Kemet.

Pause.

Maat Kill his father?

Heru Murder the God of Chaos.

Man 1 Oh, Heru.

Man 2 Zinamanga zinjalo lezizinto! [These things even lie!]

The Women placate them.

Maat Child of the Enemy, is it true? Is this your remedy?

Smeshi and Heru exchange looks.

Smeshi It is . . . It is so, Dlozi [Ancestor].

Maat You speak to an Ancient One, boy. The Gods will hold you up to it.

Smeshi I . . . understand.

Maat Then it is done. You are one.

Heru & Smeshi One?

Maat One.

Maat bangs her staff. *Drums. A possessed Heru does umgido on the spot. Smeshi chants and claps. He falls. Stop all.*

Maat Uye lo. [It is he]

Heru Uye lo? [It is he?]

Man 1 & Woman 2 Uye lo? [It is he?]

Woman 1 & Man 2 Uye lo. [It is he]

Maat Uye lo. [It is he] (*Drums.*)

Heru Uye lo? [It is he?]

Man 1 & Woman 2 Uye lo? [It is he?]

Woman 1 & Man 2 Uye lo [It is he].

Maat Uye lo! [It is he!] (*Drums.*)

Heru (*possessed. Vibrating in rhythm*) Uye lo?! [It is he?!]

Man 1 & Woman 2 (*clapping and chanting*) Uye lo?! [It is he?!]

Woman 1 & Man 2 (*clapping and chanting*) Uye lo! [It is he!]

A trance.

Maat Uye lo! [It is he!]

Heru (*lost*) Uye lo?! [It is he?!]

Man 1 & Woman 2 (*dramatic*) Uye lo?! [It is he?!]

Woman 1 & Man 2 (*wild*) Uye lo! [It is he!]

Maat bangs her staff. **Heru** does a heavy umgido on the spot. **Smeshi** does indlamu next to him. They embrace. **Heru** falls. Stop drum. Stop all.

Maat Uye umkhwenyana waseKemet lo! [This is the husband of Kemet!]

Heru (*reviving*) Dlozi, bengi – [Ancestor, I was –]

Smeshi Ngiyavuma! [I agree!]

The Community ululates in merriment. Claps. Chants. Dances. A short song.

Heru (*on his feet now*) Gogo [Grandmother] my mother doesn't –

Maat Your mother is not your destiny. Kemet is. Uzothwasa [You shall initiate] and this man's milk shall anoint thee Pharaoh of Kemet upon your graduation ritual.

Woman 1 I have never heard of this!

Woman 2 An ancient custom of Alkebulan!

Maat (*leaving*) Be swift in your cause, precise in your action. Only four hours rest between

you and the future this nation. (*To Heru.*) Wena, thwasa. [You, initiate] (*To Smeshi.*) Wena, bulala. [You, kill] Lolusiko ngolwenu nobabili. [This ritual is for your both.] Usiko LabaGcini! [The Keeper's ritual!]

Everybody (*bowing*) Camagu [Ancestor].

Maat Trust one another, boys. Your bond is deeper than your fears. I bless your journey, I command your victory!

Everybody bows. Maat exits. Normal light.

Smeshi (*anger*) How could you do that to me? Murder my own father?

Heru You said you're here to help me.

Smeshi I didn't say I'd kill the only family I have!

Heru He's your family now?

Smeshi Yes! He is my father!

Heru Who murdered my father! (*Beat.*) And what's this about you agreeing to wed me?

Smeshi (*awkward*) I . . . The kingdom needs it.

Heru The kingdom, or you?

Smeshi Please do not pretend that you do not love me.

Silence.

Heru Smeshi, my father's dying wish was that I take a wife and –

Smeshi And you are visited by Ancestry who have deemed you uMgcini [a Keeper]. This is older than us, Heru. We were never like the other boys. (*Soft.*) Your lips have always been my weakness.

Pause.

Heru (*weak*) Smeshi, there must be some other way.

Aset (*entering*) There is another way.

Heru (*startled*) Mother?

Aset There isn't much time . . . The ritual must be performed before the weighing of the heart.

Heru What ritual?

Aset The Ritual of Salvation. You must venture beyond the kingdom, through the wastelands, and find Tehuti in the Hall of Two Truths. The Hall is said to lie between the Two Mountains of Life where the sun and moon meet and beat. If you are able to make a sacrifice that is most sacred to your heart, on the Altar of Redemption and Tehuti approves, before Ra opens the Gates of Dawn, then your father may be pardoned by Maat's scale, and Anapa will resurrect him to us.

Smeshi (*bowing*) Ndlovukazi. Lehle lingehlanga. [My Queen. Condolences] My father is –

Aset You must make haste, Heru, before your father places his heart on Maat's scale and is judged. Set is –

Smeshi My father is a brute, Queen Mother, and I –

Aset Set is a monster, Heru! (*Tears.*) And all those who walk in his shadow are angels of the dark. And darkness is death. Kemet drowns in the night, my son, and the flame that leads her to dawn is in your heart.

Heru My heart?

Aset You must sacrifice that which most dear to you in the ritual. Only then can Salvation be earned, and your father returned.

Man 2 Oh, sacrifice and reward! (*The others restrain him.*)

Heru But what about intwaso [initiation]? Tehuti is supposed to initiate me before dawn. Abadala bakhulumile [the elders have spoken], Mama.

Aset Then you must change course, for your father! Let not the cravings of your flesh compose our anthem henceforth. Maat is . . . I don't know. Plead with Tehuti when you find him. (*Kisses*

Heru's cheek.) Go, Heru. Rush carefully into the abyss – and remember that shadows are phantoms, they lie. Seek duty over gratification. (*Exiting.*) I will guide you on the moon and to destiny you shall arrive.

Smeshi Mother, I will be with him and will not let –

Aset exits.

Woman 1 The number you have dialled is not available at present, please try again later.

The Community laughs.

Smeshi She hates me.

Heru She is grieving. We all are.

Smeshi Still, she never liked me.

Heru Not since we were caught . . .

Smeshi (*sigh*) Yeah . . . (*Beat.*) I miss those days. Don't you?

Heru Smeshi, that is in the past, the world, Kemet, is bigger than us.

Smeshi Do you still love me, cousin?

Heru Smeshi –

Smeshi (*advancing*) Because I never stopped loving you, mountain top.

Heru (*retreating*) Jeez, you still call me that?! (*Beat.*) You were invaluable to me, once.

Smeshi Skilful.

Heru Skilful.

Smeshi I am a skilful man.

Heru Formidable in battle.

Smeshi Did you miss my weapon? My instrument? My tool? My spear?

Heru It's a pity I hadn't put it to good use yet.

Woman 1 Baqhanyelwe laba. [These two are horny]

Man 2 Shhhh, subtext. (*To the couple.*) Qabulanani! [Kiss each other!]

Man 1 Yini wena? [What's with you?]

Man 2 Angithi kuthiwe [Remember it was said] we must make things lovey-dovey between them.

Man 1 Oh, konje . . . [Oh yes] . . .

Man 2 Ja. [Yes.]

Man 1 & Man 2 (*whispering*) Mqabule! [Kiss him!] Mqabule! [Kiss him!]

Woman 1 & Woman 2 Shhhhhhhhhh!

The Community watches over the couple.

Smeshi Well, I am here now –

Heru Yes, why are you here, Smeshi?

Smeshi I am here to help you, dummy!

Heru Help me kill your father?

Smeshi No, help you initiate, or resurrect the dead king. Whichever you choose.

Beat.

Heru (*hesitant*) The ritual won't work.

Smeshi Which one?

Heru Usiko LabaGcini. I –

Smeshi You're what?

Heru I am not fit for the ritual, to be Pharaoh! How can I dream of ruling over these lands when I don't even have a family to lead? Kemet, I am thy humble steward, but I don't know how to serve thee.

Smeshi (*nervous*) Family? You want a family?

Heru Kemet needs a consort, Smeshi. This is what I've been trying to tell you. I must have a wife and child for the people to look onto, for the bloodline to survive.

Smeshi So why haven't you chosen one?

Woman 1 Ngoba uphuphana nawe. [Because he dreams of you]

Woman 2 *smacks her.*

Heru (*defeated*) I don't know.

Smeshi (*moving towards him*) Perhaps you haven't found the right one yet.

Heru (*without fight*) Perhaps. But I must visit justice unto this Kingdom now. How? Why does

the throne want uMgcini [a Keeper] as ruler? Is this the only path to Pharaoh-hood? Why me? Why you? What if the people reject us should we couple? (*Beat.*) I have trained all my life for the crown and now I must risk it because my cousin and Ubungoma seek to lend me poems I cannot decipher? (*Retreats.*) We are men, Smeshi, and black men loving other black men is a deathly dance. Our people will have us pay with our blood. For how dare we recognise divinity in each other? How dare we worship each other's beauty? Remember, the melanated man is supposed to hate the reflection accusing him in the Nile. You cannot trick a self-loving people. I see Ubungoma, I see you, Smeshi, but would that be enough? In Africa? Where the black family has personalised trauma. Where violence is a dark thread, weaving the culture. How dare black men be soft with one another, when the world has not been so soft with us? If you keep beating a child, it will understand brutality as communication. (*Beat.*) I want to replace the Black Community with Black Communion – at least then we can be honest with ourselves and with each other. Yes, you and I were here since the beginning of time, Smeshi, we are as old as Alkebulan herself. But if I have any chance at winning the throne, then tonight I must play with the wit and might of a god. I love thee cousin, I do – but Kemet is beyond us, she is the star that I must follow and point for generations to come. (*To himself.*) Yet Maat cannot be denied, nor can her gaze upon thee, sweet man, be undone. And so the Prince of Kemet be halved, tonight. The truth that carries his sceptre may be too heavy for his people. And under this weight who shall carry him? Who shall carry him?

Smeshi I hear your agony, but I do not know how to answer. The sacrifices you are charged with are perhaps beyond our wisdoms. (*Takes his hand.*) But I am here, great Prince, as I always have. I shall be slaughtered before I see you fall –

Heru Smeshi –

Screams are heard offstage. Man 1 blows a horn. Drums.

Community Set!

Woman 2 runs offstage, returns.

Woman 2 He has already taken captive the east wing of the palace. He will be here in no time. No causalities yet. Your mother is not harmed okwamanje, Ndabezitha [for now, my Prince].

Man 1 Your Majesty, you must go.

Heru (*trance*) No, the Queen, the palace.

Man 2 We will take care of things here; you must go before his father gets here and ends things for good.

Heru (*barking*) I am not afraid of him – I will not abandon my home! My throne!

Smeshi Heru, think! If we fight Set now, we risk the ritual that will save your father and Kemet! We must find Tehuti and the Hall of Two Truths, before Ra opens the Gates!

Heru But I –

Community Now!

Smeshi kisses his hand, and leads a reluctant **Heru** out.

Set enters opposite. The **Community** assumes a war stance.

Man 2 Okay, fairies, now let's get in formation!

Community I slay! (*They prepare a clumsy battle formation.*)

Set (*livid*) You imbeciles!

Woman 2 Nawe, sfebe! [You too, bitch!]

Set You dare stand against me?

Man 2 Mina malume [uncle] I would never. It was their fault.

Woman 1 Ha uyasilahla? [You are betraying us?]

Man 2 Ey, I'm not about to fight Set, wena [you], look at him!

Set Are you not supposed to be following through my stratagem? Why have the faggots not sodomised?

Woman 2 Because you came and ruined things.

Set *advances fuming.*

Man 1 Hold on, baas [boss]. I think we might have a deal for you.

Set I shall lend you my ear after you've suffered for your lack of result!

Woman 2 Ingakho ngingamfuni lo! [This is why I don't like him]

Enraged, Set strikes. The Community screams.

Lights down.

Vignette Second

Community's soliloquy.

The Community enters in excitement, playing a jumping rope.

Man 1 The Gatekeeper, said healer,

With his magic hands.

Was known as the Shaman of

The people of these lands.

Woman 2 Twin spirits, twin energy –

Masc and feminine.

To act as conduit of

The Children of the soil.

Man 2 Now he is cast away, forgotten

Is his spell.

They say he is rotten

And they do not wish him well.

Woman 1 From Zimbabwe to Kemet,

Azania and Mali, they took away
His herbs and now we're in this folly.

All ISangoma, uMgcini, the keeper of
Secrets. Will die in the Prince
And Kemet is in doom!

Man 1 Lapho simephi thina? [Where do we stand?]

Other Three The winning side!

They all laugh and exit.

Lights down.

Scene Fourth

Lights up on a dirt path beyond the kingdom. Heru and Smeshi are running – they stop.

Heru That's enough! (*Breaking free of Smeshi's hold.*) We're cowards, fleeing a fight with your father like this – cowards!

Smeshi (*panting*) Oh let it go, Heru. It was not time yet.

Heru It is always the right time to smite that beast!

Smeshi You would have lost –

Heru I am not afraid of him!

Smeshi – and plunged the kingdom into perpetual doom.

Heru (*piqued*) You seem to have very little faith in me.

Smeshi (*impatient*) Yet I've accompanied you to gods know where to find an ancient deity that may resurrect your father, while I contemplate killing mine!

Pause.

Heru You're considering killing him?

Smeshi (*pained*) If all else fails it will have to be our last resort.

Heru (*moving towards him*) We won't fail . . . We'll . . . We'll find Tehuti and have this mess sorted out.

Smeshi (*desperate*) We're in the middle of nowhere, Heru.

Heru (*absently searching*) The Hall of Two Truths is between the Two Mountains of Life where the sun and moon meet and beat . . . I don't see any mountains here.

Smeshi See? We're done for!

The Community, ready for blood, enters.

Man 2 Jaaaaaa! [Yeeeeees!] You're done for! Sizon'bulala! [We're here to kill you!]

Woman 1 (*parading a weapon at them*) Ja! [Yes!] Ja! [Yes!] Senifile, zinja! [You are dead,

you dogs!]

Heru What is the meaning of this?

Man 1 USet uthe asizoninquma. [Set said we must come and chop you]

Smeshi (*drawing sword*) Traitors! Prepare to perish!

Woman 2 Whoa phela sithunyiwe [whoa, we were sent], don't shoot the messenger!

Heru (*weapon in hand*) We don't care, you will not impede on our quest. We will smite you where you stand, you conspirators!

Woman 2 Uyazibona-ke izitabane ne'drama, nangu u 'smite' bo! [You see faggots with their drama, here is 'smite' here!]

Heru Mabafe! [They must die!]

Heru and Smeshi *fight the Community. Community loses. Retreats.*

Man 2 Siyabuya bo'devel! [We'll come back, you devils!]

Smeshi We'll be here, cowards!

Woman 1 Sfebe! [Bitch!]

Smeshi Ndoda! [Man!]

Woman 1 (*crying in anger, advancing*) Ubiza bani ngendoda?! [Who are you calling a man?]
Ubiza bani ngendoda?! [Who are you calling a man?]

The Community restrains her, they settle in a corner, grooming each other.

Heru (*falling*) Your father is a conniving ape!

Smeshi (*rushing to him*) You are hurt! Your leg!

Heru It's just a scratch.

Smeshi With this much blood? Can you walk?

Heru Yes. (*Trying to rise, failing into Smeshi's arms.*)

Smeshi You need to rest.

Heru We can't rest, your father is –

Smeshi My father doesn't matter right now, Heru. You need to tend to that wound.

Beat.

Heru I need a cleansing.

Smeshi Yes, we need a river and –

Heru Cleanse me.

Pause.

Smeshi What?

Heru (*soft*) You heard me, bathe your Prince.

Man 2 Zasha! Umagezana! [It's happening! They're bathing each other!]

The Community sing a romantic melody as they gather a basin and water, and cloths from different wings offstage.

Man 1 (*placing everything before the couple*) Nethezekani, bafana. [Be comfortable, boys]

Woman 2 (*pouring water in basin*) Yes, enjoy, my boys.

The Community return to their corner, stand like a choir and hum their melody to the couple.

Heru (*amused*) They're crazy.

Smeshi Yeah, but not as much as I am crazy about you. (*Pause. Leans closer, presses on Heru's wound.*)

Heru *grunts in pain.*

Man 1 Udinga ukuhlambulula iDlozi. (*He needs to cleanse his Ancestor.*)

Smeshi *begins to awkwardly bathe Heru in the basin. Lights dim to romantic, the Community hums poetically. Heru closes his eyes.*

Smeshi Is it painful?

Heru (*hypnotised*) No, your touch has always been my refuge.

Smeshi And your beauty, mine.

Heru You tease me.

Smeshi I mean it, ancient beauty.

Heru LOL.

Community (*dreamy*) LOL. (*Humming.*)

Heru Enough with the compliments, Mr Silver Tongue.

Smeshi My Prince, ungubuhle [you are beauty] and I am a poet – to ask me not to sing your praise would be to ask a lion not to roar.

Community (*dreamy*) Roar. Roar. (*Humming.*)

Heru You only play with me, cousin. Like you did in our childhood. (*Grunt, trance.*)

Smeshi (*binding his wound*) And you continue to reject me, even though we are each other's.

Heru Smeshi, it's impossible. I am the next Pharaoh . . . the kingdom –

Smeshi Shhhh. Let's just be in this moment, under Kemet's stars and each other's eyes, mountain top.

Community (*in heat*) Tops. Bottoms.

They move closer to each other.

Drums. Lightning, thunder.

Heru *clutches chest in severe pain. Grunt. Trance.*

Smeshi Heru! Her –

Heru 's body convulses as he beats his chest in a trance, reciting izithakazelo. The moonlight floods the stage!

Smeshi What's going on?!

The Community is now regal, possessed.

Man 1 A God is upon us!

Woman 2 The Hall is said to lie between the Two Mountains of Life where the sun and moon meet and beat.

Woman 1 Your heart chakra has been activated, Nkosana [Prince].

Man 2 The Two Mountains are the lungs, where the sun and moon meet and beat is in thine own heart.

Community You have opened the Hall of Two Truths! Tehuti, God of Wisdom, will see you now!

Sound of a heavy door opening.

Enter Tehuti, a queen in Afrikan drag; he is camp but serious. He walks across the stage, smoking a pipe.

Tehuti Hurry up, boys! I haven't all eternity! (*Exits.*)

Smeshi picks up, **Heru** and follows, exiting with the **Community** behind.

Sound of a door closing, thud.

Lights down.

Vignette Third

Smeshi 's soliloquy.

The Community enters in excitement, playing hopscotch. Smeshi with Heru in his arms follow. Smeshi gently places Heru on the ground.

Man 1 The Gatekeeper, said healer,

With his magic hands.

Was known as the Shaman of

The people of these lands.

Woman 2 Twin spirits, twin energy –

Smeshi (*impatient, exhausted*) Shut up! Shut up!

Man 2 (*piqued*) Ohho! Shlama! [Shit-stain!]

A disgruntled Community exits.

Smeshi (*to Heru, whispering*) I cannot resist you. (*Drums. To audience.*) I cannot resist you. Two summers from your eye, your smile, your touch, and I have been a wanderer trapped in this desert world without my oasis. Crisis! Umendo awuthunyelwa gundane [Matrimony is

unpredictable]. I do not know the spell you have cast on me.

Even in our childhood you were my sun. Son. Of the Ancients. I have tried in many prayers to cast thee away from my heart. Yet here I am, against your body, a locust to his maize. You make my breathing an art, like a rainbow that cometh after a storm, you bring justice to my existence – which has been suffering. You make all things well. (*Heaves. Clumsy pirouette.*) I first took beauty when I looked upon your visage – and I know (go!) if I let go I shall cease to be – a painter without his oil. (*Produces poison from pocket.*) If I drink this now, Maat would have lost, the old Gods would have mistaken their wisdom. My father would have his throne and Kemet would bow to chaos.

Yet if I do not, I am not certain that you will honour me when the hour comes. (*Tears.*) Ah! You have resisted me so well, pure soul. You are bent on pleasing abazali [your parents], your kingdom, and tradition. And how can I ask you to turn away from your kind? Perhaps they are right . . . But are we not older than bigotry, Heru? Are there no markings in Zimbabwean caves of Usiko LabaGcini [the Ritual of the Keepers]? I am told we are as first as Africa herself. That we healed and are healing in every form we take. But I am not . . . What is this?! (*Opens poison.*) What is this? What is this?! (*Heaves. Abysmal pirouette.*) How can I kiss you when your lips are painted with shame? Are we not men? This shouldn't be so difficult. (*Beat. Cupping Heru's face.*) I could take you, right now, as my father wishes. Disgrace you and have you join me in exile. I have suffered for us both, Heru. I am thirsty for your embrace, your waters, this drink. (*Touches him inappropriately.*) It would end all our miseries. (*Ripping himself off.*) Yet how could I possibly die if not in your arms? An eagle must perish on its mountain top and you are mine, brother. (*Pause. Heaves. Fine pirouette.*) We shall toast this when there are no other roads (*Breast-pockets poison.*) For now, sweet boy, I shall walk with thee till my legs lose their step. I shall carry thee to eternity's door and break it open on our honeymoon night.

(*Carries Heru in his arms.*) I shall hold thee until my arms disappear under your weight. (*Exiting. Drums subside.*) I shall carry thee. I shall carry thee. I shall carry thee.

Lights down.

Scene Fifth

Lights up on the Hall of Two Truths. Resplendent with gold and books. A large scale of justice dominates the room. Statuettes and busts from different Afrikan cultures are seen. Tehuti enters, followed by Smeshi and Heru, and the Community.

Tehuti Set him down there, don't make a mess please, darling.

Smeshi gently places **Heru** on the floor.

Tehuti (*to Community*) Nifunani nina la? [What are you doing here?]

Man 2 (*shy*) Sizothwasa nathi. [We are also here to initiate]

Tehuti Nizothwasa amasimba?! [You're here to initiate shit?!] Get out of my fuckin' temple!

Woman 1 Tjoh angizifuni izitabane! [Tjoh I don't like moffies!]

Tehuti Get out my fuckin' temple!

The Community busies themselves with Tehuti's books. Some reading, some playing.

Smeshi Is he going to be okay, Great One?

Tehuti Ooh ha-ah angazi, [No I don't know.]

