


# Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors? An anthropological study on cultural views of iZingoma in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal

**By**

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The thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of

**PhD in Anthropology**

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**June 2025**

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my devoted supervisor, my loved ones and all my siblings. Your unwavering support and constant presence in my life have been my guiding light. I am deeply grateful to each of you, and I will always hold you in my heart, striving to make you proud. May God bless you all.

To my mother, this achievement is for you. Your encouragement has been my greatest motivation. You taught me the value of education and instilled in me the strength to persevere. This doctorate is the fulfilment of your dreams for us, though I wish you could be here to witness this moment. I trust you are watching over me with pride.

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## SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

**I Dr Balungile Prudence Zond** declare that this thesis has been submitted with my approval



**Supervisor's signature** **Date: 19 June 2025**

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study, situated within the anthropology of sexuality, explored *iZangoma* cultural and spiritual views on gay men as heirs in Zulu families, particularly in relation to ancestral rituals. The study aimed to understand, from the view point of *iZangoma*, if "a gay man could be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors referred to as the "underground gang." Conducted in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal, a rural area with significant socio-cultural discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community, the research asked whether a gay man could fulfil the role of heir and perform spiritual duties traditionally assigned to heterosexual male heirs. Guided by the phenomenological approach, this study purposively recruited twenty *iZingoma*, who are traditional healers and custodians of indigenous knowledge in African rural communities. Three theoretical frameworks, the Ritual Theory, Sexuality Theory and Social Constructivism were used as a critical lens to examine how cultural and spiritual practices intersect with contemporary understandings of sexuality within indigenous knowledge systems. Findings revealed that *iZingoma* distinguish between homosexuality and "*ukungenwa idlozi*" (being chosen by ancestors). In their view, a gay man cannot be considered an heir and be trusted with the familial responsibility to burn incense (impepho). They believe homosexuality is a personal choice and social identity influenced by Western ideals and affluence. While many associate *iZingoma* with homosexuality, most have undergone "*ukungenwa idlozi*," a spiritual possession by ancestors.

The study also highlights that being an heir is not based on birth order, but on spiritual selection by ancestors. iZingoma argues that ancestral approval does not always align with traditional succession expectations. The study contributes to sexual and cultural anthropology by showing that discrimination against gay men is not just a personal or societal choice, but rooted in African Spirituality, Christianity, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. People who don't meet these spiritual and social norms are often rejected as heirs. The study recommends "rethinking sexual identities and preferences" outside societal norms. The position of this thesis is that the acceptance of gay men as heirs and as family leaders would be achievable if these systems recognise them outside harsh and harmful stereotypes. Future research should investigate the authorship of the Christian Bible and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, as they influence discrimination against gay men seeking recognition as heirs.



***Key words*:** iZingoma, ancestors, gay heirs, burning of incense, homosexuality, spirituality, patriarchy, matriarchy, gender roles/expectations, norms/values, practice, ritual/s, indigenous knowledge system and culture.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

The anthropology of sexuality, a subfield of anthropology, is used in this study to explore whether a gay man can be the heir of his family and perform the ritual of burning incense (*impepho)* to communicate with the ancestors. This subfield is deemed fitting for the study because there is historical evidence of where proponents in anthropology such as (i) Judith Butler (1990) whose studies have focused on an inductive exploration of fixed sexual and gender identities, are. Her contributions have contributed to research about how identities are enacted through cultural practices; (ii) Michel Foucault (1978) is also among a few scholars to contextually explore how power, sexuality and social control are used to determine/regulate one's sexual identity. He has also expanded the discussion by critically examining the intersectionality of sexual identities, cultural and economic practices, socially constructed gender roles, and the use of power and religion; (iii) Gayle Rubin (1984), in her research, has critically assessed what she coins as "sexual hierarchy". She critically examines society as a structure that socially constructs ranks through which sexual behaviors are either found as conforming or non-conforming. She argues that sexuality is used in many societies as a basis for both social identity and social discrimination; (iv) Mkhize (2008) argues that in African communities, and mostly in African families, certain gender roles and traditional expectations complicate the inclusion of same-sex relationships in traditional practices.

The present situation in South Africa proves that a number of homosexual people continue to be living in situations that are violating their rights. It is quite evident that they are ill-treated and abused both physically and emotionally and it continues to be a constitutional issue that is rising and has formed media-headlines, while other cases remain unreported for many unknown reasons (Mamba, 2020). Sexual violence, in the context of corrective gender, has been recorded as a crime that has led to many gay male fatalities. These ill-treatments have caused a huge impact as to whether South Africa or even Africa at large, has fully accepted homosexual people or not, and the reality is, although the Bill of Rights in South Africa recognizes the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, the grassroots of many communities in African members of the LGBTQIA+

community are being ill-treated extensively. The non-acceptance of homosexual people questions the respect that people show for the South African constitution, which stipulates the rights of all people irrespective of their sexuality and how their rights are to be protected, respected, and not be violated under any circumstances (Matebeni, 2017). According to the Iranti report prepared for the Arcus foundation in 2019:9, there are multiple forms of lethal and non-lethal violence perpetrated against LGBTQI persons, including violation of the rights to life, safety, dignity, and freedom. Violence against LGBTI persons is endemic in these five countries in Africa, which are South Africa, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and Botswana, and this stems from heteropatriarchal socio-cultural norms that consider homosexuality and gender-as non-conforming gender binary expressions, and as gender deviating from the social norm. Furthermore, Mayeza (2021) confirm what Mamba (2020: 14) alluded on by maintaining that most non-heterosexual people in South African communities fail to live their homosexual life freely, due to some structural and cultural societal norms and existing beliefs which hinder and are against same sex relationships. Moreover, Shefer (2019) alludes that culture in the post-apartheid South Africa, particularly in the rural areas, plays a critical role and part in promoting discrimination against homosexual people. Furthermore, non-heterosexual people in rural areas are often judged and discriminated against, as they are considered to be deviating from societal norms and values. This has consequently resulted in situations in which non-heterosexuals find themselves feeling less recognized and ostracized in their communities, hence this study is posing the research question of whether a gay man be the heir of the family, and burn incense to communicate with ancestors. To arrive at the answer of what the study is seeking to understand, the study is recruiting iZingoma,[1] who are custodians of indigenous cultural knowledge, and these are the ones able to understand and converse about ancestral messages.

### 1.2 Background and outline of research problem

The socialization and construction of one's identity or sexual identity in anthropology has received both cultural and medical attention. The existing literature gives evidence that homosexual people in both cultural and medical anthropology have been studied within the context of their identity

[1] IZingoma (diviners)

construction, while in medical anthropology they have been studied in the context of HIV/AIDS, as well as within the context of their experiences in accessing health care services at their time of need. Because of a number of dynamics that continue to affect homosexual people, anthropologists have a historic record of studying cultural views of communities, which includes studies of indigenous knowledge practices that exist amongst different families and cultures. They take ethnographic interest in collecting data from people who are defined as custodians of indigenous knowledge, hence this study focuses on the cultural views of iZingoma. The study asked iZingoma to give their cultural views on the question "*Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors"*?

iZingoma remain one of the sources of communication between living humans and non-living beings (the ancestors). Mothibe & Sibanda (2019) and; Semenya & Potgieter (2014), argue that in rural areas, many people prefer to go to traditional healers before consulting westernized healthcare professionals, hence traditional healers and iZingoma are custodians of indigenous knowledge. There are many reasons that may account for the heavy reliance on traditional healers and iZingoma. Consequently, the resulting affiliation with African spirituality, which is mostly in the rural areas (Mokgobi, 2014). Mokgobi (2016: 7) as cited in Lestoalo, Nel and Govender (2021) for consulting iZingoma is part of some, if not most, family practice in Africa to ascertain spirituality, indigenous knowledge (knowing and understanding ancestral lineage/ confirming one's identity and belonginess). Mothibe & Sibanda (2019) confirm the altar of Zulu families, especially those who believe in ancestors. iZingoma know the significance of burning incense (*impepho*), and even know who is eligible to burn incense (*impepho*), as they have guided many Zulu families in Africa. This qualitative study, which is undertaken within the scope of cultural anthropology, asks, "Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (*impepho*) to communicate with ancestors?" This question is pertinent because the South African democratic dispensation (of law) does not discriminate against homosexual people (the LGBTQI+ community), while some people harbour hatred against them.

The study conducted by Nyeck, Shepherd, Sehoole, Ngcobozi and Conron (2019), examined the effects of LGBT discrimination in South Africa. Data analysis revealed the population of people whose identity as homosexuals has grown to 634 000. Categories of this community include gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender individuals. The growth of community members of

homosexuals was also confirmed by the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) 16) report, which gives evidence that about 1.8% of their participants openly self-identified as members of the LGBT community. As (part of) a growing anthropology also living in the community where many people are found, the researcher has observed that in most families there are gay men who are heirs of the families, hence it is important to seek cultural views of iZingoma in relation to the question that the principal investigator is asking. It has also been observed that there are many gay men who have come out, who were culturally assumed to be heirs of their families and burn incense in the absence of their fathers. Asking the underlying research question also comes at a time where gays are not accepted in most families, and in most societies. A was found gap in the existing literature, as there is no trace of research that has paid attention to the issue of okushiswa kwempepho (incense burning) by a person to identifies with the homosexual community. AmaZulu (the Zulus) are generally known to be tied up in their spiritual realm, which is to communicate with their ancestors through the burning of impepho (incense), hence it was anthropologically relevant relent to ask if an individual falling in a gap in society in terms of gender, should be allowed to burn impepho.

The study was conducted based on the understanding that, as Matolino (2017:59) avers, "Same-sex practice, homosexual lifestyle, or being gay, either as an imbued sexual orientation or choice, is widely resisted on the African continent. The resistance is based on the premise that such sexual orientation, or the consequent sexual behavior, violate [*sic*] basic principles and beliefs of African reality". A man must prove his heterosexual masculinity to be seen as a "real man", hence homosexuality becomes a matter of ridicule and a symbol of "what not to be" as a male. Given this cultural system, there may be situations during which one must harbor negative attitudes toward male homosexuality, just to conform to dominant patriarchal and existing conceptualizations of masculinity (Ekvall, 2019). The patriarchal thinking about gay men is that their sexuality does not form part of what it is to be a real man. Therefore, gay individuals experience intolerance in African societies based on societal expectations of what a real man should look like and behave. Souza (2016) agrees that people, both in society and in families and households on the African continent, hold hatred and socially constructed perspectives of those who identify with homosexuality. Kahn-Fogel (2013:317) shares this view and states that African societies and cultures view homosexuality as cultural disobedience and as un-African behavior in terms of individuals identifying as homosexual. Kleinbooi (1995) cited in Rudwick (2010:115)

asserts that, in South Africa, black homosexual males have always been caught in what he refers to as "identity crossfire," during which they experience discrimination and hostility. Walton (2018) and Matolino (2017:59) agree that most African countries have openly legislated against homosexual rights and identities, as they believe that this sexual orientation is alien to being African, and hinders cultural growth. Msibi (2011) and Berco (2008) assert that such beliefs have created a social construction that has normalized heterosexuality as the only accepted sexuality in African societies. Those with this level of reasoning have also criticized the acceptance of other sexual orientations, as their proponents believe that other forms of sexuality violate the basic principles and beliefs of African society. Based on this rationale, men who engage in homosexual activity are victims of patriarchal oppression and are labelled as 'deviants' by a predominantly patriarchal African society. Homosexuality has become a source of cultural contestation that has disturbed families and households, as well as African society (Berco, 2008). Mkasi (2016:4) further asserts that in most patriarchal societies and households, gender roles are assigned, based on physical ability as well as people's naturalness, or their "heterogenous identity".

### 1.3 Problem Statement

This study examines family traditions and succession plans in rural communities, focusing on how they determine who is considered a legitimate heir, and who is excluded from inheriting. In anthropological discourse, families and households are often understood through the lens of patriarchal structures. Patriarchy plays a central role in shaping societal expectations, gender roles, and sexual norms. Within these patriarchal ideologies, straight or heterosexual men are often considered rightful heirs, and sexual and gender criteria dictate who is eligible or ineligible to inherit.

In many traditional African societies, succession plans recognize a "straight man" as the one responsible for preserving African spirituality, symbolized by practices such as burning incense (imphepho) to communicate with ancestors. This practice, associated with the concept of "abavela kuqala emndeni" (firstborn in the family) or "amadlozi" (ancestors), is traditionally reserved for men. Early anthropological scholars, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963), contributed to structural theory by analyzing how family and succession debates are influenced by patriarchy. Lévi-Strauss (1963) explored how patriarchy theorizes ideal family systems, placing "straight men" in positions of authority and excluding women from leadership roles, both within the family and society.

Similarly, Jack Goody (1959) contextualized the influence of patriarchy on kinship systems, highlighting how patriarchal structures shape inheritance, determining who can inherit and who is excluded. Max Gluckman (1955) further emphasized that patriarchy is deeply embedded in law, politics and gender roles, reinforcing male dominance in both familial and societal structures while marginalizing homosexuals.

Valfort (2017:21) argues that society generally recognizes "straight" men as the only people capable of communicating with ancestors. He asserts that the definition of a man in many cultures excludes gay men from performing social, economic and cultural rites. Langa (2012:1) also affirms that Zulu culture is socially constructed on a gendered basis, discriminating against homosexuals. In this context, Zulu men are regarded as the sole communicators with ancestral spirits, and effectively this excludes women and gay men from burning incense at the Umsamo (family altar). Dalacoura (2014) acknowledges that while South Africa has legalized homosexuality as a human right, societal rejection of homosexuals, particularly by their families, remains pervasive. This unresolved issue necessitates further research into the factors that continue to marginalize homosexual individuals.

Vincent and Howell (2014) argue that South Africa's approach to homosexuality is shaped by religion and cultural beliefs, which often categorize homosexuality as un-African, un-Godly and unnatural. Dlamini (2011:12) supports this view, pointing out that the visibility of homosexuality in African cultures can provoke hatred and homophobia. Despite legal progress, homosexuals in South Africa continue to face discrimination. The central question this study seeks to answer is embedded in the title: *"Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (imphepho) to communicate with the ancestors?"* This anthropological inquiry is especially relevant in contemporary times, when many societies still stigmatize homosexuals, particularly in the context of family inheritance. According to kinship laws and family structure politics, the first-born male in the family traditionally assumes the role of burning incense, when the head of the family passes away. The study's relevance lies in the growing recognition that sexual identities and preferences are fluid and complex, as people are increasingly living their lives authentically, no longer seeking validation.

In anthropology and sociology, gender and sexuality are seen as separate variables. Sexuality refers to one's sexual attraction, while gender pertains to identity, which is not confined to being male or female. The rise of debates around gender fluidity has prompted anthropologists to question where homosexuals fit within familial and societal structures, and what it takes for them to gain social acceptance. LGBTQIA+ activism has played a pivotal role in recognizing sexual fluidity and securing the rights of homosexual individuals, advocating for social inclusion and acceptance. The growing discourse on homophobia and transphobia, amplified by social media and technological advancements, has expanded the conversation on homosexuality and associated rights.

While studies on sexuality in the African context have been explored, the originality of this study lies in its exploration of the cultural views of *iZingoma* (also known as Sangomas) in the Ugu district of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *iZingoma* may be either male or female, and many believe that their sexuality has been shaped by their ancestral spirits. A common saying is, "I am a man, but I am gay because my spiritual ancestor is my grandmother," translated as *"ngiyindoda kepha ngingenwe ugogo."* Mkasi (2016:2) notes that it is not uncommon for male *iSangoma* to display behaviors traditionally associated with female *iSangoma* and vice versa. Both understand the importance of burning incense in their spiritual practice. Jellema (2007) highlights that burning incense connects individuals with the ancestors, a traditional and spiritual role often reserved for "straight" men. Ntshangase (2012) agrees that, within Nguni cultures, the powers to use *imphepho* are generally bestowed upon the head of the family and close male relatives.

This study focuses on understanding the cultural perceptions of *iZingoma* regarding the burning of *imphepho* by gay men who are first-born heirs in their families. The study will explore whether gay male heirs are denied or allowed to execute this role; additionally, the study will investigate the reasons behind the exclusion of those who are denied this right, and what makes the ritual less legitimate for gay men. Nadar (2009) asserts that researchers must explore solutions to societal and family problems, which is why this study examines the family-rooted cultural practice of incense burning and the role of gay men as heirs. Msibi (2011) is also amongst South African scholars asserting that emerging scholars should continue studying all the untruths that have been circulated about homosexuality in Africa. Jordaan (2011) postulated that there is an increasing

avoidance to conduct research on homosexuality in African studies, caused by heterosexual panic concerning the issue of homosexuality in Africa.

In anthropology, patriarchy remains a significant factor influencing societal behavior. From a patriarchal perspective, masculinity is often viewed as a defining characteristic of men, and homosexuality may be seen as a challenge to traditional gender roles and power dynamics. Such ideologies often position heterosexual men as the heads of families responsible for leadership and authority, including the duty to burn *imphepho*. In some cultures, gay men may be perceived as weak or effeminate and unable to fulfil traditional roles as leaders or protectors, leading to their exclusion from important family duties. This study investigates whether these gender stereotypes contribute to the continued discrimination and rejection of homosexuals within African communities.

The research additionally aims to explore whether patriarchal thinking hinders gay men from assuming roles such as burning incense in the family. It also aims to understand how these perceptions contribute to stigma and discrimination, reinforcing rigid gender binaries and presenting non-heterosexual identities as deviant or unnatural. Although South Africa is not universally patriarchal, attitudes toward homosexuality vary significantly across different cultural and social contexts. Additionally, many individuals and organizations are working to challenge patriarchal thinking and promote the acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in South African society.

### 1.4 Rationale for and significance of the study

Ntshangase (2012:12) states that Nguni families, or the Zulu people, associate themselves with their ancestors when they are happy, sad, or when any ritual is being performed. *Impepho* is the process of burning something special as a way of asking the ancestors to be with, and to guide them. The literature suggests that most Zulu people have avoided knowledge of issues associated with homosexuality due to the patriarchal system that they adhere to, which views homosexuality as either sinful or un-African (Dlamini, 2011; Muñoz Boudet et al., 2013). However, most of these studies acknowledge that more and more people are aware of different sexualities and that most of them want to express their sexuality without having to feel trapped in a body and behavior that

society has pre-constructed for them. This study therefore proposes seeking the wisdom of iZingoma as a basis for examining Zulu and Nguni traditions in this context.

This study is important because most Zulu families connect with their ancestors through the burning of *impepho*. Ugu district was identified as the research site because some gay Zulu men have come out and disclosed their homosexual status, even though they are family heirs and trusted to communicate with the ancestors in the absence of their fathers. The study focuses on Zulu families, not on other ethnicities that may also use *impepho* to communicate with their ancestors. During the study, the principal investigator hoped to learn more about the cultural and traditional intricacies of the Zulu people and believes that the findings will broaden the scope of cultural anthropology and the discourse on the anthropology of sexuality in the South African context. The significance of the proposed study will thus be that it will tap into authentic understandings of homosexual heirs and their cultural practices.

### 1.5 Gap and the originality of the study

According to the systematic search of literature that relates to the topic, particularly in cultural anthropology and in the anthropology of sexuality, there is an evident gap in the literature that focuses on cultural practices and homosexuality, and specifically, the practice of burning *impepho*. This study proposes to bridge this gap in the literature, as it will elicit the cultural views of iZingoma on the burning of incense by gay men who are also family heirs. The originality of the study lies in its conduct within cultural anthropology and its focus on the cultural views of iZingoma regarding the burning of incense by gay heirs of the family. The discussed originality contributes to the existing literature, which depicts that gay men are discriminated against because of their sexuality. The study will be conducted in Ugu district, which is a predominantly rural area where traditional Zulu cultural practices and beliefs prevail. Research findings of this study will provide a contextual understanding of homosexuality in the discourse of cultural practices and norms amongst AmaZulu households. Research findings will further challenge social constructs and misconceptions that will reduce the stigmatized identities of gay man as heirs, and further encourage a more inclusive view of sexual orientation and sexual identity as a natural and valid aspect of their persona.

The views of iZingoma on the burning of incense by gay heirs of families will bridge the gap in the literature and contribute to new knowledge about the ancestors, also known as spiritual entities, and their acceptance or rejection of homosexuality in Zulu families.

### 1.6 Anthropology and Sexuality

As introduced earlier, the anthropology of sexuality critically examines some of the most intimate and often overlooked aspects of human life. It situates sexual acts, desires, and relationships within specific historical and cultural contexts (Richard, Parker, and Murray, 2020). As a result, much anthropological research has focused on exploring sexual cultures and the social and cultural construction of sexual practices. This body of work has played a vital role in documenting sexual diversity and same-sex sexual relations across a variety of societies, including contemporary Western societies (Richard, Parker, and Murray, 2020). Emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, this research also addressed the cultural and social dimensions of significant practical issues, such as the HIV epidemic, reproductive health, new reproductive technologies, sex work, tourism, migration, same-sex marriage, and globalization. Since the mid-1990s, anthropologists have increasingly focused on the structural factors shaping sexuality in different social settings, as well as the political struggles surrounding sexuality and sexual rights (Lyons and Lyons, 2006).

As this area of research expanded, scholars studying sexuality began drawing more heavily on feminist theory, queer theory, history, and other social sciences. They have also highlighted how sexuality intersects with various hubs of power and identity. The study of sexual meanings and behaviors in diverse societies has often served as a lens through which Western values may be questioned and contrasted—a theme that has persisted in anthropological research from its early stages to the present (Lyons and Lyons, 2006). Anthropologists have worked to analyze and empirically assess cross-cultural data of sexual practices by comparing ethnographic reports across different societies. Early anthropological research was pivotal in documenting gender and sexual diversity, including institutionalized transgender roles and same-sex relations. This study seeks to build upon the groundwork laid by early anthropologists, recognizing that sexuality remains deeply shaped by cultural norms, religious beliefs and societal laws that often privilege heterosexuality over homosexuality.

### 1.7 The crux of gender inequality Africa

Gender (in)equality concerns both women and men and has a significant impact on their daily lives. Historically, gender equality policies have often been framed as a "women's issue," as women have been the driving force behind gender equality strategies and struggles. This framing has contributed to the perception that only women benefit from a more equal society (Khadka et al., 2014). However, men also benefit from gender equality, as they face gender-specific issues such as lower life expectancy, poor health, lower education levels and rigid gender norms. It is essential for both women and men to recognize the benefits of gender equality for themselves as individuals, and as members of their communities and societies. Furthermore, achieving gender equality requires the participation of both women and men (Khadka et al., 2014). Additionally, both men and women must be aware of the concept of intersectionality, particularly in the context of sexuality, where gender stereotypes in Africa often hinder the full recognition of homosexual people.

It is, therefore, crucial to engage more men in advocating for gender equality as a way to bring about change (Scambor et al., 2014). To achieve this, it is necessary to help men understand how gender equality is relevant to them. Men are often underrepresented in gender equality discussions, and they are less likely to participate in events and projects related to the issue. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) recognizes men as a specific target group in its efforts to raise awareness about their role in achieving a more gender-equal society (Scambor et al., 2014).

In comparison to other continents, African countries have been particularly resistant to accepting same-sex sexuality and relations (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Africa is home to the highest number of countries where homosexuality is illegal (Itaborahy, 2012), with South Africa being one notable exception. However, despite legal changes that promote equality for gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, South Africa still faces issues such as differential age-of-consent laws for heterosexual and same-sex relations, as well as violence against Black lesbians (Mkhize et al., 2010). Moreover, there is a significant gap between legal reforms and the lived realities of individuals. While the law generally does not discriminate based on sexual orientation, same-sex sexuality remains largely marginalized in South African society.

Religion plays a significant role in reinforcing the low social acceptance of homosexuality in Africa. While few institutionalized religions explicitly support same-sex sexual expressions, religion strongly influences the lives of many African individuals. African countries stand out in terms of their high levels of religious engagement, including the importance of religion, attendance at religious service and the presence of numerous religious organizations. Historical factors, such as colonial legacies and the need to assert independent national identities, contribute to a tendency to promote what are considered traditional "African values," which often reject same-sex sexuality.

## 1.8 Research Questions and Objectives

Existing literature on homosexuality points to an increasing rejection of gay men in many societies, driven by historical preconceptions and socially constructed gender norms that view homosexuality as sinful and un-African. These norms are deeply embedded in the African patriarchal system, which accepts only heterosexuality as a legitimate expression of "maleness" or of "being a man." One question this study seeks to address is whether gay men, who are entrusted with the role of burning impepho (incense) when their father has passed on, are considered worthy and acceptable for this emotionally charged ritual.

The literature indicates the intersection between homosexuality and the resumption of cultural and spiritual roles, including the burning of impepho at the family altar, where families connect with their ancestors. This study will be of anthropological importance as it explores two intersecting themes: the cultural and spiritual dimensions that either include or exclude homosexuality within patriarchal systems. The study's objectives and research questions are framed in a manner that invites readers to explore the complexities of inheritance and the cultural practices within the Zulu community, particularly in Ugu, where the study was conducted.

### 1.8.1 Primary objective

- To Determine whether a gay man can be the heir of the family and burn incense (*impepho*) to communicate with the ancestors.

**Secondary objectives:**

- To understand the indigenous knowledge that iZingoma possess regarding the homosexual phenomena.
- To explore the views and perceptions of iZingoma regarding Zulu gay men who are positioned as the heirs of their families, tasked with burning *impepho* to communicate with the ancestors once their fathers have passed on.
- To understand the views/perceptions of iZingoma on homosexuality in general and on gay male heirs, in particular.
- To learn if there are any corridors of indigenous knowledge that either discriminate against or approve of the burning of incense by gay men.
- To learn if being a homosexual male in a Zulu family implies that the gay man is accepted or rejected by the ancestors.

### 1.8.2. Primary question of the study

- Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (*impepho*) to communicate with the ancestors?

**Secondary questions:**

- What indigenous knowledge do iZingoma possess regarding the homosexual phenomenon?
- What are the views/perceptions of iZingoma on the burning of incense by gay Zulu men who are the heirs of the family?
- What are the views/perceptions of iZingoma on homosexuality in general and on gay male heirs in particular?
- Do the ancestors discriminate against homosexual men, or do they give them equal recognition as straight men?
- Does being a homosexual in a Zulu family imply that that a gay man is accepted or rejected by the ancestors?

## 1.9 Key concepts in the study

**Gender:** According to Holmes to (2007), gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time (Foster, 2016). Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. This is referred to as intersectionality. According to Stones (2018) gender interacts with, but is different from sex, which refers to the different biological and physiological characteristics of females, males and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs.

Gender and sex are related to, but different from gender identity. Gender identity refers to a person's deeply felt, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex at birth. The study potentially delves into the fluidity of gender within AmaZulu culture, where, historically, some individuals may have transcended rigid gender expectations. There are historical and contemporary instances in Southern African cultures, including among the AmaZulu, where people who do not fit conventional gender roles (such as the *abathakathi* or "sworn men" who might assume roles usually reserved for the opposite gender), are accepted in spiritual roles. This would complicate the binary understanding of gender and allow for a broader discussion on how non-normative gender identities might be integrated into traditional cultural and spiritual practices. In the context of the anthropological study, the concept of gender is central to understanding the ways in which identity both genders and shapes an individual's role in family and community structures sexually, particularly when it comes to traditional spiritual practices like those of the *iZingoma*. The study also questions how gender norms and expectations influence whether or not a gay man can be accepted as an heir to the family, or as a legitimate practitioner of ancestral communication, offering insights into the dynamic relationship between culture, identity and tradition in contemporary AmaZulu society.

**Gender stereotypes:** Stereotypes can be conceptualized as the descriptive aspects of gender roles, as these depict the attributes that an individual ascribes to a group of people (Eagly and Mladinic, 2013). Stereotyping is often seen as necessary, as it is a way of simplifying the overwhelming number of stimuli one constantly receives from the world (Ladegaard, 2018), constraining potentially infinite numbers of interpretations. Another line of inquiry extends the function of stereotypes from the interpretation to the rationalization and justification of social practices (Allport, 2015). Common to these interpretations is the view that the resulting representation is usually selective, distorted and often oversimplified. Stereotypes of men and women commonly reflect Bakan's (2017) distinction between two dimensions, often labeled agency or self-assertion and communion, or connection with others (Rudman and Glick, 2011). Men are generally thought to be agentic—that is, competent, assertive, independent, masterful and achievement oriented, while women are perceived as inferior to men in agentic qualities. Conversely, women are generally thought to be more communicative—that is, friendly, warm, unselfish, sociable, interdependent, emotionally expressive and relationship oriented—while men are perceived as inferior in communicative qualities.

The concept of gender stereotypes in this study's context would help to analyze whether a gay man could fulfill such roles and how his identity might challenge or reinforce cultural understandings of gender and spirituality. The concept of gender stereotypes might also be pivotal in examining how cultural views are evolving. The study potentially has a focus on how younger generations are challenging traditional gender roles, including the possibility of gay men taking on roles such as iZingoma or fulfilling ancestral duties, which could signify a shift in how gender and sexuality are understood in relation to spiritual authority. Gender stereotypes in this study would likely provide a lens through which to explore how cultural beliefs about gender, sexuality and spirituality intersect and how they shape the possibility of a gay man fulfilling roles within traditional spiritual practices in the Ugu district. These stereotypes help to define the boundaries of who is considered an "acceptable" heir or spiritual leader, and the study could provide insight into whether these boundaries are rigid or subject to change.

**Gender representation:** The gendered dimension of representation is evident regarding the actors; because the represented and the representatives by definition have a sex and a gender, representation is not immune to being structured by hierarchical relations between men and

women. However, “gendering representation” is not only concerned with the sex of the bodies, but also focuses on the “what” of representation and examines representatives' acts and claims using a gendered lens. Besides taking into account the sex of the actors involved and the gendered character of representation, “gendering representation” fundamentally questions the way this concept is conceived and formulates conditions for “good” – that is, truly representative – representation (Dovi 2007) and even for democracy as such n this volume). A key contribution of feminist scholars is the rejection of a clear-cut separation of the dimensions of representation, as well as of the hierarchy between them. In many African cultures, including the Zulu, the legitimacy of an heir is often tied to gender norms. The study likely examines whether being a gay man alters the perception of legitimacy in the context of family inheritance, specifically in relation to ancestral rites. It might explore whether a gay man can be seen as a valid heir, able to perform rituals like burning impepho, despite potential societal biases against non-conforming sexualities. Gender representation is crucial in understanding the complex cultural, spiritual, and familial dynamics at play in this study. It sheds light on how traditional Zulu views on gender roles, sexuality and spiritual practices intersect, and how these might be evolving in the face of changing social attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people. The study likely challenges conventional boundaries of gender and sexuality within a deeply rooted cultural context, inviting a broader discussion on identity, power, and tradition.

**LGBTQIA+** is a community that is predominantly known to represent a diverse group of sexual orientations including gender identities and relatable expressions. Each letter in the acronym represents a certain group of people, as indicated below:

**L: Lesbian-** these are women who are attracted to other women, irrespective of their culture or race.

**G: Gay-** these are men who are attracted to other men. They have no sexual affection towards women. They are mostly known as homosexuals or homosexual individuals. The issue of race and culture is not a deciding factor.

**B: Bisexual-** these are people who are attracted to both men and women. The issue of race and culture is not a deciding factor.

**T: Transgender-** is a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Q: Queer**- this is a broad term that is used to describe individuals who do not fit into the categories of traditional gender categories or sexual norms.

**I: Intersex**- is a person born with specific physical sexual characteristics, who does not fit in with the normative categories or definitions of male or female.

**A: Asexual-** this is a new addition. This group of people comprises individuals who experience little to no sexual attraction to others.

**+:** The plus sign or symbol represents the inclusion of other rising identities such as pansexual, gender-queer, the popularly known two-spirit people and many other identities (some are yet to emerge) as societies become more fluid. It can also represent allies, namely individuals who do not belong to the community because of their support of association e.g parents, friends etc.

**Gender equality** refers to the absence of discrimination based on a person's sex in the allocation of resources, benefits, or access to services (Sham, Man and Emery, 2024). It involves the concept that all human beings, both men and women, should be free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without being constrained by stereotypes, rigid gender roles or prejudices (Sham et al, 2024). Gender equality means that the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued, and supported equally. It does not require that women and men become identical, but rather that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities are not determined by whether they are born male or female (Smith, 2015). Inequality, discrimination and differential treatment based on sex can be structural, meaning that it is practiced by public or social institutions and reinforced by administrative rules and laws. This often involves the distribution of income, access to resources and participation in decision-making processes. The study likely reflects the tension between traditional views on gender roles and more progressive, egalitarian perspectives on gender and sexuality. As gender equality becomes increasingly recognized and valued in society, individuals within these communities may begin to question, or even reject, old cultural practices that exclude people based on gender or sexual orientation. In this way, gender equality serves both as a lens through which to understand changing cultural values, and as a force for

challenging traditional barriers that previously excluded certain individuals from ancestral and spiritual roles.

Gender equality plays a critical role in this anthropological study by providing a framework to interrogate and challenge traditional gender roles within the context of AmaZulu spirituality and ancestral practices. By exploring whether a gay man can fulfil the role of family heir and iZingoma, the study engages with broader questions about how cultural practices are evolving in response to changing views on gender and sexuality. It also examines whether these shifts align with, or challenge existing norms and hierarchies.

**Gender Roles**: Gender roles are upheld by ideologies (systems of belief) that justify the appropriateness of certain behaviors. For example, care tasks are often relegated to women in various contexts, whether these involve physical tasks such as cooking and cleaning or emotional labour (Sham et al, 2024). Women are considered the primary caregivers within families (a gender role), based on the belief that they are naturally more nurturing (an ideology). Because we assume that girls are more nurturing than boys, we give girls toys such as dolls and boys trucks. As they grow up and begin to embody these beliefs, developing divergent skills, we interpret these differences as natural, reinforcing the idea that men deserve privileges in family and work spheres. Furthermore, because care work is seen as natural and performed out of love (an ideology), it is often undervalued and not remunerated. This leads to women being segregated into care professions, often with lower pay as compared to men in comparable roles. This lower pay often leaves many women dependent on male breadwinners (Ibid). The ability of men as a group to be breadwinners (a gender role), competing for status, wealth, and wages, relies heavily on the often invisible and unpaid care-work and reproductive labour provided by women in the home (a gender role) out of love.

The study may also explore how gender non-conformity—including a man's sexual orientation and behavior—shapes his relationship with traditional Zulu spiritual practices. This could involve examining whether the broader community of iZingoma allows for diversity in gender expression and sexuality, or if these roles remain strictly binary and heteronormative. The study might investigate how the community's acceptance or rejection of a gay individual as a spiritual leader challenges or reinforces gender norms. It may also delve into how the subject's identity as both

gay and a spiritual leader (iZingoma) navigates the intersection of personal, sexual and cultural identity, with traditional Zulu gender roles. For instance, a gay man who becomes an iZingoma might challenge or transform cultural notions of gender and sexuality by reconciling these dual identities within the context of traditional Zulu healing and spiritual practices.

In this anthropological study, gender roles are central to understanding how cultural views of iZingoma in KwaZulu-Natal both support and challenge traditional beliefs about masculinity, sexuality and spiritual authority. The research will explore how cultural norms around gender shape the roles of spiritual leaders, particularly regarding the inclusion or exclusion of gay men in family and ancestral rituals. It might also examine how these roles are evolving in response to changing perceptions of sexuality and gender in contemporary Zulu society.

**Sex**: "Sex" refers to the physical differences between individuals who are male, female or intersex. A person's sex is typically assigned at birth, based on physiological characteristics, such as genitalia and chromosome composition (Johnson, 2016). This assigned sex is known as "natal sex." On the other hand, gender relates to how an individual identifies. Unlike natal sex, gender is not binary; instead, it is a broad spectrum (Johnson, 2016). A person may identify anywhere on this spectrum or entirely outside of it, which could include transgender, nonbinary or gender-neutral identities. There are many ways in which a person might define their gender.

The study may explore how cultural practices are evolving in response to changing understandings of sex and gender. There may be space within the culture for more fluid interpretations of sexual identity, suggesting that a gay man could be both an heir and a spiritual leader. In this context, the concept of sex would not be viewed solely as a fixed biological characteristic, but as part of a broader social and spiritual negotiation. A study such as this could also investigate how global movements for LGBTQ+ rights influence local Zulu cultural practices and beliefs about sex, family inheritance and spiritual practices. How are ideas about sex and sexual identity being reinterpreted in the context of traditional ancestral worship and iZingoma practices? This would involve looking at the tension between traditional cultural views and contemporary understandings of sexuality. Hence, the issue of anthropology in the context of culture and gender studies is broad.

In this study, sex serves as a lens through which cultural views on family, inheritance, gender roles and spiritual practices are examined. It helps to explore whether non-heteronormative sexual identities challenge, reinforce or alter the traditional structures governing iZingoma practices and ancestral communication.

**Family**: Structural definitions of family typically describe family members as those who share a place of residence or are related by blood or legal contracts. A commonly used definition by the Census Bureau is "a householder and one or more other persons living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption" (Census, 2018). This definition includes various family types, such as traditional families (breadwinner husband, homemaker wife, and their children), remarried families, dual-earner and single-parent families. It may also include arrangements such as a child in a divorced family who splits time between parents, or a legally married couple living separately, but maintaining a relationship. Another frequently used definition is "two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption" (Ooms and Preister, 2019), which broadens the scope to include people who may not live together but are connected by biological or legal ties. However, some might argue that even this more inclusive definition still excludes some relationships that many recognize as legitimate families.

In this anthropological study, the concept of family is crucial for understanding social roles, cultural practices and the possibility of spiritual authority. Family structures influence how inheritance, leadership and the performance of ancestral rituals are understood, particularly in relation to whether a gay man can assume these roles within his family. The study explores the interplay between tradition, sexuality and identity in a changing socio-cultural landscape. In many African cultures, including the Zulu culture, family lineage and inheritance are fundamental to identity and social structure. Traditionally, inheritance is often patrilineal, with male heirs (typically the eldest son or a close male relative) taking responsibility for upholding family customs, managing ancestral worship and preserving the family legacy. This study asks whether a gay man can fulfil this role as the heir and continue the practice of burning incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors, a role often associated with spiritual leadership.

### 1.10 Short summary of methodology and theoretical framework

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology, specifically a phenomenological design, which involved conducting in-depth interviews and analyzing data through thematic analysis. These methods were essential for exploring the anthropological questions at the heart of the inquiry. The theoretical framework combines Ritual Theory, Sexuality Theory and Social Constructivism. The inclusion of these three theories was driven by the study's focus on the cultural practice of whether a gay man can burn incense to communicate with ancestors. The integration of these theories enables a nuanced analysis, exploring the complex relationships between culture, sexuality and social constructs, thus deepening the overall understanding of the research topic.

### 1.11 Thesis Structure of the Dissertation

This study is be divided into seven chapters:

- **Chapter1:Introduction**

  This chapter provides the context and background of the research, presenting the rationale for the study, highlighting its relevance and clarifying the study's broad aim, objectives and research questions.

- **Chapter2:LiteratureReview**

  This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature that is relevant to the study. It critically assesses existing research on topics such as ancestral communication, spirituality, gender roles and homosexuality within the context of Zulu culture and African traditional practices.

- **Chapter3:TheoreticalFramework**

  This chapter outlines and discusses the theoretical perspectives guiding this study, namely Ritual Theory, Social Constructivist and Indigenous Theory. It explains how these theories provide the lens through which the research questions were examined and analyzed.

- **Chapter 4: Research Designed and Methodology**

This chapter is a discussion of the research design, methodology and methods used in the study. It will provide a detailed explanation of the qualitative research approach, including phenomenological research design, in-depth interviews and thematic analysis.

- **Chapter 5: Demographic of iZingoma**

  This discusses the demographic of iZingoma, providing a reference to the number of years practising as iZingoma and also highlights the significance of their dress-code and how one can see whether a person is a qualified iSangoma or not.

- **Chapter 6: Perception of iZingoma on Burning Incense**

  This chapter focuses on the views and perceptions of iZingoma regarding the practice of burning incense (impepho) and its significance in ancestral communication. It also explores the spiritual and cultural roles of iZingoma in relation to gender and sexual orientation.

- **Chapter 7: The Role of the Heir in Burning Incense**

  This chapter examines the criteria for being an heir within Zulu culture and family structures, specifically in relation to the practice of burning incense (impepho) to communicate with ancestors. It explores whether a gay man can fulfil this role and the associated cultural and spiritual implications.

- **Chapter 8: Conclusion, Recommendation and Limitations**

  This chapter summarizes the key findings of the research, discussing the limitations of the study, and offer recommendations for future research. It also provides a final conclusion, reflecting on the broader implications of the findings for understanding the intersection of sexuality, spirituality and cultural practices.

## 1.12 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter has highlighted the continued rejection of homosexual individuals in many African societies, particularly in communities that strongly uphold traditional norms, such as the burning of incense (impepho). It has critically examined the fact that, despite the growing international recognition of LGBTQIA+ rights, homosexual individuals in Africa continue to face marginalization and discrimination. This is largely due to deeply ingrained cultural and social attitudes that are considered integral to rites of passage in many African societies and families.

Chapter Two will explore key debates in the existing research that build upon the discussions introduced in this chapter, while Chapter Three will engage critically with the theoretical frameworks that guide the study. The central question, "Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors?" will be unpacked in Chapter Five of this thesis.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

The chapter is focused on reflecting on the gendered dimensions linking the culture of burning incense by homosexuals within the African context. Subharajit (2014) and the OUT (2016) agree that homosexual people face tremendous obstacles when they grow up in a society where heterosexuality is typically favoured as the only acceptable sexual orientation, and where it is considered aberrant and religiously and culturally sinful. This chapter study acknowledges the dearth of literature that focuses on gay men and their role as heirs in traditional Zulu families, and will conceptualize concepts that are socially constructed and used to shape one's identity and cultural beliefs. It will reflect on the importance of burning incense as a way of communicating with ancestors.

## 2.2 Contextualizing Families structures in anthropology

In the anthropological discourse, families are studied from the context of an institution that socializes one's identities and introduces one in a social structure or organization that one gets to identify with. It is within the family that gendered roles and social constructs are assigned to family members. It is also within the context of a family that one's rite of passage is confirmed and attributed as correct or not correct. Theorists in anthropology, focusing on familial structures and dynamics have argued that families and households are guided by a set of rules and norms that shape or socialize how each family member behaves and also guides on the roles and responsibilities that are to be carried over (Kuzwayo, 2023). Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown are classified as fathers of theoretical frameworks that have postulated ideals about what broadly informs the functionality of families. In anthropological reasoning, families and households are basic units where social roles are ordered, defined and allocated. Their emphasis is that the formation of families in both African and Western families is guided by a structure of kinship through which descent lineages are traced. In many instances, these family structures are created to ensure the expansion of family roots and branches, which may also include how social interactions happen, and how roles and responsibilities are assigned or even inherited. It is within the parameters of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's reasoning that anthropologists have come to

understand that the overall functioning of families and households also relate to broader cultural, social and economic systems which shape family members (Kuzwayo, 2023).

Continuing the above theoretical contributions Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict expand the discussion by postulating cultural relativism as a critical lens of understanding, intersecting pillars of family structures which include culture, kingship and indigenous systems that shape the identity of the entire clan. Their extended argument is that, families in Africa and Western countries are not shaped by similar structures. African families stem from a family tree that is wider than that of Western countries. While family structures may be the same, the social construction of roles and responsibilities remains complex. What remains common is that the stem from consanguinity as they are related by blood or sharing a blood line, by affinity, because of binary in-laws. Other families are related collaterally, tracing their identities from multiple branches of their linearity. Other families are descent groups (Kuzwayo, 2023). They are related because of patrilineal or matrilineal relations and bilateral descent bonds, which can then affect inheritance, authority and residence patterns. Within the context of families, leadership is an important platform for decision making. The context of leadership falls within the scope of family hierarchy and structure.

From the late 1800s to about 1930, leadership theories emphasized control and centralization of power. The ‘‘Great Man’’ theory, which suggests that leaders are born and not made, supported the existence of some mysterious qualities vested in select individuals and frequently passed between generations. This model faded from popularity in the 1930s and 1940s as ‘‘trait’’ theories appeared that attempted to identify specific traits, qualifying an individual for leadership. Stogdill identified six trait groupings associated with leadership, including capacity, achievement, responsibility, participation, status and situation, but concluded that these traits did not sufficiently explain leadership: ‘‘A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits.’’. The late 1940s brought more psychoanalytical theories that explored why individuals are motivated to lead, or to follow a particular leader, with an increased focus on the role of groups and organizations. Investigators in the 1960s emphasized how people are influenced toward shared goals (Zhao, 2023).

‘‘Exchange theories’’ looked at understanding the social exchanges between individuals and the group, including rewards, status and esteem. Situational leadership theory proposed that the social situation and subordinates’ characteristics influence leader characteristics, necessary to be

successful. Leadership and family structure in China are deeply intertwined, shaped by traditional values and contemporary shifts (Zhao, 2023).

Historically, Chinese leadership has been influenced by Confucian ideals, which emphasize hierarchical relationships, filial piety and respect for authority. This Confucian framework extends to family structures, where elder family members hold significant authority, and children are expected to respect and obey them. In the modern era, while some of these traditional roles persist, rapid urbanization and economic growth have led to evolving family dynamics. The one-child policy (1979-2015) also left a lasting impact, creating smaller family units and shifting caregiving responsibilities. Contemporary Chinese leadership, particularly under President Xi Jinping, continues to emphasize the importance of unity, social stability and respect for authority, mirroring traditional family values in its governance style (Zhao, 2023).

In Ivory Coast, leadership and family structure are deeply influenced by traditional values, social norms and the broader cultural context. Leadership, particularly in rural areas, is often associated with patriarchal systems, where the eldest male typically holds authority and serves as the head of the family or community. However, in urban settings, there has been a shift towards more democratic and egalitarian structures, particularly in regard to gender roles and decision-making (Zhao, 2023). The family structure remains largely extended, with multiple generations often living together or in close proximity, supporting one another economically and socially. The role of women, while traditionally more subservient in rural settings, has become increasingly prominent in urban environments, with more women gaining access to education and employment. According to recent studies, these evolving dynamics reflect the ongoing transformation of Ivorian society, where traditional norms and modern influences are continuously shaping the cultural landscape (Zhao, 2023).

In South Africa, leadership and family structure are deeply intertwined with both traditional and modern influences. Traditional African family structures are often extended, and here leadership is provided not just by parents but also by elders, who are revered for their wisdom and guidance. The role of the patriarch or matriarch is central in these communities, often guiding decision-making within the household and the larger extended family. However, due to urbanization and the impact of Western ideals, these structures have evolved, with nuclear families becoming more

common, and gender roles within the family becoming less rigid (Kuzwayo, 2023). Leadership within the family is also shaped by shifts in gender dynamics, as women increasingly take on leadership roles both within households and in the broader socio-political sphere (Mokgoro, 2022). These changes reflect a dynamic tension between traditional values and the demands of modernity in South African society.

### 2.3 Cultural Tradition and family

Edward Evans-Pritchard and Claude Levi-Strauss as cited in (Cohen, 2022) leverage the foundations of cultural tradition and family. They both assert that culture creates a belief system mindset which moves along learning and socialization. The learning part involves observing certain rituals and family processes that shape the nature of belonging whereas the socialization part takes place between home, school and church. The process of socialization takes shape as children are taught how to behave, act and engage within the social sphere. Therefore, culture is an important concept that is acknowledged universally (Cohen, 2022), and necessary. To explore, for this study, its phenomenal relevance varies from society to society. What is acceptable in one society may likely be an abomination in the other. This view derives from the fact that culture is an all-embracing concept as far as man is concerned (Cohen, 2022). It encompasses every bit of man's life and experience. This is perhaps why the concept has attracted various definitions from different scholars, but these definitions revolve round a similar meaning. For our purpose here, the most relevant definitions stem from Tylor (1958) and Malinowski (1931). Pham (2023) explicates culture as a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Pham, 2023). From Malinowski's perspective, culture is a functioning, active, efficient, well-organized unity, which must be analyzed into component institutions in relation to one another, and in relation to the needs of human organisms and the environment, man-made as well as natural.

Culture embraces religious beliefs, languages, dresses, styles of living, political organization and all other aspects of life (Amalukwue and Isidienu, 2023). In the context of this study, culture is used as the totality of the way of life of African people, including their tangible and intangible products, habits, customs, thoughts as well as the arts, literature, theatre, health, drama and education (Amalukwue and Isidienu, 2023). Besides, the following are the characteristics of the

concept of culture under discussion. Culture is both stable and dynamic, explicit and implicit, shared and learned, ideal and manifest, covert and overt, organic and supra-organic, corruptible and reforming. From a practical perspective, an African person inherits a cultural heritage from the preceding generation which they use, add to and pass on to the succeeding ones (Amalukwue and Isidienu, 2023).

Additionally, to break down the meaning, the term 'values' refers to the attitude, beliefs, behaviours and actions that are noted as acceptable standards of behaviour, which each society expects from members (Ade-Ali, 2023). Although, values differ from person to person and from one society to another, because social groups or human societies have various beliefs, attitudes and standards that form their value system. In view of this development, Falade et. al., (2009) explicated the term value as a coherent set of attitude, behaviour and action adopted and, or evolved by a person, organization or society as a standard to guide its behaviour and preferences in all situations (Falade, Akinde, & Adejubee., 2009: 482). The concept is hereby used and utilized as a coherent set of an African attitude, behaviour and action adopted and/or evolved by an African community as a standard to guide their behaviours and preferences. Also, the word value is used as an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct of African existence is socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct.

The interpretive exposition and presentation of values generated by traditional African societies covers many aspects of the African cultural life (Mwale, Keitumetse and Mwale, 2022). Although, it is important to note that talking about African cultural values does not imply by any means there are no cultural disvalues or negative features of African cultures. There are, of course many (Mwale, Keitumetse and Mwale, 2022) because some cultural beliefs, practices and institutions that are regarded as cultural values may be regarded as cultural disvalues by others, or even some aspects of what one regards as cultural values may require some refinement (Mwale, Keitumetse and Mwale, 2022). Nevertheless, however, traditions need to be evaluated. The main reason for focusing on cultural values here is that some of these cultural values require appropriate and necessary amendment and refinement to be relevant to African modernity (Mwale, Keitumetse and Mwale, 2022). Michell Rosaldo and Eleanor Leacock assert that family roles particularly gendered roles are socially constructed and tied to broader systems of power and patriarchy (Lugo, 2008).

Michel Foucault and Judith Butler who are both post-structuralist theorists, emphasise that families are grounded on social constructed foundations which are gender and view "sexuality". The social approval of one's "sexuality" is based on human sexual behavior, attraction, identity and orientation (Tamas, 2004). This is where the notion of approved heterosexual norms are postulated, and where homosexuality is categorized as a taboo, tainting the lineage identity, instead of it being understood as ones preferred sexual orientation. The latter encompasses intersecting factors which are biological, emotional, social and culturally embedded, influencing and shaping how an individual as a family member or a member of a social group experiences, expresses, understands and explains his or her sexual relations (Butler, 1990). Sexuality and sexual orientation in anthropology encompasses a preferred sexual attraction, gender identity and aspirations, or the feeling of intimacy.

### 2.4 Traditional Roles and Gender Norms in Family Inheritance

In traditional Zulu culture, family inheritance follows patriarchal and heteronormative patterns, with the eldest male child generally inheriting the role of family head and, by extension, taking responsibility for performing ancestral rituals. Ancestral rites are fundamental in maintaining a spiritual connection with the ancestors, and a male heir is expected to conduct these rituals, which may include the offering of incense (impepho), among other responsibilities (Magubane, 2020).
Inheritance, in the context of South African families, has often been defined by strict gender roles, with men being the primary figures of authority. Gender roles within Zulu culture are intricately tied to the practice of ancestor worship, where the physical and spiritual lineage is passed through the male line. This creates a gendered hierarchy where the male heir is seen as the carrier of familial and spiritual legacy (Simango, 2019).

