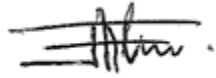


## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this dissertation has been edited in affirmation of the University of KwaZulu-Natal's policy on language editing.



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**CHAMMAH JUDEX KAUNDA**

# DECLARATION

I, Lindiwe P Mkasi, declare that the dissertation titled:

A threat to Zulu patriarchy and the continuation of community: A queer analysis of same sex relationships amongst Female Traditional Healers at Inanda and KwaNgcolosi, KwaZulu-Natal

unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is the result of my own investigation and research and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree or to any other university, and that all sources used have been acknowledged by means of complete references.



Lindiwe P Mkasi



Prof I. A. Phiri



Prof S. Nadar

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my mother Florence Qinisile Khuzwayo in Adams Mission. Her love, care and protection for her four children whom she raised on her own will never be forgotten. God bless all single parents.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I thank God for guiding me in all my life, through my studies and through the challenges of life. I am here today because of God's mercy, and it is to God that I give all praise. I thank God for allowing my ancestors to guide me through my studies and I acknowledge them even though it was difficult.

I wish to thank Prof Isabel Apawo Phiri for guiding me through my studies, training me to be an academic writer and for being a parent in time of difficulties. She is an inspiration to all of us. I also wish to thank my co-supervisor Prof Sarojini Nadar. All those sleepless nights have finally paid off. She is a superb encouragement to all young women and emerging scholars.

I would like to thank the Broken Women: Healing Traditions Project as well as the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics for funding my studies. Many thanks to my spiritual mother MaNdwandwe Bhengu and all traditional healers at KwaNgcolosi and Inanda who put aside their daily work to help me gather the information for my studies. I thank you for your courage and willingness to share your views with me. Every time I approached you for assistance you always availed yourself. Thank you very much and I hope your children will benefit from the knowledge you have shared with me.

I would like to thank the Khuzwayo family, my sisters Philisiwe and Khanyisile for their support during my studies.

I would also especially like to thank my children Wandile and Lebohang Mkasi. I have missed many activities at school due to my studies, and I thank them for their love and patience.

Thank you also to Bless Njinji who managed the domestic duties at home while I was away.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the Centre for Constructive Theology for having accorded me the opportunity to continue with my studies.



## ABSTRACT

Through a case study of female traditional healers who practice same sex relationships, this study attempts to provide some reasons for the opposition to same sex-relationships in Africa. The main question that the study grapples with is: If traditional healers practice same sex relationships, why does the Zulu community (and African communities in general) insist that same sex relationships are “un-African?” Given that homosexuality has been labeled as “un-African” and “un-cultural”, how does one explain the existence of homosexual relationships amongst Zulu *sangomas*, who are considered the custodians of culture?

The study draws on the experiences of ten female traditional healers from Kwa-Ngcolosi and Inanda. The data was produced through workshops, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Queer theory and African feminist cultural hermeneutics were the lenses through which the data was analyzed. The findings show that beliefs in procreation as a means for the continual survival of the ancestors in the community and beliefs in the supremacy of the male in society as demonstrated in the killing of lesbians are the major reasons for the rejection of same sex relationships in African societies. The study concludes that within the traditional belief systems of the ancestors, women do have authority and can choose alternative relationships. Furthermore, in the sphere of traditional healing, recognition is given to different sexualities.

## GLOSSARY

- Delela* - a jeans which a pants and top in one piece
- Ibheshu* - traditional attire made from cow hide and worn by Zulu males
- Ilobol* - bride price
- Isigodlo* - a sacred place for traditional healing
- Isangoma* - traditional healer – Isangoma (s); Izangoma (pl) Igobongo - a liquid that is a mixture of herbs placed in a dried pumpkin basin
- Istabane* - homosexual- istabane (s), izitabane (pl)
- Ingqeqe* - an animal which has three legs that is used by amaZulu for ukuthwala
- Inkonkoni* - a reference by Zulu people for homosexuals
- Inyanga* - an expert in traditional medicine
- Ithwasa* - a trainee sangoma- Ithwasa (s) Amathwasa (pl)
- Mamlambo* - a snake used for ukuthwala, mostly used by amaXhosa
- Muthi* - a medicinal mixture of herbs and/or animal parts
- Tokoloshe* - a man-made human / animal for witchcraft
- Ubizo* - a calling to be a sangoma
- Uncukumbili* - a person who is inter-sexed and identified as homosexual  
- Uncukumbili (s),Oncukumbili (pl)
- Ungqingili* - a reference used by elderly people for homosexuals  
- Ungqingili (s), Ongqingili (pl)
- Ukubhula* - consultation with the ancestors
- Ukuthwala* - a mixture of herbs or animal body parts used for the purpose of acquiring wealth
- Ukuthwasa* - the training for traditional healing
- Umemulo* - a traditional ceremony for young women hosted by parents indicating their permission for them to obtain a husband

## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AIC	African Independent Church
HIV	Human Immune Virus
LGBTI	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex
THO	Traditional Healers Organization



# KWA-NGCOLOSI MAP

The map is showing the Inanda area and Kwa-Ngcolosi where the research was conducted (NONA n.d).



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# CHAPTER ONE

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.0. Introduction

This study examines the same sex sexuality amongst female traditional healers (hereafter referred to as *sangomas*) in KwaZulu-Natal. It focuses on *sangomas* as cultural leaders since many African leaders perceive homosexuality or same sex sexuality as deviant behaviour which is un-cultural and un-African. It is important to note that the term “homosexual” is a western concept but it is used in the study to refer to same sex relationships. This study utilises both terms interchangeably. But the complexity of using western concept in an African context is that it loses its original interpretation. The study shows that the general idea in Africa is that homosexuality is not African but there is evidence of same sex relationships in some African countries.

Opponents of homosexuality in various African countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi and Uganda, to name a few, commonly use the argument that homosexuality is an “import from the West”. Yet narratives collected from *sangomas* amongst various ethnic groups in South Africa shows that homosexuality has always existed in various African cultures. The Zulu culture is no exception. Since *sangomas* are regarded as leaders and guardians of culture, it is assumed that they cannot be associated with such a form of sexual orientation. However, despite the negative attitudes towards same sex sexuality, research reveals that there are *sangomas* who practice same sex relationships (Nkabinde, 2008:68). Therefore this study, using feminist and queer theoretical lenses, aims to show that the objection to same sex relations in Africa in general, and among Zulus in particular, is a façade that hides concerns about procreation, patriarchy and power. This is well-articulated in chapter three where the researcher gives a reflection on challenges faced by a spiritual mother in a patriarchal society that demands that a female *sangoma* fulfils her role as a good wife, mother and a trainer.

## 1.1 Background of the study

The idea for this study was conceived in 2008, when I worked as a research assistant for a research project for Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar entitled: *Broken Women – Healing Traditions? Indigenous resources for gender critique and social transformation in the context of HIV in rural Inanda and KwaNgcolosi*. During one of the workshops, the topic of same sex relationships came up in the context of a discussion on HIV prevention, for further discussion on this issue refer to chapter two (Phiri and Nadar, 2009: 5-22). The reaction of the participants should be understood from the context where homosexuality in many African ethnic groups, including Zulus, is considered a taboo (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005:11). Within the debates on homosexuality in Africa, there have been a number of contesting voices. A prominent voice on homosexuality is that of the retired Archbishop Desmond Tutu who is well known locally and globally. In academic circles, a worthy example of such positive debates was published in the *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* volume 17.2, 2011 which places the debate in the field of Religion and Theology within the African context, but with the focus on South Africa. Furthermore, research on traditional healers in KwaZulu-Natal by anthropologists as well as historians has indicated that same sex relationships are cultural and not a Western imposition as argued by some of the African politicians and church leaders.

The study draws on the article by van Klinken and Gunda (2012) in which they point out that in African academic circles it is the African women theologians who have taken the lead on theorising homosexuality in religion and theology. Scholars within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians have addressed the issue of homosexuality as an issue of inclusive gender justice. Van Klinken and Gunda have further argued that “gender and sexuality are discussed in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and they have developed into progressive theologies of gender justice” but have not fully explored the issue of same sex relationships (2012:119). This is the gap that this research aims to fill.

According to Zulu culture, sexual matters are not discussed in public, especially by women in the presence of men. Furthermore, as Kanyoro argues, in a traditional society “to differ in matters of



culture is a taboo” (2002:10). Yet a heated debate ensued among the participants (whom some of them were males) on the issue of same sex relationships. Given that homosexuality has been labelled as “un-African” and “un-cultural”, how does one explain the existence of same sex relationships amongst Zulu *sangomas*, who are considered as the custodians of culture? To address this question, the following sub-questions were asked:

- i. Why is homosexuality considered “un-African”?
- ii. What is the link between the practice of traditional healing and same sex relationships?
- iii. Why do *sangomas* practice same sex relationships?

In line with the above questions, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To highlight the significance of traditional healing systems in Africa;
- ii. To demonstrate the existence of same sex relationships among traditional healers;
- iii. To investigate why *sangomas* in KwaZulu-Natal practice same sex relationships and
- iv. To demonstrate that the objection to same sex relationships lies in the beliefs about procreation, patriarchy and power and is not about same sex relationships being “un-African”.

This leads to the research question.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

The onset of HIV globally brought discussions about homosexuality to the fore. This is because initially, in the context of the United States of America and in Europe, HIV was first discovered in communities that were practising homosexual relationships. HIV has also opened up discussions about human sexuality in Africa among politicians, academics and religious circles. In this vein it has been argued by many African church leaders, politicians and scholars of religion in Africa that homosexuality is an unacceptable orientation in African communities. But current research reveals the existence of same sex relationships in Africa, but it does not show

*why* there is such fierce opposition to homosexuality or same sex relationships. Through a case study of female *sangomas* who practice same sex relationships, I have attempted to provide some reasons for the opposition to same sex relationships. The core question is: *If traditional healers practice same sex relationships, why does the Zulu community (and African communities in general) insist that same sex relationships are “un-African and un-traditional”?*

### **1.3 Theoretical framework**

In order to understand why same sex relationships are vehemently opposed in African societies, particularly in the Zulu culture, I will use two sub-theories within feminist theory. These theories are queer theory and the theory of feminist cultural hermeneutics. These two theories will be discussed in detail in chapter two.

### **1.4 Research Methodology**

#### *Location of the study*

The study is located in Kwa-Ngcolosi and rural Inanda in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (see map on page vii. The area that is inside the black square is the research area). The majority of people from Kwa-Ngcolosi and Inanda still rely heavily on traditional healing although some of them are Christians. The reason why the study includes these two areas is because the study was conducted in a specific *sangoma* training institution which has graduates in various areas around Durban. These areas include Inanda, Ntuzuma, Kwa-Ngcolosi and Kwa-Mashu just to mention a few. This study is limited to the *sangoma* training schools located in Kwa-Ngcolosi and Inanda because these two are close to each other. In Zulu communities like Kwa-Ngcolosi and Inanda, people trust and respect *sangomas* because they also play a leadership role in the community.

#### *Data Production and Sampling*

Three methods for primary data production were used: research workshops, focus group discussions and in-depth interviewing. This method of triangulation is important to ensure

collaboration of the research findings. The workshops formed part of a research project conducted by Phiri and Nadar in 2009. I was the research assistant and as the transcriber I had access to all the transcripts of their series of workshops. From the participants of those workshops I contacted ten people whom I identified based on their response on the topic of homosexuality during the workshops. During telephone conversations, participants were given a brief explanation about the follow-up to the study. It is from this group that I formed the second focus group of five female traditional healers and three male traditional healers, one local elderly woman and one local younger woman who come from traditional healer families. In this group, four of the participants practice same sex relationships and six were aware of the existence of such relationships and knew people who were in these relationships. It was explained that the follow-up research was about same sex relationships and traditional healing. We agreed on a date and met in one of the participants' homes. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants and they agreed to sign consent forms, consent forms were interpreted in local language (Zulu) (see appendix 1). The theme discussed with the focus group was limited to the existence of same sex relationships among traditional healers. From the ten participants I chose five female traditional healers for in-depth interviews. This is the group who spoke from their own experiences of same sex relationships. It is important to note that all participants are members of African Instituted Churches.

### *The Process of Data gathering*

The advantage of using the focus group is that people refresh one another's memory as they listen to each other's story. The disadvantage is that some participants take over the debates and others become silent participants where a researcher has to interfere. The challenge of this study was the topic itself, as mentioned above that sexual issues are not public issues. Whenever we meet I had difficulties of engaging people into a conversation. Often it took insistence to make them say something, especially at the beginning of the meeting. Another challenge was the time schedule. The time of meeting was not the time agreed on because of many reasons. First, was that I came while a *sangoma* was in consultation or was on calls with some other clients. Other times I was interviewed by the interviewee to hear my views about the topic whether I am against the homosexuality or not.

In addition to the above primary methods of data collection, secondary methods of data collection were also used. This involved literature research in the library; collecting data from the existing resources and published works on issues of homosexuality among *sangomas*. Media resources such as newspapers, articles, television documentaries and government gazettes were also consulted.

### *Ethical issues*

This research involved persons who have experienced traumatic and stressful life. Some of these traditional healers have not disclosed their sexuality because of violence and the stigma from the society. To protect participants I have use of pseudonymous names and assurance of confidentiality. I have also made an attempt to ensure the confidentiality of their responses.