Smeshi Aren't you omniscient, God of Wisdom?

Tehuti Aren't you not supposed to be fucking him, Spawn of Chaos?

Smeshi Kemet needs him.

Tehuti Kemet or you?

Smeshi (*desperate*) Kemet and me! (*Petulant.*) Both.

Pause.

Tehuti Then kiss him.

Smeshi What?

Man 2 What?! (*The Community shooshes him.*)

Tehuti Kiss him. It might bring him back to life.

Smeshi I-I –

Tehuti (*mocking*) You-you what?

Smeshi I believe in consent.

Tehuti (*yawning*) How boring.

Tehuti *sneezes, groans.* **Heru** *wakes.*

Tehuti Welcome back, Prince. If only your father could wake this easily.

Heru Dad? Where is my father?

Tehuti He's somewhere over there.

All Where?

Tehuti There.

Heru (*searching*) I do not see him.

Tehuti Are you here to see your father, noma uzothwasa? [Or are you here to initiate?]

Heru I –

Tehuti Yes?

Heru I –

Tehuti Yebo? [Yes?]

Heru (*anxious*) I am here for Kemet. For duty. For what is best for the throne.

Tehuti Yes?

Heru (*to Smeshi*) I'm sorry. (*To Tehuti.*) I am here for the Ritual of Salvation, Makhosi.

The Community gasps.

Tehuti The Ritual of Salvation?

Heru The Ritual of Salvation.

Tehuti Mhm . . . Are you sure?

Heru (*hesitant*) I – I am sure.

Smeshi Her –

Heru I'm sorry.

Smeshi, *defeated, retreats to a corner, weeps.*

Tehuti Okay! As you wish, Prince! Prepare your Sacrifice!

Heru I am the sacrifice.

All What?

Heru I shall take my life for Kemet. Death for what you love is an eternal breath unto it.

Smeshi Heru!

Tehuti Silence! (*Thunder.*) The Prince has spoken. Landani impepho, boDali. [Fetch impepho, my darlings]

The Community scatters, exiting and retuning with two calabash, impepho and different coloured candles and place them on the floor before Tehuti.

Tehuti Thatha izibani, Nkosana [Take the candles, Prince], phahla [connect]. (*Hands him a dagger.*)

Heru (*lighting the candles and impepho*) Siyakhuleka eMakhosini. [We humble ourselves before thee, Royals] Sikhuleka kuni bo Geb, oNut, oRa kanye noMaat. [We humble ourselves before thee Geb, Nut, Ra and Maat] Umntwana wenu lo uHeru. [This is your child, Heru] Ngithi Makhosi ngizoninxusa ngizonicela, ukuba nibuyise ubaba wami iSilo uAusir. [Your Majesties, I beg, I plead with thee to return my father, the King, Ausir] (*Driving knife in himself.*) Mayivuke ekufeni iNkosi izohola iKemet! [Let the King rise from the dead and rule over Kemet!] Ngiyaninxusa, ngiyaninxusa Makhosi. [I beg, I beg thee, Your Majesties] Ngithi [I say] – (*Grunts in pain.*)

A loud bang on the door.

All Set!

Tehuti Phahla, [Connect] Heru! If you do not finish this ritual, I cannot cast any spells tonight! Are you not your most sacred sacrifice?!

Heru *tries to carve himself but he is now possessed, grunting, reciting izithakazelo.*

Man 2 (*in battle*) Masiye kuye! [Let's go to him!]

The Community, charged, exit for Set. They immediately return, screaming, being driven by him.

Smeshi (*rising*) Daddy.

Set Fuck you! I see you have not fulfilled your promise, boy. The Prince is untarnished!

Tehuti (*grave*) I see you have no regard for any ancient laws tonight, God of Chaos.

Set I have only come to claim what is mine, God of Wisdom.

Tehuti And what is that?

Set My son, the next Prince of Kemet. Where do we belong?

Smeshi On our mountain top.

Silence. Everybody stares at Smeshi.

Smeshi Father, I am –

Set Think, boy! If this little shit sacrifices himself, and my brother wakes, he shall resurrect him. Ausir is God of the Underworld, remember?! (*Frustrated.*) Weak! How do you expect us to rule this kingdom together if you do not perform the deed?

Smeshi Together?

Set Yeah-yeah as a family. Molest him! Disgrace him!

Smeshi *undoing his trousers.*

Tehuti He who breaks ubambo lwakhe [his rib] shall limp for eternity.

Smeshi *advances on a grunting, wounded, possessed Heru, hesitates.*

Tehuti (*to the Community*) You two! Go delay Ra from opening the Gates of Dawn!

Woman 1 Uthi simuthathephi thina uRa? [Where are we supposed to find Ra?]

Tehuti Please get out of my fuckin' temple!

Woman 1 and Man 2 *make a hasty exit.*

Set Fine I'll do it myself (*Advancing on Heru.*)

Tehuti (*intercepting*) No! Not ithwasa lami [my initiate]!

Set You're going fight me, Tehuti?

Tehuti If I have to, sfebe! [bitch!]

Smeshi Enough! (*Standing between them. To Tehuti.*) He needs a sacred sacrifice for the Ritual of Salvation to be complete, doesn't he?

Tehuti Yes but –

Smeshi On the Altar of Redemption! (*He produces poison, drinks, pirouettes, falls.*)

Heru *screams.*

Set Yes! My work is almost done! The end is near!

A sober Heru rushes to embrace Smeshi in his arms.

Smeshi (*choking*) Perhaps I mean to you what you mean to me. Take my sacrifice. The rest is silence. May the old Gods throw a petal of your smile in my rest. (*Fading.*) Goodnight, sweet

Prince. I shall dream of you, my mountain top. (*Dies.*)

Heru *wails. Drums. Enter Maat in armour. Lights down.*

Scene Sixth

Lights up on a river. Enter Ra, downstage, rowing a canoe, singing. Enter Woman 1 and Man 2, searching.

Woman 1 Uphi? [Where is he?] Oh nangu! [Oh there he is!] Yoo-hoo! Baby! Sthandwa [Love]. Cela u'lift [May I catch a lift]. (*They both approach Ra.*)

Ra (*noticing, excited*) Aw insizwa enhle kanje, mhm woza dali. [Aw such a beautiful man, mhm come darling]

Woman 1 Ubani indoda wenanja?! [Who's a man, you dog?!]

Man 2 (*placating her. Flirting*) He means . . . er . . . you doggy-dog, woof – woof, grrrr – grrrr.

Ra (*chuckling, blushing*) Nawe [You too], my lady, you can also come on my boat.

Man 2 Oh no, baby-daddy. Stop, for a moment. We want to talk to you, sweetie.

Ra Sorry, can't stop! I must open the Gates of Dawn.

Man 2 (*jumping into canoe*) But babazi [daddy], I want you to tell me about the pedal you carry. (*Stroking Ra's pedal.*) What an impressive shaft.

Ra (*blushing*) Hhayi wena musa ukudlala ngami. [No you, don't toy with me]

Man 2 *disappears in between Ra's legs. Woman 1 climbs behind and massages Ra's shoulders. Ra moans.*

Lights down on the canoe.

Lights up in the Hall of Two Truths.

Heru *clutching a dead Smeshi on the floor. Tehuti and Set in a tussle.*

Heru He is dead.

Maat (*approaching Heru*) He is the sacrifice.

Heru No! Not him.

Maat Your most sacred. Vuka mfana [Wake up, boy]. (**Heru** *crying.*) This is your Consort over here. There. Wake him. Wake him with a poet's hymn. He is ours. I am with you so you may be with him. Usiko LabaGcini [the Ritual of the Keepers] is between you both.

Heru How?

Maat You have sacrificed and therefore qualify for Salvation. Perform intwaso [initiation] and spell my oath. That you are queer for the other world is near. The powers you earn right may heal the dead of this night. Defeat this daemon and win our kingdom, your father you'll save, your mate you'll wake, and earn Tehuti's wisdom. (*To Set.*) You!

Tehuti (*throwing Set off*) You!

Heru (*rising*) You!

Set Ah fuck! (*Draws a sword.*)

Maat gives **Heru** her sword. **Tehuti** and **Maat** retreat into a corner, so does **Man 1** and **Woman 2**. Drums. **Tehuti** lights *impepho* and they all chant from their corners. Drums.

Set Ah, beautiful nephew, our time has come at last.

Heru Indeed, uncle. We must finish this now; Kemet needs to know who her Pharaoh is here on out.

Set (*advancing*) What a shame it had to come to this. (*Strikes*)

Heru (*blocking*) I can only imagine the regret you feel. (*Attacks.*)

Set laughs. *They cross swords several times and separate.*

Maat UMndawe! UMndiki! (*Drums.*)

Man 1 and **Woman 2** exit and return with an *ukhamba*, **Heru** drinks from it, grunts in a trance. **Maat** bags her staff, a wild **Heru** does *umgido* on the spot. The **Community** and **Tehuti** chants and claps. **Man 1** bleats like a goat, **Woman 2** slaughters him. **Heru** falls, rises to **Set**.

Set (*blocking*) But you must allow me a token of contrition before our last step in this dance.

Heru (*alert*) What do you want, Set?

Set Your buttocks are plump, Heru. I see why my son cannot resist you.

Heru The same son lying dead behind you?

Set Another mistake in my miscalculations I'm afraid. But you and I, we could head this kingdom as a mighty force, for eternity.

Heru attacks. **Set** blocks.

Maat Isithunywa! Abalozi! Igobongo! Igobongo! (*Drums.*)

Man 1 and **Woman 2** exit and return with an *ukhamba*, **Heru** drinks from it, grunts in a trance. **Maat** bags her staff, a wild **Heru** does *umgido* on the spot. The **Community** and **Tehuti** chant and clap. **Woman 2** bleats like a goat, **Man 1** slaughters her. **Heru** falls, rises to **Set**.

Heru I want nothing to do with you!

Set And I want you, sweet man. Plump and ripe for plucking. You are beauty, dear nephew, and I am power. We can both hold the sceptre of this land in an eternal grasp. Imagine the splendour of it all!

Heru You fiend! (*They cross swords, separate.*)

Set Boy, listen! (*Stop swords. Stop chants. Stop drums.*) With me by your side you shall be unconquerable. We shall rule the entire cosmos. Our reign would last for eons. See it. The Nemes, the Spectre of Was, the jewels, pyramids and subjects! All these things will I give thee, if thou will fall down and let me taste the sweet nectar of your fruit.

Pause. **Heru** is still. He attacks and **Set** disarms him.

Tehuti Bhula, thwasa! [Divine, initiate!] Ziphizikhali?! [Where are the weapons?!]

Maat Zilaphaya! [They are there!] (*She points and Heru dashes in that direction.*)

Zilaphaya! [They are there!] (*She points and Heru dashes in that direction.*)

Zilaphaya! [They are there!] (*She points and Heru dashes in that direction.*)

Zilaphaya! [They are there!] (*She points and Heru dashes in that direction to find iwisa and spear in one of Tehuti's drawers*). Akageze! [He must bathe!]

Man 1 and Woman 2 exit and return with a bucket, they splash cold water on **Heru** and he shivers and grunts in trance.

Maat Mbathiseni! [Cover him!]

Man 1 and Woman 2 exit and return with leopard amabhayi. They tie them around **Heru's** shoulders and waist. **Maat** bags her staff, a wild **Heru** does umgido on the spot. The **Community and Tehuti** chants and claps. **Woman 2 and Man 1** both bleat like goats, they slaughter each other. **Heru** falls and crawls to his candles and impepho. He claps and chants, connecting.

Set (*desperate*) Our reign . . . See it, Heru!

Maat (*approaching Heru*) Nyathela kanje. [Walk like this] (*She does a slow combination of umgido and vogue, Heru imitates, carrying his weapons.*)

Set No! See it! See our reign!

Heru (*moving with Maat*) I see it.

Set No you fool! What are you doing?

Heru Seeing it! (*Drums. Chants.*) Get thee behind me, daemon!

Enraged, Set attacks! They cross weapons and Set scratches Heru's eye.

Heru (*falls. Howling in agony*) My eye!

Set How do you see it now? You little shit! You faggot!

Heru (*in pain*) Dlozi, ngiyavuma! [Ancestor, I agree!]

Tehuti Ha! (*He approaches Heru, blows on his injured eye, then retreats.*)

Maat extends her hand to **Heru**, who becomes possessed and recites with her.

Maat & Heru INkonkoni siyilanda emandulo!

Yathi kuMvelinqangi izobamba bobubili
Ubulili ibhule amaphupho abadala ngobuzwilili.
IDlozi lesalukazi lidlinza emzimbeni wenkosana,
Naye wagqoza njengogogo bogogo bakhe.
Uphahla ukujula kwamajuba asemkhathini,
Ephethe ishoba leNkonkoni ethungathwe
UMndawe, uMndiki, Isithunywa, Abalozi, noMnguni.
Unyathela okwenziswa okwentombi kuhlangene
Ubulili, kuhlangene imimoya emzimbeni munye.
Uvula amasango onke eZulu, isanusi sakwaZulu,
Insizwa yesalukazi, intombi yekhehla, kuhlangene
Ubulili nemimoya. Thokoza Mgcini, ombethe

Imfihlakalo yesiGodlo sikaTehuti. Wena obhula
Ngeshoba leNkonkoni kuhle komhlaba otusa ilanga
Nenyaga. Hamba-ke, bamba-ke amahubo eziThixo
NamaKhosi okhokho-khokho. Nyathela Mgcini,
Siyakulandela.*

Heru stabs Set, *who falls and exits, crawling away.*

Maat (*calling after him*) I am not through with you, fiend! You have earned eternal damnation for your tonight's ungodly acts! Get back here and pay for your sins, I'll imprison thee forever and kick your shins! (*Giving Tehuti one of her feathers.*) Write this day's epic, Scribe of the Gods, and note our Prince's weight on your scale. Let the ages know of this day's tale, that two men lie as lions holding the cosmos in each mane.

Tehuti Where are their hearts?! Where are their hearts?!

Woman 2 Nazi! [Here they are!]

Woman 2 and Man 1 reach into their loins and pull out hearts and hand them to Tehuti, *who places them on one plate of the scale. He places Maat's feather on another plate. He studies the scale for a moment and scribes on a papyrus.*

Maat Go call the others! (**Man 1 and Woman 2 exit.**) I must go find Set. Heru, ungubani [who are you] this night?

Heru crying.

Maat Heru! Ungubani? [Who are you?]

Heru (*whimpering*) I am . . . I am the temple of the Gods.

Maat Ungubani? [Who are you?]

Heru I am the temple of the Gods.

Maat (*exiting*) Ungubani? [Who are you?]

Heru I am the temple of the Gods!

Maat (*off*) Ungubani?! [Who are you?!]

Heru I am the temple of the Gods! Keeper of the sanity of the cosmos. Tongue of the Creator. And I command that you bring him back! Expel him from the underworld as you have me from my Kingdom! I want him in my arms! Heart drumming so that I may dance. I want . . . (*Rushes to Smeshi and undresses him.*) I need him back. And if not, then I am no Pharaoh. And Kemet belongs to her thieves. Tehuti! TEHUTI! (**Tehuti still writing.**) NgiyiSanusi, nginike umqhele wami! [I am a Shaman, give me my crown!] Please, I must glide the winds of his laugh once more. Where is the incense of Ausir? We must plead with him to release the sun of my dawn. Bring him back, father, he belongs with me, bring him back! I cannot lead without the Consort of Kemet. Return the star of my path. Maat, Camagu [Ancestor], we are your children for we sing to each other with your breath. He is an angel and I am his wings. My first prayer was always his name.

Why this sacrifice?! (*Desperate.*) We must pray. We need a prayer . . . (*Searching, finds second ukhamba, dips hand and retrieves ibomvu.*) Baba wethu osezulwini. (*Returns to body and rubs*

ibomvu all over it.) Malingweliswe igama lakho. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Usiphe namuhla isinkwa sethu, semihla ngemihla. (Rocks the body in his arms.) And forgive us our trespasses, njengoba nathi sibathethelela abanecala kithi. Lead us not into temptation, (Continues with ibomvu.) kodwa isisindise kokubi. Ngokuba umbuso ungowakho, the power and the glory. (Kneels with the body in arms.) Kuze kube phakade.

Amun. (Kisses the corpse.)

Enter Ausir, green, dazed but serene, with a crook and ishoba. He assesses the scene, hands Tehuti ishoba and touches Smeshi's forehead with his crook. Smeshi breathes and returns Heru's kiss. Ausir exits, only seen by Tehuti.

Heru *(overwhelmed, enveloping him)* Siyakudumisa Thixo, father, siyakuvuma ukuba unguYehova [We worship you, God, father, we concede that you are Yehova].

Community entering. *Sings Umbhedesho. A purple hue.*

Heru *undresses himself and they both wrap the leopard amabhayi around their waists. The couple begins an intimate umgido, rubbing ibomvu on each other. Drums. Tehuti drops his quail, animated, he reads.*

Tehuti *(delicate yet serious)* Oh my boys – sons of the soil. *(To audience.)* The image before us was painted by Het-Heru eons ago, and now that they are here . . . I tremble with grief. I lament the bodies that will soon fade, for death is life. *(To the stars.)* Oh, Maat, Ancestor before time. What charge have you given our Prince? To carry you all of before and run him beyond manhood? He dances outside his body for Ubungoma, nina bengoma [ye of the song], a sight too complex for feeble eyes. *(The couple moans. Audience.)* There are no ears to this tune, it belongs to the cosmos. Yet the flesh bends to the pining of the heart. The boys are men in each other. No calculus can compute this equation. On the mat they play with sacred geometry. Erecting shapes that only abadala [the elders] can bear. A beauty uncaptured by knowledge. *(Pointing.)* Look at them *(They moan. Drums intensify.)* – I am the God of Wisdom and yet this ritual knows better than I. I am jealous. Tehuti is jealous.

Not of their flesh but of their . . . their . . . purpose. They mean each other. Usiko LabaGcini. They *are* each other. If one walks alone, whole, then he is half.

Their arms exist for the other to embrace. IZinyanya call anomaly to fight the night. No bones can be thrown before they kiss, akupahlwa bengathintene laba [there is no ritual until they have touched]. *(Moans and drums intensify.)* There is nothing my wit can offer here. They are each other's temple. *(Tears.)* This is where reason surrenders to art. And pure are their strokes. *(Gathering himself.)* Your journey is complete, Prince Heru. Your consort lies on your chest. Your father is on his way to his nest. What is next is best. *(Blows on ishoba, places it before them. They stop in an embrace, moaning. Stop drums.)* Go, boys, finish and go. I have another eternity to fathom izaNusi zeZulu [the diviners of heaven]. *(Claps hands.)* Niphahlile, siyavuma [you have done the ritual, we agree]. Go!

They take ishoba and a draw two glasses of milk from the second ukhamba, and hand them to each other. They drink, grunt, and look at the audience.

Couple Siyavuma! [We agree!]

Smeshi *dips a finger in his glass and rubs milk on Heru's temple, he kisses him there.*

Tehuti UMakhosi! [The Royal One!] The Pharaoh of Kemet!

The Community celebrates in ululation. Lights down.

Lights up on the canoe.

Ra is fastening his trousers and fixing his apparel. Enter **Set** being pursued by **Maat**. They both exit, opposite.

Ra (amused, rolling eyes) Gods! (Remembering something.) Shit! Ilanga! [The sun!]

Rows his canoe across dramatically.

Lights down.

Vignette Fourth

Community's soliloquy.

The Community enters in excitement, playing a hand-clapping game.

Man 1 The Gatekeeper, said healer,

With his magic hands.

Was known as the Shaman of

The people of these lands.

Woman 2 Twin spirits, twin energy –

Masc and feminine.

To act as conduit of

The Children of the soil.

Man 2 Now he is cast away, forgotten

Is his spell.

They say he is rotten

And they do not wish him well.

Woman 1 From Zimbabwe to Kemet,

Azania and Mali, they took away

His herbs and now we're in this folly.

All ISangoma, uMgcini, the keeper of

Secrets. Has risen in the Prince

And now we have a wedding!

Man 1 Lapho simephi thina? [Where do we stand?]

Other Three Empothulweni! [In his graduation!]

Drums. They all laugh, clap, sing, dance and exit.

Lights down.

Scene Seventh

Drums. Song. Dance. Lights up in the Palace. The throne room is decorated with different amabhayi and other Afrikan cloths. Heru is on his throne, flanked by Smeshi and Aset. The sun rises over them.

The Community sings Ancestral songs as it is Heru's graduation. One of them bleats like a goat and is slaughtered by the others. They take its bile and place it on Heru's head, and they give the Prince a cup of the goat's blood to drink. Heru does umgido along with his ishoba. Dance, song, celebration. The slaughtered wakes and moos like a cow, running away. The Community chases them, laughing, singing, dancing, exiting.

Enter Ausir, green and royal, with his crook in hand. Stop drums.

Heru Baba! [Father!]

Ausir (*embracing him*) You saved me, son.

Aset (*in tears*) He saved us all.

Ausir Along with our Smeshi. Greetings, son.

Smeshi Hello, uncle.

Ausir I hear you both are more than cousins now.

Heru (*nervous*) Father I . . . I am taking Smeshi as my Consort.

Ausir (*taking Smeshi's hand*) Ha! A new era, welcome, son.

Smeshi Ngiyabonga, baba [Thank you, father].

Ausir And my brother?

Heru He was banished by the old Gods. He lurks beyond the borders of the kingdom.

Ausir What a pity.

Aset He deserves it. (*To Smeshi.*) But you saved my son, I shall forever be grateful.

Smeshi I would do anything for him, Mother. He is my family.

Ausir I am hungry.

Aset We have prepared a feast for your return.

Ausir Ah you know me too well. I'll lead the way.

They all exit, laughing.

Enter the Community with a second throne. They place it next to Heru's.

Community (*in their original line downstage*) They shall rule together, jointly, father and son. Along with their beloved Consorts they shall nourish Kemet with all their might. The world shall know of the fated Prince and his Love. The world shall know of Usiko LabaGcini [the Ritual of the Keepers].

Woman 1 Whooo hhayi, andilambe! [Oh no, I'm so hungry!]

