

# **Shaping the Boys' South African Identity: Suppressed Queer Space in *Spud* and *Inxeba***

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Shaping the Boys' South African Identity: Suppressed Queer Space in *Spud* and *Inxeba***

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The purpose of this study is to explore how “queerness” is both represented and suppressed in select South African fiction. The study will investigate to what extent a post-colonial form of education reinforces the colonial and apartheid traditions of South African normative masculinities in same-sex, educational environments. These aspects will be explored and investigated in John Van de Ruit’s *Spud: A wickedly funny novel* (2005), *Spud: The madness continues...* (2007), *Spud: Learning to Fly* (2010), and will be complemented with an investigation of the recent South African film, *Inxeba* (2017). The series of novels and films demonstrate how the contestation between queerness and traditional masculinity threatens heteronormativity and how various forms of violence try to enforce a dominant South African masculinity.

In these texts, as well as their film adaptations, heteronormativity is threatened by the presence of other emerging *masculinities*. In this thesis, gender studies and queer theory will form a theoretical framing, with particular attention given to the representation in the texts of the South African context and social interactions, behaviour and speech within a same-sex environment. By exploring the various ways in which queerness is suppressed, this study proposes re-reading former concepts of masculinity. New forms of masculinities are emerging in post-apartheid South Africa which allow for individualism and the acknowledgement of difference. These factors are necessary for acknowledging a spectrum of *masculinities* in a context where traditional masculinity is no longer normative.

## **KEYWORDS**

*Spud*

*Inxeba*

Van de Ruit

Queer

Sexuality

Homosociality

Incitement to Discourse

Masculinities

Minor Intimacy

Heteronormativity

Suppression

Post-Apartheid

Intermediality

Gender identity

Film

Adaptation



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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that *Shaping the Boys' South African Identity: Suppressed Queer Space in Spud and Inxeba* is my work, that it has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Joshua Willows

Date: \_\_18 December 2020\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_JW\_\_\_\_\_



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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Overview**

This thesis seeks to explore how questions of queerness can be used as a critical framework to re-read one of post-apartheid South Africa's most popular and widely read series of novels, namely John Van de Ruit's *Spud* (2005) narratives. The thesis will read the novels alongside the film adaptation, and in a closing chapter, I will complement Van de Ruit's narratives of white male adolescence with a comparative analysis of a recent controversial South African film, namely *Inxeba* (2017) directed by John Trengrove. These particular texts and films reflect in different ways current preoccupations in South African literature and culture with questions of gender and identity. Both *Spud* and *Inxeba* showcase similar themes despite the cultural differences. They both explore the motif of the fraught transition from male adolescence into adulthood, and are set in mono-gendered spaces and male-only educational institutions. Both *Spud* and *Inxeba* have received controversial reviews with regards to the complex queer characterization. A prominent example of these critiques is the response of a South African Supreme Court judge, Edwin Cameron. After seeing the film adaptation of *Spud*, Cameron writes:

[D]espite my pleasure in the experience, last night I was kept awake by one aspect of it – which I guess faithfully, derives from the book – and find after a long day of thought that I must share my distress with you. It was the casual denigration of gays – the amiable gay-hating incidents – that occasionally spike up in the movie. (De Vos)

Similarly, *Inxeba* received controversial judicial commentary that gives insight into the film's even more controversial nature. Judge Joseph Raulinga, in his judgement, claims:

If cultural beliefs and practices are to be considered, the film is harmful and disturbing and exposes 16-year-olds to the sexual conduct depicted in the film. The film included language which was degrading to Xhosa women and further exposed women to societal violence such as rape. It contains harmful scenes which could cause tensions within the Xhosa community and even the broader African community. (Khoza)



The above comments position the films as problematic. Both judges, from different points of view, highlight issues of violence and hate with regards to the frail institutions of tradition. Judge Cameron alerts us to the idea that there is a misrepresentation of gays, whereas judge Raulinga makes it known that the incidents that occur in the film are offensive to traditional views of initiation. Taking a cue from these two different views of queerness, this thesis will assess how both films and their accompanying texts portray traditional institutions, and characters that go against the heteronormative grain.

The thesis mainly concerns itself with a queer reading of the *Spud* series of novels, which includes the first subtitled novel *Spud* (2005), followed by *Spud: The madness continues...* (2007), *Spud: Learning to fly* (2011), and *Spud: Exit, Pursued by a bear* (2012)<sup>1</sup>. Van de Ruit was born in Durban in 1975 and educated at Michaelhouse, an Anglican Diocesan College situated in the midlands of Kwazulu-Natal on which the setting of the novels is modelled (Stiebel). The series is reported, in an interview with the Van de Ruit on Moneyweb, to have sold “over six hundred thousand copies worldwide” (Hogg). The series has been able to capture a cross over audience of teenagers and adults alike, and has been translated into 11 languages. The success of the novels has resulted in its own film franchise starring award-winning actors such as John Cleese (the Guv), and pop singer and songwriter, Troy Sivan (John “Spud” Milton). Despite its popular appeal to mainstream audiences, not all viewers were uncritical, as evident in Edwin Cameron’s review of the film as cited above. As I explore more fully in Chapter 5, the release of the film, *Inxeba*, generated wide-spread hostility and criticism, which mainly focused on the queer elements of the narrative.