## **1.5 Limitation of the study**

Traditional healers are very conservative when it comes to sharing their knowledge or their experiences. The reason for their reticence is that it requires them to take a step back into the past (initiation period) which is usually not a pleasant experience for any *sangoma*. As much as I am a *sangoma* I am also an outsider because I am an academia which differentiates me from them. Most of them are very sceptical and they believe that when outsiders approach the community to carry out research, they want to arrogate their knowledge and trade it to the western doctors. Nevertheless, I was fortunate to be given a chance to work with these female traditional healers as I was who enabled me to carry out this research.

## **1.6 The structure of the study**

Chapter one comprises the general introduction to the study, the research problem, methodology and the limitation of the study.

In chapter two the theoretical frameworks of the study are described which are queer theory and African feminist cultural hermeneutics. This chapter includes a detailed literature review of the theoretical frameworks with the aim of showing how academic studies in each theory have evolved. Special attention was brought to bear on how these two theories could be used as tools to analyse material on same sex relationships among female traditional healers.

Chapter three forms the locus of the study on traditional healers within the wider context of the concept of traditional healing in Africa. This discussion was developed in three sections as follows: a) the recognition of traditional healing in post-apartheid South Africa; b) the identification of the different types of traditional healers in South Africa; c) the training of the *sangoma*. It is within the training of the *sangoma* that the beginnings of homosexual practices are first identified.

Chapter four centres on a discussion of the experiences of the traditional healers same sex relationships. This chapter contains the findings from the field work. The data generated from the fieldwork has been divided into four themes, these being: a) Existence of homosexuality in the Zulu society; b) Male traditional healers and same sex relationships; c) Female traditional healers and same sex relationships; d) same sex relationships and beliefs about patriarchy, procreation and power.

Chapter five analyses different perspectives emerging from this study using queer theory and African feminist cultural theories. This chapter also provides theological reflections based on the emerging themes.

In Chapter six is a concluding summary and the conclusion of the study. The next chapter deals with conceptual and theoretical positioning of the research.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.0. Introduction**

The first chapter explored the background and motivation for this study and showed how this research builds on and expands on the work already completed in the area of same sex relationships in Africa and among female traditional healers. In this chapter a detailed literature review of the theoretical frameworks is presented. These theories are: Queer theory by Sullivan (2003) and Schippert (2005) and African Feminist cultural hermeneutics by Oduyoye (2001) and Kanyoro (2002). Special attention is given to how these theories could be employed as tools in analysing material on same sex relationships among the female traditional healers. Before engaging with the theoretical framework it will be helpful to first conceptually frame the study and the understanding of homosexuality in Africa.

#### **2.1. Conceptual understanding of homosexuality in Africa**

The aim of this section is to contend with the question of the existence of homosexuality in traditional African communities, which openly declare that homosexuality is not African. This issue will be addressed in three sections as follows; a) the debate that homosexuality is “un-African” and unnatural; b) Homosexuality amongst African women; c) same sex relationships amongst *sangomas*.

##### **2.1.1. The debate about homosexuality as ‘un-African’ and unnatural**

The general perception is that sex in African societies is associated with heterosexuality, which makes homosexuality ‘un-African’ and unnatural. Churches, schools and the communities treat heterosexuality as “normal;” anything outside of this category is considered as deviant (Collins,

2005: 37). Thus the majority of African political leaders deny the existence of homosexuality in African societies. They see homosexuality as a challenge to gender norms and a behaviour which undermines traditional social order. Moreover, it is viewed as an “imposition of western culture on traditional culture”). President Mugabe of Zimbabwe argues strongly that homosexuality is “non- traditional” and “un- African” (Jolly, 2000:82). Other African leaders like Sam Nujoma, former President of Namibia and Yoweri Museveni, current president of Uganda, reject homosexuality in African history and culture (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005:289).

African leaders believe that homosexuality is a result of western influence, although existing reports confirm that same sex patterns occurred in African societies during colonization, but were ignored by anthropologists and colonizers. Murray and Roscoe state that “the colonialist did not introduce homosexuality to Africa but rather the intolerance of it” (1998: xvi) To support this statement there are reports which confirm that homosexual behaviour was not uncommon in African societies. It was practiced among some of the youth by both males and females. In South Africa female husbands were known amongst the Sotho, Lovedu, Koni and the Zulus. Amongst the Lovedu, the Queen was forbidden from having a male husband and was required instead to have a wife (Murray and Roscoe, 1998: 255). Marriages between men were marked at Umkhumbane around the 1950s where anal and oral sex was practiced (1998: 175). Obviously homosexuality in Africa “is neither random nor incidental – it is a consistent and logical feature of African societies and belief system” (1998: xv).

However, public denouncement of homosexuality in these countries does not mean that it does not exist, as is shown by the research conducted by Morgan (2005). Murray and Roscoe’s research in *Boy Wives and Female Husbands* (1998) indicates the existence of same sex relationships in over fifty societies in every region of Africa. However, in the book, *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives* (2005), Morgan and Wieringa demonstrate that while the concept of homosexuality exists in Africa, it still remains a taboo topic in many parts of Africa. They argue that the reason for this is that the concept of “homosexuality” invented by Hungarian Bankert von Kertbeny in 1869 only gained popularity through the work of Havelock Ellis in the 1880s and 1890s. However, Parker and Aggleton have correctly argued that even



today there are some African communities who do not understand the meaning of the concept homosexuality although they are aware of same sex relationships (1999:22).

### **2.1.2. Homosexuality or same sex relationships amongst women**

In the global North, relationships among women began as romantic friendships among bourgeois women. Segal maintains that romantic friendship amongst women was referred to as “female husbands”. It is suggested that homosexuality started as a romantic friendship, or domestic partnership, as a way to control male domination (1997:209). Weeks states that women have always been close to each other, touching and holding hands, hugging and kissing, and whilst these actions are a way of showing love and comfort to each other, signs of sexual expression have also been evident (1989:116).

### **2.1.3. Same sex relationships amongst *sangomas***

There is little information about same sex relationships amongst women traditional healers or *sangomas*. In Africa, particularly in South Africa, very few articles or books have been published on female homosexuality (Murray and Roscoe, 1998: xx). Much information for this study is drawn from two books, entitled: *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My life as a Lesbian Sangoma* by Nkunzi Nkabinde and *Boy Wives and Female Husband: Studies in African Homosexuality* by Murray and Roscoe.

Morgan and Reid (2003: 378) cite Laubsche, a psychiatrist who, in 1937 wrote about same sex relationships amongst Zulu *sangomas* through the practice of “ancestral wives”. Laubsche argues that “forms of overt homosexual behaviour between women are described by female *Isanuse* [*sangomas*]” (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 378-379). However, it is not only through the practice of “ancestral wives” that same sex relationships exist.

The recent documentation on *sangomas* in same sex relationships by Nkabinde contains primary data collected in the 20th century. Nkabinde is the first *sangoma* to write about herself as a

lesbian. She explains that even if her ancestors did not want her to be a lesbian she could have not become one. (2008:67). She included reports about interviews she conducted with women *sangomas* from different ethnic groups in South Africa. Her work provides evidence of the existence of same sex relationships amongst traditional healers or *sangomas*. Nkabinde refers to *sangomas* she interviewed as lesbian. She says her ancestor (Nkunzi) wanted her to be a lesbian because her sexual desires are inspired by Nkunzi, who is also very sexually active (:67). She reveals that she once had a dream in which she saw herself male genitals. She highlights that the fact that *sangomas* take instructions from their ancestors; it would be considered taboo to reject instructions from Nkunzi. The question is: if Nkunzi did not possess Nkabinde, would she still be a lesbian? This a complex question because Nkabinde, seems to believe that she a lesbian because she is possessed by a male spirit. Would one ask: is it possible that there are some male *sangomas* who possessed by female spirit would are gay? Coming back to Nkabinde, at one time she was told to take an old women as her wife but she was not happy about that and she told her ancestors that she is too old for her. But it was clarified that they were not going to be intimate partners but was meant for inheriting the gift from her. To show that these relationships are sexual Nkabinde says:

Nkunzi loves woman especially young women. If I am with a woman of 21 or 22, normally Nkunzi will want to have sex with her. I will feel his presence as if someone is touching my shoulders and sometimes I see the legs and genitals of a man. This is one way he shows himself to me. I have more power when Nkunzi is in me, especially when we both desire the same woman. When this happens I change. I become strong. He takes control of my body and even the sounds I make are different.

Nkabinde continues that “if you have ever experience a touch of a women you will never want a man again” (2008:68). Phiri has also shown through her research in 2009 that same sex relationships exist among *sangomas* (As mentioned in general introduction that, this is a follow up research on Phiri’s work). Same sex relationship was one of the hottest issues which came up during this research, as much as the theme of the workshop was not about same sex relationship but participants agreed that it exists. One of the participants declared that she had taken a decision to engage in a same sex relationship because it was safer, as her husband refused to go

for HIV testing. This confession led to a heated debate about same sex relationships amongst *sangomas* (Phiri 2005: 84-92; Phiri and Nadar 2009: 5-22).

In comparing Nkabinde's work and the data collected from this study I have noticed that *sangomas* interviewed by Nkabinde mostly use western concepts, like gays and lesbians but the ones from this study use traditional concepts as shown in chapter four. Often they speak on same sex relationships not homosexuality.

## **2.2. Queer Theory and the study of Religion**

According to Schippert:

Queer theory as an academic discipline was named when feminist film critic Teresa de Lauretis introduced the term in the pages of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* in 1991. Emerging in the context of a conference on critical approaches to gay and lesbian sexualities and a conference on queer film and video, queer theory began at the intersection of theory and activism; queer theory intended to problematize the multiple differences in the production of dominant and normative categories of sexuality (2005: 90).

The background to queer theory can be found in film studies in the North American context and it has become an acceptable academic approach in most fields of humanities globally in the study of gender and sexualities. The disciplines of Theology and Religious Studies have also contributed to the discourse of queer theology as will be shown in this section. It is at the intersection of religion and queer theory that this study is located.

Since homosexuality is perceived as unnatural, queer theory is used in this study as a "deconstructive strategy that aims to denaturalise hetero-normative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality and the relation between them" (Sullivan, 2003:81). The purpose of placing this theory in African context is because it challenges traditional gender roles and sex norms and brings to the centre the sexualities of the marginalised people, such as *sangomas*. As much as *sangomas* have authority in the society but the patriarchal system is male centred,

only those who are brave enough to use that authority with the help of ancestors practice same sex relationships openly. Queer theory is relevant to this study because it refuses those labels attached to people of different sexualities, and “it is also concerned with the removal of pathologies of sexuality and gender behaviour” (Moorland and Willow, 2005:117). Labels attached to people of different sexualities in Zulu society have a negative connotation when compared to western concept that is more accommodative. Moreover, the Zulu concept is not as descriptive as western concept which is difficult for Zulu people in same sex relationships to identify with them. In Zulu society ordinary people who are in same sex relationships are ostracised but *sangomas* who are in same sex relationships are not discriminated. Reason being *sangomas* seem to carry out this leadership position of ancestors who are not to be disrespected at any cost and the society is aware that those people are powerful.

Queer discourse involves “all whose sexual identities and practices fall beyond the parameters of “hetero-patriarchy”; it also implies that sexualities can and will change over a life-time (Russell and Clarkson, 1996: 289). This implies that sexuality “must be viewed as a constructed category of knowledge rather than as a discovered identity” (Spargo, 2000:40). In order to clarify the deconstructive nature of queer theory as described by Sullivan and others above, it is important to first examine what is understood by hetero-normative and compulsory heterosexuality. Heterosexual relationships are generally understood to be between males and females, and what differentiates male from female is the sexual organ which is identified at birth. Therefore in most cultures it is assumed that the biological gender of the child determines the future sexual partner, and that always has to be with someone of the opposite gender. Therefore this heterosexual relationship is referred to as a “normal” relationship which makes same sex relationships abnormal. Contrary to this view, nothing is normal about a *sangoma*, the life of a *sangoma* is a mystery from the day of initiation onwards. A *sangoma* can never know what the ancestors have purposed for them. Their lives are controlled by the ancestors. Moreover, in African context as it has been mentioned before *sangomas* are expected to change roles, their gender is not fixed. Often female *sangomas* who are possessed by male spirit are referred to as Grandfather or Father as in ancestral name for Nkabinde who is called by Nkunzi, which is male cow (Nkabinde 2008:68).

As mentioned in chapter one and which is supported by the observation of Jolly, in Africa the prevailing view is that heterosexual relationships are the norm and that homosexuality is ‘un-African’ and unnatural (2000: 84-85). Moreover, the naturalisation of heterosexuality persuades women into heterosexual relationships, even those who are lesbian (Abelove, Barale and Halper, 1993:229). Furthermore, the pressure to conform to the societal description of women prepares women to become the “emotional and sexual properties of men”. Rich argues that “compulsory heterosexuality is an institution by which women have traditionally been controlled – patriarchal motherhood, economic exploitation and the nuclear family” (1993:228). Same things occur amongst the *sangoma* who marries because they do not want to be discriminated against. They keep their sexuality a secret, especially to protect their work (Nkabinde, 2008:121). *Sangomas* in same sex relationship are breaking the taboo and rejecting the hetero-normative understanding of life which is based on patriarchy; this behaviour compromises men’s privileges in the traditional society. This explains why they see homosexuality as a “direct or indirect attack on male right” (1993:239). It is within this context that one begins to understand the practice of “corrective rape” of lesbians, which has become common in the South African context. Even within South Africa, there are groups of activists who have used queer theory to protest against the killing of lesbians.<sup>1</sup>

Of particular importance to this study is the work of Schippert who has focused on establishing connections between queer theory and the academic study of religion. She has applied the subversive intentions of queer theory to critically engage with scholars in the field of religious studies, liberation theology and religious ethics. She has located the beginnings of the academic study of religion and queer theory in the late 1990s. Some of the prominent work in this field cited includes the works of Bob Goss (2002) *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* and *Take Back the Word, a collection of LGBT and queer readings of the Hebrew and Christian Scripture* edited by Mona West (2000). In these publications the scholars are challenging the Protestant Christian theological interpretations which label homosexuality as a sin. Furthermore, Schippert emphasizes how “queer theory and the Jewish question investigate the emergence of distinct

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<sup>1</sup>See protest on You Tube, *Action Against Corrective Rape*, Cape Town. South Africa of 15 May 2011.