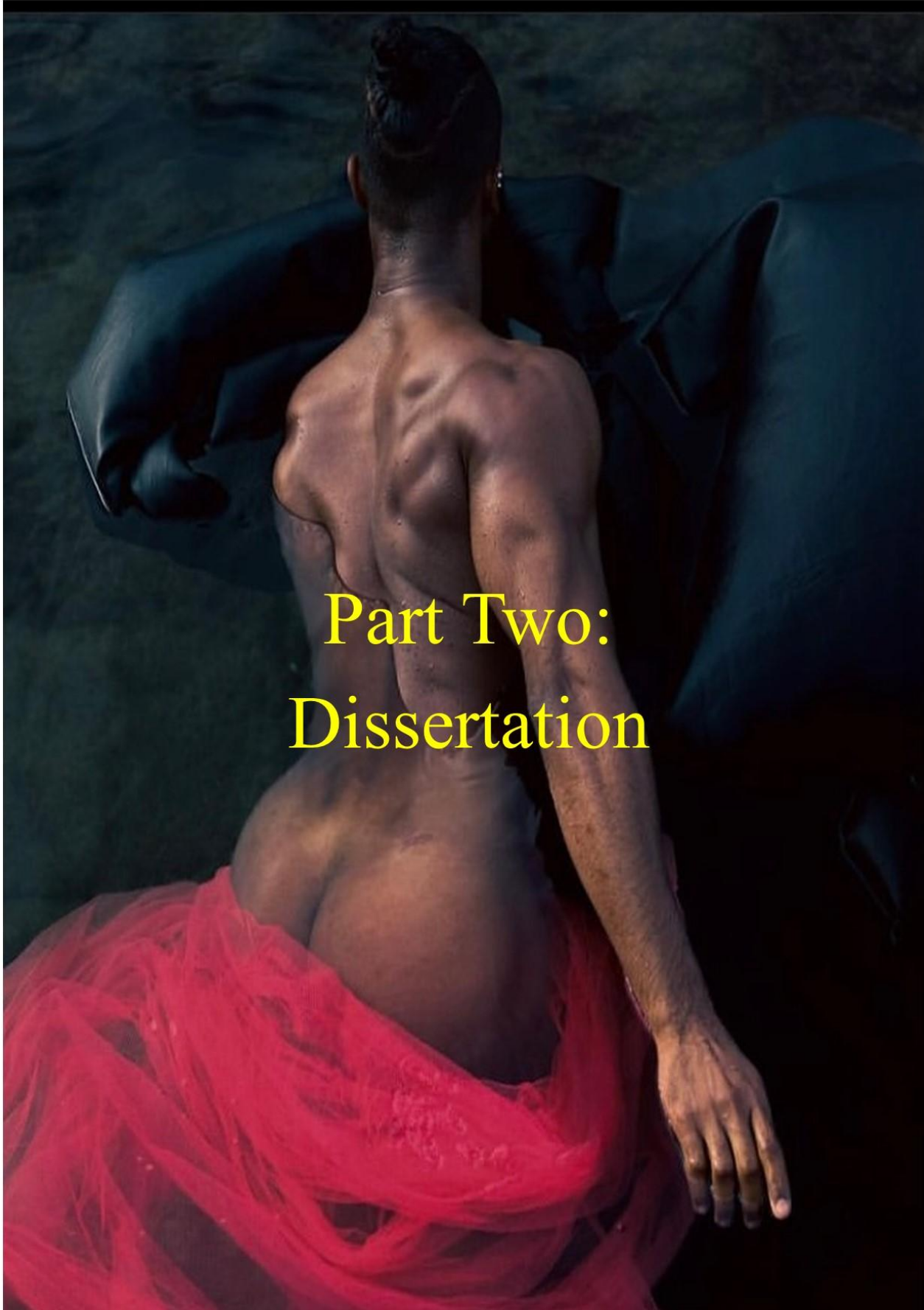
Man 2 Asambe, wethu. [Let's go, dear]

Man 1 (*arm over Woman 2*) Shall we?

Woman 2 Indeed.

*Drums. They all exit, singing 'Ngihawukele Thongo Lami'. A spotlight on the thrones.
Lights out.*

* See translation in Appendix 2.



Part Two:
Dissertation

Chapter One:

Introduction

Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

James Baldwin (1962)

Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to this dissertation. I commence with this study by first giving an account of its background. With this, I seek to articulate my curiosity as a scholar, on how queerness has been positioned in African/black culture generally, contrary to African/black histories and philosophies. I then consider queerness in the South African context, followed by an observation of the phenomenon in my own isiZulu culture. My personal journey, subject position and interests are then articulated as this is an autoethnographic, practice-based research¹ study, and I position myself as a researcher who identifies as gay/queer, with a calling in ubungoma. Ubungoma is the phenomenon in the isiZulu culture where an individual is inhabited by an ancestor and is thus granted spiritual responsibilities such as divining, prophesying and healing within their communities. Since my study engages with ubungoma as a key phenomenon, I have chosen not to italicize this (or other terms deriving from it) in the dissertation. I then define the purpose of this study, which is to investigate the relationship between queerness and

¹ These terms, 'autoethnography' and 'practice-based research' will be further expanded upon in Chapter 2 - Methodology.

ubungoma through playwrighting; and this is succeeded by a list of the research questions I aim to answer. Key terms and seminal scholars and the structure of this dissertation are then noted, followed by a short conclusion, summarising the contents of this chapter, while introducing the next.

Queerness and Africa: Background

In the continent of Africa, homosexuality is currently illegal in 30 countries (Rakhetsi 2021; Kojoué 2024). In June 2024, the Namibian High Court ruled that laws banning same-sex acts between men in the country was unconstitutional, making Namibia the 24th country in Africa to recognise queer bodies as sovereign beings (Kojoué 2024; Booty 2024). South Africa is the only country, out of 54, where queer peoples may enjoy the privileges of marriage (Rakhetsi 2021). Although many scholars have argued that indeed queerness has existed in the continent since prehistoric times, the homophobia that African LGBTQIA+² communities face is predicated by the notion that non-heterosexual orientations are not ‘African’ (Murray and Roscoe 1998; Epprecht 2004).

Despite the political rhetoric African leaders use to denounce homosexuality as a Western³ import, African scholarship has categorically affirmed this sexual orientation as part and parcel of African culture (Dlamini 2006; Msibi 2011). Scholars like Malidoma Somè, for example, have even gone as far as to insist that gay, lesbian, and bisexual peoples have been historically viewed as having a unique importance in African cultures (1993). Somè maintains that in the Dagara tribe of Burkina Faso and the Dogon tribe of Mali, queer people are known as traditional healers

² LGBTQIA+ is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersexed, Asexual/Ally and other (+) non-binary genders.

³ Although the term “global North” is more acceptable in decolonial scholarship, I use “the West” to highlight the cultural imperialism of the European colonial project - which is one of the main frictions unpacked in this study.

and are called ‘gatekeepers’ (1993). Gatekeepers are understood to have sacred spiritual powers and are respected as curators of the divine, and of the culture of their societies (Somè 1993; Somè 2000; Newcombe 2002).

Nevertheless, homophobia in Africa remains a serious predicament for queer people; in Nigeria, Mauritania, Somalia, South Sudan, homosexuality is punishable by death (Rakhetsi 2021). In May 2023 Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni signed the Anti-Homosexuality Act, passed by parliament, which deemed homosexual intercourse a criminal offence punishable by life imprisonment (APF 2023). Although this sparked global outrage, several African statesmen, like Edem Senanu of Ghana have championed Uganda’s legislation, while others like South Africa’s Julius Malema condemned Uganda’s persecution of queer peoples (NBC News 2023).

Queerness in South Africa: Context

Although same-sex relationships were legalized in 1994, and same-sex marriage was legalized in 2006, the South African LGBTQIA+ community still faces many challenges as members of the country’s citizenship. Homophobia still plagues South African society and Thabo Msibi notes that in Africa, “homophobia reflects the rise of neo-conservatism, fueled by patriarchy” (2011, p.72). Despite the constitution preserving LGBTQIA+ rights in Section 9 – Bill of Rights, South Africa has witnessed several homophobic hate crimes, including but not limited to corrective rape⁴ and murder. Names such as Lindo Sea, Buhle Poswa, Anelisa Mngqolo, Lonwabo Jack, Lindo Cele and Phelokazi Mqathana have dominated social media and news outlets (in recent

⁴ Corrective Rape is the rape of lesbian women with the aim of “correcting” their sexual orientation. Rapists believe that by giving a lesbian woman a heterosexual sexual experience, they will thus be converted to heterosexuality (Doan-Minh 2019).

years) as queer people continue to be targeted as victims of bigoted violence. I myself have experienced several verbal assaults pertaining to my sexuality, even on a supposedly safe and non-discriminatory space such as a university campus.

Homophobia in South Africa may be attributed to the colonial church and its rejection and demonisation of homosexuality (Somè 1993; Mkasi 2013). Early missionaries ensured that they sowed the seeds of anti-queer Euro-Christian ideals, and the apartheid government fashioned laws against queer bodies in this land. It is interesting to note, however, that South African indigenous epistemologies also have their view on queerness. Busangokwakhe Dlamini, for example, proposes that “in some instances homosexual relations carry some religious and spiritual significance, as in the case of izangoma, izinyanga and other traditional healers” (2006, p.129). Several queer izangoma in media have also noted a correlation between their sexualities and spiritual gifts. Izangoma are diviners of the Nguni cluster. According to Winifred Ogana and Vivian Ojong, “in South Africa’s KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province, the isangoma (diviner) remains firmly entrenched at the apex of the hierarchy of African traditional medicine” (2015, p.52). Izangoma is the plural form of Isangoma. Zulu traditional healing is practiced as ubungoma. I have had a calling in ubungoma, and I identify as queer, and it is this phenomenon that I wish to further explore.

Queerness in the IsiZulu Culture: A Personal Journey

In 2017 I consulted with uMakhosi ⁵ at UKZN (Howard College), and this was her reading from the bones:

⁵ uMakhosi is a title used to refer to iSangoma in the IsiZulu culture.

“You are not alone, when I see you, I make out a twin-spirit. Intrinsic in your being is an Ancestor of yours. She is female. She rules over your life, your physicality, your personality, and your psychology. This is why the way you are; this is why you are gay.”
(Makhosi [University of KwaZulu Natal], Student Union, 12 March 2017)

In that moment I came to a critical confrontation with a culture and tradition I had been alien to throughout my childhood, until that consultation. Although I had heard of such a phenomenon before, in African cultural contexts – spirituality influencing sexuality – it had never been a personal experience. I have since sought to understand the relationship between sexual orientation and spiritual affiliations, as constructed and viewed from an African epistemological paradigm. This, in large is the purpose of this study.

Purpose of Study: Playwrighting, Queerness, Ubungoma

The study I seek to conduct is therefore inspired by my positionality as an African gay man with an Ancestral calling – ubungoma. How then, does queerness relate to ubungoma? Is it a causal relationship? And how, furthermore, can this relationship be explored through theatre and Playwriting? According to numerous izangoma that I have consulted since my first time at UKZN in 2017, my sexuality is influenced by the presence of an Ancestral⁶ possession. An associate of mine, who is also initiated in ubungoma, has also said that I am with a female Ancestor, who will not only grant me abilities to heal people in our traditional ways, but who is also the reason for my sexual orientation. This is not a unique phenomenon, for it is accepted in the isiZulu tradition that male izangoma are expected to have homosexual inclinations (Lee 1969;

⁶ I capitalize this term as a sign of respect to my Ancestry, an aspect of divinity that my (isiZulu) culture venerates in its high regard of Ubungoma.

Maynard 2007; Mkasi 2013; Ogana and Ojong 2015). Not only is homosexuality accepted among izangoma, suggests Kent Maynard (2007), but it is in fact typical, as the isangoma symbolises an androgynous being mediating between the worlds of the living and the deceased.

An important note on this phenomenon, however, is that it is in direct contrast with my experience of the prevailing narrative within current isiZulu culture, given the homophobic rhetoric I have experienced that asserts homosexuality to be un-African, as mentioned above. This is an ideology that I have encountered numerous times growing up in black (isiZulu) spaces. More so, pro-black academics like Dr. Umar Johnson - clinical psychologist and eminent pro-black scholar in the United States of America - are known for their homophobic gospels, as he maintains that he “does not support a lifestyle that’s destroying and eroding the black family” (2017). The irony here of course is that LGBTQIA+ peoples in Africa are being denied the right to marry or to start their own families, which, it could be argued, is equally destroying the black family. “Pro-black is a lifestyle that encourages the economic growth and development of the black people as a whole with a purpose of increasing the wealth and population of black people around the world” (Q The Truth 2016). This is a movement that is generally associated with African American community in the United States.

Lindiwe Mkasi, a practicing sangoma and graduate researcher at the Department of Religious Studies and Arabic (University of South Africa), has a different perspective from Johnson. In her study on isiZulu traditional healers and sexuality, she asserts her discovery that among izangoma, homosexual relations are acknowledged as being related to Ancestral possession (2016). Mkasi has also argued that homosexual practices between male izangoma are “predominantly perceived as being related to their medicinal rituals” (2013, p.35), implying that sexual intercourse among male izangoma is ritualised.

Though I concur with this as far as my own sexuality is concerned, I do not claim that *all* male izangoma are queer, nor that *all* queer males are izangoma – I wish to be clear on this. I shall limit this paper to what I understand of my own sexuality, namely that it is influenced by my calling in ubungoma. In fact, my interest is in creatively investigating, through playwriting, the relationship between my sexuality and ubungoma, in the African spiritual context. I begin, however, with the acceptance of ubungoma as a phenomenon that reconciles sexuality and spirituality in a manner that interprets queerness through an Afrocentric paradigm, as will be discussed in *Chapter 4 – Contextual Framework*. I have explored these ideas through a questioning of my writing process in scripting a play, namely *Izwi LabaGcini*⁷, over a period of three months. Here I am inspired by prominent sangoma Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, who passed away in 2023, who has given insights to ubungoma in his writings, maintaining that “we [izangoma] have pursued art in all its forms for many generations” (1996, p.28).

Given that I am at exploring Afrocentric ideas in framing this paper, and that I am looking into ubungoma as an area of interest, it therefore follows that the creative component of this study employs Ritual Theatre as a means of enquiry. While appreciating Victor Turner (1979) and Richard Schechner’s (2013) scholarship around ritual and theatre, I am more convinced by Wole Soyinka’s (1976) understandings of Ritual Theatre as it relates to African modes of expression. In his treatise *Myth, Literature and the African World* (which is a seminal work in this paper) Soyinka maintains that Ritual Theatre in the African context is the “process of spatial definition which precedes... the actual enactment [and] must therefore be seen as an integral part of man’s constant efforts to master the immensity of the cosmos with his miniscule self” (1976, p.40).

⁷ *Izwi LabaGcini* means “Word of the Keepers”.

Here Soyinka proposes that theatre in the African paradigm is used as a means to master reality in the context of existing in a vast cosmos. These musings correlate with the thematic concerns of the creative component of this study as *Izwi LabaGcini* is a play narrating the journey of a protagonist who seeks to master his reality as he negotiates his sexuality with ubungoma. I am also interested in this creative pursuit, given that the relationship between queerness and spirituality, in my observation, is seldom placed as a primary focus for exploration within South African theatre; and *Izwi LabaGcini* addresses this gap.

Research Questions

My aim, in the creative element of this study is to explore the process of scripting a play that negotiates queerness and ubungoma. My creative focus is on playwriting and interrogating my own writing practice in this project. This is supported and underpinned by the theoretical component, with which I seek - through a practical enquiry as playwright of *Izwi LabaGcini* - to develop a critical understanding of the positions of queer narratives in ubungoma. My research objectives are as follows:

Creative:

- 1) To write a ritual theatre play, *Izwi LabaGcini*, in which I shall investigate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma.

Theoretical

- 1) To investigate the ways in which I can compose a ritual theatre script that negotiates queerness in ubungoma.

- 2) To understand the relationship between spirituality and sexuality from an Afrocentric paradigm.
- 3) To investigate ways in which my own subject position, experience and personal knowledge contribute to the creative process.
- 4) To interrogate and understand my own writing process, in terms of how it is influenced by my subject position and what playwriting techniques I employ.

The following questions will be addressed as a navigation of this study:

- 1) What elements of ritual theatre can be used to script relations between queerness and ubungoma?
- 2) What Afrocentric understandings could be explored, in the writing of ritual theatre, as a means to interrogate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma?
- 3) How, in the process of writing *Izwi LabaGcini*, will I use my own understanding and experience of being a gay man with a calling in ubungoma?
- 4) Under what form of practice can *Izwi LabaGcini* be written, in the context of understanding one's own praxis as a playwright?
- 5) What, having written *Izwi LabaGcini*, is my understanding of the relationship between queerness and ubungoma?

Structure of Dissertation

This enquiry will be structured in six chapters, namely:

Chapter 1: Introduction: This is the current Chapter where I introduce the background and key concepts of this study. I also articulate the main question of this dissertation, which is what is the

relationship between queerness and ubungoma, and how can I as a playwright use my creative abilities to investigate this.

Chapter 2: Methodology – Autoethnography in Playwriting: Here I will go over the Methodology employed in this study. The study is an autoethnographic enquiry and will use practice-based research⁸ in order to interrogate how, through playwrighting, I may investigate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. Concepts like ‘observation research by Gordon Ramsay (2002) will be discussed, along Steven Pressfield’s (2002) meditations around daily productivity, which I have adopted in my progress. I have kept a reflexive journal on my creative writing process, and it has been entered as data for analysis.

Chapter 3: Conceptual/Theoretical Framework - Afrocentricity and Ritual Theatre: Key theories Afrocentricity, Decoloniality and Ritual Theatre are problematised and discussed in greater detail, particularity their appropriateness in a study that seeks to investigate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma.

Chapter 4: Contextual Framework - Queerness in the Afrocentric Paradigm (Ubungoma): The study is given context. How queerness is viewed and debated throughout the continent historically and how politically it is observed. I also argue for the cultural significance of queerness in indigenous spiritualities and how this differs from modern understandings of queer peoples and their position in society.

Chapter 5: Data - Scripting Izwi LabaGcini: My writing process will be interrogated, along with my findings on the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. I will also argue for a new theatre I have coined, the Absurd Ritual, during the scripting of *Izwi LabaGcini*.

⁸ Terms like *Autoethnography* and *practice-based research* will be expanded upon in *Chapter 2: Methodology*.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Here I will offer a summary and conclusion of the dissertation, detailing the limitations of the study and avenues for future research.

Conclusion

Queerness has been subject to great debate in African political, theological, cultural, and academic spheres; and I aim to contribute to discourse pertaining to this phenomenon by analysing the scripting of a ritual theatre text that interrogates the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. This Chapter has cited the background of the study ahead. I have discussed the personal and academic reasons for embarking on this investigation. My research aims and questions have been identified, and I have also determined the key terms of this study and its seminal scholars. I have mapped out the structure of this dissertation, and shall now proceed with the second Chapter which deals with the research Methodology employed in my investigation.

Chapter Two:

Methodology

I am black and I am gay, I cannot separate the two into a secondary and primary struggle.

Simon Nkoli (1993)

Introduction

In order to pursue this study, a working frame needed to be established. This Chapter entails the methodology that I have used in conducting my inquiry. I will first cite my personal reasons for having pursued this study. Second, I shall lay out my research paradigm. This involves a discussion on Qualitative Research (Chilisa and Preece 2005) as a sound research paradigm. I will then provide an argument on Autoethnography (Holman Jones 2007) and how I have positioned myself a researcher in this project - my identity as a Zulu queer man will be negotiated along with the scope of research that I have pursued. What follows is an elucidation on Practice-Based Research and Creative Research, and how I have researched my craft as a playwright, along with how I have used playwriting to interrogate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. This will be succeeded by an articulation of my Methods and Process. My writing process under the Critical Friend's Protocol and Reflexive Journal will be covered as the research instruments that have generated my data. How the data has been analysed will also be mentioned. I will then conclude by citing the salient scholars and writers that have influenced my creative process. The end of this Chapter will see a summary and conclusion, whereby the following Chapter, the *Theoretical/Conceptual Framework*, will be introduced.

A Need for Black Queer Letters

It is summer in Durban, South Africa 2016. The evening has cast a charming blanket of black over the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Howard College. I am with two friends in the computer LAN when one of them, Ntokozo, turns to me and excitedly asks: "Have you seen *Moonlight*?". "Moonlight?" I ask back, having no idea what he was on about. Ntokozo then proceeds to beg me to watch the newly released film directed by Barry Jenkins (2016). He does not tell me what it is about, he only insists that seeing it will affect me deeply. Trusting my friend's taste in film and drama, and the vigour of his recommendation, I head straight to my residence to stream the film and, unbeknownst to me at the time, to commence a journey that would lead me to a study on the relationship between queerness and ubungoma, as a theatre practitioner. *Moonlight* was the first instance where I saw the black queer subject being interrogated in-depth, and my understanding of the position of black queer narratives within black culture subsequently shifted.

The months rolled by and the *Moonlight* became a sensation. Everyone black and queer spoke about it. Andile, a mutual friend of Ntokozo and myself, had stopped me several times on campus to discuss new insights he had on *Moonlight* after a recent re-watch. About five months later we are in winter, the sun is cleverly out, mischievously so, almost teasing the young minds below it at UKZN Howard College. I am walking across campus when I bump into Andile who, appearing from nowhere, passionately insists: "There's a book called *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* by K Sello Duiker, it is the *Moonlight* of books, you have to read it!" (2001). Andile's possession also sets me to task, I retrieve the book from our campus library and am certain in the next week or so of reading it, that my paradigm has shifted, as it did with *Moonlight*.

If writing is a manner of advanced thinking⁹ - novels, films, plays, poems, short stories are written - then it is clear, to me anyway, that black queerness has not received much thought, at least in the industries and cultures producing the above literary artefacts. In fact, it is only in recent years that the black queer narrative has been given the spotlight in any given media or arts outlet. Growing up in the 90s, there simply were no images of black queerness, except of course in the instance of caricature or stereotyping, that marked black gay life as a joke or source of entertainment. Nothing serious, or with any depth. It is only in the 2000s, or more so 2010s, that items like *Noah's Ark*, *Intersexions*, *Inxeba: The Wound*, *POSE*, and a few others have occupied a healthy space in mainstream media as cultural investigations into black queer existence.