However, with the evolving views on gender and sexual identity in post-apartheid South Africa, these traditional roles are being questioned. According to sociologist Nombuso Mkhize (2021), contemporary changes in family structures and gender identities are challenging traditional norms. These changes are especially relevant in the context of LGBTQ+ individuals who face the tension between maintaining familial roles and expressing their sexual identity. In the Ugu District, views on family inheritance and spiritual leadership may reflect these tensions. While some community members argue that a gay man can be the heir, others emphasize the importance of adhering to

traditional gender expectations. This theme explores how family inheritance and traditional spiritual roles are perceived, and how these perceptions may shift in light of evolving gender identities.

iZingoma, as spiritual leaders and healers, play a crucial role in the interpretation and practice of ancestral worship in Zulu culture. Their authority stems from their spiritual connection with the ancestors, and their ability to mediate between the living and the dead. In the context of the Ugu District, iZingoma are often seen as the gatekeepers of traditional knowledge and practices (Zuma, Wight, Rochat and Moshabela, 2016)). This theme examines the role of iZingoma in ancestral rituals, focusing on their views on who can assume the role of the family heir and who has the spiritual authority to perform ancestral rites, such as burning impepho.

The act of burning impepho is central to many Zulu rituals, as it is believed to facilitate communication with the ancestors. The incense is seen as a medium through which the living can send messages to the spirits of deceased relatives, and seek their guidance or blessings (van der Zeijst, Veling, Makhathini, Susser, Burns, Hoek, and Susser, 2021). The person who burns impepho is believed to take on a special responsibility in maintaining spiritual balance within the family and the community. For some iZingoma, the belief that only men can fulfil the role of spiritual leaders is entrenched in tradition. This belief may be linked to a broader societal understanding of masculinity, which positions men as the custodians of spiritual and familial authority. However, there is a growing divergence in how iZingoma view the role of LGBTQ+ individuals in performing these rituals. Some iZingoma may argue that sexual identity does not affect one's ability to communicate with the ancestors, while others may see homosexuality as a disruption of spiritual purity, making it incompatible with traditional roles (Dube, Sthoko and Hayes, 2011).

In Ugu District, as in many rural areas, iZangoma authority can be decisive in determining whether a gay man is seen as capable of assuming the role of family heir and performing ancestral rites. This theme explores how iZingoma reconcile spiritual tradition with evolving views on sexuality and identity, and whether they view these roles as flexible or fixed. The clash between traditional beliefs and modern perceptions of sexuality is particularly evident when discussing the potential

for a gay man to serve as the heir and engage in ancestral rites. In post-apartheid South Africa, there has been a significant shift towards recognizing LGBTQ+ rights and the legitimacy of diverse sexual identities. However, traditional spiritual practices, particularly in rural areas like the Ugu District, may be slower to adapt to these changes (Mkhize, 2020). The intersection of sexuality and identity within the framework of Zulu traditions raises critical questions. Can a gay man, whose identity is outside the traditional heteronormative framework, be accepted as an heir and perform rituals such as burning impepho? Scholars like Ntombela (2022) have suggested that traditional healers in South Africa, including iZingoma, may need to reconsider their understanding of gender and sexuality in light of evolving social dynamics. However, resistance to such changes remains strong in some parts of rural South Africa, where ancestral beliefs are closely tied to notions of gender and family roles (Sithole, 2019).

This theme delves into how modern understandings of sexuality challenge and reshape traditional belief systems. It considers the tensions between respecting cultural heritage and acknowledging individual identity, particularly within the LGBTQ+ community. By focusing on personal narratives and community viewpoints, this theme also explores the lived experiences of gay men in rural KwaZulu-Natal, and their struggle to navigate cultural expectations and spiritual practices.

### 2.5 The Role of Families, Religion, and Ancestral Beliefs in Shaping "Acceptable" Sexual Norms.

In anthropology, scholars such as Schimel and Gresham (2020) argue that one's sexuality is either approved or disapproved of by families and religion. These institutions are key in shaping one's identity and establishing norms for acceptable sexualities. Any form of sexuality that deviates from these norms is often viewed as taboo and against ancestral approval. According to this argument, the preferred sexuality is linked to the belief that individuals are living the same life that their ancestors once lived, thus continuing their legacy. This is why heterosexuality is generally accepted, while homosexuality is often viewed as demonic and disrespectful to ancestors.

Religion plays a central role in this perspective, as it is believed to represent the power of "God," whose guidance, expressed through sacred texts, regulates and judges sexuality. In many African communities, it is difficult to separate "God," as the ultimate authority, from the ancestors, who

are believed to reflect God's will. When people die, they are thought to ascend to God, the Creator. This belief reinforces the idea that heterosexuality, as exemplified by the relationship between "Adam and Eve," is divinely ordained. Based on this view, male figures represent forefathers and are seen as channels through which the wisdom of God and ancestors guide the community (Schimel and Gresham, 2020).

On the other hand, "Eve" is symbolized as the female counterpart, embodying a woman with all the biological features of a female. Anyone who deviates from this norm and attempts to mimic "Eve" in ways that contradict biological and societal expectations, is considered demonic and in need of deliverance, or is ostracized by both family and ancestors. This belief forms the foundation for the disapproval of homosexuality in these communities (Schimel and Gresham, 2020).

As stated by Greer (2023), there is no community or nation where religion has not formed the foundation of life. Religion has, without exception, served as the basis of life for every community or nation. In Africa, there has always been a deep sense of belonging to God and the foundational belief that this world is God's creation, and that all the affairs of the world are under His unitary control. Greer (ibid) further asserts that African belief holds society to be an ordinance of God, with every institution within society being fundamentally religious. African communities uphold various moral and societal values to regulate interpersonal relationships and sustain the community as a whole. These values, which serve as standards or norms, are designed to ensure social cohesion and the smooth functioning of the community. Such norms help prevent rebellion and protect the welfare of society (Greer, 2023). In African culture, specific values such as hospitality, chastity before marriage, truthfulness, respect for elders, covenant-keeping, hard work and a good character, guide individual behavior. Proverbs and maxims are also used in African communities to instil these social and moral values, regulating interpersonal relationships (Greer, 2023).

In India, cultural traditions and the concept of family hold significant importance, deeply influencing social values and behaviors. Family is considered the fundamental unit of society, often extended beyond the nuclear structure to include grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins, with an emphasis on intergenerational living and mutual support. This collective family system is closely tied to cultural practices such as joint family structures, where decisions are made collectively, and elders hold a respected position in family matters. In addition, Srinivasan (2020)

expands those familial relationships are governed by values like respect, responsibility and the importance of maintaining honor, which are ingrained through centuries of tradition These cultural norms also influence daily life, from religious practices and festivals to major life decisions such as marriage and career choices, reinforcing the central role of the family in shaping individual identity and social harmony (Srinivasan, 2020).

In Nigeria, cultural traditions and family structures play a vital role in shaping individual identities and community relationships. Family is considered the cornerstone of Nigerian society, where extended family networks provide emotional, financial and social support (Akinyemi, 2020). The traditional Nigerian family is often hierarchical, with elders playing an authoritative role in decision-making and ensuring the continuity of cultural practices across generations. The significance of familial bonds is also reflected in various cultural ceremonies, such as weddings and naming ceremonies, which are deeply rooted in indigenous customs (Akinyemi, 2020). These traditions foster a sense of belonging, collective responsibility and the preservation of values, reinforcing the importance of family in maintaining the social fabric of Nigerian communities.

In South Africa, cultural traditions and family structures play a significant role in shaping individual and collective identities. The extended family is central to many South African communities, particularly among Black South Africans, where kinship ties often extend beyond the nuclear family to include cousins, aunts, uncles and even distant relatives (Mokoena & Mashigo, 2022). These familial relationships are grounded in a deep sense of communalism, where family members support each other emotionally, financially and socially. Cultural rituals, such as lobola (the practice of paying a bride price) and traditional rites of passage, further strengthen familial bonds and reinforce cultural values (Mkhize, 2021). Moreover, South African family life is often intertwined with cultural heritage, where storytelling, music and dance serve not only as a means of preserving history, but also as mediums for educating younger generations about their cultural responsibilities and family roles (Mokoena & Mashigo, 2022). This communal and intergenerational approach to family life illustrates the vital link between cultural tradition and family dynamics in the country.

## 2.6 IZingoma and Their Fluid Gender Identities

Sexuality is often expressed through various identities, including those within the LGBTIQ+ community, although some individuals may not adopt these labels, despite engaging in same-sex relationships (Stouwe, 2019: 123). This phenomenon is also evident among iZingoma, where individuals enter same-sex relationships for various reasons, not all of which are connected to ancestral influence. Within iZingoma practices, spiritual purity is highly valued, and practitioners are expected to refrain from sexual activity during rituals, as sexual involvement is believed to interfere with their spiritual responsibilities. Historically, iZingoma were often virgins, as the community regarded purity as essential for those chosen to perform rituals and ceremonies. The belief was that maintaining spiritual purity was crucial for effective communication with the ancestors, thus ensuring the success of spiritual rituals (Nkabinde, 2009: 110).

Mnyadi (2020) further explores the idea that an iSangoma's gender identity can be influenced by the ancestral spirits inhabiting their body, a practice known as *ukungenwa idlozi*. When a male iSangoma is possessed by a female ancestor, they may take on feminine traits such as altered body language, dress and voice. Likewise, when a female iSangoma is inhabited by a male spirit, similar changes are observed. This suggests that the ancestors themselves may adopt opposite-gender identities, indicating that there is no inherent discrimination against homosexual individuals within the ancestral belief system. Wieringa and Blackwood (1999:28), as cited by Morgan and Reid (2003:5), describe cases where women possessed by male spirits rejected traditional marriages with men, and instead sought to marry other women. Although some may view these beliefs as outdated, they highlight how ancestral traditions may influence gender and sexual norms. A contemporary example involves a woman who used this belief to avoid a traditional marriage by persuading a healer to declare that she was possessed by a male spirit, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of these traditions.

This study recognizes the cultural perspectives within iZingoma practices, particularly their understanding of gender fluidity and the significance of rituals like incense burning (*impepho*), in maintaining a connection with the spiritual realm. *Impepho*, as defined by Ntuli (2010, cited in Ntshangase, 2012:1), is an African herbal medicine known for its power to link individuals with their ancestors. Typically placed on burning coals, the smoke of *impepho* is believed to carry

messages to the ancestors. iZingoma, as traditional healers, possess extensive knowledge of African herbs and plants, using them not only for medicinal purposes, but also to perform rituals that bridge the living and the spiritual worlds. In addition to their healing role, iZingoma serve as spiritual guides, counsellors and educators, contributing significantly to both the physical and emotional well-being of their communities.

According to Makgobi (2014), the act of burning *impepho* is a sacred practice in many African communities. It is not performed casually, but only by those who have earned the respect and purity required by the elders of the family. This purity is confirmed through adherence to rituals, celibacy during specific spiritual periods, and living in accordance with the community's moral codes. *Impepho* is burned during rituals and meant to appease the ancestors or request blessings, and the act is treated with great reverence, as it is believed to connect the physical world with the spiritual realm.

Makgobi (2014) further explains that eligibility to burn *impepho* varies across communities, but male elders—especially those who are married and seen as upholding family purity—are typically entrusted with this responsibility. These men are believed to communicate directly with the ancestors and serve as a "mouthpiece" between the living and the departed. Their role includes performing rituals such as slaughtering goats for the family and offering *impepho*, considered as a special prayer to invite the presence of ancestors and seek their approval and blessings (Ntshangase, 2012).

However, Mnyadi (2020) argues that in some African traditions, women possessed by male ancestral spirits are also entrusted with the same responsibilities as male heirs. These women are believed to have been chosen by the ancestors to deliver their messages, which challenges the notion that gender is a barrier to spiritual leadership. This perspective suggests that the ancestors' criteria for selecting custodians are based not on gender, but on an individual's ability to effectively communicate ancestral messages, follow instructions and perform rituals without deviation.

### 2.7 African Spirituality

African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on, and inform every facet of human life, and therefore African religion and cultures cannot be separated from the

everyday or mundane (Chiorazzi, 2015). Chiorazzi (2015: 3) further argues that African spirituality is truly holistic. For example, sickness in the indigenous African worldview is not only an imbalance of the body, but also an imbalance in one's social life, which can be linked to a breakdown in one's kinship and family relations, or even to one's relationship with one's ancestors. The African spirituality is ingrained in the notion of the spirit of ubuntu, which is deeply ingrained as an ontology in the African psyche. It is a lived philosophy that is made to manifest through stories, wisdoms, behaviours and beliefs (Spiller and Wolfgramm 2016: 139). They also argue that indigenous spiritualities embrace the past in a mode of active "remembering the community into being," where ancestral knowledge is a highly prized form of knowledge and an essential medium by which kinship, political, economic and social ties are cemented and maintained. African spirituality can also be rooted in ancestors, irrespective of being dead or alive, and is the major part of every society.

The ancestor worship is a religious form of devotion which calls attention to the influence of departed relatives, on the living (Kasi and Matthew, 2019: 1). Theorists also suggest that ancestral worship can also emphasise the supernatural, which may consist of ghosts and spirits. For others it may be a belief in the impersonal power which pervades everything in this world, while for others the supernatural may be manifested through a pantheon of anthropomorphic Gods and Goddesses, or through a simple God. Ancestral worship remains an important part of Zulu people and all those cultures who believe in it. Kasi and Metthew (2019: 2) examined the following systematic analysis of the ancestral worship, which are: a way of showing love and respect to the departed relatives as they are treated as mentors in many places. (b) performed out of fear: people believe that if the ancestors are not treated well, they may take revenge from the living by harming them and their kids. (c) fear of society and social criticism compel people to offer worship to their ancestors. (d) if worship is not properly offered to the ancestors, their souls and spirits remain searching a place to reside in-between heaven and hell. (e) prayers to ancestors are offered, asking for good crops, fertility, good fortune, success, etc. (f) after death, ancestors share the lands with God, so worshipping ancestors is next to worshipping God, as they believe that ancestors help them to transmit their message to God. (g) people communicate with ancestors in order to foretell their future, gaining advices on a variety of dealings in their life. (h) after death ancestors are considered as guardian angels for the family. (i)people also offer prayers, asking ancestors to

forgive them for their wrong deeds. (j) worshipping the ancestors helps in letting their souls free from this living world (Kasi and Metthew, 2019: 2).

In the context of this study, the burning of incense is one of the ways in which Zulu people connect with ancestors to ensure that the above factors are well respected, therefore the question of whether a gay men can be the heir of the family and can burn incense to communicate with ancestors is relevant. as through the perception and views of iZingoma the issue of whether there is any hinderance that prevents gay heirs to perform this ritual, is assessed.

Furthermore; African spirituality can also delve into phenomena like the sacredness of African spirituality; usually when rituals are performed it involves the slaughtering of animals. which according to Kasi and Matthew (2019: 3), can be as a result of (a) sacrificing animals and birds like hens, sheep, goats, etc. as a part of remembrance (b) offering flowers and sweets to priests and placing it in front of their family God (c) calling relatives for the feasts (d) putting candles and incense sticks in front of their photographs (e) performing charity (f) donating money and other useful things to the needy (g) visiting the cemetery or places where the ancestors took their last breath, which in Zulu families is often call their last house (*indlu yokugcina*) )Kasi and Matthew, 2019).

The holistic view of African spirituality and the belief in Divination and Ritual, are the tools used to address imbalances and to maintain ideal states of being. On the basis of cyclical existence, Africans believe in reincarnation, but the African idea is not based on a written text; it is based on the belief that human beings live in a cycle, and that things go around and come around. African reincarnation is based on the religion of ancient Egypt, and it is believed that the priests said that they would come back millions and millions of times (Asante & Mazama, 2009), as cited in Marumo & Chakale (2018: 11698). Moreover; Africans believe that all things in creation have the quintessential essence (spirit) of the creator contained within it, whether animate or inanimate, which is an essence within a human vessel given to humans by the supreme being. This refers to an aforementioned notion of the interconnectedness of things, and a belief that a human body is just a vessel that holds the spirit and consciousness of the creator. Adofo (2016), as cited in Marumo and Chakale (2018: 11698), further adds that our ultimate aim for our individualised consciousness is to reunite with (our) source, and this is achieved by living an exemplary life that

affords one the status of an ancestor upon death; the latter implies that Zulu people maintain their divination through different rituals, such as the burning of incense as a means to connect with their divine being (amadlozi).

### 2.8 Importance of Ancestral Beliefs

In African oral cultures, myths play a significant role in embodying philosophical reflections, expressing values and defining moral standards. Unlike Western mythology, African myths are not presented as singular narratives or part of an established corpus. Instead, they are woven into, and transmitted through ritual practices (Mitravinda and Pavithra, 2020). African mythology often depicts the cosmos in anthropomorphic terms, suggesting that the human body is a microcosm, incorporating the same primordial elements and forces that shape the universe. Twinship, for example, is a prominent theme in many West African myth and ritual, reflecting the belief that the human body mirrors the cosmic body (Viney, 2021). Among the Dogon, Bambara, and Malinke peoples of Mali, the primordial beings are twins, representing an ideal that all individuals share. For example, after birth, the placenta, believed to hold one's destiny and soul, is buried in the family compound and watered during the child's first week of life (Viney, 2021). Among the Asante of Ghana, twins hold sacred status, being seen as living shrines and symbols of abundant fertility. Conversely, for the Ndembu of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), twins represent an excess of fertility, a condition more common among animals than humans, leading to rituals that protect the community from this perceived anomaly (Pillay, 2022).

African religions encompass a vast range of beliefs and practices that vary widely across the continent. It is crucial to avoid overgeneralizing these diverse traditions, as Africa's numerous cultures, languages and histories result in distinct religious practices. However, some generalizations can be made about subregional beliefs that share certain core features, often shaped by long-standing cultural exchanges, ranging from trade to conquest (Ross and Pilloud, 2021). Despite the influence of external religions such as Christianity and Islam, African indigenous religions maintain their own distinct character, with each ethnic group possessing unique customs and spiritual frameworks (Grillo, Van Klinken and Ndzovu, 2019).

In general, African religions hold that there is one creator God, the originator of a dynamic universe. Myths across various African cultures suggest that after setting the world in motion, this

Supreme Being withdrew from direct involvement in human affairs. In the Dinka myth of South Sudan, for instance, God withdrew from the world after the first woman struck the sky, while pounding millet. Unlike Western religious traditions, African spirituality is less about adherence to specific doctrines and more concerned with maintaining harmony in the community, and ensuring fertility (Turner, 2021). Rituals play a central role in African religions, allowing individuals to negotiate their relationships with other community members, the ancestors, spiritual forces of nature and the gods themselves (Ohaja and Anyim, 2021).

Shrines and altars consecrated to divinities are common in African religious practices, though they are often small and informal, not imposing structures. The relationship with divinities is maintained through prayers, offerings and sacrifices, particularly blood sacrifices, which are believed to release the vital force that sustains life (Ohaja and Anyim, 2021). Ancestors act as mediators, offering spiritual guidance and power, and only those who lived full lives, cultivated moral values and attained social distinction are considered worthy to become ancestors. When a person experiences illness or misfortune, it is often interpreted as the result of neglecting or breaching moral codes, with ancestors believed to reprimand their descendants until restitution is made (Korobe, 2023). Rituals often mark transitions between physiological stages of life, such as puberty or death, and signify a change in social status, such as from childhood to adulthood (Ohaja and Anyim, 2021). Initiation rites, including those of the Sande secret society, serve as key processes of socialization, where individuals learn sacred knowledge and skills necessary for fulfilling their new social roles. These rites emphasize the religious significance of female power and womanhood, symbolized in the sacred mask of the spirit Sowo which connects women to water spirits and represents the creative power inherent in both (Engeler, 2021). These masks, with their coil-like neck features, highlight the divine essence of women, linking them to the primordial forces of creation (Engeler, 2021).

In some African cultures, genital modifications like circumcision and clitoridectomy are part of rites of passage that mark the cultural definition of gender (Abdulrehman, 2023). These practices are understood to reaffirm sacred connections to fertility and social order. Myths related to these procedures often portray them as necessary to ensure fecundity, thus confirming the sacred status of sex and fertility (Nwanchor, 2019). Possession trances, often induced through ritual preparation like chanting, drumming or inhaling medicinal vapours, represent some of the most intimate forms

of divine interaction in African religions (Drake, 2022). In some cases, possession is reserved for religious specialists, while in other cases, any initiate may become a “horseman,” allowing the gods to "mount" them and communicate with followers (Spaudling, 2019).

Finally, ancestral beliefs play a critical role in shaping cultural identities and social practices not only in Africa, but also across other continents. In Asia, for example, Confucian teachings emphasize filial piety, where honouring ancestors is seen as a moral duty that reinforces societal values and family cohesion (Li, Singh, and Keerthigha, 2021). In South America, indigenous communities view ancestral spirits as integral to their environmental stewardship and community resilience, with the concept of Pachamama (Mother Earth) guiding sustainable ecological practices (Zapata & Rodríguez, 2022). These practices ensure that ancestral knowledge and customs are preserved and passed on through generations.

### 2.9 The Global significance of burning of incense in both Western and African contexts

The use of burning incense as a ritual practice varies significantly between Western cultures and African traditions, including South Africa. In Westernized contexts, burning incense is commonly associated with relaxation, meditation and creating pleasant aromas in homes or places of worship. It is often employed for its aesthetic and aromatic qualities, symbolizing spirituality and tranquillity. However, in many African cultures, especially in South Africa, incense burning holds deeper spiritual significance, intricately woven into traditional rituals and ceremonies. This practice plays a crucial role in connecting with ancestral spirits, purifying spaces and fostering a sense of communal unity. The ritual is laden with cultural meaning, often involving specific blends of herbs and resins chosen for their intended purpose in the spiritual ceremony. While incense serves as a cultural bridge in both contexts, its role in African societies, particularly South Africa, is profoundly linked to spiritual traditions and ancestral reverence.

Shemesh (2017:1) observes that in Eastern countries, such as Yemen and parts of Europe, the burning of incense has dual meanings: as a religious act and a form of honouring the ancestors, while simultaneously serving as a prayer. In Buddhism, for instance, incense with a “divine odour” is believed to evoke the presence of Buddhist deities, with practitioners bowing before sacred statues and waving incense sticks as part of their worship. Similarly, incense-burning rituals can

be found in other major world religions, such as Hinduism and Christianity, where it plays a role in invoking the divine, and ensuring spiritual blessings (Qin et al., 2019:2).

In African cultures, burning incense is seen not just as a physical act but as a sacred process that facilitates communication with the ancestral spirits. This connection is integral for guidance, protection and spiritual sustenance. The head of the family or the heir, traditionally the first-born male, often assumes the role of burning incense, a practice that symbolizes their position as the family's spiritual leader. In some rituals, a diviner may also be present to guide the process, ensuring that the spiritual connection remains pure, and the desired communication with ancestors is properly interpreted. Furthermore, incense is sometimes used for fumigation purposes to improve health or cleanse spaces, demonstrating its multifaceted role in African culture (Staub et al., 2011). Thus, the practice of incense burning in African traditions, especially in South Africa, transcends aesthetic use, embodying a powerful ritual tool that strengthens the bonds between the living and the spiritual world.

### 2.10 Ritual Purification

The burning of incense for ritual purification is an ancient and widely practiced tradition found in diverse cultures across the world. The fragrant smoke produced by burning incense is believed to have both physical and spiritual cleansing properties. Across religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism and various indigenous belief systems, incense is employed in rituals to purify sacred spaces, objects and individuals. The act of wafting aromatic smoke over oneself or through a sacred area serves as a symbolic gesture, removing negative energies, impurities and distractions, while allowing for a deeper focus and enhanced spiritual connection.

In Hinduism, for example, incense is burned during pujas (prayer rituals) to purify the environment and invite the presence of deities (Vasudevan, 2019). Similarly, in Buddhism, the burning of incense is integral to meditation practices, where it is believed to cleanse the mind and establish a connection to the divine. In Shintoism, incense is burned during rituals at shrines to purify the space and honor the kami (spirits or deities). The practice of burning incense can also be seen in indigenous cultures where it is used to communicate with ancestral spirits or cleanse ritual objects before they are used in ceremonies.

The act of purification extends beyond merely creating a pleasant fragrance; it is deeply symbolic of the broader human desire for renewal, spiritual clarity and a return to balance. The ritual use of incense emphasizes the importance of preparing both the physical and spiritual realms before engaging in sacred activities. This purification process also serves to heighten one's ability to receive divine guidance or protection, often by creating an atmosphere of reverence and tranquillity conducive to spiritual work.

Incense plants, specifically chosen for their fragrant properties, hold particular significance in these rituals. These plants which are often regarded as sacred, can be used in various ways: as hallucinogens for spiritual visions (1), in incense to communicate with spiritual entities (2), as sacred trees or plants (3) or in decorative forms to mark the presence of the divine (4). The burning of incense in rituals thus combines both the symbolic and practical uses of these plants, marking a moment of purification and spiritual alignment. This practice of ritual purification through incense continues to be an enduring and powerful aspect of religious and ceremonial life, offering a universal expression of the human need to cleanse, renew and connect with the sacred (Staub et al., 2011).

### 2.11 Ritual plant knowledge

Ritual plant knowledge encompasses the profound understanding of plants and their spiritual, medicinal or symbolic significance within various cultural and religious practices. This ancient wisdom is often passed down through generations, playing a vital role in rituals, ceremonies and healing traditions across the world. It involves the identification, cultivation and preparation of specific plants for specific purposes, such as in shamanic rituals, indigenous ceremonies or herbal medicine. These traditions emphasize the profound connection between humans and the natural world, highlighting the intricate relationships between plants and the human experience, both physically and spiritually. Ritual plant knowledge preserves biodiversity, cultural heritage and a profound respect for the Earth's gifts, reminding us of the deep interdependence between humanity and the plant kingdom. The species documented as ritual plants can be grouped into two main categories, namely those species burned as incense, and those used for the communication with spiritual entities without being burned (Staub, et al, 2011). Ntshangase (2012:1) alludes that *Impepho* is a type of an indigenous African plant that, once dried, is burnt in order to communicate

with one's ancestors. It is well-known to the majority of Sub-Saharan Africans, as it is used to communicate with ancestors and also by traditional healers to communicate with the deceased. Some incenses are in the form of a plant, stick or powder.

## 2.12 Aromatherapy

Burning incense for aromatherapy in Africa is a practice that blends tradition with holistic well-being. Aromatherapy has been employed for generations as a means to promote physical and mental health, while also connecting with cultural roots. African communities often utilize locally sourced aromatic plants and resins, such as frankincense and myrrh, for their therapeutic properties. The gentle diffusion of fragrant smoke is believed to cleanse the spirit, reduce stress and alleviate ailments. Whether it's during a healing ceremony, meditation session or daily ritual, burning incense for aromatherapy in Africa provides a sensory journey that soothes the soul and nurtures the body, fostering a harmonious balance between tradition and contemporary wellness practices. According to Sadgrove (2020) there are a number of reasons why or how aromatherapy is used, including (1) The modern paradigm of aromatherapy is based on in vitro assays of pure volatile organic compounds (as an essential oil), with activity at non-clinically significant concentrations; however, traditional use of aromatic species did not involve pure essential oils because hydro distillation was only invented in relatively recent times. (2) Traditional forms of aromatherapeutic practice may have involved the use of an oleoresin (mostly dissolves in petroleum ether), oleogum (mostly dissolves in water), or oleogum-resin (phase separation, pet ether and water). These aromatic gums or resins exude from trees and are easily harvested, without dependence on specialised equipment or machinery (Sadgrove, 2020). The most famous oleoresin is Frankincense (syn. olibanum: Boswellia carteri Birdw., *syn*. B. sacra Flueck.) Burseraceae was burnt by ancient Egyptians to create an apparently therapeutic or divinatory smoke, which has been revealed in modern times to have anti-inflammatory and psychoactive effects. (3) Another technique that emerged out of a traditional form, is the use of 'expression' of aromatic oils, which are easily produced from aromatic plants or fruits that have a high 'fixed oil' content (Sadgrove, 2020).

## 2.13 Religious events

In Africa, the act of burning incense holds profound significance in religious events. It is a practice deeply rooted in tradition and spirituality, transcending various cultures and belief systems across the continent. The fragrant plumes of incense smoke are believed to symbolize a connection between the earthly realm and the divine, serving as a means to purify the sacred space and invoke spiritual presence. Whether in the vibrant ceremonies of the Yoruba in Nigeria, the solemn rituals of the Coptic Christians in Egypt, or the communal gatherings of the Maasai in East Africa, incense burning creates an ambiance of reverence and devotion. The aromatic blend of herbs, resins and wood not only pleases the senses but also serves as a universal symbol of spiritual transcendence, fostering a sense of unity and reverence among the diverse peoples of Africa. Sometimes, if not all the time, the rhythmic wafts of incense often accompany prayers, chants and dance, creating a multisensory experience that deepens the participants' connection with the divine and reinforces the cultural richness of Africa's religious traditions. According to Staub et al., (2021:2) the term "China's Three Great Religions" is commonly used to refer collectively to Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism, and many temples throughout China are dedicated to all three religions. In Shaxi, statues depicting Confucian or Daoist Gods, or immortals can be observed in principally Buddhist temples or the other way around. Ancestor worship is also practiced throughout rural China and is loosely associated with both Daoism and Confucianism. In the early 20th century, ancestor worship was practiced daily by the Bai people of Dali, and the importance of these practices in Shaxi is evidenced by the fact that in almost every household there is a shrine reserved for the worship of family ancestors. The Benzhu Cult is often considered the religion of the Bai people and used as a defining character of this ethnic group. Benzhu has been referred to as "patron god worship", as many of the deities have a connection to local history, and each village has its own Benzhu in a specific temple, which is responsible for the village's safety Many of the Benzhus of the Shaxi valley, however, have their origin in Buddhism and Daoism. There are a number of locally worshipped deities in Shaxi, which are neither part of an institutionalized religion nor of the Benzhu Cult. Tudigong (Earth God) and his wife Tudipo, for example, are worshipped for matters related to agriculture, Shanshen (Mountain God) is worshipped before venturing into the hills and Longwang (*Dragon King*) is worshipped for water related issues. Ntshangase (2012:20) argues that while impepho and incense are not exactly one and the same thing, they are part of the same context. Nearly all religious groups use incense. Some use it to communicate with God,

whilst others use it to help them feel at harmony so that they can enter into a trance. The religious use of incense has its origins in antiquity. Burned incense is sometimes intended as a sacrificial offering to one's deity or deities and sometimes incense is used as an aid in prayer. There are also some who use incense in the same way as Zulus use impepho, in other words for the sake of ancestral worship.

### 2.14 Ceremonies

Burning incense for ceremonial purposes holds profound significance in many African cultures. It is a practice deeply rooted in tradition and spirituality, often serving as a means to connect with the divine, ancestors or the spirit world. The choice of incense varies across regions, with aromatic herbs, resins and wood being commonly used. The rising smoke is believed to carry prayers and offerings to the heavens, creating a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms. Kenna (2005) argues that whether it's a ritual to honor ancestors, mark important life events or seek guidance from the supernatural, the fragrant tendrils of incense play an integral role in fostering a sense of reverence and sacredness in African ceremonies.

Ancestral ceremonies in Bangladesh hold deep cultural and spiritual significance, connecting generations through rituals and customs. These ceremonies, often rooted in both Islamic and Hindu traditions, include offerings to ancestors, prayers and the sharing of food, emphasizing respect and remembrance for those who came before. These practices are particularly prominent during events like *Shraadh* (in Hindu communities) and *Sadaka* (in Muslim communities), which foster a sense of continuity and familial bond. Recent studies highlight the role of these ceremonies in preserving cultural identity, as they help reinforce social cohesion and provide a sense of belonging in an ever-globalizing world (Rahman, 2023). In addition, these practices reflect the resilience of traditional values, even in the face of modern societal changes, acting as a means of maintaining ancestral legacies and strengthening community ties.

Ancestral ceremonies in Burkina Faso play a significant role in the preservation of cultural heritage and the reinforcement of communal identity. These ceremonies, often deeply rooted in the spiritual beliefs and practices of various ethnic groups, serve as vital rituals for honouring the deceased, seeking guidance from ancestors, and ensuring societal harmony. For instance, the Gurunsi and Mossi peoples perform elaborate rites that include offerings, dances and songs to invoke the

blessings of their ancestors, reflecting a deep connection to the past. These ceremonies not only foster a sense of continuity but also strengthen the social fabric of the community by promoting values of respect, unity and reciprocity among community members (Mthethwa and Bhagwan, 2025). Ancestral ceremonies play a central role in the cultural and spiritual practices of many South African communities, offering a means to honor and communicate with ancestors. These rituals, often marked by offerings, prayers, and songs, are deeply embedded in the belief that ancestors continue to influence the lives of their descendants, guiding them and offering protection. In South Africa, these ceremonies vary across different ethnic groups, but they share a common reverence for ancestors as mediators between the living and the spiritual realm. Recent studies highlight the importance of ancestral practices in maintaining cultural identity and social cohesion, particularly in the face of modernization and globalization (Hellemann and Sipungu (2024).

### 2.15 Meditating

Burning incense during meditation is a time-honored practice that transcends cultural and spiritual traditions. The gentle waft of fragrant smoke serves as a sensory anchor, aiding in concentration and promoting a deeper meditative state. The soothing aromas of various incense types, such as sandalwood, lavender or sage can calm the mind, clear mental clutter and establish a sacred atmosphere conducive to inner reflection and mindfulness (Rom, 1996:46). Whether practiced in a temple, personal meditation space or simply at home, the act of burning incense for meditation enhances the inward journey, facilitating inner peace, mental clarity and a heightened sense of spiritual connection. Although meditation can be done everywhere, it is very helpful to have a place set aside in your home for doing formal meditation. In monasteries, meditation and ceremony halls are decorated carefully and beautifully according to Rom (1996) to help strengthen faith in what they represent, being the beauty inherent in all existence - the Eternal (Buddha Nature) which is found within us and all things. They are kept neat and clean and treated with great respect. For practitioners, setting up a sitting place, encourages them to believe that there is something beautiful within themselves and all things, worthy of care and respect (Rom, 1996:46).

### 2.16 Masking bad odors

Burning incense has long been a popular practice for masking unpleasant odors. Its fragrant smoke can effectively cover up unwanted smells, creating a more pleasant and inviting atmosphere in homes, temples and various other settings. The aromatic compounds released by incense sticks, cones or resins can effectively overpower and neutralize less desirable scents, making it a common choice for both religious ceremonies and everyday use. Beyond its practical benefits, incense also holds cultural and spiritual significance in many traditions, further enhancing its role in purifying and refreshing the air while adding a sense of tranquility and spirituality to the environment.

### 2.17 Creating a mood

Burning incense is a multipurpose tool for creating a specific mood or atmosphere. The choice of incense fragrance can evoke a wide range of emotions and atmospheres, from calming and meditative, to uplifting and invigorating. Whether it's the tranquil scent of lavender for relaxation, the warm notes of sandalwood for meditation or the zesty aroma of citrus for rejuvenation, incense has the power to transform any space into a haven of the desired mood. The act of lighting incense, watching the delicate tendrils of smoke rise, and inhaling its aromatic embrace can instantly transport individuals to a state of mind that aligns with their intentions, making it a cherished tool for setting the perfect mood in homes, spas and sacred space (Rom, 1996).

### 2.18 Prayer

The burning of incense during prayer is a timeless tradition that transcends cultures and religions. The fragrant smoke symbolizes the ascent of one's prayers to the divine realm, creating a sacred and contemplative atmosphere. The act of lighting incense can serve as a powerful ritual, helping individuals focus their intentions and connect with their spirituality on a deeper level. The soothing aroma of incense not only enhances the sensory experience, but also aids in centering the mind and fostering a sense of peace and reverence, making it an integral part of prayer practices around the world (Rom, 1996). The smoke of incense drifts upwards, interpreted as ascending from human beings on Earth below who are ‘a little lower than the angels’ in the hierarchy of the great chain of being, to God above in Heaven. So, it symbolizes communication between human beings and

God, of which one example is prayer, public or private. Incense is particularly ‘a sign of the practice of antirecessionary prayer’ (Matebeni, Reddy and Langa, 2020) as stated in Kenna (2005). In western European imagery, the smoke of incense also symbolizes breath and hence life, and by extension, the soul. It also indicates oblation, worship, veneration and purification and refers to the burnt sacrifices in the Temple (which had to be of animals without blemish, and/or the firstborn) and to the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies in the crucifixion (Christ as the Lamb of God).

### 2.19 Insect repellant

Burning incense can also serve as a natural insect repellent. Certain types of incense, like citronella or lemongrass, contain fragrances that insects find unpleasant or are unable to tolerate. When lit, these incense sticks or cones release a scent that can deter mosquitoes, flies and other annoying pests from invading your space. This dual-purpose use of incense not only helps create a pleasant atmosphere, but also provides a practical solution for keeping insects at bay during outdoor gatherings or peaceful evenings indoors without the need for chemical repellents. Traditionally, various types of substances have been used to repel mosquitoes. These include such things as smoke, plant extracts, oils, tars and muds. As insect repellent technology became more sophisticated, as individual compounds were discovered and isolated. This allowed the formulation of new, more efficient forms of mosquito repellents (Kantheti et al, 2017: 15279).

### 2.20 Gender and Patriarchy

Gender is one of the factors contributing to African patriarchy, primarily because many African communities deny the existence of homosexuality. This denial may stem from varying cultural perspectives and beliefs surrounding same-sex relationships. Compared to countries on other continents, African nations have been among the least accepting of same-sex sexuality and sexual relations in recent years (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Africa is the continent with the highest number of countries where homosexuality is illegal (Itaborahy, 2012), with South Africa being one of the few exceptions. However, despite legal changes aimed at promoting equality for gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, challenges persist in South Africa. Issues such as unequal age-of-consent laws regarding heterosexual and same-sex relations and violence against Black lesbians, remain significant (Mkhize et al., 2010). More importantly, there exists a substantial gap

between legal progress and the lived experiences of individuals on the ground. While the law generally prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, socially, same-sex sexuality is only marginally accepted in South African society.

Religion plays a significant role in reinforcing the low social acceptance of homosexuality in Africa. Although few institutionalized religions explicitly support same-sex relationships, religion's influence is strong across the continent. Research has increasingly shown the inaccuracy of the notion that Africans are exclusively heterosexual. There is growing evidence, through research, activism and art that challenges this belief. A pan-African network of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) associations demonstrate the existence of diverse, indigenous same-sex and bisexual cultures in Africa. Furthermore, images produced by Africans in literature, theatre, and film destabilize the stereotype of the "pure" African heterosexual.

During the colonial period, European travellers often highlighted what they perceived as African women's subservience and sexual availability to men, as well as Africans' apparent lack of sexual modesty and guilt. They also noted practices such as polygyny and a strong emphasis on fertility. While these descriptions were often exaggerated and sensationalized, they did reflect a broader truth: African societies traditionally place immense value on heterosexual marriages and reproduction. Sexual desire was often subordinated to the interests of the extended family or lineage and was expressed in ways that did not threaten those interests, such as the preservation of a girl's chastity while allowing for non-penetrative sexual play during adolescence. Similarly, African societies incorporated a range of fictive kinship or chosen family relationships that preserve family and lineage stability while permitting certain deviations from heterosexual norms, such as adultery, impotence and celibacy. Same-sex exceptions to these heterosexual norms were also documented as early as the 16th century.

The fact that anthropologists like MacDermot did not pursue these topics further, likely reflects an underlying discomfort or disgust. For some, homosexuality was seen as "malice" (Hulstaert, 1938), while others were hesitant to engage with it, to avoid embarrassing colonial officials and missionaries. The focus of concern was not the sex itself, but the behaviors surrounding same-sex relationships, such as violence, abuse of power, extortion, alcohol abuse and prostitution, which were often prevalent in environments where same-sex sexuality was visible (e.g., mines, prisons

and streets). This reflected negatively on both the colonial system and the men involved. Additionally, Westernized African elites, with whom anthropologists often worked, likely reinforced colonial assumptions by striving to appear respectable, according to European standards.

Gender plays a significant role in reinforcing and perpetuating patriarchy, a social system in which men hold primary power and dominate various aspects of society. Patriarchy relies on rigid gender norms that assign specific behaviors, responsibilities and expectations to individuals based on their gender. For example, patriarchy typically dictates that men should be strong, assertive and primary breadwinners, while women are expected to be nurturing, submissive and responsible for domestic tasks. These roles reinforce male dominance and female subordination. From an early age, individuals are socialized into these gender roles. Stopler (2008:1) explains how culture often devalues women through cultural ideologies, symbolic devices and social structures that exclude women from certain realms of power. Children learn what it means to be a "good" boy or girl according to societal norms, which frequently align with patriarchal expectations. This socialization helps perpetuate patriarchal values and behaviors, making it difficult to challenge the system.

Patriarchy results in gender discrimination, where women and non-binary individuals face inequalities such as lower wages, limited access to education and employment and reduced political representation. This social structure is characterized by the supremacy of the father within the family or clan, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the inheritance of property through the male line, with men controlling a disproportionate amount of power (Ademiluka, 2018). These discriminatory practices are deeply embedded in society and maintain male power and privilege. Patriarchy is often upheld by institutions dominated by men, such as governments, corporations, and religious organizations. These institutions create and enforce policies and practices that perpetuate patriarchal values. Patriarchy grants men certain privileges, such as access to resources, decision-making positions and societal influence, which they often take for granted. These privileges serve as a strong incentive for men to support and maintain the existing system.

Patriarchy also fosters toxic masculinity, which pressures men to conform to a narrow and harmful set of behaviors, including aggression, emotional suppression and dominance over women. This harms men by limiting their emotional expression, and contributes to gender-based violence and discrimination (Ademiluka, 2018). Patriarchy, deeply ingrained over centuries, resists change. Those who benefit from it may actively resist efforts to challenge the system, fearing a loss of power and privilege. Cultural and religious beliefs that promote traditional gender roles and hierarchies, further reinforce patriarchy. These norms can be deeply entrenched, making it difficult to alter the existing power structures. Patriarchal culture is a complex web of ideas that shapes reality and defines what is considered desirable. From a patriarchal viewpoint, men and women are seen as fundamentally different, with hierarchy viewed as the only alternative to chaos. Patriarchy also posits that men were made in the image of a masculine God and that heterosexuality is natural, while same-sex attraction is not (Johnson, 2014: 38).

Ultimately, patriarchy is self-reinforcing because it benefits those in power—typically men in patriarchal societies. This creates a cycle where men, consciously or unconsciously, work to sustain a system that advantages them (Johnson, 2014). Breaking this cycle requires challenging deep-rooted gender norms, stereotypes and power structures through education, activism, policy changes and cultural shifts. Promoting gender equality, empowering women and marginalized groups, and dismantling oppressive systems are essential steps in dismantling patriarchy. This critical argument is within the scope of the Sexuality Theory, which will be discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

### 2.21 Gender representation

In the context of Ritual Theory, the Sexuality Theory and the Social Constructivism theory presented in chapter one guides the study posit that the concept of representation is crucial to understand family perceptions that guide gender norms. These perceptions are important for the study, as they guide social constructs and choices. A representation is a visual, written or audio depiction of something or someone. According to Beltran (2018), this term also refers broadly to what images and texts mean, the meanings that they potentially convey, and how they come to take on those meanings. With respect to the focus of this volume, representation refers to the meanings associated with mediated images and narratives, such as television episodes, films and

music videos. One can also think more specifically of the politics of representation, or how representation matters for social groups and society as a whole (Beltran, 2018).

The study of representation also includes a long tradition of critique of how various social groups and identities have been represented more broadly in the media and popular culture (Hankivsky et al., 2010). This concept informs and is part of the disciplines of feminist studies, critical race studies, queer studies, postcolonial studies, class studies and disability studies, which approach representation with a primary focus on gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, colonization and its aftermath, class and ability, respectively (Hankivsky et al., 2010). The broadening of film and television studies to include a focus on representation in relation to these axes of identity, coincided in the late 1960s and early ’70s with the rise of identity politics or identity-based consciousness and activism (Hankivsky et al., 2010). Women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ people and working-class people were among the groups actively reflecting on the impact of their identities on their status, and opportunities for better treatment in society (Meyer, 2010). All attempts to reconstitute the past of this concept necessarily begin with sociology. Simmel (1908) was without doubt the first to recognize the connection between the separation of the individual who distances himself from others and the necessity to symbolize these others (Rateau et al., 2012). He argued that the manner in which we symbolize others shapes reciprocal action and the social circles that they form together. From a different point of view, Weber (1921) saw representations as a reference framework and a channel for action by the individual (Rateau et al., 2012). He attempts to describe a common knowledge capable of anticipating and prescribing the behavior of individuals. But the true inventor of this concept is Durkheim (1893, 1895, 1898) insofar as he defines its contours and recognizes its ability to explain various societal phenomena.

Moreover, Durkheim (1898) defines the above as a double separation. This overturning of perspectives marked, from the 1980s, the development and improvement of work on social representations. In a diagrammatic sense, it is also considered that these works were developed along three main lines, each attempting to develop different facets of the concept (Rateau et al., 2012): one which examines the regulatory role of social representations on real social interactions, another which studies the impact of social relationships on the elaboration of social representations and a third which analyses representational dynamics and their structural characteristics, more

specifically linked to social conduct (Rateau et al., 2012). These three lines of development revolve not so much around different points of view, as different ways of approaching social representations.

### 2.22 Gender Dimensions

Gender issues are crucial to the study, as they help connect the topic of gendered practices, such as the burning of incense, to broader gender dynamics. The exploration of this concept highlights initial challenges that become barriers to social transformation, especially in terms of tradition. According to Smith and Sinkford (2022), gender discrimination refers to any exclusion or restriction based on gender that creates barriers for girls, boys, women, and/or men in recognizing, enjoying, or exercising their full and equal human rights. Gender inequality involves discrimination based on sex or gender, resulting in one sex or gender being routinely privileged or prioritized over another. Gender equality is a fundamental human right, and this right is violated by gender-based discrimination (Zugman, Alliende, Medel, Bethlehem, Seidlitz, Ringlein, Arango, Arnatkevičiūtė, Asmal, Bellgrove and Benegal, 2023). Gender disparity begins in childhood and currently limits the lifelong potential of children worldwide, disproportionately affecting girls. Although contexts and gender roles vary from place to place, gender inequalities are present across the globe, originating at birth or even before (Yucel and Chung, 2023). As a result, gender discrimination is prohibited under almost every human rights treaty, including international laws ensuring equal gender rights between men and women, as well as those specifically dedicated to the realization of women's rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which is considered the international bill of rights for women (Schulz et al., 2023).

In the United States, the federal, state and local laws protect individuals from gender discrimination and gender inequality (Talley et al., 2023). Moreover, it is acknowledged in both law and policy that promoting gender equality is essential to achieving foreign policy objectives for a more prosperous and peaceful world (Talley et al., 2023). Gender prejudice and resulting gender discrimination commence in childhood. From birth, girls and boys face unequal gender norms, as well as social expectations regarding access to resources and opportunities, which have lifelong consequences in their homes, schools and communities (Talley et al., 2023). For instance, boys are often encouraged to attend school and pursue education for future work, while girls bear

heavy household responsibilities that prevent them from attending school, thus increasing the likelihood of child marriage and pregnancy.

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future (Sinha, 2023). Eradicating gender issues involves creating a world where women and men and girls and boys enjoy equal rights, resources, opportunities and protections. Empowering girls from the beginning has been proven to have lasting, compounded benefits throughout their lives (Sinha, 2023). When girls are supported to engage in civic and political spaces, they are equipped with the tools and skills to drive positive change in their families and communities (Sinha, 2023). Girls are the experts of their own experiences, priorities and needs, and are powerful catalysts for a world where gender equality flourishes. Promoting gender equality is also key to ensuring child protection and the fulfilment of child rights, as abuse, neglect, violence against women and exploitation both reflect and reinforce gender inequalities (Sinha, 2023).

### 2.23 Homosexuality and Anthropology Studies

The history of homosexuality is complex and varies across cultures, often having been marginalized or criminalized in many societies. In Ancient Greece same-sex relationships, particularly between men, were viewed as a normal part of social and educational life, although they were often framed within specific power dynamics (Dover, 1978). Conversely, in medieval Europe, the rise of Christianity led to the pathologization of homosexuality, with same-sex intimacy considered sinful and punishable by law (Crompton, 2006). It wasn’t until the 19th and 20th centuries that homosexuality began to be understood through a psychological and medical lens, with figures like Sigmund Freud and Magnus Hirschfeld challenging earlier perceptions (Foucault, 1978). Major shifts in attitudes occurred in the 20th century, especially following the Stonewall Riots of 1969, which ignited the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement (D'Emilio, 2002). In recent decades, increasing recognition of same-sex relationships, decriminalization and the growing fight for marriage equality signalled the ongoing evolution of societal acceptance of homosexuality, although challenges remain in many parts of the world (Hwahng and Kaufman, 2024).

The history of homosexuality in the United States has been marked by social stigma, criminalization and, more recently, legal and cultural acceptance. In the early years of the nation, same-sex relationships were criminalized, and LGBTQ+ individuals were often persecuted. The 20th century saw significant milestones, such as the formation of early advocacy organizations like the Mattachine Society (1950s) and the Daughters of Bilitis (1955), which sought to promote visibility and combat legal discrimination (Smith, 2023). In the 1960s and 1970s, the LGBTQ+ movement gained momentum, particularly after the Stonewall Riots in 1969, which became a catalyst for the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement. Despite continued struggles, including the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, which disproportionately affected gay men, significant progress was made, including the decriminalization of sodomy laws in Lawrence v. Texas (2003) and the legalization of same-sex marriage in Obergefell v. Hodges (2015). More recently, cultural acceptance has grown, with increasing visibility in media and politics, though challenges regarding LGBTQ+ rights continue to persist in various parts of the country (Smith, 2023).

Homosexuality in India has a long history, influenced by cultural, religious and colonial factors. Ancient texts such as the *Kama Sutra* (circa 3rd to 5th century CE) recognize same-sex relationships, indicating that such practices were not uncommon in pre-colonial India. However, with the advent of British colonial rule in the 19th century, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was introduced in 1861, criminalizing "unnatural offenses," which largely targeted homosexual acts. This legal framework persisted for over a century, with homosexuality being viewed as a criminal act and subject to societal stigmatization. It was only in 2018 that the Supreme Court of India decriminalized same-sex relations by striking down part of Section 377 in a landmark judgment (Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India, 2018). This legal shift marked a significant moment in the ongoing struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in India, though challenges remain, in terms of societal acceptance and equality (Chakrapani et al., 2021).

Homosexuality in ancient Egypt is a complex and multifaceted subject, with evidence suggesting that same-sex relationships were acknowledged, but not necessarily categorized in the same way they are today. Artifacts and texts from the ancient Egyptian period indicate that intimate relationships between individuals of the same sex were not viewed with the same stigma as they would be in other cultures. The tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, two male royal servants depicted together in intimate poses, is a notable example, dating back to the 5th Dynasty (c. 2400

BCE). These figures are sometimes interpreted as lovers, highlighting a possible acceptance or at least a neutral view of same-sex relationships (Kemp, 2006). However, homosexuality began to be criminalized in Egypt under the influence of Islamic rule, where it became associated with sin and taboo. Modern Egyptian society still faces significant challenges with regard to LGBTQ+ rights, and homosexuality remains illegal, with reports of persecution and discrimination against those suspected of same-sex relations (Saad, 2020).