Jewish and homosexual identities in the West – and their connections from the perspectives of Jewish cultural studies and queer theory” (2005: 94).

Mona West went further and examined what scholars of religion are saying in queer theory by focusing on two topics, these being, ethics without norms and queer agency and the materiality of bodies. First, under the topic of Ethics without norms, Schippert (2005: 95) has identified the following questions:

Can there be ethics that are not implicated in normativity or effect domination? Are there norms, or constellations of norms, that do not produce or require abjection of others? Can we describe ethics that can formulate value (and thereby produce valuable bodies) without at the same time producing or requiring deviants who must be disciplined? How are we to formulate such ethics and what would its embodiment or political manifestations look like? Does a queer theoretical view of power and resistance to identity prevent queers from having ethics (with values and norms), concrete political agency, and a practical theory of "sexual liberation" that can respond to the contemporary political climate?

Schippert is of the view that these questions are important when one is looking at queer theory from the perspective of liberation theology. These questions are of interest to this study too because African women’s theology belongs to the family of liberation theology from cultural and religious oppression and discrimination of women as will be shown later under African feminist cultural hermeneutics theory.

Furthermore, Schippert also examines *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, 2003) and points out that these scholars raise critical questions about a theology of tolerance towards homosexuality which focuses on hating the sin and loving the sinner, previously noted by Goss above. Of significance to this study is the analysis by Jakobsen and Pellegrini when they question tolerance towards homosexual people and the lack of freedom and democracy. Constitutional debates around religious freedom as an ethical project is supposed to create justice for homosexual people; instead they are discriminated against and use phrases such as “Love the sinner, hate the sin” to distinguish the spectators from the participants (2003:3).

This argument is relevant to the South African context, where religious organisations have also adopted the same stance of loving the sinner and hating the sin when referring to the issue of homosexuality. Secondly, under the topic of queer agency and the materiality of bodies, Schippert supports the argument held by Judith Butler that:

The materiality of the body is produced within regulatory regimes of heterosexuality. "Sex," far from being a natural fact or an existing category prior to the advent of cultural gender norms, can be shown to be "a performativity enacted signification (and hence not 'to be' at all) (1990: 33).

This quotation confirms what was stated earlier, that bodies are not fixed. Culture assigns meaning to bodies. However, in queer theory the focus is not only on the power to construct meaning but also on all the networks which make it possible for power to function or create meaning on bodies. This network is well-regulated by the prevailing heterosexual conditions. Within this context queer theory of ethics propagates the agency of resistance to the constraining of the body by heterosexuality. (Armour and St Ville, 2006:160). Schippert states that irrespective of all the power and network that constrains the sexed body to produce a normal gender, the expected performance might fail if this is considered as a threat which interferes with social norms. In these circumstances failure can be considered as a critical resource to shape norms (2006: 162). Certainly to normalize the performance of bodies is inappropriate as performances of bodies are subject to change but in African view this is not real because bodies are gendered. Mutwa speaks of "self", although he speaks in spiritual context but his description of self identifies with one's body developments, he state that "When a child is born, it does not possess self. The self builds up slowly of the memories and thought and the experiences as it grows into a man or woman" (1998: 568). Mutwa sounds right because every individual discover who she/ he through development stages.

According to Althaus-Reid (2003:110) there are "different bodies of the people of God in God's Trinity, everybody could belong without being forced to choose or assume a sexual identity". No bodies should be discriminated against in terms of gender. This is aptly stated by Goss when he says "The risen Jesus stand in solidarity with oppressed gay men and lesbian. The risen Jesus is the hope for justice" (Gos, 2002:160). Church leadership in African Independent Churches do

not agree with this view as people of different sexualities have been discriminated by the Church, most leave the Church. This is elaborated in chapter four in stories shared by participants who are members of the AIC. Schippert concludes by stating that the queerness of religion provides scholars of religion who use queer theory to study religious spaces and rituals in order to examine the non-normative sexual practices which impacts on sex and gender identities. In the next section I am interested in how African theologians have dealt with the issue of homosexuality.

### **2.3. African Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics in the study of homosexuality**

Theologians have defined African Theology in many different ways. For example, Mbiti argues that “African Theology is the articulation of the Christian faith by African Christians: both theologians and lay people. Christians ask themselves what their faith means to them and try to explain or simply live it within the context of their history, culture and contemporary issues” (1998:144). According to Desmond Tutu, African theology is concerned with “the relationship between the Christian faith and African culture and tradition” (Parratt, 1987:43). He believes that African theology is to “interpret essential Christian faith in authentic African language in the flux and turmoil of our time, so that there may be genuine dialogue between the Christian faith and African culture” (1987: 43). African theology give Africans an opportunity to be part of Christian faith as they have always felt in between, feeling as they do not fit into Christianity. This is because cultural practice is considered as paganism (Mutwa, 1998: 552).

The arrival of Christianity in Africa not only introduced western ideas to Africans but also appropriated their confidence, their identity and everything that defines them as African. Missionaries did not only undermine the African culture but they managed to erase from their memory valued aspects such as their cultural practice, land and wealth. They encouraged them to embrace western culture and in the process they lost everything (Bediako, 1995:230). Parratt and Mutwa) concurs by stating that “there was a tendency of missionary Christianity to devalue traditional African culture and especially to dismiss traditional religion as heathen or pagan. This



attitude left no room for a sympathetic appreciation of all that was noble neither in African culture, nor for the assimilation of traditional ideas and ritual into Christianity” (1987: 4, 1998: 552).

Having argued for African Theology rooted in African religion, this study will draw on African women’s theologies as they engage with African Theology; the sources drawn from African culture and African religions in relation to African women’s experiences. In particular, the study will use feminist cultural hermeneutics theory which focuses on a feminist critic of culture which is one of the sources of women’s theology. The feminist African cultural hermeneutics theory deconstructs life-denying elements in African culture and religion and promotes those elements which are life-affirming (Kanyoro 2002:5). Kanyoro states that feminist African “cultural hermeneutics puts every culture to scrutiny with the intension of testing its liberation potential at different times in history” (Kanyoro, 2002: 10). She concludes that feminist African cultural hermeneutics encourages a struggle for liberation of women from patriarchy and cultural practices that dehumanise women (2002:5). What this study will attempt to ascertain is whether same sex relationships among African women traditional healers can be considered as a cultural experience that is life-affirming and therefore worthy of using African feminist cultural hermeneutics to reclaim it openly as their normative identity.

In the article “What’s in a Name? – Forging a Theoretical Framework for African Women’s Theologies” (2006), Phiri and Nadar observe that African women theologians have been forthcoming in researching and writing on women and sexuality. They claim that:

Feminist cultural hermeneutics has therefore been used as a tool to analyse a variety of issues within African culture, including that of sexuality. Although sexuality has been widely engaged in feminist discourse in the West, it is usually discussed in the context of sexual orientation and reproductive rights. In contrast, amongst African women theologians, such issues are discussed in the context of rites of passage, including childbirth (women’s sexuality in the context of giving birth), menstruation (purity and impurity laws), circumcision (male and female), marriage (the patriarchal constraints within marriage and the different forms of marriage), and even death (practices such as widow-cleansing (2006: 6).

With this study I intend to depart from the way African women theologians have conducted existing discourse on the sexuality of African women. It will do so by focusing on “queering” the African women traditional healers who are considered as the vanguards of African culture and religion, because for a very long time their sexuality has been constructed as heterosexual, which has not always reflected their lived experience. Thus, whilst the African feminist cultural hermeneutics theory has proven to be helpful in understanding issues such as gender violence and harmful cultural practices, none of the works of African women theologians have actually used this theory to challenge the African cultural denial of the existence of homosexuality in African culture. In this study, the theory of African feminist cultural hermeneutics will be used to interrogate the argument that homosexuality is ‘un-African’, using culture as a basis for the argument. Furthermore, the theory will be used to assess the extent to which culture is being used as a means to deny full personhood to those of homosexual orientation. The work of African feminist theologians has thus far restricted the use of African feminist cultural hermeneutics to show how culture is used in ways that can be harmful to women. Here I will use the same theory and apply it to the homosexual orientated individual.

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the conceptual framing of homosexuality in Africa and has discussed the two theoretical frameworks of this study, which are queer theory and religion and African feminist cultural hermeneutics. These theories will be used as the lenses through which the critical questions will be responded to. Chapter three will discuss the concept of traditional healing in Africa, where the training of traditional healers for homosexuality will be explored.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **TRADITIONAL HEALING IN AFRICA**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

Chapter three explores the notion that African Christian identity is developed from indigenous cultures and their religious histories. This discussion is divided into four sections as follows: a) the recognition of traditional healing in post-apartheid South Africa; b) the identification of the different types of traditional healers in South Africa; c) the training of *sangoma*, and d) the spiritual mother, wife and family woman.

#### **3.1. The recognition of traditional healing in post-apartheid South Africa**

Since the study is about women traditional healers, it is important to provide a background to traditional healing and the role it plays in African societies. *Sangomas* and herbalists are important contributors to the primary health care system in Africa. Campbell accurately observes that traditional healers have been the main providers of health care in Africa for centuries but their work has been ignored because of modern western health care and technology (1998:1).

In post-apartheid South Africa, it was former Minister of Health Manto Tshabalala-Msimang who argued for the importance of Government-regulated *sangomas*, herbalists, birth attendants and traditional surgeons. Tshabalala-Msimang acknowledged the popularity of traditional medicine based on the fact that many communities practice and make use of this health care system. She quoted from the Department of Health records which indicated that some 70% of South Africans consult traditional healers. This resulted in the drafting of a Bill in 2003 which would regulate the work of *sangomas* and protect those who are *bona fide* healers. She estimated that about 200,000 traditional health practitioners stood to benefit from the legislation. However, the Bill was received with mixed feelings despite the South African Medical Association's view that any form of legislation would promote safety standards. This view was not embraced by Doctors for Life International, as they did not trust the efficacy of traditional

remedies. Although the Traditional Healers Organisation <sup>2</sup> welcomed the Bill, it was concerned about the poor consultation on the Bill. The voice of the Traditional Healers Organisation (THO) in South Africa is significant because it has 25 000 members who are affiliated to the organisation. The Bill was passed in 2004.

### **3.2. The identification of the different types of traditional healers in South Africa**

Pretorius (1999: 251) identifies three types of traditional healers; faith healers, herbalists and diviners (*sangomas*). Faith healers or prophets originate from African Independent Churches. This kind of healing is preferable for those who follow the Christian faith as other methods of healing are believed to be associated with witchcraft. Faith healers use water, candles, prayers and ashes in the healing procedure, although this may differ from church to church (Ngubane, 1977: 148).

The second method of healing is through consultation with a herbalist. A herbalist has indigenous knowledge in healing; this knowledge is inherited from a member of the family and is passed on from one generation to the next. During consultation a patient explains the situation to the herbalist who then prescribes medicinal remedies. It can be argued that the work of herbalists is similar to that of pharmacists where one seeks advice and can purchase medication. The herbalist does not have any supernatural powers and he or she is not possessed by spirits. By and large, herbalists do not undergo any special training except informal teaching (Thornton, 2009: 21).

The third group of healers are diviners or *sangomas*, who receive a calling from their ancestors to work on their behalf, to offer healing in the community. The ancestral spirits which possess a

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<sup>2</sup>The main organization representing traditional healers is the Traditional Healers Organization (THO), which has been around for more than four decades. It is entrusted to decrease the tension between western methods of healing and traditional healing. This organization originated in South Africa and has spread to the rest of the continent (Richter, 2003: 11). One of the main requirements for members of THO is to attend a workshop, which introduce them to its activities, Through observation THO has proven to be effective and helpful amongst traditional healers in KwaZulu-Natal as it visit the communities and facilitate traditional healers about HIV& AIDS and hygienic methodologies of healing. Through the attendance certificate they receive after attending THO workshops, traditional healers have permission to visit their patients in local hospitals.

person in order to take up the calling is referred to *idlozi* spirits, these spirits are relatives who has passed on. (Mkhize, 2009:11) A traditional healer has special intuitive powers regarding the patient's problem and the symptoms experienced even before they are verbalised (1998: 88). The Zulu community makes use of all three methods of healing described above but the focus of this study is on the third group of healers commonly known as *sangomas*.