South African theatre is no different. I always put the question: “How many published black queer texts can you list in the South African theatre scene?” and my colleagues and students often cannot mention even one. It is from this exact lack of literary and theatrical representation that playwriting became a useful prism through which I sought to explore black queerness in its Afro-spiritual context. Along with stimulating my creative impulses as a writer, scripting *Izwi LabaGcini* assisted me as a researcher to adequately grapple with the subject of this study. The play-text therefore became the primal instrument through which themes around the relationship between queerness and ubungoma could be interrogated. This means that writing the play helped me understand and dissect the phenomenon. Playwriting became a research method. The following is a discussion of the research design used to conduct this study.

⁹ Toni Morrison maintains that “writing is a way of thinking”, while Jordan Peterson claims that “writing is formalized thinking” (2015, 2018).

Research Paradigm

Interpretive Paradigm

The study I pursued falls under the Interpretive Paradigm. According to Bagele Chilisa and Julia Preece, “Interpretivists believe that knowledge is subjective because it is socially constructed and mind-dependent” (2005, pg. 29). This tends to contradict the Positivists who insist that knowledge is subjective and can only be ascertained through scientific inquiry (Chilisa and Preece 2005). Hazel Smith and Rodger Dean, however, argue that - particularly in the humanities - our subjectivities influence the research we conduct as scholars and that these subjectivities should be incorporated into the research process (2009). The Interpretive Paradigm is therefore an appropriate point of departure in considering a study such as this, given that I am researching my own understanding around queerness and that “the purpose of interpretive research is to understand people’s experiences” (Chilisa and Preece 2005, pg29). The idea of Ancestors communicating to one from beyond the physical realm and potentially influencing one’s sexual orientation is not one that can be examined through the scientific method, and I, therefore, claim the Interpretive Paradigm and the philosophical underpinnings of this study.

Qualitative Research

This study engaged Qualitative Research, which can be understood as research whereby researchers seek to naturally understand a phenomenon through its context in reality (Patton 2002; Golafshani 2003). This implies a diversion from research whose findings are based on empirical or statistical procedures that draw from the positivist paradigm of Quantitative

Research (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Merriam 2002). Qualitative Research, rather, is located within an interpretive paradigm of reality, which, as mentioned above, suggests that reality is socially constructed and, therefore, one's understanding of and engagement with reality can be subjective (Merriam 2002; Merriam 2009; Merriam and Greiner 2019). The friction between Qualitative and Quantitative research has much dominated academic discourse, with the former being perceived as inferior to the latter, given its subjective nature (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Silverman 2005). This view parallels back queer realities since in most of our communities we are relegated to second-class citizenship and our 'legitimacy'¹⁰ is constantly questioned. Thus, Qualitative Research becomes an apt manner in which to conduct this study, since my subjectivity as a queer man called to ubungoma is the phenomenon I am investigating (Merriam and Greiner 2019; Bourgault and Rosamond 2023).

Methodological Approach

Practice-Based Research

The study has engaged Practice-Based Research, which is understood as “an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice” (Candy 2006, p.01). Practice-based research presents a different form of ‘intellectual inquiry’ since it generates knowledge through ‘creative production’ (Riley and Hunter 2009). I have used my practice as a playwright to interrogate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma, such that the findings of the research and the conclusions emerging

¹⁰ This re-visits the trope of homosexuality being ‘un-African’.

from the process have been based on the creative component or practice (Candy 2006; Ramsay 2002; Smith & Dean 2009).

According to Gordon Ramsay, Practice-Based Research is an apt research methodology for the playwright since one performs two functions i.e., an academic and a playwright; and these two roles may inform one another (2002). In this way, one's process as a writer may enrich the research, while one's study as an academic may give insight to one's creative process (Ramsay 2002). This is where I have situated *Izwi LabaGcini* as an artefact, meaning my functions as playwright and academic did influence one another advantageously; that is, the literature I have gathered has been synthesized in the form of a play, thus granting deeper insight into the phenomenon, since a dissertation *and* a play-text have been used to interrogate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma.

Creative Research

This study also integrated ideas around Creative Research, as an extension of Practice-Based Research. There is a growing acceptance in the academy for creative outputs constituting knowledge, and researchers are continuing to develop research methodologies that adequately facilitate creative research projects. According to Smith and Dean “[c]reative work within the university environment is now often referred to as practice-led research, practice-based research, creative research or practice as research” (2009, pg. 02). These terms signal different ways to approach research where creativity or the arts are used as a primary means through which knowledge is generated. Rebecca Bourgault and Catherine Rosamond maintain that creative research “introduces students to qualitative research methods that use the artistic process as the

primary strategy to understand and examine experience through different ways of knowing” (2023, pg. 30).

In this study, creative writing has been used as a methodology for the production of knowledge pertaining to my relationship with my Ancestry, and this is corroborated by Tony Kelly who maintains writing can be used as a means to examine our connection to others (in Mitchel, Weber and Reilly-Scanlon 2005). Playwriting thus became a process through which the interlinks between my queerness and ubungoma could be holistically understood, a process that Michel Foucault supports, as he states that, “[t]hrough the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing, one should be able to form an identity through which a whole spiritual genealogy can be read” (1997, pg. 214).

Autoethnography

I have also employed Autoethnography, which Stacey Holman Jones proposes to be “a theoretical, methodological, and (primarily) textual approach that seeks to experience, reflect on, and represent through the evocation of the relationship among self and culture, individual and collective experience, and identity” (2007, p.1). Dwayne Custer corroborates this notion by stating that ‘Autoethnography is a style of autobiographical writing and qualitative research that explores an individual’s unique life experiences in relationship to social and cultural institutions” (2014, p10). Guiding the structure of my intended study was my positionality as a gay man with a calling in ubungoma. I have employed my subject position as a frame of reference in navigating the writing of *Izwi LabaGcini*. Holman Jones supports this approach by stating that “autoethnographic texts strive to be *performative* – to demonstrate how selves-in-cultures and

cultures-in-selves are not constituted outside of or beyond discourse, language, and history, but are instead created and recreated in the moments of their telling” (2007, p.1).

From this, my spirituality as a black gay man has therefore been negotiated and articulated aptly through writing, since a play-text is written for performance. I have, furthermore, engaged the Afrocentric model of research which requires the researcher to interpret a cultural phenomenon in its purposed function within a culture (Mkabela 2005; Pellerin 2012). Doing so, as Queeneth Mkabela and Marquita Pellerin maintain, ensures that the researcher holistically appreciates the phenomena they investigate since they have understood the epistemology from which a particular cultural sample derives (2005; 2012). Autoethnography was therefore a fitting methodology since it highlights the significance of the researcher’s personal narrative about the culture they wish to explore (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). This in turn provides a more dynamic understanding of the researcher’s cultural self in relation to others (Chang 2008; Holman Jones 2005).

In further pursuing an autoethnographic methodology, writing *Izwi LabaGcini* was guided by Afrocentric¹¹ thought, where I engaged “Africaness”¹² through the conceptions of key theorists and practitioners, that is Barbara Molette and Carlton Molette (2013); Wole Soyinka (1976); Credo Mutwa (1996, 1964 and 2001). The writing process was also aided by Victor Turner’s (1982) *From Ritual to Theatre*, since I explored the limonoid aspect of *Izwi LabaGcini* as a ritual theatre script. These frames of reference were, at the beginning, deliberately generic because I wished not to be too prescriptive in my writing. I was adamant that my process ought to be an organic one and therefore could not be rigid on the sections I wished to explore from the

¹¹ Afrocentricity will be thoroughly covered in Chapter 3 - Theoretica/Conceptual Framework.

¹² I do concede that Africa is not a monolith, however, there are similarities/parallels in African cultures that constitute “Africaness” or an African Civilisation.

abovementioned works. This is in line with Ramsay's ideas on the uninhibited process of writing, which shall be discussed below (2002). The play was composed over a period of three months, November 2021-January 2022, and I interrogated Afrocentric discourse from a playwriting perspective. A working synopsis for *Izwi LabaGcini* that I had at the beginning was:

The protagonist- a young prince- has been called to ubungoma. He has to undergo the process of ukuthwasa (initiation). During his transitional progress the prince has to come to terms with his sexuality. There is an antagonist, however, that will seek to use the prince's sexual identity against him. Should the prince complete his initiation he shall benefit his kingdom; if he fails, he condemns his people to doom.

This synopsis afforded me the space to explore my subject rigorously. The themes set out ensured that I could work both as a researcher and playwright, since I needed to gather information and translate it into a drama, thus gaining new knowledge in the process. The study was both challenging and fulfilling, for I had the two-fold task of forming an intellectual argument pertaining to the relationship between queerness and ubungoma while scripting a play that further negotiates this, along with illustrating its own creative merits.

Data Collection

Practice/ Playwriting

Izwi LabaGcini was written over three months. During these three months, I was supposed to write for an hour every day. Informing the writing process was Steven Pressfield's (2002) *War of Art*, a treatise designed to encourage writers to compose on a daily basis. I was particularly interested in Pressfield's discussion on the use of ritual and appealing to the supernatural or

spiritual in order to gain inspiration for writing (2002). Toni Morrison also emphasises the importance rituals associated with writing, as she maintains that “ritual comprises [her] preparation to enter a space [she] can only call non-secular [and that] all writers devise ways to approach that place where they expect to make the contact, where they become the conduit, or where they engage in this mysterious process” (1993, p.1). This correlated with my identity as one with a calling in ubungoma, and I made use of spirituality and ritual even as I wrote. I therefore made introspection of my own writing practice as I experimented with different forms of preparatory rituals that were meant to assist in the creative process. The nuances of this process will be properly addressed in *Chapter 5: Findings*, however, the process I planned and the process I actually engaged had their differences.

Along with my writing rituals was an appropriation of Ramsay’s playwriting method, which employs observation research involving a constant awareness of one’s reality (2002). This means that the playwright “look[s] with care [and] listen[s] with care” (Ramsay 2002, p.45). It furthermore involves interacting with one’s reality as an observer, thereby placing the playwright in a position to draw from their reality in their creative process (Ramsay 2002). Here I was particularly interested in observing other forms of art, i.e. visual art, music, dance, film, and literature (other plays included), in order to discover, as Ramsay encourages, how consumption of art might influence my own creativity (2002). This process was fitting in terms of creative output since in Africa, theatre tends to blur artistic categories of song, dance, and acting into a performance style encompassing multiple disciplines (Soyinka 1976; Moyo and Young-Jahangeer 2023). My selection of artworks was organic, instinctual, and evolving; thus, keeping with Ramsay’s assertion that “observation that is framed by a prescribed or preordained scheme is observation limited and ultimately some observation becomes excluded” (2002, p.46).

Adopting a reflexive awareness of the artistic material allowed me to investigate how it contributed to my scripting of *Izwi LabaGcini*.

Critical Friend's Protocol

One of my key research methods was the use of 'critical friends' as a means of evaluating *Izwi LabaGcini* as a script and charting my process. Developed for education research, the 'Critical Friends Protocol' is a system of having one's academic or professional peers review their work for the purpose of developing one's praxis (Costa and Kallick 1993; Appleby 1998; Constantino 2010). To do this, I asked six colleagues in my professional sphere to conduct a review of *Izwi LabaGcini* as a script. All six of the participants were theatre practitioners - two were practicing ubungoma; two were of isiZulu ethnic descent; and the other two had international backgrounds, i.e. from Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

I specifically selected these individuals to diversify the readership of the text, while retaining a critical gaze since we all had theatre knowledge. We made use of the Critical Friends Protocol where having read the script, the participants rendered feedback on it (Appleby 1998; Constantino 2010). This was done in three sessions over three months. I appropriated this method of peer reviewing to suit the mandate of my study, meaning the 'artefact' that I presented was the script *Izwi LabaGcini*, which I distributed for reading a week before each feedback session (Dunne and Honts 1998; Constantino 2010).

The facilitator (Zaza) and I discussed and established what each feedback session will focus on, regarding the subject matter of my research, i.e., the interrogation of queer identities in Afrocentric and Ritual Theatre. I re-drafted the script according to the feedback I received in

each sitting. Each Critical Friends Protocol was held on Zoom and the recordings were transcribed to serve as data (See *Chapter 5: Findings*). To address issues of potential bias I appointed an impartial facilitator, i.e. Zaza, who ran similar feedback sessions when I participated at the Almasi African Playwrights Conference (2019, 2021)¹³. It is Zaza's facilitation skills that drove a robust conversation among the six participants in each sitting of the Protocol. During each session, I was silent - my video and mic were off - and this was so as to participate in the Protocol from a distanced position from my peers, who were the Critical Friends (Constantino 2010).

Reflexive Journal

For the purposes of critical reflection, I kept a reflexive journal - a measure of transparency and a means to record my process during the study (Sutherland 2007; Ortlipp 2008). I made journal entries after every writing session and used specific reflexive questions to prompt my responses (see Appendix Five). Another aspect of journaling that interested me was Alexandra Sutherland's notion of the creation of a self-affirmed subjectivity which results from the authorship of one's creative process in *Drama* (2007). I therefore thought critically and reflected on my process as an artist and researcher. As Sutherland suggests, "the journal writing process opens possibilities for negotiating uncertainty, difference, self and other, as well as providing an important space to understand and learn from the immediacy and ephemerality of the performance act" (2007, p.111).

In the journal, I recorded my progress on the study, i.e., the writing of *Izwi LabaGcini*, but not simply as a means of narrating events; rather, it was aimed at interrogating my practice and

¹³ The Almasi African Playwrights Conference is an annual conference where playwrights are invited to develop their scripts.

drawing possible theoretical meanings from this confrontation with praxis (Sutherland 2007; Ortlipp 2008). The method of reflexive journaling during the process of constructing *Izwi LabaGcini* was the main platform for thinking through my creative practice as a playwright. This was appropriate since I was using my own subject position as a focus of enquiry; that is, my own practice as a black queer playwright with a calling in ubungoma became the focal point of the investigation. In such circumstances, journaling becomes a valuable source of data since it “asks the writer to use personal experience as a source for authority” (Sutherland 2007, p.117). I consider the reflexive journal a necessary facet to the research project since it, as it has for Michelle Ortlipp, “enable[d] me to make my experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research design, data generation, analysis, and interpretation process” (Ortlipp 2008, p.703).

Challenges

There were supposed to be seven participants in the Critical Friends Protocol, but one individual pulled out before the first session. I was not pleased here since he was also practicing ubungoma. I anticipate that the study would have benefited from this individual’s participation since they were also a theatre practitioner. Having only two participants practicing in ubungoma in the Protocol was indeed a limitation. Having more individuals who were accustomed to the nuances of ubungoma would have afforded a more robust engagement with *Izwi LabaGcini*, and perhaps even debate. It would have also allowed for a greater scope in terms of discussion around the interplay between queerness and ubungoma.

Another challenge in the study was time. I had originally planned to conduct the study over six weeks, but it ended up taking three months. I had underestimated the pressures of being constantly creative and ended up producing inadequate work, which the Critical Friend's Protocol flagged. Perhaps, in the planning of the study, I should have catered for the discrepancies that could have arisen between my creative needs and deadlines. Writing a play in six weeks was indeed ambitious, especially since that play was to undergo three drafts and receiving critical feedback from professionals. I did, however, manage to finish *Izwi LabGcini* in three months and the process allowed me insights regarding my creative process - these I expand on in *Chapter 5: Findings*.

Writers Influencing the Creative Process

Given that this was a writing project, an additional voice that influenced my methodology was that of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who argues for the significance of Africans expressing themselves in their languages, in their literary or theatrical works (1986). I make mention of language here after grasping its meaning from Morrison, who in her Nobel Lecture stated, that "we do language, and that may be the measure of our lives" (Morrison 1993, p.106). In an interview, Morrison also conveys her appreciation for African writers, since "those writers could assume the centrality of their race" (Morrison 1998). Race is also emphasized by Carlton Molette and Barbara Molette who maintain that "when focusing on Afrocentric theatre, racial identity is life whether we wish it to be or not" (Molette and Molette 2013, p.1).

As an African writing a play about queer Africans, I considered it incumbent upon me to ruminate on the language that I invested in as a means of communication. Whether it be verbal or

thematic, *Izwi LabaGcini* sought to employ a language system that carried African culture and black racial imperatives in its function. I also drew from Mutwa's work, particularly *Zulu Shaman: Dreams, Prophecies and Mysteries*, which deals with isiZulu mythology, folklore and ubungoma as kept and practiced by izangoma through generations (1996). Mutwa shares his journey and experience in ubungoma, and as a fellow artist (and prospective isangoma) I considered his work a reliable frame of reference (1996).

Another disquisition that posits the value of Afrocentric theatrical language is Sharrell Lockett and Tia Shaffer's *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* (2017), which posits "an African-centered origin to theatre and theatre making that broadens the theatrical canon and provides a culturally specific contribution to performance pedagogy" (Lockett and Shaffer 2017, p.1). In particular, I was interested in Tawnya Pettiford-Wates' chapter (Offering)¹⁴ entitled 'Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum', in which she elucidates the uniqueness of poetic drama rooted in the African ritual process, exemplified in Ntozake Shange's 1976 *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (Lockett and Shaffer 2017). Here the language of poetry and the aesthetics of African ritual are conceived and negotiated through a specific African American lens (Pettiford-Wates 2017). These writers and artists further assisted my autoethnographic inquiry, given that African letters also have a culture that I sought to understand and practice. This particular version of Afrocentric Theatre thus appealed to my practice as a playwright for it crystallized language, while arching towards the spiritual, encapsulating what *Izwi LabaGcini* intended to do.

¹⁴ In *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches* chapters are referred to as Offerings (Lockett and Shaffer 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this Chapter has dealt with the methodology of this study. I have articulated my issues with black queer narratives not being part of mainstream South African (published) theatre. I also positioned my study with the interpretative paradigm and in Qualitative Research. I then cited my reasons for making use of Practice-Based Research, Creative Research and Autoethnography as appropriate research approaches. I then elucidated on how the Critical Friend's Protocol and Reflexive Journal have operated as my primary research instruments, in my pursuit to understand the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. Other writers and works that have influenced my process have been cited. The Chapter succeeding this, *Chapter 3: Contextual (Theoretical) Framework*, will discuss the major theories informing this study.

Chapter Three:

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Afrocentricity, Decoloniality and Ritual Theatre

Black men loving black men is the revolutionary act.

Marlon Riggs (1989)

Introduction

This study rests on three theoretical pillars, namely, Afrocentricity (Asante 1988), Decoloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015) and Ritual Theatre (Soyinka 1976). The selection of these has been informed by the thematic concerns that I have noted as exactly pertaining to the thought of my investigation. Afrocentricity, as to be illustrated, holds as its intellectual thrust the robust and apt lens through which I may frame the borders of my argument. Ritual Theatre, on the other hand, provides useful if not necessary parameters within which to explore the creative component of this treatise. The following chapter will therefore be an examination of the main three theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation. I shall begin with Afrocentricity, since it marks an overall theme in my critical ruminations at a point of inception; and show how it has been criticized in academia and why. I have nevertheless insisted on its function in my scholarship. Decoloniality, an idea parallel to Afrocentricity, is also a theory that will be discussed since the work I have

done with *Izwi LabaGcini* seeks to engage African sexualities beyond the colonial gaze (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Finally, I will explore Ritual Theatre as a means in which to creatively investigate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma.

Afrocentricity

At the nucleus of this study is the idea of Afrocentricity, which, according to seminal Afrocentric scholar, Molefi Kete Asante, is an African-centred approach to reality where the peoples of African descent (in the continent and diaspora) understand (and express) existence, drawing from an “African Cultural System” (Asante, 1988, p.1-2). Thus, Afrocentricity becomes a frame of reference from which African people establish a cultural common denominator as a point of departure, so as to adequately engage with their societal membership. An important objection to bear in mind here is that Africa is not a monolith. This is a continent comprising miscellaneous societies and cultures, whose practices and beliefs may contradict one another. What I appropriate from Afrocentric thought, however, is the idea that our respective indigenous philosophies are at the forefront of we imagine ourselves as African peoples. As an isiZulu man, this is important to me and the study I have conducted. Being a queer man called to ubungoma, isiZulu spirituality and mythology has become a primal lens through which I approach my position as a healer within my culture (Mutwa 1964; 1996).

Mfuniselwa Bhengu has argued that isiZulu mythology can be traced back to ancient Kemet/Egypt origins (2010; 2015). Although wildly contested by the Western academy as pseudo-science and historical fantasy, other Afrocentric scholars such as Yosef Ben-Jochannan (1989), Cheikh Anta Diop (1974), Ivan Van Sertima (1983), Martin Bernal (1987) and John

Henrik Clarke (1993) have also argued that classical North African civilizations (e.g. Kemet/Egypt) were black civilizations and that modern black peoples should find their histories in these cultures and epochs¹⁵. This notion, observes Cecil Gray, “has been discussed and debated frequently, sometimes ferociously, within and beyond the Academy” (Gray 2001, p.1). Kingslee Akala Daley, on the other hand, insists that he has yet to encounter any significant critique of Afrocentricity that has no racist undertones which seek to deny Africa’s contribution to world history (2015).

I must clarify, however, that Afrocentricity is not an idea as much as it is a practice. Mambo Ama Mazama explains that “Afrocentricity is a perspective on the African experience that posits Africans as subjects and agents, and which therefore demands grounding in African culture and the worldview on which it rests” (2002, p.219). This assertion, rather than limiting Afrocentricity as a philosophical pursuit, affirms it as a way in which reality may be interpreted and expressed. Thus Afrocentricity, I posit, is more a manner of being than it is intellectual theory; it is a consciousness (Asante 1988; James Myers 1993; Gray 2001).