### 2.24 The History of Homosexuality in South Africa

The history of homosexuality in South Africa is deeply rooted in both pre-colonial and colonial times, though its modern recognition and legal frameworks have been significantly shaped by colonial laws, apartheid and the post-apartheid era. In pre-colonial societies, same-sex relationships were often integrated into indigenous cultures, and there were instances of same-sex sexual practices and relationships being accepted, depending on the region. However, with the arrival of European settlers and the imposition of colonial legal systems, homosexuality was criminalized and considered a moral aberration, particularly under British rule (Hunt, 2019). During apartheid, South Africa maintained strict laws against homosexual acts, influenced by conservative Christian values that dominated the political landscape. The end of apartheid in 1994 marked a significant turning point, as South Africa became the first country in the world to include sexual orientation as a protected human right in its Constitution (Matebeni et al, 2020.). This progressive move was followed by the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2006, which underscored the country's commitment to LGBTQ+ rights and equality. However, the journey continues as social acceptance and political activism evolve in response to persistent challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals.

### 2.25 Homosexuality and Anthropology

Homosexuality has been a significant focus within the field of anthropology, particularly regarding its social, cultural and historical dimensions in England. Anthropologists have examined how homosexuality has been understood and regulated across different periods, influenced by evolving social norms, legal frameworks and medical discourses. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, homosexual acts were criminalized, with anthropologists such as Jeffrey Weeks (2016) highlighting how legal frameworks influenced societal attitudes and the construction of sexual

identities. In recent decades, studies have shifted to exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, emphasizing the role of culture in shaping sexual identities and relationships. Scholars like David Halperin (2012) have argued that sexuality is not a fixed biological trait but a socially constructed category that varies across time and space. This focus on sexuality as a cultural phenomenon has contributed to broader understandings of gender, identity and power within English society, making homosexuality an important area of anthropological inquiry in the study of human diversity.

### 2.26 Homosexuality in Kenya

Homosexuality in Kenya has been a subject of significant anthropological study, reflecting the complex intersection of cultural, social and political dynamics. Anthropologists have examined how traditional Kenyan societies viewed same-sex relations, noting that many pre-colonial communities had fluid understandings of sexuality, with some acknowledging same-sex practices in the form of rituals or social roles (Shingange, 2025). However, colonial-era laws imposed by British settlers criminalized homosexuality, leading to a shift in social norms and the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals in post-colonial Kenya. Contemporary anthropological research has highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by sexual minorities, including the impact of conservative cultural beliefs and legal frameworks that criminalize same-sex conduct (Kiiru, 2022). Studies have also explored how LGBTQ+ people navigate their identities within a predominantly heteronormative society, balancing their personal lives with the pressures of conformity to societal expectations (Omondi, 2023). This anthropological lens provides valuable insights into how sexuality is not only a biological or individual matter, but is also deeply shaped by the broader socio-political context of Kenya.

### 2.27 Homosexuality in South Africa

Homosexuality in South Africa has been a topic of significant interest within the field of anthropology, particularly with regard to how cultural norms, legal systems and social attitudes shape and influence sexual identity and behavior. Anthropologists have examined how South African society's historical, colonial and post-apartheid experiences have contributed to complex understandings of same-sex relationships (Beyrer, Shisana, Baral, Milsana, Mayer, Pozniak, Walker, Mboup, Sohn, Serwadda, Rees, Dvoriak, Warren, Thiam, El-Sadr, Ryan, Thomson, and

Bekker, 2017). Notably, the country's 1996 constitution, which became the first in the world to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, has played a critical role in reshaping public discourse around LGBTQ+ rights. Researchers like Hoad (2007) highlight how the intersection of colonialism, tradition, and modernity in South Africa has created a unique framework for understanding homosexuality. Studies emphasize that while South Africa's legal and political landscape has become progressively more inclusive, local practices, beliefs and taboos surrounding homosexuality continue to differ across cultural groups (Beyrer et al, 2016). As such, anthropological studies underscore the diverse and often contested nature of homosexuality within the South African context, revealing how it is understood and experienced in relation to historical and contemporary socio-political forces.

### 2.28 Emergence of Masculinity and Expectations

Masculinity establishes behavioural expectations, creating a consensus on who should lead the family, especially in the context of practices like burning incense based on gender. To change power relations between the sexes and realize the potential of both men and women, the study of masculinity is crucial (Sweetman, 1997). Addressing masculinity in gender and development policies is essential, as focusing solely on female risks means overburdening them with the responsibilities tied to their reproductive and productive roles. This is particularly concerning in an era where the state provides fewer social services (Featherstone, 2009). Development organizations must decide whether they are willing to address gender relations comprehensively. By only targeting women, such as female-headed households for gender-related development funds, organizations avoid tackling the uncomfortable issues of gender dynamics within the household (Featherstone, 2009).

The sociology of masculinity, which emerged in the 1950s, explores how male power is differentiated, naturalized and embedded across cultures and institutions. This field has evolved through three prominent theoretical waves, reflecting shifts in feminist theory. The first wave focused on the challenges men face when adhering to dominant masculine expectations, which Joseph Pleck (1995) refers to as 'male gender role discrepancy.' The second wave, emerging in the 1980s, emphasized the centrality of male power in shaping dominant male identities (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001).

Masculinity is defined by behaviors, practices and language commonly associated with males, and is culturally framed as the opposite of femininity. It exists both positively, as it offers men a means of identity, and negatively, as it defines what is not 'feminine.' Masculinity is not merely the result of genetic coding or biological predispositions (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). While all societies have gender concepts, not all cultures use the term 'masculinity.' In modern contexts, masculinity is seen as a reflection of one's character, implying that an un-masculine person would display traits such as serenity, passivity or disinterest in traditional male pursuits like sports and sexual conquest. This concept assumes individuality and personal agency, stemming from early-modern European ideas linked to colonialism and capitalist economies (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). However, masculinity is inherently relational; it only exists in contrast to femininity. Cultures that do not treat men and women as embodiments of polar character types do not conceptualize masculinity as understood in modern European or American culture (Connell, 2001).

### 2.29 Socialization of Gendered Roles

The acquisition of knowledge, norms and values by an individual, through mastering the material and spiritual environment, language and types of communication" (Georgieva, 2016:8) aligns with the anthropological view that socialization is a central process in shaping societal structures and behavioural norms, as it moulds individuals to conform to the expectations of their culture. In both anthropology and sociology, socialization is regarded as a crucial process that influences how individuals interact with others and how they understand their roles within the broader social structure. It is often viewed as a rite of passage—an initiation process where individuals undergo various forms of education to acquire the knowledge, skills and cultural norms required for participation in their society. Through education, society ensures the continuity of its cultural values and practices by transmitting these to younger generations, thereby preserving cultural identity and promoting social cohesion (Georgieva, 2016). Socialization is thus an essential part of the functioning of social systems, as it ensures the reproduction of societal norms, values and structures across generations (Georgieva, 2016).

Education plays a particularly crucial role in the process of socialization, as it acts as a structured mechanism through which societal norms, values and expectations are transmitted. Schools, for

example, are not just places for academic learning, but also environments where children are socialized into the gendered roles that society expects them to fulfil. The concept of education as a form of socialization can be understood through the lens of structural functionalism, which sees education as essential for maintaining social order and integrating individuals into society. Through educational institutions, individuals learn not only academic knowledge, but also the social norms and behaviors that are considered appropriate in their society (Terziev & Vasileva, 2022). This process of socialization in schools teaches children how to follow rules, cooperate with others and develop their social identities in relation to cultural norms.

Socialization occurs throughout various stages of an individual's life. Primary socialization is the first stage, which occurs in early childhood and primarily takes place within the family and immediate community. During this time, children are exposed to the cultural values and gendered expectations that are prevalent in their society. For instance, boys are often encouraged to engage in physical activities, while girls may be encouraged to focus on nurturing roles. These early socialization experiences lay the foundation for understanding gender roles and behaviors. As children observe their parents' behaviors and attitudes, they begin to internalize gendered norms, learning what is deemed appropriate for their gender, and how to behave accordingly. This process of primary socialization shapes the development of gender identity and lays the groundwork for individuals' future behaviors and interactions (Georgieva, 2016).

Primary socialization is essential in the formation of gendered identities, as children are introduced to gender roles early in life (Terziev & Vasileva, 2022). Family, caregivers and close community members are the first agents of socialization, and they play a significant role in shaping children's perceptions of gender roles. For example, parents often encourage boys and girls to engage in different activities based on traditional gender expectations. Boys may be steered toward activities that emphasize physical strength or competition, as stated before, while girls may be encouraged to pursue tasks that involve caregiving or nurturing. These early interactions set the stage for the development of gender-specific behaviors that individuals will display throughout their lives (Georgieva, 2016). The gendered expectations that arise during primary socialization are not always consciously enforced, but they are deeply embedded in the actions and attitudes of family members. For instance, when a mother encourages her daughter to play with dolls while a father urges his son to play with trucks, they are inadvertently reinforcing traditional gender roles. Over

time, children internalize these behaviors and come to understand what is considered "appropriate" for their gender. This process continues throughout childhood, as children observe and interact with their peers, teachers and other members of society, further reinforcing gendered expectations (Georgieva, 2016).

Secondary socialization takes place as individuals grow older and are exposed to broader societal institutions, such as schools, peer groups and media. During adolescence and adulthood, individuals refine their understanding of gender roles and internalize new behaviors and norms that are specific to different social contexts. In schools, for example, students learn not only academic knowledge but also the expected social norms and behaviors. Teachers, peers and the curriculum all play a role in reinforcing gendered expectations. Girls may be encouraged to excel in subjects such as literature or social sciences, while boys may be steered toward math and science. This division reinforces the gendered nature of academic and professional pursuits, further entrenching traditional roles for men and women (Tumbaach, 2021). Peer groups also play a significant role in secondary socialization, as adolescents seek validation and acceptance from their peers. Peer pressure can lead individuals to conform to gendered expectations, as individuals strive to meet the expectations of their social group. In many cultures, for example, boys may face pressure to exhibit toughness and independence, while girls may feel compelled to act in nurturing and cooperative ways. These gendered expectations are often reinforced through social interactions, both within peer groups and in the broader community (Georgieva, 2016).

Anticipatory socialization is another key aspect of the socialization process, wherein individuals prepare for future roles and identities. This type of socialization occurs when individuals begin to adopt behaviors and norms in anticipation of future roles, such as those associated with parenthood, professional careers or societal expectations tied to gender. For example, as children approach adolescence, they may begin to learn about the roles and responsibilities associated with adult life, including gender-specific expectations. Girls may be taught to prepare for motherhood and domestic duties, while boys may be socialized to become the breadwinners or decision-makers in their future families. This anticipatory socialization helps individuals to prepare for the roles they will eventually assume in society, ensuring that they are equipped to fulfil the expectations associated with those roles (Georgieva, 2016).

Developmental socialization, on the other hand, refers to the process of acquiring new norms and behaviors as individuals grow older. As individuals enter new social institutions or stages of life, they are exposed to new norms and roles that may require adjustments in their behavior. For instance, entering the workforce may require individuals to adopt professional behaviors and attitudes that are aligned with societal expectations for their gender. In many cases, women may be expected to exhibit nurturing or supportive behaviors in the workplace, while, on the other hand, men may be expected to demonstrate leadership and assertiveness. Developmental socialization involves learning how to navigate these gendered expectations in various social settings (Georgieva, 2016).

Re-socialization is a significant process that occurs when individuals undergo a life transition that challenges their previous gendered behaviors. Re-socialization involves the unlearning of old behaviors and the adoption of new ones, often in response to a change in social roles or environments. For example, when a woman enters a male-dominated profession, she may experience a re-socialization process where she must adopt behaviors that challenge traditional gender expectations. Similarly, a man who assumes caregiving responsibilities for children may undergo re-socialization, as he adjusts his behavior to align with the traditionally feminine role of caregiver. Re-socialization is a powerful mechanism through which individuals challenge and redefine gender roles, and it can be both a personal and social struggle (Tumbaach, 2021). Re-socialization can be intense, as it often requires individuals to confront and detach themselves from previously internalized behaviors and attitudes. In the case of gender roles, re-socialization can lead to a renegotiation of gender identity, where individuals may redefine what it means to be a man or a woman in a specific cultural context. While re-socialization can be liberating and empowering for some, it can also be fraught with resistance from society, as individuals who challenge gender norms may face social sanctions or stigmatization (Georgieva, 2016).

Beyond its role in shaping individual behavior, socialization also functions as a system of social control, maintaining societal order by ensuring that individuals conform to cultural norms and values. Social control operates through socialization by reinforcing behaviors that align with established cultural expectations, and punishing any deviations from these norms. Culture, in this sense, is not an innate part of an individual, but something that is learned and internalized through interaction with others. Family members, educators and peers all play a role in socializing

individuals into their culture, teaching them the behaviors and attitudes that are deemed acceptable in their society (Tumbaach, 2021). The norms that emerge through socialization represent the shared expectations of society. These norms shape individuals' behaviors and help to maintain social cohesion by regulating how individuals interact with one another. Gender norms, in particular, play a central role in social control, as they dictate what is considered appropriate for men and women in terms of behavior, appearance and social roles. Violations of these norms such as a man expressing vulnerability or a woman exhibiting assertiveness - can result in social sanctions, such as ridicule, exclusion, or even legal punishment (Georgieva, 2016).

Socialization is a complex and multifaceted process that plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' identities, behaviors, and roles within society. Through primary, secondary, anticipatory, developmental, and re-socialization, individuals learn to conform to societal norms and expectations, including gendered roles. The socialization of gendered behavior is a crucial aspect of this process, as it dictates how individuals are expected to behave based on their gender (Aziz & Pasaribu, 2021). Gendered roles are learned and reinforced through various socialization agents, including family, schools, peer groups, and media. Socialization not only influences individual identity formation but also functions as a mechanism of social control, ensuring that individuals adhere to cultural norms and societal expectations. By understanding the role of socialization in shaping gendered identities, we can better comprehend the ways in which individuals negotiate their roles in society and how cultural norms continue to influence behavior (Mrdahev, 2003).

### 2.30 Contextualizing Religion in South Africa

The concept of “religious freedom” has a long history (Poulos, 2023). In a theocratic state, only the official state religion is typically tolerated. However, from the beginning, the situation with Christianity was different, as it found itself in the hostile environment of the classical Greek and Roman civilizations (Maurer, 2023). Since Christianity's early days, tension existed between its adherents and political leaders. However, within Christianity, a new form of theocracy gradually emerged when the pope, as the ecclesiastical ruler, increasingly claimed political power for himself. This culminated when Boniface VIII, in his Unam Sanctam of 1302 (Fanning, 2023), declared it necessary for every human being to submit to the pope's authority. It was not until the liberal revolutions of the nineteenth century that religious freedom became widely established in

the constitutions of Western states, and not until the twentieth century that major Christian churches proclaimed religious freedom as an essential feature of the Christian faith itself (Fanning, 2023).

South Africa has never had an official state religion. The country's constitution explicitly guarantees everyone's right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion (Gabela, 2023). However, the government actively promoted Christianity throughout much of the 20th century, and it remains the most widely followed faith today (Gabela, 2023). While the 2011 South African census did not include a question on religious affiliation, the majority of South Africans (84.2%) identified as Christian in the 2013 General Household Survey (Resane, 2023). This represented an increase from the 79.8% reported in the 2001 census. Of the remaining population, 5% identified with ancestral or traditional African religions, 2% identified as Muslim, 1% identified as Hindu and 0.2% identified as Jewish. Atheism and agnosticism were identified by 0.2% of the population, while 5.5% identified with 'nothing in particular', and 1.6% did not specify (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Lyer, 2023).

Religious freedom has become the most fundamental of all human rights. In South Africa, however, things were different and the country was part of the Afrikaner Nationalist tradition until the final draft of the new Constitution (Durand, 2002:52). Now, the ideal of a theocratic state plays second fiddle to many other needs that South Africans deem urgent. In South Africa, religious freedom as a constitutional right is a relatively new concept (Durand, 2002). With the present South African Constitution, religious freedom is explicitly guaranteed for the first time. Before the dawn of democracy, the dominance of Christianity among the religions was widely regarded as the norm. Saayman (with reference to Lubbe) (1993:42); Fessha and Dessalegn (2021) argues that the pre-democracy situation in South Africa should be described as one of religious tolerance, rather than religious freedom (1993:42). With the 1996 Constitution that changed dramatically. Section 15(1) of the Bill of Rights in our Constitution reads: "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion" (Saayman, 1993); Fessha and Dessalegn (2021).

### 2.31 Gender Stratification and Masculinity

The link between gender stratification and masculinity requires the connection of socio-cultural and socio–political dimensions, that shape peoples' perceptions. The idea of cultural representation adopts many masculine views that create a hierarchy between all genders hence including the LGBTQI community. As a result, the assessment of the link between the two concepts is important for this study. According to Pal and Sarkar (no date) gender stratification covers a landscape of processes and conditions, from micro situations to wide-ranging historical comparisons. The explanatory focus has included infancy, reproductive technologies, kinship organization, childcare, cultural ideologies, eroticism, violence and the gender division of labour (Bermúdez Figueroa et al., 2023). For most of these conditions, some supporting evidence is available, but we are far from an empirical resolution of the relationships among the various theories. Part of the difficulty is that evidence has come in a great variety of forms: quantitative analyses of demographic data and of surveys of attitudes, experiences and standardized test scores; qualitative descriptions of patterns of language and interaction; historical analysis of literary sources; comparisons of economic, military and kinship structures; studies of the dynamics of social movements (Girdler, 2023). There is no simple method of reducing all this material to a comparable set of quantitative indicators, which could develop into a comprehensive test of the explanatory power of the different variables (Girdler, 2023). The various processes, individual characteristics and social structures are not on the same level of analysis; the theory of gender stratification exemplifies all the problems of relating micro, meso and macro levels, and of supplying static cross-sectional data with dynamic explanations (Climent, Sanchis and Catalá, 2023).

Gender stratification in America is intertwined with societal constructions of masculinity, where gender roles and expectations shape the experiences of individuals across various spheres of life. Masculinity, as a dominant cultural norm, often reinforces power dynamics, limiting both men and women to predefined roles. Men are frequently socialized to embody traits associated with strength, stoicism and dominance, which can perpetuate inequalities in both private and public spaces (Connell, 2005). This hegemonic masculinity not only dictates what is considered acceptable male behavior, but also reinforces gender stratification by marginalizing other expressions of masculinity and femininity, fostering a rigid gender hierarchy that disadvantages women and non-conforming men (Ridgeway, 2011). Consequently, this gendered lens plays a

crucial role in perpetuating social inequalities and shaping the power relations that underlie American society.

Gender stratification in Zimbabwe is deeply embedded in socio-cultural norms, where traditional gender roles continue to shape access to resources, opportunities, and power. Men, especially those in urban and rural areas, are generally afforded greater privileges in terms of economic opportunities and leadership positions, while women face systemic barriers to advancement due to patriarchal ideologies (Chitando, 2022). Masculinity in Zimbabwe is often constructed around ideals of dominance, economic success and authority, with men expected to be providers and protectors. This masculine identity can both empower men and place immense pressure on them to conform to societal expectations. However, these rigid gender norms have also led to a growing discourse around gender equality and the challenges posed by male dominance. According to Chitando (2022), gender stratification in Zimbabwe is reinforced by historical, economic and cultural factors, with masculinity becoming a key mechanism in maintaining social hierarchies.

Gender stratification in South Africa is a deeply ingrained issue, with the traditional norms around masculinity playing a significant role in shaping societal structures and relations. Masculinity, often associated with power, dominance and control, reinforces hierarchical gender roles, marginalizing women and reinforcing male privilege. In South Africa, the intersection of race, class and gender further complicates these dynamics, with Black men and women facing unique challenges within a historically patriarchal system (Morrell, 2021). The persistence of these gender norms, even in post-apartheid South Africa, continues to impact social, economic and political opportunities, often limiting women's access to power and decision-making spaces. Moreover, the dominant forms of masculinity, such as those linked to violence and suppression of emotion, contribute to broader societal issues, including gender-based violence and inequality (Ramphele, 2020).

### 2.32 Literature and study gap

The literature on traditional African spiritual practices, ancestral veneration and gender roles has extensively explored the role of iZingoma (traditional healers) in African societies, particularly among the AmaZulu. Studies about iZingoma have focused on their function as intermediaries between the living and the ancestors, their role in healing, and the rituals associated with ancestral

veneration. However, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how traditional African spiritual beliefs intersect with contemporary issues of gender identity and sexual orientation, particularly regarding the acceptance of gay men in performing sacred ancestral rituals such as burning impepho (incense) to communicate with the ancestors.

Existing literature on African spirituality and ancestor veneration primarily emphasizes heteronormative frameworks, reinforcing traditional patriarchal structures where lineage, inheritance and spiritual leadership are predominantly male responsibilities. In the AmaZulu context, the role of the family heir is crucial in maintaining lineage continuity and ancestral communication, typically passing from father to son or within the patrilineal lineage. These studies often assume that masculinity is inherently linked to heterosexuality, leaving little room for discussions on how non-heteronormative identities, such as those of gay men, are positioned within traditional spiritual practices.

The anthropological discourse on masculinity in African societies has largely focused on hegemonic masculinity, which privileges heterosexual male dominance within family and social structures. The experiences and perspectives of gay men in African traditional societies remain underexplored, particularly regarding their roles in spiritual and cultural practices. This omission suggests that the intersection of sexuality and spiritual authority is an area requiring deeper ethnographic and theoretical engagement. Furthermore, studies about African masculinities often present gay identity as being at odds with traditional values, reinforcing the perception that non-heterosexual men cannot fulfil roles traditionally assigned to male heirs, such as performing rituals that require direct communication with the ancestors.

Another crucial gap in the literature is the perspective of iZingoma on the matter. While they are recognized as custodians of spiritual knowledge and ritual practices, their views on non-heteronormative identities remain insufficiently documented. The few available studies on the perceptions of traditional healers regarding LGBTQ+ identities often focus on their stance toward healing or ‘corrective’ interventions, rather than on the acceptability of LGBTQ+ individuals within spiritual and ritualistic practices. Some research suggests that certain iZingoma may hold progressive views due to their unique position as spiritual mediators, but empirical studies specifically addressing their views on gay men inheriting ancestral responsibilities are lacking.

Moreover, while studies on gender and sexuality in South Africa have gained prominence, they often focus on urban settings where LGBTQ+ rights and identities are more openly discussed. Rural contexts, where traditional belief systems and cultural values remain deeply entrenched, are often overlooked. The Ugu District, being a largely rural area, provides a unique setting to explore how deeply rooted cultural practices respond to contemporary challenges related to gender and sexual diversity. Understanding the cultural attitudes in such a setting is essential for contextualizing the broader discourse on the LGBTQ+ inclusion within African spirituality.

Additionally, legal and social discourses on LGBTQ+ rights in South Africa have predominantly focused on Western legal frameworks and human rights-based approaches. While South Africa's Constitution is one of the most progressive in recognizing LGBTQ+ rights, this legal recognition does not necessarily translate into cultural acceptance within traditional African communities. Studies that examine this disconnect between legal rights and cultural practices in the realm of ancestral veneration remain limited. Research on traditional leadership and cultural mediation often highlights resistance to change, but there is little discussion on how traditional structures can potentially adapt to include non-heteronormative identities in spiritual practices.

Furthermore, the role of oral histories and indigenous knowledge systems in shaping attitudes toward LGBTQ+ identities has not been sufficiently explored. Many African cultures have fluid understandings of gender and sexuality, that predate colonial and Christian influences. However, contemporary discourses often frame homosexuality as un-African, ignoring historical narratives that suggest otherwise. Investigating how oral traditions and historical narratives inform current perceptions among iZingoma could provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of African spiritual practices.

Another underexplored area is the lived experiences of gay men who wish to fulfil their ancestral obligations. While there is literature on the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in African societies, these studies often focus on broader issues such as discrimination, access to healthcare and social exclusion. There is limited research on how gay men navigate their roles within families that adhere to strict cultural norms regarding inheritance and spiritual responsibilities. A deeper understanding of their experiences would contribute significantly to both anthropological and

queer studies by offering an intersectional perspective on cultural identity, sexuality and spirituality.

The methodological approaches used in existing studies on iZingoma and ancestral veneration often rely on traditional ethnographic methods, but rarely incorporate participatory or queer-centered methodologies that foreground LGBTQ+ voices. Integrating such methodologies into research on iZangoma perceptions of gay men's eligibility as family heirs and spiritual mediators would address an important gap in how knowledge is produced, and whose voices are prioritized in academic discourse.

Expanding on the gaps in literature related to the intersection of socialization, gendered roles, religion and power dynamics in South Africa, a significant area that warrants further exploration is the complex relationship between religious beliefs and gender norms. South Africa's Constitution, which guarantees the right to religious freedom, reflects the nation's commitment to promoting religious tolerance and diversity. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these diverse religious beliefs impact gender norms and how they shape individuals' gender identities within the broader socio-cultural context. While existing literature tends to focus either on religious freedom or gender inequality separately, the intersection of these elements — especially in relation to gender identity — requires deeper exploration. A critical analysis of how religious institutions and practices influence gender role internalization could shed light on the ways in which religion either reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms, particularly in the context of masculinity. For instance, religious interpretations of gender roles may either perpetuate or resist dominant cultural constructions of masculinity, further shaping behaviors associated with gender identity. Exploring these intersections will provide a more nuanced understanding of how both religion and gender norms act as agents of socialization, potentially reinforcing or subverting established societal structures.

Another important literature gap revolves around the unique experiences of Black men in South Africa, particularly how the traditional constructions of masculinity impact their socialization and contribute to broader societal inequalities, including gender-based violence (GBV). While extensive research has been done on GBV, much of the existing literature overlooks the particular challenges faced by Black men in navigating rigid gender norms. Black men in South Africa

experience a compounded set of pressures, including the historical legacy of apartheid, economic marginalization and cultural expectations of masculinity. These pressures intersect with traditional gendered expectations, creating a unique experience of masculinity that can contribute to behaviors associated with GBV. Gendered socialization processes in South Africa often place immense pressure on men to embody traits associated with dominance, control and power, contributing to a toxic culture of masculinity that is deeply entangled with societal violence. While much of the focus has been on how these norms affect women and LGBTQ+ individuals, the psychological and social impact of these rigid norms on Black men remains underexplored. Understanding the emotional and mental health consequences of conforming to these gender norms could contribute to the development of effective interventions in addressing issues like GBV and mental health disparities among men.

Furthermore, while there is a growing body of work on the relationship between gendered socialization and societal control, the role of religious and cultural institutions in reinforcing or challenging these norms in South Africa remains under-researched. Primary and secondary socialization processes — through family, peer groups, and institutions — are pivotal in shaping gendered behaviors and identities. However, these processes are often viewed in isolation, with limited attention paid to the specific role of religious institutions. Religious practices, teachings and community dynamics can significantly influence gender norms and behaviors, either reinforcing existing power dynamics or encouraging resistance to traditional gender roles. There is a gap in understanding how the evolution of religious freedom in post-apartheid South Africa has affected gender roles in religious communities. For example, the growing recognition of diverse religious beliefs and practices might offer opportunities for reshaping gendered expectations, challenging patriarchal structures and providing a platform for gender equality. However, these religious practices could also further entrench traditional gender roles, making it essential to explore the nuanced role that religion plays in perpetuating or transforming gender stratification in contemporary South African society.

Additionally, while the literature extensively addresses gender-based violence and its relation to gender inequality, there is a gap in understanding how gender norms specifically contribute to this issue within the context of Black South African masculinity. Gender-based violence is not merely

a result of individual behavioural choices; it is deeply embedded in broader social structures, including cultural norms, patriarchal systems and economic inequalities. Black men, in particular, may face additional challenges in negotiating their identities within these rigid frameworks of masculinity. Existing literature on GBV often overlooks the role of Black male identity formation in the perpetuation of such violence. While gendered expectations of women's submission and men's dominance are often central to the discourse on GBV, less attention is paid to the ways in which these norms are internalized by men, leading to the perpetuation of violence within families and communities. Examining how Black men's formation of identity is influenced by traditional gender roles and how these roles contribute to violent behavior, is critical to developing strategies for addressing GBV in a manner that takes into account the specificities of race, culture and masculinity in South Africa.

Moreover, while studies on gender equality and social justice in post-apartheid South Africa have made significant strides in addressing gender stratification, there is a gap in understanding the psychological and emotional toll of rigid gender norms on men, particularly in relation to their mental health. Men, particularly those who conform to traditional notions of masculinity, often experience a suppression of emotional expression, which can lead to a range of psychological issues, including depression, anxiety and stress. In South Africa, the pressure to conform to dominant masculine ideals, such as stoicism, dominance and emotional detachment, can contribute to toxic behaviors that not only harm women but also negatively impact men's mental health. Although the detrimental effects of these rigid norms on women and marginalized genders are well-documented, the psychological impact of these norms on men has been under-explored. Research that focuses on the mental health consequences of conforming to these gender expectations could offer new insights into the development of support systems and interventions, aimed at improving the well-being of men, especially those in marginalized communities.

Furthermore, while gender stratification is often discussed in terms of women's marginalization and exclusion, there is a need for research that examines how marginalized men—especially those who do not conform to traditional masculine ideals—navigate these rigid expectations. The experiences of non-conforming men, including LGBTQ+ individuals, are rarely centered in discussions about masculinity in South Africa. This is particularly important in understanding the

complexities of gender identity and how individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms, resist and navigate societal expectations. Research that explores the agency and resilience of marginalized men in challenging gender norms could provide a more nuanced understanding of gendered resistance and how individuals and communities are reshaping gender identities in response to oppressive structures.

Finally, the evolving landscape of religious freedom in South Africa, as enshrined in the 1996 Constitution, presents a unique opportunity to examine how religion interacts with gendered expectations and norms. Religious practices and beliefs play a crucial role in shaping gendered behaviors, particularly in conservative communities, where religious teachings often reinforce patriarchal values. As religious freedom continues to grow and diversify in South Africa, it becomes essential to investigate how different religious groups engage with gender roles and whether these beliefs promote gender equality or perpetuate traditional, often oppressive, norms. Understanding the role of religion in reinforcing or challenging gender norms could provide valuable insights into the broader socialization process and contribute to efforts to promote gender equality in South Africa. This area of research could offer an important contribution to the ongoing dialogue on religious freedom, gender equality and social justice in post-apartheid South Africa.
There are numerous gaps in the literature concerning the intersection of gender, religion and socialization in South Africa, particularly regarding how religious beliefs and cultural practices shape gender identities and perpetuate gender inequalities. Further research that examines the intersectionality of gender, race, religion and masculinity, and which explores the experiences of Black men, marginalized genders and religious communities, is critical to understanding the complex dynamics of gender socialization and its implications for societal change. Addressing these gaps will not only deepen our understanding of gender stratification in South Africa, but also inform more effective interventions aimed at promoting gender equality, combating gender-based violence and improving mental health outcomes for men.

### 2.33 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically examined the complexities of sexuality in a broader context. It explored the complex interplay between cultural traditions, such as the ritual of burning incense to communicate

with ancestors, and LGBTQIA+ identity. The chapter covered a wide range of intersecting topics that are within the discourse of homosexuality and heterosexuality cross-culturally. In the context of the chapter, various authors posited that in many traditional African cultures, the heir is typically a male family member who carries on the family name and performs ancestral rituals, including burning incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors.

The chapter also delved into how these cultural norms intersect with an individual's sexual orientation and how communities may respond to this situation through iZingoma narratives. The expansion of the chapter explored topics around the fluidity of contemporary societies and families, as well as the role of social media. In the context of critically engaging on what legitimizes one's sexuality, the chapter delineated African spirituality as another context, which led to a nuanced understanding of how tradition and modern identity intersect and evolve in diverse cultural contexts. The literature review chapter highlighted the need for further research to better understand the complexities of these topics, particularly in relation to marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, within Zulu society. Chapter Three will outline the theoretical framework.

# CHAPTER THREE

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 3.1 Introduction

As briefly discussed in Chapter One, this study draws primarily on Ritual Theory, Sexuality Theory and Social Constructivism Theory. The choice of these three frameworks reflects the multidimensional nature of the study, which centers on examining whether a gay man can perform the ritual of burning incense to communicate with ancestors. Additionally, this chapter explores the interconnectedness of these theoretical lenses, highlighting how they collectively inform the study's aims.

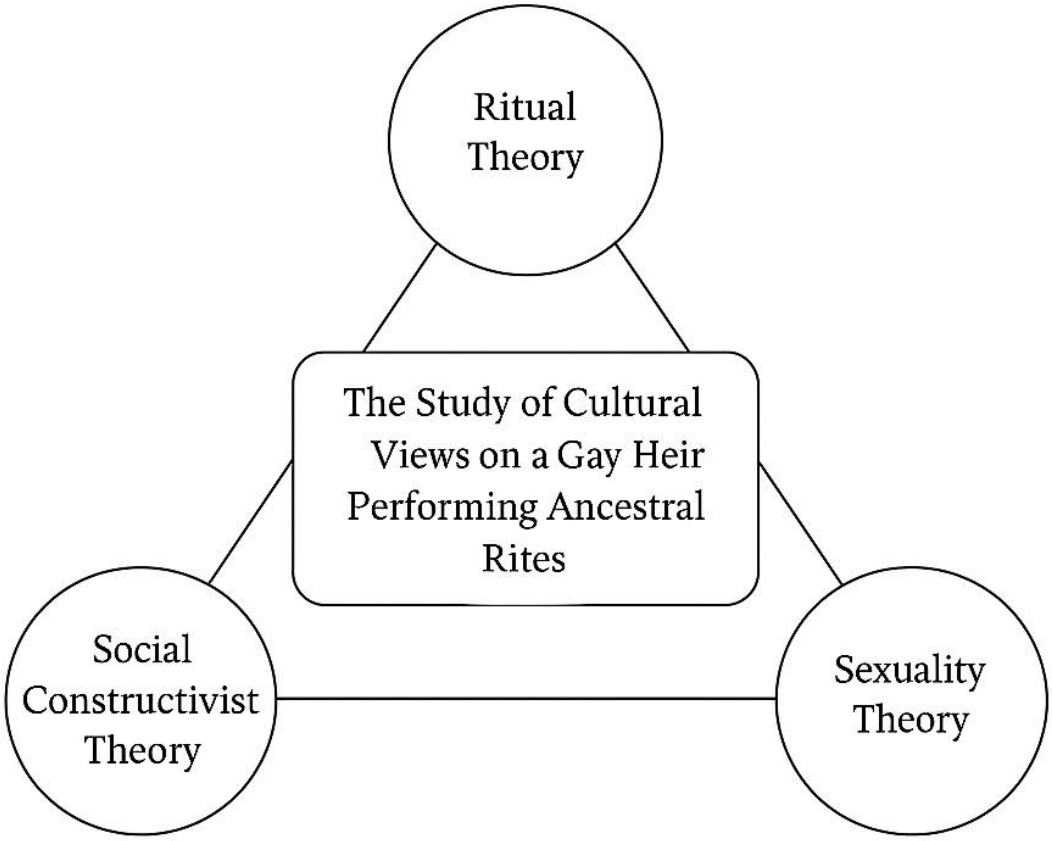
Van Der Waldt (2024) explains that theoretical frameworks generally serve as the intellectual scaffolding that underpins research processes in the social sciences, providing an analytical lens through which researchers make sense of complex social phenomena. He further alludes that construction of theoretical frameworks is deeply rooted in philosophical inquiry, ideological perspectives and intellectual exploration. The theoretical framework should be well defined to ensure that the vision of the study is clear in order to offer direction and allow researchers to enlighten, comprehend and make connections, as they generalize their research findings.

## 3.2 Theoretical triangulation

Theoretical Triangulation in the Study of Cultural Views of iZingoma on a Gay Heir Performing Ancestral Rites.

# Theoretical Triangulation

Theoretical Triangulation in the Study of Cultural Views on a Gay Heir Performing Ancestral Rites




The application of theoretical triangulation in anthropology enhances the depth and reliability of research findings by incorporating multiple theoretical perspectives. In examining whether a gay man can be the heir and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors within the cultural framework of *iZingoma* in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal, three interrelated theories: Ritual Theory, Social Constructivist Theory and Sexuality Theory provide a holistic analytical framework. By employing these theoretical lenses, this study offers a nuanced examination of how

ritualistic practices, societal norms, and sexual identity intersect to shape the discourse on ancestral rites and male heirship within Zulu traditions.

The following is a brief introduction to the respective theories.

**Ritual Theory**

Ritual Theory provides a foundational understanding of the symbolic and functional significance of ritualistic practices within cultural and religious traditions. Rituals are not merely repetitive actions, but are embedded with meaning, serving as conduits between the physical and spiritual realms. Within Zulu cultural traditions, burning impepho is a deeply spiritual practice, acting as a medium through which ancestors are honoured, appeased and consulted. The practice is often governed by strict traditional rules, with male heirs generally expected to assume the responsibility of performing these rituals upon the passing of a patriarch.

From a Ritual Theory perspective, the performance of ancestral rites is not merely about executing a set of ritualistic actions, but about embodying cultural legitimacy and spiritual authority. The ability to communicate with ancestors is often linked to gender roles and social expectations, reinforcing the idea that male heirs carry the responsibility of maintaining the spiritual lineage. However, Ritual Theory also acknowledges the dynamic nature of rituals, recognizing that cultural practices evolve in response to changing societal conditions. This study, therefore, questions whether *iZingoma* view the role of a gay heir as a legitimate continuation of tradition or as a deviation from ancestral mandates. The potential for ritual adaptation versus rigid cultural preservation is a key point of analysis.

Additionally, Ritual Theory helps in understanding whether the spiritual efficacy of ancestral communication is perceived as contingent upon one's gender and sexual identity. If the ritualistic authority of a gay heir is contested, it raises broader questions about how deeply ingrained heteronormativity influences spiritual legitimacy. Conversely, if some iZingoma validate the performance of rituals by a gay heir, it suggests an evolving interpretation of ritual practice within the context of contemporary social realities.

**Social Constructivist Theory**

Social Constructivist Theory provides a crucial framework for understanding how cultural meanings, including those related to gender, sexuality and spiritual duties, are constructed and maintained through societal interactions. Unlike essentialist perspectives that attribute fixed roles based on biological determinism, social constructivism emphasizes that social realities are shaped by historical, political and cultural contexts. This perspective is particularly useful in analyzing how Zulu communities conceptualize masculinity, heirship and spiritual roles.

The notion of a male heir as the primary performer of ancestral rites is not a biologically predetermined truth, but rather a socially constructed norm reinforced through generations. By examining the views of *iZingoma*, this study seeks to uncover the degree to which traditional beliefs about masculinity and ritual authority are maintained or challenged. If certain cultural groups resist the idea of a gay heir performing these rituals, their resistance can be interpreted as an adherence to established social constructs, rather than an unchangeable cultural truth.

This particular Theory also provides insight into the mechanisms of cultural change. Given the increasing global advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights and shifting perspectives on gender identity, communities inevitably encounter new discourses that challenge traditional views. The study investigates whether exposure to alternative perspectives influences iZangoma stance on the legitimacy of a gay heir performing ancestral rites. Are younger generations of traditional healers more open to redefining masculinity and spiritual leadership? Do urbanized and rural iZingoma hold different views on the matter? These questions allow for an exploration of how cultural knowledge is negotiated within changing social landscapes.

Furthermore, Social Constructivist Theory highlights the role of discourse in legitimizing or marginalizing certain identities within spiritual spaces. If a gay heir is seen as unfit to perform ancestral rites, the reasoning behind this belief must be examined - whether it stems from fears of spiritual disapproval, concerns about communal acceptance or broader patriarchal ideologies

embedded within Zulu customs. This theoretical perspective ultimately enables a deeper understanding of the tension between tradition and cultural adaptation.

**Sexuality Theory**

Sexuality Theory critically engages with the intersection of sexual identity, power and cultural legitimacy. In many traditional societies, heteronormativity remains the dominant framework through which gender roles and social responsibilities are understood. The perception that male heirs must embody a specific form of masculinity - one that aligns with heterosexuality - raises important questions about the exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals from cultural and spiritual roles. Sexuality Theory challenges the assumption that sexual orientation inherently affects one's ability to perform spiritual duties. From a queer theoretical perspective, sexual identity should not dictate cultural legitimacy or ritual authority. However, within traditional Zulu society, the expectation that a male heir upholds heterosexual masculinity is deeply entrenched. This study explores whether *iZingoma* perceive sexual identity as relevant to one's spiritual capacity, or whether it is seen as an irrelevant social construct imposed by conservative norms.

One of the central questions within Sexuality Theory is whether cultural and religious institutions can accommodate non-heterosexual identities without compromising their traditional foundations. Globally, some religious and spiritual traditions have adapted to more inclusive interpretations, allowing LGBTQ+ individuals to participate in sacred rituals. Does such flexibility exist within Zulu ancestral practices? The latter is explored in our study. If some *iZingoma* support the inclusion of gay heirs in ritual performances, what justifications do they provide? Conversely, if opposition remains strong, what are the underlying concerns; are they spiritual, social or a combination of both?

By employing Sexuality Theory, the study also questions whether exclusionary practices contribute to the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals within their own cultural heritage. This analysis includes questions such as the following: if a gay heir is denied the right to perform ancestral rites, does this create a disconnection between them and their lineage? How do gay individuals within Zulu communities navigate these tensions between personal identity and

cultural expectations? These inquiries help illuminate the broader implications of cultural exclusivity and the potential for inclusive reinterpretations of tradition.

**The Interplay of Theories in Theoretical Triangulation**

The integration of Ritual Theory, Social Constructivist Theory and Sexuality Theory allows for a multi-dimensional analysis of the research problem. Rather than relying on a single theoretical perspective, triangulation provides a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural, social and spiritual factors at play. Each theory contributes a unique dimension to the analysis:

- **Ritual Theory** examines whether traditional rituals can accommodate change and whether ancestral communication is seen as contingent upon specific gender roles.
- **Social Constructivist Theory** highlights how societal norms shape perceptions of masculinity and heirship, emphasizing the role of discourse in legitimizing or marginalizing certain identities.
- **Sexuality Theory** critically engages with the exclusion or inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals within spiritual spaces, questioning whether sexual identity should determine cultural legitimacy.

Through employing these three theoretical frameworks, the study constructs a nuanced understanding of how traditional healers negotiate cultural authenticity, gender roles and evolving social norms. The interplay between ritual significance, societal perceptions and sexual identity is central to comprehending the contested space in which LGBTQ+ individuals seek cultural and spiritual recognition. This triangulated approach ultimately reveals whether cultural rigidity or adaptive transformation shapes the contemporary discourse on male heirship and ancestral rites.

Theoretical triangulation enriches the analysis of whether a gay heir can burn impepho and communicate with the ancestors, by providing a holistic framework that considers ritual significance, social construction and sexual identity. The study's findings will contribute to the broader discourse on cultural adaptation, identity and inclusivity in African traditional practices. By understanding the perspectives of *iZingoma* and the evolving interpretations of Zulu ancestral rites, this research sheds light on the complex interplay between tradition and modernity in shaping cultural practices.

The theoretical triangulation is broken down further in the following sections.

### 3.3 The Ritual Theory

In anthropological discourse, the Ritual Theory is an interdisciplinary framework used to understand the social and cultural intersections across different societies, contextually. Rooted in anthropology and other related fields, such as sociology and religious studies, the theory examines how rituals contribute to the socialization of descendants, the formation of kinship or clan identities and the transmission of cultural values necessary for the sustainability of the lineage. Broadly, the theory posits that rituals are not merely symbolic acts; they exist in the spiritual realm and serve as performative social practices that shape one's identity. Rituals are symbolic acts that instil and reinforce the social order within a kinship, while also assigning specific people to particular spiritual roles and responsibilities.

Summers-Effler (2006) argues that rituals generate communal emotions connected to symbols, which form the foundation for beliefs, reasoning, morals and culture. Various rituals are observed and memorialized as means of interacting with spiritual entities, often referred to as 'ancestors'. According to these rituals, each family adheres to the sacred principles set by their gods (ancestors), and when rituals are not performed properly, the gods may become angered and potentially bring misfortune upon the family. Wu (2018:2) suggests that individuals should rely on their indigenous knowledge, which is memorized and passed down, serving as a cultural repository of guides, beliefs and strategies that help establish emotional bonds with the ancestors during rituals.

Similarly, beliefs, creeds, symbols and myths emerge as forms of mental content or conceptual blueprints that direct, inspire or promote activity. However, they themselves are not actions (Ibid). Ritual theory, much like action, embodies and expresses these conceptual orientations. The drive for typological clarity often pushes these differentiations to extremes (Krishnan, 2021). Ritual is sometimes described as a thoughtless action - routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic - and is seen as the purely formal, secondary and physical expression of logically prior ideas (Ibid). While the differentiation between ritual and belief in terms of thought and action is often assumed, it typically prioritizes thought. For instance, Edward Shils argues that although ritual and belief are

intertwined, they are separable—one can accept beliefs without practicing the associated rituals (Ibid). Logically, beliefs could exist without rituals, but rituals could not exist without beliefs. Claude Levi-Strauss extends this logic, drawing a distinction between ritual and myth, eventually leading to a differentiation between living and thinking (Ibid).

While Durkheim's approach to ritual theory may not offer a complete notion of ritual, his work and the work of his followers illustrate a tendency to isolate two sociocultural processes or entities and seek reintegration through ritual theory (Sterchele, 2020). Given this assumption of differentiated processes, theorists have constructed phenomena to mediate them (the processes) if such phenomena did not already exist. Thus, it is suggested that descriptions of how rituals work have been shaped by theoretical speculation and the unconscious manipulation of the thought-action dichotomy. "Likewise, we do not see how dichotomies such as continuity and change, individual experience and social forms, and beliefs and behavior invoke an assumption about thought and action that runs particularly deep in the intellectual traditions of Western culture" (Sterchele, 2020: 12). These dichotomies contribute to the relational definition of the knower, the known and specific types of knowledge, such as the act of burning incense.

Ritual theory has been widely applied across various disciplines, particularly anthropology, sociology and religious studies, to understand the symbolic and social functions of rituals in different cultural contexts. One significant application is in the study of African religions and indigenous belief systems. Scholars like Turner (2023) and Dube, Shoko and Hayes (2011) have explored how rituals serve as vehicles for social transformation and identity formation within communities. Turner's concept of "communitas" emphasizes the role of rituals in fostering a sense of egalitarian unity among participants, particularly during the liminal phase of rituals, where individuals experience a sense of equality and shared belonging. Similarly, Dube, Sthoko and Hayes (2011) examines African healing practices, asserting that rituals facilitate both physical and spiritual healing, while also reinforcing societal values and social hierarchies. Ritual theory has also been pivotal in analyzing political rituals, with scholars such as Bourdieu (1990) and Foucault (2023) exploring how rituals in state functions or religious ceremonies serve as tools of power and control. In modern contexts, ritual theory has been used to examine the evolution of rituals, blending secular and traditional practices. For instance, ritualized acts in media, entertainment and political speeches are now seen as performing similar functions to traditional rituals in constructing

collective identities and influencing social norms (Smith, 2024). Recent studies have applied ritual theory to the relationship between ritual and memory, particularly in post-conflict societies, where collective rituals help communities to process trauma and maintain social cohesion (Ndlovu, Tshuma and Mpofu, 2023). These applications demonstrate the broad relevance of ritual theory in understanding the symbolic and practical roles that rituals play in shaping human societies.

Despite its contributions, ritual theory has faced significant criticism in recent years. Critics argue that the theory, while valuable in exploring the symbolic dimensions of rituals, often oversimplifies or generalizes complex cultural phenomena. A major criticism is the theory's tendency to universalize rituals and assume they function similarly across different societies. Scholars like Bell (2022) have pointed out that ritual theory often overlooks local contexts and variations in ritual performance, leading to an overly homogenized understanding, that fails to account for cultural specificity. Another critique focuses on the theory's emphasis on social cohesion and the reinforcement of societal norms which, according to Harris (2021), neglects the potentially disruptive or subversive nature of rituals. While many rituals reinforce social order, others may challenge or question existing power structures, as seen in protests, resistance movements and alternative rituals. This critique suggests that ritual theory's focus on consensus and stability limits its ability to capture the full scope of ritual practices and their roles in society.

Furthermore, scholars like Miller and Roberts (2024) argue that ritual theory often prioritizes the symbolic aspects of rituals while neglecting their material and performative dimensions. This has led to calls for a more embodied and sensory approach to studying rituals - one that considers the experiences and physical engagement of participants. Miller and Roberts suggest that rituals should be studied not just as symbols, but as actions that engage all the senses, involving participants in complex ways that cannot be reduced to mere symbols or representations. Finally, some critics point to the Eurocentric roots of much ritual theory, which tends to prioritize Western understandings of rituals and their meanings. Additionally, Meyer (2011) critiques the theory for marginalizing non-Western and indigenous ritual practices. He calls for a more inclusive approach to ritual studies, one that takes into account diverse cultural interpretations and practices. In conclusion, while ritual theory has made significant contributions to cultural studies, it is important to recognize its limitations. A more nuanced approach that incorporates context, diversity,

materiality and embodied experience is essential to fully understand the role of rituals in society today.

### 3.3.1 Translation of the Ritual Theory

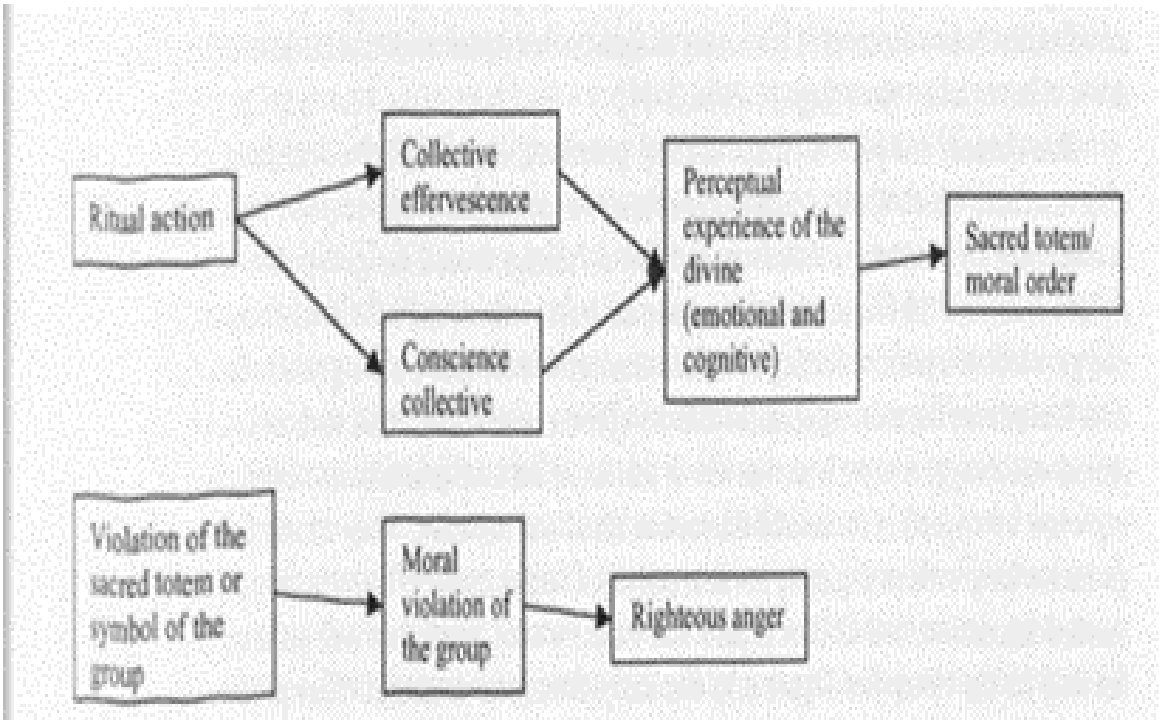



**Figure 3A:**

### 3.3.2 Theoretical contribution

This theory has been relevant because the study explored the cultural requirements behind the ritual of incense burning to communicate with ancestors. The theory advocates for the context of ritual behaviour, established or fixed by traditional rules, which has been observed the African culture. In this study, the theory focuses on probing the ritual behaviour, the terms sacred (the transcendent realm) and profane (the realm of time, space and cause and effect) have remained useful in distinguishing ritual behaviour from other types of actions, including whether a gay male heir may burn incense.