A *sangoma* attends to the basic needs of the community. When there is illness or misfortune in the family a *sangoma* (or *sangomas*) is consulted to identify the problem and a ritual is performed to appease the ancestors (1999:107). *Sangomas* are entrusted to work honestly and to be truthful to the community because the spirit which possesses them operates on a high moral level (1977: 34). Their work is about healing, curing and protection, using natural health care programmes (1998: 2). According to Pretorius:

traditional healing does not treat the body only but provides multi-dimensional health care by using vegetable, animal and mineral substances and certain other methods based on the social, cultural and religious backgrounds as well as the prevailing knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding physical, mental and social well-being and the causation of disease and disability in the community (1999:250).

In modern times *sangomas* enter into traditional healing for different reasons. For some it is a calling whereas for others it is purely a commercial enterprise. It is important for this study to differentiate between the *sangoma* that has a calling and one who is in business because there is the perception that all *sangomas* are corrupt and involved in criminal acts (Munthali, 2006: 28). The criteria used to determine the difference between the two groups of *sangomas* is based on the reason why one chooses to be a healer. This study will also shed some light on differences between the two groups regarding same sex relationships amongst *sangomas*.

### **3.1.1. Traditional healing as a business (*Ukuthwala*)**

Munthali (2006:28) asserts that traditional healing is no longer a calling but can be viewed as a business practice. While this assertion may be valid, it is also important to differentiate between the type of training for *sangomas* who are in healing for business and those who are in healing for the welfare of the community. Those who are in business do not undergo the initiation

process where one is taught appropriate ways of taking care of nature and the role it plays in protecting and healing people (Rakoczy, 2004: 326).

The *sangoma* who is in healing for monetary gain goes through the process of *ukuthwala* (training). Wood (2008: 338) looks at *ukuthwala* as “the way economic, erotic and supernatural aspects are brought together in the practice of *ukuthwala*. This is a dangerous and powerful procedure for long-term wealth, widely believed to involve the ownership of a wealth-giving being”. The individual uses certain herbs and usually acquires an *umamlambo* (snake), which is believed to bestow wealth upon its owner. The *mamlambo* is well-known amongst the Xhosa people, whereas the focus group discussed the *Ingqeqe* (known amongst the Zulu people) which is an animal with three legs. However, the *umamlambo*'s owner is required to sustain the *ukuthwala* pact with sacrifices that come at great personal and moral cost. The significance of this process is that in the end the initiate will leave with a reward, which could be anything from herbs to reptiles and animals, a *tokoloshe* (human-made) and baboons (1977: 34). Mutwa describe *tokoloshe* as a faked death of a person who is used in witchcraft (1998:606)

During a focus group discussion it was pointed out that a received reward requires a blood sacrifice, be it human or animal. The sacrifice could be in a form of the blood of those related to or closest to the owner, such as family members. This process of *ukuthwala* is not only practiced by *sangomas* but also by spiritual leaders. Unfortunately this kind of practice perpetuates criminal behaviour in communities and places people's lives at risk. It is not related to healing but it is more a manipulation of power or witchcraft which makes use of evil spirits. Broster's argument that *sangomas* who are in healing through the use of *ukuthwala*, cannot perform the same duties as *sangomas* who have received a calling because there is no relationship between them and God (1981:23).

### **3.2.2 Traditional healing as a calling (*Ukuthwasa*)**

In traditional healing a calling is regarded as honourable and it is not to be taken for granted. One can only be a true *sangoma* after going through *ukuthwasa* or training. In order to fulfil a

calling, one needs a spiritual mother or father for guidance. Nkabinde (2008:48) explains the need for training of *sangomas* as “finding a balance so that we can live with respect for all life”. According to Mlisa (2009: 5) there is no unique way of defining *ukuthwasa* since it a personal journey. She says the amaXhosa define *ukuthwasa* “as an inborn gift that manifest in afflictions and crises as a person grows. In turn, afflictions and crises are viewed as a normal process to force a person to accept *ubizo* (a calling) as well as train the person how to deal with the odysseys of others” (2009: 7). Traditional healing is a holistic gift which is coming from God as it is believed that ancestors are close to God (Broster, 1981:23). Carton says traditional healing maintains social order in the community (2009:313). In the African world view there is no direct communication between the living and God but God is approached through ancestors with prayers and sacrifices. Nkabinde emphasises that “in training we find our place in relation with God” (2008: 54).

In the past, *ukuthwasa* was stigmatised as educated individuals and Christians would not publically admit that they have a calling because people who have a calling are perceived to be uncivilised or non-Christians. Often among Christians there is confusion as to whether ancestors are worshiped or venerated by African people (Stinton, 2010: 72). Nevertheless, Mlisa mentions that rejecting or not responding to one’s calling could lead to on-going crises and misfortunes for that person, to such an extent that it may be interpreted as madness or death (Nkabinde, 2008:51 and Broster 1981:22). An example of this is the case of Mayi Chimpondeni from the Chilombwe Healing Centre in Malawi. Phiri states that “Mayi Chimpondeni developed various sicknesses because she refused to accept a call from God. There was a time when Chimpondeni became blind and she began hearing voices speaking to her; she heard the voice saying ‘Mrs. Chimpondeni, I want you to do my work’ (Phiri, 2000: 272). While Chimpondeni associated her calling with God, many traditional Africans would interpret such a calling as coming from the ancestors; hence it is impossible to reject it and remain unaffected.

In the Zulu context, once a person has accepted his/her calling, they attach themselves to a training school indicated by their ancestors. At the training schools both males and females reside together as brothers and sisters at *esigodlweni*, (the household of a spiritual mother who

runs the school). Instructions on how one should behave while in training are laid down by the spiritual mother. The training period to qualify as a *sangoma* can last from one to ten years. The deciding factor for the end of the training period is the initiate's ability to raise funds for the closing ceremony. During the initiation period initiates are not allowed to be visited or to visit their spouses or children. They are expected to abstain from sexual activities and often live under harsh conditions (Campbell, 1998: 48). There are several food taboos that the *ithwasa* (the trainee) needs to observe. For example, she/he may not eat margarine, sour milk, eggs, cheese and milk because it is believed that these types of food increase the libido (Mlisa, 2009: 149).

There is no uniform curriculum for the training of a *sangoma* as it depends on how the spiritual mother/father (*sangoma*) was trained (Mlisa, 2009:18). The *sangoma* draws on skills acquired during her training; however, there may be changes when she trains her students (*amathwasa*) because of her experiential knowledge and the interaction that takes place between the *ithwasa's* own ancestors and the spiritual mother's ancestors. Dreams are communicating tools between the *ithwasa*, spirits and spiritual mother, as they all need to be connected to follow the instructions of training (Berglund, 1976:136) In training, the trainer is not only training the *amathwasa* but also their ancestors, which can be a challenge for a trainer. Nkabinde confirms this as she relates her own story, that it was difficult for her trainer to teach her stubborn ancestor by the name of Nkunzi. She continues by saying that there were times when Nkunzi did not want to accept that there are different races. He had to learn that, besides black people, there are also white people (2008: 59-60).

### **3.1.2. The training of *Sangomas***

There are different activities in the household and all of these form part of the training. On the first day or on arrival the *ithwasa* or trainee has to bring a goat which signifies that she/he has accepted her/his ancestors. Nevertheless, each training institution does things differently. The trainer (spiritual mother/father) burns incense and lights candles to report the *ithwasa* to her/his ancestors. The trainer calls upon his/her own ancestors, to join the *ithwasa's* ancestors and to assist the *ithwasa* through initiation (Mlisa, 2009:143). The ritual involves hiding all objects used for the ceremony. This includes hiding a goat, knife, and chickens. Hiding items from the



*ithwasa* is important because it signifies the beginning of the process of teaching *ukubhula* (divination). The *ithwasa* is required to consult with ancestors so that she can predict where things are hidden. This process tests the mental powers of the *ithwasa* and also marks her/his future because being a *sangoma* is about divination, being able to see what others cannot see, revealing secrets. In performing this ritual, three chickens of different colours are slaughtered. According to my spiritual mother, in whose school I was trained, the most important part of the ritual is allowing these chickens to stand on the head of the *ithwasa*, which is a sign that the ritual is accepted by the ancestors. The ceremony is marked by different practices like the drinking of Zulu beer, the drinking of goat and chicken blood, drinking and use of bile, application of clay on the body and changing the dress code (Mlisa, 2009:114). Various ceremonies are conducted during the grooming and teaching process until the *ukuphuthula* (graduation). The *ithwasa* receives a grass mat and a stick during the first ceremony; these are considered as tools used during divination.

It is important to note that all the costs incurred are covered by the *ithwasa*'s family or the trainee if employed, which, according to Mlisa (2009:65), is expensive and has caused problems for many who have undergone the training process, but for financial reasons are unable to reclaim their healing identities and remain lost or confused. Nkabinde concurs that the spiritual mothers/fathers are treating traditional healing as a business, when in fact being a *sangoma* is a gift, and therefore one can train a person without money (2008:67). Even though the cost of training is very high there are alternatives to assist the *ithwasa*.

While in training, the *ithwasa* has to acquire the skills of digging and mixing *umuthi* (remedies), divination or *ukubhula*, singing and dancing. A schedule for these activities is drawn up. Every morning at 03h00 the *amathwasa* wake up, burn incense, stir the *umuthi* (*igobongo*), induce vomiting and bath, using cold *muthi* (Mlisa, 2009:163). It is believed that cold water makes the *amathwasa* active and attentive. Afterwards they dance and sing while one of them beats drums. The dancing and singing is performed to invoke the spirits and this is the time where others go into a trance and communicate with ancestors (Janzen, 1992:1).

Divination or consultation (*ukubhula*) is an important aspect of training as mentioned above. The quickest way to learn *ukubhula* is when the family members of the trainer, especially children, hide essential objects from the *ithwasa*, like a special stick that is always carried by the *ithwasa* or a hand woven grass mat that is received on the first day (Nkabinde, 2008: 104). These are regarded as important divination tools that must always be available. If these are intentionally hidden, it forces the *ithwasa* to consult the ancestors. Another way to learn *ukubhula* is to observe the *sangoma* when people come to the *esigodlweni* (shrine) for this purpose. The *ithwasa* is also given a chance to prove her/his capabilities and do the consultation but she/he will be assisted by a spiritual mother or father, should he/she fail.

It is forbidden to wear shoes in the shrine; the *ithwasa* is not allowed to wear shoes at all during the entire training period. The *ithwasa* is also only allowed to sit on the grass mat on the floor. The *amathwasa* or anyone who enters the shrine is supposed to stoop when approaching the shrine as a sign of respect because it is a respected and holy place. All the ancestral activities and ceremonies are performed here; the consultation equipment is also kept in this place. The only people who are permitted to enter the *isigodlo* are the *amathwasa* (*trainees*), patients, *isangomas* and members of the family on special occasions. However, training schools differ. Some schools do not allow women who are menstruating, have had miscarriages, have recently had sexual contact or who have recently attended a funeral, to enter the shrine as it is believed that such persons will weaken the strength of the *umuthi*. It is therefore a requirement that they can only begin to use *muthi* and enter the shrine *after* they have gone through a cleansing process.

Learning about various herbs is crucial for the *ithwasa*, as it is one of the skills required to become a *sangoma* (Nkabinde, 2008:56). The trainer takes the *amathwasa* into the bush to search for various types of herbs (Mlisa, 2009:164). The trainer imparts knowledge on caring for nature to the *amathwasa*. The *amathwasa* learn how different trees, stems, branches, leaves and roots can be used for the treatment of various diseases. More importantly, the trainer/*isangoma* teaches the *amathwasa* about nature conservation and how to benefit from trees without destroying them. As Rakoczy (2004: 326) rightly observes, in traditional spirituality, God is part of nature and He reveals Her/Himself through nature. Therefore the trainees/ *amathwasa* are taught to relate to

nature in a respectful manner. They are taught methods of removing and cutting down trees which allow for quick recovery. In this way the trainee learns how to conserve trees for future use. The respect for nature is also displayed in the ritual of entering the forest which often takes place early in the morning before sun-rise. When entering the forest the trainer and the *amathwasa* kneel down and burn incense and spill snuff (traditional tobacco) on the ground, for permission to enter the forest and for protection against snakes and animals while they are looking for *muthi* or different herbs (Nkabinde, 2009:164).

Visiting other schools is a way of socialising for the *amathwasa* since they are not allowed to go anywhere but spend most of the time at the *esigodlweni*. The spiritual mother often receives invitations from other trainers to attend festivals and ceremonies. These visitations are part of training where the *amathwasa* learn through participation and observation. During the visits, some training schools treat the *amathwasa* with kindness while others treat them like slaves. Spiritual mothers are not expected to defend their *amathwasa* when they are ill-treated because they may be perceived as being lenient towards the *amathwasa*. This negative treatment is meant to make them strong and enables them to face challenges they will encounter in the future. During these festivals the *amathwasa* do everything, from slaughtering and washing to serving graduated *sangomas*.

### **3.3. A spiritual mother, wife and family woman**

In a patriarchal society every woman is expected to marry and have children. A married woman is the centre of the family; she is expected to look after the children, take care of her husband and fulfil her duties at home. For married female *sangomas* all these tasks are doubled and need special attention. Under such circumstances, Phiri (2002: 276) observes that women are known to have the ability to multi-task; they care for their families and they are able to still practice as *sangomas*. Based on my observation, one cannot deny the challenges that come with it; a spiritual mother assumes multiple roles: that of trainer, wife and mother. She is a mother of two families: her biological family and her spiritual family. One of the challenges that a spiritual mother encounters in performing her duties is spending most of her time working away from

home or working at night. This directly affects her biological family's lifestyle. Unfortunately this cannot be changed because in traditional healing, ancestral work is prioritised. A spiritual mother will often involve her children in her healing work. Thornton (2009:23) confirms my experience, that when a *sangoma* is not available at home, the children participate in training the *amathwasa* in *ukubhula*, (divination) by playing a game of hide and seek of objects with them.