The above-mentioned paradigm, however, is not an end in and of itself - Afrocentricity finds its meaning in its function, which is to afford African peoples their self-determination by reinstating their miscellaneous cultures and values as the prime frame of reference for Africans existing in the modern world (Sefa Dei 1994; Graham 1999). Ndlovu-Gatsheni describes this process as ‘epistemic freedom’ which is “fundamentally about the right to think, theorise, interpret the world, develop own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism” (2018, p.17). It is here that I would like to point that, whether for the best or worst,

¹⁵ Even though the scholars cited here are predominantly from the global North, their ideas are relevant in that they are arguing for the centering of indigenous epistemologies when Afrocentricity is concerned, at the social and individual level, in the global South.

African culture has been influenced by other global cultures; whether it be colonialism, imperialism or intercultural exchange - an 'authentic African culture' would be hard to argue for. The Afrocentrist, therefore, places "the black experience", black history and black culture at the centre of their understanding and engagement with reality, while recognising that so-called black culture is also a result of engaging with other cultures (Sefa Dei 1994; Asante 1988; Graham 1999).

In articulating the academic responsibility of scholars to affirm Afrocentricity, Bayo Oyebade asserts that "Afrocentricity expresses the need to change hegemonic cultural aggression through research and writing from the African perspective... this is why the definition of Africa must be Africa-centered" (1990, p.237). Africans can engage this idea, Ndlovu-Gatsheni asserts, by "accepting Africa as a legitimate epistemic centre from which we make sense of the world" (2018, p.39); which is critically significant for those (Africans) who wish to identify and express themselves according to their own social and cultural perspectives.

It is imperative to note here that I am not suggesting that "Africaness" constitutes a homogenous manner of being; Africa is a continent with numerous cultures and social conditions that may be similar to, or different from, one another. What I take from Afrocentric discourse is, however, that African peoples should draw from their own (varied) unique cultures as ways in which to engage with the modern world. For the purposes of this study, as a black gay man with a calling in ubungoma, I have drawn from my culture and lived experiences as I negotiate the relationship between black gay identities and African spirituality through writing *Izwi LabaGcini*. Midas Chawane highlights the necessity of African peoples' self-awareness and self-determination by stating that "when Africans view themselves as centered and central in their own history, they see themselves as agents, actors, and participants rather than as marginal and on the periphery of

political or economic experience” (2016, p.78). This perhaps, may be the liberation that the Afrocentric mandate pursues. Ndlovu-Gatsheni corroborates this by suggesting that Africans must look on to Africa as the basis of their understating of and interaction with reality (2018).

There is, furthermore, an element of Afrocentricity that honours the existential paradigms of African peoples, namely its emphasis on Indigenous spiritualities. Various scholars have asserted that Afrocentricity holds in its centre the cultural promotion of spirituality (Bekerie 1994; Graham 1999; Mkabela 2005). As Adisa Alkebulan proposes, “for African peoples, the essence of life is spiritual” (2007, p.6); I therefore submit that the acknowledgment of the African’s cosmological understanding and relations to existence is unique. As Africans, we have our own systems of knowledge, epistemologies and spiritualities to which we may refer. Thus, the articulation of my own spiritual interaction with reality is what I have explored from an artistic perspective. Ama Mazama corroborates these notions, stating: “I wish to make a case for the conscious and necessary inclusion of spirituality as part of the Afrocentric quest... [which] is demanded by the tenets of Afrocentricity itself” (2002, p.219).

Given that this study uses Ritual Theatre as a means to negotiate the connection between queerness and African spirituality (ubungoma), I have adopted the Afrocentric frame as an instrument of investigation, since its conceptions are based partly on the spiritualities of African peoples. This has enabled me to draw from my own positionality as an African male called to ubungoma - this an autoethnographic point of departure in the research. I have conducted this study from such a subject position.

Through writing *Izwi LabaGcini* as a ritual theatre script, within the above-mentioned parameters stipulated by the Afrocentric paradigm’s position on spirituality, I have explored ubungoma’s understandings and portrayal of queerness, not only as a focal point of enquiry, but also as a

guiding compass in determining queer themes in Afrocentric Theatre. *Izwi LabaGcini* has therefore employed Afrocentric Theatre as a creative means that seeks to explore Afrocentricity as a school of thought and manner of expression. Molette and Molette propose Afrocentric Theatre to be theatre that highlights the lived experiences and cultural uniqueness of Africans in the continent or the diaspora, arguing that “general agreement seems to prevail with regards to the notion that Afrocentric theatre is for, by, and about Black people” (2013, p.8).

It achieves this, continue Molette and Molette, by positioning the black individual or community at the centre of their theatre and making use of African or black culture themes and aesthetics, drawn from African ritual which can be traced back all the way to ancient Kemet (Egypt), in the theatre form (2013). Such ritual, they claim, predates documented history, maintaining that “Afrocentric theatre and culture are older than recorded history” (Molette & Molette, 2013, p. 43). Given that Afrocentric Theatre finds its roots and frame of reference in the ritual dramas of Kemet, I postulate that Ritual Theatre could be considered a primary facet of Afrocentric Theatre (Molette and Molette 2013). While the issue of negotiating black gay identities is already in paucity in South African theatre, the connection between queerness and spirituality in ubungoma is not really explored, and the focus of queerness in ubungoma as a central theme rests largely in the margins of South African ritual theatre texts. With *Izwi LabaGcini*, this paper aims to contribute to research in this lacuna. Thus, discourse around queerness in spirituality (ubungoma) was the primal thread weaving together the creative nuances of *Izwi LabaGcini* as an Afrocentric (Ritual) Theatre text.

Decoloniality

This study adopts decoloniality as a supporting frame in which to view and engage with theatre. According to Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, decoloniality is “a long-standing political and epistemological movement aimed at the liberation of (ex-) colonized peoples from global coloniality but also a way of thinking, knowing, and doing” (2015, p.485). Colonialism, as is argued, maintains its legacy through coloniality, which is the assumption that European and North-American epistemology, ontology and culture are at the center of the total human experience (wa Thiongo 1981; Mignolo 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Mignolo & Walsh 2018).

The West positioning itself as the standard of civilization and relegating other societies into inferior status that should model its example is why, I submit, some social ills in (South) Africa persist. Homophobia, for example, can be seen as a manifestation of Western religious bigotry, since Christianity arrived with Leviticus in the 15th century, on European ships captained by white supremacy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). Decoloniality therefore acts as an emancipatory philosophy and way of being through which Africans determine their collective being and trajectory, outside the European and North-American gaze (wa Thiongo 1981; Fanon 1986; Grosfoguel 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Maldonado-Torres 2017). This, I argue, parallels the tenets of Afrocentricity as discussed above. Decoloniality therefore offers a means for African thinkers and creatives to contribute to their civilization free from the epistemological imposition of colonization on African thought, values, economies and sexualities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015).

The decolonial project is also geared towards liberating sexualities from colonial dogma. Homosexuality, as can be argued, received widespread persecution when Europe invaded Africa in the seventeenth century (Murray and Roscoe 1998; Matebeni 2021; Okwenna in Oladupupo

2021). Colonial and apartheid law criminalized and persecuted queer bodies in this country (Thompson 1990; Sanders 1997; Currier 2011). This can be seen in the example of the Immorality Amendment Act, 1969. Although LGBTQIA+ rights have been enshrined in the constitution of the new democracy, as stated in the introduction, many queer individuals face discrimination and violence due to the legacy imposed by colonial thought in South Africa. Decoloniality therefore asks African peoples to view sexuality beyond the colonial gaze (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015).

“Quare Theory” by Patrick Johnson is an example of how decoloniality can extend to a conception and engagement with sexuality for black peoples (2001). As discussed in the *Contextual Framework*, Johnson proposes a “theory in the flesh” where race (and culture) play an integral part in how sexuality is perceived (2001). This idea parallels the Afrocentric notion of sexuality, also expanded upon in the *Contextual Framework*, where sexuality is seen to be linked to spiritual connotations by several African societies (Somè 1993; Somè 2000; Epprecht 2008; 2013; Ogana and Ojong 2015; Montle 2021; Okwenna in Oladupupo 2021). Thus, decoloniality informs the way in which ex-colonized societies re-imagine their cultures, their philosophies, their beliefs, their sexual and gender expressions, and their arts.

Theatre practitioners are also called to a decolonial theatre. This I argue to be the main frame for the praxis of this study, as shall be seen in the next section on Ritual Theatre. Ngugi wa Thiongo, for example, proposes an African theatre whose language can be found in the struggles of the oppressed (1981). He maintains that “the peasants and workers of Africa are making a tomorrow out of the present of toil and turmoil... [t]he authentic language of African theatre should reflect this even as it is given birth by that very toil and turmoil” (1981, p.60). The struggles of an

ostracized queer community (See *Chapter Four Contextual Framework - Homophobia in Africa*) are what I have also articulated in *Izwi LabaGcini*.

African drama finds its inception in ritual and myth, where our Ancestors told stories of the gods and creation, where dance was ritualized and had religious expressions (Soyinka 1976; Dhlomo 1977; Asagba 1986). If queerness is to be examined through drama in the African context, I argue then that it ought to be first articulated through the legacy of Ritual Theatre. This is not in the instinct of erasing Western influence on Africa theatre, as Austin Ivigueraye Asagba observes of some radical practitioners, but as a means to draw from a history that informs modern culture for black peoples (1986). He continues that “[i]f modern African playwrights and theatre practitioners are to bridge the enormous gulf at present existing between them and their audience, a first step would be to write plays that are relevant to the historical and cultural values of their people” (Asagba 1986, p98).

This also makes decolonizing queerness necessary, since queerness - as argued in previous chapters - is already perceived as ‘unAfrican’. It is my position, as will be unpacked in the next chapter - the *Contextual Framework*, that some of this rhetoric does stem from colonial indoctrination, in which heteronormative Western ideals were imposed on a global scale, during European conquest (Bashki 2016; Asante & Hanchey 2021). I mention this with the acknowledgment that Africa as a whole has never been a ‘queer paradise’, and that Euro-Christian ideals may have succeeded due to their alignment with some endogenous prescriptions on sexuality and gender expression - these ideas will be further addressed in the following chapter 4.

Ritual Theatre

As an extension of Afrocentric and Decolonial thought, *Izwi LabaGcini* has been written as a ritual theatre script that seeks to investigate the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. According to Victor Turner, ritual was used by various societies, over time, to meditate on the society's state of being as well as to prescribe a desirable future for the society's members (1982). Margaret Drewal understands ritual as a process by which communities "construct reality" (1988, p.26). *Izwi LabaGcini*, therefore, acts as a construction of the black queer individual's reality. My creative vision was primarily informed by Wole Soyinka's assertion that African literature and theatre is a method of "self-apprehension" (1976, p.x). Soyinka continues to define the purpose of ritual theatre in the African context as the "process of spatial definition which precedes... the actual enactment [and] must therefore be seen as an integral part of man's constant efforts to master the immensity of the cosmos with his minuscule self" (1976, p.40). With these thoughts in mind I sought, with the play, to investigate queerness in the African context and therefore to demystify taboos around queerness, and challenge the idea that it is 'un-African'.

Chesley Taylor and G. R. Thompson maintain that "throughout human history, life has seemed ultimately mysterious, and man's persistent efforts have been to identify the nature of that mystery; ritual tries to make the mysterious concrete by objectifying it in a fixed sequence of acts" (1972, p.19). I therefore wrote a ritual theatre play-text with the desire to critically engage with the so-called mystery of my identity as a gay man with a calling in ubungoma. Erika Fischer-Lichte, furthermore, proposes that "ritual could become a model for solving problems at stake" (2005, pg.31). *Izwi LabaGcini* therefore endeavored to unpack the conundrum of the queer African in a South African (Zulu) homophobic context.

Ritual specifically impacted the theatrical structure of *Izwi LabaGcini*. Modern ritual, as Turner postulates, is dependent on an individual's authorship; even though rituals may subscribe to specific cultural constructions (1979). Richard Schechner further develops this idea by proposing that ritual and theatre have overlaps that influence one another (2013). Turner continues to observe that, although possessing fixed and patterned symbology, ritual can comprise playful episodes; all senses are engaged, and different performative genres are utilized (1979; 1982). This is why Schechner has postulated that "instead of thinking of the oppositional binary 'ritual or art,' one should think of a spectrum or a dynamic braid (2013, p.87).

Soyinka, on the other hand, cautions against separating ritual from theatre under such categories for, he maintains, in the African context, ritual and theatre serve the identical function of articulating the human condition in its relation to the cosmos (1976). Although there may be similarities in the structure and content of rituals, they are, I maintain, not identical. Drewal supports this as she notes that "across Africa, the focus of the ritual ranges in a continuum from communal to individual depending on what the participants hope to accomplish" (1988, p.28). *Izwi LabaGcini's* focuses on the identity of a black queer man called to ubungoma, as a subject of interrogation.

A ritual that can could be used as a grounding frame of reference is that of igobongo. Igobongo is often referred to as 'food for the ancestors' and is used by someone who is possessed by Ancestry in order to cleanse themselves and their Ancestor, and to hold sacred communion with the spirits of their Ancestors that are in the afterlife (Fowler 2011; Dumakude 2021). This is a liminal phase that occurs from one month to three, and the initiate engages in constant communication with the Ancestor/s, involving drinking medicine herbs and divining, all in an effort for the initiate to decipher a clear path from their Ancestors, on the journey they have

called them to (Dumakude 2021; Masondo 2023). The initiate of igobongo mixes herbs in ukhamba (a calabash) every morning before sunrise, then drinks the foamy liquid at their altar, while they recite ancestral prayers and seek guidance from their ancestors (Masondo 2023). Igobongo is concluded with a graduation ceremony involving the slaughtering of a goat and imgido, which is a ritual dance where izangoma gather to perform a spiritual dance evoking the Ancestors (Mbatha 2019; Dumakude 2021; Ngubane 2021).

In *Izwi LabaGcini*, Heru also undergoes initiation in igobongo (Sosibo 2022). In Scene Sixth, Heru performs igobongo in an effort to strengthen his relationship with Maat, his Ancestor, and to acquire guidance from her, on his future as King of Kemet (Sosibo 2022). This scene reflects my own spiritual journey and how I also performed the igobongo ritual for three months in 2019. What I attempted to capture here in the play, was how the ritual of igobongo acts as a precipice of transformation for the initiate, and how Ancestry guides the initiate in undergoing this process of change on behalf of their community (Mbatha 2019; Sosibo 2022). The purpose of my igobongo in 2019 was to accept my Ancestor's calling and to allow them to guide my existence, also in the choosing of a partner; and Heru undergoes a similar experience as Maat chooses Smeshi as his consort (Sosibo 2022). The Community slaughtering each other in Scene Sixth and the graduation ceremony in Scene Seventh mark a dramatized completion of igobongo as Heru is transformed through ritual (Soyinka 1976; Turner 1979).

The storyline in *Izwi LabaGcini*, therefore, has been influenced by Soyinka's assertions on Ritual Theatre's structure, namely that the protagonist ventures into the chthonic realm on behalf of the community (1976). These ideas are synonymous with Turner's notions of the "liminal phase" in ritual, which he posits to be a state of transformation where the participant in the ritual is in the process of metamorphosing from one socio-cultural status or state of consciousness to another

(1979; 1982). Turner further explains that “liminality is full of potency and potential, it may also be full of experiment and play” (1979, p.466). It is this experimental process that interests me since it offers space to investigate Schechner’s proposed spectrum between efficacy and entertainment as ritual arcs toward the artistic (2013).

It is the above-mentioned significance that I wished to interrogate through *Izwi LabaGcini*, since “ritual suggests a sequence or pattern of acts that is both formal and intensely serious in its purpose” (Taylor and Thompson 1972, p.17). The scenarios in the script function as a means of reflection as I investigated the connections between being queer and spiritually inclined from within the Afrocentric paradigm. As I have stated, the issue of queerness remains a taboo topic in black communities, often met with homophobia. *Izwi LabaGcini* also aimed to address this, since as Taylor and Thompson propose, “man is also a creature who finds meaning through order, and ritual is one way of ordering an apparently chaotic and frequently hostile environment” (1972, p.19).

With this project I hoped to investigate my queer identity as part of my calling in ubungoma. Using Soyinka’s suggestions, the protagonist of *Izwi LabaGcini* “reflect[ed] through physical and symbolic means the archetypal struggle of the mortal being against exterior forces” (1976, p.43). Since this mandate has the element of spirituality in its core, it was fitting that I make use of ritual theatre as a means of critical interrogation. Drewal corroborates this by stating that “through ritual, people gain a sense of thought and reflection” (1988, p.26). I hope that the exploration of the scripting process of the play, particularly under academic observation, will contribute to the cultural discourse within the black queer community and its heterosexual counterparts. Turner captures the mandate of *Izwi LabaGcini* when he declares that:

insofar as the community and its individual members regard themselves as the masters or 'owners' of ritual and liturgy, or as representatives of the ancestors or gods who ultimately 'own' them, they have authority to introduce, under certain culturally determined conditions, elements of novelty from time to time into the socially inherited deposit of cultural customs. (1982, p.31)

It is this authority that I pursued, through an individual narrative, as I ventured to understand queerness through the lens of my own culture.

Conclusion

This Chapter has discussed Afrocentricity, Decoloniality and Ritual Theatre as theories that inform this study. All three theories have been expanded upon and interrogated; and I have also mentioned why they are consistent with the aims of my inquiry. The following chapter, *Chapter Four: Contextual Framework*, deals with how queerness has been perceived and treated in Africa, with a specific look into isiZulu culture.

Chapter Four:

Contextual Framework

Queerness in the Afrocentric Paradigm (Ubungoma)

All people have dignity. There's nobody who was born without a soul and a spirit.

Binyavanga Wainaina (2014)

Introduction

To pursue this study, a working context must be established. This will begin in an account of dominant theories around sexuality in university or intellectual culture. I will then problematise Queer Theory in its Eurocentric standard, noting the implied exclusion of black culture and black epistemologies in its scope. I continue in the pursuit of properly contextualising queerness in the African body, culture and spirituality. Therein is an argument on the circumstance of homophobia in Africa. Given that I am investigating the relationship between sexuality and ubungoma, I consider it important that I examine the phenomena of sexuality through the understandings and philosophies of my Ancestors. This is a necessary undertaking, I argue, because queerness has existed and has been articulated in African culture since pre-recorded history. This is contrary to the homophobic rhetoric that plights LGBTQIA+ discourse from African leaders and those they represent. I conclude this chapter by noting, with support from nuanced scholarship, that the location of queerness in African spirituality is a legacy that has

persisted from the dawn of civilization to modern times, thus corroborating ideas around black queer existence in an isiZulu paradigm.

Theorising Sexuality

The phenomenon of human sexuality is as vast as it is multifaceted, with many civilizations in recorded history making their own addition (subjectively positive or otherwise) to our collective musings on the subject in current discourse. Academic discourse around sexualities, however, begins to evolve in Eurocentric scholarship around the latter half of the twentieth century, such that the complex and varied notions that sexuality as a concept has undergone critical interrogation, which lends to notions around this subject as accepted and popularised in intellectual spaces such as universities.

These theories around sexuality have been advanced through the history of European colonialism, among other intercultural exchanges. Although imperial by nature, it is also worthwhile to appreciate their utility, as will be discussed in a later section, *Homophobia in Africa*. Michel Foucault (a seminal scholar of the above-mentioned intellectual culture) for example, considers sexuality an organic human experience that has been subject to control and regulation by institutions of power (Foucault 1978; Spargo 1999). Judith Butler, on the other hand, views sexuality as a socially constructed phenomenon that has been restricted by performative prescriptions that have come to be considered as social norms (1993; 2004; 2009). That is, it has been understood as normal for people to act or behave in a particular manner, as suggested by their preconceived binary gender identities (Butler 2004).

Judith Butler's arguments fall under the scholarship of Queer Theory which, according to Diane Raymond, seeks to afford non-conforming genders and sexualities a reflective space in culture and society (2003). These reflections, continues Raymond, highlight the idea that gender and sexuality within the LGBTQIA+ community do not occur in fixed categories of homogenous identities (2003). This proposition is supported by Kosofsky Sedgwick, who maintains that 'queerness' is a subjective knowledge and should only be completely claimed and articulated by an individual who self-identifies as queer (1993). This subjective experience fosters a unique perspective on gender and sexuality where "'queer' seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation" (Sedgwick 1993, p.9).

While these ideas are critical in current discourse around sexuality, I shall not pursue them at length for they do not contribute to the focal point of my study. I depart from this school of thought because, and this is important for me, Queer Theory is a primarily Western construction. What I have sought to accomplish with *Izwi LabaGcini* is to use ritual theatre to frame the negotiation between sexuality and spirituality from the African perspective of ubungoma. I should add that I am not in any way dismissing Queer Theory on racial grounds; indeed, there are ideas within the discourse that offer parallels to my proposed understanding on sexuality. Butler's notions on the performativity of gender, for example, resonates with Ogana and Ojong's ideas around how gender can be a performed phenomenon in ubungoma (2009; 2015).

The above is an example of how discourse around sexuality can sometimes overlap, and it contends with the notion that Western and African ideas/cultures are mutually exclusive. I myself am an isiZulu man conducting a study that I have written in English, and already this so-called cultural binary has been challenged by virtue of this dissertation. Queerness, as seen

through Queer Theory, also poses a challenge to gender and sexual binaries (Sedgwick 1993; Butler 1993; 2004). I do, however, concur with Patrick Johnson's argument that "queer theory has often failed to address the material realities of gays and lesbians of color" (2001, p.5).

Johnson suggests that queer theorists impose Eurocentric ideas on sexuality and ignore the realities or epistemologies of other (often black) racial groups when discussing sexuality (2001). In addition to this, I maintain that Queer Theory does not engage indigenous African epistemologies in its interrogation of sexuality. This is also consistent with the Afrocentric philosophy that I engage with in this Chapter. The relationship between spirituality and sexuality, as I have investigated it, is a phenomenon absent in Queer Theory. With research around this topic still emerging, this is the gap in the literature that I have attempted to address. Thus, queer theory provides a useful background when engaging ideas around sexuality, but, for my purposes, it is not sufficiently consistent with Afrocentric views pertaining to sexuality and its supposed links to spirituality.