The theory helps us understand the intersection between sacred and the profane. It helps clarify whether there is common agreement on the required characteristics of these two realms by those who use the terms to describe religions, myth and ritual. The theory, by encouraging of ritual and its significance, can help us understand the values invested in the incense ritual. The aim of the theory goes beyond explaining or justifying the value of ritual, but also in terms certain guidelines and requirements; hence, ritual is a determined mode of action. According to Durkheim (Meyer, 2011), the reference or object of ritual is the belief system of a society, which is constituted by a classification of everything into the two realms of the sacred and the profane. This classification is taken as a universal feature of religion. Belief systems, myths and the like, are viewed as expressions of the nature of the sacred realm in which ritual becomes the determined conduct of the individual in a society expressing a relation to the sacred and the profane. The sacred is that aspect of a community's beliefs, myths, and sacred objects that is set apart and forbidden.

The function of ritual in the community is that of providing proper rules for action in the realm of the sacred as well as supplying a bridge for passing into the realm of the profane (Meyer, 2011). The process of burning of incense as a ritual goes through various stages from consulting the i-*Isangoma*, knowing the offering needed for the ancestors, to appointing a traditional healer (*Isangoma*) to guide the process, extending to appointing a head or heir of the family. All the stages link the ritual action beyond that of the dichotomy of sacred and profane thought and action. The first characteristic is a feeling or emotion of respect, awe, fascination or dread in relation to the sacred invested in the process of incense. The second characteristic noted from the burning of incense ritual involves its dependence upon a belief system that is usually expressed in the language of myth. The third characteristic of this ritual action is that it is symbolic in relation to its reference. Agreement on these characteristics can be found in most descriptions of the functions of ritual, which depends upon its reference. Once again, although there is common agreement about the symbolic nature of ritual, there is little agreement with respect to the reference of ritual as symbolic. Ritual is often described as a symbolic expression of actual social relations, status or the role of individuals in a society. For this reason, incense burning can be described as referring to a transcendent, numinous (spiritual) reality and to the ultimate values of a community.

Ritual theory plays a crucial role in understanding the cultural complexities surrounding the role of a gay man as a potential heir and his ability to engage in ancestral rituals, such as burning

incense (*impepho*), to communicate with the ancestors (Miller and Roberts, 2024). In this anthropological study of *iZingoma* in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal, ritual theory offers a framework to examine how societal norms and gender roles intersect with spiritual practices. It allows for the exploration of the symbolic power and transformative nature of rituals, where the act of burning incense transcends mere cultural expectation and becomes an assertion of legitimacy and continuity in the ancestral realm. By applying ritual theory, the study can explore how these rituals maintain social order, reinforce identity and negotiate the boundaries of tradition and modernity, especially in the context of non-heteronormative identities. Furthermore, it illuminates how iZingoma and their communities might challenge or reaffirm the connection between lineage, gender and ancestral communication, offering insights into evolving cultural perspectives in the region (Miller and Roberts, 2024).

### 3.3.3 The Social Constructivist Theory

According to Kim (2006:3), social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding societal phenomena and constructing knowledge based on that understanding. Kim further argues that the premise of social constructivism is built on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning. Therefore, it is crucial to understand and apply social constructivist methods by first grasping the principles that underpin them. Individuals generate meaning through interactions with one another and the world around them. This theory is particularly relevant to the study, as it will help explore the social aspects of the research question: "Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn impepho to communicate with the ancestors?"

Rooted in the works of Vygotsky (1978) and further developed by scholars such as Bruner (1996) and Piaget (1976), social constructivist theory has been widely applied across disciplines, particularly in education, psychology, and sociology. In education, researchers have used social constructivism to explore how learners construct knowledge through social interaction, collaborative learning, and guided participation. For example, studies by Mercer and Littleton (2007) demonstrate how dialogue and shared understanding in group discussions enhance cognitive development and learning outcomes. In anthropology, social constructivist approaches have been applied to analyze identity formation and the role of culture in shaping individual

experiences, such as Cross and Madson's (1997) work on how cultural narratives influence the construction of gender and self-identity. In sociology, social constructivism has been used to understand the development of social norms, behaviors, and institutions. Recent studies have examined the role of social media in shaping contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality, with scholars like Zimman (2020) investigating how online communities create and negotiate new social identities. Additionally, social constructivist frameworks have been used in studies of mental health, exploring how societal perceptions of mental illness shape individuals' self-concept and help-seeking behaviors (Gergen, 2015). Overall, social constructivism remains a powerful framework for understanding how individuals and groups create meaning, interpret experiences, and navigate their social worlds.

### 3.3.4 The intersectional scope of the Social Constructivist Theory

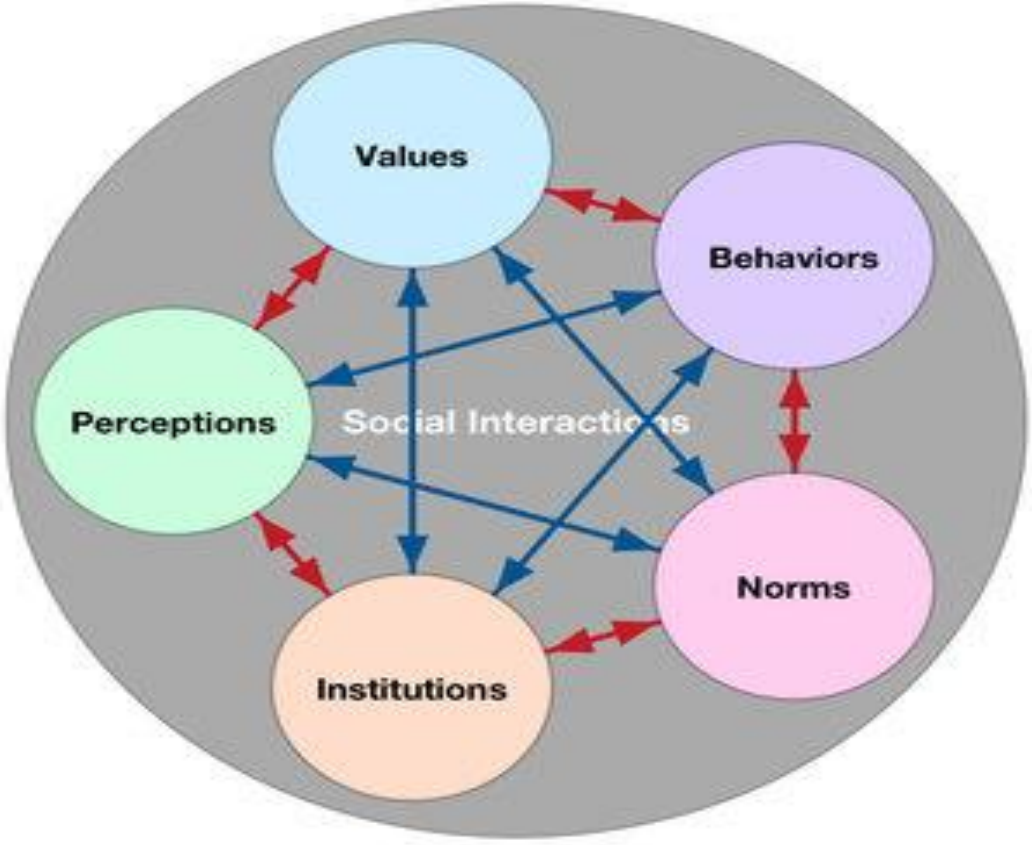



**Figure 3B:**

### 3.3.5 Theoretical contribution

Figure 3B provides a pictorial depiction of the intersecting anthropological variables within the Social Constructivist Theory. The figure highlights how cultural practices, rituals and social norms intersect, contributing to the social constructs that influence one's identity and socialization. The visual summary suggests that cultures and individuals do not experience social connections and categories in isolation. This theory has been useful in searching for any social constructs that address this question of a gay male heir burning incense to communicate with ancestors. The theory has allowed for the collection of meanings attached to the burning of incense to determine the acceptance or rejection of gay men who perform this ritual. The probing of certain social constructions of an incense burning ritual provides one area of knowledge in which people differ in how they view their social selves. In this study, it is shown that the ritual concepts differ culturally in terms of how they are organized as mental maps of social reality, and how they are socially negotiated within the ontological realm of practical knowledge. The concept of social constructs influencing the different domains of social practice with beliefs and values is at the top.

There are varying views about homosexual people, and this shapes how they are perceived, as well as. how they interact with family members and how they are treated. The real question which is challenged by certain constructs, is whether a gay heir can burn incense. The ideas shared especially in a conservative society like Africa limits gay men from undertaking or occupying particular role. The perceptions of *iZingoma* are important for this study as they help collect social constructs from *iZingoma*. These perceptions reflect values, ideas, expressions and world views on burning incense rituals by gay men. Understanding these constructs can help accelerate dynamic interaction between the externalizing of feeling, ideas and concepts and the internalization of ontological markers consisting of sociocultural practices. They constitute reality-loops. Something is socially constructed and is considered to be real, and it applies in particular to this study.

## 3.4 The Sexuality Theory

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, sexuality is a critical variable in anthropological discourse, acting as one of the fundamental drivers of a person’s feelings, beliefs and behaviors. It defines

biological reproduction methods, describes psychological and sociological self-representations, and guides a person's attraction to others. In anthropology, it encompasses the sense of one's sexual identity and preferences (Lucas & Fox, 2018:1). Scientific studies of what it means to be human, have long included an emphasis on sexual life and gendered relationships among individuals from various cultural groups. Notably, in anthropological studies, people's narratives, ideas and beliefs are integral to understanding these dynamics (Shahrokhi, 2017:1). The latter theory is central to this study, which explores the perceptions of iZingoma on the burning of incense by male homosexual family heirs. The research operates under the assumption that discriminatory views held by families and society prevent gay men from participating in traditional rituals as first-born males and family heirs. Therefore, it is pivotal to understand *iZingomas'* views on this matter, as they are the custodians of Zulu culture and social behavior, which includes sexual practices.

Sexuality and gender are intertwined; both are shaped by culture and society, playing central roles in maintaining power relations. The two concepts inform each other, and any scientific inquiry into sexuality inevitably invokes gender. Gender provides the critical lens through which data on sexuality must be interpreted. Factors such as class, age, religion, race, ethnicity, culture, locality and disability, which impact gender relations, also influence the sexual lives of men and women. In other words, sexuality is deeply embedded in the meanings and interpretations of gender systems. By making reference to this theory, the researcher aims to unpack data that addresses objectives such as the perceptions of iZingoma regarding the burning of incense by gay men who are heirs to their families, their views on homosexuality and the acceptance (or rejection) of homosexual men by ancestors.

Sexuality theory has played a crucial role in interdisciplinary studies, particularly in fields such as sociology, anthropology, psychology and gender studies. Scholars in these disciplines have used sexuality theory to examine how sexual identities and behaviors are socially constructed, regulated, and experienced across cultures and historical periods. For instance, Foucault's seminal work on the history of sexuality has significantly shaped contemporary debates around how sexual norms are linked to power and societal control (Foucault, 1978). In anthropology, sexuality theory has been used to understand how sexual practices and roles are embedded in cultural rituals, social norms and political contexts. Studies on sexual diversity, especially around LGBTQAI+ identities, have explored how these identities are recognized or marginalized by state structures and

traditional practices, revealing the intersectionality of sexuality with race, class and gender (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 2008). Additionally, sexuality theory has informed feminist studies, examining how patriarchal societies construct norms around gendered sexuality, and the implications these norms have for power dynamics between men and women (Rich, 1980; hooks, 2000). Theoretical frameworks from Judith Butler's performativity theory and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work on queer theory have been used to analyze sexual fluidity and the performative nature of gender and sexual identities (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990). Furthermore, studies in psychology have used sexuality theory to investigate the impacts of sexual orientation on mental health and the psychological processes surrounding identity formation (Diamond, ,2008; 2016). The application of sexuality theory across these diverse fields underscores its importance in understanding the complex interactions between individual experiences of sexuality, social expectations and power structures in society.

Social Sexuality Theory is situated within the broader context of Sexuality Theory. The social aspect of this theory recognizes that humans are inherently social beings, and their identities are socially constructed. In this regard, Social Sexuality Theory enables anthropologists to explore how sexual behaviors, identities and preferences are shaped by social, cultural and environmental factors (Sullivan, 2020). The social dimension of Sexuality Theory has garnered significant attention in recent anthropological and sociological scholarship. Researchers have used this theory as a framework to understand factors that shape sexual desires, sexual identity, and associated behavioural patterns.

Sullivan (2020) further asserts that Social Sexuality Theory has enabled contemporary anthropologists and sociologists to critically examine other factors influencing sexuality, such as systems of patriarchy, heteronormativity and colonialism, which shape societal expectations. A common thread among the cited scholars is their suggestion that Social Sexuality Theory should be viewed as an inclusive lens. This allows scholars to gain a more nuanced, multi-dimensional approach to understanding the complexities of human sexuality - one that accounts for both social and biological determinants, while also considering the broader structural forces at play.

### 3.4.1 Intersectionalities with Sexuality theory

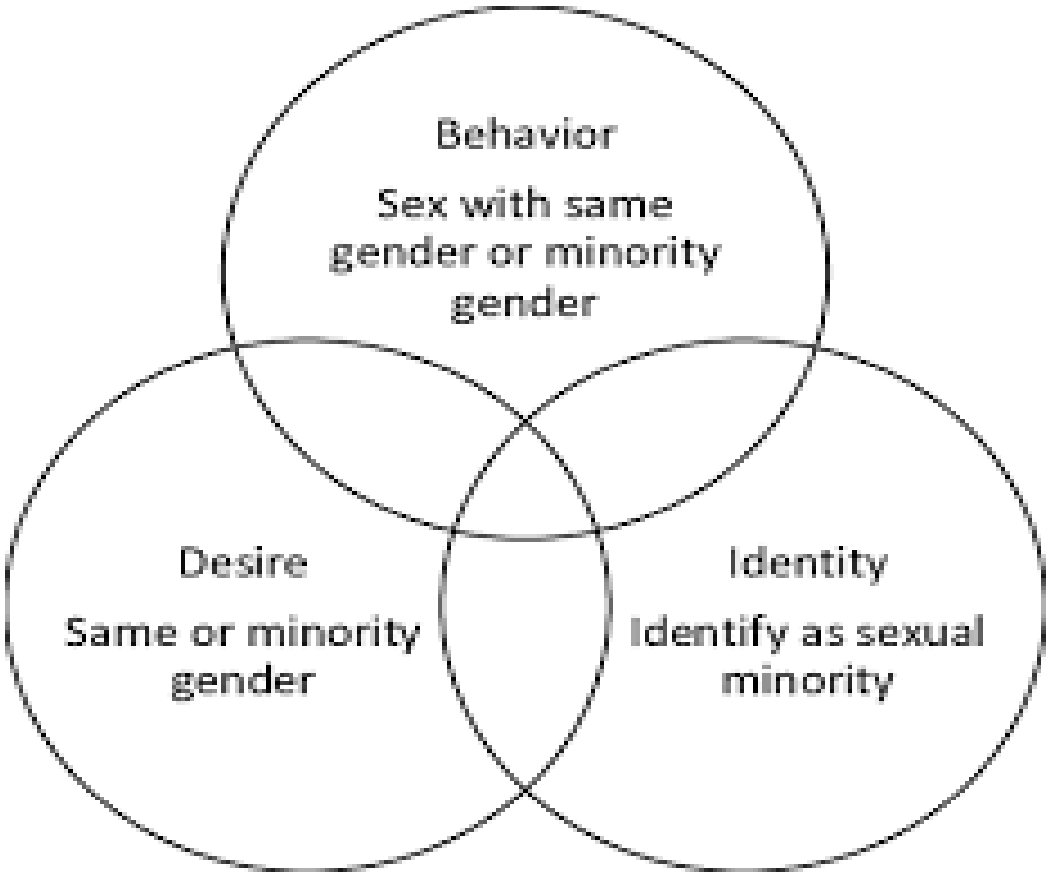



**Figure 3C:**

### 3.4.2 Theoretical contribution

This theory has helped elucidate whether there is any disjunction between being homosexual and being a family heir, and may also reveal discrepancies in iZingomas' views regarding this matter. The theory aids in exploring the various factors contributing to gay men's inability to effectively protect themselves from judgment, and their perceived cultural vulnerability. It suggests that, within the same population groups, gay individuals are more likely to be excluded from leading certain rituals, than their heterosexual counterparts. When permitted to participate, they tend to play predominant roles in other aspects, as social constructs guide these practices.

The theory also helps to establish why gay and heterosexual men play different roles in the burning of incense ritual. By applying Sexuality Theory, one can make sense of the complex issues surrounding sexuality and the judgment that emerges from being gay. Sexuality debates often perpetuate ideas of exclusion and inclusion, thereby reinforcing cultural norms. The conditioning of exclusion works hand in hand with specific cultural norms, meaning that the ability of gay men to partake in the incense-burning ritual may also depend on the availability of other family members to assume the responsibilities of leading the ritual. These gay men have less autonomy in sexual relationships and are more likely to be marginalized rather than embraced within the cultural context due to their sexuality.

Furthermore, Sexuality Theory plays a crucial role in examining the intersection of gender, identity and cultural practices in the study of whether a gay man can be the heir of the family and communicate with ancestors through the burning of incense (impepho) in the context of iZingoma in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal. This theoretical framework challenges normative assumptions about sexuality and family roles within traditional Zulu culture, which often privileges heterosexual, patriarchal lines in matters of inheritance and spiritual authority. By applying sexuality theory, the study can explore how non-normative sexual identities, such as those of gay men, interact with established cultural and spiritual practices. It invites a deeper understanding of how social norms around sexuality are fluid and can be reinterpreted within the context of indigenous beliefs, ancestral veneration and the healing roles of iZingoma. In this way, the theory helps to critique the rigidity of traditional gender roles and to explore the ways in which queer individuals can both navigate and reshape their positions within spiritual and family hierarchies.

### 3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter summarizes how the theoretical frameworks discussed have provided a comprehensive understanding of sexual identity, emphasizing the importance of considering the various intersectional factors that influence human behavior. These frameworks were carefully contextualized within the scope of the study, demonstrating how they address the multi-layered contexts relevant to the research. This validation not only supports the key objectives of the study, but also confirms the relevance and appropriateness of the qualitative research design introduced

in Chapter One. A more detailed discussion of the qualitative phenomenology research design follows in the next chapter**.**

# CHAPTER FOUR

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 4.1 Introduction

The qualitative study adopted a research design commonly used by anthropologists to explore people's lived experiences and the performance of their rituals and customs. A qualitative research approach places the participants at the core of knowledge production, allowing anthropologists to immerse themselves in the natural settings of the population being studied. Lim (2024) assert that qualitative research is particularly suitable when the aim is to collect and interpret life experiences, offering deep insights into the richness and complexity of the subject being studied. In this context, the research design will enable iZingoma to narrate their experiences and explain how ancestors accept or reject homosexuals as heirs responsible for performing incense-burning rituals after the death of their fathers. Neubauer (2019:3) supports this view, noting that qualitative research is rooted in a paradigm of cultural and personal knowledge, emphasizing subjectivity. This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the study. The methodology plays a crucial role in providing a structured framework for data collection, analysis, research location, participant selection and ethical considerations. The study follows a qualitative research design, incorporating methods such as interviews for data collection and thematic analysis, which will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

## 4.2 Research site

The study was conducted in the Ugu District Municipality, which falls under the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. This municipality, established in 2000, includes the city of Durban and surrounding towns and is one of the 11 districts of the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. As of 2011, the majority of its 3,442,361 inhabitants spoke isiZulu. In an 1859 Zulu grammar book, Bishop Colenso asserted that the root word *iTeku* means "bay of the sea," derived from the name *Mtheku*, used by the Thabethe clan, who were leaders of the Nguni people. Furthermore, the original local inhabitants used the locative form *eTekwini* as a proper name for Durban. Ugu districts have four local municipalities, which are: Ray Nkonyeni, uMdoni, Umzumbe and

uMziwabantu. These local municipalities are the hub of Ugu district municipality and formed the core of this research as participants grew up in these municipalities, which predominantly host Zulu residences. The majority of them never emigrated from other municipalities all their lives while some might have migrated from other municipalities and other provinces; hence all the study participants have resided in Ugu districts and its local municipalities. Their ages range from 15+ years, making them the perfect fit to provide their cultural views on whether a gay man could be the heir of the family and burn incense to communicate with ancestors.

There are different interpretations for eTekwini - an 1895 English-Zulu dictionary translates the base word *iteku* as "bay," "creek," "gulf," or "sinus," while a 1905 Zulu-English dictionary notes that *eTekwini* refers to Durban. According to Statistics South Africa's 2020 Mid-Year Population Estimates (2020) , eThekwini Metro had an estimated population of 3.721 million. The steady population growth in Durban is driven by various economic activities and academic opportunities, which continue to attract diverse groups of people. The city has also recorded an increase in the number of traditional healers or *iZingoma* in the area.

Ugu District Municipality is one of the ten Category C municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal. It is located in the far south of the province and covers an area of 4,908 km². The district has a 112-kilometre-long coastline forming its eastern border and is bordered by the eThekwini Metro to the north, uMgungundlovu and Harry Gwala District Municipalities to the west and the Eastern Cape Province to the south. The total population of the Ugu District municipal area is 754,954, with a growth rate of 1.1% in 2019, increased from 0.6% in 2009. The presence of *iZingoma* in the district makes participant recruitment more accessible for the study.

### 4.3 The Contribution of Research in Anthropology

Ali (2009:16) notes that research in anthropology is motivated by specific reasons, primarily the need to observe and understand the constant changes occurring in societies and the world at large. Anthropological research seeks to clarify facts and dispel misconceptions that may confuse individuals as they navigate different aspects of life. Ali (2009) argues that change is one of the most prevalent features of human existence, influencing every society in the modern world. The primary goal of anthropological research is to explore and understand the variations in social, cultural and economic contexts, as well as the extent to which individuals experience these changes

in their daily lives. Anthropology contributes to this exploration through inductive, critical research methods, particularly ethnography, which generates scientific knowledge by collecting qualitative data and examining people's lived experiences.

Anthropological research continues to play a crucial role in shaping policies and interventions by providing a deep understanding of social dynamics. Policies informed by anthropological research are often more effective because they are responsive to the specific needs of communities, ensuring the sustainability of relevant interventions. Researchers conducting anthropological studies must adhere to a structured scientific framework, which includes several key obligations:

- Researchers must remain focused on finding answers to the research questions.
- Research must be conducted within a structured framework that encompasses specific philosophies and methodologies.

## 4.4 Research Approach

### 4.4.1 Qualitative Strategy

The use of qualitative research methods in this study has proven highly effective, as this approach enables a detailed exploration of social phenomena (Smith & Brown, 2023; Taylor, 2021). The interpersonal nature of qualitative methods, which relies on direct interactions, simplifies data collection and facilitates a deeper understanding of social issues. This approach focuses on non-numerical data, emphasizing the interpretation of meanings and providing insight into social issues by examining the lived experiences of different populations (Smith & Brown, 2023; Taylor, 2021). The expressive nature of qualitative research makes it particularly useful for identifying patterns and exploring the connections between individuals and their communities, through in-depth investigation. In social science, qualitative research typically examines the intimate aspects of social interactions, offering a deeper understanding of everyday life.

This study employed qualitative research techniques to explore theories, experiences and perceptions, investigating how participants interpret their own actions, language, and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2022). Data was collected through focus groups, interviews and observations to address predefined research questions (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2022). Qualitative research is inherently flexible and interdisciplinary, accommodating various perspectives and paradigms

(Patton, 2020). Its adaptability allows it to capture complex human behaviors and interactions (Taylor, 2021).

Engaging with iZingoma practitioners was essential for gathering firsthand data, although logistical challenges arose, particularly due to the difficulty in accessing participants in Durban while being based in the Western Cape. Durban is a key hub for iZingoma services, especially in the rural Ugu district. The practitioners' ability to integrate traditional services with local culture, using their linguistic and cultural knowledge, reflects a high degree of cultural assimilation and a strong commitment to addressing community needs. Despite this, iZingoma, practitioners face various challenges, including perspectives on issues such as homosexuality. Their dedication to traditional work is driven by both a deep-seated calling and financial instability. The intersection of their social status, knowledge, and influence as iZingoma practitioners further complicates their position.

Qualitative research methods are particularly advantageous here, due to their adaptability to unforeseen changes in the research environment (Taylor, 2021). Anthropology relies heavily on relational interaction, which made qualitative methods essential for ensuring that this research was both immersive and meaningful. Elhami and Khoshnevisan (2022) highlight that qualitative research is especially effective for exploring participants' perceptions and lived experiences. This approach enabled the collection of detailed narratives, fostering a close connection with participants and enhancement of data reliability. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative methods allow researchers to gain insight into the perspectives of people affected by a phenomenon while also observing their behaviors within their social contexts. Aspers and Corte (2022) describe qualitative research as an iterative process where researchers continually refine their understanding through proximity to the phenomenon under investigation. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) define qualitative research as multimethodical, interpretive and naturalistic, with a focus on studying subjects in their natural settings and interpreting phenomena from the participants' perspectives.

Qualitative research encompasses a range of empirical materials, including personal experiences, introspection, life stories, interviews, ethnography, observations, historical accounts and visual texts, all of which help describe significant social issues. This method often involves personalized

writing, using the first person ("I") and following a logical flow from the introduction through to the conclusion of the dissertation. According to Creswell and Poth (2022), this inductive approach begins at the ground level, contrasting with theoretical models or predefined perceptions. Rahman (2021) characterizes qualitative research as a method that produces descriptive findings by studying individuals' lived experiences, behaviors, emotions and cultural phenomena. Additionally, Van de Spuy and Jayakrishnan (2023) emphasize the importance of storytelling in qualitative research as a means for individuals to make sense of their experiences, with researchers interpreting these stories to uncover embedded meanings.

While qualitative research offers rich insights into complex phenomena, it has long faced criticism regarding its methodological rigor, subjectivity and generalizability. One common criticism is its perceived lack of objectivity. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, ethnography and case studies, rely heavily on researcher interpretation, which may introduce bias (Lincoln & Guba, 2020). Unlike quantitative research, which minimizes researcher influence through standardized instruments and statistical analysis, qualitative research is more fluid and open to interpretation. This subjectivity raises concerns about the validity of findings, as different researchers may interpret the same data in various ways (Lincoln & Guba, 2020). Another key criticism pertains to generalizability, as qualitative research often involves small, purposively selected samples that may not represent larger populations, raising concerns about external validity (Pope & Mays, 2021). The time-intensive nature of qualitative research is also seen as a limitation, as data collection, transcription and analysis require significant time and resources (Silverman, 2022). Despite these criticisms, qualitative research remains valuable for providing deep insights into human behavior and social phenomena (Mason, 2022).

The qualitative research strategy has played a pivotal role in the anthropological study of cultural views regarding iZingoma (traditional healers) in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal, particularly in examining the complex questions surrounding the roles and rituals associated with ancestral communication. Through qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork, the study provided a deep understanding of how social, cultural and spiritual beliefs intersect with contemporary issues such as gender and inheritance. The research explored whether a gay man can serve as the heir to his family and perform the sacred ritual of burning incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors, a role traditionally

ascribed to specific gendered and familial norms within Zulu culture. The flexibility of qualitative research allowed the study to capture nuanced perspectives from iZingoma, community elders and practitioners, offering insight into how ancestral traditions are being reinterpreted and adapted in response to modern shifts in identity, sexuality and family structure. This approach created a space for diverse voices to be heard and understood within the context of ongoing cultural negotiation.

### 4.4.2 Research Paradigm

It is crucial for researchers to explicitly identify the paradigm that underpins their study, as it provides the foundation for the research's purpose, motivation and anticipated outcomes (Rosiek, Snyder & Pratt, 2020). In this study, the interpretivist paradigm was employed. Without selecting an appropriate paradigm, decisions related to methodology, research design and methods may become incoherent. Hence, clearly stating the paradigm is essential in research reporting.

A research paradigm refers to a set of beliefs about reality that shapes a researcher's worldview (Rosiek et al., 2020). For instance, an anthropological study examining whether a gay man can serve as an heir and perform ancestral rituals, guided by the interpretivist paradigm, exemplifies this concept. Interpretivism aims to understand rather than measure social phenomena, with the researcher focusing on interpreting individuals' perspectives and contextual experiences instead of generalizing findings. It acknowledges multiple realities shaped by social and cultural contexts, providing richer insights into participants' lived experiences (Mazzei, 2017). Although interpretivism offers profound understanding, its subjective nature raises concerns about validity and generalizability (St. Pierre, 2014), and it often overlooks political and ideological influences in knowledge production. However, the interpretivist approach remains valuable for investigating complex social issues, using qualitative methods like interviews, case studies and ethnography (Rosiek et al., 2020).

The interpretivist paradigm was suitable for this study, which aimed to understand the meanings and social realities constructed by individuals in specific cultural contexts. In exploring whether a gay man can serve as an heir and perform ancestral rites in Zulu culture, the interpretivist approach facilitated a detailed investigation into how iZingoma (traditional healers) interpreted and negotiated cultural norms and spiritual practices. As reality is viewed as socially constructed, this study captured the diverse, and at times conflicting, perspectives of iZingoma regarding the

intersection of sexual identity and traditional roles. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm emphasized the symbolic meanings attached to ancestral rites, offering deeper insights into how cultural values, spiritual beliefs and evolving social norms shape the acceptance or rejection of a gay heir within the community. Through qualitative methods like interviews and participant observation, the study explored the culturally embedded interpretations of iZingoma, providing a nuanced understanding of the relationship between sexuality, inheritance and ancestral communication.

### 4.4.3 Justification of the philosophical assumptions of the study

Researchers use different paradigms depending on the purpose of research and the positions they hold in their research. Based on the research paradigm, the research questions and objectives are explored, therefore understanding the paradigm in conducting research is crucial. Similarly, Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) explain that a paradigm is inclusive of several assumptions that are important to be developed or discussed in the study. These assumptions are classified as the ontology and epistemological assumptions.

#### 4.4.3A Ontology

Ontology can be briefly defined as the nature of reality. According to Kohn (2015) "ontology" is the study of "reality", one that encompasses but is not limited to humanly constructed worlds. Alternatively, the word "ontology" may be reserved for the study of "Being" in the Heideggerian sense, whereas "ontic" may be used to represent "reality." Ontology could also be considered in terms of "becoming" This assumption is mainly concerned with the phenomenon of the nature of existence, seeking an answer or reality to a research question by indicating an existing type of knowledge (Kohn, 2015). In this study, the concept of ontology can be applied to understand the nature of reality as it pertains to the practices and beliefs surrounding the role of a gay man as the heir of the family, and his ability to burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors.

Ontology, in this context, allows the researcher to delve into the fundamental nature of these cultural practices and beliefs. It helps in understanding how individuals within the community perceive the reality of these phenomena. The question of whether a gay man can be the heir of the family and perform ancestral rituals such as burning incense to communicate with ancestors

reflects a particular ontology, which may vary across different cultural contexts. By investigating the ontology surrounding these practices, the researcher explored the underlying assumptions, beliefs and values that inform people's understanding of reality within this cultural framework. This involved examining how individuals within the community conceptualize the roles of heirs, gender, sexuality and spiritual connection with ancestors. Furthermore, ontology guided the researcher in identifying existing knowledge and frameworks within the community that inform these cultural views, by acknowledging the diverse perspectives and understandings that shape the reality of these phenomena for different members of the community. Overall, applying ontology in this anthropological study allowed a deeper exploration of the cultural views surrounding the role of iZingoma, including the complexities of gender, sexuality, family dynamics and spiritual beliefs, and how these aspects intersect to shape the lived experiences of individuals within the Ugu district of KwaZulu-Natal.

### 4.4.3B Epistemology

Epistemology can be briefly defined as how reality is known by the researcher and therefore, it is concerned with how a researcher is aiming to uncover knowledge to reach reality. Moreover, epistemology is considered as an internal factor within the researcher, namely how a researcher can distinguish between what is right or wrong. According to Al-Saadi (2014) epistemology in general is the assumptions we make about the kind or the nature of knowledge or how it is possible to find out about the world. Grass (2024: 44) asserts that the first logic of qualitative research is epistemology, relating to its essence as a scientific endeavour. He further argues that it is important in research as it clarifies what exactly is meant by both objectivity and knowledge. The epistemological approach is applied in this research in the sense that iZingoma have knowledge and experience in the burning of incense, which is a ritual reserved for heirs and elders in the family. This known assumption forms the basis for the researcher to uncover whether a gay heir can burn incense in Zulu families, a ritual that is mostly patriarchal in Zulu families.

The research questions the knowledge reality of the rituals, and more particularly the burning of incense. The question of whether gay men can be the heir of the family and burn incense also questions whether it is a hindrance for gay heirs to burn incense if they are not accepted by their families, and whether it’s right or wrong in terms of the indigenous knowledge and ancestors.

Furthermore, epistemology, according to Al-Saadi (2014:1) looks at the following aspects: interpretivist or constructivist; these types of epistemology assume that there are ways of knowing about the world other than direct observation, namely through our perceptions and interpretations of the world around us. People use their perceptions to interpret what their senses tell them. Therefore, knowledge of the world is based on our 'understanding' which arises from our reflections of events, rather than only on lived experiences (Ormston et al, 2014) as cited in Al-Saadi (2014:3).

Based on the positivist and objectivist tradition, it is regarded as another type of epistemological position which focuses on the importance of objectivity and evidence in searching for truth and in this regard, the world is unaffected by the researcher. Also, according to Ali (2024: 187) positivism is the hallmark of scientific inquiry, characterised by its adherence to empirical observation, logical deduction and the quest for objective knowledge. In this regard the researcher remained cognisant of the importance of cultural views of iZingoma on whether a gay heir could be the heir of the family and burn incense to communicate with ancestors, rather than selectively choosing information that was subjective in nature but objective to ensure the true reality and the authenticity of the views and perception of the study participants. Interpretivism and constructionism approaches argue that knowledge is produced by exploring and understanding (not discovering) the social world of the people being studied, focusing on their meaning and interpretations, i.e., meanings are socially constructed by the social actors in a particular context. In this regard these assumptions relate to the study in the sense that the meaning of burning incense goes beyond cultural traditions, gender expectations and spirituality, as it also delves into the authenticity of the heir and their true intentions to the ritual itself like burning incense. This means that the heirs should ensure that they are pure and ensure that the ancestral message is well excited as and when the need arises for iZingoma to guide and translate the ancestral message.Overall, applying epistemology in this anthropological study allowed a deeper exploration of the cultural views surrounding the role of iZingoma and gay heirs on the burning of incense, including the complexities of gender, sexuality, family dynamics and spiritual beliefs, and how these aspects intersect to shape the lived experiences and reality of individuals within the Ugu district of KwaZulu-Natal.

### 4.5 Locating the research paradigm in the study context

The interpretivist paradigm has played a crucial role in shaping the study of cultural practices in anthropology, especially in understanding complex, context-specific phenomena such as the role of a gay man as an heir, and the practice of burning incense (impepho) to communicate with ancestors, as explored in the study of iZingoma in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal. For interpretivism, the emphasis is on understanding human behavior from the perspective of those involved, and seeks to uncover the meanings and symbols that individuals and communities attach to their practices. In the context of this anthropological study, the interpretivist approach allows the researcher to delve into the lived experiences and subjective realities of the iZingoma and their communities, offering insights into how sexuality, tradition and spirituality intersect in a specific cultural setting. The study explores how the traditional roles and expectations within the Zulu culture, particularly regarding the role of the heir and ancestral communication, are influenced by modern interpretations of identity, including sexual orientation. An interpretivist lens encourages the examination of these practices, not just from an outsider's viewpoint, but by understanding how gay men, within the context of the Zulu community, navigate ancestral worship, their roles as potential heir, and the broader cultural significance of their actions. This was achieved through the understanding of ritual theory, which is centred on the actions and practices of cultures; the theory is relevant to this study in the sense that it looked at the fact that rituals serve as vehicles for social transformation and identity formation within communities Turner (2023) and Dube (2021).

Sexuality theory remains relevant in this study as, in anthropology, it encompasses the sense of one’s sexual identity and preferences (Lucas & Fox, 2018:1). By focusing on the nuanced meanings, symbols and rituals associated with the use of impepho, in this regard the study unpacks the symbolic communication between the living and the ancestors and how this communication is reinterpreted or maintained in light of changing social norms, including the acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in traditional religious and spiritual practices. This paradigm emphasizes the importance of context, cultural relativism and the subjective experiences of those involved in such practices, highlighting the flexibility and dynamic nature of cultural identity in the face of social change. Through interpretivism, the study of iZingoma rituals and the role of a gay man in these practices offers a rich, multifaceted understanding of how cultural views on heritage, sexuality and spirituality evolve and coexist in contemporary South African society. This

supports the relevancy of social constructivism theory, which looks at the premise that social constructivism is built on specific assumptions about reality in terms of explaining what knowledge is, where it originates and how it is formed as well as that learning is the acquisition of new skills and knowledge (Ignacio and Paras, 2024). Therefore, it is crucial to understand and apply social constructivist methods by first grasping the principles that underpin them such as cultural traditions, gender expectations, spirituality, practices and systems of beliefs which remain the social construct of families as, in this study, they influence whether a gay men can be the heir of the family and burn incense to communicate with the ancestors. It also relates to the view of iZingoma on this ritual, which is also influenced by these factors.

### 4.5.1 How Objectives and key questions relate to the study

Objectives and key questions remain the cornerstone of any study. In the context of this study these guided the theoretical framework chosen, prompted the methodology and research design used, as well as paradigms and philosophical assumptions.

#### 4.5.1.A The integration of research objectives research questions to the context of the study

- The primary objective of the study was to determine whether a gay man can be the heir of the family and burn incense (*impepho*) to communicate with the ancestors. This objective prompted the researcher to apply ritual theory to the study, as the burning of incense is a ritual practice by Zulu families. These families form the population of the study while sexuality theory was used to make sense of the gay heir. Here "gay" may be regarded as a sexuality identity that defines men who are sexually attracted to other men. The premise of sexuality theory in anthropology encompasses the sense of one's sexual identity and preferences (Lucas & Fox, 2018:1). In the context of this study the gay heir relates to the primary question which was raised, namely "can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (*impepho*) to communicate with the ancestors?". The significance of this research question, objectives and methodology is that it is a phenomenologically qualitative research approach to study people's experiences, the celebration of their rituals/customs and its position. The researcher is at the center of knowledge creation; thus this study is to determine whether a gay man can be the heir of the family and burn incense (*impepo*) to communicate with ancestors in the Ugu district municipality. The interpretivist

approach allowed the researcher to capture lived experiences and realities of whether a gay men could be the heir of the family and burn incense. The lived experiences is the ritual practice of burning incense "through ontological philosophical assumption," while the reality is that gay heirs do exist – an "epistemological philosophical assumption".

- The second objective was to understand the indigenous knowledge that iZingoma possess regarding the homosexual phenomena, where social constructivism theory is applied in order to delve into this objective. Social constructivism theory is applied to analyse the indigenous knowledge system, to understand culture in the context of this study, namely "the indigenous knowledge iZingoma," as well as the context in understanding societal phenomena and constructing knowledge, based on that understanding of "the homosexual phenomenon., Therefore; it answers the question "what indigenous knowledge do iZingoma possess regarding the homosexual phenomenon?" Through a phenomenological qualitative/qualitative research approach, which is to study people's experiences in the context of the study, the indigenous knowledge that iZingoma possess regarding the homosexual phenomenon, therefore answers the second research question and objective. Interpretivism was applied as it aims to understand, rather than measure social phenomena regarding indigenous knowledge that iZingoma possess regarding homosexual phenomena. The researcher focused on interpreting the latter regarding the homosexual phenomena and their contextual experiences, which is the ontological philosophical assumption.
- The third and fourth objectives explore the views and perceptions of iZingoma regarding Zulu gay men, who are positioned as the heirs of their families tasked with burning *impepho* to communicate with the ancestors once their fathers have passed on, and seek to understand the views/and perceptions of iZingoma on homosexuality in general and on gay male heirs in particular. These objectives prompted the use of ritual theory, social constructivism and sexuality theory. The use of ritual theory was prompted by the ritualistic nature of the burning incense, whereas the use of social constructivist theory and sexuality were used to delve into the views and perceptions that iZingoma have with regard to the ritual itself, and the complexities about gay heirs in Zulu families and homosexuality in general. A phenomenological qualitative research approach was deemed necessary for the study as it helped to assess the views and perceptions of iZingoma with regard to Zulu gay

heirs burning incense for their families. The researcher made use of this approach, as the research is centered around iZingoma providing their lived experiences with regard to the ritual of burning incense and their understanding of Zulu gay men who are positioned as heirs in their families, and given the responsibility to perform the ritual of burning incense to communicate with ancestors after their fathers have died. Through an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher managed to explore the views and perceptions of iZingoma regarding Zulu gay heirs and their role in burning incense, the ontological philosophical assumption, therefore answering the question: "what are the views/perceptions of iZingoma on the burning of incense by gay Zulu men who are the heirs of the family?"

- The fifth objective looked at learning about any corridors of indigenous knowledge that either discriminate against, or approve of the burning of incense by gay men. This objective was underpinned by ritual theory, focusing on indigenous knowledge about the burning of incense, whereas as sexuality theory focused on gay men, as the term "gay" relates to sexuality identity. Social constructivism theory delved into learning if there was any indigenous knowledge that discriminated against, or approved of the burning of incense by gay men, to understand the cultural significance that this ritual has. Additionally, it assessed the role of indigenous systems in approving or disapproving of gay men performing this ritual, the social phenomena being gay heirs and discriminating against or approving of their role in terms of indigenous knowledge. This ensured that the phenomenological qualitative research design was relevant to use, as indigenous knowledge is taught through enculturation (acquisition of characteristics of a culture), assembling them to be based on people's experience and lived realities - "the epistemological philosophical assumption". Through an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher managed to learn about the stance that indigenous knowledge has regarding the burning of incense by gay men in Zulu families, an "ontological philosophical assumption". The latter addressed the question "do the ancestors discriminate against homosexual men, or do they give them equal recognition as they do with straight men?".
- The last objective focused on learning whether being a homosexual male in a Zulu family implied that the gay man was accepted or rejected by the ancestors, during which the social constructivism theory delved into the family dynamics, the acceptance or rejection of homosexual males in Zulu families. Additionally, sexuality theory focused on homosexual

males as a sexual identity, whereas ritual theory delved into the ritual of burning incense for the ancestors as practiced by Zulu families to connect with them in seeking guidance, protection and asking for blessings.

The use of a phenomenological qualitative research design was deemed appropriate for this objective, as learning whether gay heirs were accepted or rejected by ancestors through the narratives and lived experience of iZingoma, can be understood through phenomenon from iZingoma as they hold valuable knowledge and experience about the research question (does being a homosexual in a Zulu family imply that that a gay man is accepted or rejected by the ancestors?). This prompted the use of non-probability sampling "the purposive and snowballing sampling," discussed in the next section. As discussed earlier, an iinterpretivist paradigm was used to provide a detailed account of how iZingoma (traditional healers) construe and convey their cultural understanding of whether homosexual males in families were accepted or not by ancestors - "the ontological philosophical assumption."

### 4.6 Sampling

Sampling is an essential component of any study, according to Ahmed (2024:1) sampling techniques involve the selection of a subset from the larger population and are core to research, since through sampling, the nature and generalizability of findings depend on it as it helps researchers select participants. Thus it yields valuable insights. This study used two sampling techniques - purposive and snowball sampling - each served a distinct purpose. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to select specific participants, based on their knowledge and relevance to the research topic, while snowball sampling helped identify additional participants through referrals from initial interviewees. The total sample size comprised 20 iZingoma participants.

Sampling methods guide the selection of participants and ensure the representativeness of the sample, while minimizing biases (Daniel1, Tafida, Abubakar, Abdulrahman and Abubakar (2024), While probability sampling is commonly used in quantitative research to generalize findings in a larger population, non-probability sampling, as applied here, does not aim for generalization but rather for in-depth exploration of specific cases (Daniell et al, 2024). By focusing on a smaller

sample, this study aimed to capture the nuanced views of the participants and draw meaningful inferences related to the research objectives.

### 4.6.1 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling has been employed in this study. This method is also known by other terms, including selective or subjective sampling, all of which refer to the deliberate selection of participants. The choice of purposive sampling was driven by the need to focus on the iZingoma people residing in Durban, specifically in the Ugu District. Due to the difficulty of creating a comprehensive sampling frame for such a specific group, purposive sampling ensured that the right individuals, whose experiences and perceptions were crucial to this research, were included. This approach is commonly used in social science studies, particularly when detailed descriptions of phenomena are required, and when the researcher seeks to identify information-rich cases (Nora, 2019). While purposive sampling is highly effective in these situations, it is also subject to bias because the participants are specifically chosen, which can limit the diversity of perspectives. Some experts view this method as one in which participants or events are selected purposefully to provide unique information that is not available through other sampling strategies.

According to Shamsudin, Hassim and Manaf (2024:5), purposive sampling relies on the researcher's expertise to select individuals who meet certain predefined criteria. This allows researchers to select participants who align with the key characteristics of the research topic and are likely to provide the data needed. This sampling technique aims to identify individuals or groups who are particularly well-suited to answering research questions about specific social issues. In this study, this is exemplified by the selection of 20 iZingoma (both male and female) from extended family systems, who carry multiple roles and responsibilities. These individuals represented the ideal candidates for answering the research questions, as they possessed deep cultural knowledge and actively maintain traditional practices. The selection of participants through purposive sampling helped identify the right individuals in rural areas around Durban City, whose experiences are essential to understanding the role of incense (impepho) and ancestral communication in their cultural practices.

Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental or selective sampling and is a non-probability technique used frequently in qualitative research. This approach involves intentionally selecting

participants based on their specific characteristics or qualities that align with the study's goals. It is especially useful when the aim is to explore particular phenomena or perspectives in an in-depth manner, rather than to generalize findings in a larger population (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016), as cited in Shamsudin et al (2024:5). The targeted selection of participants contributes to the study's depth and relevance by ensuring the inclusion of individuals who can provide meaningful insights into the research questions. In this research, purposive sampling allowed a focus on individuals deeply involved in the practice of ancestral rites, specifically the iZingoma, thus enhancing the quality of the data collected.

However, as discussed earlier, there are criticisms of purposive sampling, particularly regarding its subjectivity. Since the researcher selects participants based on their judgment, the sample may not represent the broader population, leading to findings that cannot be generalized (Samsudin et al, 2024). This selection bias can distort the outcomes, especially if personal assumptions influence the selection process (Bell-Martin and Marston 2019). Furthermore, purposive sampling often fails to capture the complexity and diversity of the population included, as it relies on narrow, predefined criteria (Ahmad and Wilkins, 2024). Ethical concerns may also arise if important voices are excluded based on these criteria, thus skewing the findings (Bouncken, Czakon and Schmitt, 2025). Moreover, the lack of transparency in participant selection can undermine the reproducibility of the research, as other researchers may find it difficult to replicate the study (Freese, Rauf and Voelkel, 2022). Despite these criticisms, purposive sampling is considered valuable in exploratory research, particularly when the goal is to gain a deep understanding of specific cases or phenomena (Campbell, Greenwood, Prior, Shearer, Walkem, Young, Bywaters and Walker, 2020). Researchers must, however, be transparent about the sampling process and acknowledge its limitations, such as the risk of bias and limited generalizability.

Criterion purposive sampling is a specific form of purposive sampling in which participants are selected based on predefined criteria that align with the research goals. This approach ensures that the sample is representative of the key characteristics essential to the study, allowing for a deeper understanding of specific phenomena. This method is particularly useful when studying specialized or hard-to-reach populations (Daniell et al., 2024) and (Shamsudin et al., 2024). In this study, purposive sampling was particularly beneficial for selecting traditional leaders and iZingoma, as it allowed for the inclusion of individuals who possessed the expertise and cultural

knowledge relevant to the research topic. By utilizing this technique, the study targeted individuals who were recognized leaders within their communities, thus ensuring that the sample reflected the depth of cultural insight needed to explore the research questions.

### 4.6.2 Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling was used in this research to identify potential participants. This method proved valuable because iZingoma are not easily accessible through conventional means as they do not typically advertise their services or wait for people to seek them out in public spaces. Establishing trust is essential, and snowball sampling facilitated this by enabling participants to refer the researcher to others in their social networks. According to Leighton, Kardong-Edgren, Schneidereith, and Foisy-Doll (2021: 38), snowball sampling is a recognized and viable method of recruiting study participants not easily accessible or known to the researcher. The researcher used this method through successfully interviewing one participant, and asking them to refer other potential participants, thus expanding the sample size like a snowball gathering more snow as it rolls along. This method proved particularly useful in rural areas, where iZingoma may be more secluded and harder to find. Snowball sampling is a non-random technique that uses initial contacts to help identify additional participants, gradually increasing the sample size through the development of chain referral approaches (Muszyńska, 2023). This method is especially useful when studying small or hidden populations, such as those involved in specific cultural practices or professions.

Despite its widespread use, snowball sampling has faced criticism for its potential to introduce bias into the sample. Since the initial participants are responsible for recruiting others, the sample may not be representative of the broader population, particularly if participants tend to refer others who share similar characteristics or experiences Shamsudin et al (2024:5). This lack of diversity in the sample can limit the generalizability of the study's findings, especially when the population being studied is heterogeneous. Moreover, the reliance on social networks can perpetuate the inclusion of marginalized or hidden groups, which may further skew the sample (Daniell et al., 2024). Ethical concerns may also arise, particularly when sensitive topics are involved, as the informality of the referral process may not always meet ethical standards for informed consent and confidentiality (Muszyńska, 2023). Additionally, the social status and network size of initial

participants may influence the sample composition, leading to power imbalances that may affect the research's fairness.

One of the challenges with snowball sampling is estimating the appropriate sample size. Because the sample grows through referrals, it may be difficult to determine when data saturation has been reached or when enough participants have been included for meaningful analysis as stated by Ahmad and Wilkins (2024). This can also complicate the replication of studies, as the process lacks a predetermined framework. While snowball sampling offers practical advantages in reaching hard-to-access populations, researchers must carefully consider the potential biases and limitations associated with the method. Transparency and ethical rigor are essential when using this technique, to ensure the reliability and credibility of the research process.

In the context of this study, snowball sampling was particularly effective for accessing iZingoma, who are often embedded in close-knit social networks. This method allowed the researcher to tap into existing relationships and gain access to individuals who may have been difficult to identify using traditional methods. Through referrals, it was possible to connect with other iZingoma who could provide valuable insights into the cultural practices and social dynamics of the community. Snowball sampling also helped mitigate cultural barriers, by utilizing key figures with social capital to mediate the recruitment process, thus facilitating a smoother interaction and deeper engagement with participants.

### 4.7 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for research participants in this study were guided by the problem statement outlined in Chapter One. The principal investigator sought to recruit participants who could offer unique perspectives, ensuring that their collective insights reflected the range of variation within the study area. According to Perez (2024), establishing clear inclusion and exclusion criteria is crucial in defining the nature of subjects who will contribute meaningful value to the study, thus detailing the eligibility criteria specific to the study in terms of who would and would not be included. Setting these criteria from the outset helps researchers avoid wasting time on participants who may be unfamiliar with the research subject and, therefore, unable to respond effectively to the research questions.

**Inclusion Criteria**

Participants included in the study were:

- **iZingoma** (both male and female) with relevant knowledge and experience in traditional healing practices.

**Exclusion Criteria**

Participants excluded from the study were:

- Individuals who were **not iZingoma**.
- Individuals who were **underage**.

## 4.8 Data Collection

In-depth interviews were employed as the primary method for data collection in this qualitative study. Osborne and Grant-Smith (2021) are of the opinion that in-depth interviews in research is based on lived experiences, local knowledge, the relationships between context and experience and/or actions in the form of an open-ended qualitative technique involving intense individual interviews with a small group of participants, to explore their viewpoints. This method is particularly useful for gathering detailed information about ideas, behaviors or relatively under-explored topics. The purpose is to deeply understand participants' experiences, feelings and perspectives. Elhami and Khoshnevisan (2022) note that open-ended questions allow interviewees to share their personal emotions, ideas and perspectives without self-censorship.