Since most of the time a *sangoma* cannot fulfil the expectations of a good wife, according to tradition, this often discourages some *sangomas* to commit to marriage. A patriarchal society such as the Zulu society expects female *sangomas* to marry, although these marriages do not succeed (Nkabinde, 2008: 110). If they choose to marry, it is not uncommon to allow their husbands to engage in polygamous marriages. A second wife provides for the sexual needs of the husband when a *sangoma* is preparing for specific prayers or rituals because during this period she is expected to abstain from all forms of sexual activities (Nkabinde, 2008: 110). During the praying period, a husband may not touch his wife, which is problematic, as in this society sexual activity is the husband's right and a woman does not have the power to deprive him thereof (Sistig, 2010: 22).

Even though women have limited choices when it comes to sexual matters, the ancestral belief system can provide a safe space for *sangomas* (Sullivan 2003: 120). Ancestors have the power to decrease the libido of a *sangoma*. This serves as a precaution to make sure that there is no sexual activity during prayers. This encourages a *sangoma* to concentrate on her work. In Phiri's work, it is stated that often a *sangoma* who is sexually active does not work effectively because sex is regarded as unclean and can weaken the medicine (Phiri, 2006: 163). She also offers this as a reason for some of the female *sangomas* to be in same- sex relationships. A spiritual mother who is in a heterosexual relationship is not in control of her sexuality, but the one in a same sex relationship, by virtue of her legitimate power of being a *sangoma* is, and as such can dictate the terms of the relationship.

### 3.4. Conclusion

This chapter had as its nexus the centrality of traditional healing in South Africa. The recognition of the THO by the South African government is a breakthrough for a number of *sangomas* who remain truthful to their healing practice. It is evident that not all *sangomas* are sincere. There are some who join the profession in order to amass wealth and are involved in evil practices. It is in this abuse of the traditional healing system that one appreciates the need for a controlling body to regulate the work of traditional healers and protect unsuspecting people from being robbed by corrupt *sangomas*.

Emphasis was placed on how authentic traditional healers are called and trained; how *bona fide* training schools for traditional healers play an important role in preserving the environment and natural resources as they search for herbs. The chapter also showed that traditional healing requires sexual purity and cleanliness which has contributed to some women *sangomas* choosing alternative sexual behaviour or same sex relationships, not because the same sex relationship is pure, but in same sex relationships both partners share a mutual understanding, and one partner is not superior to the other. A *sangoma* who is in a heterosexual relationship is not in control of her sexuality, unlike her counterpart in a same sex relationship.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

# **EXPERIENCES OF SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS AMONGST TRADITIONAL HEALERS**

### **4.0. Introduction**

Chapter three set out the background to traditional healing in an African context, using the Zulu from South Africa as an example and showing that traditional healing is still relevant in African communities today. The differences between genuine healing practice and healing practice based on purely commercial gain were also discussed. Emphasis was placed on the process of training genuine *sangomas* and the role played by the spiritual mother who runs a *sangoma* training school.

Chapter four will now turn to a discussion of the traditional healers' experiences of same sex relationships and the findings from the field work. The data generated from the field work has been divided into four themes, these being : a) Same sex relationships in Zulu society; b) Religious beliefs towards same sex relationships, c) Traditional healers in same sex relationships, d) Female traditional healers and same sex relationships and e) Same sex relationships and beliefs about patriarchy, procreation and power.

### **4.1. Same sex relationships in Zulu Society**

As mentioned earlier in this study, the word 'homosexual' as such is not used in the Zulu context; hence this study will refer to same sex relationships. It must be noted however, that both secondary literature and life studies show that same sex relationships do exist in the Zulu community. This is not a recent phenomenon but is as old as the Zulu community itself. To confirm this, there are traditional concepts used by Zulu people to refer to people who practice same sex relationship. These terms include, inter alia, *ongqingili*, *inkonkoni*, *oncukumbili* and *izitabane*. In rural areas they are called *ongqingili*, *inkonkoni* and *oncukumbili*, especially by the

elderly whereas the younger generation in urban areas call them *izitabane*. This study is not concerned with the etymology of these concepts, but clarity of the term ‘*uncukumbili*’ is provided to avoid any misconceptions. In both focus groups and in-depth interviews, it became evident that Zulu people use all four concepts to refer to same sex relationship, but use the term *uncukumbili* to refer to an individual who has two sex organs, a female and a male organ (hermaphrodites).

Focus group discussions revealed that in a Zulu context, to give birth to a child who is a *uncukumbili*, is the same as giving birth to a disabled child, which is often perceived as a curse (disgrace) in the family. The birth of such children would be interpreted as a result of disobedience on the part of the parents to the commands of their ancestors. The stigma attached to this belief results in negative attitudes towards the child and the parents by the society. In most cases this leads to the parents relocating their child to live with relatives who live far away. All this is shrouded in secrecy as discussions about a person’s sexuality are deemed as taboo in the Zulu community. For this reason people are not always aware of others with different sexual orientation. Since traditional society does not discuss sexuality, one wonders about the rationale behind the denial of same sex relationships in African societies. The focus group discussions suggest that current religious beliefs may be responsible for this view.

#### **4.1.1. Religious beliefs towards same sex relationships**

The argument against same sex relationships amongst African societies is based on African traditional religion and Christianity. In both religions same sex relationship is perceived as an immoral act, a sin or aberrant behaviour which is against nature. The participants from the focus group and the in-depth interviews indicated that parents who have a child who shows signs of homosexuality take her/him to a traditional healer or to a church. It is believed to be something that can be healed through prayers or traditional medicines. One of the participants who is in same sex relationship shared her experiences as follows:

You know, I cannot count how many traditional healers I have been taken to, pastors to pray for me, diviners, I cannot count. My parents gave me Vaseline from Kwa-Shembe to apply because I have a demon (Participant A, 8/10/2011).

The prayers for healing are supposed to cure her from homosexuality. If there is no change one is then excommunicated from the church and in many cases those who have homosexual leanings voluntarily leave the church. Others, such as in the case quoted above, have tried different ways to be healed from homosexuality as they are told that homosexuality can be cured through healing.

Another participant shares her experiences as follows:

I knew I felt for girls although I didn't understand what it was. I went to different churches but the problem was still the same. People were gossiping about me as I moved from one church to another. People talked behind my back. I decided to move out of the church. From there I stayed away from the church because I didn't know how to help myself. I prayed, I fasted I did all I could but it didn't help. I am still like this today. It has been four years now I am not going to Church. I am scared of what people may say about me. This is stressful for me because I love God but there is nothing I can do. The community and the church do not like us, so I just drink (alcohol) to forget all about it (Participant B, Kwa- Ngcolosi, 11/10/2011).

One of the participant in a group share her story

There was a time where I didn't understand what was going on in my life, if I go to church, people would say Sodom and Gomorrah. I thought, "No ...". One day I stood up in the Church and I raised my hand. I said, 'I repent because I see that life is not good'. I said, "God change me, change me". But after repentance my dressing code was a problem to the members of the church because I could not wear skirts, unfortunately I cannot wear a skirt. Moreover, having done all that, I was raped and infected with HIV. I was devastated, I hated God. I said "God why did you let this happen to me?" There are times when you call God and He is nowhere to be found. I said there is no God. I had to try because I wanted to fit in, telling myself that there is no such thing as 'istabane' (homosexual). One day I prayed, I said, 'God what is it, that I did, that is so wrong?' He said, 'Go and read your Bible, you are not a mistake, you are not a mistake'. I said, "God, I will work for you, being homosexual as I am. I said, I know you, as my Lord and my Saviour, you saved my life" (Participant H, Ntuzuma, 04/10/2011).



From the above narratives, it is clear that the church believes that same sex relationship can be cured as it is perceived as unnatural behaviour. The church, through its actions, is promoting stigma which makes it difficult for a person who has a homosexual orientation to remain in the church. The above accounts reflect the internal struggle that people with homosexual orientation undergo. One has a commitment to God but is driven away from God and the church, because of stigma. Such a person is driven towards destructive behaviour, like alcohol consumption, and sometimes becomes a victim of rape which often results in HIV infection. The contents of these accounts are an indication that the church has failed in its expression of unconditional love of the Triune God.

## **4.2. Traditional healers in same sex relationships**

The discussions resulting from the workshops, the focus group and in-depth interviews reveal that some *sangomas*, both female and male, practice same sex relationships. Some female *sangomas* have secret relationships while others speak openly about it. It is reported that male *sangomas* are frank about their sexuality compared to female *sangomas* and this behaviour is also observable in *sangoma* training institutions. A brief discussion of one of the main reasons that lead to same sex practices amongst male *sangomas* is provided hereunder.

### **4.2.1. Male traditional healers and same sex relationships**

The focus group discussion revealed that there is *umuthi* which is mixed with male semen and is perceived as a powerful medicine which can attract more customers. Therefore, in order for one not to run out of this mixture, one has to be sexually active. Nevertheless, there is a belief that male *sangomas* who use this *muthi* should not be sexually involved with their wives or any female as this would render the *muthi* ineffective. The group argued that this only occurs amongst male *sangomas*. This may explain why ordinary African men are not concerned about homosexual men as they understand that their relationship is predominantly perceived as being related to their medicinal rituals. Unfortunately the participants did not perceive a link between these practices among male traditional healers, who probably have sexual relationships with

many partners whenever they need semen for medicines – and the fact that it could lead to sexually transmitted viruses like HIV and AIDS. What becomes clear from the conversations is that the community is aware of such male relationships but seem not to object to these. However, this issue is not within the scope of this study and will require further research.

### **4.3. Female traditional healers and same sex relationship**

The participants in this study clarified the existence of female traditional healers and same sex relationships in terms of spirit possession. The sexual behaviour of a *sangoma* depends on the gender of the spirit that possesses him/her. According to this study there is a relationship between same sex relationships and spirit possession. Since ancestors take control of a *sangoma*'s life, it is believed that ancestors sometimes may interfere with a *sangoma*'s sexuality. According to the participants, three categories of spirit possession can be identified: a) a female spirit in a female *sangoma*; b) a male and a female spirit in a female *sangoma*; and c) a male spirit in a female *sangoma*.

#### **4.3.1. Female spirits**

A *sangoma* who is possessed by a female spirit might be interested in males or in females. She can be in a heterosexual relationship or in a same sex relationship. If she is in a same sex relationship, this means the spirit that possesses her is not interested in men but appreciates women, i.e. it is a lesbian spirit. This woman will not marry a man but will prefer to live a celibate life or practice same sex relationships secretly. These secret relationships are not easily identified by the community because they start as ordinary female friendships. This can also happen in the partnership between an initiate and a trainer during or after the period of training to become a *sangoma*. Weeks rightly points out that such relationships are easily concealed from society because “women have always been close to each other” (1989:116). To illustrate this point, one participant shared with the group that:

When my husband was not around I took local girls and slept with them in his bed. I would be very happy knowing that I would have my girlfriend over (Participant H, Ntuzuma, 04/10/2011).

The above quotation confirms that being a female *sangoma* provides a safe space for the *sangoma* to be in secret relationships amongst themselves or with trainees or other ordinary women. Unfortunately, as argued by Collins, “the invisibility of gay and lesbian relationships helps to normalise heterosexuality, fuel homophobia, and support heterosexism as a system of power” (2005:108).

#### **4.3.2. Male and female spirits**

The participants pointed out that a female *sangoma* who is possessed by a female and a male spirit, i.e. a bisexual spirit, is likely to be in a heterosexual relationship while they also have clandestine relationships with a woman. Even if a *sangoma* marries, she might have a relationship with a woman in her husband’s family or outside the family. Thus if the spirit in her wants a woman, she will sleep with a woman. Similarly if the spirit in her wants a man, she will sleep with her husband. She is, therefore, comfortable in both relationships.

#### **4.3.3. Male spirits**

The participants explained that there are two types of male spirit possessions. One type of male spirit possession allows a *sangoma* to get married in a heterosexual relationship as expected of her by the community. This group of *sangomas* often experience serious problems in heterosexual marriages because they find it difficult to fulfil the woman’s role. They do not derive pleasure from having intercourse with a male. One female participant from the focus group reported that:

When a woman is possessed by a male spirit, you can see that her behaviour changes, she acts like a man. Everything that person does changes. I feel sorry for young women who are possessed by a male spirit because when ancestors do not want men, they actually don’t want men anywhere near them... You actually feel it, yourself,

that you do not want him. It happens to me but I am safe because I am a grown woman and I already have children. My concern is what if this happens to a young sangoma. Firstly, a family is based on a sexual relationship between men and women. When a man looks at you, the only thing he wants is the vagina. If you don't want to have sex with him he will have nothing to do with you (Group in Kwa-Ngcolosi 05/10/2011).