Queerness in Africa

It is not a hidden knowledge that queerness has existed in Africa since pre-historic times (Epprecht 2004; 2013; Montle 2021). In fact, one simply has to observe the Gुरुve San cave paintings of Zimbabwe to know that same-sex sexual activity has occurred since what could possibly be dated back as 11000 years ago (Epprecht 2004; Montle 2021). Furthermore, ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) papyri have on record homosexual behaviour among the peoples of that civilisation (Bullough 1973; Dynes, Donaldson & Dynes 1992; Manniche 2013).

Queerness is also known to have existed even among prominent figures of African history - Credo Mutwa, for example, makes the following statement about the founding isiZulu monarch,

King Shaka KaSenzangakhona Zulu: “Unlike his brother Shaka, who often practiced homosexuality, Dingana was inordinately fond of women” (1964, p.640). This suggests that, even though it is not conclusive what a particular society’s views on queerness were, same-sex intercourse is an existing occurrence in numerous African societies throughout history. Modern history, furthermore, has miscellaneous accounts of queer behaviours among Indigenous African cultures (Murray and Roscoe 1998; Tamale 2011; Matabeni, Monro and Reddy 2018).

There are many ways in which Africans have contextualized queerness in their respective societies throughout history. In Western Africa, Abisola Balogun and Paul Bissen maintain that “[f]rom the Hausa *yan daudu* s of the north to the Yoruba cross-dressers of the southwest and the ‘male daughters’ of the East, Nigerian men have historically troubled what is assumed to be the hegemonic form of masculinity and demonstrated a multiplicity of masculinities and sexual expressions (in Matabeni, Monro and Reddy 2018). Maarit Sinikangas supports this observation by citing a *yan daudu* and *bori* presence among the Hausa people of West Africa, whose gender and sexual orientations deviate from hetero-normative expressions (2004). The frame within which these sexualities have been understood among the *yan daudu* will be elucidated in the next section. Other West African countries have shown evidence of having queer citizens in their societies - Ghana, for example, is known for its acceptance of homoerotic relations between boarding-school pupils, the older member of such relationships typically assuming the role of protector and provider (Ajen in Murray and Roscoe 1998).

In the Congo, Central Africa, same-sex male intercourse is framed in the cultural nuances of different ethnicities and varies from boys sleeping with each other before they are old enough to sleep with women; to adult males engaging in sex as a medicine that ensures material wealth for the penetrating partner; and adult males engaging in sexual behaviour with young men as a form

of play or gaming (Murray and Roscoe 1998). In northern Congo it is reported that the Azande clan had its warriors taking young men as their temporary wives during warfare in pre-colonial times, going so far as to pay a bride-price to the family of the boy (Evans-Pritchard 1970, 1971; Murray and Roscoe 1998; Dlamini 2006).

The above examples illustrate the presence of queerness as part of the African social fabric throughout history. Pre-colonial Africa, in fact, shows miscellaneous examples of queerness being part of African life (Murray and Roscoe 1998; Dlamini 2006; Okwenna 2021). One can argue that there was no point in Africa's recorded chronology where, with the exception of the colonial era, homosexuality was unanimously condemned act. Chrysogonus-Maria Okwenna supports this premise by stating that “[h]omosexuality existed in different fashions in traditional Africa and was socially acceptable. Only a few variants which was considered deviant were discouraged but were never discriminated against” (in Oladipupo 2021, p.292).

In South Africa, LGBTQI+ rights are protected by the constitution (Grazioano 2004; Gloppen and Ranken 2020; Rakhetsi 2021). As previously mentioned, South Africa is the only country in the continent where same-sex marriage is legal (Rakhetsi 2021). This has proven a major milestone in continental human rights, given that the colonial project sought to eradicate non-conforming sexualities in its religious stance (Human Rights Watch in Lennox and Waites 2013; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). Although South African law is in favour of its LGBTQIA+ citizens, homophobic hate crimes continue to be the plight of queer bodies in this country (Rudwick 2011; Msibi 2011; Farber 2019).

Queerness, however, does seem to have been part of South African life in pre-colonial times (Lee 1969; Mutwa 1998). It is also imperative to bear in mind that current borders within the

continent were established in the 1800s and that territories had fluid occupation until then (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016). The San Cave paintings in Gurusu Zimbabwe, for example, could be considered as an artefact reflecting the nature of queerness in prehistoric Southern Africa as a whole, and not necessarily a specific country. Nevertheless, queerness in current South Africa oscillates between a homophobic heterosexual majority and a marginalized queer minority. An example of this would be the phenomenon of isiZulu queer men in township areas in KwaZulu-Natal, who re-imagine their social standing by inserting their sexualities into existing isiZulu cultural facets.

“IsiNgqumo” is an isiZulu gay lingo that appropriates traditional isiZulu linguistic patterns and adapts these to the township queer subculture (Rudwick and Ntuli 2008; Rudwick 2011). This is an interesting phenomenon given the homophobia that permeates current isiZulu social rhetoric around masculinity and masculine sexuality. I submit that this form of participation in indigenous culture reaffirms the idea of indigenous epistemologies understating the nuances of sexuality within their own respective cultural frames. Thus, isiZulu queer men navigating their identities through isiZulu cultural imperatives - language, spirituality, the isiZulu ethos of *ukuhlonipha* (respect) - is a suggestion of how queerness evolves within indigenous cultural contexts from a historical and social perspective (Rudwick and Ntuli 2008; Rudwick 2011).

IsiNgqumo as a social phenomenon, among other things, reconciles ‘isiZuluness’ and ‘gayness’ in a sense, re-establishing queer identities in the isiZulu culture. As Stephanie Rudwick maintains, “[m]any Zulu gay men have felt pushed outside of their ethnic culture by Zulu homophobes. But because they ‘feel Zulu’ and feel proud of the Zulu language and cultural roots they have created their own isiZulu-based sub-culture in KZN” (2011, p.97). The instance of isiNgqumo and the other examples of queer occurrences within different African cultures

throughout history can be summarized by Okwenna's observation that "certainly, it is historically correct to declare that homosexuality existed in traditional Africa and that it was socially accepted" (in Oladipupo 2021, p.289). In fact, some of these queer identities may be understood, as the following section discusses, to have spiritual connotations.

Queerness and African Spiritualities

The phenomenon of non-heteronormative sexual orientations among the custodians of African spiritualities seems not to be an anomaly in indigenous African societies. As mentioned, San cave paintings in Gurusu Zimbabwe, depict a queer sex ritual between a healer and another male figure (Epprecht 2008; 2013; Montle 2021). This ancient legacy seems to have prevailed over different epochs in African history. In his studies on homosexuality in African culture(s), historian of (African) art Fredrick Lamp has noted that "homosexual persons may be more inclined than others to become practitioners of the arts and rituals" (2002, p.3). Examples of this can be seen in the Dagara people of Burkina Faso for, according to Malidoma Somè and Sobonfu Somè, the traditional healers of their tribe are called gatekeepers and are homosexual in orientation (1993; 2000). Gatekeepers are understood to have sacred spiritual powers and are respected as curators of the divine, and of the culture of the Dagara people (Somè 1993; Somè 2000; Newcombe 2002, Okwenna in Oladupupo 2021).

The instance of clairvoyance influencing sexuality is also apparent in the Dogon community of Mali (Somè 1993; Newcombe 2002). Malidoma Somè and Dustin Newcombe continue to suggest that gay men among the Dogon are also referred to as gatekeepers or priests and are held in high regard as they serve as a link between the Dogon people and the divine or supernatural

(1993; 2002). Nigeria also shows examples of queerness being linked to spirituality with the existence of the *yan daudu*.

The *yan daudu*, among the Hausa people in northern Nigeria, are a group of predominantly homosexual men that belong to the *bori* cult (Sinikangas 2004; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). The *yan daudu* are often seen in women's clothing and they occupy traditional roles often associated with women among the Hausa (Sinikangas 2004; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). According to Okwenna, the *yan daudu* is often housed within the *bori* cult, where members are known to be in spirit possession and this is why they are associated with witchcraft or wizardry (in Oladipupo 2021). Sinikangas, on the other hand, argues that the rest of the *bori* conduct rituals and other religious activities, but the *yan daudu* merely dance in public events and also donate money to the *bori* leaders, and that their existence in spirit possession is thus misinterpreted (2004). The *yan daudu*'s relation to the *bori* cult is that the cult seems to be the primary institution that accommodates non-conforming sexual minorities, among the Hausa, meaning that the *yan daudu* may exist within the cult, but do not necessarily participate in its spiritual activity (2004). Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe, however, seem to embrace both arguments about the spiritual and sexual identities of the *yan daudu* by maintaining that "the Hausa speak of those who are possessed as being horses "ridden" by the spirit. Homosexual participants are called 'yan daudu (son of Daudu)" (1998).

Murray and Roscoe further elucidate on how some research has indicated that the *yan daudu*, due to their cross-dressing and feminine behaviour, usually occupy roles of intermediary between sex workers and customers, instead of a spiritual practice. Although their spiritual identities are debated among scholars of the Hausa, it is interesting nonetheless to note, in the *yan daudu*, a group of men within an African society whose gender expression and sexual

orientations are non-heteronormative, and whose position in that society is affiliated with a so-called ‘cult’ who claims to be of spiritual possession (Murray and Roscoe 1998; Sinikangas 2004; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). There is, interestingly, a seeming parallel in this phenomena with the Nguni cluster here in Southern Africa. The connection between queerness, and those who are responsible for the preservation of sacred cultures and healing the indisposed, among the peoples of Southern Africa, can be seen in izangoma.

Although dominated by women, the practice of ubungoma does have a male population. Of these male izangoma, a considerable number is argued to be queer, suggesting that there could be a correlation between ubungoma and queerness (Lee 1969; Maynard 2007; Rudwick 2011; Mkasi 2013; Ogana and Ojong 2015). I, for one, am aware of other male acquaintances called to ubungoma, who identify as queer. There are also gay male izangoma who have appeared publicly in local South African media, further illustrating the instance of having an Ancestral calling and being queer through their personal anecdotes. These individuals demonstrate the existence of queerness within the context of (African) isiZulu spirituality and their anecdotes substantiate notions of queerness relating to ubungoma, as shall be discussed below (Masweneng 2018; Hlople 2017; Sefali 2015; Bulawayo24 News 2013; StreetTalkTV 2017; Harrisberg and Reuters 2019). In fact, Busangokwakhe Dlamini recognises this relationship in his study on homosexuality in Africa, noting that certain scholars agree that in certain instances “homosexual relations carry some religious and spiritual significance, as in the case of *izangoma*, *izinyanga* and other traditional healers” (Dlamini 2006, p.129). I myself do identify as a gay man with a calling in ubungoma, and therefore am using this subject position as the fulcrum of my study.

It is imperative, however, to note that not all queer izangoma attribute their sexuality to their Ancestral calling. In Rudwick’s study on queer township men, for example, some participants

who were gay and were izangoma did not endorse a correlation between the latter and the former; Rudwick notes that “not all of our participants felt that *amadlozi* [Ancestors] were the source of their same-sex desires” (2011, p.104). Other gay men who are izangoma have insisted on the same argument - in an interview with StreetTalkTV, gay sangoma Siyasekwa Mbikwana, maintains that “I don’t think it has anything to do with my calling, me being gay” (2017). This indicates that within ubungoma sexuality is not perceived as a monolith, and that different practitioners may have diverging understandings of the relationship between queerness and ubungoma - which is interesting for me as a scholar, as it suggests a greater avenue for research.

In the same StreetTalkTV interview noted above, however, another gay sangoma, Mabhuti Mkhangeni, maintains that “if you are woman and you are a lesbian isangoma, there is a male ancestor inside you; as a gay man, there is a female ancestor inside you (2017). It is these contradictions that I seek to address in this study.

Mkasi, in her research on women izangoma and gender, supports the above notion, as she states that “[t]he power of ancestors and the role played by spirit possession in same sex relationship amongst female *sangomas* has also become evident” (2013, p.43). Gay sangoma Xolani Chamane explains in the Sunday Times that “when my ancestors take over my body, they can be either male or female... when they visit my gender is naturally more fluid” (in Harrisberg and Reuters 2019, p.01). Despite there being inconsistencies within ubungoma around the notions of sexuality, it is clear that the prevailing argument is that the gender of an Ancestor may influence one’s sexual attraction or orientation.

Somè, in a hypothesis parallel to the above, argues that it is the phenomena of mediating between two worlds, operating in between the realm of the living and dead, that engenders sexual or

gender androgyny (1993; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). Indigenous knowledges around the relationship between spirituality and sexuality seems, in light of the above, to be nuanced. Nkunzi Nkabinde contributes to this discourse by offering that her life as a lesbian isangoma draws from an ancient tradition where a spirit possesses someone and influences their sexuality (Nkabinde and Morgan 2006). Nkabinde cites her male Ancestor, 'Nkunzi', who is fond of women and has thus caused her to prefer female partners, as she identifies as a lesbian (Nkabinde and Morgan 2006). This anecdote is consistent with several of the above notions around spirit possession influencing sexual orientation, and I also offer my own as an example. At least two izangoma, at different occasions, have (during a consultation) indicated that it is my grandmother who has caused me to prefer male sexual/romantic partners. This has occurred during a general consultation, where my sexuality was not a subject of discussion - these izangoma have, at random, brought it up and stated the case as a matter of fact, confessing that they were not aware of my (homo)sexuality before they began divining. This is an interesting indigenous frame pertaining to sexuality, given that homophobia in (South) Africa is a social ill that plights its LGBTQIA+ citizens.

Homophobia in Africa

Even though there are examples of queerness situated in the South African (and African) spiritual context, it is interesting to note that being a gay African continues to remain a controversial topic within Afrocentric discourse (Newcombe 2002). Thabo Msibi corroborates this, noting that in Africa “homophobia reflects the rise of neo-conservatism, fuelled by patriarchy” (2011, p.72). There is a persistent philosophy, evangelized by African leaders, that homosexuality is un-African, and this is the premise that drives the homophobic onslaught that

gay Africans endure in black communities (Msibi 2011; Rudwick 2011; Okwenna 2021). An example of this would be former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, who once stated that “homosexuality degrades human dignity, it is unnatural and there is no question of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs...if you see them arrest them and hand them to the police” (Dunton and Palmberg 1996, p.18).

The rhetoric of queerness being un-African can, interestingly so, also be traced back to the colonial project. Murray and Roscoe report of earlier European anthropologists who, because of their conceptions of African peoples as primitive, imposed notions of a ‘pure’ sexuality onto them and thus recording the African as distinctly heterosexual (Murray and Roscoe 1993; Dlamini 2006; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). This essentializing of Africa also meant an erasure of indigenous queer narratives that some African societies embraced (Murray and Roscoe 1993, Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). Africa is, however, a vast continent with 54 countries in it. It would also be disingenuous to assume that *every* African society in the past was accepting of queer identities. Traditional patriarchy also prescribed binary roles for men and women, meaning that queer people existing outside those binaries may have been discriminated against (Msibi and Rudwick 2015; Matebeni, Monro and Reddy 2018; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021).

It is therefore my position that although some forms of homophobia may be attributed to colonialism and the Christian church it came with, it is not correct to suggest that Africa may have been free of conservative views on sexuality in precolonial times. Evidence of this is that even though there are queer men who are openly gay, for example, they nevertheless assume binary roles in their relationships, and this they attribute to their respect and practice for tradition (Murray and Roscoe 1993; Msibi and Rudwick 2015; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). This suggests to me a need for queer people to assimilate into heteronormative presentations of

themselves, even in their so-called ‘out’¹⁶ queer identities. Nevertheless, Western contribution to modern liberal discourse around queerness in Africa by queer Africans cannot be denied. This is evident for example, in the use of identifying language markers from this discourse - such as ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘bisexual’, ‘transgender’, and ‘non-binary’ - even though (again) not all black queer people have access to said language (Sedgwick 1993; Butler 2009; Johnson 2001; Msibi and Rudwick 2015).

Although Africa does have notable examples of queer life in its collective history, as noted above, this does not protect contemporary queer Africans who face legal backlash in the 30 countries where homosexuality is illegal (Rakhetsi 2021; Kojoué 2024). The violence experienced by queer bodies in South Africa, for example, is inspired by the notion that queerness is not part of our African culture (Rudwick 2011; Farber 2019). Homophobic hate crimes were so prevalent during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, that President Cyril Ramaphosa issued a statement during Freedom Day 2021, castigating homophobia and the violence queer people were facing in South Africa. Ramaphosa stated “[t]his is something we should be deeply ashamed of... I want to send a very strong message that hate crime will not be tolerated in our society”, amid the rising cases of homophobic murders being reported to authorities (in Rakhetsi 2021, p.1). Although this statement stands in powerful opposition to his Zimbabwean counterpart, quoted above, it has failed to stem the violence against the community. Violence is so rampant against LGBTQIA+ South African citizens, such that the South African Institution of Race Relations has reported that four out of ten queer South Africans know someone who has been murdered because of their sexuality (van Heerden 2017; Rakhetsi 2021). Although respected culturally, izangoma are also not exempt from homophobia.

¹⁶ “Out” refers to queer individuals living a public queer life - it is derived from “coming out the closet”, which is what queer people do when they forgo hiding their queer identities from their families and communities.

Having constitutional rights for its LGBTQIA+ citizens, South African queer izangoma are, nonetheless, subject to prejudice and homophobia. The queer izangoma mentioned in the passage above have attested to instances of homophobia where their legitimacy, as queer spiritual mediums, has been called to question. Thabiso Bhengu recalls - in the *Sunday Times* - his Christian family's reaction to his calling, noting that to his family, "it came across as though [he] was possessed by a demon" (in Masweneng 2018, p.01). Michael Khumalo stated on *News24* that "when a heterosexual person seeks help and realizes that the sangoma who is going to help him is gay, suddenly he changes his mind, saying that the gayness will rub off on him and that he doesn't want to be helped by a gay sangoma" (in Sefali 2015, p.01). Sphamandla Ndebele felt the need to defend himself as he asserted the following on *Bulawayo24 News*: "people just need to accept me for who I am; those who criticize me are old-fashioned; I'm good at my work and I respect my ancestors" (in Bulawayo24 News 2013, p.1).

Gugu Mthembu sought to validate his practice as a gay isangoma by informing *MambaOnline* thus: "I will displease my ancestors if I do not heal the sick, that means they approve of our sexuality" (in Hlople 2017, p.01). These testimonies echo the homophobia I have had to face as a black queer individual growing up in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Being raised in a Christian family, my sexuality has not been embraced; neither is my sexual or romantic life something I discuss freely with my family. This is one of the main reasons why I was motivated to conduct this research. Through writing *Izwi LabaGcini* using Afrocentric Theatre, I explored the hypotheses scholars like Dlamini have offered, whose argument "lends support to the evidence of the existence of African homosexuality, and that the latter is compatible with African culture, cosmology and spirituality" (Dlamini 2006, p.67).

Conclusion

This Chapter has articulated a context through which queerness can be viewed in the African paradigm. First, I provided a point of departure on the prevailing theories around sexuality in modern academic culture. I then suggested reasons for why my research deviates from this hegemony, given that intellectual discourse around queerness in university spaces is often grounded in European thought. What constituted the main thrust of this Chapter was a contextualization of queerness in African culture(s), particularly as pertaining to African spiritualities, in contrast to our continental homophobia as a civilisation. What I have concluded with is the salient note of queerness being part of African existence since pre-historic times, as shown by the San cave paintings of Zimbabwe. More so, the importance of these cave images ought to be considered, given that they entail ritualised queer intimacy, thus corroborating the idea that queerness has had spiritual connotations in African life. It is imperative to bare this in mind moving forward, since this study is an investigation of the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. The following Chapter explores my writing process and the findings that *Izwi LabaGcini* produced as an item of Practice-Based Research.

Chapter Five:

Findings

Scripting *Izwi LabaGcini* and Data Analysis

Art must discover and reveal the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid.

Alain LeRoy Locke (1925)

Introduction

The content in this chapter entails the results of this study. There are three categories of thought that I bring forward as pockets of knowledge to which this study has contributed. First is the writing method. Here I have analysed my process as a playwright, considering Pressfield's theory around consistency and the artist "turning pro" (2002). The preliminary rituals to each writing session have also been examined, in an effort to comprehend further the tenants of productive creativity and the playwright's position in literary production. I postulate, in this manner, that writers ought to maintain a high calibre of discipline, as a cornerstone to their creative method. The second question that I address in this chapter is that of the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. Through engaging with the play-text, *Izwi LabaGcini*, I submit that although it requires further research to determine exactly if ubungoma 'causes' queerness, It is my position that ubungoma is accompanied by queerness. Such a relationship is elucidated upon, relating to the literature reviewed in *Chapter Four: Contextual Framework*. The

last field of knowledge unto which this study has yielded results is that of theatre itself, through a conception of a neo-theatre form. I coin this new theatre “The Absurd Ritual”. I observe *Izwi LabaGcini* as drawing from Ritual Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd in its form, themes and aesthetic. I therefore propose the Absurd Ritual as a theatre that articulates the existential circumstance of the black queer subject, in the context of collective African/black culture. These findings are a result of a data analysis gathered from the Critical Friend’s Protocol and Reflexive Journal I have used as methodology. These research instruments will be cited throughout.

I: Writing Process

I started writing *Izwi LabaGcini* in December 2021. The instinct to script a play of this nature has always been part of my creative interests. The idea of iDlozi¹⁷ influencing sexuality has always been attractive to me, particularly since other cultures around the globe have parallel examples of this phenomenon. The Hijras of South Asia, for instance, are believed to have the ability to bless or curse male infants at birth (Nanda 1986). Hijras are typically born male and exist as a third gender (after emasculation) in many Indian societies; the devotion to the goddess Bahuchara Mata affords them a unique position in the culture, where they are called to perform at weddings, festivals or at births (Nanda 1986). The Native Americans also have their version of a third gender that is considered sacred in their societies. Two-spirited individuals in Native American communities are considered to have both male and female ‘spirits’ and perform sacred and ceremonial duties for their peoples (Balsam et al 2004). These ideas had been brewing in my cognition and when I further discovered that different African societies had a similar view on

¹⁷ IsiZulu: Ancestor, Ancestry, or the spiritual realm.

sexuality, the idea of a play became more urgent. The main catalyst into *Izwi LabaGcini* was when I developed a relationship with my Ancestors (ukuphahla¹⁸, ukuhlola¹⁹, etc) and it was revealed to me that my sexuality has been influenced by my spiritual gifts, along with the igobongo ritual I undertook in 2019.