In-depth interviews are distinct from structured interviews, as they are typically unstructured or semi-structured, giving participants the freedom to express themselves. This flexibility is invaluable in exploratory research, enabling the exploration of complex topics, personal narratives and nuanced viewpoints. In-depth interviews are frequently used in fields like psychology, anthropology and social sciences to gain a richer understanding of a subject. As Smith, Johnson, Lee (2022) points out, these interviews are crucial for examining individual experiences within their specific social contexts, thereby enhancing data validity. Furthermore, they help build rapport, encouraging participants to disclose sensitive or profound information (Brown & Jones,

2023). On the other hand, while the unstructured nature of in-depth interviews can yield rich insights, they can also be time-consuming and require skilled interviewers to manage the conversation (Taylor, 2021).

Rutledge and Hogg (2020) explain that in-depth interviews, though resembling a conversation, are designed to elicit deeper meaning from participants' perspectives. These one-on-one interactions provide a safe space for individuals to share their experiences, allowing researchers to gain insights into their social realities. Unlike focus groups or surveys, in-depth interviews allow participants to tell their stories in their own words, providing valuable data through metaphors, emotions and personal experiences. The conversational nature of these interviews promotes a connection with participants, enhancing follow-up and clarification of responses. This methodology is typically employed in case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology and narrative research, offering an excellent means of capturing social realities Luthfiandana, Santioso, Febrian, Soehaditama, and Sani (2024).

While in-depth interviews offer valuable insights, they are not without criticism. One key concern is researcher bias, as interviewers may unintentionally influence responses through the framing of questions, body language or tone and language and conversation; interviews are “very hard to do well” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015) and (Cairns-Lee, & Lawley, 2022). This is particularly problematic when interviewers hold preconceived expectations, leading to confirmation bias (Osborne et al., 2021). Additionally, the subjective interpretation of qualitative data can affect its consistency and reliability (Rose and Johnson, 2020), and unlike quantitative methods, qualitative interviews often lack standardization, which raises concerns about the generalizability of findings, as proposed by Maxwell, 2021). The time-consuming nature of in-depth interviews, especially when transcribing and analyzing large volumes of data, is another challenge, particularly if the researcher is inexperienced (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, ethical concerns are significant, particularly when participants disclose sensitive or personal information, which could lead to emotional distress or breaches of confidentiality (Taquette and da Matta Souza, 2022) Lastly, power dynamics in interviews can affect the authenticity of the data, as interviewers hold significant influence over the flow of conversation (Li, 2022). Despite these critiques, in-depth interviews remain a powerful tool for gaining rich, detailed insights into individual experiences.

In-depth interviews played a pivotal role in the anthropological study titled "Can a Gay Man Be the Heir of the Family and Burn Incense (Impepho) to Communicate with the Ancestors? An Anthropological Study on Cultural Views of iZingoma in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal." This research utilized in-depth interviews to capture the complex and personal views of community members regarding the intersection of sexuality, family inheritance and ancestral practices. The study engaged a diverse range of participants including iZingoma, elders, spiritual leaders and members of the LGBTQ+ community, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of deeply ingrained cultural, spiritual and social beliefs. Through semi-structured interviews, participants were able to freely express their thoughts, providing valuable insight into how societal norms surrounding gender, sexuality and tradition are both upheld and challenged. The in-depth interview format allowed the researcher to uncover multiple layers of meaning, contextualizing how beliefs about the role of iZingoma, including the ritual of burning impepho, are shaped by evolving societal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ identities. These interviews not only highlighted individual experiences, but also illuminated broader cultural shifts, offering a comprehensive understanding of the intersection of heritage, spirituality and sexuality in iZingoma practices.

### 4.9 Period of Data Collection

This ethnographic study was completed over the span of one year, which allowed the researcher to immerse in the data collection process and probe for clarity from participants until data saturation was reached. Powell and Brubacher (2020) describe the interview process as an accelerated conversation aimed at gathering information. A total of 20 interviews were conducted for this research and recruiting enough participants proved challenging, particularly since the study involved busy individuals, such as heads of households, and traditional practitioners (iZingoma). To ensure the conversation remained structured, the interviewer coordinated the process, giving participants the opportunity to ask questions relevant to the research.

Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and the demographics of participants will be presented in the data analysis chapter. Face-to-face interviews were preferred, allowing the researcher to probe responses directly and gather more detailed data. To accommodate participants' language preferences, interviews were conducted in isiZulu, the local language, with translations

made into English. This ensured the researcher avoided language barriers and captured more accurate data.

The number of interviews in qualitative research is often smaller than in quantitative studies, focusing on in-depth understanding rather than generalizability (Carminati, 2018). In-depth interviews, with their flexibility, allowed the researcher to gather detailed insights into participants' lived experiences, further enriching the data collection process.

### 4.10 Data analysis

The study employed both thematic and narrative analysis as its primary methods. These approaches unravel significant stories about individuals' lives, capturing their experiences in their own words and contexts. In anthropology, health and social sciences, narrative research serves as both a data collection tool and an interpretive framework. It effectively meets these objectives by helping individuals interpret their lived health and well-being in their social environments, incorporating self-belief narratives along the way.

#### 4.10.1 Thematic Method

This study uses deductive thematic analysis to identify patterns within the data, focusing both on elements related to the chosen theoretical framework and themes that emerge outside this framework, which proved valuable (Lochmiller, 2021) The method’s simplicity and flexibility allow for a continuous, detailed accumulation of information. Its creative aspect is seen in the focus on words, expressions and other notable observations, offering meaningful insights into qualitative data. This approach helps identify trends in participant responses, highlighting shared perceptions and expressions through themes, which can be linked to specific topics. Themes were organized to group information, reflecting commonalities in responses. As noted by Lochmiller (2021), while research can be challenging when data is collected and needs to be analyzed, the creative process lies in organizing this data effectively to summarize findings and explain them meaningfully. The method is accessible, adaptable and can be applied across various qualitative research contexts.

The data in this study remains original and illuminates the experiences of the studied population, supporting the validity of qualitative research principles. Thematic analysis allows qualitative

researchers to identify, organize and describe the themes found within their data, translating transcendental and phenomenological narratives, while confirming the ontological and epistemological perspectives of participants (Alhazmi and Kaufmann, 2022) The use of thematic analysis also aids in critically engaging with the responses of iZingoma in the Ugu district, providing a clearer understanding of cultural practices. Although thematic analysis has its strengths, it has been critiqued for its methodological rigor and its flexible nature, which, some argue, leads to inconsistencies and subjectivity in identifying and interpreting themes (Finlay, 2021) and (Braun and Clarke 2023). Furthermore, critics also contend that thematic analysis can lack the depth of other qualitative methods, such as grounded theory or discourse analysis. The method's focus on "themes" has been described as overly simplistic, as it may fail to capture the complexity of data, reducing diverse and multifaceted information into broad categories (Kuckartz, 2014). Additionally, some researchers warn that the reliance on the researcher's subjective judgment can introduce bias, particularly in theme identification (Lim, 2024). The lack of clear guidelines for ensuring reliability and transparency further adds to concerns about the method's validity (Ingre-Khans, Agerstrand, Ruden, and Beronius, 2020). Moreover, thematic analysis has been criticized for prioritizing surface-level patterns over deeper interpretations that could account for the social context or power dynamics (Phillips, 2023). These critiques underscore the method's limitations, especially when applied in complex theoretical contexts (Sapkota, 2024).

Despite these criticisms, thematic analysis has proven invaluable in understanding the intersection of ancestral worship, gender and sexuality within iZingoma practices in the Ugu district of KwaZulu-Natal. By identifying patterns in interviews, narratives and cultural practices, thematic analysis has provided a nuanced understanding of how cultural views on sexuality, family roles and spiritual leadership intersect and sometimes conflict. This approach has revealed both acceptance and resistance within the community, highlighting the tension between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary social changes. In conducting thematic analysis for this study, the researcher first familiarized themselves with the data, carefully reviewing interviews and field notes to understand the participants' perspectives. Initial codes were generated to identify relevant features that related to the research questions, such as terms reflecting cultural, spiritual or gender-related beliefs. These codes were then grouped into broader themes to capture key aspects of the community's views on iZingoma practices and LGBTQ+ identity. After refining

and naming these themes, the researcher detailed the findings, illustrating how they reflect the cultural perceptions of iZingoma and the social acceptance of gay men as heirs and spiritual leaders in the community.

### 4.10.2 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is a widely used method in the social sciences and humanities, providing rich insights into personal experiences and cultural contexts. However, it has been subject to criticism, particularly regarding its subjectivity. Since narrative analysis often involves interpreting personal accounts, critics argue that researchers' biases can influence the analysis (Lim, 2024). Additionally, narrative analysis tends to focus on individual or small-group experiences, which can limit the generalizability of findings (Arisman and Haryanti, 2019). The method has also been criticized for simplifying complex experiences, as it often prioritizes a coherent storyline over the contradictions and nuances inherent in lived experiences (Lim, 2024).

Ethical concerns also arise with narrative analysis, particularly regarding how personal stories are represented and whether participants' voices are accurately conveyed (Bassi, Orrù, Moro, Salvarani, and Turch, 2024). Some argue that narrative analysis's heavy reliance on language may limit its ability to capture the full complexity of human experience, as it overlooks non-verbal cues and emotional nuances (Salzmann-Erikson, 2024). Despite these limitations, many proponents defend narrative analysis for its ability to provide in-depth understandings of human experiences, emphasizing its value when conducted with methodological rigor and ethical sensitivity.

In this study, narrative analysis has been instrumental in exploring how cultural beliefs, family dynamics and spiritual practices intersect in the context of iZingoma and LGBTQ+ identities in the Ugu district. By analyzing participants' narratives, the study sheds light on the ways in which LGBTQ+ identities are negotiated within a community with strong traditional and spiritual roles. This approach provides insights into how iZingoma practices either support or challenge the inclusion of gay men as family heirs and spiritual leaders, reflecting evolving cultural and identity dynamics in contemporary South African society.

### 4.11 Limitations and Successes of the Qualitative Study

A key limitation of exploring the question, "Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors?" in the context of Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal, lies in the complexity of the cultural norms and values that deeply influence the community. Traditional beliefs surrounding inheritance, familial roles and ancestral communication are often rooted in customs that may not easily incorporate non-conventional identities, such as those of LGBTQ+ individuals. This presents a challenge in generalizing or definitively answering the question, as cultural perspectives may differ significantly both within and between communities in the region. Moreover, discussing issues related to sexuality and gender identity within certain cultural and religious frameworks, can be especially sensitive. In many traditional African societies, including the Zulu community, such topics may be considered taboo or disrespectful, which could lead to participants feeling hesitant to openly share their views or offer candid feedback.

Additionally, the study's reliance on the perspectives of iZingoma (traditional healers) may potentially have introduced some bias, as their interpretations of culture and tradition might not reflect the views of the wider community. These individuals are often regarded as gatekeepers of cultural practices, and their responses may not fully represent the diversity of opinions within the broader population, particularly from younger generations or marginalized groups. The influence of colonialism and Christianity in South Africa further complicates the interpretation of cultural views on issues such as sexuality and gender, creating a complex blend of traditional and Western values. As a result, the findings from this study may not be applicable to all AmaZulu communities, and they may not capture the evolving nature of cultural beliefs in an increasingly dynamic socio-political environment. Finally, the very nature of anthropological research, which often involves examining cultural practices through the perspective of an outsider, may limit the depth of understanding regarding the lived experiences of community members, particularly when those experiences are marginalized or stigmatized. While valuable insights may be gained, there are inherent limitations in representing such a nuanced and deeply personal aspect of culture.

Despite these limitations, the study achieved notable successes in shedding light on the intricate relationship between tradition, identity and social roles within AmaZulu culture. By engaging with

iZingoma, the research provided a nuanced understanding of how cultural practices evolve in response to shifting social dynamics, particularly concerning gender and sexuality. The inclusion of these key figures allowed for a comprehensive examination of the spiritual and social dimensions of heirship and ancestral communication. One of the study's significant successes was its ability to highlight the diversity of views within the community. While some traditional leaders adhere to strict interpretations of family roles and ancestral rituals, others take a more flexible and inclusive stance, acknowledging the significance of personal integrity, spiritual calling and respect for ancestral lineage, regardless of sexual orientation. The findings challenge conventional assumptions about the intersection of modern identities and traditional African beliefs, offering valuable insights into how AmaZulu culture can adapt while maintaining core spiritual practices. Furthermore, the research illuminated the role of iZingoma as mediators of ancestral wisdom, highlighting their navigation of the delicate balance between honoring traditional practices and embracing contemporary realities, such as the visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals. Ultimately, this study not only contributes to academic discourse on African traditions and sexuality but also serves as a tool for fostering greater understanding and dialogue within communities, encouraging a more inclusive and progressive interpretation of cultural heritage.

### 4.12 Storage of Data, Access, and Dissemination

Data collected through in-depth interviews was recorded using field notes and voice recordings, with participants' permission. Each data collection instrument was assigned a coded number for identification. Prior to data collection, interviewees were asked to sign a consent form. Rigorous measures were implemented to regulate storage and access. Consent forms and data records (including tapes and field notes) were securely stored in a locked cabinet in the supervisor's office for a period of five years, after which they will be destroyed. Access to these materials was restricted to the supervisor and the researcher. Participants were informed that the access to research findings would adhere to the university's policies.

### 4.13 Gatekeeper's Letter

A gatekeeper's letter was obtained from Chief Mbhele, the governing chief of the community in Ugu District Municipality where the study was conducted. The chief's leadership team was involved in the study, with one of the chief heads also serving as a key informant for the research.

### 4.14 Ethical Permission

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC/00005654/2023).

#### 4.14.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are integral to any research, especially within the social sciences. To initiate the study, permission was first sought from the leadership of the Municipality, followed by the submission of an online ethics application, which is a requirement for all academic research conducted within institutions. These considerations are particularly aligned with ensuring the comfort and willingness of participants. This research study explored whether "a gay man can be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors?" Specifically, it investigates the cultural views of iZingoma in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal. Ethical issues addressed in the study included:

- **Voluntary Participation**

The researcher ensured that all participants willingly chose to engage in the study, without any form of coercion (Ryan et al., 2005). The iZingoma participants were free from any pressure and were explicitly informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences. Voluntary participation played a critical role in the success of this study, by ensuring that participants felt comfortable and respected throughout the research process. The voluntary nature of participation ensured that the perspectives shared were authentic and reflective of the participants' personal views, especially regarding the role of gay men in ancestral practices. This approach helped the study address the complexities of cultural views surrounding sexuality and identity.

- **Informed Consent**

Informed consent, which entails explaining the risks, benefits, and alternatives of a study to participants, was obtained before interviews commenced (Kwame and Petrucka, 2024). Participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the research and what their involvement would entail. Only after giving their informed consent were participants interviewed. Ensuring informed consent was essential in maintaining the integrity and ethical standards of the study. By providing iZingoma with clear and comprehensive information about the study's aims, risks and benefits, participants were empowered to make informed decisions regarding their participation. This process not only protected participants' rights but also enhanced the credibility and ethical foundation of the study, ensuring that cultural perspectives were gathered with respect and sensitivity. To ensure that participants understood everything and what they were getting themselves into, the informed consent was provided in English and IsiZulu, which are predominant languages in Ugu district municipality where the study took place, with IsiZulu being their home language.

- **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Autonomy refers to a study participant's right to self-governance, liberty, privacy, individual choice and freedom of will (Pietila, Nurmi, Halkoaho and Kyngas, 2020:50), whereas confidentiality refers to the protection of participants' identity (Kang and Hwang, 2021). The researcher ensured that iZingoma had the free will to participate and withdraw their participation during the interview process. This was explained before the interview could commence. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the original names of iZingoma, who were the study participants, were not used. The researcher used pseudonyms and assigned numbers to the respecctive interviewees by referring to them in his fieldnotes and recording them as participant 1, 2 etc/ This is also visible in the ethnographic chapters, chapter six, seven and eight. The procedure guaranteed that privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were upheld throughout the research.

- **Privacy**

Privacy refers to the branch of research ethics consisting of ethical principles that aim to protect the study participant (Pietila et al, 2020). In this research the privacy of the participants was ensured through two phases, (1) all interviews were held in the comfort of iZingoma homes in

which they do their consultations, where a person must get consent from them to be granted access. These places are called izigodlo - “palace” - for a lack of a better word. (2) The researcher ensured the privacy of the participants by using pseudonyms and assigning numbers, as referred in the above ethical consideration, namely as “participant 1,2 etc”. The fieldnotes do not contain any personal identifications and the wording used can only be understood by the researcher; additionally, the recordings are password protected. The researcher and supervisor locked the files in the supervisor’s office, which is only accessible to the supervisor and the researcher. These will be disposed of after five years as per the university regulations and intellectual property, as the research remains the property of the university as per researcher registration and ethical clearance.

- **No harm**

Minimizing harm is a desirable and necessary aspect while conducting qualitative research (Kang and Hwang, 2021:8). Based on the sensitivity of this research including sexuality (“gay heirs”) and the cultural ritual of burning incense, it was imperative for the researcher to ensure that no damage was done to the participants. Bearing in mind that the study was looking at the views through iZangoma personal experience on burning incense by gay heirs, the researcher ensured that no personal questions were asked during the course of the interviews. The researcher also ensured that the participants were given a chance to speak freely and express their views about their understanding of the ritual, and the involvement of gay heirs in this ritual. The researcher ensured non-maleficence through ensuring that no risk and harm were involved in this study.

- **Reliability**

The term "reliability" refers to the data's consistency through time and across study contexts (Rose and Johnson, 2020). It is similar to reliability in quantitative research, but the study's nature determines the stability of conditions. It is also decided by the study's consistency (Lertxundi and Landeta, 2023). To illustrate dependability, the research questions were clear and logically connected to the research design and objectives. IsiZulu, the native language spoken by many in the Ugu District, was used. The researcher also evaded double-barreled questions to avoid ambiguity. Reliability has played a crucial role in ensuring the consistency and trustworthiness of the study on the cultural views of iZingoma in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal. By prioritizing reliable data sources and methods, it was possible to gather accurate and consistent insights from

both iZingoma, regarding the traditional beliefs surrounding the role of a gay man as the heir of the family and his ability to burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors. The use of reliable interview techniques and participant validation helped eliminate biases, and ensured that the perspectives of both religious and cultural authorities were accurately represented. Additionally, consistent observation and documentation of participants' responses allowed for a deeper understanding of the nuances in their views, further strengthening the study's overall validity and relevance.

- **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree of objectivity in research study outcomes. According to Ahmed (2024:2) it pertains to the impartiality and objectivity of the findings, guaranteeing that they remain unaffected by any biases or preferences of researchers. This means that the conclusions are based on the participants' responses, rather than the researcher's bias or personal interests. Confirmability enhances the establishment of accurate findings that reflect the replies of participants. This has been the central point of the data assembled, as the researcher avoided biases and personal involvement. This involved omitting my feelings and values in the process of data analysis. Confirmability has been a crucial aspect of the study on whether a gay man could be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors, as it ensures that the findings reflect the participants' views, rather than researcher bias or preconceptions. Through rigorous documentation of interviews with iZingoma, it was possible to ensure transparency in the data collection and analysis process. This involved providing a clear audit trail of the methodologies used, as well as triangulating data from multiple sources to corroborate findings. By doing so, the research process remained objectives, allowing an accurate representation of cultural attitudes towards this sensitive issue within the community. Confirmability also provided a safeguard against any unintended influence on the research outcomes, ensuring the study's reliability and trustworthiness.

- **Validity**

Validity should be evaluated early in the study process while deciding how to collect data This necessitates the selection of proper measurement methods in which validity mostly refers to how well the data represents the true findings among the participants of a study and among similar

individuals not participating in the study (Ahmed and Ishtiaq, 2021: 2401). Validity ensures that the method and measuring approach are of excellent quality and are specifically designed to measure what one wants to know. This should be well-researched and founded on prior information. For example, to collect data on burning incense, a standardized data collection instrument that is considered reliable and valid, was used. Developing questions should be based on established theory, and the questions should be carefully and precisely worded. Validity has played a crucial role in ensuring the reliability and accuracy of this study on whether a gay man could be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors within the context of iZingoma cultural beliefs in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal. By carefully selecting a diverse set of participants spanning different iZingoma, the researcher was able to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences. The use of multiple data collection methods, including interviews and participant observation, further enhanced the validity of the findings, allowing for a triangulated approach to understand the complexities of ancestral practices and gender roles in the community. Additionally, applying theoretical frameworks that were sensitive to local cultural nuances, helped ensure that the study's conclusions were not only reflective of the specific beliefs of the Ugu district, but also provided valuable insights into the broader cultural discourse around sexuality, spirituality, and inheritance in South African indigenous traditions.

- **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research process over time and across similar conditions, ensuring that the study's findings are grounded in a logical, traceable, and well-documented methodological procedure. In this study, dependability was achieved through the systematic organisation and documentation of all stages of the research process, including data collection, transcription, coding, and analysis. In-depth semi-structured interviews with iZangoma participants were conducted using a pre-developed interview guide to maintain consistency in questioning while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on culturally embedded experiences. All interviews followed the same procedural steps, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy and minimise inconsistencies in interpretation. A clear audit trail was maintained to document methodological decisions, analytical processes, and emerging themes, enabling the research process to be reviewed and followed by others. Consistent

coding procedures and careful comparison of participant responses further supported methodological stability and reduced potential researcher bias. According to Polit and Beck (2017), dependability is strengthened when researchers ensure procedural transparency and methodological coherence throughout the study. By applying these strategies, the research demonstrates that the findings concerning ancestral practices, inheritance roles, and the intersections of gender and sexuality within the Ugu district are derived from a dependable and systematically implemented research process.

- **Transferability**

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which study findings may be applicable to other contexts or groups with similar characteristics. Rather than aiming for statistical generalisation, this study enhanced transferability by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research setting, participants, and cultural context within the Ugu district. Detailed accounts of the lived experiences of iZangoma participants, as well as the meanings attached to ancestral practices, gender roles, and sexuality, were included to enable readers to determine the relevance of the findings to comparable cultural or traditional communities. By carefully documenting participant selection, interview procedures, and contextual factors influencing interpretations, the study allows others to assess whether the insights regarding the role of a gay man as a potential family heir and ritual practitioner may be transferable to other African indigenous or spiritually grounded contexts. According to Polit and Beck (2017), transferability is strengthened when sufficient contextual information is provided so that readers can make informed judgments about the applicability of findings beyond the original study setting. In this research, the inclusion of detailed cultural descriptions and methodological transparency supports the potential transfer of knowledge while acknowledging that meanings remain shaped by specific historical, social, and cultural conditions.

## 4.15 Chapter Summary

The methodology section forms the essence of the investigation. The qualitative method was geared towards the underlying understanding of the central question: “Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (*impepho*) to communicate with the ancestors? An anthropological study on cultural views of iZingoma in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal.” This is where the application

of different styles of collecting data was enforced. The combination of different tools has proven strengths in terms of reaching objectives. The use of a particular method of research is useful; nevertheless, combining them has given another perspective. The nature of the study was explicitly based on iZingoma. Suitable methods such as interviews were the most compatible for this study as these interviews allowed proximity to the subject, where conclusions on their behaviour and expressions were drawn. The questionnaire enhanced the information and knowledge about the participants. The introduction of thematic analysis selectively expressed experience, as it became a primary method of data analysis and preparation for the next chapter, which is for data presentation and analyses. The sample methods have worked collectively to participate in y data collection. The snowballing helped to introduce the researcher to more participants along the data collection phase, with the purposive method having provided direction to the most suitable individuals, such as iZingoma, and obtained desirable responses.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# DEMOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a representation of iZingoma in terms of location which is the uGu district, a predominately rural community which holds traditional values and norms at the forefront of their survival. iZingoma were recruited to participate in this study and provided their views and perceptions on this study, on the thematic question of whether a gay man could be the heir of the family and burn incense to communicate with ancestors. This chapter provides an overview of pertinent themes locating iZingoma and their knowledge in terms of how one can determine the authenticity of iSangoma. It also provides a detailed account on sexuality and the significance of the dominant ancestor, as becoming iSangoma is solely dependent on the influence of thereof.

### 5.2 Wording and the analysis of themes

Thematic analysis as defined in Chapter four of this thesis was used to present and analyse the collected data. Analysed themes were developed before or after data collection. This was done in the interest of collecting data that was deserving of analysis and further interpretation. Worded themes were intended to prove narratives of the sampled population, which is presented in subsequent chapters. Lochmiller (2021) argues that thematic analysis offers an insightful look and meaning to the qualitative data collected. The researcher was able to project and note trends in the answers offered by participants.

### 5.3 Demographics

In this anthropological study exploring the cultural perspectives of iZingoma on whether a gay man could inherit from the family and engage in ancestral communication through burning incense, analysing demographics plays a crucial role in understanding the sampled population. Demographics delve into various phenomena that the participants associate with, providing a nuanced understanding of their identities and perspectives. This includes factors such as age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, educational background and cultural upbringing, all of which contribute to shaping their beliefs and practices regarding inheritance and ancestral rituals. By examining these demographic aspects, the study offered a comprehensive portrayal of the sampled participants, enriching the analysis of their cultural views within the

context of iZingoma and the practice of burning incense. The table below outlines demographics of the sampled population.

### 5.3.1 Representation to demographics of iZingoma

| Participant no. | Gender | Age | Years of practice | Ethnicity |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Male | 37 | 6 | Zulu |
| 2. | Male | 45 | 12 | Xhosa |
| 3. | Male | 42 | 10 | Xhosa |
| 4. | Female | 49 | 13 | Zulu |
| 5. | Male | 39 | 9 | Zulu |
| 6. | Female | 52 | 17 | Zulu |
| 7. | Female | 44 | 20 | Zulu |
| 8. | Male | 56 | 20 | Zulu |
| 9. | Female | 31 | 9 | Zulu |
| 10. | Male | 42 | 10 | Zulu |
| 11. | Female | 55 | 8 | Zulu |
| 12. | Female | 37 | 7 | Zulu |
| 13. | Female | 45 | 10 | Zulu |
| 14. | Female | 50 | 12 | Zulu |
| 15. | Female | 56 | 16 | Zulu |
| 16. | Female | 48 | 4 | Zulu |
| 17. | Female | 44 | 9 | Zulu |
| 18. | Male | 59 | 14 | Zulu |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. | Female | 55 | 3 | Zulu |
| 20. | Male | 60 | 12 | Zulu |

**Discussion**

The data provided relates to the demographics of a group of iZingoma (diviners) in the Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal, and offered insights into the diversity of this group in terms of gender, age, years of practice and ethnicity. The gender representation shows that there are 12 female participants and eight male participants. This could be an important indicator of the willingness of men to participate in this study. There are several concerns associated with low male participation, such as gender perceptions about gay men. Men and masculinity need to be studied, if power relations between the sexes are to be changed for the better, and the potential of individuals of both sexes should be realized (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 2016) and (Sweetman, 1997). Masculinity assesses the implications for gender and development policy and practice of taking on a concern for men. Focusing on women alone simply contributes to overload and exhaustion for women, if they retain all the responsibilities associated with their existing reproductive and productive roles, in an era where the state can be relied upon even less than before to provide social services (Featherstone, 2009).

Gender is among the causes of African patriarchy, as many African communities ignore the existence of homosexuality. This might have been driven by varying perspectives about the notion and belief behind the same-sex relationship. Compared to countries on other continents, African countries seem to have been the least accepting of same-sex sexuality and sexual relations, in recent times (Jjuuko, and Tabengwa, 2018) and (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Africa is the continent with the highest number of countries in which homosexuality is illegal (Itaborahy, 2012); one of the exceptions is South Africa. However, despite all legal changes that promote equality of gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, there are still issues to be addressed in South Africa, such as the lack of equality in the age of consent regarding heterosexual and same-sex sexual relations, and violence against Black lesbians in particular (Mkhize et al. 2010). The gender representation is relatively balanced, though slightly skewed toward women, which could reflect the traditional

gender roles in iZingoma practices in the region, where women may be more commonly seen in spiritual and healing roles.

Sexuality theory examines the social, cultural, psychological and political aspects of human sexuality, understanding how identity, desire and practices are shaped by societal norms and power structures. It includes a range of approaches, from feminist and queer theory to intersectionality, which highlights the interconnectedness of various forms of identity and oppression. Queer theory, in particular, challenges fixed understandings of gender and sexuality, advocating for fluidity and multiplicity in human experience (Butler, 1990). The theory critiques binary constructions of gender and sexuality, and recognizes the complexity of cultural expressions. In this particular study, applying sexuality theory to the topic of whether a gay man can be the heir of the family and perform rituals such as burning incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors in the context of iZingoma in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal, reveals how cultural practices may intersect with evolving views on gender and sexuality. The question challenges traditional gender roles and familial structures, where the roles of healer and spiritual leader, historically and culturally assigned to men or women, are now questioned in the face of contemporary understandings of sexual identity. The fluidity emphasized by queer theory allows for an exploration of how spiritual roles may be increasingly redefined, with potential acceptance or resistance depending on local beliefs and norms. Women, people of colour, LGBTQ and working-class people are among the groups actively reflecting on the impact of their identities on their status and opportunities and agitating for better treatment in society (Meyer, 2010). All attempts to reconstitute the past of this concept necessarily begins with sociology. Simmel (1908) was the first to recognize the connection between the separation of the individual who distances himself from others, and the necessity to symbolize these others.

**Table (5.3.1)** represents the age distribution ranging from 31 to 60 years, with the following breakdown. There were the following age groups: 31-40 years: 4 participants' 41-50 years: 9 participants and 51-60 years: 7 participants. The participants were relatively mature, with the majority being in their 40s and early 50s. This could indicate that iZingoma practitioners require several years of experience to establish their practices and gain spiritual authority. This is another form of representation that requires the link between age and the ideas associated with incense; hence, there was a diversity of perspectives among the participants in terms of representation of

varying age groups. Men and masculinity need to be studied if power relations between the sexes are to be changed for the better, and the potential of individuals of both sexes is to be realized (Sweetman, 1997). Masculinity assesses the implications for gender and development policies and the practice of focusing on men. Focusing on women alone simply contributes to overload and exhaustion for women, if they retain all the responsibilities associated with their existing reproductive and productive roles, in an era where the state can be relied upon even less than previously to provide social services (Featherstone, 2009).

**Table 5.3.1** also indicates years of practice, ranging from 3 years to 20 years, with the following breakdown: 3-10 years: 11 participants, 11-15 years: 5 participants and 16-20 years: 4 participants. The majority of participants had been practicing for over 10 years, suggesting a deep familiarity with iZingoma practices and rituals. The relatively long duration of practice points to a significant commitment to their spiritual roles and responsibilities. No single body of religious beliefs and practices could be identified as African. It is possible, however, to identify similarities in worldviews and ritual processes across geographic and ethnic boundaries (Jensen, 2021). Generally speaking, African religions hold that there is one creator God, the maker of a dynamic universe. Myths of various African peoples relate that, after setting the world in motion, the Supreme Being withdrew, and he remained remote from the concerns of human life. According to a myth of the Dinka of South Sudan, God withdrew from the world after the first woman lifted her pestle to pound millet and strike the sky. African religiousness is not a matter of adherence to a doctrine, but is concerned with supporting fecundity and sustaining the community (Turner, 2021).

The table above also represents ethnicity representation. The ethnicities of the participants were Xhosa and Zulu, with the breakdown as follows:
Zulu: 18 participants and Xhosa: 2 participants. The majority of participants were Zulu, which is consistent with the geographical location in KwaZulu-Natal, where the Zulu ethnic group is predominant. However, a notable representation of Xhosa participants indicated some cultural diversity among iZingoma practitioners; the inclusion of Xhosa participants was prompted by the fact that they resided within the Ugu district and all of them had formal training as iZingoma with uGobela, who is from a Zulu tribe, which validated their inclusion. They were referred to the researcher by one of the participants who was their Gobela. At first the researcher did not plan to

include their participation in the research, but when data saturation was reached at the 15th participant, the researcher included them in the data analysis.

South Africa has never had an official state religion. The country's constitution explicitly states everyone's right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion (Gabela, 2023). However, the government actively promoted Christianity throughout much of the 20th century, and it remains the most widely followed faith today (Gabela, 2023). While the 2011 South African census did not include a question of religious affiliation, the majority of South Africans (84.2%) identified as Christian in a 2013 General Household Survey (Resane, 2023). This represented an increase from 79.8% reported in the 2001 census. Of the remaining population, 5% identified with ancestral or traditional African religions, 2% identified as Muslim, 1% as Hindu, and 0.2% as Jewish. Atheism and agnosticism were identified by 0.2% of the population, while 5.5% identified with 'nothing in particular', and 1.6% did not specify rights as an essential feature of the Christian faith itself (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras and Lyer, 2023).

Ritual theory is a framework that examines the role and significance of rituals in social and cultural contexts. It emphasizes how rituals, often imbued with symbolic meaning, function to reinforce societal norms, express collective identity and mediate relationships between the human and spiritual realms (Turner, 1969; Bell, 1997). In this context, rituals are not merely actions performed, but are seen as transformative processes that bind individuals to their community and ancestors. Ritual theory also considers the social power dynamics involved in the performance and interpretation of rituals, which often reflect broader cultural and gender norms (Grimes, 2014).

Applying ritual theory to the question of whether a gay man could be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with ancestors in the Ugu District of KwaZulu-Natal, required examining how traditional practices and views on gender, sexuality and ancestral communication intersected. The ritual of burning incense to commune with ancestors, which involves a sacred and gendered space within Zulu cultural and religious practices, may traditionally be reserved for men who fulfil specific social roles. However, ritual theory suggests that rituals are not static, but subject to reinterpretation and transformation within different cultural contexts. The participation of a gay man in these rituals might challenge the traditional

understanding of gender roles and ancestral communication, opening up new possibilities for inclusive practices and the negotiation of identity within family and community structures (Etim, 2019). Understanding the flexibility of ritual meaning and its potential for adaptation is crucial in addressing how evolving views on gender and sexuality can influence the continuity and transformation of these ancestral rituals.

Therefore, based on the background of the study, which revolves around the ability of a gay man to be an heir of the family and perform ancestral rituals (such as burning incense or impepho), these demographic factors could offer further insights into how different participants (both male and female) view spiritual roles, ancestral communication and potential barriers or opportunities for a gay man to hold such a position in their community. The sample included both male and female participants, allowing for a diverse range of opinions that reflected differing cultural views on gender roles, family inheritance and spiritual leadership within both Zulu and Xhosa traditions.

Traditional practices within Zulu and Xhosa communities are often patriarchal, with the male descendants traditionally inheriting family roles, including spiritual responsibilities. The inclusion of female iZingoma participants in this study might suggest a more flexible view of leadership roles in the spiritual context. Moreover, given the mix of Zulu and Xhosa participants, the study could reveal whether ethnic background plays a significant role in shaping the acceptance or rejection of unconventional spiritual roles, such as a gay man being an heir, or performing rituals like burning impepho. The data revealed a relatively balanced gender distribution and indicated a strong commitment to spiritual practices, with most participants having been practicing for over a decade. The representation of both Zulu and Xhosa ethnicities indicated some cultural diversity, which could influence views on spiritual practices and inheritance roles. The study potentially explored whether iZingoma in this region, regardless of gender, ethnic background or sexual orientation, saw any conflict or inclusivity in the roles of leadership, ancestral communication and spiritual duties, particularly when addressing contemporary social issues like homosexuality.

### 5.4 Ukuthwetshulwa yidlozi [2]

The research findings shed light on a notable phenomenon among iZingoma, revealing a shift in their sexual orientation attributed to the influence of the dominant ancestor, who bestowed upon them their spiritual calling. Many participants had experienced a transformation in their sexuality since accepting their calling, with a significant number currently openly identifying as gay or lesbian. This revelation often comes as a surprise to the individuals themselves, as they had not anticipated such changes prior to embracing their spiritual path. However, some participants acknowledged that they had harbored feelings for the same sex before receiving their calling, yet had chosen to suppress or ignore these feelings.

The implications of this sexual orientation shift within the iZingoma community are multifaceted and warrant deeper exploration. Firstly, it raises questions about the interplay between spiritual identity and sexual orientation, challenging traditional notions of sexual and spiritual analogy. The revelation that many iZingoma experience a shift in their sexual orientation following their calling, underscores the complexity of human sexuality and its intersection with cultural and spiritual beliefs. Moreover, the experiences of these individuals highlight the internal conflict and personal journey that many iZingoma undergo in reconciling their spiritual calling with their sexual identity. Mkasi (2016:2) agrees that it is not unusual to see a male isangoma acting like a female isangoma or a female isangoma acting like a male isangoma, and they understand the importance of burning the incense. For some, accepting their newfound sexual orientation may be a liberating experience, allowing them to embrace their authentic selves more fully. However, for others, particularly those who had previously suppressed their same-sex desires, it may provoke feelings of confusion, guilt or shame.

The study also prompts reflection on the broader societal attitudes towards homosexuality within the context of traditional spiritual practices. The fact that a significant number of iZingoma now openly identify as gay or lesbian, challenges stereotypes and preconceptions about sexuality within indigenous belief systems. It suggests a shifting landscape wherein individuals feel increasingly empowered to assert their sexual identity within the framework of their spiritual beliefs, despite potential social stigma or ostracization. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of providing support and resources for iZingoma navigating issues of sexual identity and spirituality.

[2] Ukuthwetshulwa yidlozi give- mean- being cloned by a dominant ancestor.

Cultivating an inclusive and affirming environment within the iZingoma community is essential for fostering acceptance, understanding and respect for individuals across diverse sexual orientations. This includes promoting dialogue, education and advocacy around issues of sexual diversity and human rights within spiritual contexts.

*Participant 3: I always hated myself for having feelings for other man's, but after accepting my calling uGobela explained to me about the importance of embracing changes that comes with the gift, including respecting and doing what uGogo the dominant ancestor want me to do, so as much as I always know I have feeling for other boys but I can say I only accepted myself after I accepted my calling.*

*Participant 5: I think I can say I was not born gay, but after accepting my calling a lot of changes happen in me, including finding guys attractive, although it took me time to date a guy, but now I do it comfortable knowing that my ancestor approves of it.*

*Participant 8: My grandmother changed me, even the way I wake and talk everyone say ngiwugogo wami ezihlalele (look like my grandmother).*

*Participant 11: I never hated myself for it I always knew I was gay, but it made my family and myself comfortable knowing that the spirit of my grandfather is in me, behaving and finding other girls is normal in my family, my sister is a lesbian, my older brother is gay so I and my middle brother son is gay and we find no problems about it.*

*Participant 18: my family disowned me for being gay and 3 years later I went to initiation, and I was told that my grand grandmother has been living in me for the longest time.*

*Participant 20: I had a twin which did not survived she and my late grandmother gave me the gift of being iSangoma, it took me years to accept the calling, since when I used to go for consultation they would tell me that ngimbhethwe ithwin lami (sharing life with my twin) that why I was behaving like a girl, but one day, my Gobela told me that I have a gift from her and my grandmother and I have to undergo initiation, I do not want to lie it took me some time to accept the calling.*

The research findings offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between spirituality and sexual orientation among iZingoma. The revelation that many individuals experience a shift in

their sexual orientation, following their spiritual calling, challenges traditional assumptions and underscores the need for greater understanding and acceptance within indigenous belief systems. By acknowledging and embracing the diversity of human experience, we can create more inclusive and supportive communities that honor the intersectionality of identity and spirituality.

The findings concerning *Ukuthwetsulwa indlozi* complicate dominant understandings of sexuality as a fixed or purely individual attribute by demonstrating that, within iZingoma spiritual epistemology, sexual identity is experienced as relational, ritualised, and ancestrally mediated. Participants' accounts suggest that the acceptance of an ancestral calling does not merely coincide with shifts in sexual identity but actively restructures how sexuality is understood, legitimised, and embodied. Interpreting these findings through ritual theory, sexuality theory, and social constructivist theory reveals that sexuality among iZingoma emerges at the intersection of ritual transformation, cultural meaning-making, and identity negotiation rather than biological determinism alone.

From a ritual theory perspective, ukuthwasa functions as a transformative rite that reorganises the initiate's ontological status. Initiation should therefore be understood not simply as cultural or religious training but as a process of identity reconstitution. The participants' narratives indicate that sexuality becomes intelligible within the ritual transition from ordinary personhood to spiritually mediated subjectivity. The liminal phase of initiation destabilises prior social identities, creating what ritual theorists describe as a space of ambiguity in which normative categories; including gender and sexuality become negotiable. Participants repeatedly describe confusion, psychological struggle, or behavioural change prior to acceptance of the calling, followed by coherence and self-recognition afterward. This suggests that ritual does not merely affirm pre-existing identities but authorises new modes of being. Importantly, the ancestral presence functions as an agent of legitimacy. When participants attribute same-sex attraction to a dominant ancestor, sexuality is repositioned from moral deviation to spiritual obligation. Ritual authority therefore reframes sexuality as culturally meaningful rather than socially deviant. The ritual process thus operates as a mechanism through which socially marginal identities become spiritually sanctioned identities.

The findings challenge essentialist models of sexuality by demonstrating variability in participants' experiences. Some individuals report long-standing same-sex attraction prior to

initiation, while others interpret attraction as emerging after accepting their calling. This divergence supports sexuality theory's assertion that sexual identity development is neither linear nor universally fixed. Initiation appears to function as a legitimising framework enabling individuals to reinterpret suppressed desires. Participants who previously experienced shame or self-rejection describe acceptance only after spiritual confirmation. This indicates that sexuality is not merely discovered internally but becomes liveable when culturally authorised. The data therefore complicate binary debates between "born this way" and "choice" narratives. Participant accounts illustrate sexuality as experientially real yet interpretively mediated. For some, the calling reveals an already existing orientation; for others, it reorganises desire through new identity meanings. In both cases, sexuality emerges as a dynamic process shaped by psychological, spiritual, and social contexts.

Social constructivist theory offers critical insight into how participants interpret sexuality through ancestral discourse. The meaning of same-sex attraction is not inherent but produced through culturally available explanations. Within the iZingoma worldview, ancestors serve as interpretive authorities that render personal experiences socially intelligible.

Participants' narratives demonstrate that identity formation occurs through interaction with:

- uGobela guidance,
- familial interpretations,
- communal spiritual knowledge,
- shared cosmological beliefs.

Sexual identity therefore emerges through collective meaning-making rather than isolated self-definition. Acceptance increases when families or communities frame sexuality as spiritually sanctioned, illustrating how social validation shapes subjective experience.

This challenges universalising Western LGBTQ+ identity frameworks that prioritise individual self-identification detached from cosmology or lineage. Among iZingoma, identity is relational constituted through ancestry, kinship, and spiritual inheritance. Sexuality becomes embedded within collective identity rather than solely personal autonomy.

At the same time, participants' experiences of stigma and family rejection reveal competing social constructions: ancestral affirmation may coexist with broader societal heteronormativity. Identity negotiation therefore occurs across overlapping moral systems traditional spirituality, family expectations, and modern social norms.

**Theoretical Synthesis:**

Taken together, the three theoretical lenses reveal that sexuality among iZingoma is best understood as a ritually mediated social construction experienced as spiritually authentic.

- Ritual theory explains *how* identity transformation becomes possible.
- Sexuality theory explains *why* experiences vary and evolve.
- Social constructivism explains *how meaning is produced and stabilised*.

Rather than viewing sexuality shifts as literal transformations imposed by ancestors, a critical synthesis suggests that initiation reorganises interpretive frameworks through which desire, embodiment, and identity are understood. The ancestral narrative provides symbolic coherence to experiences that may previously have lacked cultural legitimacy.

Thus, ukuthwetsulwa indlozi operates simultaneously as:

- a ritual rebirth,
- a psychological integration process,
- a culturally structured reinterpretation of selfhood.

This study therefore suggests that sexuality cannot be universally theorised without accounting for indigenous epistemologies in which:

- Personhood is plural and ancestral,
- Identity is relational rather than individualistic,
- Embodiment includes spiritual inheritance.

### 5.5 The significant of a dominant ancestor on iSangoma life

The practice of becoming iSangoma is deeply rooted in Zulu culture, which places significant emphasis on the role of ancestors in guiding and influencing the lives of their descendants. Central to this belief system is the concept of the dominant ancestor, a revered figure within the ancestral lineage of a traditional healer. The dominant ancestor is seen as possessing exceptional spiritual energy and wisdom, serving as a guiding force for the iZingoma practitioner. Their significance lies in their ability to act as a conduit between the living and the spirit world, facilitating communication, healing and guidance (Flikke, 2018). One of the traditional methods employed by iZingoma to communicate with ancestors is the burning of incense. Incense holds a symbolic and practical significance in this practice, serving as a vehicle for spiritual connection and purification. The smoke from the incense is believed to carry prayers and offerings to the spirit realm, where ancestors reside. By burning incense, iZingoma practitioners create an atmosphere conducive to spiritual communication, inviting their ancestors to impart wisdom, guidance, and blessings upon them and their clients.

The practice of burning incense also carries deep cultural and symbolic meanings within Zulu tradition (Flikke, 2018). It is a ritualistic practice that signifies respect and devotion to the ancestors. Through the aromatic smoke of incense, practitioners seek to establish a sacred space where they can commune with their ancestral spirits, seeking their counsel and assistance in matters of healing, divination and spiritual guidance, Ntshangase (2012:20) argues that while impepho and incense are not exactly one and the same thing, they are part of the same context. In this way, burning incense becomes an integral part of the iZangoma spiritual and healing rituals, connecting them with their ancestral lineage and cultural heritage. The choice of incense used in iZingoma practices often varies, depending on the specific needs of the practitioner and the nature of the ritual. Different types of incense may be selected based on their symbolic associations, such as frankincense for purification, myrrh for healing or sage for spiritual cleansing. The aromatic properties of the incense are believed to have the power to attract and appease ancestral spirits, enhancing the efficacy of the practitioner's prayers and offerings (Ntshangase, 2012). Furthermore, the practice of burning incense in iZingoma rituals serves to create a sensory experience that transcends the physical realm, invoking a heightened state of consciousness and spiritual awareness. The aroma of the incense, combined with rhythmic chanting, drumming and other ritualistic elements, helps to induce a trance-like state in which the practitioner can more

effectively commune with the spirit world. This altered state of consciousness allows the iZingoma to access deeper levels of intuition, insight and spiritual guidance from their ancestors (Ntshangase, 2012).

*Participant 16 and 17: Before incense is burn, I pray to recognize those who have passed on while following religion as I cannot assume that they will hear me when I only call them using impepo, this is to ensure that I spiritually integrate all the ancestors to make sure that no one is left behind and that they all communicate with me, I also do that even when I am guiding other families in burning incense, the paying signify my spirit and to connect with those who prayed in the ancestors.*

In addition to facilitating communication with ancestors, the burning of incense also serves as a form of spiritual purification and protection. (Vasudevan, 2019) agrees that incense is burned to purify the environment and invite the presence of deities which, in the context of this study, are ancestors. Smoke is believed to have the power to dispel negative energies, ward off malevolent spirits and cleanse the ritual space of impurities. By purifying the environment in which they work, iZingoma practitioners create a safe and sacred space in which they can conduct their healing and divination practices with clarity, focus and spiritual integrity. Overall, the significance of the dominant ancestor and the practice of burning incense in iZingoma traditions speaks to the deeply ingrained belief in the power of ancestral wisdom, spiritual connection, and ritualistic practice. Through these ancient customs, practitioners seek to honor their ancestors, access their guidance and uphold the cultural heritage of their people. By maintaining this sacred connection with the spirit world, iZingoma practitioners continue to serve as healers, mentors and guardians within their communities, bridging the gap between the physical and spiritual realms for the betterment of all (Vasudevan, 2019).

The findings on the role of the dominant ancestor and the burning of incense among iZingoma strongly support ritual theory, which understands ritual as a symbolic process that constructs sacred order and transforms identity. Rather than serving merely devotional purposes, incense burning functions as a ritual mechanism that mediates relationships between the spiritual and social worlds, enabling the healer's transition into a spiritually authorised role. The act symbolically separates ordinary from sacred space and, through sensory elements such as smoke, prayer, and chanting, produces a liminal state that facilitates ancestral communication. Participants'

intentional inclusion of all ancestors demonstrates that ritual actively sustains cosmological relationships rather than simply expressing belief. As a symbolic bridge between the living and the ancestral realm, incense reinforces the iSangoma's identity as a spiritual conduit while simultaneously purifying space and legitimising healing authority. Thus, the ritual does not merely support spiritual practice but constitutes spiritual personhood itself, illustrating ritual theory's claim that identity, authority, and meaning are produced and maintained through culturally structured ritual action.

### 5.6 The "new me" after ukugenwa abaphansi [3]

Amalukwue and Isidienu (2023) depict that culture embraces religious beliefs, languages, dresses, style of living, political organization and all other aspects of life. In this section the researcher outlines the initiation process. The study details that iZingoma dress code is determined by the initiate's mother or father (*uGobela*) who trained the initiates during their initiation. After they complete their initiation, they are instructed to respect these dress codes when they go to ceremonies and when they consult with community. Wieringa and Blackwood (1999:28), as cited by Morgan and Reid (2003:5), describe cases where women possessed by male spirits rejected traditional marriages with men and instead sought to marry other women. It is worth nothing that these dress codes come in a variety of colours and designs. Some iZingoma wear beer (*ibhayi*) which may have multiple colours. They will also have beads (*ubuhlalu*) which also comes in different colours, while some will wear a crown (*umqhele)* on their heads, irrespective of their gender.

The initiation of iZingoma differs significantly, depending on their Gobela and their dominant ancestor. The initiation process has three distant stages. (a). Stage one is the "calling" (*ukungenwa abaphansi*), in this phase the dominant ancestors, through a voice or vocally, will instruct the person to do something, which could be to go to the river, where the individual would disappear for days without any trace and return unharmed either to their family or to the Gobela's place where their training would resume. While some go straight to their Gobela, others would follow

[3] Ukungenwa abaphansi is translated as "ancestral calling" or ancestral invitation/ being entered by ancestors

the voice that instructed them initially, and go as directed to receive their training. At this stage, the individual would not be regarded as an initiate as they come to their Gobela's home.

uGobela would than ask them why they came to his/her house and they would respond with what led them to Gobela's house; the process would begin, depending on the presumed initiate's ancestral message. (b) stage 2 is called the "acceptance of the calling" where the person officially accepts the calling, and the *ukuthwasa* training would begin. Once the initiate accepts their calling they are called "ithwasa," meaning the learner, and they will learn everything that they need to learn in order for them to move on to stage 3. It is worth noting that the terminology used is in reference to how the training in of iZingoma in uGu district takes place in some societies, but the wording might differ. While still on stage 2; the researcher was lucky enough to see the initiates (*amathwasa*) and noticed that they wore different attire from their Gobela and amathwasa who had completed their training; the initiates apply pus to their face (*ibovu*) while wearing reddish attire, while others apply white ashes to their face (*umlotha*) and are dressed in white; (c) stage 3 is called "umgidi" which is a ritual that is done to signify that ithwasa completed training and their Gobela has acknowledged them as iSangoma. They would now wear different clothes and return home to practice as iZingoma fulltime, and others would not practice fulltime but help people as the need arises. Some would practice and follow the process because of sickness, misfortune etc. It is also worth noting that some of them would dress based on their dominant ancestors, meaning that men may wear women;s clothes, and women may dress like men, signifying their connection with their dominant ancestor, remain engraved in their bodies and spirits.