Male participants agreed that the ancestors can prevent sexual relationships between two people, but they offer women another option. They suggest that women should consider polygamy because it is part of the culture. As far as they are concerned, a husband should be given another wife who will be of service to him during the period of abstinence. The women were not in favour of polygamy but agreed that it seemed the only option in a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, this is not a voluntary decision but it is the only way to prevent a situation whereby a husband might choose to have external affairs with many women in the community. To protect the family and the clan name, polygamy is considered. Women *sangomas* agreed that polygamy is an option, although it has its challenges. They pointed out that, in a polygamous marriage, wives often develop animosity towards each other. A participant shared with the group that:

I don't want to be in a polygamous marriage because the new woman often causes problems in the family, instead of looking after her husband, she will go after you. We (women) do not accept it anymore (Participant G, Kwa-Ngcolosi 05/10/2011).

During the discussion it was observed that some *sangomas* would rather be in same sex relationships than be part of a polygamous marriage. Those possessed by male spirits are more likely to have female partners, to prevent problems with ancestral spirits. Irrespective of all the problems women *sangomas* encounter in heterosexual relationships, men did not see same sex relations as a solution. Instead, one of them said:

You should not be submissive to your ancestors, "you cannot let your ancestor turn you into an istabane (Participant F, Kwa- Ngcolosi 05/10/2011).

Nevertheless, the group had different views on a female *sangoma* who is possessed by a male spirit. Often *sangomas* possessed by male spirits end up in divorce, and, if possible, such women prefer not to enter into marriage at all. The only reason these women choose heterosexual relationships is the fear of rejection by their society. Therefore she sacrifices her happiness for

others, and accepts to get married to a man. According to the group, this is because to her, the need to belong to the family means more to her than her sexual freedom.

The second type of male spirit is more authoritative, more controlling; it plays a dominant role in a female *sangoma*'s life. Physically these women are often more masculine than feminine. They feel more comfortable in men's clothes. They walk like a man and speak like a man. Thus male characteristics are observable in a *sangoma* who is possessed by this spirit. To illustrate this point, one of the participants who were possessed by an authoritative male spirit shared her experience about her first sexual union with a man. One participant shared her story:

I tried to have a boyfriend I nearly died but I had to try because I was scolded at home and girls of my age teased me. Others were getting married and some had children. My grandma used to ask me "When do we get to see your boyfriend - do you want to bring an unknown child into this family?" I knew what I felt although I didn't know how to explain it. After many years of avoiding men in my life I decided to have a boyfriend because I was tired of being mocked every day. The first visit to my boyfriend was also the last one because my whole body was sore, I was very sick for one whole week. This was a clear sign for me that I was not meant to have a male partner. Since then I have never slept with a man but I have had a few female partners and I have no problems (Participant G, Kwa-Ngcolosi 11/10/2011).

The participants also reported that female *sangomas* with a male spirit are not questioned by their community regarding their preference for female partners because they are deemed 'unapproachable' due to their display of male characteristics. Their physical appearance speaks for itself that "I am a man". The woman who was telling the story also had a male character.

Another story was shared of a female *sangoma* with a male 'authoritative' spirit. This *sangoma* was permitted to marry a woman according to the traditional customs of the Zulu. The story is as follows:

Same sex relationships do take place amongst women but I don't know how. I have witnessed something like that. There was a woman in my neighbourhood; she was my Auntie's age. While they were teenagers, they used to go to festivals as virgin girls. There is one thing which confused everyone when there was a festival or ceremonies. Since they were all virgins, this girl did not bath with others, during her *memulo* and when it was time for bathing, my Aunt said she took her soap and went down to the river. She used to bath alone, privately and she came back when she was

done. From the river she would cover herself with a bath towel and she would go straight home, not mingle with other girls. When everyone was dressing for memulo she was wearing 'ibheshu (cow's skin)', holding her stick. Everything she did on that day it was like, she was in a male character. Men would say "I like girl "so and so" but I am afraid of her, she is like a man". When you looked at her, she was built like a man, the thing that usually helped was her face, when you looked at her you would recognize that she was a woman, she was beautiful. She was light in complexion with small cuts in her face but when you looked at her from the neck down, she was a man. She stayed a long time without a boyfriend and everybody assumed that her problem was caused by her ancestral spirit. They took her for training, she came back, completed her training, and she was a sangoma. When everyone thought it was time for the sangoma to get married, she took her shield and went out and proposed to a girl. Everyone was shocked. Surprisingly the girl she approached agreed. The bride-to-be used to be seen around the sangoma's hut. Finally they got married. If you think about it "how was she supposed to get children"? (The story teller asked the group).

A male participant intruded and argued that "marriage didn't go anywhere." The woman continued:

It went somewhere because the ancestors had planned this. After a while the woman was pregnant. One of the sangoma's brothers had made her pregnant. It was arranged; the family grew and became a big family. The ancestors talked to her because they didn't want that house to vanish. They wanted the clan name to continue; they wanted the people to say this is the house of 'so and so.' The sangoma's heart was softened by her ancestor to let the brother sleep with her wife; she had three children by the same brother. The wife stayed in the family and she didn't fall for the brother-in-law. The brother also got married and he had his own wife and children. That sangoma died recently, she was older than us. We were still in school at that time. This sangoma was working, people used to say "We are going to Healer So and So". Even when you came for consultation she would be wearing short pants, her in-laws understood her situation. But she was really beautiful, she looked like a doll but come down to this part (pointing from the neck down) wee..... a real man, everything was twisted. You wouldn't say two or three words to her, she would take her sticks and your head would be bleeding in no time. Men of her age were afraid of her. When other women wore traditional attire for celebrations she would wear jeans, we used to call those jeans 'delela' (Participant F, Kwa-Ngcolosi 05/10/2011).

In my observation women who are possessed by this kind of a spirit tend to be patriarchal. They do not want to associate themselves with any roles performed by women. They expect their

women to be submissive to them as is the case in heterosexual relationships. Therefore in the local communities where they come from, these relationships are perceived to be male – female relationships rather than same sex relationships. This is because they are also fulfilling society’s goal for the marriage, which is to have children in order to perpetuate the legacy of their family lineage. It also becomes clear that the reason why many Zulu communities become violent towards homosexuals is because it interferes with procreation, which will be the topic of the next section.

#### **4.4. Same sex relationships and beliefs about patriarchy, procreation and power**

While female traditional healers in same sex relationships are protected by ancestors in their position as community leaders, ordinary women who are in these relationships do not enjoy the same protection. Firstly, this was confirmed during an e.TV 3rd Degree programme in February 2012, when a man was asked to share his views on homosexuality. His response was:

I don’t have a problem when a man dates another man but when a woman dates a woman that is not right. Women should be dating us.

This statement is also reflected in the findings of the research by Murray and Roscoe who confirm the existence of “boy wives” in Zulu communities (1998: 179). However, the speaker on ‘3rd Degree’ confirmed the traditional societal opposition to women who live openly in same sex relationships. Thus loving another woman openly becomes a risk as they become victims of violence and many women are raped every day. One participant shared her experience as follows:

Five men raped me to make me a woman. They beat me and they left me thinking I was dead. I decided, ‘I am tired of being called names.’ I tried female – male relationships. I got married. Unfortunately that is how I contracted HIV. I gave birth as everyone wanted but I have a sick child who is HIV positive. Still, up to today I have not changed, I am still a lesbian. (Participant D, Ntuzuma 08/10/2011).

Responses such as these reveal the struggle of women seeking an identity, their sexual identity being the most daring in traditional communities. This is a story of resilience despite the odds;

one can take a risk by being sure of one's sexuality and with the knowledge that no amount of abuse can turn a person into a heterosexual if one is not.

Secondly, parents who expect their children to continue the family name force their homosexual children to conform to patriarchal definitions of marriage. Through respect and fear of being disowned by their parents, homosexual children often live a heterosexual life to meet the expectations of their parents. As one male participant emphasized:

Our family background does not condone it (same sex relationship) and it cannot be practiced in public. If you have a son, you know that your family name will continue and if you have a daughter, you expect that she is going to bring cows into the family. If boys have male partners, then that is a disaster and confusing. This is bad. (Participant F, Kwa-Ngcolosi 05/10/2011).

As long as community and family expectations are met, parents are not concerned whether the decisions taken for their children will affect their future or not. It is assumed that everything will go according to plan: get married, have children and live a perfect life. A participant, who went through this agony, shared her experience as follows:

I began sleeping with girls at the age of 15 and nobody noticed anything. I even slept with my relatives. The thing is, I am coming from a traditional family and my father had four wives. I was the only girl from my mother, I had three bothers therefore I was expected to get married. I didn't have a boyfriend for a long time but I thought I should give it a try so I tried twice. I had a first boyfriend, it didn't work. I left him I tried another one but I could not sleep with him either. He knew that I had spirit possession so he thought if he paid lobolo things will change. He went to my parents and paid but even then nothing changed. Whenever he wanted to sleep with me, I would refuse; to me, he had this bad smell. We always fought about sex and then I was his bride I was supposed to sleep with him. We physically fought, pushing each other around. I could feel myself having this power. He would hit me and I would hit him back, he tried to use his power, pressing me down by force. One day I beat him until he fell into a wardrobe. I locked him inside the wardrobe. Many times he tried to have sex with me but he failed. The other day he came to my house, I had an outside building at night same thing happened fighting, pushing. He was so angry and his ancestral spirits were angry, I think because he screamed hysterically, I couldn't calm him down. My mother came and knocked at my door. We called his mother. She came and she burnt incense for him until he was calm, she took him with her, they went home that night. I had never slept with him. After sometime his family came and took some of the cows. I didn't care I had never liked him anyway but it was an embarrassment for my family. My family thought my behaviour was caused by ancestors. They used to say that I am possessed by my grandfather's spirit. That is



when I realized that I have a male spirit; I think that is why I don't want men near me. (Participant E, Ntuzuma, 08/11/2011).

Traditional expectations of families receiving *lobola* for their daughters during negotiations for marriage place pressure on parents to prepare their girl children to get married and have children. Unfortunately, as observed in the above account, there are a few women who are indeed strong enough to protect themselves from such situations.

One may wonder why the narrator of the above story does not refer to the pushing and fighting with her boyfriend attempted rape. In African culture, the fact that a man paid *lobolo* gives him the right to have sex with her. Under normal circumstances, the pushing and fighting can be interpreted as intentionally delaying the husband, not because one has no interest in sex but that is how women are taught to behave during the first day of intercourse.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, it is important to note that I have used pseudonyms for the participants whom I have quoted, in order to protect their identity. This chapter provided evidence that women traditional healers practice same sex relationship. Through the accounts of these women it is clear that this practice is part of the Zulu history although it is still a taboo subject. The power of ancestors and the role played by spirit possession in same sex relationship amongst female *sangomas* has also become evident. This chapter also presented reasons for the practice of same sex relationships amongst women. The following chapter will present the analysis of the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS, ‘UN/AFRICAN’: DATA ANALYSIS

#### 5.0. Introduction

In Chapter four, data was presented which demonstrated that same sex relationships are tolerated and are practiced by some Zulu people who are not influenced by western culture. The arguments that same sex relationships are ‘un-African’ conflict with what is taking place on the ground, where custodians of culture known as *sangomas* confirm same sex practices amongst themselves. It seems that the rejection of same sex relationships is not about being ‘un-African’ or unnatural, but as shown above, factors such as religion, power, procreation and patriarchy contribute to the denial of same sex relationships in Africa. Chapter five provides an analysis of the different perspectives emerging from this study, using Queer theory and African Feminist cultural hermeneutics theory with the aim of broadening the reasons behind the rejection of homosexuality in African culture. The contesting voices of African women theologians and Queer theorists will further the debate on the topic.

Both the above mentioned theories challenge social structures which dominate and oppress marginalized individuals, such as female *sangoma* who are in same sex relationships. In the previous chapter it was shown that *sangomas* who are in same sex relationships are being forced into heterosexual relationships in order to conform to social expectations. Therefore, in the following section one of the central questions of this study, whether same sex relationships are indeed ‘un-African’, will be interrogated.

#### 5.1. Homosexuality is African

This study has shown that there is a level tolerance and acceptance of same sex relationships in Africa depending on the context and circumstances. But the majority African societies are

secretive when it comes to sharing sexual matters or knowledge about it (Moyo, 2005:186). In African societies indigenous knowledge has been transmitted orally from one generation to the other and as sexual matters are considered taboo, a problem arises when older people refuse to pass information about the variety of sexuality on to the younger generation.

People would have not known that same sex relations existed if no one talked about it. It is wrongly assumed that since sexual matters are classified as private and are not discussed in public, they therefore do not exist. The problem was exacerbated when anthropologists, who documented the practice of homosexuality in Africa, concentrated on male practices and failed to pay sufficient attention to a similar practice among women – or, perhaps if they were male, did not have access to that kind of information. By largely ignoring the experiences of traditional homosexual women, they succeeded in preserving a distorted history of the local people. The women's experiences were excluded from collective memory regarding the diversity of sexuality in existence among the Zulu people. Murray and Roscoe have expressed it well when they state that “people forgot that homosexuality was part of their culture. Thus, these relationships became stigmatized” (1998: xvi).

Even though there is little written on same sex relationships, there is a challenge of making such information available to ordinary people. It is preserved on shelves in libraries for those who are literate in a context where the majority of locals are illiterate. Furthermore, the little information that is available is written from a western perspective and mainly in a language that is inaccessible to the greater community.