Writing a play was therefore an apt practice with which to navigate this new world I was discovering. The question *how does ubungoma relate to queerness* continued to be the main thrust of my inquiry. As a writer, the field of creativity was the best platform on which to debate these themes, on behalf of generating new knowledge (Smith and Dean 2009). I therefore used playwriting as a means to carefully consider this topic and the play I have written, I submit, has afforded me a better understanding of the subject in question. The writing, process, however, required its own meditation. *What exactly is my process, and how do I crystallize this as a playwright*, were also questions I sought to answer. I therefore had to observe my process and critically engage with it. What was fundamental, as Pressfield proposes, was establishing an identity as a writer (2002). An entry point to this journey was mapped in the journal questions I prepared for myself (see Appendix Five) and these were addressed after each writing session.

The writing process is what any writer seeks to establish for themselves. Or rather, it is what every writer *should* establish (Morrison 1993). The manner of doing so is an individual endeavor, of course, and each writer arrives at their process on their own terms. Writing *Izwi LabaGcini* made it possible for me to ponder my process in a focused manner. This particular project required a routine of me that I had not maintained before. One of the main challenges was time. It turns out, writing a play in six weeks was not as simple as I thought it would be. I remember,

¹⁸ A ritual where one communicates with his/her Ancestors. Divining.

¹⁹ Consulting an Isangoma for guidance and spiritual insight.

when I defended the proposal for this dissertation, one of the panelists noted that writing everyday would be an unrealistic endeavour and that it may perhaps stifle my creative process (Panelist 2019). At the moment I thought this an exaggeration, perhaps I overestimated my productivity.

What I have discovered since is that writing every day is a commitment of immense discipline. I noted in the journal, “I am exhausted and have no more juice left in me” (Sosibo 2022, pg.18). This was probably midway through the journey. Pressfield refers to this so-called inability to commit to the work as “Resistance” (2002, pg. 13). ‘Resistance’, according to Pressfield is what every artist has to overcome, daily, in order to fulfill their professional obligations of producing creative output on a frequent basis (2002). The process that Pressfield proposes to overcoming Resistance is described as “Turning Pro” (2002, pg. 66). This is an unyielding daily commitment to the craft (Pressfield 2002). What assisted me in accessing this measure of discipline was the ritual I developed over time scripting *Izwi LabaGcini*.

Initially the ritual was lighting a white candle and praying to my Ancestors every morning at 06h00am. I noted on my journal:

I have never written like this before. It feels like conjuring up spirits for inspiration and guidance. I am not sure how effective that will be. I have always relied on my instincts and lighting a candle feels a little strange for writing, but also important for some reason. I hope this will work long term. (Sosibo 2022, p.09)

I admit, it was rather unnatural, performing this ritual in the beginning; which is interesting, given that I often pray before I perform on stage. How then is writing different, I asked. Perhaps the main difference is that rather than most acting, which is rehearsed, writing can be quite unpredictable. You improvise as you go along. No two sessions are alike, some are long and

banal, others short and exhilarating; and the material is rarely the same. Whether one is moving the plot or editing, the creative landscape is always different from the day before. And so, the rituals that Morrison and Pressfield propose, seem counterproductive, in that they seek grounding on ever-shifting, unreliable territory (1993; 2002). It was not until the mid-way point that I realized that the ritual I practiced as a point of entry to my craft was a flawed one, and that is when things began to change.

The Critical Friends Protocol also recognized my lapse in routine. The play was scheduled to be written over six weeks and, after the second draft (fourth week), the Protocol advised that I take more time in working on the play. “You won’t have enough time to fully justify your aims”, Nguse expressed her concern (2022). “It seems rushed and I don’t think a week is enough to have a well-cooked script”, Mzindle noted (2022). This was during the second Protocol meeting, which was the most challenging. The group concurred that the script was underdeveloped and that I needed more time to work on it, rather than the two weeks I had scheduled. It was difficult to hear, however, I conceded - noting on my journal - “[t]he Protocol advises I dedicate more time to finishing *Izwi LabaGcini*, although it feels like a failure, I nonetheless shall heed my colleagues’ advice and perhaps add another two or three weeks to the process” (Sosibo 2022, pg.21). One of the main critiques during this session was that I had not done enough research on ubungoma as it was depicted on paper. My immediate defense was that I was not doing anthropology, however, I knew that I had overestimated my capabilities which made me procrastinate on some level and it was evident in the work (Sosibo 2002).

I therefore needed to re-imagine my process. This came with the introduction of the Muse. This conception arrived serendipitously one morning during my sessions. I noted in the journal:

When I wrote a short story two years ago there came a morning I could not write. I spent this session browsing through the internet for immediate gratification in the form of male beauty. This is one of the symptoms of Pressfield's *Resistance* (2002). During this scavenging, an energy seemed to seep out of my body. It was quite a visceral experience. I knew, almost instinctively, that that was my Muse abandoning me. *This is my time*, he seemed to say, *I will not share it with your debauchery*. (Sosibo 2022, pg. 24)

Ever since that day I have been attempting to regain that presence in my writing sessions. On the third week of *Izwi LabaGcini* I decided to invite the Muse to my morning session. The concept of Muses stems from ancient Greek mythology. Pressfield defines a Muse as a supernatural being that inspires an artist to make their work (2002). I concur with this assertion and I would further propose Muses to have their own personalities. This, of course, is a matter of psychology and beliefs, but ubungoma is ubiquitous with supernatural beings that are believed to be real. I have heard several izangoma profess that they have seen mermaids with their naked eye, for example. The idea that a supernatural being may influence one's creative impulse is therefore not far fetched at all, in my cultural background. I noted in the journal:

I am trying to bring back the Muse. Today I lit a white candle and took a moment to observe my breath, while invoking images of male beauty in my imagination. An angelic form came to vision. He had deep brown skin, an Afro, and large pure white wings. He smiled at me, then turned around to look away, and I somehow felt as though this was my cue to begin writing. The words came. Not the in the form of a gushing flood that I expected, but a stream that trickled softly from sentence to sentence. Throughout the session this vision of the Muse kept returning, he had his back turned to me the entire time,

as though daring me to chase after him. I am grateful to be writing again. (Sosibo 2022, pg. 26)

Nigerian writer Akwaeke Emezi uses their ambitions as motivation. They write, “I bribed myself with the future. I dangled the things I wanted in front of my greedy eyes, and in the flush of that desire I reminded myself that writing five hundred words right now would reel in the world I wanted” (2021, pg.23). This is an interesting method to cultivate discipline in oneself. Emezi continues to reason that without the work, writing, the writer does not have a future to look to (2021). Although I was aware of this logically, it was nonetheless difficult to overcome Resistance and commit myself to daily productivity (Pressfield 2002). This is why the Muse became important for me. It was a way in which I could be accountable. Given my spiritual background, it was not difficult to assume that a supernatural entity influenced my writing process and sought from me the discipline that Ancestry demands of any conduit.

In the movie *Hemingway and Gellhorn*, the character Ernest Hemingway declares “writing is like mass, God gets mad when you don’t show up” (Kaufman 2012). I appreciate this assertion in its militant approach to art. Attaining this discipline is a personal journey. My point of entry has been the Muse. It is possible that the future is Emezi’s Muse, as well; since they maintain:

Everything else can shift however it wants, but the work will always be the work. No matter what changes, that instruction is still the same. What happens after you make the work might be uncertain, but one thing is guaranteed: If you *don’t* make the work, *nothing* will happen. Discipline is just a series of choices. With the spell, we can understand that each choice is carving out a future, finding our way out of the desert. (Emezi 2021, pg. 25)

Perhaps the idea of invoking the Muse was indeed necessary. Perhaps it was only a psychological trick I needed to play on myself. Nevertheless, the work resumed, and I also began to analyse where I got some of my ideas from. What was clear from the beginning was the chorus or the Community (Sosibo 2023). When I first sat to script the piece, Man 1, Woman 1, Man 2 and Woman 2 appeared in what was my vision of a stage in Act First, as the plays begins (Sosibo 2023). I then concluded, from their striking first image, that they would carry the story forward not only as a way of narrating the myth, but also as a comic relief for the audience. They were, I later realized, largely inspired by the Muses from Disney's Hercules (Clements & Musker 1997). I noted in the journal that "the Community are the Muses. Having grown up on Disney I somehow have revisited my childhood through these four characters who are both larger than life, but are human in their magic nonetheless" (Sosibo 2022, pg. 18).

Set, therefore, was somehow a mixture between Hades (Clements & Musker 1997) and Scar (Minkoff & Allers 1994). In fact, one Critical Friend in the Protocol jokingly observed that "Set is just Scar in human form - he is as evil and as conniving as him - even the way he talks" (Sikhakhane 2021). Although this may sound like a compliment, I quickly became concerned with ideas around originality (and plagiarism). Another concern for me on this front was that a serious character in a play I had written pertaining to spirituality was influenced by a Disney character. The idea of imperialism in its specific aspect of the 'cultural bomb' afforded me a way in which I could appreciate how my own literature could be influenced by diluted Western stories (Wa Thiong'o 1986). And in this case, an American version of an African story, with all the problematic stereotypes, sold back to Africa to consume.

Furthermore, Set symbolizes a homophobia that, as I have argued in the previous chapter (*Contextual Framework*), can be understood as the Western gaze that seeks to essentialise

Africans (Murray and Roscoe 1993; Dlamini 2006; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). Set states: “Homosexuality is un-Afrikan! A man with another man is a disgrace to our people!” (p.22, Sosibo 2022). This is the exact rhetoric that I sought out to challenge, and Smeshi (Set’s son) provided an antithesis to these homophobic assumptions:

But are we not older than bigotry, Heru? Are there no markings in Zimbabwean caves of usiko labaGcini [the ritual of the Keepers]? I am told we are as first as Africa herself. That we healed and are healing in every form we take. (p.36, Sosibo 2022)

Although Ramasay, like many theorists on creativity, insists that the creative process involves a consumption of art, I worried about my work being close to a particular piece of art, where plagiarism could be a possibility (2002). The late Nobel Laureate, Nadine Gordimer, proposes that “one must read in order to write”, and this is advice I agree with (1991, pg. 1). Storytelling is a tradition that requires one to consume different types of narratives from different cultures in order to enrich one’s own practice. Furthermore, the universality of archetypes in storytelling is also how I allowed myself to write Set the way he himself wanted to be written as a character (Vogler 2007). I am aware that being inspired by a story does not necessarily mean replicating one. Set therefore became an archetype that needed its own unique background or arch (Vogler 2007). This was particularly difficult since the play is a re-imagination of Kemetic (Egyptian) mythology. What I had challenged myself to do was to use ancient African cosmology in order to interrogate a phenomenon that is a point of friction in many African societies today (Ben-Jochannan 1972; Anta Diop 1974; Bernal 1987; Bhengu 2015). The Kemetic pantheon is perhaps the most recorded and therefore most accessible, notwithstanding that the themes explored by our Ancestors thousands of years ago still persist today, one of them being sexuality.

II: The Relationship Between Queerness and Ubungoma

The relationship between queerness and ubungoma remains inconclusive. This is because ubungoma is a vast and multifaceted practice and different practitioners have varying opinions. The insights gained through writing *Izwi LabaGcini* are, however, potent to the already existing discourse around ubungoma and sexuality. And, as stated in the first chapter (*Introduction*) I can only comment conclusively on *my* sexuality. According to Credo Mutwa, Ancestral possession is a strenuous process, wrought with illness and hallucination in the beginning, and this is what we see with Heru in *Scene First* (1996; Sosibo 2022). There are several initiation rites that an isangoma must undergo at the beginning and Heru is also tasked to initiate to save his kingdom (Mutwa 1996; Sosibo 2022). Mutwa defines sleep as “a state of being one with the star god” (1996, pg. 173) and this is the relationship Heru has with Maat in the opening scene (Sosibo 2022).

In *Scene First*, Maat presents Smeshi to Heru, and this is inspired by my own dreams where my Ancestor presented a potential romantic partner to me. Nkabinde has argued that it was her Ancestor, a male, who wanted a wife and therefore influenced her attraction to women (Nkabinde and Morgan 2006). *Izwi LabaGcini* as a text explores this notion. An Ancestor wanting or selecting a particular partner is not a foreign concept in ubungoma (Mutwa 1996; Nkabinde & Morgan 2006; Ndlanzi 2020). Sexuality thus becomes flexible when considering that an Ancestor can have their own stipulations or preferences.

Afrocentric literature seems to concur with ideas around queer peoples owing their sexual orientation to spiritual gifts or shamanism (Somè 2000; Mkasi 2013; Ogana and Ojong 2015;

Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). I support this notion, not as a means to ‘explain the gay away’, but as an attempt to grapple with an ancient concept pertaining to a complicated topic. Western thought often cites biology in understating homosexuality: one is born gay. African knowledge systems, however often view same-sex attraction as a gift signaling that one is called to healing. These are ideas discussed in Chapter Four (*Contextual Framework*), but they are also represented in African literature. *Izwi LabaGcini* therefore positions itself as a text in a canon that understands queerness to be located in ubungoma, or spiritual calling. This form of knowing is supported by the idea that creative output can constitute how knowledge is produced within a culture (Smith and Dean, 2009; Bourgault and Rosamond 2023.)

The following examples therefore add to South African discourse around queerness relating to cosmology. Tshepo, in K Sello Duiker’s *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, undergoes a journey where he discovers his sexuality within the context of unraveling his birthright and responsibility as a healer (2001). In the last chapter of the novel, Tshepo declares “I am Horus”, which can be read as an affirmation of one’s identity in the Afro-spiritual context (2001, pg. 608). In Nakhane Tour’s *Piggy Boy’s Blues*, the main character Davide asserts in the concluding chapter, “I am a prophet” (2015, pg.154). Once more in South African literature, a queer protagonist identifies with being spiritually gifted and this theme is revisited within the journey of self-discovery (Tour 2015). Zakes Mda’s *Little Suns* cites the legend of Queen Mamani kaPhahlo, an AmaMpondomise monarch in the 1700s who was allowed to marry a woman because part of the debate around her sexuality was that she was a healer or shaman (2017).

South African literature seems to place queer identity with the context of being spiritually gifted. This concept, however, is not exclusive to South African letters only. American novelist Robert Jones Jr, further explores queerness within the calling of spiritual healing in his *The Prophets*

(2021). Set in the antebellum period in the American South, the novel cites two queer male couples who parallel each other in time, and both are understood by their respective communities to be spiritually gifted (2021). These ideas concur with those presented in *Chapter Four: Contextual Framework*, and I once more return here to the San cave paintings in Gruruve Zimbabwe which can be seen as the first form of literature that documented queerness as a central aspect of African spirituality.

Izwi LabaGcini therefore positions itself within this cluster of literature. Heru, affirming his place as an isangoma and consolidating this with his queerness proclaims, “I am the temple of the Gods!” (Sosibo 2022, pg. 47). This is consistent with Mutwa’s views that an isangoma is a mediator between worlds (Mutwa 1996). Malodoma Somè, on the other hand, insists that in order for one to mediate between worlds an androgyny of spirit is required (1993). This is echoed by the above-mentioned so-called twin spirit phenomenon that marks queer people in some native American communities (Balsam et al 2004).

The actual metaphysical conditions of a spirit or entity influencing one’s sexuality is beyond the scope of this dissertation. What the literature has demonstrated, however, is that shamanism in various indigenous cultures is where queerness finds its cultural bearings. Although it difficult to say conclusively whether or not ubungoma *causes* queerness, it is however safe to say that ubungoma is often *accompanied* by queerness. In my case I have embraced the readings given to me by other izangoma who have insisted that my grandmother who has given me spiritual gifts of healing is also the reason for my attraction to men (2017; 2022; 2022).

I welcome this truth, as it allows me a more intimate relationship with my history and culture. I once took a long Uber ride and the driver and I began conversing. Our talk led to our interests

and I related to him my Master's journey, much to his fascination. I was attempting to explain my findings on the so-called relationship between queerness and ubungoma, I was struggling to find the exact words to explain queerness, to which he excitedly proposed “Oh, munutu usuke engenwe iDlozi [Oh, that person is possessed by an Ancestor]” (Uber driver [Pietermaritzburg] 2023, 1 September). This is a long-standing cultural understanding and it is relieving to know, that despite homophobia, queer people have a unique historical and cultural place in various African societies. *Izwi LabaGcini* has further contributed to this discourse as a play-text that interrogates the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. The result has not only been a contribution to discourse, but a discovery of a new theatre form.

III: The Absurd Ritual

Playwrights and theatre practitioners are always seeking innovative ways to further their discipline. Such were my ambitions as a playwright during the progress of this study. Scripting *Izwi LabaGcini* has resulted in a theatre I here call The Absurd Ritual. As the title suggests, this is a genre that draws from Ritual Theatre (Soyinka 1976) and the Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin 1960). The Absurd Ritual can be defined as a theatre that explores, investigates and depicts black queer life. The obvious implication of this is that on stage is a ritual and it is absurd. This art is influenced by two dramatic forms and their practitioners - Ritual Theatre and its Wole Soyinka (1976), along with the Theatre of the Absurd and its Albert Camus (1955). The thesis is as follows:

Black queer peoples are persecuted in the continent of Africa and its diaspora. Justification for this is the myth, as discussed in previous chapters, that ‘homosexuality is unAfrican’.

Homosexuality and queerness overall, however, as illustrated previously, has been with us since prehistoric times (Epprecht 2008; 2013; Montle 2021); therefore, by virtue of their existence, black queer peoples have been relegated to an absurd reality. This can be further substantiated by the several scholars who have been cited throughout this dissertation, who have argued that African epistemologies (in their past/pre-colonial notes) have insisted that queer persons play a pivotal role in African spirituality and cosmology (Somè 2000; Dlamini 2006; Mkasi 2013; Ogana and Ojong 2015; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021).

As stated in the *Contextual Framework*, cultural experts have argued that several shamanistic practices in this continent often view queerness as a result of spirit or Ancestral possession and that the custodians of these healing practices are queer (Lee 1969; Somè 1993; Somè 2000; Maynard 2007; Rudwick 2011; Mkasi 2013; Ogana and Ojong 2015; Sinikangas 2004; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). Queerness therefore seems to be a significant indication of custodianship of African cultures and spiritualities, in a continent where 30 out of 54 countries have deemed homosexuality illegal (Rakhetsi 2021; Kojoué 2024). To be a queer individual, particularly one who identifies as a queer by virtue of spiritual connotations (as some have indicated in the previous Chapters) in a civilization that rejects queerness as a non-African phenomenon, is indeed an absurd condition. African Absurdist literature tends to position itself as commentary on the socio-political condition of each respective society - F. Odun Balogun maintains that “[c]ontemporary African literature of the absurd therefore developed as a reaction to the general world malaise and the absurd conditions of modern Africa (1984 p.41). Queer people proceed with existence while grappling with homophobia throughout the continent. The Absurd Ritual therefore acts as a medium through which this condition is unpacked.

This genre, as seen in *Izwi LabaGcini*, is an amalgamation of Ritual Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd. Aspects from each theatre tradition have been incorporated in the composition of the play. Of Ritual Theatre, what is central is that there is a ritual on stage. A metaphysical entity, a god and Ancestor, has called our protagonist to perform a ritual on behalf of their community (Sosibo 2022). This is consistent with Soyinka's ideas stated earlier in the *Conceptual Framework* around how, in Africa, ritual is used as a means to master our human condition in the cosmic context (1976). The protagonist, Soyinka, ventures into the underworld (a liminal realm) to perform a ritual whose success determines the future of the community that sends him (1976). Heru in *Izwi LabaGcini*, has to undergo intwaso (initiation) in behalf of his kingdom (Sosibo 2022). Should he fail, his nemesis, Set will win the throne of Kement and plunge his people into doom (Sosibo 2022). Aspects of ritual, like spectacle, dance, spirits and sacrifice are also seen in the Absurd Ritual. But this theatre also ruminates the sexuality of its protagonist in absurd terms, this is what the writing process insisted in, I noted in the journal:

The play I am writing seems to come from Ritual Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd. I cannot exactly tell why Absurdism is so palpable in the text. Perhaps it is because the queer condition, as I have lived it, in the continent is an absurd reality. (Sosibo2022, pg.15)

Tenets of the Theatre of the Absurd are employed, such as repetitious dialogue, apparently meaningless speech, suspension of time, comic or ridiculous action, inconsistent plot/characters, empty gestures, all to argue for the existential crisis the protagonist faces, as pertaining to the reconciliation of their sexuality and culture (Esslin 1960; Sosibo 2022). Balogun further contextualizes Absurdism in African literature by arguing that “the absurd for the African fulfills the same purpose as satire—a way of correction. The African absurdist may have a pessimistic

cynical vision but he has not yet despaired” (1984, p.46). The protagonist of the Absurd Ritual meets his objectives by accepting his responsibilities amid the circumstances. In doing so, they become Camus’ absurd hero - “one must imagine Sysiphus happy” (1955, pg.201), declared Camus, and this concession to their absurd reality is also how the protagonist of the Absurd Ritual must posture themselves should they wish to master the adventure they are called to. Heru is therefore an absurd hero (Sosibo 2022).

If the protagonist of the Absurd Ritual articulates the life of the queer African man who is queer because of his spiritual/Ancestral calling (i.e. Heru is an isangoma), Smeshi then represents the modern queer man for whom this identity does not apply (Sosibo 2022). The term ‘Smeshi’ originates from ‘Smash’, which is what township queer men call themselves around KwaZulu Natal. This is from iSingqumo which, as mentioned in the *Contextual Framework*, is an isiZulu dialect used by black queer men in KZN’s townships (Rudwick 2011; Msibi and Rudwick 2015). Smeshi, as he appears in *Izwi LabaGcini*, is the everyday black queer man who is biologically queer, rather than by supernatural influence. He also appears as the love interest of the protagonist, thus suggesting that although black queer life is not a monolith, members of this community can exist in communion and - in the case of the Absurd Ritual - in love (Sosibo 2022). Smeshi is not an isangoma, he instead represents the urban queer man who faces his own challenges and is also attempting to master his own fate (Soyinka 1976). He is the mate of our protagonist, thus implying a union between tradition and modernity (Sosibo 2022). They challenge each other, Smeshi and Heru, and this reveals to us the typical nature of romance, while symbolizing a clash between Africa’s past and her future, as seen through the queer gaze.