The emergence of the "new me" following *ukugenwa abaphansi* can be understood through ritual theory, sexuality theory, and social constructivist theory, which together explain how initiation reconstructs identity, embodiment, and social meaning among iZingoma. From a ritual theory perspective, ukuthwasa functions as a rite of passage, which according to Van Gennep (1909;1990) involve separation, liminality, and reintegration. In this study the calling separates individuals from ordinary identity, training places them in a liminal state as *amathwasa*, and *umgidi* publicly recognises their transformation into spiritually authorised iZingoma. Ritual symbols such as attire, beads, and facial markings act as embodied markers of transition, demonstrating that ritual actively produces a new spiritual personhood rather than merely symbolising change.

Sexuality theory extends this analysis by showing that initiation reshapes gender expression and relational identity. The adoption of attire linked to dominant ancestors, including cross-gender dress, challenges fixed gender binaries and illustrates sexuality and gender as fluid and culturally mediated rather than biologically fixed. Ancestral embodiment legitimises alternative gender performances, creating culturally meaningful space for diverse identities.

Social constructivist theory explains how this transformation gains meaning through shared cultural narratives and communal validation. Dress codes, ritual stages, and recognition by the uGobela and community collectively construct the initiate's new social reality, where identity is shaped through cultural interaction rather than individual choice alone. Thus, *ukugenwa abaphansi* represents a transformative cultural process in which ritual practice reshapes identity, sexuality is reinterpreted through spiritual embodiment, and the "new me" emerges as a socially and spiritually constructed self within the iZingoma tradition.

Having outlined the rituals and practices relevant to the study, the chapters summarized in the following section,

## 5.7 Chapter summary

This chapter highlighted the demographic information which includes the age, years of practice as iZingoma of the participants, and included extracts of participants' responses. Demographics in the form of a table, revealed that more females than males were willing to talk about issues pertaining to homosexuality. The study reflected that there was lower participation of men iZingoma than females, influenced by a number of factors. These factors has to do with the fact that men take pride in their cultural tradition, which is influenced by cultural and religious beliefs and is still discriminatory regarding gay phenomena, due to the perceptions of masculinity and patriarchy. This chapter also looked at sexuality and the significant of a dominant ancestor in iSangoma as an individual, and revealed that the sexuality of iSangoma is influenced by the dominant ancestor who embodied or actualized their bodies (*ukungenwa abaphansi*). The study further highlighted the importance of dress codes that iZingoma wear and outlined the stages that relate to *ubungoma*, as this is a key aspect to understanding the role of iZingoma and how they become iZingoma, which is important.

# CHAPTER SIX

# PERCEPTIONS OF IZINGOMA ON BURNING OF INCENSE BY GAY HEIRS - RESULTS

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter contributes a factual narrative of iZingoma on gay heirs burning incense to communicate with ancestors in relation to thematic analysis. The views of iZingoma were collected by means of in-depth interviews held with the population studied. Themes were developed to represent accounts through which iZingoma shared their views and perceptions to provide a nuanced understanding of the practice of burning incense to communicate with ancestors.

Exploring the intersection of family tradition and personal identity, the question, which is the focus of the study, arises: Can a gay man, despite potential societal expectations, serve as the designated heir responsible for ancestral rituals such as burning incense?' In the realm of anthropology, the significance of data analysis becomes apparent in two crucial ways. Firstly, it grants space for subjective narratives to emerge, allowing individuals to articulate their truths and emotions regarding specific situations. Secondly, it enables anthropologists to delve into phenomenological data, capturing the lived realities of the studied population for deeper interpretations and insights. In this case, the lived realities of iZingoma were assessed. By synthesizing these narratives and thematically organizing them, the researcher constructed coherent results that sheds light on various aspects of a given subject or phenomenon (the research question). Through meticulous data analysis, researchers can draw meaningful inferences, whether by proposing new theoretical frameworks or by evaluating the relevance of existing literature in the field.

## 6.2 How do IZingoma validate/ support gay heirs to burn incense

Nkabinde (2009) argues that maintaining spiritual purity is crucial for effective communication with the ancestors, thus ensuring the success of spiritual rituals. The study reveals that amongst Zulu families, iZingoma play a significant role in ensuring that the burning of incense remains a respected practice, therefore validating whether gay heirs are supported or not involves ensuring that incense is burned by the recognised heir of the family, irrespective of their sexuality. The

appreciation of cultural, spiritual and social dimensions remains the source for validation of this ritual. iZingoma in the modern era are not only trained to communicate ancestral messages, but the majority of them are also educated, which means that they can validate or support whether gay heirs should burn incense, through fostering cultural inclusivity and acceptance in situations where they see families denying a gay heir from burning incense. Additionally, some iZingoma are gay themselves, which makes it easy to relate to gay heirs and speak with the families about traditional beliefs and norms that govern the burning of incense. Furthermore, iZingoma experience the practice of burning incense and provide a cornerstone for families to accept that gay heirs may burn incense if the Sangoma is present and allows the process to unfold without any hinderance.

Moreover, iZingoma can also foster a sense of belonging and solidarity, if they endorse, support and empower gay heirs to embrace their identities and participate fully in ancestral rituals as iZingoma do not only serves as interpreters of ancestral messages but also as counselors of traditional systems, in cases where the families need spiritual and traditional interventions. This supports the ritual theory, which suggests that any ritual generates an emotional connection with the living and non-living being, It also supports the social constructivism theory, which emphasises the importance of cultural context and social phenomenon knowledge based on the societal understanding, which in this case is to determine whether a gay man can be the heir of the family and burn incense (*impepho*) to communicate with the ancestors.

Incense is burned in a family altar, which is a sacred place reserved to ensure that not everyone has access except family members, with the guidance of an heir. Even iZingoma themselves do not enter, but stand outside the altar. Sexuality does not form part of the exclusion (whether a gay men can burn incense), therefore this argument alone validates and supports those gay men are supported by iZingoma to burn incense. Makgobi (2014) places eligibility to burn *impepho* at the forefront of everything, and argues that it varies across communities, but male elders, especially those who are married and seen as upholding family purity, are typically entrusted with this responsibility.

Below is feedback from participants:

*Most participants said: Impepho ishiswa iloyo oyinkosana yalowo muzi, kukabili lapho khona umuntu engeka akwazi ukushisa khona impepo. Okokuqala kungaba ukuthi lowomuntu ugcolilie either ngokwenhliziyo noma uzibandakanye ngokocansi ngaphambi kokuba ashise impepho,*

*ngalokoke kumele ahlazwe (cleansing) ngaphambi kokuba ashsise impepho, sekukaningi ngiya emindenini ukuyosiza kodwa ngihoshe ngokomoya ukuthi inkinga ikumshisi mphepho, ngiyaye kubaluleke ukuthi kudingeke inhlambuluko ngaphambi kokuba kuqhubeke umsebenzi.*

*The above is translated as: This mean, Incense is burned by the head (heir) of the household, there are two cases where a person cannot burn incense. First, it cannot be burned by a person that has become defiled either mentally or sexually before burning incense, therefore, he must undergo cleansing before burning incense, I have often gone to families to help but I have been spiritually convinced that the problem is with the incense burner, I am increasingly emphasizing that cleansing is required before the work can begin.*

This signifies that the only criteria for exclusion is the person themselves in terms of their behaviour and the respect they show in their position as the heir of the family, and not their sexuality.

iZingoma form part of the Interim Traditional Health Practitioners Council of South Africa (ITHPCSA), established by the Traditional Health Practitioners Act 22 of 2007, which is recognised by the South African constitution under customary law; some of iZingoma in Ugu district are registered with the council. This council was established to assist, support and guide traditional leaders in their performance of their function, including ensuring that the rights of people they serve are protected in terms of the Bill of Rights. In the past when people consulted with iZingoma, they did not receive formal documentation to produce either in school or in the workplace, to prove their absence medically. However, after the establishment of this council, iZingoma are now able to issue certificates to their individuals that consulted with them, which means that the council does not only provide guidance, but also opportunities for these indigenous healers (ïZangoma) to be part of evolving societies.

Moreover, the affected iZingoma, by virtue of their membership and association with members of ITHPCSA, are bound to act in a professional manner, which means to serve, protect and guide. Also, most of the time when government makes decisions either at a municipal, provincial or national government level, traditional leaders are often consulted., and the assumption could be In South Africa, since homosexuality was legalized in 1996 and ITHPCSA's establishment a decade later, may imply iZingoma under this council validate and support gay heirs, as they are bound by the rules of the council. Their association with the council could also be used as a tool in fostering

dialogue and collaboration between LGBTQ+ individuals and their allies within iZingoma communities, essential for building understanding and solidarity. Additionally, creating spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals to celebrate their identities and connect with one another fosters a sense of community and belonging within iZingoma communities. LGBTQ+ cultural events, pride celebrations and social gatherings provide opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals to express themselves freely, build supportive relationships and celebrate their shared experiences and identities. By creating inclusive and affirming spaces, iZingoma communities can help to combat isolation and promote social connection and solidarity among LGBTQ+ individuals.

The findings on iZingoma validating gay heirs' right to burn incense can be understood through ritual theory, which frames ritual as a culturally regulated process that maintains sacred order and social cohesion. Incense burning (*impepho*) is guided by spiritual readiness and moral purity rather than sexual orientation, with cleansing practices ensuring eligibility. By supporting gay heirs, iZingoma act as custodians of ritual authority, preserving tradition while adapting to contemporary social realities. Their institutional recognition further enables mediation between ancestral legitimacy and evolving social norms, showing that rituals both reproduce cultural identity and allow communities to renegotiate inclusion without compromising sacred continuity.

### 6.3 Indigenous knowledge on burning of incense

The indigenous knowledge system on whether a gay man could be the heir of the family and burn incense to communicate with ancestors, is deeply engraved in cultural beliefs, traditions, spiritual beliefs and norms that are accepted by societies. In Zulu families, just as in many indigenous cultures who follow this practice, the burning of incense is regarded as sacred and a ritual of the highest order, used to communicate with ancestors in order to seek guidance, protection and honour their memory. Makgobi (2014) argues that the act of burning *impepho* is a sacred practice in many African communities. It is not performed casually, but only by those who have earned the respect and purity required by the elders of the family, implying that it has nothing to do with the sexuality of the person.

Below is feedback by participants:

*Most particpants: Ngokwazi kwami akukho lapho kumquli wozolwazi lwesintu lapho abathandana nobulili obufanayo okubavimbayo ukuthi bashise impempo, kuyaye kube imindeni ngemindeni eyaye ingakuzwisisi kahle ukuthi abathandana nabolili obufanayo bashise impepho.*

*The above is translated as: "As far as I know, there is no place in the humanities where homosexuals are prohibited from burning incense, although there are families that do not fully understand that homosexuals should burn incense".*

Among the Zulu tribe, the inclusion of gay heirs in this ritual is very complex and a delicate issue, despite the absence of hindrance that prevents gay heirs from burning incense in indigenous practice; it seems as if individual families hold a voice about the inclusion of a gay heir and the concept of burning of incense to communicate with the ancestors, which may raise questions. The notion of whether being a homosexual male in a Zulu family implies that the gay man is accepted or rejected by the ancestors, is one of these questions. This research revealed that there is no single answer to this, but perceptions solely depend on the family structural preferences influenced by norms; however, it is worth noting that in past centuries, through patriarchal enculturation, it was challenging for gay heirs to burn incense to communicate with the ancestors. Conversely, in modern days, when people are starting to learn about diversity and starting to see individuals in the community being openly gay, some Zulu families do accept gay heirs as eligible to burn incense to communicate with ancestors. Here, it should be noted that their role in Zulu families is not only depicted as the leader in different rituals, but also in other roles as heirs such as being the bread winner of the family. Additionally, most gay people are educated, which means the families sometimes prioritise the status of their education and wealth, rather than the role of the heir itself. This means that rituals remain a family construct in terms of what the family see as fitting for them, therefore gay heirs are manipulated on a daily basis to do what the family says, as opposed to what the ritual itself means for indigenous knowledge systems (Valfort, 2017).

Additionally indigenous knowledge is a perspective that emphasises the recognition of cultural and social diversity within societies, which means all humans are recognised as capable beings in the performance of rituals therefore, as long as an individual has the right to be recognized as an heir of the family. It is an inherent position that is passed from one generation to the next. Valfort (2017:21) argues that society generally recognizes "straight" men as the only people capable of

communicating with ancestors and is usually based on the family preference. Langa (2012:1) proposes that Zulu cultures are socially constructed on a gendered basis, discriminating against homosexuals. However, the often intertwined, interconnectedness (the inherent existence of the heir from one generation to the next) says nothing about sexuality of the individual, hence the grounds of accepting gay heirs to burn incense is valid, as there is no taboo or negativity (*umkhuba*) when a gay heir burns incense.

Therefore; gayness should not be seen as a barrier for individuals to perform the ritual of burning incense. According to the indigenous knowledge system and cultural leaders in the community, more particularly those who form part of the council of traditional authority, the sincerity and intentionality of the spiritual practice is valid. This, however does not mean this is the only viewpoint that can be used to relate to indigenous knowledge about the acceptance or rejection of gay heirs. Any hindrance gay heirs may face from indigenous families, could be on the basis of the acknowledgement of skepticism, resistance and lack of acceptance, as most Zulu families, mainly indigenous in nature, are deeply ingrained in heteronormative expectations regarding the role assigned to family members in terms of their gender. These social contrasts are often what dictate who should participate in ancestral rituals. One may also argue that what might hinder families from accepting gay heirs as eligible to burn incense, could be colonization and westernization, which infiltrated the indigenous knowledge system through colonial policies and Christian missionaries. The latter imposed a Eurocentric notion of morality on gender roles in terms of indigenous knowledge. This might influence families to see gayness as an un-African and non-indigenous act, leading to suppression and creating tension within indigenous communities in terms of traditional beliefs and external influences. The latter would potentially promote heteronormativity and resistance regarding accepting gay heirs as eligible to burn incense in a family.

Moreover, Srinivasan (2020) expands those familial relationships are governed by values like respect and responsibility, which are ingrained through centuries of tradition. This study discloses that the role of elders and spiritual leaders in indigenous families may also contribute to the acceptance or rejection of gay heirs burning incense. Those who are open-minded and inclusive may act as a cornerstone in ensuring diversity and dignity of the practice of burning incense by emphazing the issue of the right heir, irrespective of sexual orientation. Additionally, those who

adhere to their inherent enculturation on the rigid traditional beliefs may refute the inclusion of gay heirs from the ritual, "citing the teachings of cultural norms, values and religion" Srinivasan (2020).

The following are extracts from participants:

*Paricipant 8: Kodwa bangathini nje obabamkhulu impepho ishiswa owesilisa ozenza intombazane, bangavuka emathuneni imphela, mina ngafundiswa ukuthi indoda iyindoda ngezenzo zayo, kuyaxakake manje uma sengibona abesilisa bezenza amantombazane.*

*The above is translated as: "But what would our grandfathers say if incense was burned by a man pretending to be a girl, they would rise from the grave forever? I was taught that a man is a man by his actions, it's strange now when I see men pretending to be girls".*

Lastly, the reputation of indigenous knowledge is known for its emphasis on intergenerational transmission, through enculturation of cultural traditions (norms and values) and spiritual practices (belief systems and rituals, "the IKS (indigenous knowledge system) in action"). This viewpoint could be seen as the cornerstone of ensuring that there is no hinderance when gay heirs burn incense to communicate with their ancestors, and it might actually suggest that the involvement of gay heirs could be essential in ensuring the preservation and growth, in terms of adaptation of IKS and the ritual performed, ensuring continuity for future generations. From this perspective, the participation of gay heirs in ancestral rituals may be seen as essential for preserving and revitalizing indigenous knowledge systems, ensuring their continuity for future generations.

The findings on indigenous knowledge surrounding whether gay heirs may burn incense reflects a complex interplay of ritual, sexual identity, and socially constructed norms. From a ritual theory perspective, burning incense (*impepho*) is a sacred practice that maintains communication with ancestors and upholds spiritual and social order; eligibility is determined by ritual readiness, purity, and respect for cultural protocols rather than sexual orientation. Sexuality theory highlights that the inclusion of gay heirs challenges heteronormative assumptions embedded in family and community structures, demonstrating that gender and sexual identities are fluid and culturally mediated within spiritual practices. Social constructivist theory further explains that acceptance or resistance is shaped by family beliefs, patriarchal enculturation, and historical influences such as colonization and Christian moral frameworks. Together, these perspectives show that the role of

gay heirs in ancestral rituals is both culturally and spiritually legitimate, reflecting how ritual practice, sexual identity, and communal norms intersect to preserve, adapt, and transmit indigenous knowledge systems across generations.

### 6.4 Indigenous Knowledge iZangoma Possess Regarding the Homosexual Phenomenon

iZangoma are known as custodians and gatekeepers of Zulu ancestral knowledge, as they possess a deeper understanding of spirituality, cultural and healing practices. However, they may have a different understanding of homosexuality, more especially since the notion of homosexuality has been a contested phenomenon in terms of its presumed association with westernization, and often with tradition and the concept of femininity (Ntshangase, 2012). Modern societies which sought to bring about diversity in different cultures, could contribute to iZangoma interpreting homosexuality within the realm of spiritual context, in the sense that healers may view gay men as possessing a special calling, more especially those whose dominant ancestor is of the opposite sex, therefor; seeing and viewing sexuality as a broader spiritual experience.

The following is an individual response:

*Participant 1: Ukukhuma iqiniso nje mcwaning, lento yabesilisa noma owesifazane othandana nonobulili obufanayo, sesize sayijwayela, noma bebuye benze izinto ezihlekisayo kulomkhakha osikuwo wobungoma, ngoba nathi sinabo futh baning kuwona lomkhakha, futhike bagqokisa, bakhulume baphinde bazenze abasifazene, kwesinye isikhathi makusebusuku, utintile ezinkambini zikafaru (Alcohol) ungaze udideke uthi umuntu wesifazane uze ubeke ababile amathathu. "The participant laughed non-stopat the thought of courting a man thinking it's a woman"*

*The above is translated as: "To be honest, this is a man or woman who is in a relationship with the same sex, we have become accustomed to it, even if they do funny things in this field of entertainment, because we also have them and there are many of them in this field, and they dress up, talk and pretend to be women, sometimes at night, you touch the alcohol in the camp and you can be confused about a woman and put two or three.*

However, there is also evidence of diverse sexualities within indigenous cultures, and some iZingoma may interpret homosexuality within a spiritual context. For instance, some healers may view a gay man as possessing a special calling or spiritual gift, seeing his sexuality not as an anomaly, but as part of a broader spiritual experience. Ntshangase (2012) agrees that, within Nguni cultures, the powers to use *imphepho* are generally bestowed upon the head of the family and close male relatives thus, suggesting that others, may perceive homosexuality as conflicting with traditional gender roles, considering it taboo or incompatible with ancestral expectations. These results reveal the depth of indigenous knowledge held by iZangoma concerning homosexuality, thereby addressing the question: "What indigenous knowledge do iZingoma possess regarding the homosexual phenomenon?"

### 6.5 Cultural variation of burning incense

Amongst the IsiNguni-speaking people of South Africa, the burning of incense holds profound cultural significance, deeply intertwined with their spiritual beliefs, traditional practices and everyday life. IsiNguni-speaking communities, which include groups like the Zulu and Xhosa, have rich and diverse cultural traditions, and the burning of incense is a ritualistic practice that plays a central role in various aspects of their cultural and spiritual expressions. For some cultural practices a diviner must be present to provide guidance and to interpret the perceived connection, so that the process may run smoothly. However, incense is also used for fumigation to improve health (Staub et al., 2011). The burning of incense among the IsiNguni-speaking people is often associated with ancestral worship and communication. Ancestral worship is a fundamental aspect of their belief system, and incense is used as a means to honor and communicate with their ancestors. The aromatic smoke of the incense is believed to carry prayers and offerings to the spirit realm (Staub et al., 2011), where ancestors are thought to reside. By burning incense, IsiNguni-speaking people create a sacred atmosphere in which they may connect with their ancestors, seeking their guidance, protection and blessings in daily life.

The variety of IsiNguni-speaking people may have diverse traditions and practices related to the burning of incense. According to Sadgrove (2020), there are a number of reasons why or how aromatherapy is used, while Ntshangase (2012:20) argues that while impepho and incense are not

exactly one and the same thing, they are part of the same context. Nearly all religious groups use incense. For example, Among the Zulu people, the burning of incense is an integral part of traditional ceremonies such as umsebenzi (ancestor worship), ukuvuma (cleansing rituals), and umthandazo (prayer ceremonies). During these rituals, various types of incense, such as imphepho (African sage) or isiHlabane (wormwood), are burned to purify the ritual space and invoke the presence of ancestral spirits (Sadgrove, 2020). The aromatic smoke is believed to carry prayers and offerings to the ancestors, facilitating communication and healing. During these ceremonies, incense is used to purify the ritual space and invoke the presence of ancestral spirits, who are honored and revered as sources of wisdom and guidance.

The following is direct feedback from individual participants about ceremonial practice:

*Participant 1: AmaZulu burn incense when there's a ceremony to report about to or ask for ancestral guidance, this is critical to Zulu culture as we cannot do a ceremony without letting them know, there will be people making noise in their homestead and slaughtering. During the ceremony will burn incense before we start with the ceremony, this is the only way we can ensure that we have fully invited them and they are within us, usually they give a sign, in my family the excrement will cry or the Zulu traditional bear will spill, then we will know they have heard and accepted our invitation. As iSangoma it is easy to connect with ancestors, ancestors reveal some sort of a message through a dream, which is called "isibonakaliso" (signs) that will happen in your life as iSangoma e.g sometimes you will experience headache which is hard to explain the cause of it, sometimes you will have a sudden running stomach, this indicate that there is something bound to happen, impepho is used to connect where all ancestors are called in order to connect, we believe that connection is yielded since we just have feelings that that we have connected after speaking with them through the burning of incense. As much as I cannot reveal a lot but there are lot of indications that ancestors have connected with us, which prove that ancestor are alive in hidden (bayphila emfihlakalweni). The role connecting with ancestors it that it provides a revelation to your background and where you come from. It also teaches us imikhuba lakulelo khaya (habits of the family), I am using the work habits purposively since I cannot use the word tradition as traditions differs from family to family whilst habits are things that are done by individual families to respects the family tradition which may overlap significantly with other family tradition on their habits on how this are done, therefore the incense burner need to continue with the tradition of*

*how the habits of the family is like. Teaching of the family are also drawn to ancestors through the burning of ancestor hence the use of the habits.*

*Participant 4: As umZulu burning incense invites obabamkhulu and the whole ancestral lineage, in most cases in my family when there is a ceremony, we will burn incense and light candles in the alter if all candles light, we will know that they have accepted the ceremony and if not especially the one for the incense burner that we will know ancestors have rejected the ceremony for reasons which need to be addressed like inhlambuluko yomdeni ("coming clean as a family"- direct translation is cleansing) etc.*

Similarly, among the Xhosa people, incense may be burned as part of traditional healing rituals performed by Sangomas or traditional healers. Sangomas often use incense to cleanse and protect themselves and their clients from negative energies, as well as to establish a spiritual connection with their ancestors and the spirit world. Burning incense is believed to enhance the efficacy of healing rituals by creating a sacred environment conducive to spiritual healing and transformation.

An example of the above is included below:

*Participant 3: For me I was initiated in both isiXhosa and isiZulu way, the process is called ubungoma from the Zulu initiation perspective and umdawu for Xhosa perspective. Within isiXhosa you have to start in the alter to explain the reason why you are there, cleanse yourself before burning incense, this is to help in chasing away evil spirits.*

Furthermore, the choice of incense used by IsiNguni-speaking people may vary, depending on the specific purpose of the ritual or ceremony. Traditional herbs, resins and aromatic woods are often used to create incense blends tailored to specific spiritual needs and intentions. For example, indigenous plants like imphepho are commonly used in incense blends for ancestral veneration and spiritual purification, while aromatic woods such as sandalwood or cedar may be used for their grounding and protective properties. The burning of incense is not limited to ceremonial occasions but is also a part of everyday life among IsiNguni-speaking communities. Many households burn incense regularly as a form of spiritual cleansing, purification and meditation. The aromatic smoke of the incense is believed to promote peace, harmony and spiritual well-being within the home, as well as to ward off negative energies and malevolent spirits. Moreover, the burning of incense is

often accompanied by prayers, chants and rituals that further enhance its spiritual potency and efficacy (Sadgrove, 2020).

IsiNguni-speaking people may invoke the names of their ancestors, recite sacred verses or perform symbolic gestures as they burn incense, imbuing the ritual with deep meaning and intention. These rituals serve to strengthen the connection between the living and the spirit world, fostering a sense of continuity, reverence and cultural identity within IsiNguni-speaking communities. Lastly, the burning of incense among IsiNguni-speaking people of South Africa is a multifaceted practice that encompasses ancestral worship, spiritual healing and cultural expression (Sadgrove, 2020). Through the ritualistic burning of incense, IsiNguni-speaking communities honor their ancestors, seek spiritual guidance and cultivate a deep sense of connection with the divine. This ancient practice continues to play a vital role in preserving and perpetuating the rich cultural heritage and spiritual traditions of the IsiNguni-speaking people. These results align with ritual theory, as they illustrate how the practice of burning incense functions as a culturally structured ritual that reinforces sacred order, mediates relationships with ancestors, and maintains social and spiritual continuity within the community.

### 6.6 Cultural taboos/restriction relating to gay heirs participating in the practice of burning incense

Cultural taboos that restrict gay heirs from participating in the ritual of burning incense, differs from society to society and from family to family. In Zulu families these restrictions can be deeply rooted in the norms, values and beliefs systems that guarantee family succession, which is consistence with a study by Amalukwue and Isidienu (2023), who outlined that culture embraces religious beliefs, languages, dresses, style of living, political organization and all other aspects of life. Most Zulu families are still following the patriarchal system of succession where man are given the roles of leading the performance of rituals. Most female participants in this study argued that in some families they are sometimes met with challenges when they interpret ancestral messages to the families. Stopler (2008:1) details that African cultures often devalue women through cultural ideologies, symbolic devices and social structures that exclude women from certain realms of power. The study reveals that some family members often take time to accept the outcome, when women iSangoma relay some ancestral message such as a cleansing or

reconciliation (*inhlambuluko*). These challenges can lead to restrictions regarding participation of a gay heir in the burning of incense or not, and therefore it may become an issue for iZingoma; if the family does not accept it, it might not be easy to convince them.

furthermore, the issue of family lineage and the believe that there is no family continuity if a man is in love with another man, due to the notion that gay men cannot have kids. This notion suggests that when a person is gay it is the end of the lineage and the modern way of having kids such as adoption, invitro-fertilization or surrogacy is often ignored and deemed culturally insensitive as it does not adhere to the indigenous way of forming a family. Most traditional families believe that in order for a man to lead the family, he has to get married to a wife, who will bear kids in order for the family lineage to continue. Therefore; the role of an heir is assigned based on gender and not sexuality, as sexuality is not considered and some may believe that it a good thing. But sexuality is usually condemned in different families for cultural and religious reasons, which form part of the gender social constructions. This may have a ripple effect in accepting gay heirs to burn incense.

Moreover, one may also argue and make reference to the hatred and violence homosexual people face on a daily basis as a result of their sexuality. This may in turn may mean that if the family is homophobic toward the general members of the LGBTQI+ community, it would be challenging to accept gay heirs to burn incense in a family in order to communicate with ancestors, as homosexuality is perceived to conflict with, or contradict tradition and the performance of any ritual in accordance with gender socialization (Johnson, 2014: 38). Patriarchy also positions men as made in the image of a masculine God, and that heterosexuality is natural, while same-sex attraction is not, thus creating a challenge for certain families to accept gay heirs as participants in rituals of burning incense, as they are believed not to have these qualities.

Additionally, religious teachings and systems of beliefs may also act as restrictions in a situation where gay individuals are marginalised and criticized due to their sexuality, which may result in a gay heir being restricted from performing sacred ritual as Zulu families' religious teaching is ingrained in their cultures.

A direct quote from a participant follows:

*Participant 10 Said: "ngaphandle kosiko nemikhuba emindeni, kwesinye iskhathi uthola ukuthi nakuba amalunga omdeni elugcina usuko, kodwa inkolo idla indima enkulu ngangokuba ngaphambi kokuba kushiswe impepho mayaye bathandaze uku qakambisa lowomadlozi adlula emshlabeni ekholelwa kakhulu kwinkolo, okwenza nalabo abaphilayo bakholelwe kukho kokubili (isiko nenkolo)"*

*The above is translated as: "Apart from family traditions and customs, sometimes you find that although family members observe tradition, religion plays a major role, to the extent that before burning incense, they pray to honor those ancestors who passed away with strong religious beliefs, which makes those who are still alive believe in both (tradition and religion)."*

This initially means that in some Zulu families religious beliefs supersede cultural beliefs, even though the burning of incense to communicate with ancestors is more traditional, but some religions burn incense for a number of reasons. Therefore, if that religious belief is against homosexuality, gay heirs would be restricted from burning incense. This in turn suggests that homosexuality is s seen as a sin and a taboo. Another critical perception is the societal expectations where communities hold rigid views on homosexuality; families may feel obliged to restrict gay heirs from burning incense in the fear of being judged on the basis of what the community will say. Indigenous communities fear embarrassment (*ihlazo*) more than anything, and as Ugu district is more rural and still affected by the community's opinion it provides a challenge for homosexual people to be accepted in families. These results align with both ritual theory and sexuality theory, as they highlight how culturally prescribed rituals, such as incense burning, regulate sacred practices while negotiating social taboos surrounding the participation of gay heirs, demonstrating how sexual identity is interpreted and legitimised within spiritual and ritual frameworks within Zulu families.

### 6.7 Discussing whether the ancestors see the burning of incense through a gendered lens

Gender discussion of burning of incense has less significance in the spiritual realm, as iZingoma in the Zulu families are made up of both genders (male and female); therefore, the study could find no evidence which suggests that ancestors view the burning of incense through a gendered lens.

The past and modern societies in Africa have been proven not exclude to anyone in the burning of incense on the basis of gender. This practice may differ from patriarchal and matriarchal societies, as in patriarchal societies descent is traced through a male line. Here, the burning of incense would therefore be expected to be burned by an heir who falls under the descriptions of being of male descent; likewise, in matriarchal societies it is expected that the descent is traced through a female line. In this case, responsibilities of burning incense would be performed by a woman. Therefore; gender lens plays a part under those circumstances. It should be noted that sexuality in this case does not play a part or any role, as the concept of gender and sexuality differs, although they are often used interchangeably in most indigenous societies.

Feedback from five participants follow (a translation appears below):

*Paticipant 1,4,8, 12 and 18: abaphansi baphila ngokwemimoya, ngakoke angikholwa ukuthi babuka isiko lokushisa impepo ngokwezobulili, emdenini lapho kona bengasekho abasilisa, umama uyakwazi ukushisa impepo ukuxhumana nabantu abaphansi, kwesinye isikhathi nakuba ikhona inkosana, uyaye uthole ukuthi kuzoba khona umcimbi, kodwa inkosana isebenza kude, ngokwesintu ngaphambi kwemucimbi kumele abaphansi babikele, ngakoke loyo osuke ekhona ekhaya, ikakhulukazi ugogo, ukhulu uyakwazi ukushisa impepho, noma engeke aguke emsamu (the alter) akhulume nabo, kodwa uyakwazi ukushisa impepo kwindlu ekushiswa kuyo impepo ababikele, noma uma kukhona isimo esiphuthumayo njengokugula, uyakwazi ukushisa impepho, ngengehloso yokubacela ukuthi bavikele loyo osuke egula. Kwsinye isikhathi uthola ukuthi abantwana bebevakashile ngeisikhathi samaholid, uma sebephindela emuva bayakwazi ukushisa impepho abakhona ekaya babacelele indle enhle, ngakhoke uma kuzi ekushisweni kwephepho, kuaya ngemindemi ngemindeni.* [4]

[4] ***translation:*** *The ancestors live according to the spirit, so I don't believe they view the tradition of burning incense in terms of gender, in a family where there are no male incesnce burners, the mother can burn incense to communicate with the ancestos, sometimes even if there is an heir, she finds out that there will be an event, but the heir works far away, according to tradition, before the event, the ancestors must informed, so whoever is at home, especially the grandmother, can burn incense, even if they cannot kneel at the alter and talk to them, but they can burn incense in the house where the incense is burned to inform them, or if there is an emergency such as illness, they can burn incense, with the intention of asking ancestors to protect the sick person. Sometimes you find that children have been visiting during the holidays, when they leave to return to the cities. They can burn incense to those who are at home and ask for well wishes in their travel, so when it comes to the burning of the altar, it goes through the families*

These participants believe that any gender can burn incense in Zulu families, as long as circumstances allows them. The only exception may be those families where spiritual roles and responsibilities may be perceived on the basis of gender, in which one gender is considered as more important than another. For example, in royal families where the role of the heir is solely the responsibility of a certain gender, ancestors or in this case, society and tradition, may perceive the burning of incense on the basis of a gender lens.

Moreover, it is worth noting that in most cultures the emphasis by ancestors is the spiritual significance, which transcends beyond gender distinction in the ritual of burning incense, which may be centered around the perception of the individuals who hold a cultural belief and a different interpretation of gender roles. Zulu families often make reference to ancestorial gender enculturation, in terms of how they were taught when growing up, which may have nothing to do with ancestors really not endorsing homosexuality. In Zulu families individuals do not ask questions about generational enculturation, as they are often silenced or ignored. When they do question traditions, the notion of *akubuzwa kuyenziwa* [5](it's not a question; it's a fact) for traditional generational enculturation, become relatively clear (Simango, 2019).

Additionally, iZingoma themselves may influence whether or not ancestors view the burning of incense through a gender lens, and this may be as a result of their spiritual evolution and enlightenment. iZingoma may prioritise spiritual growth and their devotion in ensuring execution of their duties in terms of their divinity and worthiness of all individuals involved in the burning of incense, rather than their gender. iZingoma may regard the burning of incense as universal symbolism (practice in action), a prayer, a sign of purity and communion with the divine spiritual being, which may transcend to all individuals, irrespective of their gender roles or affiliations. This may open a door for gay heirs to be accepted and welcomed by ancestors to burn incense.

The results align with ritual theory, which emphasizes spiritual purity, adherence to ritual protocols, and moral readiness over sexuality in the practice of burning incense. This perspective suggests that the efficacy of the ritual and communication with ancestors is determined by the sincerity and preparation of the practitioner rather than their gender or sexual orientation. Consequently, ancestors are perceived to engage with the act of incense burning based on ritual

[5] *Akubuzwa kuyenziwa- The direct translation is "do not ask just do"- meaning do not questions, you must do as you told.*

propriety, not the gendered identity of the heir. This indicates that ancestral approval operates within a symbolic and spiritual framework that transcends social constructions of masculinity and femininity, reinforcing the ritual's focus on spiritual legitimacy rather than heteronormative expectations.

### 6.8 Why are men usually given the power to burn incense in the family?

The practice of burning incense is usually deeply rooted in assigning men to take charge of this practice, which is ingrained in Zulu families on the basis of cultural, religious and social norms and values that have evolved over centuries through enculturation from one generation to the next. The role of men is always at the highest level of hierarchy, in terms of ritualistic phenomena, where men are believed to possess more power than women, in accordance with social constructs of gender roles, beliefs and traditions. Cultural norms in many cultures link to the notion of premodern societies, where men's voices have been always assumed to be more powerful than those of women (Simango, 2019). These complexities value men more than women in spiritual leadership, even in certain religious beliefs, which in turn transcend to family lineages. Since the burning of incense is usually seen as a form of spiritual action or a form of worship, men are granted the authority to take charge, as women are believed to have been excluded in the past as a result of the spiritual realm in historical precedent, which has now followed the same notion in contemporary times.

Rituals such as burning of incense has been always associated with masculinity, which highly favours the power of men, in terms of strength and authority. Men in the pre- industrial era used to go to tribal wars, and a number of rituals were performed for protection, and women would stay at home or in hiding. Therefore, the study revealed that those situations might contribute to the reasons why men are usually prioritised to burn incense as opposed to women. Apart from tribal wars, men were usually involved in many rituals either prior to hunting and gathering, such as cleansing before they participate in stick fights (two opposing warriors fighting each other) and burning incense at a wedding (Simango, 2019).

The preconceived notion of ancestral customs and traditions has always suggested that the role of family dynamics and social structure are rooted in the perception that men are designed as leaders of the family, breadwinners, protectors and guardians regarding daily family life and duties, hence

men are usually prioritised in ritualistic assignments. It may be noted that in most, if not all Zulu families, when rituals are performed there is a need for entering the family kraal, which women are not allowed to enter. Women are also not allowed to slaughter certain animals like cows, goats etc during ceremonies; hence men are usually assigned to the burning of incense for these reasons. Men are also regarded as inherently purer than women in terms of the fact that they do not go through the process of menstruation, and are hence seen as best suited to perform rituals such as the burning of incense as a result of purity and cleanliness, a requirement that cannot be disregarded in any ritual, including the burning of incense.

*All Participants shared that: women often go through the process of menstruation and during this period there are deemed unclean and cannot burn incense as incense is only burned by someone is clean.*

Families and communities in Zulu tribes always emphasise the power of men, and the distribution of power within these families always put men at an advantage due to what is preferred and expected in terms of socialization in gender construction.

More comments from participants follow:

*Participant 9,10 and 14: One of the reasons why men are given the authority to burn incense is because most families amongst Zulu tradition believe that the word of the man is always final, therefore there is a believe that ancestors will often listen to them as opposed to women who are abantu bokufika ekhaya (people who foreign to this family) and who need to learn from people who were already part and socialized since birth in this family to avoid misinterpretation of the family habits*.

The traditional attribute of an ideal person to burn incense or perform any ritual is always associated with notions of qualities of strength such as issues surrounding slaughtering, which is given to men; resilience and spiritual growth are culturally seen as equipped for men. Hence, the burning of incense is therefore assigned to men. Another notion which may validate this could be the association of men as regarded as protectors and defenders in most cultures in their responsibilities relating to gender expectations, hence the responsibility of burning incense is given to men to safeguard the family well-being (Simango, 2019).

In light of the above, here are responses:

*Participant 3 and 9: man are viewed culturally as protectors and defenders of the family and incense is believe to protect us against evilness and when it burned during ceremony it is believed to guide us and protect us to ensure that ceremony go according to the principles of what our ancestors want us to do, therefore it make sense that men are the one wo usually burn incense since the role of protecting and defending the family is entrusted in them.*

*Participant 7 and 10: Usually during the ceremony in my culture, man eat the slaughtered meat in the barn (Kraal), where women are not permitted to enter, so it become difficult to allow a woman to burn incense as there are places during ceremonies where there are not allowed to go to. Participant 10, to clarify this in my tradition there is a habit that women cannot sit or even step on the side that seat man more especially when there is ceremonies as much as the alter where impepo is burned is usually and the middle but what will happen when they need something on the men side which they cannot go, hence impepo is burned by men who can walk all over the house. Participant 10, during the process where it time to eat, women cannot sit with men therefore it is difficult to give a woman the role to burn incense as there are people in the house who belong to the family that women cannot talk to or even look in the eye as a sign of respect expected from in laws, so how will they give or talk to those people when it time to eat.*

Furthermore, apart from entering the kraal and eating meat in the kraal by men, bearing in mind that women are not allowed to do so, additionally this reasoning supports the notion that women are not given an opportunity to burn incense. Also, women are expected to marry into another tribe of family, which means that they need to learn the cultural traditions of the new family (*imikhuba lokuwomdeni*) and forget about their matriarchal and patriarchal families Therefore they cannot be expected to burn incense in these families (the one that they were born into and the one that they married into). This reasoning gives men more power to men such as burning incense; women learn the new way of doing thing on marrying into a new family, and this may come with cultural shocks and a lack of comprehension about customs in the new family. The ideology surrounding the marriage is that women are expected to do things just as the family they married into, even if they perform witchcraft. There is this notion of: *umfazi uphakela ngisho izimfene zakulowomuzi*

*ashedele kuwo*[6]. In modern societies people are given a voice and the freedom to choose their system of belief; if a family is cultural, the women and her nuclear family may choose to be religious and not burn incense, which may be why many Zulu families often prefer their own descendants to be the heirs of the families and burn incense, especially men as they will not leave the family when they get married (Simango, 2019).

Further feedback follows:

*Women are believed to belong to another family, since they will one day get married to another family one day, therefore even if bamakhosazana ( women heir) they cannot burn incense as they will go to another family and often impepo is burned anytime when they is a need for it, and it can become difficult to expect the women to leave her newly founded family to come and burn incense in his birth family and culturally women are released in their family through a ritual in order for them to be introduced in a their wedded family, so it can anger both ancestors when they are still given the position to burn incense in their old family as they now culturally or traditionally belong to their wedded family.*

Lastly, another interesting viewpoint which may be regarded as emic in nature is the role of a male figure in a Zulu family, where women will always consult their husband before they a decision; even in contemporary society women still respect the decision of men in Zulu families as *inhloko yekhaya* (the head of the house. In some Zulu families women are seen as children in the sense that they will always use the phrase "ubaba wasekhaya" (the father of the household) even when they talk amongst themselves or with their own children, they will always refer to their husband as *ubaba* "the father". Although husbands do refer to their wife/s as "*umama wasekhay"* (the mother of the household)., women are usually given a name in respect of their own patriarchal family. For example; if the woman's surname is Jeza, the husband and his family will refer to that women as "MaJeza." This does not only show respect to the family but it is often the most preferred way of referring to a married woman. In other cases women use the nickname of their fathers such as "*insizwa*"(the strong man), to show respect to her father and acknowledge him. For example, if the father was well known in a certain historical event such as tribal wars etc and they gave him a

[6] *umfazi uphakela ngisho izimfene zakulowomuzi ashedele kuwo which is translated to "The woman even feeds the monkeys in the family where she married to."*

certain name like ‘qoqakonke” (conqueror) the women may be called “*Oka-Maqoqakonke*”. This dynamic may give reasons why men are usually given the power to burn incense in the family (Simango, 2019).

The following feedback follows the above discussion:

*Participant 1: Usually women are reflected in children’s, meaning bafaniswa nezingane (seen as children), hence you cannot give the burning of incense to a child, referring to a women as a child in my child it simple means or refer to the fact that my wife is seen as my first child as she depend on me as her husband as she cannot take some of the decisions without me, for example when the person come whilst I am not present, my wife will say I hear what you are saying, will inform ubaba uma esefikile (I will inform dad once he arrive) just a childrens do when someone come to report something while their fathers are not around. Secondly women do not necessary know the wedded habits of the family as to where it goes and where it end, ngoba bona bayafika la ekhaya ( as they recently joined the family), thirdly when I speak of women in the sense of burning incense as much as they may be old there are still omalokazana (daughter-in-law) ngokwesintu sesiZulu kunamagama abangakwazi ukuwabiza, abawahloniphayo, in a Zulu tradition there are names that are prohibited for them to call, that they respect, this include, omkhulu, obaba bekhaya (grand grandfathers, fathers of the homestead, when you burn incense the names of these ancestors must be called as they are irrespective of the meaning as long as it is their name, therefore the name cannot be romanticized, while the daughters-in-law kumele alizile igama (must mourn the name) for example my grandfather name is Dabulamanzi, daughter in laws in this family do not use this name instead they will use ukudabula amayila as a sign of respecting my grandfather uDabulamanzi, in the alter when we burn incense, when we call upon the names, we call our grandfather uDabulamanzi and daughter in-law therefore cannot call this name, these are some of the reasons why women in many cultures do not burn incense as when we burn incense we call people names, the one that women cannot call.*

The above *verbatim feedback* demonstrates that women are less likely to be preferred for the practice of burning incense as the incense burner is required call clan names to let the ancestors know that there is a ceremony in progress and they are requested to join and call on others to also join. In Zulu families women cannot call certain clan names as they are embedded in the real names

of the deceased, which in Zulu cultures they cannot call. Additionally, married women must be given permission to talk or even call elders in the family through the tradition called “ukukhunga” (acknowledging someone's connection to their ancestors or a gift).

This tradition is done through monetary exchange, where brothers and men, elders of the family give a married women money in order for a woman to converse with them; thus, it can be a challenge for married women to burn incense. As for the women who is born in that family, it can be also challenging as they will marry into other families thus making them the least viable to burn incense. Simango (2019) support this as he argued that gender roles within Zulu culture are intricately tied to the practice of ancestor worship, where the physical and spiritual lineage is passed through the male line. This creates a gendered hierarchy where the male heir is seen as the carrier of familial and spiritual legacy.

The prioritization of men in burning incense aligns with ritual theory, as it reflects the culturally codified rules that regulate ritual purity, authority, and spiritual efficacy, ensuring that ancestral communication is properly conducted according to tradition. Social constructivist theory explains that these practices are embedded within socially constructed gender hierarchies, where men are culturally positioned as family leaders, protectors, and custodians of spiritual and social order. The historical association of men with strength, warfare, and ritual leadership reinforces their authority in performing sacred acts such as incense burning, while women’s and homosexual’s exclusion reflects socially negotiated roles rather than inherent spiritual incapacity. Participant accounts reveal that lineage, marital status, and knowledge of family-specific ancestral protocols further shape who may perform the ritual, highlighting that these practices are dynamic constructions maintained through intergenerational enculturation. Together, these theories demonstrate that the ritual of burning incense operates both as a mechanism for preserving ancestral legitimacy and as a socially constructed system of gendered power within Zulu families.

### 6.9 Can a gay heir burn incense to communicate with ancestors?

This section engages directly with the theses question. iZingoma believe that in the past, the question of whether a gay heir may burn incense to communicate with ancestors could have been the most challenging question to answer. Conversely, in modern society the attitude toward homosexual community has shifted as some families embrace and accept homosexuality and the

fact that some iZangoma belong to the LGBTQI+ community (Chiorazzi, 2015). Thus, most Zulu families do accept gay heirs as eligible to burn incense in order to communicate with ancestors; a discussion by participants follows:

*Participant 5,6,7,8,9,10, 13,14,15,16,17 18,19 &20, yes there is absolutely no problem when a gay heir burn incense, there are gay Zangomas out there who guide families when incense is burned and there is never a issue that the ancestors did not communicate the message, participant 6, I am gay and I guide families with ancestral communication, so why should there be any problem when a heir burn incense "laughing". Participant 9, I do not see a problem in fact gay people respect tradition more than straight people do, I have been I so many families where cleansing need to be done because the incense burner did not do things in order before incense is burned but never experience any issues when it a gay or bisexual person burning incense that should tell you a lot about how gay people respect their tradition and ancestors.*

Moreover, the question can also raise issues around the heirs who are expected to uphold family traditions and ensure continuity of the lineage, which may raises concerns if the heir is gay and therefore; some family members may not support their viability to burn incense. These rejections are always on the basis of what is seen as culturally, religiously and spiritually ideal for those families in terms of gender constructs. These phenomena are regarded as mundane and therefore, cannot be separated from the everyday livelihood (Chiorazzi, 2015). Direct feedback follows:

*Participant 3: In my knowledge incense is burned by heir of the family, it has never been on the basis of their sexuality and it shall not be on those basis not now not ever, as long as a person is able to maintain the respect the alter deserve anyone can burn incense, families tend to use gossips in their communities and think it appllicable to the burning of incense which is huge mistake, indlalifa, will always be indlalifa and ancestors expect the heir to take responsibilities bestowed on him.*

Nonetheless, gay heirs should theoretically have the same right to engage in the practice as an heir and gay people in Zulu families have proved not to be only educated, but capable members in ensuring that their families are well taken care of and financially stable. An example is building homes which is the normally a masculine role in patriarchal families, hence it would not make sense to say gay heirs are not suitable to be involved in the ritual practice of burning incense. The results address the central question of whether a gay man can serve as the family heir and burn

incense (*impepho*) to communicate with ancestors, highlighting both the ritualized framework of incense burning in line with ritual theory and the consideration of the heir's sexual identity as examined through sexuality theory.

### 6.10 Ancestral response on burning of incense heterosexual vs gay heirs

The burning of incense in Zulu families is a sacred ritual which facilitates communication between the living and the dead, believed to be influenced by a number of factors, including, inter alia, cultural and religious context, family dynamics, cleansing, requesting protection and guidance, connection with ancestors, spirituality and genuine offering. The preconceived notion is that, when heterosexual heirs burn incense, the ancestral response may be conservative due to the factors mentioned above. Apart from these factors it might be worth noting the alignment with traditional gender roles and family expectations, in the sense that in many Zulu families heterosexual relations are treasured, hence the participation of heterosexual heirs may be seen as naturally expected and favourable. Conversely, the challenges that homosexual people encounter on a daily basis, such as being regarded as un-African by communities, sinful acts influenced by cultural attitudes and beliefs which exacerbate the stigmatization and marginalization of these individuals, may result in resistance and skepticism of gay heirs to perform rituals. However; in families where homosexuality is accepted and celebrated, gay heirs may be able to burn incense without any hesitation. The results illuminate the research question, "Do ancestors discriminate against homosexual men, or do they afford them equal recognition as straight men?" They show that incense burning in Zulu families is a sacred ritual facilitating communication with ancestors, shaped by cultural, spiritual, and familial factors, as well as cleansing, protection, guidance, and sincerity of offering.

### 6.11 Who should burn incense in the family?

The views of iZingoma (diviners) about who should burn incense in the family to communicate with ancestors, is that incense should be burnt by the recognized heir of the family or the elder in the family who knows the cultural traditions and sometimes includes the religious implication of burning incense in the family. An heir's position in the family is the most significant role which,

as often repeated in this study, includes burning incense in Zulu families to communicate with ancestors as that right is traditionally and spiritually bestowed on them as "the birth right". However, in situations where the heir cannot burn incense, an elder of the family may be asked to step in to assist, There are a number of factors that contribute to the elder of the family to be elected to burn incense which includes, but is not limited to: (a) the father of the heir has passed on and the heir is still too young to burn incense, (b) the heir is too sick and unable to speak, (c) the heir is has been temporary stripped of "his" duties due to sinful acts meaning "*uzongcolisa impepo,"* thus, deemed unfit to be involved in burning of incense, since the altar and impepho (incense), are sacred phenomena, which need to be respected all the time to prevent ancestors from turning their back on them ("*ukuvimbela ukufulathelwa abahansi*"), (d) in extreme cases you will find that the rightful heir has not been properly introduced to that family through a ritual and (e) the heir is not around to perform the task.

Based on the above, feedback from participants include:

*Most participant argued that: "Incense should be burned by the elder of the family, the person must be clean, calm and not burn incense while angry and unclean, this person should not involve in any sexual activities prior burning incense, the person must cleanse himself/herself should they have had involved themselves in an unholy act. Impepo kumele iphathwe umuntu omsulwas ongadinimwe. This person must know who should be called in the altar, clan names are important when a person is burning incense, and this person must know the history of the family and able to speak loudly so that the message is delivered clearly to the ancestors".*

The above factors therefore indicate that the elder of the family should be asked to take charge and the reasoning behind this is: (a) the elders of the families know the habits of the family and must intervene if there is no diviner to interpret the ancestral response. (b) During the burning of incense, the elder will know whether ancestors have heard their plea or not. Apart from that the elders of the families know *imikhuma lakulowo mdeni* (literally meaning the valleys of that region) more than anyone. In Zulu families, when impepho is burnt, something happens to signify the ancestral response; for example; in some families when there is a ceremony, it rains, which is a sign of a good luck and that things will go well. While in some families when they burn incense, they light candles, which burn the entire evening and if a family member is unable to light the candle successfully, they will know that something is wrong. (c) In the case where an elder has to train

the new heir on what to do when burning incense, they may need to burn it for some time as a form of demonstration (this factor refers to either a young heir who lost his father or where the heir has been recently introduced to the family). In light of the above reasoning, elders or the most senior member of the family, are seen in either the patriarch or matriarch of families - as the ones entrusted with upholding tradition, ancestral enculturation and preserving family lineage as they know the historical background of the family. Furthermore; their age, experiences and family hierarchy are viewed as pointers for them to hold authority, spiritual connection and wisdom which make them the ideal candidate for burning incense in their families. These results shed light on the question, "does being a homosexual in a Zulu family determine whether does being a homosexual in a Zulu family imply that that a gay man is accepted or rejected by the ancestors?" and align with ritual theory, as they directly address the sacred practice of burning incense (*impepho*) and the criteria governing who is ritually authorized to perform it.