The study has also shown that the Zulu language has a variety of terms for homosexuality. As shown in chapter four, the *uncukumbili* is more widely tolerated and acknowledged by the Zulu community because this person is born with two sex organs therefore this is taken as a natural phenomenon. The existence of these individuals means that they are part of creation, their sexuality is natural. Nevertheless, there are elements of discrimination from the community where a family of the new born feel disgraced as this is perceived as a misfortunate. There is no doubt that a woman who bears that child feels lesser of a woman for giving a birth to an

unwanted child. This is one of the matters she can do anything about, it is her body, her child but she has the pain. This is the cruelty of cultural practice in African countries that most women has to deal with every day.

The challenge for African communities with people of different sexualities is the upbringing of these individuals since there is no clear indication which gender to assign to them. Fortunately amongst the Zulu community these individuals are not in danger as long as they do not participate in sexual activities because either way, it would be considered as unnatural and abnormal. As illuminated in chapter four, the *oncukumbili* expresses her sexuality in three ways: first, she can only practice same sex relationships privately and risk punishment because this is seen as deviant behaviour. Second, she can live a celibate life which is acceptable and praised in the traditional community. Third, she can pretend to be heterosexual.

## **5.2. Normalisation and naturalisation of heterosexual relationships**

This study has shown that some participants who have a homosexual orientation are forced into heterosexual relationships. This is part of the societal normalisation of heterosexuality, which is based on gendered bodies. There is a societal assumption that the biological gender of the child determines with whom the child will have a sexual relationship in the future, and that it always must be with someone of the opposite gender. For people who perceive gender in this way it is thus assumed that it is constant, fixed to biological bodies and it is natural. Butler correctly observes that “bodies are understood by society through our ideas about sex and gender (Butler, 1994:34). People are categorised as male or female according to their sexual organs and the potential capacity for pregnancy; Butler sees this not as a simple description of reality, but rather as the outcome of a decision on the part of society to stress the importance of certain aspects of our bodies, rather than others, and the importance of particular differences between bodies” (Butler, 1994:34).

Thus, Sullivan argues further that the “naturalisation of heterosexuality encourages ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ which serves as an institution that plays a central role in the implementation and

perpetuation of male domination or patriarchy”. Sullivan maintains that by normalising heterosexuality, women are persuaded into heterosexual relationships, even those who are lesbians on account of “privileges and punishment associated with conformity and deviancy” (2003: 120).

What also becomes evident from this research is that male sexual problems can contribute to women choosing a female partner while remaining in a heterosexual relationship. A *sangoma* opted for a female partner because of her husband’s erectile problems. After a few years of marriage she spent seven years of sexual abstinence with her husband. In order to keep her children close to her and retain her marriage, this woman resorted to a same sex relationship.

### **5.3. *Sangomas* in heterosexual marriages**

This study reveals that often *sangomas* cannot fulfil the expectation of being good traditional wives due to the nature of their job. This discourages some *sangomas* to commit to marriage (Nkabinde, 2008: 110). As shown in chapter four, ancestors take over and control the lives of *sangomas* and even interfere with their sexual desires.

A closer examination of the sexual abstinence period within traditional healing shows that ancestors have a way to deal with the situation (Nkabinde, 2008: 110). Morgan and Reid refer to women who marry female *sangomas* as “ancestral wives” (2003: 378-379). According to my understanding, there is another explanation for the term, ‘ancestral wife’. Based on my personal observation as both a *sangoma* and a Zulu woman, ‘ancestral wife’ may be demanded by the ancestors in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships. When one marries a woman or a man, that partner may not be able to fulfil the ancestral duties such as tolerance during the period of abstinence. However, on the other hand, the wife chosen by the ancestors will not dispute the requirements determined by the ancestors. As explained in chapter four, during the abstinence period ancestors have the ability to temporarily suppress sexual desires and that would be understood by an ‘ancestral wife or husband’. Moreover ancestors can control the sexual desire

of a wife or a husband chosen by them. The wife or husband not chosen by the ancestors may not cope with the abstinence demands of the ancestors.

Whilst a man married to a female *sangoma* has the option of taking a second wife, a woman who is married to a male *sangoma* is not afforded this option during periods of abstinence. This is an indication that culture protects the interests of men but not that of women who face the same problem. From the research it was clear that polygamy can be abusive but most women have no choice but to live in it. They put their lives in danger to protect their marriage and families. It seems women in Africa have been socialised to put others first before themselves. It is also in such cases where female same sex relationships provides a safe space for women or *sangomas* where their sexual needs are met.

#### **5.4. Same sex relationships and gendered spirits**

In chapter four the study showed that the sexual behaviour of a *sangoma* is encouraged by the gender of a spirit that has possessed her or him. As much as western concept of homosexuality does not fit into African context, there are similarities in explaining the role played by spirits in same sex relationships amongst *sangomas*. Analysis of the study shows that western concepts could be explained in the following way:

- i. Lesbian - A female *sangoma* who is possessed by a female spirit
- ii. Bisexual - A female *sangoma* who is possessed by a female and a male spirit
- iii. Transgender – A female *sangoma* who is possessed by a male (authoritative) spirit, or *vice-versa*.
- iv. Hermaphrodite –A *sangoma* with both sexual organs

Firstly, as shown in chapter four of this study, a female *sangoma*'s lack of interest in men is associated with spirit possession. Spirit possession helps them escape from “compulsory heterosexuality” which plays a central role in the implementation and perpetuation of male domination or patriarchy” (Sullivan 2003: 120). However it is not evident from this study that all

*sangomas* who practice same sex relationships do so as a result of spirit possession. There are those who may pretend that they are possessed by a spirit in order to compel society to accept their sexual preference. In so doing, spirit possession becomes a safe space for women who have a homosexual orientation.

Secondly, the leadership roles and authority that female *sangomas* have is obtained from the ancestors who provide them with a choice in how they want to live. Women *sangomas* have chosen alternative relationships as a means to seek liberation from patriarchal control which is encouraged through heterosexual relationships (Kanyoro, 2002:5). Some of these women practice same sex relationships privately while others risk their lives by practicing it openly. Those who are open about it are resisting a culture of silence and invisibility. They have joined those feminists who resist patriarchy and are in search of liberation. In this search, ancestors or spirit possession are the tools used by *sangomas* to deconstruct cultural strategies that dehumanise female *sangomas* in same sex relationships (2002: 5). Ancestral spirits are life affirming for women as they deconstruct patriarchal structures of traditional society. Nevertheless there is more freedom in western same sex relationships than African same sex relationship because those involved do not require the spiritual world reinforced their sexual orientation.

However, the study has shown that gender oppression continues to exist even in spirit possession (authoritative spirit) which is very controlling. This spirit operates within a patriarchal paradigm whereby a woman who is possessed by this spirit cannot marry a man. According to Queer theory these women can be identified as transgender and they often desire other women. Pointek asserts that “lesbians are male “souls” trapped in a woman’s body” (2006: 53). The body of this woman is often more masculine than feminine and she has a man’s character, as noted in the examples given by the participants in chapter five. Women who are possessed by a male spirit view themselves as male. Therefore they expect women to be submissive to them and they assume a superior position in the relationship. This means the relationship is more a heterosexual than a homosexual one; it is as gender oppressive as a heterosexual relationship. It is unfortunate that the same sex relationships in Zulu context are suppressive instead of liberative as some

*sangomas* are forced be photocopies of men. It can be argued that women who have relationships with fellow women who possess male characters or male spirits are trapped in patriarchy. The account by the participant as detailed in chapter four shows elements of male domination when the *sangoma* organised her wife to be impregnated by her brother; whether a wife objects or not is not important. What is important is that she must show her power as a male by having children, by whatever means she chooses.

Indeed this relationship is similar to a heterosexual relationship, because if a woman chooses a same sex relationship it should give them freedom; both partners should come to a mutual understanding where no-one is superior to the other (Segal, 1997: 206- 207). The terms ‘wife’ and ‘husband’ in a same sex relationship perpetuates and promotes the heterosexual hierarchy.

## **5.5. Theological perspectives on same sex relationships**

This study has shown that some participants experienced rejection from their churches based on their homosexual orientation, even though they love God and wanted to remain in the church. Weeks states that the reaction of the religious communities against same sex relationships and their lack of tolerance is reinforced by the belief that homosexuality is a “sin against nature” (1989: 99, 116). This perception is based on the teachings from the Bible which proclaim that from inception, God created a man and a woman (Genesis 1:23). However, this verse fails to include or explain God’s creation of those human beings who are neither male nor female (*Oncukumbili*) as discussed in chapter four of this study. Mutwa has a similar view about a non-discriminating God. He argues that God “is neither male nor female”. This means that men should not think that they are more powerful than woman. (1998:552) The Bible also proclaims that every human being is created in the image of God. In the New Testament there is no record where Jesus addressed the issue of homosexuality. Nicolson (2008:21) argues that the biblical texts which refer to homosexual acts are set within the context of prostitution and does not include committed love relationships. Therefore it is incorrect to assume that all same sex relationships are based on lust and ignore the existence of same sex relationships which are



based on mutual love. As Weeks comments, “if you want to use the Bible to hit people over the head, you have to keep it closed!” (1989: 243).

The experience of some of the participants in this study shows that Christians associate homosexuality with demon possession or practices that distance people from God. It is a behaviour that is considered immoral and unethical so it cannot be accommodated in the Church. On the other hand Kalven and Buckley takes the stance that homosexuality is a state of being, something that is within the makeup of a human being. They pose the question, “Do you think a religious conversion will change a left-handed person into a right-handed person? Does conversion change what they will want to do with their hands?” (1984: 246 -7).

My study reveals that the church pretends not to see the homosexuality of people who have “come out” about their homosexuality and are gifted in God’ ministry; they prefer to concentrate on their ministry. Collins captures the pretence of the church aptly when he says: “it’s all right for you to be here, just don’t say anything, just play your little role. You can be in the choir; you can sit on the piano bench, but don’t say you are gay” (2005: 206). This means one has a choice - remain in the closet or forfeit the church. In this study this very behaviour of the church was reported to be present in the African Independent Churches (AIC) where most of the participants who are *sangomas* are also in same sex relationships. Their healing ministry is embraced but their sexuality is ignored. In these churches, seating arrangements are based on gender; women on one side and men on the other. AICs are male dominant, women are silenced and that is the theology in the church which makes it impossible to experience the liberating promised of God which the Bible speaks (Kanyoro 2002: 15).

The assumption in the AIC is that everyone who enters the church is either male or female. Similarly, some of the participants who were rejected by some AICs joined a Pentecostal church which claims to accommodate lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) in Durban, and discovered that this particular church acknowledged male and female relationships. In this church, there is an assumption that every homosexual person is either male or female (transgendered), they do not acknowledge other sexual orientations, for example bisexual people.

This Pentecostal church does not embrace African cultural beliefs like the AIC; as a result these individuals are still oppressed.

There is a need, therefore, for an AIC church that openly accepts people who have homosexual tendencies or who are practicing it. Such a church could be grounded in the belief that the body of Christ does not allow any of its parts to condemn another part on the basis of their sexuality or cultural practices that is life-affirming. The church should accept change as inevitable part of life, there is no culture or religion that is static, people's lifestyle change as new identities are formed (Kanyoro, 2002: 15)

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that, firstly the argument about homosexuality being 'un-African' is not accurate because the concept of different sexualities does exist in Zulu society. Secondly, it was argued that cultural beliefs about taboos and keeping secrets hinders the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another, especially regarding the existence of different sexual trends. Thirdly, the lack of comprehensive research and documentation on homosexual practices within Zulu culture has also contributed to ignorance about the existence of different sexualities in Zulu society. Fourthly, it was argued that the normalisation and naturalisation of heterosexuality amongst Zulus makes homosexuality unnatural, yet the experiences of the participants revealed the opposite, that it is also natural and normal and contrary to what is being said in North Africa, which is, that homosexuality is unnatural.

According to this study the ancestral belief system provides space for same sex relationships amongst women although it may contain patriarchal elements. Amongst the mysteries of the spirit world there is a safe space for homosexuality, but the majority of the mainline supporters and AICs churches will not accept or comprehend such mysteries.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARISING THE STUDY

#### 6.0. Introduction

This concluding chapter provides a brief summary of the study by revisiting the the objectives of the study in order to evaluate if they have been met. The central question that the study grappled with was as follows: “*If traditional healers practice same sex relationships, why does the Zulu community (and African communities in general) insist that same sex relationships are “un-African and un-traditional”?*” The study was guided by the following objectives: a) to highlight the significance of traditional healing systems in Africa, b) to demonstrate the existence of homosexuality among traditional healers, c) to investigate why *sangomas* in KwaZulu-Natal practice same sex relationships, d) to demonstrate that the objection to same sex relationships lies in the beliefs about procreation, patriarchy and power and is not about same sex relationships being “un-African”. Summary of each objective is as follows:

#### 6.1. The significance of traditional healing systems in Africa

The study revealed that traditional healing is very powerful in African communities, especially in traditional communities, whether it is a Christian community or not. As described in chapter three, there are different categories of traditional healers: those who attend to the needs of the Zulu Christian community and those who attend to the needs of the traditional Zulu communities. On one hand, the estimated number of *sangomas* who practice traditional healing shows that traditional healing is in demand in South Africa. More over the number of people who rely on traditional medicines is an indication that traditional healers form an important part of the health care system in South Africa. The study differentiated between traditional healers who work for the benefit of the community and those who practice to enrich themselves by generating personal wealth.