The process of writing *Izwi LabaGcini* has allowed me to engage with my culture in ways that have shifted my understanding of queerness as a Zulu man called to ubungoma. The Absurd

Ritual results from this autoethnographic engagement with the traditions of my Ancestors and ubungoma as a cultural structure. With theatre being a method for self-determination, it follows that isiZulu queerness could best be interrogated through Playwriting (Soyinka 1976; Wa Thiong'o 1986). This has been this journey of autoethnographic inquiry that has led me to determine black queer life as an absurd endeavour. Writing this text has revealed to me how absurd black queer life can be in a largely homophobic Africa, and the Absurd Ritual is the best form through which these ideas could be articulated. *Izwi LabaGcini* has been an experience through which I “acknowledge[d] the inextricable link between the personal and the cultural” (Wall 2006, p.1).

Examining my queerness within isiZulu culture has fostered a creativity that has contributed a new knowledge that I hope will resonate with readers, as they consider their positionalities within their cultures (Custer 2014). In the third session of the Critical Friends Protocol, one of the participants stated, “I like how you have brought gayness and ubungoma together, we don’t often talk about this, and your play has started this conversation” (Ndlungwana 2022). IsiZulu as a culture is as vast as it is complex, and the idea of conducting a study that has interrogated my own queer identity in relation to my culture, and to have produced as a result a play that proposes isiZulu queerness to be an absurd circumstance, corroborates the notion “autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, reflexively” (Jones 2013, p.10).

The Absurd Ritual, as a new theatre form, does not claim an exclusive identity. It learns, as with all new life, from its predecessors. At this stage, I am satisfied to have suggested a theatre that is specifically black and queer. This is in line with the notions of Afrocentric theatre as about specifically back cultural imperatives (Mollett & Mollet 2013; Luckett & Shaffer 2017). Like

Notozake Shange who coined the choreopoem (1975) as an articulation of black female existence and struggle, so do I introduce *The Absurd Ritual* into the South African theatrical and literary scene. With this theatre, I hope to contribute to the conversation exploring black queer life in the arts and in broader society, and, as a theatre practitioner, I hope to expand the borders of South African theatre. According to Turner, ritual can be re-imagined to suit the circumstances that necessitate its function (1979). This is the position that *The Absurd Ritual* assumes in the South African context - a necessary art that highlights and investigates people who have been silenced and marginalized for too long.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of my study. I have analyzed my process as a playwright over a three-month period. During this time, I scripted a play text, *Izwi LabaGcini*, which investigated the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. I made use of a six-member Critical Friends Protocol and a Reflexive Journal, which were the main research instruments for this study (Constantino 2010; Ortlipp 2008). Three areas constitute this study's findings: First, after critically observing my playwriting method, I have concluded that discipline is central to craft (Pressfield 2002). I arrived at the following three-feedback sessions with the Protocol, who highlighted for me the importance of keeping a healthy productive writing schedule as a means for creative success. Second, I have also proposed that although it cannot be stated conclusively that ubungoma causes queerness, it is more credible to state that ubungoma is often accompanied by queerness - a result of Ancestral possession and androgyny that marks indigenous healing practices (Somè 2000; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). The process of Playwriting allowed me to

synthesize the literature I have gathered pertaining to these ideas into a play-text that best represents this discovery. Theatre therefore became a method for ‘self-apprehension’ (Soyinka 1976). The third finding is the introduction the Absurd Ritual, a new theatre that seeks to observe and examine black queer life in the (South) African context, which resulted from scripting *Izwi LabaGcini* (Sosibo 2022). The following chapter will be the conclusion of this dissertation.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

Summary and Conclusion

I know where my greatest treasures lie. They are within me.

K. Sello Duiker (2001)

Introduction

This is the conclusion of this dissertation. I shall first present a summary of what I have covered in the previous chapters. This will be a reiteration of the socio-political circumstance of queer peoples in (South) Africa, and why such research as I have conducted is necessary. I will then attempt to identify the study's limitations, and then propose avenues for further research on this topic. With this I pose challenges on the critical Friend's Protocol I made use of and perhaps how playwriting as a method can be improved upon. I also propose further ways in which *The Absurd Ritual* can be expanded, and how my future writing and research will be geared towards this. The final commentary will be my concluding remarks on the journey I have taken with *Izwi LabaGcini* and the research I have done in interrogating the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. Here I re-emphasise my findings and how they contribute to the ongoing conversation around LGBTQIA+ rights in the content and what responsibilities do artists and writers have in envisioning a homophobia-free Africa.

Summary

This study was conducted over a total of three months. During these three months, I rendered three drafts of the play-text *Izwi LabaGcini*. I also kept a Reflexive Journal to interrogate my progress as a playwright (Sutherland 2007; Ortlipp 2008). *Izwi LabaGcini* was read and reviewed by a Critical Friends Protocol of six participants, who gave me feedback on each iteration of the text over our three sessions between December 2021 and February 2022 (Costa and Kallick 1993; Appleby 1998; Constantino 2010). The play has been an exploration of what I have noted in various indigenous cultures globally, that is queerness seems to be linked to shamanism or healing practices. I used the play as a means to specifically interrogate my own queerness, in its relation to my calling in ubungoma. I also used the progress of writing *Izwi LabaGcini* as a way in which to study my process as a playwright, considering Steven Pressfield's notions on discipline being central to the craft of the writer (2002).

I also explored my preparatory writing rituals in terms of praxis and invoking the Muse (Morrison 1993; Pressfield 2002). My playwriting methods were also informed by Ramsay's notions of observation research, where the dramatist uses their environment and an organic consumption of the arts in order to enrich their process of composition. What resulted was an ancient Kemetite epic, with a prince who had to go under the initiation ritual of igobongo, to save his kingdom from peril (Fowler 2011; Dumakude 2021; Sosibo 2022; Masondo 2023). During the igobongo ritual, the protagonist of *Izwi LabaGcini* develops an intimate relationship with his Ancestor, who also proposes a partner for him, which is what I also experienced in my journey in ubugoma in 2019. *Izwi LabaGcini* thus situates itself as a pocket of knowledge in the South African theatre context, where themes around interlinks between queerness and ubungoma are interrogated (Smith and Dean 2009; Bourgault and Rosamond 2023).

Queerness and Ubungoma

This study explored the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. The Critical Friends Protocol was instrumental in this inquiry, since two of its participants were practicing izangoma. What the study allowed for was a synthesis of the literature I gathered which supports the idea that there are various examples throughout Africa where different societies have understood queerness to be part of each respective culture's spiritual system of shamanism and healing (Somè 2000; Mkasi 2013; Ogana and Ojong 2015; Okwenna in Oladipupo 2021). The participants in the protocol were somewhat divided in terms of linking queerness to ubungoma, and this reflects the existing contradictions within ubungoma as a discipline, thus creating an opportunity for more research to be conducted on this phenomenon, as will be illustrated below. What *Izwi LabaGcini* did succeed in, however, is existing as a play-text that encourages robust dialogue pertaining to the relationship between the queer subject and Ancestry, as could be seen in the charged sessions of the Critical Friends Protocol.

While the relationship between queerness and ubungoma cannot be stated conclusively, I have however argued that ubungoma is often accompanied by queerness. I make this claim as relating to my own journey in ubungoma, where different izangoma have proclaimed that my queerness is as a result of a grandmother who has afforded me spiritual gifts (2017; 2022; 2022). This, once more, is not an anomaly in African cosmology since shamans are often called to an androgyny that reflects the mediation between the physical world and the afterlife (Somè 1993; Somè 2000). It is imperative, again, to highlight that this is not a universal truth throughout Africa, or even specifically within South African ubungoma. There are traditional healers who may insist on queerness being un-African, while there are queer izangoma who do not see a correlation between their queerness and ubungoma. What is important to me as a playwright, however, is

having a play-text within South Africa's literary culture that explores these themes. More so, as indicated in the *Introduction* of this dissertation, I can only make assertions on *my* queerness exactly, and not others. What is therefore exciting for me, is that *Izwi LabaGcini* also contributes to the tradition of South African letters which reconcile queerness and spiritual gifts as accompanying one another (Duiker 2001; Tour 2015; Mda 2017).

Playwriting and The Absurd Ritual

This was a study that both challenged and developed my craft as a playwright. The Critical Friends Protocol was a major part of this. It was affirming to present my work to my professional peers, who engaged with it for the purpose of making me a better playwright (Costa and Kallick 1993; Appleby 1998; Constantino 2010). It was indeed a humbling experience to note that as artists, we sometimes overestimate our creative abilities, and I take from this study the importance of setting oneself realistic goals as a creative. What has also been a revelation is that discipline is central to the writer's craft (Pressfield 2002). This has been a useful concept to grasp, given that as a playwright, I am constantly seeking what constitutes good craft and a successful writing process. *Izwi LabaGcini* afforded me the opportunity to reconcile my relationship with my Muse, and this has been a breakthrough for me as one who aspires in a career in playwriting (Pressfield 2002).

The process of writing *Izwi LabaGcini* has resulted in me coining a neo-theatre genre that I call the Absurd Ritual (Sosibo 2022). As mentioned in Chapter Five (*Findings*), the Absurd Ritual draws from the tradition of Ritual Theatre (Soyinka 1976) and the Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin 1960). What is unique about the Absurd Ritual, I submit, is that it is a theatre that seeks to

observe and interrogate black queer life, particularly in its nuanced position in African spiritualities. The protagonist of the Absurd Ritual, as seen with Heru, becomes Camus' absurd hero, in that they accept the absurd condition of the dramatic call to adventure while being queer in a homophobic society (1955). The Absurd Ritual, therefore, becomes a theatre that deals specifically with black queer themes, through employing tenets from Ritual Theatre (Soyinka 1976) and the Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin 1960), in its structure and aesthetic. This theatre, I propose, further contributes to the decolonial project, where sexuality and gender expression are also phenomena that require decolonization from Eurocentric hegemony (Johnson 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). I am excited to develop this theatre in further writing and further study.

Limits of Study

Although I am excited by the findings of this study, I do think that it was limited in certain aspects. Firstly, I do think that the study could have benefited from a larger Critical Friends Protocol, particularly one with more individuals practicing ubungoma who identify as queer. I believe that the study would have benefited from participants who are in the community for a more robust conversation around the intersections between queerness and ubungoma. Secondly, a performance of *Izwi LabaGcini* could have perhaps cemented the ideas it carried as a script. Although the creative project of this dissertation was playwriting, I am curious to see how the text would have developed in the hands of actors and a director. I argue this, particularly since ritual is primarily performed, and documentation succeeds the instance of organically developing a ritual through the collaboration of different participants (Taylor and Thompson 1972; Schechner 2013). With the Absurd Ritual being a new theatre, I think it could have benefited from being solidified through the process of production. I furthermore concede that *Izwi*

LabaGcini as a script would have become richer if edited post-production, which is typical of most play texts. Lastly, a production would have granted me the opportunity to engage with a wider audience and perhaps expand on the conversation of the relationship between queerness and ubungoma, since this could have been conducted in post-performance discussions with different audiences in several production runs.

Further Research

I do believe that the phenomenon of queerness being located in African spirituality needs more research, and this is a task that is not only limited to research in the arts. This is a growing field of knowledge, as South African queer people continue to locate themselves in their indigenous cultures. The arguments presented in this dissertation are from a particular individual who has a particular subject position, and I am excited to see how other researchers could contribute to the discourse about the relationship between queerness and ubungoma (Holman Jones 2007; Custer 2014). Perhaps further engagement with individuals practicing ubungoma, who identify as queer, could be explored. Another avenue for further research is the production of *Izwi LabaGcini*. As mentioned earlier, new theatre scripts are often finalized after the first production, and I believe that *Izwi LabaGcini* does require further exploration through the process of production. Although I did discover some insights into my process as a playwright, I do foresee myself further studying my writing methods. The methods I explored in this study sufficed for this specific project, but I am also looking forward to seeing how other playwrights approach their work (Morrison 1993; Ramsay 2002; Pressfield 2002). Lastly, with *The Absurd Ritual* being a new

theatre, I am most excited to see how other theatre practitioners in the country will receive and engage with it in their creative research. (Smith and Dean 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter was a conclusion to this study, which was an interrogation of the relationship between queerness and ubungoma. I first presented a summary of this dissertation, followed by my final remarks on the interlinks between queerness and ubungoma. Then I finalised my ideas on playwriting methods, followed by my closing remarks on the Absurd Ritual. I then articulated the limitations of this study and then proposed avenues for further research. Africa continues to struggle towards a homophobic-free reality. The recent Namibian decision brings hope to one, that we every so slightly edge towards a just future, where all children of the soil will enjoy their birthright as citizens of this vast complicated civilization, despite their sexual orientations or gender expressions (Kojoué 2024; Booty 2024). The Muse continues to appear with his back to me, leading the way of my writing, and I shall follow wherever he goes - I remain steady in the wings of the African stage, awaiting his cue. The Absurd Ritual is but an infant in the longstanding tradition of African theatre and African literature, but I am hopeful that it shall take up space and fulfill its act on behalf of all the queer voices who have been silenced by prejudice and injustice. It is from this perspective that decolonizing queerness becomes a necessary undertaking, for the freedoms of queer peoples throughout Africa (Johnson 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015). The Absurd Ritual is a queer theatre, whose purpose is captured succinctly by Balogun when he states:

The African absurdist writer does not believe that life in itself is absurd or meaningless. Life to him is very meaningful; what can be absurd and meaningless are individuals and situations. The conditions, the instances, the personalities, and the attitudes that deprive life of this meaning which he values so much are the things he ridicules in his works by exposing the absurdity inherent in them. (1984, p.46)

This is the hope of the Absurd Ritual, this is the hope of *Izwi LabaGcini*.

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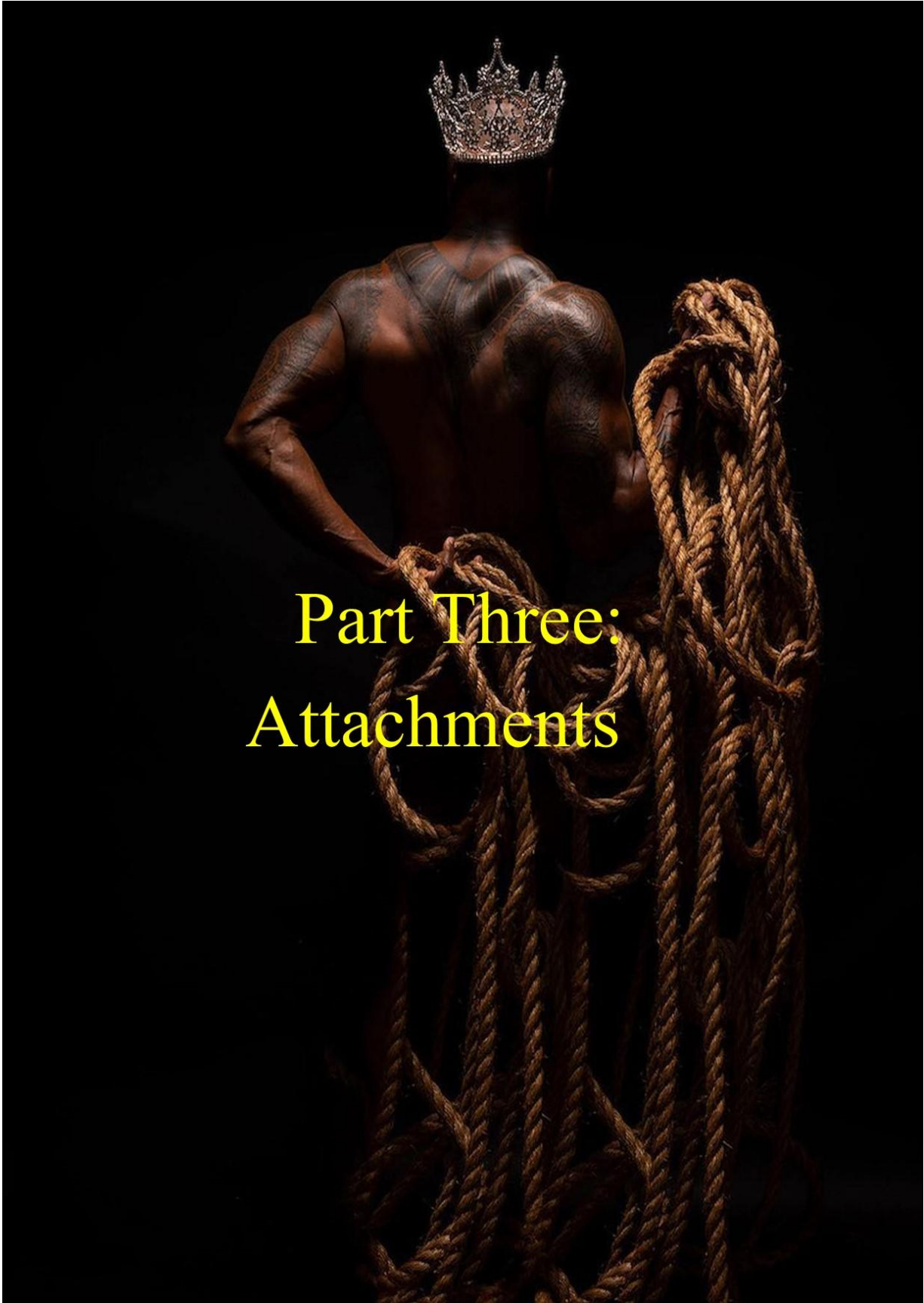
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Part Three:
Attachments

Appendix 1: Translation – *Izwi LabaGcini****Maat's Monologue (Scene First & Scene Sixth)*****Maat** (*under a spot. To audience*)

INkonkoni is fetched from antiquity!
 He said to Mvelinqangi he'll hold both
 Genders and divine dreams from the elders musically.
 The female Ancestor dwells in the prince
 And he walks like his grandmother's grandmothers.
 He connects with the depths of the ethereal pigeons,
 Carrying ishoba of iNkonkoni, surrounded by
 UMndawe, uMndiki, Isithunywa, Abalozi, noMnguni.
 He walks like a woman like a man gender is
 Mixed, spirits are mixed in one body.
 He opens all heavenly gates, diviner of the Zulu,
 A male grandmother, a female grandfather, gender
 And spirits are mixed. Rejoice Keeper, he who carries
 The secrets of Tehuti's temple. He who divines with
 Ishoba of the wildebeest like the earth worshipping the sun
 And the moon. Go now, hold now the psalms of the Gods
 And diviners of Ancestry. Walk Keeper,
 We are behind you.

Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form



PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Declaration of Consent:

I _____ (full name of participant) hereby confirm that I have been informed about the study entitled ***Izwi LabaGcini: Investigating the relationship between homosexuality and ubungoma through the scripting of (Afrocentric) Ritual Theatre***, by S'fundo W. Sosibo.

I understand that my role as a participant in the Critical Friends Protocol will be to read three drafts of the script *Izwi LabaGcini* and provide feedback on the text in three scheduled sessions, on Zoom, in December 2021.

I consent to participating in the research project as a Participant in the Critical-Friends Protocol of *Izwi LabaGcini*.

I understand that the work is voluntary and that I will not receive remuneration.

I hereby provide further consent to:

Participate in the Critical-Friends Protocol where each session will be audio recorded. YES/NO

My feedback being incorporated in the script *Izwi LabaGcini* and being noted in the dissertation by the researcher. YES / NO

I understand that if I have further questions / concerns related to the study, I may contact the researcher at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED] and/or the supervisor, Dr. Tamar Meskin, at (031) 260-1139 or via email at meskint@ukzn.ac.za.

If I have concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher, then I may contact either the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration, and have been provided with their contact details.

Signature of Participant Date

Name of Witness

Signature of Witness Date

Appendix 3: Critical Friends Protocol



CRITICAL FRIENDS PROTOCOL

Date:

1. What is your first impression of the script?

2. What worked for you in the script, what are its strengths?

3. What did not work for you in the script, what are its shortcomings?

4. How has the playwright been successful in exploring links between queerness and ubungoma?

5. How has the playwright not been successful in exploring links between queerness and ubungoma?

6. How, would you say, is *Izwi LabaGcini* a Ritual Theatre text?

7. Do you have any questions for the playwright?

8. What would be your overall note of improvement to the playwright regarding the script?

Appendix 4: Critical Friends Protocol Translation



I-CRITICAL FRIENDS PROTOCOL

Usuku:

1. Kuveleni ngekathi ufunda lombhalo okokuqala?
2. Yini oyithandile ngalomdlalo?
3. Yini ongayithandanga ngalomdlalo?
4. Umbhali uphumelele kanjani ekuhloleni ukuhambisana phakathi kokuthanda ubulili obunye nobuNgoma?
5. Umbhali akaphumelelanga kanjani ekuhloleni ukuhambisana phakathi kokuthanda ubulili obunye nobuNgoma?
6. Umdlalo *Izwi LabaGcini* ungumbhalo weshashalazi omayelana namasiko na? Kanjani?
7. Ikhona imibuzo onayo eya kumbhali?
8. Kuyini ongakusho kumbhali ukuze athuthukise lomdlalo?

Appendix 5: Reflexive Journal



IZWI LABAGCINI – REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

Date:

1. What are today's comments on the writing process?
2. What are today's writing successes?
3. What are today's failures during the writing process?
4. What is today's concern?
5. Why is this a concern?
6. What can I do about it?
7. What is today's note for improvement?
8. Did the pre-writing ritual have any affect on today's process? Substantiate.
9. What 'observations' could have been incorporated to today's creative work?

10. How has the feedback from the Critical Friends Protocol contributed to today's writing?

Makhosi