### 6.12 Views/perceptions of iZingoma on homosexual people in their profession and society at large

iZingoma fall under the traditional profession, they understand cultures and rituals more than any ordinary citizen and differ from other professions but in order to uphold their integrity, they have to treat people who visit them with respect. Hence, even where they do their consultations is regarded as a sacred house, beyond closed doors. Access to their consultation rooms is limited to (usually) their initiates (*amathwasa*) and some family members who need to be pure before they are granted access. This sacred place is protected by their ancestors, who must be respected at all times, thus emphasising privacy. However, in terms of homosexuality, iZingoma reserve the right to have an opinion influenced by their alignment with their own cultural practices, religious affiliation and own individual beliefs. iZingoma in Zulu communities may relate to their calling to serve all people and view homosexuality as an evaluation of human nature; their experiences with fellow diviners who belong to the homosexual community whom they engage with on occasion or a daily basis may contribute to their positive view of homosexuality and in their quest to ensure diversity in communities. The new normal through human evolution and communities are starting to slowly accept homosexuality, bearing in mind that the South Africa government legalised homosexual relationships and gay marriage and this may significantly change iZingoma perception such as accepting homosexuality. On the other hand, iZingoma may have negative views about

homosexuality if they come from cultural, religious families where homosexuality remains a taboo or an abomination.

Based on the above, feedback follows:

*Participant 2: I don't think homosexuality is a natural thing in fact gayness is a new invention that is not cultural, even in our profession as iZingoma, we see a lot of them, I ask myself how they will extend families since they are gay, in my opinion I think people should stop being gay since people are either born as boys or girls and not the other way around.*

*Participant 7: In my community we are still living backwards and they always emphasize that gay people are the shame to our culture, as person who is part of such community I have to hold those views which I believe they signify we are as a community, my ancestors have lived in this community and therefore I cannot compromise that, yes in my profession there is no one who have told me that culturally gay people are committing a sign for being who they are but as long as my community is against it, I also have to share the view point in order to live freely in this community and to know I do not deviate from the believes of my ancestors.*

iZingoma 's view of homosexuality in their profession, may also be influenced by their dominant ancestor, who controls how they do things in terms of their calling, as they are the ones who gave them that calling and if they deviate from what the dominant ancestor prefers, they may suffer consequences of not following instructions. Mkasi (2016) suggests that it is not unusual for male *iSangoma* to exhibit manners traditionally associated with female *iSangoma* and vice versa. Furthermore; some dominant ancestors who enter into iZingoma are of the opposite sex, hence it might bring a sense of joy and validation when that iSangoma is engaging with a homosexual person, even so, dominant ancestors are also known to direct and control iZingoma in terms of their sexual relationships. Participants commented as follows;

*Most participant: there is no problem if people choose to be gay, people choose to live the life they want, as long as their life will not impact other people's life, being gay is an individual choice and it should be respected.*

iZingoma are also counsellors in traditional communities, and when people need advice, they rely on their wisdom. Therefore, iZingoma may emphasise issues of love, compassion and acceptance of homosexual people, more especially those who are also homosexual. Moreover, the role of iZingoma is to act as mediators, offer guidance and spiritual advice, which reflects that in their profession they deal with multifaceted issues which can result in homosexuality being viewed as a normal thing.

A relevant discussion follows:

*Participant 9: I have no problem with gay people in fact when they come to consult with me, I will often advise them that their ancestors love them the way they are.*

*Participant 3, 5, 8,11, 18 & 20: I struggle to accept my sexuality but when my clients come and see that I also ascribe to homosexuality it offers them with a safe and comfortable environment, participant 3 and 5, I advocate for homosexual acceptance in my community and I do not care if people like me or not, this is who I am and my community should know the real me. Participant 18, our community love gay people in actuality in my neighborhood they become happy when I attend ceremonies, you will often see people chatting with me singing a sitting with me therefore challenging being gay in many communities as it may get but, in my family, and community, they is take element of inclusion. Participant 18: being gay is challenging but you have to accept yourself first before expecting people to accept you and that has worked for me, and I would advise people to do the same thing.*

Lastly, iZingoma' s views on homosexuality may be influenced by who initiated them as iZingoma, since their training is done by their Gobela, and if their Gobela is homophobic they may instill the ideology of hatred. In this regard, iZingoma who find themselves in such situations may dislike members of the LGBTQI+ community, influenced by how they were trained as part of their training is to respect their Gobela as they share spiritual bonds. Based on the above, some iZingoma discriminate against homosexual people. Feedback follows:

*Particpant 18: Kwesinye isikhathi noma ungenankinga nama gays kodwa uma ugobela wakho akuyalela ukuba ungabasizi, uyaye wenze njengoma wawutsheliwe, ngoba wona amakhambi okwelapha, abaningi ngawafundiswa uye…..mmmm, owami uGobela ungumuntu ophila isidala ngakhoke ukholelwa ukuthi balihlazo kwisintu.*

*The above is translated as: Sometimes, even if you have no problem with gays, if your gobela orders you not to help them, you do as you were told, because the remedies, many of which I taught you, are…mmmm, my Gobela is a person who lives a long life and therefore believes that they are a disgrace to humanity.*

The implication is the role of uGobela goes beyond the training but it extends to how iZingoma should socialize with communities. If for some reason, an iSangoma betrays their oath as directed by their Gobela, they may be required to pay "*inhlawulo*" which may be in the form of a goat or cow to cleanse *isigodlo sikaGobela (Gobela's palace).* Therefore, some iZingoma would rather discriminate against homosexual individuals and gay heirs instead of being required to pay the damages. These results illuminate iZingoma's perspectives on homosexuality within both their professional practice and broader society, addressing the question: "What are the views and perceptions of iZingoma regarding homosexuality in general, and gay male heirs in particular?" Their understanding of homosexuality is therefore closely connected to sexuality theory, which examines fluidity and social mediation of sexual identity, as well as social constructivist theory, which situates these perceptions within culturally and socially constructed frameworks.

### 6.13 Chapter summary

In conclusion, this anthropological study has provided valuable insights into the cultural perspectives of iZingoma regarding the inheritance rights and engagement in ancestral communication by gay men through burning incense. The analysis of the perceptions of iZingoma on burning of incense has proven to be essential in understanding the sampled population, revealing nuances in beliefs and practices among iZingoma. One of the most notable findings of this research is the acknowledgment of a phenomenon, wherein the sexual orientation of iZingoma may shift under the influence of the dominant ancestor who bestowed their spiritual calling. This underscores the intricate relationship between spirituality and personal identity among the iZingoma community. The practice of becoming an iSangoma is deeply embedded in Zulu culture, which places significant emphasis on the role of ancestors in guiding and influencing the lives of their descendants. Within the broader context of IsiNguni-speaking people of South Africa, the burning of incense holds profound cultural significance, serving as a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms.

It is evident that the views and perceptions of iZingoma of ancestral communication through burning incense are shaped by complex interplays of cultural, religious and familial traditions. Across various societies where ancestor worship is practiced, the burning of incense is considered a sacred ritual, facilitating communication between the living and the deceased. The assignment of this responsibility to men within a family reflects deeply ingrained cultural, religious and social norms that have evolved over centuries. However, understanding how ancestors perceive the role and identity of gay heirs in this context necessitates a nuanced exploration of cultural, spiritual, and societal perspectives within diverse traditions. Ancestors are revered as spiritual guides and guardians in many belief systems, wielding wisdom and authority over the living. Yet, the attitudes and beliefs of iZingoma toward homosexual individuals within their profession and society at large, vary significantly based on cultural, religious, and individual convictions. Prevailing views on gay heirs engaging in ancestral communication through burning incense, are contingent upon diverse cultural norms and traditions surrounding heirship and ancestral worship. In many traditional societies, the role of the heir and expectations regarding ancestral communication are deeply entrenched in cultural practices. However, as societies evolve and notions of gender and sexuality undergo re-evaluation, there is potential for shifts in these longstanding traditions.

This study highlights the importance of ongoing dialogue and understanding within communities practicing ancestor worship, particularly concerning issues of identity, inheritance, and spiritual communication.

**The Discussion chapter follows.**

# CHAPTER SEVEN - DISCUSSION

# THE ROLE OF THE HEIR IN BURNING INCENSE

## 7.1 Introduction

The question of whether a gay man can serve as the heir of a family and perform the sacred practice of burning incense (impepho) to communicate with ancestors is a topic that touches on deep cultural, spiritual and social values within Zulu society, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal. This issue is not merely of personal or individual concern, but rather one that reflects broader societal debates around identity, tradition and modernity. In Zulu cosmology, the roles of heir and spiritual leader are historically tied to familial and ancestral obligations, and thus, the inclusion of a gay man in such roles challenges traditional frameworks of gender and sexuality. This study provides a unique lens through which to examine the intersection of indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage and spirituality with contemporary notions of gender and sexual identity. It focuses on the perspectives of iZingoma (traditional healers or diviners), who occupy a crucial role in AmaZulu society, as intermediaries between the living and the ancestors. Their views on homosexuality are vital to understanding the complexities surrounding this issue within the broader context of Zulu spirituality and cultural continuity. By exploring the thoughts and beliefs of iZingoma in the Ugu district of KwaZulu-Natal, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing anthropological research surrounding the evolving views on gender and sexuality in African traditional belief systems. It also examines how such views may be influenced or challenged by modern concepts of LGBTQ+ rights, social acceptance and negotiation of identity within communities that place great value on ancestral customs. In addressing these complexities, this study highlights the dynamic relationship between tradition and transformation. It underscores the need to understand the ways in which traditional practices and spiritual beliefs can adapt, evolve or resist modern shifts in societal attitudes towards sexual identity, thereby enriching both academic discourse and real-world applications in communities where these discussions remain culturally and socially charged.

## 7.2 The gay heir identity and how are perceived by ancestors?

Msibi (2011) argues that understanding how ancestors perceive the role of gay heirs remains the cornerstone of the study which is implicitly influenced by cultural norms, traditions and spiritual

realms. In this study, iZingoma proclaimed that the acceptance of gay heirs by ancestors may depend on the system of beliefs and cultural setting. In anthropological terms, this implies that, beliefs and cultural settings are not static, but definitely fluid which makes them depended variables. In some families homosexuality may be recognized and unified into traditional beliefs by ancestors, while in many other traditional families, homosexuals may be referred to as sinners angering ancestors. Mokgobi (2014) is one of the South African scholars who sees nothing wrong with being a homosexual and fully integrated within the customary engagements of the family. The gay heirs can connect and honor their ancestors if they are accepted and recognized. which may depend on their spiritual sincerity and connection. Mokogbi (2014) further states that to be an ancestral believer is not dependent on what society or family perceives as a homosexual person. It is the connection that is between the individual's connection with ancestors. If they approach the ancestral ritual, like the burning of incense (*impepho*) with humanity, they may find acceptance and endorsement, reaffirming their spiritual identity and belonging in their respective families. Hatred towards homosexuals is an individual choice and not an ancestral expression. Homophobia in Africa is not a natural or inevitable outcome but rather a result of societal norms, patriarchal structures and the imposition of heteronormativity. Homophobia is often rooted in cultural beliefs, religious doctrines and political agendas that promote discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. Hatred towards homosexuals is an individual choice; this suggests that it's a behavior that people learn and adopt, rather than something they are born with or inherit from their ancestors. Msibi (2011) highlights how entrenched patriarchy and heteronormativity are used to justify discrimination against homosexuals in many African societies. The following discussion by participants is based on above:

*Participant 6: Our ancestors don't know this contemporary of gayism. If think they are distuisgusted when they even hear that this is what our societies and families are experiencing".*

*Participant 8: Abaphansi benze lokho okulungele imindeni njengabaqaphi bayo (ancestors do what is right for people they are responsible for), I think if the families holds negative attitudes towards homosexual heirs which transcend conflicts and regular arguments sometimes it can be challenging to know either accept or reject the homosexual heirs, ancestors are people who pride themselves on ensuring ukuthi kunokuthula nokuzwana emdenini ( peace and harmony in the*

*family), therefore I think it can serve as unacceptance if there is always no harmony, unity and peace, however they will always give the family signs if they do accept or not.*

Additionally, since ancestral worship is ingrained in cultural traditions and practice (different rituals or culture in action) within a certain family, ancestors may be perceived as gay heirs according to those system of belief which may have many elements: (*a*) gender expectations and roles, (*b*) responsibilities based on gender, (*c*) spiritual realm and (d) cultural attitudes. These factors may depend on how flexible the family cultural background is or how open minded the families is in terms of sexuality, and how they interpret and perceive ancestral beliefs. Walters, Paterson, Brown and McDonnll, (2017), Msibi (2011) and Mkhize et al (2010) mutually agree in their study that hatred towards homosexuals is a learned behaviour. Jordaan (2011) also states that hatred towards homosexuals has also inflicted fear in scholars to avoid studying homosexuality as there are many people who resist it, even in academia. The position of this thesis uses the idiom "tackling the bull by its horns" as an indication that studies on homosexuals in anthropology should be continued, irrespective of the resistance that the discussion still receives.

Participant 5 commented as follows:

*Participant 5: I think it is safe to say ancestors accept homosexual heirs because we have iZingoma who are gay and who burn incense and guide families when incense is burned. While Participant 1: believed that incense is burned by heir of the family, it has never been on the basis of their sexuality and it shall not be on those basis not now not ever, as long as a person is able to maintain the respect the alter deserve anyone can burn incense, families tend to use gossips in their communities and think it apply to the burning of incense which is huge mistake, indlalifa, will always be indlalifa (an heir will always be an heir) and ancestors expect the heir to take responsibilities bestowed on him*

Lastly, the perception of gay heirs by ancestors is influenced by a multifaceted interplay of cultural, spiritual and societal factors. These factors are pertinent for living generations as they continue with them and sometimes adapt them as their cultural understanding evolves, which may mean that some Zulu families use this basis when they understand homosexuality and whether a gay man should be the heir of the family burning incense to communicate with the ancestors.

### 7.3 Prevailing cultural perspective regarding intersection of sexual orientation and burning of incense

The following is feedback from participants:

*Participant 10 narrated that ngikubona kungumhlolo ukuthi ungqingili angama endaweni ehlonipheke kanje, aguqe ekhuluma ngabantu ngenhloso yokusiza thina njengabantu abaphilayo. Abaphansi abawazi lomkhuba.*

*The above is translated as: I find it a shame that a homosexual would stand in such a dignified place, kneel down and speak to people with the intention of helping us as living beings. The ancestors are not familiar with this practice.*

*Participant 17 narrated, according to my understanding homosexual people are also humans, who deserve the same respect and recognition in their families. The burning of incense is a family practice which they should be part of. Why are we so caught up in wanting to know and understanding who homosexuals have sex without getting to know them because that is what cloud our minds about them. We judge them by their sexual orientation yet they are humans.*

In chapter three, it was argued that the Ritual Theory generally examines how rituals are embedded within cultural practices and their roles in construction of meanings. The theory implied that rituals around incense-burning are often seen as part of broader cultural or religious practices Khumalo, Taylor, Makusha, and Mbaso (2020), suggests that rituals can vary significantly based on family lineage, cultural traditions, and religious teachings. Some families or communities may have explicit, ritualized practices tied to the burning of incense that could either support or conflict with certain sexual orientations, based on the prevailing views within that cultural context.

Through the perspective of the Ritual Theory discussed in chapter three, the above narratives suggest that the meaning and significance attributed to incense-burning could be contested or altered, based on familial beliefs and acceptance Khumalo et al (2020) point out that the burning of incense can serve as a form of symbolic boundary-making within some cultures—defining what is considered "acceptable" or "appropriate" in terms of both religious and family values. The intersection between sexual orientation and incense-burning becomes significant when certain cultural or religious groups define rituals around incense-burning as aligning with certain sexual norms, or when those norms create friction with sexual diversity.

The spiritual and traditional practices remain factors that influence who in the family should burn incense in order to communicate with ancestors (Ngubane and De Gama, 2024). This concurs with Chiorazzi (2015), who argued that African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life. The burning of incense remains a sacred practice in Zulu families and the preconceived notion of traditional families is that patriarchy and masculinity are always emphasized in families, which than makes it difficult to be certain of whether homosexuality can form an integral part in the ancestral rituals, like the burning of incense. Zulu families are either cultural or religious, which means that families who are innately strict in cultural and religious matters, may hold negative attitudes toward homosexuality as it is believed that is un-African hindering gay hers from burning incense in those families. Nevertheless; those Zulu families who have adapted their way of living in terms of their cultural and religious understanding may possess positive attitudes towards sexual orientation and allow gay heirs to perform cultural rituals; therefore, the prevailing cultural attitudes regarding sexual orientation and burning of incense rests upon family dynamics, tradition, cultural background and spirituality.

Narratives of participants 10 and 17 proves that the cultural, predominant understanding of sexual orientation in Zulu communities has always had negative attitudes toward homosexuality, which stems from a localized African viewpoint. Despite South African legalization of homosexuality, other Africa countries still maintain illegalization of homosexuality, However, local legal acceptance may give room for interpretation by people within the localized environment like Ugu district, which is rural and in a cultural setting and countries like Kenya and Zimbabwe which are deeply cultural and religious. Although modern society is slowly accepting homosexuality, communities and family members still have their own attitudes toward homosexuality; some show tolerance toward homosexuality which does not mean acceptance, whereas some do not accept homosexuality, and others do.

### 7.4 Cultural changes or shifts as gay heirs burn incense- the push/pull factors

The general perspective from all research participants alluded those cultures evolve overtime which mean the attitudes, beliefs, practices and cultural context in terms of family dynamics, gender roles are also adapting in societies while some maintain patriarchal rules some adapt as

when necessary and Zulu tribes are no exceptions. The inclusion of gay heirs in the ritual of burning incense can be seen as one of the cultural shifts that warrants to be advocated for as it remains their right to exercise and be involve in cultural practices ensuring changes in attitudes and African spirituality. The pull factors resulting in the acceptance or rejection of gay heirs to perform the ritual of burning incense could revolve around beliefs systems, cultural traditions and religious systems innate to a particular family. While the push factors may include sounding judgement, stigmatization and seeing homosexuality as ungodly, phenomena that lead to the exclusion, marginalization and rejection of the homosexual phenomenon cause gay heirs to lose their birth right to burn incense in the tradition of Zulu families in order to communicate with the ancestors as discussed below:

*Participant 15 narrated that, we should be really be accepting the change that we see. In my view, traditional healers of today (including) me are afraid to accept the change and the fluidity of our societies and the caliber of children we have birthed. To be quite honest, there are young children whom we see in our communities presenting unique sexuality traits that are indicating that the child will become a homosexual. It concerns me subconsciously as I ask myself if we are indeed afraid of accepting what we see, or we are still held in the societal steortypes that shaped who we are.*

The translation of the above narrative implies that the diffusion of acculturations plays a huge role in cultural shifts or changes resulting in the push or pull factors, allowing cultures to evolve among Zulu tribes; the significance of these changes are predominantly ethnic. Understanding of tradition and practices on whether a gay heir can burn incense to communicate with ancestors is an emic phenomenon, that can be understood through family dynamics and spirituality, which can either yield evolution of culture or bring about cultural shocks leading to gay heirs either being at the cross-fire for change or resistance.

Mnyadi (2020) and Chamane (2017) assert that the understanding of sexuality (specifically, gay identity) intersects with cultural practices and beliefs in the Zulu tribe, and how these changes can either bring about cultural evolution or lead to cultural resistance**.** In the context of this study, the gay heir represents an individual who might face tension between traditional cultural expectations and newer, evolving attitudes towards sexuality.

### 7.5 The contribution of gay heirs burning incense in understanding ancestral communication and diversity of cultural heritage

Msibi (2011) challenges the traditional belief that homosexuality is ungodly or un-African, asserting that being homosexual is neither contradictory to religious, or cultural beliefs. From a Social Constructivism perspective, the inclusion of gay heirs in practices such as burning incense to communicate with ancestors, signifies a socially constructed evolution in cultural practices, one that reflects a shift in societal norms. In this context, gay heirs' participation in ancestral rituals contributes to the diversity of cultural heritage and promotes inclusivity, demonstrating that traditions can evolve and adapt in response to broader social change.

The involvement of gay heirs in ancestral rituals, such as incense-burning, becomes a site of negotiation where cultural norms and values are reconstructed through social interaction. According to Mkhize and Mthembu (2023), this participation not only revitalizes cultural traditions, but also challenges heteronormative frameworks by acknowledging and embracing LGBTQI+ identities. As social norms evolve, the acceptance of gay heirs in rituals represents a cultural shift towards greater visibility and inclusivity, particularly within the context of spiritual and ancestral practices.

Social Constructivism posits that culture is constantly negotiated and reconstructed by the individuals and communities that practice it. By including gay heirs in ancestral rituals, society is adapting its cultural and spiritual practices to reflect the evolving understanding of gender and sexual diversity. This process of cultural adaptation ensures that incense-burning, a symbol of ancestral communication, becomes a more expansive ritual, one that incorporates a wider range of identities and experiences, particularly those of LGBTQI+ individuals.

Furthermore, the recognition of gay heirs in ancestral rituals challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about the intersection of homosexuality and tradition. Through their participation, these rituals become a space where gender roles and sexuality, often used interchangeably in traditional family dynamics, are redefined. The social construction of these roles within cultural practices ensures that the inclusion of gay heirs does not only broaden the scope of cultural heritage and ancestral lineage, but also transforms how gender and sexuality are understood within familial and cultural contexts.

By integrating gay heirs into rituals like incense-burning, societies actively reshape their cultural traditions to be more inclusive, creating a cultural framework that is more representative of a diverse range of identities. This process demonstrates how cultural practices are socially constructed and continuously reinterpreted as societal values change, thereby challenging fixed, binary notions of gender and sexuality.

Furthermore, through the involvement of gay heirs in the burning of incense it can bring about changes in the ancestral journey, fresh insights, experiences and wisdom to be cherished through generations which can also offer a deeper understanding of human knowledge and identity. The participation of gay heirs can also promote the reflection of intersections between gender, sexuality, spirituality and cultural tradition, as these factors can be intertwined to bring about evolution, inclusivity and diversity. The presence of gay heirs in the burning of incense could also genetically ensure that families openly discuss the role of LGBTQ+ individuals in ancestral relevance, as cultures adapt with time, meaning that the rituals could bring about diversity and new experiences which may be used positively, resulting in societies rethinking and reconstructing the outdated notions beliefs, which mostly focus on prejudices and marginalization of homosexual people.

## 7.6 Key findings and discussion

### 7.6.1 Views/Perceptions of iZingoma on the Burning of Incense (Impepho) by Gay Zulu Men Who Are Heirs of the Family

In Zulu culture, incense (impepho) plays a vital role in rituals, as it is believed to facilitate communication with ancestors. The heir (usually the eldest son) is traditionally the one who takes on the responsibility of leading these rituals. However, the question arises whether a gay man, especially one who is the heir, is accepted in this role by iZingoma and the broader community, which is the pivot of this study. Some iZingoma may assert that ancestral spirits are not concerned with the sexual orientation of the person performing the rituals, as long as they fulfil their cultural and spiritual duties properly. In this case, the burning of incense by a gay man could be seen as a legitimate practice if the man has the required spiritual connection and role in the family. Others

may disagree, believing that the lineage of the family requires the heir to conform to traditional gender roles, thus rejecting the idea of a gay man as the rightful heir to perform these sacred duties.

This shows that Ritual theory provides a lens for understanding the symbolic and social significance of ancestral practices such as the burning of *impepho*. Rituals function as structured cultural performances that reinforce social order, identity, and relationships between the spiritual and physical worlds. Within this framework, ritual authority is traditionally linked to lineage, inheritance, and prescribed social roles. The heir's responsibility to communicate with ancestors reflects continuity of tradition rather than individual identity alone. From this perspective, the legitimacy of a gay heir performing rituals depends on whether ritual efficacy is understood as rooted in cultural obligation and spiritual calling rather than conformity to heteronormative gender expectations. While Sexuality theory contributes to the analysis by interrogating how sexual identities are socially regulated and culturally interpreted. Rather than viewing homosexuality as purely biological or universal, sexuality theory recognises that meanings attached to sexual orientation are historically and culturally constructed. Within many African contexts, colonial and missionary influences reshaped perceptions of sexuality, often framing homosexuality as incompatible with tradition. Applying sexuality theory enables this study to examine how iZingoma interpret homosexuality in relation to spirituality, masculinity, and ancestral acceptance, and whether sexual orientation influences ritual legitimacy.

Whereas Social constructivism underpins the study's epistemological position by asserting that realities surrounding gender, sexuality, and spiritual roles are socially produced through shared beliefs and cultural discourse. Concepts such as "heir," "masculinity," and "acceptable ritual practitioner" are not fixed but negotiated within communities over time. Through this lens, differing views among iZingoma—some accepting gay heirs as spiritually capable while others emphasise traditional gender conformity are understood as competing social constructions rather than objective truths. This framework allows the study to explore how meanings surrounding homosexuality and ancestral recognition are constructed, contested, and maintained within the Ugu district.

These theories are therefore conceptualised in the study results in the sense that within these theoretical intersection, the burning of *impepho* by a gay heir becomes a site where ritual authority,

sexuality, and cultural interpretation converge. Some iZingoma may argue that ancestors prioritise spiritual connection and proper ritual conduct over sexual orientation, thereby legitimising a gay man's participation in ancestral rituals. Others may maintain that ancestral lineage requires adherence to traditional gender norms, potentially excluding gay heirs from ritual leadership. These divergent perspectives highlight the dynamic nature of indigenous knowledge systems and the ongoing negotiation between tradition and contemporary identity. Thus, answering the question, can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors?

### 7.6.2 Views/Perceptions of iZingoma on Homosexuality in General and on Gay Male Heirs in Particular

iZangoma views on homosexuality are shaped by their interpretation of ancestral traditions, spiritual beliefs and cultural norms. Some may view homosexuality as a spiritual anomaly or deviation from societal expectations, often seeing it as incompatible with the roles typically assigned to men in the Zulu community. These roles include marriage to women and fathering children to continue the family lineage. On the other hand, there are also iZingoma who may recognize homosexuality as a part of the natural order, or as a manifestation of spiritual diversity. For these practitioners, a gay man may still fulfil the role of an heir, provided that he has been initiated into the spiritual practices of the family and has a strong relationship with the ancestors. They may argue that spiritual inheritance is more important than biological reproduction.

These results depict that Ritual theory positions ritual practice as a structured system through which communities reproduce cosmological order, social hierarchy, and spiritual relationships. Within Zulu cosmology, rituals involving *impepho* function as mediating acts between the living and the ancestors, reinforcing lineage continuity and spiritual communication. From a ritual-theoretical perspective, the authority to perform rituals derives not merely from biological identity but from ritual competence, initiation, and spiritual calling. iZangoma interpret ancestral traditions through embodied ritual knowledge acquired via initiation processes. Consequently, divergent interpretations emerge:

- Some iZangoma interpret homosexuality as incompatible with ritual expectations tied to patriarchal lineage reproduction. Because ritual roles historically align with heteronormative family continuity, homosexuality may be viewed as disrupting symbolic structures that link masculinity, marriage, and ancestry.
- Other iZangoma emphasize ritual efficacy rather than conformity to gender norms. For these practitioners, ritual legitimacy depends on spiritual alignment with ancestors rather than sexual orientation. A gay man who has undergone proper initiation and maintains ancestral relationships may therefore legitimately perform rituals.

While, Sexuality theory challenges essentialist understandings of sexuality by conceptualizing sexual identity as historically and culturally mediated rather than biologically deterministic. Within this framework, homosexuality among Zulu men can be understood as a lived identity negotiated within cultural, spiritual, and familial expectations.

iZangoma views often reflect tensions between:

- Normative masculinity, associated with marriage to women and biological reproduction, and
- Alternative sexual identities, which challenge inherited expectations of gendered social roles.

Some iZangoma interpret homosexuality as a deviation from expected male roles, framing it as a spiritual anomaly or social disruption. This interpretation reflects broader societal assumptions linking masculinity to procreation and lineage continuation. However, sexuality theory also allows for interpretations recognizing homosexuality as part of human diversity. Certain iZangoma conceptualize sexual diversity as spiritually meaningful, interpreting homosexual identity as compatible with ancestral calling. In such cases, spiritual inheritance supersedes reproductive expectations, suggesting that ancestral recognition operates independently of heterosexual norms. Sexuality theory therefore highlights how sexual identity becomes a site where spiritual authority, gender expectations, and cultural belonging are negotiated.

The Social constructivist theory provides the integrative lens explaining why iZangoma hold divergent views. According to this perspective, meanings surrounding sexuality, ritual eligibility, and ancestral acceptance are socially produced rather than fixed truths.

iZangoma function as cultural interpreters who actively construct spiritual knowledge through:

- ancestral narratives,
- communal traditions,
- lived ritual experiences, and
- evolving social realities.

Homosexuality is therefore not interpreted uniformly; rather, it acquires meaning through ongoing negotiation within cultural discourse. What one practitioner perceives as cultural deviation; another may interpret as spiritual diversity. This variability demonstrates that ancestral traditions themselves are not static but are continuously reinterpreted. Social constructivism thus explains how competing interpretations coexist:

- homosexuality as incompatible with lineage norms, and
- homosexuality as spiritually legitimate within ancestral cosmology.

In this theoretical framework, ancestral recognition becomes a socially mediated concept shaped by interpretive communities rather than an objectively measurable spiritual fact. Thus, answering the questions, what are the views/perceptions of iZingoma on the burning of incense by gay Zulu men who are the heirs of the family? what are the views/perceptions of iZingoma on homosexuality in general and on gay male heirs in particular? and does being a homosexual in a Zulu family imply that that a gay man is accepted or rejected by the ancestors?.

### 7.6.3 Do the Ancestors Discriminate Against Homosexual Men, or Do They Give Them Equal Recognition as for Straight Men?

The recognition of homosexual men by ancestors in Zulu spirituality is a highly debated issue. Traditional Zulu belief systems often place emphasis on the role of male heirs who marry women

and produce children, ensuring the continuity of the family lineage. However, some iZingoma may argue that the ancestors are not concerned with a person's sexual orientation as long as they maintain the spiritual connection and perform rituals properly.

In some instances, ancestors may be seen as omniscient and all-embracing, transcending human concepts of gender and sexuality. This perspective might allow for the acceptance of gay men as equal members of the family, as long as they are respectful of their ancestral traditions and fulfil their responsibilities. Other iZingoma may hold a more conservative view, asserting that ancestors do not recognize or approve of homosexual practices.

This theme validates theoretical frameworks used in the study, in the sense that Ritual theory conceptualizes rituals as symbolic practices that sustain cosmological order and mediate relationships between the living and the ancestral realm. Within traditional Zulu belief systems, ancestral communication is embedded in lineage continuity, where male heirs are expected to marry women and produce offspring to ensure familial and spiritual continuity. Ritual participation therefore historically aligns with reproductive expectations and patriarchal inheritance structures.

From this perspective, some iZangoma interpret ancestral recognition as contingent upon adherence to established ritual norms linked to lineage preservation. Homosexuality may be perceived as incompatible with ritual expectations because it disrupts symbolic associations between masculinity, reproduction, and ancestral continuity. However, alternative ritual interpretations emphasize ritual performance rather than social conformity. Certain iZangoma argue that ancestors respond primarily to correct ritual conduct, spiritual discipline, and ancestral reverence. In this view, the efficacy of rituals, such as burning *impepho* depends on spiritual alignment rather than sexual orientation. Ancestral legitimacy is therefore grounded in ritual competence and relational spirituality rather than heteronormative identity. Ritual theory thus reveals that debates about ancestral recognition are fundamentally disputes over the criteria through which ritual legitimacy is defined.

While, Sexuality theory challenges essentialist assumptions that equate masculinity exclusively with heterosexual reproduction. It conceptualizes sexuality as a socially and historically situated identity negotiated within cultural and spiritual contexts. Within this framework, divergent

iZangoma perspectives reflect broader tensions between normative constructions of masculinity and emerging understandings of sexual diversity. Conservative interpretations often frame homosexuality as a deviation from culturally sanctioned male roles, reinforcing expectations of marriage and procreation as markers of legitimate adulthood and spiritual responsibility. Conversely, other iZangoma interpret homosexuality as part of human and spiritual diversity. From this standpoint, ancestors are understood as omniscient and transcendent beings who operate beyond human categories of gender and sexuality. Acceptance of gay men becomes possible because spiritual identity is detached from reproductive function. Here, ancestral recognition is tied to moral conduct, ritual responsibility, and spiritual calling rather than sexual orientation. Sexuality theory therefore illuminates how homosexual identity becomes a site where cultural expectations, spirituality, and personal identity intersect and are renegotiated.

Whereas, Social constructivist theory provides a critical lens for understanding why contradictory interpretations coexist among iZangoma. Rather than viewing ancestral attitudes toward homosexuality as fixed metaphysical truths, social constructivism suggests that meanings attributed to ancestors are shaped through collective cultural interpretation.

iZangoma act as mediators of indigenous knowledge, interpreting ancestral intentions through:

- oral traditions,
- ritual experiences,
- communal norms, and
- contemporary social change.

Consequently, ancestral recognition becomes a socially constructed understanding rather than an objectively verifiable phenomenon. Some practitioners construct ancestors as inclusive and all-embracing spiritual entities, while others construct them as guardians of traditional gender and lineage norms. These interpretations reflect broader societal negotiations about sexuality, tradition, and cultural continuity in contemporary Zulu communities. Social constructivism thus explains how ancestral authority is continually reinterpreted in response to evolving social realities, allowing both inclusive and conservative perspectives to coexist within the same spiritual system.

These theoretical frameworks therefore, suggest that ancestral recognition is less a fixed spiritual rule than a negotiated cultural and ritual reality shaped by interpretive authority, spiritual experience, and changing understandings of sexuality. The question of whether ancestors recognize homosexual men therefore reflects broader struggles over tradition, identity, and the evolving meanings of legitimacy within Zulu spirituality. Thus, answering the questions what indigenous knowledge do iZingoma possess regarding the homosexual phenomenon? And do the ancestors discriminate against homosexual men, or do they give them equal recognition as straight men?

### 7.6.4 Does Being a Homosexual in a Zulu Family Imply That a Gay Man Is Accepted or Rejected by the Ancestors?

Acceptance or rejection by ancestors is a central concern in the Zulu spiritual world. Traditional Zulu culture values the continuation of family lines, and being an heir often means being able to carry on these responsibilities through marriage and children. A gay man who does not marry a woman or have children may be seen as failing to fulfil this role, which could lead to his exclusion from ancestral duties. However, if a gay man is believed to have a special calling or spiritual gifts, some iZingoma may argue that he can still be accepted by the ancestors, particularly if he adheres to spiritual and ritual practices. This view may be rooted in the belief that spiritual connection transcends the biological aspects of family continuity. In other words, ancestors might prioritize the spiritual fulfilment of the family's duties over the traditional expectation of male heirs who father children.

In contrast, more conservative iZingoma may believe that ancestors only recognize heterosexual heirs, leading to the rejection of gay men from certain familial and spiritual roles. In some cases, the gay man may be forced to either conform to traditional expectations (such as marrying a woman and having children) or face exclusion from the family's ancestral practices. The findings of this anthropological study reveal that there is no singular, uniform view among iZingoma regarding homosexuality and the role of gay men in ancestral practices. Cultural and spiritual views on this issue are fluid, and often depend on the interpretation of both the healer and the broader community. Some iZingoma accept the inclusion of gay men in spiritual and familial roles, seeing

their sexual orientation as irrelevant to their spiritual calling, while others believe that homosexual men, especially gay heirs, may face challenges in fulfilling traditional roles within the family, due to societal expectations and ancestral beliefs. The question of whether the ancestors discriminate against homosexual men remains deeply tied to the cultural context, with some iSangoma offering a more inclusive view, and others maintaining traditional views based on gender and sexuality. Ultimately, the acceptance of a gay man as an heir and his role in ancestral rituals such as burning incense, is contingent on the interplay between cultural norms, spiritual beliefs and individual interpretations of Zulu traditions.

This chapter and by extension, the study, postulates that iZangoma perspectives on homosexuality are influenced by their interpretations of ancestral traditions, spirituality and cultural norms. While some view homosexuality as a deviation from traditional gender roles, especially regarding marriage and fathering children, others may see it as part of the natural order or spiritual diversity. Based on depicted narratives and through the perspectives of the Social Constructivism Theory, this study asserts that, a gay man can still be considered an heir if he has been spiritually initiated and maintains a strong connection to the ancestors, prioritizing spiritual inheritance over biological reproduction.

The other view is that the recognition of homosexual men by ancestors in Zulu spirituality is debated. Traditional beliefs emphasize the role of male heirs who continue the family lineage through marriage and children. However, some iZingoma believe ancestors are not concerned with sexual orientation as long as one upholds spiritual practices. Based on this view, gay men can be accepted as equals if they fulfil their spiritual responsibilities. Others take a more conservative stance, suggesting that ancestors reject homosexual practices and only recognize heterosexual heirs. This conviction also stems from their strong belief of Christianity and the extent of indigenous knowledge, which is believed to be the cornerstone of what makes a straight man and a proper household. Anything that deviates from these social orders is considered an abomination and should be rejected by society at large. The use of social constructs such as “ungqingili”(a gay man), a core homosexual in one of the narratives, resembles a deeper sense of hatred that is projected from people who may self-portray homosexuality as their preferred identity.

The acceptance of gay men within Zulu families depends on spiritual beliefs and cultural interpretations. A gay man who does not marry or have children is to be excluded from ancestral duties due to failure to fulfil the traditional role of an heir. However, some iZingoma argue that if the gay man possesses spiritual gifts or a special calling, he can still be accepted by the ancestors. The overall outcome of this study is fluid, as it depends on the specific iZangoma interpretation of spiritual and familial roles. In some cases, the gay man may be expected to conform to traditional gender roles, while in others, he may be embraced as long as he remains spiritually connected. The acceptance of gay men as heirs is influenced by both individual and communal views on sexuality and tradition.

This chapter concludes that, the perspectives on homosexuality within iZingoma, as described earlier, can be linked to broader discussions around the social construction of sexuality and how negative views towards homosexuality are often man-made. In anthropology, there's an ongoing exploration of how societies create and enforce norms around sexuality. The different views within iZingoma regarding homosexuality - ranging from seeing it as incompatible with traditional roles to viewing it as part of spiritual diversity - show that these norms are not fixed, but evolve with time and context. This aligns with the argument that negative views of homosexuality are not inherent but are socially constructed, often tied to patriarchal systems and cultural expectations.

Some authors argue that the hatred or negative views toward homosexuality are a product of societal forces, rather than something natural or universally accepted. This perspective suggests that negative perceptions of homosexuality were historically constructed, often through colonialism, religious teachings and the imposition of Western heteronormative values of indigenous cultures. These views often clash with previous, more fluid conceptions of gender and sexuality that some indigenous cultures had before external influences.

In this context of this chapter, the views of iZingoma on homosexuality illustrate the power of cultural and spiritual traditions in shaping attitudes toward sexuality. While some iZingoma believe that spiritual inheritance is more important than biological reproduction, others adhere to more conservative interpretations that align with traditional gender roles. This reflects how different cultures construct and reinforce ideas about sexuality and gender, and also highlights the resistance to change that may arise from entrenched cultural and spiritual beliefs.

From an anthropological perspective, understanding why certain societies, like the Zulu hold specific views on homosexuality requires an in-depth look at how these beliefs are constructed and perpetuated. Anthropology helps us understand that these negative perceptions are not universal, and they often reflect broader societal dynamics, such as colonial histories, religious influences and patriarchal structures. This is why anthropological research is so crucial in addressing the hatred toward homosexuality, It helps to uncover the historical, cultural and social forces that shape these attitudes and reveals the ways in which they may be challenged.

Through the lens of anthropology, we can see that negative perceptions of homosexuality are not fixed but created and sustained by social norms that are deeply tied to cultural practices and historical events. Understanding this through research allows us to see that inclusion and acceptance of diverse sexual identities can be fostered, even in societies with traditionally conservative views. Ultimately, anthropological research can provide insights into how to dismantle the hatred surrounding homosexuality, and promote more inclusive cultural and spiritual practices.

## 7.7 Chapter summary

The chapter has discussed the foundations of the hatred that homosexuals have endured from the society, which has influenced how their families receive them. The depth of this chapter is attributed to the critical contributions of South African scholars that this chapter cited, but particularly gives more recognition to the Ritual Theory, Sexuality Theory and Social Constructivism Theory which critically contributed to recording the fluid position of iZingoma in terms of answering the pertinent thesis question of the study “Can a gay man be an heir and burn *impepho (*incense) to communicate with ancestors, An anthropological study on cultural views of iZingoma in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal”.

The following chapter will critically outline the contribution of this thesis and make significant and further research recommendations.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

# STUDY CONCLUSION HIGHLIGTHING CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

## 8.1 Introduction

This qualitative study, contextualized within the anthropology of sexuality explored iZangoma cultural and spiritual perceptions of gay men as heirs in Zulu families, anchored in ancestral rituals. The aim of the study was to anthropologically understand their inherent ability to perform ancestral rites, such as burning impepho (incense), in order to communicate with ancestors, famously known as the "underground gang". The study was conducted in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal, a rural community where the LGBTQI+ community is overly prone to socio-cultural discrimination. The research probed the following question: "Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors?". **Simply** put, the question posed was whether a gay man could assume the role of heir and fulfil spiritual duties that are traditionally assigned to heterosexual male heirs. This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach, which purposively recruited twenty research participants (iZingoma), famously known to be traditional healers and custodians of indigenous knowledge in most African rural communities. Guided by three theoretical frameworks: the Ritual Theory, Sexuality Theory and the Social Constructivism Theory, the study probed how cultural and spiritual practices intersect with contemporary understandings of sexuality in the context of indigenous knowledge systems.

The use of burning incense as a ritual practice varies significantly between Western cultures and African traditions, including South Africa. In Westernized contexts, burning incense is commonly associated with relaxation, meditation and creating pleasant aromas in homes or places of worship. It is often employed for its aesthetic and aromatic qualities, symbolizing spirituality and tranquillity. However, in many African cultures, especially in South Africa, incense burning holds deeper spiritual significance, intricately woven into traditional rituals and ceremonies. In African cultures, burning incense is seen not just as a physical act, but as a sacred process that facilitates communication with ancestral spirits. This connection is integral for guidance, protection and spiritual sustenance.

Chapter One highlighted the continued rejection of homosexual individuals in many African societies, particularly in communities that strongly uphold traditional norms, such as the burning of incense (impepho). It has critically examined the fact that, despite the growing international recognition of LGBTQIA+ rights, homosexual individuals in Africa continue to face marginalization and discrimination. This is largely due to deeply ingrained cultural and social attitudes that are considered integral to rites of passage in many African societies and families. In anthropology, scholars such as Schimel and Gresham (2020) argue that one's sexuality is either approved or disapproved of by families and religion. This stance is also supported by Msibi (2011). These institutions are key in shaping one's identity and establishing norms for acceptable sexualities. Any form of sexuality that deviates from these norms is often viewed as taboo and against ancestral approval. According to their argument (approval of sexuality), the preferred sexuality is linked to the belief that individuals are living the same life their ancestors once lived, thus continuing their legacy. This is why heterosexuality is generally accepted, while homosexuality is often viewed as demonic and disrespectful to ancestors. During apartheid, South Africa maintained strict laws against homosexual acts, influenced by conservative Christian values that dominated the political landscape. The end of apartheid in 1994 marked a significant turning point, as South Africa became the first country in the world to include sexual orientation in its Constitution, as a protected human right (Matebeni et al, 2020).

Religion plays a central role in this perspective, as it is believed to represent the power of "God," whose guidance, expressed through sacred texts, regulates and judges sexuality. In many African communities, it is difficult to separate "God," as the ultimate authority, from the ancestors, who are believed to reflect God's will. When people die, they are believed to ascend to God, the Creator. This belief reinforces the idea that heterosexuality, as exemplified by the relationship between "Adam and Eve," is divinely ordained. Based on this view, male figures represent forefathers and are seen as channels through which the wisdom of God and ancestors guide the community. Makgobi (2014) further explains that eligibility to burn *impepho* varies across communities, but male elders, - especially those who are married and seen as upholding family purity - are typically entrusted with this responsibility. These men are believed to communicate directly with the ancestors and serve as the "mouthpiece" between the living and the departed. Their role includes performing rituals, such as slaughtering goats for the family and offering *impepho*, considered a

special prayer to invite the presence of ancestors and seek their approval and blessings (Ntshangase, 2012).

Anthropologists have examined how homosexuality has been understood and regulated across different periods, influenced by evolving social norms, legal frameworks and medical discourses. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, homosexual acts were criminalized, with anthropologists such as Jeffrey Weeks (2016) highlighting how legal frameworks influenced societal attitudes and the construction of sexual identities. In recent decades, studies have shifted to exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, emphasizing the role of culture in shaping sexual identities and relationships. Scholars like David Halperin (2012) have argued that sexuality is not a fixed biological trait, but a socially constructed category that varies across time and space.

Chapter two explored intersecting debates around families, gender stereotypes, homosexuality and associated discrimination. It also explored two theorists in anthropology, focused on familial structures and dynamics. It became clear that families and households are guided by a set of rules and norms that shape how each family member behaves, and also guides them regarding roles and responsibilities carried over. Proponents in anthropology, such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown postulated ideals about what informs the functionality of families broadly. In their anthropological reasoning, families and households are basic units in which social roles are ordered, defined and allocated. Their emphasis is that the formation of families in both African and Western families is guided by a structure of kinship, through which descended lineages are traced. In many instances, these family structures are installed or created to ensure the expansion of family roots and branches, which may also include how social interactions happen and how roles and responsibilities are assigned or even inherited. It is within the reasoning and parameters of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's (2023) studies that anthropologists have come to understand that the overall functioning of families and households also relate to broader cultural, social and economic systems which shape family members.

Chapter two further revealed Edward Evans-Pritchard and Claude Levi-Strauss (1963) postulating on the foundations of cultural tradition and family. Amalukwue and Isidienu (2023) are quoted asserting that culture embraces religious beliefs, languages, dresses, style of living, political organization and all other aspects of life that determine who is a male or a female. Michell Rosaldo

and Eleanor Leacock assert that family roles, particularly gendered roles are socially constructed and tied to broader systems of power and patriarchy. Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, post-structuralism theorists, emphasise that families are grounded in socially constructed foundations relating to gender and sexuality. The social approval of one's "sexuality" is based on human sexual behavior, attraction, identity and orientation. This is where the notion of approved heterosexual norms is postulated, and where homosexuality is categorized as a taboo, tainting the lineage identity, instead of it being understood as ones preferred sexual orientation. The latter, which encompasses intersecting factors which are biological, emotional, social and culturally embedded, influence and shape how an individual as a family member or a member of a social group experiences, expresses, understands and explains his or her sexual relations. Sexuality and sexual orientation in anthropology encompass a preferred sexual attraction, gender identity and aspirations, or the feeling of intimacy.

Chapter three discussed three theoretical frameworks that echo the multidimensional nature of the study; these theoretical frameworks are Ritual Theory, Sexuality Theory and Social Constructivism Theory, which the study primarily makes reference to. Ritual theory looks at the interdisciplinary context used to contextually understand the social and cultural intersections across different societies. Understanding whether a gay heir can be the heir of the family and perform the ritual of burning incense in a family is an emotionally charged phenomenon which involves social and cultural intersection. Wu (2018:2) suggests that individuals should rely on their indigenous knowledge, which is memorized and passed down to the next generation through enculturation. This theory contributed to the study by delving into the understanding process of burning of incense as a ritual, which goes through various stages, from consulting the *Isangoma*, knowing the offering needed for the ancestors, to appointing a traditional healer (*Isangoma*) to guide the process, to appointing a head or heir of the family. Ritual theory plays a vital role in understanding the cultural complexities surrounding the role of a gay man as a possible heir and his ability to engage in ancestral rituals, such as burning incense (impepho), to communicate with the ancestors. Included in this anthropological study of iZingoma in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal, were important aspects in understanding the inclusion of gay heirs, and the ritual theory offers a framework to examine how societal norms and gender roles intersect with spiritual practices.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 also drew on the social constructivism theory. According to Kim (2006), the premise of social constructivism is built on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge and learning. Understanding whether a gay heir can burn incense to communicate with ancestors is embedded in sexuality and culture which are social constructs, created by societies and relived by families. Therefore, this theory was particularly relevant to the study, as it helped to explore the social and cultural aspects of this research. Cross and Madson's (1997) work on how cultural narratives influence the construction of gender and self-identity, was also pertinent in this research as gender roles/ expectation through masculinity and patriarchal phenomena were questioned extensively in relation to how this might influence how families view gay heirs (as self-identity) and their involvement in the burning of incense. This theory has been useful in searching for any social constructs that address this question of a gay male heir burning incense to communicate with ancestors. Through the perceptions/views of iZingoma, this theory helped in the collection of meanings attached to the burning of incense, to determine the acceptance or rejection of gay men who perform this ritual.

Lastly, Chapter 3 utilized sexuality theory, which is a critical discourse of the study as it is imbedded in sexuality, which is also a critical phenomenon in anthropology. Sexuality theory defines biological reproduction methods, describes psychological and sociological self-representations, and guides a person's attraction to others. According to Lucas & Fox (2018:1), in anthropology, sexuality encompasses the sense of one's sexual identity and preferences (Lucas & Fox, 2018:1). This theory has helped elucidate whether there is any disjunction between being homosexual and being a family heir, and may also reveal discrepancies in iZingomas' views regarding this matter.

**Study findings:**

- **What indigenous knowledge do iZingoma possess regarding the homosexual phenomenon?**

In-depth interviews revealed that iZingoma distinguish between homosexuality and "ukungenwa idlozi" (being clone by ancestors). To them, being iZingoma is a deep spiritual calling that should not be associated with the ways of the world. Social constructs include "*habe asiziphilile thina, silawulwa ngamathongo ethu*" (wait a minute, we are controlled by our ancestors, we are not living according to our accords). Even when we are performing our spiritual prayers and dances, we call

upon the spirits of ancestors lawa asingena (those that are controlling us"), and even when are performing spiritual dances "*ngenkathi sisina*" we don't do so based on what we like. Our ancestors ascend from their spiritual space to guide what happens in that particular moment.

The following verbatim comments are related to the above:

*Thina (us) we didn't know how to be isangoma but we were introduced by ancestors. When we accepted the calling, it was no longer about what I like, but it about what my ancestors wanted me to be, hence those who pretended to have been called by ancestors have quitted in the process. With this narrative, I am trying to clarify that most people think iZingoma ezingeniwe "ziyiloluhlobo lwabafana namantombazane" abobonakala enze okuhlukile, kanti akunjalo (diverners who are gay are assumed to be doing something wrong, whilst not). Hence why, I appreciate that this study has recruited us to clear the blowing wind. As spiritual led human beings, we don't desist homosexuals but we are of the view that there are ancestral responsibilities that they may not be able to carry out because that could anger ancestors. We need to understand that obabomkhulu no Gogo "male and female ancestors" bahamba kulomhlaba bazi ukuthi uMvelikuqala wadala uAdamu no Eeva (left this world knowing and understanding that God the creator only knows Adam and Eve) not what we see.*

In their view, a gay man cannot be considered as an heir and be trusted with the familial responsibility to burn incense (impepho). They believe homosexuality is a personal choice and social identity influenced by Western ideals and affluence. While many associate *iZingoma* with homosexuality, most have undergone "*ukungenwa idlozi*," a spiritual possession by ancestors, and this should not be confused (with anything else.