## **6.2. The Existence of same sex relationships among traditional healer**

The findings from the field research reveal that same sex relationships exist amongst the Zulu people and the community is aware of the different types of sexuality. The existence of concepts such as *ongqingili*, *inkonkoni*, *oncukumbili* and *izitabane* used by the Zulu community to describe people of different sexuality confirm this knowledge of homosexuality. Nevertheless, it was also shown that the Zulu community is silent about the existence of other types of sexualities besides heterosexuality. Families remain silent on the existence of homosexuals to avoid discrimination. Therefore homosexual individuals tend to lead a secretive life style. The study also revealed that the Zulu community is tolerant towards traditional healers who are in same sex relationships rather than ordinary member of the community (those who are not *sangomas*).

The stories collected from the group discussion and individuals showed that same sex relationships were and are still commonly practiced by *sangomas*, although the community elects to be silent about it because *sangomas* are considered to be the leaders of the community. Furthermore, I argue that since *sangomas* are powerful contributors to the health care system in the Zulu community, people prefer to be silent about their sexuality. The study revealed that same sex relationships are more visible amongst male *sangomas* than female *sangomas*. Furthermore, it also revealed that the practice of same sex relationships amongst *sangomas* is not something new but began a long time ago when female *sangomas* used to have “ancestral wives”.

## **6.3. *Sangomas* and the practice of sex relationships in KwaZulu-Natal**

It seems there are many reason for practice of same sex among the *sangomas*. The discussions from the focus group and in-depth interviews revealed that both female and male *sangomas* practiced same sex relationships. Although some were open about it others chose to be secretive. It was argued that one of the reasons why male *sangomas* practice same sex relationships was to strengthen their healing practice and to attract more customers. As described by the participants of this study, there is a particular *muthi* that requires male semen and those who use it should not

be sexually involved with women as it would render the medicine ineffective. This paradox has led some male *sangomas* to practice same sex relationships.

Another explanation for the existence of homosexuality among traditional healers is linked to spirit possession. Female *sangomas* who prefer female sexual partners are said to have been possessed by male spirits while male *sangomas* who prefer male sexual partners are said to have been possessed by a female spirit. The latter explanation for the existence of homosexuality among *sangomas* was linked to the purity of medicines as dictated by ancestors. Yet other participants suggested that same sex relations were entered into because there was a mutual understanding when it came to decision making in same sex relations, while husbands demanded sexual intercourse even during the period when ancestors required abstinence.

#### **6.4. Objection to same sex relationships in KwaZulu-Natal**

The study argues that the objection to same sex relationships lies in the beliefs about procreation, patriarchy and power and is not about same sex relationships being “un-African”. The male participants objected to same sex relationships because it did not lead to procreation and the extension of the family line as expected by the ancestors. The participants also stated that same sex relations caused males to lose control over women. The men who marry *sangomas* are aware that they have no control over the sexuality of their wives. A female *sangoma* has more power than an ordinary man because she is able to make her own decision based on what she is told by the spirit that possesses her. When *sangomas* choose same sex relationships, it is perceived as a threat to the community because same sex relationships are not productive. This could be perceived as a threat to male supremacy and leadership because they have no power over *sangomas*; and it was shown previously that men use sex as a tool to oppress women. Therefore same sex relationships practised by women are perceived as deviant behaviour which destroys the social structure.

The study proves that same sex relationships are not imposed to Africans. As much as I wanted to show that same sex relationships are not western influence but I wanted to show that there is a

chance that society can accept homosexual people if they are able to accept same sex relationships among the *sangomas*. The marginalised people like women who cannot protect themselves are being killed because of their sexuality yet there is a group of people who do the same and they do not experience violence. My question still stands that if traditional healers practice same sex relationships, why ordinary people cannot do the same? Coming to the end of this study I would like to suggest recommendations about same sex relationships/ homosexuality.

## **6.5. Recommendations**

The following four points may be suggested as recommendations:

First, there is a need for educational programmes on same sex relationships or homosexuality. Leaders of Training institutions of traditional healers should encourage *sangomas* in same sex relationships to talk about it because their voice is more powerful than that of ordinary woman. Traditional healers can make a difference and share with the society in affirmation of same sex relationships. If they agree that they have knowledge of same sex existence they may save a number of people who are being accused of corrupting the society with deviant behaviour.

Second, everyone in South Africa should have basic knowledge of what really means to be homosexual. Knowledge in this area can decrease the abuse that is perpetuated against people of different sexuality, especially woman. Knowledge will help people understand that corrective rape will not change transgender person into heterosexuality. The information needs to reach rural communities and families of homosexual people. The informal discussion I had with participants shows that even homosexual persons do not understand them, what they know is that they are different from others. Through observation it is clear that most of them cannot identify themselves, one claim to be a lesbian, the next day she is bisexual the following day she is transgender. This behaviour is confusing for the community because it looks like this practice reinforces promiscuity.

Third, elderly people who have knowledge of the existence of homosexuality should share the information with others because people see it as something new which is a western imposition to Africans. People should start talking about homosexuality and same sex relationships. This will encourage other who lives in a closet to come out and be living proof of homosexuality in African communities. The idea that “matters of sexualities are a taboo” should be abandoned so that people of different sexualities openly practice their sexuality. This will assist those who do not believe that homosexuality exists in South Africa.

Four, education on sexualities in religious institutions is needed because the study shows that some churches who claim to be LGBTI friendly, recognise heterosexuality partnership “a male (transgender) and female (female)”, this is from the scripture. As a result, Church leaders encourage marriage without teaching about sexual orientation or sexual identity. Education could help also when homosexual people decide to enter into marriage. For instance, when a lesbian marries a transgender person, that marriage is due to fall apart because the couple enters into a marriage with different expectations. In this case, it is like a man who marries a woman with an expectation that she will be cooking, washing and cleaning the house for him. Whereas in a lesbian relationship, a woman enters into the relationship with the view that she found herself a partner whom she can share house chores be equally responsible in looking after the children. The lesbian’s aim of dating another woman is to free herself from male bondage.

## **6.6. Conclusion**

This study has fulfilled all the objectives which were set out in chapter one. This research has shown that same sex relations in traditional African communities are described in terms of African spirituality. It is connected to spirit possession and traditional healing practices of the Zulu people which existed before the coming of western culture and religion. Using the lens of queer theory and African feminist cultural hermeneutics, it was shown that ancestors give women a chance to share their sexual experiences openly in a traditional society. Nevertheless there are elements of patriarchy in spirit possession.

The power and authority granted by ancestors to women gives them a chance to release themselves from male domination where they are forced into obligatory heterosexual relationships and used as reproduction mechanisms. Alternative relationships place women in control of their well-being where there is no man involved, even though some parts of my study revealed that patriarchy is practiced even in same sex relationships. Further research is required to understand the existence of patriarchy in same sex relationships among female *sangomas*. What this study has established is that ancestors give these women a right to openly refuse heterosexuality and allow them to finally be true to themselves.



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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **CONSENT FORM FOR TRADITIONAL HEALERS TO BE INTERVIEWED IN A FOCUS GROUP AND AS INDIVIDUALS<sup>3</sup>**

**Study topic:** “A threat to Zulu patriarchy and the continuation of community”: Same sex relationships amongst Female Traditional Healers at Inanda and KwaNgcolosi, Kwa- Zulu Natal

**Investigator:** Lindiwe Promise Mkasi , BA in Theology, BA Honours in Theology.

**Affiliation:** School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X01, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg.

#### **Purpose:**

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research study designed to explore and analyse “Same sex relationships amongst Female Traditional Healers at Inanda and KwaNgcolosi, Kwa-Zulu Natal.”

Before giving your consent, I outline below the procedures, risks and benefits that will help you to make a decision as to whether or not you wish to go ahead and be part of this research study.

#### **Description of procedures**

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be required to be interviewed by myself as a researcher. I will be asking you questions and writing the answers you will give. I will read to you the answers for any clarification before I go and type the notes. I will arrange with you the suitable time and place for the interviews, which may take about one hour.

The questions will be about the existence of same sex relationships in Africa; the practice of same sex relations among traditional healers in KwaZulu Natal; why traditional healers in KwaZulu Natal practice same-sex relationships; and whether or not that the objection to same-

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<sup>3</sup> For academic purposes I have presented the consent forms and the questions (Appendices) in English but I will translate them into the vernacular language, *IsiZulu* when using them.

sex relationships is about procreation, patriarchy and power and not about the relationships being “un-African.”

### **Risks and benefits**

Since the study involves giving information about same sex relationships among traditional healers, you may feel uncomfortable. I also realize that the study will take some of your valuable time. I will therefore make sure I adhere to the agreed time. If, for any reason, we fail to meet, I will try to reschedule for another meeting.

Your participation in this study will also be a learning process for you. You will be sensitized to how issues of our culture impact people’s attitudes towards women who are in same sex relationships. You will receive feedback on the research findings. Your contributions will assist you to voice out your opinions about same sex relationships within the Zulu culture.

### **Confidentiality**

Since the study involves giving information about traditional healers who are in same sex relationships, and this may pose a threat to your safety. I will make every effort to keep your responses confidential. No name will appear on the forms, unless if you give permission for me to do so. You will also be expected to keep strict confidentiality about any information you share or come across during the focus group discussions.

### **Voluntary participation**

Please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are therefore free to decline to participate, or to withdraw your participation any time for any reason without feeling bad, and that our relationship will continue to be friendly.

### **Questions**

For any queries you may contact Lindiwe Promise Mkasi at School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X01, Scottsville, 3201, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa cell number 0730617197 Or Professors Isabel Phiri(0724239134) and Professor Sarojini Nadar 0825707177.

**Agreement to participate**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby confirm that I have read and understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research study, and I agree to participate in this study.

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

(A) FOR FOCUS GROUP AT KWA-NGCOLOSI

Date: 5 October 2011

(B) FOR FOCUS GROUP IN NTUZUMA

04 October 2011

Age: 28 years to 60 years

No. of years in Traditional healing: From 3 years to 20 years

1. Have you ever heard of same sex relationships in your community?
2. Does it exist amongst Zulus?
3. Do you know when or how it started?
4. Is a same sex relationship really “un-African?”
5. What is the future of people in same sex relationships in this community?
6. What is the attitude of the community towards same sex relationships?
7. Do same sex relationships exist amongst traditional healers?
8. What is the role of the traditional healer in the Zulu community?
9. Do you know anything about ancestral wives?
10. Can ancestors choose a wife or husband for a traditional healer?
11. Can a traditional healer be possessed by two opposite spirits?
12. Do traditional healers possess power that enables them to choose their sexual partners?
13. Do you think traditional healers are more powerful than ordinary men and women in the community?
14. Do you think female sangomas have more authority than ordinary men in the community?
15. What is the impact of patriarchy on a traditional healer?

16. How important is procreation to the Zulus?
17. Why is the Zulu community against same sex relationships?

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (A) INDIVIDUAL TRADITIONAL HEALERS (pseudonym names)

### **Participants in Ntuzuma**

Participant A, Date: 8 October 2011.

Participant D, Date: 8 October 2011.

Participant E, Date: 8 October 2011.

Participant H, Date: 04 October 2011.

### **Participants in Kwa-Ngcolosi**

Participant B, Date: 11 October 2011.

Participant F, Date: 05 October 2011.

Participant G, Date: October 2011.

1. Are you in a same sex relationship?
2. How many partners do you have?
3. Who makes decisions in your relationship?
4. Are you equal partners in your relationship?
5. Have you ever been in a heterosexual relationship?
6. When did you realize that you are different?
7. What caused you to be in a same sex relationship?

8. How would you explain your sexuality to other people?
9. How do you identify yourself in this relationship?
10. Is it possible that some sangomas have male partners and female partners?
11. What happens if a sangoma is possessed by a spirit of the opposite sex?
12. Does the sexual behaviour of a sangoma change when possessed by a spirit of the opposite sex?
13. Do you think ancestral spirits have sexual desires?
14. Do you know anything about ancestral wives?
15. Are you open about your sexuality (family, clients and community)?
16. Do you talk about your sexuality or your relationship in public?
17. How does this relationship affect you family and those who are close to you?
18. Why people are being violent towards gay and lesbian persons?
19. What is the reason behind the killing of women in same sex relationships but not men?
20. Have you ever experienced abuse or discrimination in this relationship?
21. Why are sangomas disclosing their sexuality now?
22. Why the secrecy about this relationship?
23. Does this relationship practice affect your work as a traditional healer in the community?
24. Do you think the gender of ancestral spirits plays any role in same sex relationships?
25. Would you be able to identify a difference between your sexual desire and ancestral sexual desire?
26. What does procreation mean for you as traditional healers who practices same sex relationship?
27. How does patriarchy impact on your work as a sangoma?

## APPENDIX 3

### Higher Degree Ethical Approval Letter



Research Office, Govan Mbeki Centre  
Westville Campus  
Private Bag x54001  
DURBAN, 4000  
Tel No: +27 31 260 3587  
Fax No: +27 31 260 4609  
[mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

16 August 2011

Ms LP Mkasi (9701364)  
School of Religion and Theology  
Faculty of Humanities, Development & Social Sciences  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms LP Mkasi

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0721/011M**  
**PROJECT TITLE: "A threat to Zulu patriarchy and the continuation of community ": Same sex relationships amongst Female Traditional Healers at Inanda and KwaNgcolosi, KwaZulu-Natal"**

In response to your application dated 10 August 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application 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 school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
**Professor Steven Collings (Chair)**  
**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

cc. Supervisor: Prof IA Phiri & Prof S Nadar  
cc: Mrs B Jacobsen, Post-Graduate Office, PMB Campus