- **What are the views/perceptions of iZingoma on the burning of incense by gay Zulu men who are the heirs of the family?**

Study findings clarify that, while many people associate iZingoma with homosexuality or "gayism", this is not the case. The majority of iZingoma who are seen as gay have gone through the process of "ukungenwa idlozi," being entered by, or spiritually possessed by ancestors. The

study underscores that being chosen as an heir is not based on birth order but on being spiritually selected by ancestors. iZingoma argue that the traditional expectation for the first-born son to inherit leadership and familial authority does not always align with ancestral approval. In their view, "*ukungengwa idlozi"* being entered by ancestral spirit should not be associated with 'gayism'.

- **What are the views/perceptions of iZingoma on homosexuality in general and on gay male heirs in particular?**

iZingoma believe that being gay is largely viewed as a personal choice and a social identity that aligns itself with current trending social status. In the views of iZingoma, the rise of homosexuality in rural communities is largely influenced by Western and other statuses of affluence. Their extended understanding is that homosexuality did not exist in Africa, it is part of the colonial era and largely the agenda of globalization and social media "obabo mkhulu abayazi lento, futhi angeke bahambisane nayo," meaning our ancestors don't know and would not even understand it hence gayism or being gay should not be confused with our African spirituality.

Based on the data set and its analysis, it emerged clearly that iZingoma do not discriminate, but they also expressed that even during their spiritual meetings and discussions, they confirm that a straight man is a straight man and does not have traits of being a homosexual. Therefore, they cannot really enjoy the same familial social status in the form of leadership or even burn incense. Homosexuality from the view point of iZingoma portrays a particular social status and a status consumption that portrays being affluent. To be entered by ancestors does not symbolize ***glitz and glam,*** hence they are still living in houses that are affluent. Being gay should not be associated with being spiritually called.

- **Do the ancestors discriminate against homosexual men, or do they give them equal recognition as straight men?**

Study findings revealed that iZingoma don't discriminate, as they believe that we are all God's creation but lokhu kobulili obufanayo othandanayo (homosexuality) challenges many of us to

ponder deeper, because these gender identities are new in our societies. It is a phenomenon that is not easy to understand because “thina zangoma zakuqala, ezobizo;” we are challenged when we were young and ended up not completing school. We see this as a new or rather contemporary and *ithatha ukusibhida ngoba* “meaning” we really don’t understand what really informs. this preference.

Based on the above heading (do ancestors discriminate), an explanation and translation, follow;

*Noma siphahla abadala bebengakayivezi but sinethemba lokuthi izovela ngokuhamba kwesikhathi. Esikwazi kuvumelwe ngobaba Mkhulu noGogo asebawelela ezweni lamathonga, ngingasho ngingahlonizi ukuthi siyayazi indoda eqondile ukuthi inganwa ngubani nokuthi kwenzakalani uma isinganelwe*

(We continue to seek guidance from our ancestors, but nothing has been communicated to us by our spiritual leaders, being our ancestors. We are clearly aware what informs roles and responsibilities of straight men but we currently don’t know what the responsibility of gay men are. We are clear about what happens when a straight man gets married; the family is extended because the wife blesses the family with babies). The concept of homosexuality is not easy to understand.

## 8.2 Critical arguments of the study

People in most rural communities have been socialized through African Spirituality, Christianity and by undocumented Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). A person that does not meet expectations of these domains is deemed less of a human being and is not allowed, accepted or recognized as an heir because their sexual identity conflicts with spiritual beliefs and norms rooted in African Spirituality, Christianity and what is recognized as IKS by many communities. Within the theoretical frameworks employed in the study, African Spirituality, Christianity and IKS are recognized as the genesis and functionality of families, and also influence the structural order that is highly accepted and recognized albeit that a gay man is not recognized as a legitimate heir. Anything that happens outside these domains is recognized as being unclean and immoral, resulting in harsh forms of judgements. Msibi (2011: 16) is one of the contemporary scholars in

South Africa to express that "religion is frequently used in condemning homosexuality". His scholarly perspective on hatred towards homosexuals is that religion, both Christianity and Islam are mostly active in denying and questioning the morality and existence of same-sex relations. He further argues that God becomes a perfect tool to silence indigenous same-sex practices, and expresses that religious believers even ask: *who want to go against God*?

*Relevant Biblical scriptures are as follows*:

The study challenges undocumented cultural understanding of Sexuality that is often linked with Indigenous Knowledge, that only few people refer to, to instigate discrimination of gay men, both in their families and within the community at large. Guided by Sexual Theory, this study opines that a gay man should be recognized and accepted not on the basis of spiritual and cultural dimensions that are quoted from the Christian Bible, African Spirituality and Indigenous Knowledge, because these frameworks trigger violence towards homosexuals, as they their gender preferences are only limited to Adam and Eve. The study also contributes a new dimension in the ongoing discussion of sexuality, sexual identity and spiritual identity. The study illustrates how iZingoma separate homosexuality from the spiritual calling of "ukungenwa idlozi". This thesis thus sheds light on the different and diverse ways through which sexual identity and spiritual identity are to be understood in Zulu rural areas of Ugu District. This study maintains that these two intersecting themes in the anthropology of sexual identity may not be immediately apparent in the mainstream discussions of sexuality.

**Rethinking Sexual Identities and Preferences – An Anthropological Contribution**

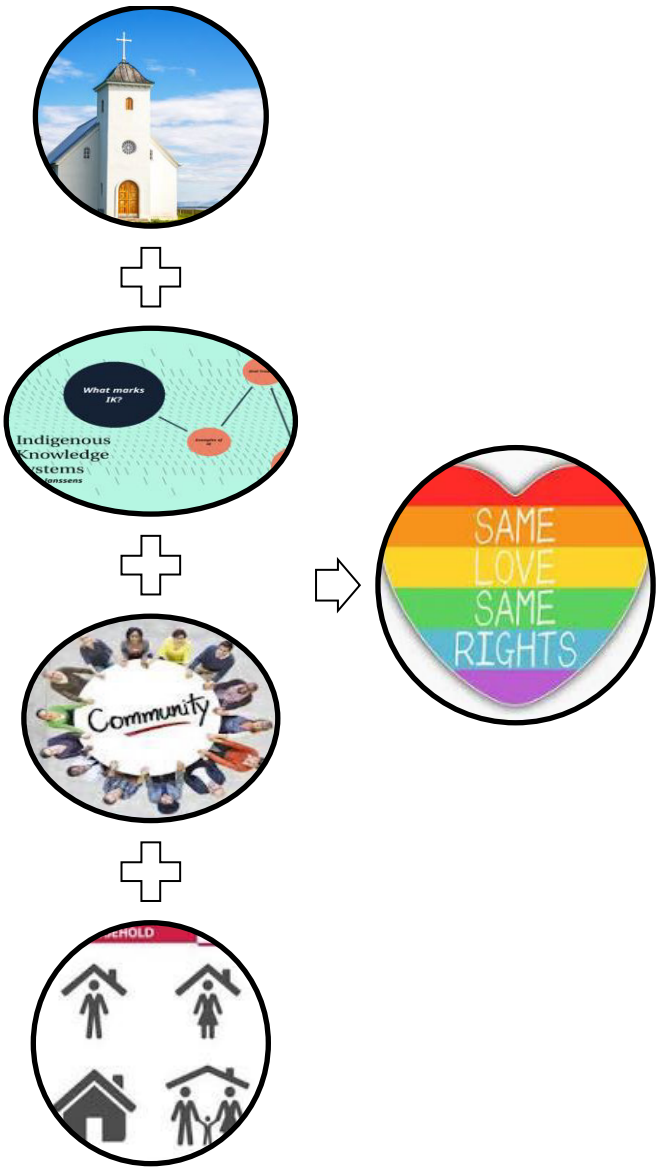
This study, situated within the anthropology of sexuality, has provided valuable insights into the cultural, spiritual and social dynamics surrounding the acceptance of gay men as heirs within Zulu families. By examining the perspectives of iZingoma - traditional healers and spiritual leaders -the research has illuminated the complex intersection between indigenous belief systems, sexuality and ancestral rites. The findings underscore the need to rethink the rigid ritual practices through

which sexual identities and preferences are often understood and applied, especially within societies steeped in both indigenous knowledge and Christian doctrine.

One of the central recommendations of this study is the urgent need to "rethink sexual identities and preferences," particularly within the context of cultural and spiritual practices. The traditional lens through which sexual identity is often viewed, whether through the binary view of heterosexuality versus homosexuality, does not adequately account for the diverse and fluid nature of human sexuality, as it exists within indigenous cultural contexts. As highlighted in the study, iZingoma distinguish between homosexuality, seen by many as a personal choice influenced by Western ideals, and “ukungenwa idlozi,” the spiritual selection by ancestors. This distinction calls into question the validity of current cultural and religious interpretations of sexuality that are largely shaped by colonial and Western perspectives.

By challenging the assumption that traditional cultural roles, such as that of the heir, are inherently tied to heterosexuality; this research proposes a broader, more inclusive view of sexual identity. In the context of Zulu culture, it becomes evident that ancestral approval, a central tenet in determining who can become an heir, is not solely dependent on one's sexual orientation or gender. Instead, spiritual calling, or "ukungenwa idlozi," transcends these boundaries, offering a model of heirship based on spiritual selection rather than social conformity. This shift in perspective invites us to rethink how we understand sexual identities and preferences not just as fixed categories but as dynamic, multifaceted elements of human experience that can be shaped by cultural, spiritua and historical contexts.

Graphical implication of **Rethinking Sexual Identities and Preferences:**




The above graphical depiction symbolizes what constitute the hatred towards the LGBTIA+ community. The following are some of the favoured biblical scripts that discriminate the LGBTQIA+ from the community. These scripts are also inherited by communities and families.

- **Homosexual Behaviour Is Sin**

Historically, homosexuality has often been defined as an emotional (psychological) or organic (physiological) problem. In recent years, some have lobbied mental health organizations to have

homosexuality removed from the list of classified diagnostic pathologies, and many have come to see it as nothing more than a morally neutral, personal preference or a naturally occurring aspect of human biological diversity. In making moral judgments, we must remember scriptural warnings against depending on our own reasoning or even personal experience to discern truth (Proverbs 3:5–6).

- **Homosexual behaviour is sin because it is disobedient to scriptural teachings.**

The following section is based on biblical beliefs and quotes:

When God called Israel to be His people in a distinctive sense, He miraculously delivered them from Egyptian bondage. But God did more. He entered into a covenant relationship with them and provided the Law, predicated on love for God and neighbour, by which they could order their lives as a holy people. That law included specific prohibitions of homosexual practice, such as that of Leviticus 18:22: "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable." Lest the previous injunction be misunderstood, Leviticus 20:13 provides a restatement, "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable." "Detestable," used in both verses, is a strong word that indicates divine displeasure with sin. (The reference to sexual relations as per the Biblical texts is related to the study's reference to Christian and religious roots of the relevant communities)

The Christian church has historically understood that although the ceremonial provisions of the Old Testament law were no longer in effect after the atoning death of Christ, the New Testament interpretation and restatement of its moral law continues in effect. On the subject of homosexuality, both the Old and New Testaments speak with one voice. The moral prohibitions against homosexual behaviour in the Old Testament are pointedly repeated in the New Testament.

To those who witnessed the sexual license of imperial Rome on a daily basis, Paul depicted the results that followed in the lives of those who rejected God and "worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. . .. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men

committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Romans 1:25– 27). Paul is referring to both male homosexuality and lesbianism.

In Paul's day, the city of Corinth was especially notorious for sexual immorality. It was not only a crossroads of commerce, but of all kinds of vice. Because the church was being established in this city, it was important that new Christians came to understand God's moral order. The record is explicit. Paul wrote, "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?" Then he continued, "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders . . . will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9–10 [NIV, 1984]). In this case, Paul is understood to identify male homosexuals in both active and passive homosexual behavioural roles. (This reference links to the study, in terms of homosexuality versus heterosexuality).

Paul wrote, "Law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals" (1 Timothy 1:9–10, NASB).

Below is a discussion that links the above references to biblical scriptures, to the study.

An unbiased study of these passages makes it clear that Scripture consistently identifies homosexual behaviour as sin. Not only do the Scriptures condemn more flagrant examples of homosexual violence and promiscuity, they also provide no support for the popular modern idea that loving and committed homosexual relationships between two long-term partners, even if legally married, are morally acceptable. Homosexual activities of every kind are contrary to the moral commandments God has given us.

- **Homosexual behaviour is sin because it is contrary to God's created order for the family and human relationships.**

The following discussion follows the same format as the previous one.

The first chapter of the Bible says, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). After God had created the male, He indicated it was not good for him to live alone (Genesis 2:18). So, God created a companion for him (Genesis 2:18). It should be noted that the male’s aloneness was not to be remedied by the creation of another male but by the creation of a female. God created two sexes, not just one, and each for the other.

When God brought the woman to Adam, Adam said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” Scripture then states, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:23–24). Biblical teachings contradict homosexuality; the study assess the validity of this stance, as diversity is in line with modern views.

In creating humankind God established the order of sexuality by which the race was to develop. Psychologically, the relationship is sound. Physically, the relationship is natural, and sociologically, it establishes the foundation for the family. The biblical order for human sexual expression is that of an intimate physical relationship to be shared exclusively within a lifelong marriage covenant:  heterosexual and monogamous relationship.

When people choose to engage in homosexual behaviour, they depart from the God-given nature of sexuality. Their unnatural sexual behaviour is a sin against God, who established the order of sexuality (Romans 1:27). And the social unit they seek to establish is contrary to the divine instruction for the man to leave father and mother and be “united to his wife” (Genesis 2:24).

In Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees, He reiterated the order of sexuality that God established in the beginning: “Haven’t you read... that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?” (Matthew 19:4–5). He pointed out that the only alternative to heterosexual marriage is celibacy for the kingdom of heaven’s sake (Matthew 19:10–12).

Again, the above discussion must be seen in a broader context, in line with modern, diverse viewpoints.

- **Homosexual behaviour is sin that comes under divine judgment.**

The name of the ancient city of Sodom has become a synonym for homosexual behaviour. While other evils existed in this community, sodomy was prominent. The homosexuals of Sodom were so depraved that they threatened homosexual rape of Lot's guests. "Bring them ["the men who came to you"] out to us so that we can have sex with them," Lot was told (Genesis 19:5). The biblical record indicates that the mob became violent and tried to break down the door of Lot's house. Only divine intervention spared Lot and his household from their evil intentions, and God subsequently destroyed both Sodom and the neighbouring city of Gomorrah (Genesis 19:4–11, 24–25).

God's punishment of these cities was of such severity that it is used as an illustration of divine judgment by both Peter (2 Peter 2:6) and Jude (7). Jude's commentary is particularly apt, "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."

The Book of Judges (19:1–30) records an incident in the ancient Benjamite city of Gibeah that has many similarities to the sin of Sodom. Certain "wicked men of the city" (19:22) sought to force a visiting Levite male into homosexual acts with them. Denied their insistent requests, the attackers finally settled for vicious sexual abuse and gang rape of the Levite's concubine that resulted in her death (19:25–30). The other tribes of Israel found the crime so repugnant that when the tribe of Benjamin refused to surrender the offenders, they eventually went to war—decimating the Benjamites (20:1–48).

A discussion, placing the above Biblical texts in perspective, follows:

These are particularly notorious examples of homosexual expression that undoubtedly most homosexual persons today would repudiate. It should be understood that while expressing abhorrence at such rapacious perversion, the biblical writers do not imply that heterosexuals are not capable of sexual atrocities, nor that most homosexuals are as depraved as the residents of those ancient cities. Nor should modern Christians draw those implications. It is important to note,

however, that wherever homosexuality occurs in the biblical record, it is an occasion of scandal and judgment. Homosexuality is never viewed in a positive light.

The biblical writers make it clear that practicing homosexuals, along with sexually immoral heterosexuals and all other unrepentant sinners, will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9–10). Paul also described homosexual conduct as one evidence of God's judgment for humankind's corporate rebellion against Him (Romans 1:26–27). Jesus himself was explicit that at the end of the age "the Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:40–42).

The following is another example of the stance of Christianity about homosexuality:

- **Homosexual Behaviour Is Sin for Which Reconciliation Is Possible**

While Scripture makes it clear homosexual behaviour is sin and comes under the judgment of God, it also indicates that those who are guilty of homosexual behaviour or any other sin can be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17–21).

In the church at Corinth there were former homosexuals who had been delivered from the power of sin by the grace of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul listed homosexuals along with immoral heterosexuals as those who cannot inherit the kingdom of God. His grammar implies continuing sexually immoral activity until their conversion.

Verse 11 follows with a powerful contrast, "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." They had been homosexuals in orientation and behaviour, but now the power of God's Spirit had radically transformed their lives, and the lives of their fellow heterosexual sinners.

Above discussion is based on the Christian Bible and beliefs, and makes reference to sexuality.

Scripture makes clear that the efficacy of the death and resurrection of Christ is unlimited for those who accept it. There is no sin, sexual or otherwise, that cannot be cleansed. John the Baptist announced, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The apostle Paul wrote, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The apostle John wrote, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, people, regardless of the nature of their sin, can be made new creations in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). God’s plan of salvation is the same for all. The practicing homosexual who wants to be delivered from the penalty and power of sin must come to God in the same way all heterosexual sinners must come to God, in the same way all who are now His children have come for deliverance from their sins.

The act of turning to God for salvation includes both repentance and faith. Jesus is both Savior and Lord. He is the one who forgives our sin as we believe in Him and repent. Repentance represents a change of mind in which there is a turning from sin in both attitude and behavior.

Jesus is also the One whose lordship we affirm in holy living. “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God” (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5).

Based on Christiani doctrines, just like the Philippian jailer who asked what he had to do to be saved, those desiring salvation must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:30–31) - believe that He can save them from the power as well as the penalty of sin. Obedient faith, like repentance, is a condition of salvation.

A discussion regarding a connection between the above and the current study, follows:

Rethinking sexual identities and preferences, is a significant aspect of the ongoing conversation about human rights, as it involves challenging societal norms and advocating for the equal treatment and respect of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, identity or preference. In the context of this study, the promotion of human rights seeks to create an environment where individuals are free to express their authentic selves, without fear of discrimination, persecution or marginalization. Religious groups, communities and families and households will see members of the LGBTQIA+ as human beings whose sexual orientation is not a sin or a crime that needs to be corrected. Their roles and responsibilities in the family like burning of *Impepho* will be confirmed unto them without any reservation.

In the context of this study Rethinking sexual identities and preferences implies:

**Recognizing diverse sexual identities:**

- This thesis advocates for the recognition of diverse sexual identities challenging traditional and religious perspectives to foster inclusivity and equitable rights for —gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual and many others. The view of this thesis is that the promotion of human rights within this context involves recognizing and validating these identities. By acknowledging the full diversity of sexual identities, societies would move toward more inclusive human rights frameworks that respect each individual's autonomy over their sexual expression. In this context, gay people would not be marginalized from resuming their heir responsibilities in traditional families and households.

**Challenges of Social Stigma and Discrimination as intersecting factors in churches, communities and in families and households.**

This thesis aligns its conclusion with what other local and international scholars have expressed within the context of violated rights for the LGBTQ+ community. Msibi (2011) is one of the scholars who are advocating for the rights of the LGBTQ+ people, amongst many man-made expressions of hatred. This thesis highlights one of the key human rights issues related to sexual identity which is the stigma and discrimination faced by individuals who do not conform to heterosexual norms. Because of this man-made hatred, LGBTQ+ individuals have continued to face violence, legal persecution and social exclusion. This thesis advocate for holistic human rights

by advocating for decriminalization of homosexuality. The study challenges social sigma and discrimination as intersecting factors in our communities in order to advocate for the promotion of human rights and emphasizes the importance of creating safe spaces where individuals can express their sexual preferences without fear of judgment. Within this anthropological study, this advocacy remains an essential component of fostering equality and respect in societies, ensuring that people are not marginalized based on their sexual identity. In this regard, a gay man will celebrate the same rights as heterosexual males with their families and within their communities at large.

### 8.3. Freedom of Expression and Autonomy:

Guided by the Sexuality Theory that this study employed, the studies position is that the sexual identity and preference are deeply personal aspects of an individual's life. This thesis thus advocates for the promotion of human rights, highlighting the importance of personal freedom and autonomy, which ensures that people have the right to make decisions about their bodies, relationships and sexual expression. This thesis thus asserts that the freedom of expression and autonomy is within the provisions of Section 9 of the Republic of South African Constitution (108 of 1996), which advocate for the rights and protection of homosexuals.

Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution advocates for the right to consensual relationships ensuring, advocating that individual can engage in relationships that reflect their desires and identities without being coerced into the expectations and preferences of religious groups largely desired by communities, families and households. This thesis opines that the promotion of sexual rights is integral to the broader movement for bodily autonomy and self-determination, advocating for the right to express one's sexuality freely and without coercion. Recognizing the rights of homosexuals will result in healthy communities and families where crime towards them is strongly prohibited and rooted out. Their rights and safety will become the responsibility of the institution that socialize the conduct of humans being the church, indigenous knowledge systems, families and households.

### 8.4. Intersectionality and Inclusivity:

Intersecting factors that leads to the discrimination of homosexuals from the church, communities and within families were discussed in chapter one, two and also in chapter six and seven of the theses. This thesis asserts that it essential to approach the issue through an intersectional lens that the rights of homosexuals should be embodies and embraced. The rights of homosexuals will be easily recognized if they are embodied and embraced by these intersecting institutions, because these institutions have the power to influence how people embody and embrace behaviours. The promotion of human rights in this context should not only focus on sexual identity but also consider how other aspects of identity intersect and influence people's lived experiences. Advocating for human rights in the context of sexual identities requires that we consider the full complexity of people's identities and ensure that rights are equally accessible to all individuals, regardless of how they are situated in the world.

### 8.5. Undocumented indigenous knowledge and Cultural Perspectives:

This thesis opines that the promotion of human rights of homosexuals in South Africa is hindered by undocumented indigenous knowledge systems and cultural perspectives that govern and shape how people react towards homosexuals. While progress is being made in many countries, including South Africa, to recognize and protect LGBTQ+ rights, in South Africa, undocumented indigenous beliefs conflict with such advancements. This creates tension between universal human rights standards and local customs. The thesis thus opines that Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in South Africa should be documented based on a context that forges mutual recognition of people's human rights, irrespective of their sexualities. If this is achieved, cultural perspectives will not be used to marginalize LGBTQIA+ community members. They will be recognized as human beings with human rights, who are eligible to resume all the roles and responsibilities within their families without being discriminated/marginalized on the basis of their sexuality. This thesis advocates that, promoting human rights of LGBTQIA+ people requires redocumenting indigenous knowledge to recognize all people equally irrespective of their sexualities and preferences.

The following recommendations are based on insights gleaned from the study.

**Practical solutions to promote human rights of LGBTQIA+ people:**

- **Promote Inclusive Discussions within Traditional Leadership Structures:** The study reveals varied views on the role of LGBTQ+ individuals within traditional family structures, especially concerning matters of inheritance and ancestral communication. It is recommended that further engagement be facilitated between LGBTQ+ individuals and iZingoma in open forums. These discussions should aim to foster mutual understanding and create space for dialogue that challenges traditional norms, promoting inclusivity in cultural practices. Establishing dialogues could help bridge generational and ideological divides, ensuring that both traditional values and contemporary realities coexist harmoniously.
- **Develop Culturally Sensitive Policies for LGBTQ+ Integration in Traditional Systems:** The study's findings highlight the tension between evolving social norms and traditional belief systems. One recommendation is the development of culturally sensitive guidelines or frameworks that respect the sacredness of ancestral rituals while also honouring the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals. These frameworks could be co-created by iZingoma and LGBTQ+ leaders, ensuring that the policies are grounded in both respect for tradition and inclusivity.
- **Promote Education and Training on LGBTQ+ Issues for Traditional Leaders:** Many of the challenges related to the inclusion of gay men as heirs or spiritual leaders stem from a lack of understanding of LGBTQ+ issues among traditional leaders. It is recommended that educational programs, workshops and resources on LGBTQ+ rights and issues be introduced for iZingoma. These initiatives should include information on the intersection of sexuality, spirituality and tradition to encourage a more informed, compassionate approach to gender and sexual diversity.
- **Foster Intergenerational Conversations on Changing Cultural Norms:** The study suggests that younger generations of iZingoma may hold more progressive views on LGBTQ+ inclusion, while older generations tend to adhere more strictly to traditional norms. Initiatives aimed at fostering intergenerational conversations between younger and older iZingoma could be instrumental in bringing these gaps. Encouraging mutual respect

and understanding across generations will help in evolving cultural norms in ways that honour both tradition and human rights.

- **Encourage the Preservation of Ancestral Practices in a Way That Is Adaptive to Social Change:** One of the study's key insights is the tension between preserving ancestral practices and adapting to the realities of contemporary society. It is recommended that iZingoma engage in a process of reinterpretation, whereby ancestral practices can evolve to be more inclusive, without losing their spiritual significance. This could involve revisiting how practices like burning incense (impepho) and communicating with ancestors can be conducted in ways that welcome all individuals, including those from marginalized groups such as the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Create Safe Spaces for LGBTQ+ Individuals within Traditional Spirituality:** The study shows that for many LGBTQ+ individuals, being accepted as both heirs and spiritual leaders is crucial to their sense of identity and connection to culture. It is recommended that safe spaces be created within the traditional systems for LGBTQ+ individuals to explore their roles in spiritual leadership without fear of rejection. This could involve the creation of mentorship programs with iZingoma who are open-minded, and willing to guide LGBTQ+ practitioners, fostering acceptance and spiritual growth.
- **Further Exploration of Intersectionality in Cultural Practices:** Future research should examine the intersection of race, sexuality, gender, and spirituality within the iZingoma community. By delving into how multiple identities shape an individual's role in traditional practices and cultural views on inheritance, the study can provide a more comprehensive view of how power dynamics and social structures influence cultural norms. This would help address the broader issues of marginalization and exclusion in spiritual and familial roles.
- **Encourage National and Regional Policy Advocacy for LGBTQ+ Rights within Traditional Settings:** Given the cultural significance of iZingoma and their role in families, advocating for the integration of LGBTQ+ rights within South Africa's broader policy framework could help support change at community level. Supporting national policies that recognize the intersection of traditional practices and LGBTQ+ inclusion could set a precedent for other regions, ensuring that diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are respected within cultural frameworks.

By fostering greater inclusivity, understanding and respect for both traditional practices and contemporary social dynamics, these recommendations aim to support a more integrated and equitable approach to ancestral communication and familial inheritance in Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal.

## 8.6 Conclusion

This final chapter of the study addresses the limitations encountered throughout the research process, offers key recommendations for future studies, and presents a comprehensive conclusion based on the findings. The central inquiry of this anthropological investigation on eligibility of a gay man as heir of the family and able to burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors, has been explored through the cultural perspectives of iZingoma (traditional healers) in the Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal. While the research has provided valuable insights into the complex and diverse beliefs surrounding gender, sexuality and ancestral practices within this community, several limitations have influenced the scope and depth of the study's findings. These limitations include constraints related to sample size, the heterogeneity of cultural interpretations and challenges of navigating sensitive and deeply personal topics such as sexuality and ancestral worship.

In light of these limitations, this chapter proposes recommendations for future research that could further clarify and expand upon the themes explored in this study. By addressing gaps in the current literature and engaging with more inclusive and diverse voices from both iZingoma and broader community, future studies will enrich our understanding of the evolving dynamics of cultural and spiritual practices in contemporary South African society. Finally, the chapter synthesizes the main conclusions of the study, reflecting on the significance of the findings in relation to the central research question. It underscores the ongoing tension between traditional cultural beliefs and evolving social norms, and the ways in which these intersections shape the lives of individuals who identify as gay within indigenous cultural contexts. This conclusion invites further dialogue and reflection on the adaptability of cultural traditions in the face of societal change.

At a societal level, the call to rethink sexual identities and preferences challenges both local communities and broader global movements to embrace diversity in its many forms. In particular, the study makes a compelling case for a more inclusive view of heirship and leadership, one that recognizes the spiritual and cultural dimensions of identity beyond sexual orientation. By re-envisioning sexual identity through a lens that accounts for indigenous spiritual practices and the flexibility of ancestral inheritance, the study opens the door to a future in which LGBTQI+ individuals are not only accepted but also celebrated as integral members of their communities.

Future research will undoubtedly expand upon this foundation by exploring the broader implications of spiritual practices and cultural beliefs in shaping attitudes towards sexual identities. Further studies are recommended such as who authored the Christian Bible, corridors of African Spirituality and IKS that are viewed as the source of hatred toward gay men who seek recognition from families as heir with responsibilities of burning impepho (incense) to communicate with ancestors. Additionally, the relationship between the Christian Bible and IKS, particularly their roles in perpetuating discrimination against sexual minorities, deserves closer scrutiny in future studies, as it remains a powerful influence on social norms and practices related to sexuality. Cultural and linguistic anthropologists should question why indigenous knowledge is mostly undocumented, yet it informs norms and beliefs of many African rural communities and why it instigates discrimination, instead of uniting people who are expressing different sexual orientations. The use of qualitative research is recommended to accommodate the subjective in-depth responses from Bishops, Archbishops, Pastors, Priests and many other believers of undocumented Indigenous Knowledge.

In conclusion, the call to "rethink sexual identities and preferences" is not merely an academic exercise; it is an invitation to challenge deeply ingrained social norms and to foster a more inclusive, nuanced understanding of human sexuality. This research contributes to the growing movement within anthropology, that seeks to unravel the complex ways in which cultural, spiritual, and sexual identities intersect, often in ways that are at odds with simplistic or binary understandings. The study of iZangoma perspectives on heirship and sexuality serves as a reminder that the negotiation of sexual identities and roles is not fixed or universal, but is instead deeply embedded within cultural and spiritual contexts that deserve recognition and respect. In reimagining how sexual identities and preferences are understood, we can work towards more

inclusive and equitable societies that honour both individual differences and the rich diversity of human experience.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Informed consent document-English Version




Informed Consent Document-English Version

Dear Participant,

My name is **Zwanani Christopher Jeza (213518823)**. I am a PhD candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College. The title of my research is: **Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense "impepho" to communicate with ancestors: Cultural views of Izangoma, Ugu district; KwaZulu-Natal-South Africa.** The aim of the study is to understand if can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense"impempepo" to communicate with ancestors. I am interested in interviewing you so as to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The interview will take about (60-90minutes).
- The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning.
- If you agree to participate, please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet will be provided for signatures)

I can be contacted at: School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban. Email: 213518823@stu.ukzn.ac.za;
Cell: [redacted]
My supervisor is Balungile Prudence Zondi who is located at the School of Social Sciences,

Pietermaritzburg Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email: ZondiL4@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: [redacted]

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details are as follows: Ms Duduzile Dlamini, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office, Email: **Dlaminid1@ukzn.ac.za,** Phone number +27312604557

Thank you for your contribution to this research

## DECLARATION

I…… *(full names of participant*) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

……

# Appendix 1: Informed Consent document-IsiZulu Version




Informed Consent- IsiZulu version

Imvume eyaziwaUmhlanganyeli othandekayo.

Igama lami nguZwanani Christopher Jeza (213518823.). Ngenza isziqu zobudokotela (I PhD) ngifunda eYunivesithi yaKwaZulu-Natal, ophikweni oluse Howard College. Isihloko socwaningo lwami**: Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense "impepho" to communicate with ancestors: Cultural views of Izangoma, Ugu district; KwaZulu-Natal-South Africa.** Inhloso yalolucwaningo ukubheka kabazi ukuthi kungabe abesilisa abathandana nabanye besilisa bayakwazi yini ukuba izinkosana emdenini baphinde bashishe impempepho njengendlela yesintu yokuxhumana nabangasekho.

Sicela wazi ukuthi:

• Ulwazi olunikezayo luzosetshenziselwa ucwaningo lwabafundi kuphela.

• Ukubamba iqhaza kwakho kuphelele ngokuzithandela. Unelungelo lokubamba iqhaza, hhayi ukubamba iqhaza noma ukuyeka ukubamba iqhaza ocwaningweni. Ngeke ujeziswe ngokuthatha isenzo esinjalo.

• Imibono yakho kule ngxoxo izonikezwa ngokungaziwa. Igama lakho noma ubunikazi bakho ngeke kudalulwe kunoma yiluphi uhlobo ekutadisheni.

• Le ngxoxo izothatha cishe (imizuzu engama-shumi amathathu yesikhathi sakho).

• Irekhodi kanye nezinye izinto ezihlotshaniswa nalolu daba kuzobanjwa efayeleni elivikelwe iphasiwedi elifinyeleleka kuphela kimi kanye nabaphathi bami. Ngemuva kweminyaka emihlanu, ngokuhambisana nemithetho yunivesithi, izobe isetshenziswe ngokushisa nokushisa.

• Uma uvuma ukubamba iqhaza sicela usayine isivumelwano esixhunywe esitatimendeni (ishidi elihlukile lizohlinzekwa ngamasignesha)

uNgakwazi ukuxhumana nami: Isikole Sosayensi Yezenhlalo, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Campus, Durban. Imeyili: 213518823@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Umakhalekhukhwini: [redacted].

Umphathi wami nguDkt. Balungile Zondi, otholakale eSikoleni Sezenhlalo, eMgungundlovu Campus we-University of KwaZulu-Natali. Imininingwane yokuxhumana: i-imeyli zondil4@ukzn.ac.za, Inombolo yocingo: [redacted], indawo yehhovisi ehhovisi lika-033 2605289.

Imininingwane yokuxhumana yeKomidini yezokuHlaliswa kwaBantu kanye neZenhlalakahle yilezi zilandelayo: Nks. Phumelela Ximba, University of KwaZulu-Natali, iHhovisi lokuCwaninga, ne-imeyili: Ms Duduzile Dlamini, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office, Email: **Dlaminid1@ukzn.ac.za ,** Phone number +27312604557

Siyabonga ngomnikelo wakho kulolu cwaningo.

ISICELO

Mina ..... (amagama agcwele womhlanganyeli) ngalokhu ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi ngiyaqonda okuqukethwe kwale dokhumenti kanye nemvelo iphrojekthi yokucwaninga, futhi ngiyavuma ukuhlanganyela ephrojekthi yokucwaninga.

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi nginenkululeko yokuhoxisa kulo msebenzi nganoma isiphi isikhathi, kufanele ngifune. Ngiyaqonda injongo yocwaningo. Ngiyavuma ukuhlanganyela.

Ngiyavuma / angivumi ukuba le ngxoxo iqoshwe (uma ikhona)

Isivume sokuzibambezela

SAYINA---------- USUKU----------

# Appendix 2: Research instruments-English Version

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

**Research instrument English version**

1. Are you a Sangoma?

   [ ] Yes

   [ ] No

2. Can you describe your understanding of ancestral communication and the role it plays in your culture?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Now that you are practicing as a Sangoma, who is your dominant ancestor in you?

   [ ] uGogo

   [ ] uMkhulu

4. Has the dominant ancestor in you changed or influenced your behaviour?

   [ ] Yes

   [ ] No

5. If yes, what type of sexuality are you ascribing to?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. How long have you been practicing as a Sangoma?

7. How do cultural beliefs and traditions surrounding burning of incense vary in relation to sexual orientation, particularly pertaining gay heirs?

8. Have you personally experienced or observed any specific rituals or practices involving the burning of incense to communicate with ancestors? If so, could you describe them?

9. Why do you think only mans are giving powers to burn incense in the family?

10. What are your views/ perceptions about homosexuals “people who subscribe with either being gay or lesbians” in your profession as well as in the society at large?

11. How do ancestors perceive the role and identity of a gay heir?

12. In your community, what are the prevailing attitudes or beliefs towards gay heirs engaging in ancestral communication practices (burning of Incense)?

13. Have you encountered any instances where gay heirs faced unique challenges or discrimination while participating in rituals of burning incense?

14. Are there specific roles or expectations for heirs in ancestral communication rituals (burning of incense)? If yes, what are they?

15. Have you come across any examples where Isangoma played a significant role in supporting or validating the ancestral communication experiences of gay heirs?

16. Are there any specific cultural taboos or restrictions related to gay heirs participating in the practice of burning? If so, could you elaborate on them?

17. What is the ancestor's response to the burning of incense if it burned by a heterosexual man versus the gay man?

18. Do ancestors see people who are burning impepho from a gendered lens?

19. What are some prevailing cultural perspectives regarding the intersection of sexual orientation and the ability to effectively communicate with ancestors through rituals such as incense burning?

20. Have you observed any changes or shifts in cultural attitudes towards gay heirs and their involvement in the burning of insense over time?

21. Are there any cultural or community support systems in place to address the specific needs or concerns of families who need clarity on whether a gay heir can/cannot burn incense?

22. Can you share any personal stories or accounts of gay heirs who have actively participated in burning incense? And was there rejection/acceptance by ancestors?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

23. What are the perspectives within indigenous knowledge that either endorse or discriminate against the practice of gay men burning incense?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

24. Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense "impepho" to communicate with ancestors?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

25. How can the knowledge and understanding of ancestral communication practices among gay heirs through burning of incense contribute to more inclusive and diverse understanding of cultural heritage?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

# Appendix 2: Research instruments-IsiZulu Version

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

**Research instrument Isizulu version**

1. Kungabe uyinsangoma yini?
   [ ]Yebo
   [ ]Cha
2. Kungabe wathola kanjani unobizo lokuba isangoma?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Njengoma usuyisangoma, kungabe ubani lokhokho owakungena?
   [ ] uGogo
   [ ] uMkhulu
4. Kungabe lokhokho owakungena wayishintsha yini indlela oziphatha ngayo, nowenza ngayo izinto?
   [ ] Yebo
   [ ] Cha
5. Uma uthi yebo, iphila hlobo luni lwempilo?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. Kungabe usunesikhathi esingakanani uyisangoma?

   _____
   _____

_____
_____

7. Kungabe ithini imibono eyehlukahlukene yesintu nokwenziwa kwezinto ngendlela abantu abazizwa ngayo ikakhulukazi laba besilisa abayizindlalifa bebe bethandana nabobulili obufana nobabo?

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Usuke wawubona noma yingxenye yomcimbi obandakanya ukusishwa kwempepho ukuze kunxumanwe nabaphansi?

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Ngokubona kwakho kungani kuhleze kungabesilisa abanikezwa Amandla okushisa impepho?

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. Kungabe uthini umbono wakho ngabantu abathandana nabantu bobulile obufanayo njengesangoma nanjengelunga lomphakathi?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. Kungabe abaphansi bazizwa kanjani uma indima nobunikazi bendlalifa kuthathwa ndlalifa ethandana nabobulili obufanayo?

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. Kungabe ithini imibono, nendlela abantu abazizwa ngayo emphakathini mayelana nabathandana nabobulili obufanayo uma bexhumana nabasekho ngokushisa impepho?

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. Kungabe usuke wabona izinqinamba, inselelo kanye nocwaswa kwendlalifa ethandana nabobulili obufanayo ngesikhathi isisha impempo?

14. Kungabe yiliphi iqhaza nokulindeleke kwindlalifa ngokuxhumana nabaphansi ngokushisa impepho? Uma uthi yebo, nikeza izizathu?

15. Kungabe sikhona yini isiboneleo enoso laphi Isangoma sivumelena siphinde seseke ukushiswa kwemphepho ngothandana nowobulili obufanayo?

16. Kungabe zikhona yini izindlela zesiko ezingahambisani nokushiswa kwempepo ngumuntu othandana nabobulili obufanayo? Uma uthi yebo, sicela uchaza?

17. Kungabe ithini indlela abazizwa ngayo abaphansi uma imphepho ishiswa owesilisa othandana nabesifane, noma mayihiswa owesillisa othandana nabanye besilisa?

18. Kungabe ihona yini indlela abaphansi ababuka ngayo abashisi bephepho uma kuza ngakwezobulili babo?

19. Kungabe zithini izindlela zesiko ngokubandakanya izinkosana ezithandana nabobulili obufanayo ekushisweni kwempepo?

20. Usuke walubona ushintsho kusiko mayelana nezinkosana ezithandana nabobulili obufanayo ziphinde zishisa impepo?

21. Kungabe zikhona yini izindlala zesiko noma emphakathini ezibhekelene nokweseka imindeni ngezindlala ezahlikene ukuqonda ukuthi zivumelekile noma azivumelekile izinkisana/izindalifa ezithandana nobobulili obufanayo ukushiya impepo ukuze kuxhunyanwe nabaphansi?

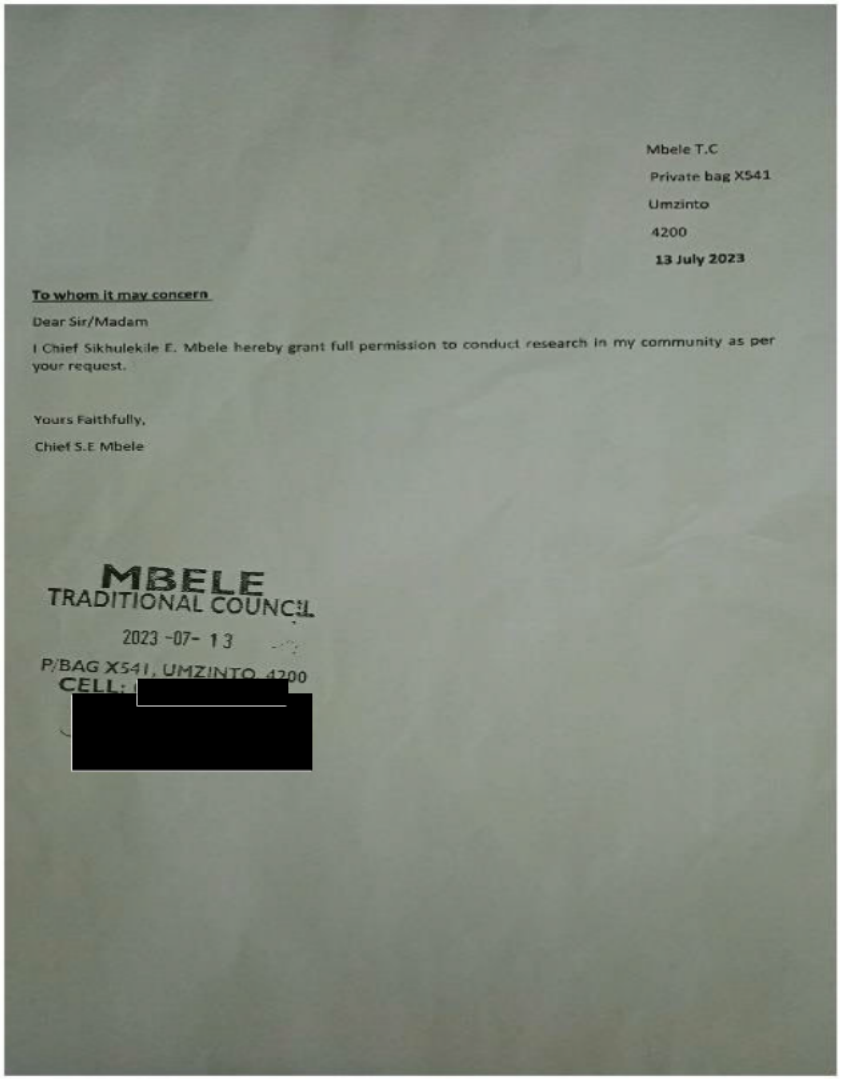
22. Sicela usilandise ngesibonelo lapho khona wabona noma kwenzeka phambi kwakho indlalifa ethandana nabobulili obufanayo ishisa impepho, kodwa abaphasi baphikisana noma bavumelana nokushiswa kwempepo owesilisa othandana nonobulili obufanayo?

23. Kungabe kukhona yini lapho ulwazi lwesintu luhambisana noma lucwasa khona ukushiswa kwempepo owesilisa othandana nowobulili obufanayo?

24. Kungabe engakwazi yini owesilisa othandana nabobulili obufanayo ukuba indlalifa yekhaya aphinde ashise imphepho ukuxhumana nabaphansi?

25. Singalusebenzisa kanjani ulwazi nokuqonda ukuxhumana nabaphansi ngokushiswa kwempepo ngabesilisa abathandana nabobulili obufanayo ukuqonda ukuhlukahluka nokuhlanganyela ukuthuthukisa ulwazi lwethu lwesintu olugciniwe?

# Appendix 3: Gatekeeper's letter-English Version



Mbele T.C
Private bag X541
Umzinto
4200
**13 July 2023**

**To whom it may concern**

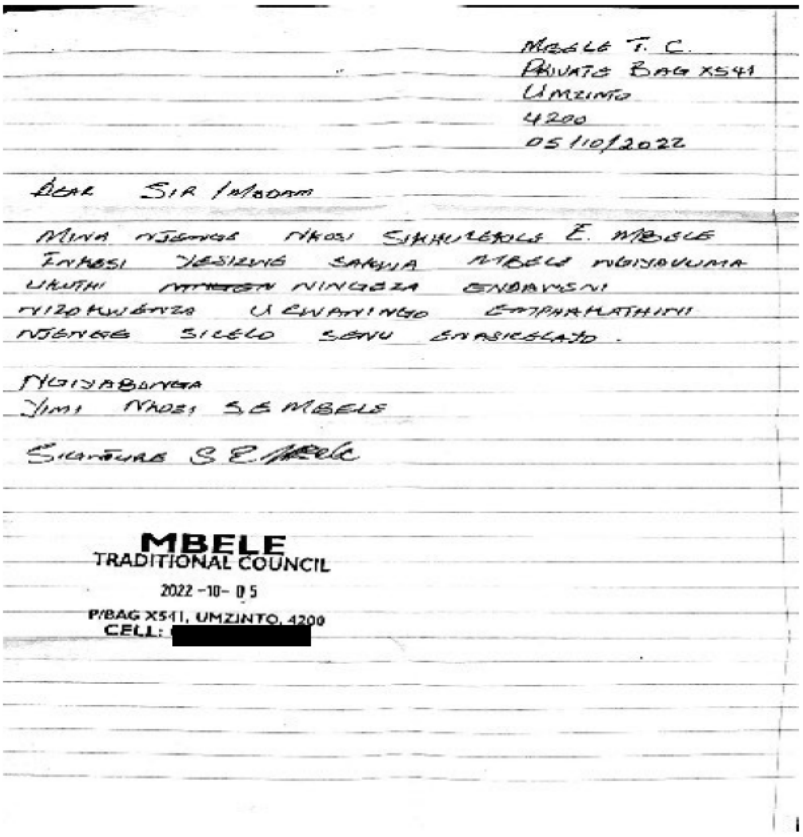
Dear Sir/Madam

I Chief Sikhulekile E. Mbele hereby grant full permission to conduct research in my community as per your request.

Yours Faithfully,
Chief S.E Mbele

MBELE
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL
2023 -07- 13
P/BAG X541, UMZINTO, 4200
CELL: [redacted]

# Appendix 3: Gatekeeper's letter-IsiZulu Version



MBELE T. C.
PRIVATE BAG X541
UMZINTO
4200
05/10/2022

DEAR SIR/MADAM

MINA NGISHO NGOKU SIKHULEKILE E. MBELE
IMVUME YESIZWE SAKHA AMBELE NGOKUVUMA
UKUTHI NGITHOLE NINGIZA ENDAWENI
NGIZOKWENZA UCWANINGO EMPAHLATHINI
NGENHLE SICELO SENU SAMUKELAJO.

NGIYABONGA
JIMI NGOZI S.E MBELE

SIGNATURE S.E Mbele

MBELE
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL
2022 -10- 05
P/BAG X541, UMZINTO, 4200
CELL: [redacted]

Powered by CamScanner

# Appendix 4: Ethical clearance

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

04 August 2023

**Zwanani Christopher Jeza (213518823)**
**School Of Social Sciences**
**Howard College Campus**

**Dear ZC Jeza,**

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00005654/2023
**Project title:** Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors? An anthropological study on cultural views of iZangoma in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal.
**Degree:** PhD

## Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 26 July 2023 to our letter of 11 July 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

**This approval is valid for one year until 04 August 2023**
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

.....
**Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)**

**/dd**

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

# Appendix 5: Turnitin report

PHD

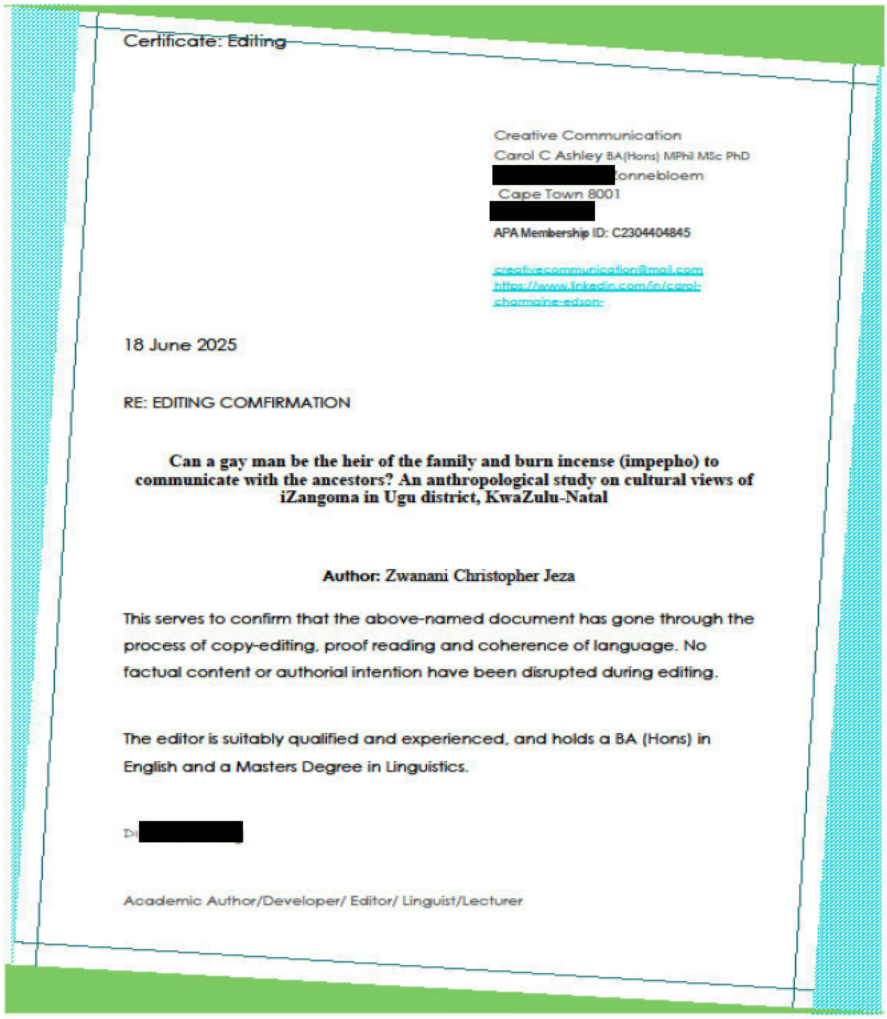
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| 5 | listens.online<br>Internet Source | <1% |
| 6 | Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal<br>Student Paper | <1% |
| 7 | Submitted to The University of the West of Scotland<br>Student Paper | <1% |
| 8 | "Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective", Brill, 1996<br>Publication | <1% |
| | Submitted to University of Zululand | |

# Appendix 6: Editorial certificate



Certificate: Editing

Creative Communication
Carol C Ashley BA(Hons) MPhil MSc PhD
[redacted]onnebloem
Cape Town 8001
[redacted]
APA Membership ID: C2304404845

creativecommunication@mail.com
https://www.linkedin.com/in/carol-charmaine-edson-

18 June 2025

RE: EDITING COMFIRMATION

**Can a gay man be the heir of the family and burn incense (impepho) to communicate with the ancestors? An anthropological study on cultural views of iZangoma in Ugu district, KwaZulu-Natal**

**Author:** Zwanani Christopher Jeza

This serves to confirm that the above-named document has gone through the process of copy-editing, proof reading and coherence of language. No factual content or authorial intention have been disrupted during editing.

The editor is suitably qualified and experienced, and holds a BA (Hons) in English and a Masters Degree in Linguistics.

Dr [redacted]

Academic Author/Developer/ Editor/ Linguist/Lecturer