The texts used for this thesis are predominantly transitional and post-apartheid and add to a collection of literature that helps to redefine the discourse of identity and sexuality. Tim Trengove-Jones (2008) argues that it is within the transitional period into a democracy that the "dominant values of 'traditional' normative structures have been most severely tested" (94). This testing, Jones continues, is faced by an "increasingly gritty - one might say dirty - grappling with the realities of transition" (ibid). According to Brenna Munro (2012), queer writings during the transitional period are sometimes "fashioned as a sign of resistance to the

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<sup>1</sup>This titled novel will not be included in this study as the narrative explores Milton’s journey post-matric, while this study explores Milton’s journey as a student. Rather than exploring Milton’s already formed foundation as an individual, the study will instead focus on the forming foundation of his identity.

mores of an authoritarian regime that attempted to regulate everyone's sexuality in the name of racial purity" (7). Munro further argues that queer writings helped bring in an "unexpected new identity" (23). Despite the freedoms of a democratic South Africa, freedoms which also include the right to express gender non-conforming identities, Trengove-Jones notes that the "after-life" of Apartheid continues to pour out the pillars of "inclusion and exclusion" and provides the most striking "persistence of the troubling battle between power and identity which we have carried over from apartheid" (95). Because *Spud* and *Inxeba* are situated within the transition and "after-life" of apartheid, they are inevitably framed by a nostalgic appeal to a past and display the way the characters come into conflict with norms of society, a conflict which forges an emerging adolescent, or young adult male identity. In this case, Van de Ruit has constructed a narrative that repeatedly concerns itself with the matter of "proper" male gender roles, and how these both articulate (and occasionally) trouble hegemonic masculinity. As I will show in this thesis, in the narratives, queerness repeatedly surfaces, but it is also consistently suppressed. Van de Ruit's novels, and its film adaptations, allow then for an interrogation of the complexities of identity and masculinity in the South African transition.

While *Inxeba* is considered to be a gay film, *Spud* is not, but I argue that it nevertheless unconsciously goes against the grain of heteronormativity. I will therefore argue that Van de Ruit's *Spud* novels and films, as well as *Inxeba*, both assert and question the fundamental colonial constitution of heteronormative identity, and that in this project of shaping young South African male selfhood the question of queerness becomes a counter-discourse, paradoxically present and suppressed through the intimate and affective attachments, as a central site of contestation in the management of adolescent desire.

## 1.2 Sketching Queerness

One of the critical concepts in this thesis is the idea of queerness, and as I will show, it is a concept that cannot be limited, reduced, or contained to a single idea, notion, or definition. Indeed, the very idea of "queer" resists any attempt to constrain or contain it to a single set of meaning. In its original 16<sup>th</sup> century meaning as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1993) the words "queer" has the following meaning:

Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric, in appearance or character. Also, of questionable character, suspicious, or dubious. Queer fellow, an eccentric person; also used, esp. in Ireland and nautical contexts, with varying contextual connotations. (483)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994) explains that “queer”, in contemporary discourse has acquired a more positive set of meanings. “Queer” can connote the “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, or anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically” (8). Cheryl Stobie (2003), who has critiqued binary forms of identity in a South African context, suggests that the term queer is “fairly flexible, to imply an umbrella of subculture opposed to heteronormativity” (118). Cathy Cohen (2004) argues that theorists who used the term “presented a different conceptualisation of sexuality, one which sought to replace socially named and presumably stable categories of sexual expression with a new fluid movement among and between forms of sexual behaviour” (74). Queerness, as I will show in this thesis, is an adaptable and mobile notion, and therefore, I will track how this concept is consistently being negotiated and re-made. My second chapter will explore queer theory more carefully, extending this beyond. Using the idea of queerness, rather than gayness, allows for a departure from mainstream accounts that interrogate the making of masculine identity. One of the most significant studies has been the work of Robert Morrell. However, in a discussion with Morrell, I will present a counter-argument that presents his work as problematic when exploring the novel as a queer space rather than a hyper-masculine space.

My thesis cannot discuss queerness without discussing post-structuralism and post-modernism. The work of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Eve Sedgwick engages with the concepts of queerness and non-normative sexuality. Their theoretical works have helped shape and reassess the field of gender, offering insights into the way queerness deconstructs identity. The thesis will use these ideas as a point of departure to critique the problematic binary of “heterosexual” and “homosexual”. Instead, the more unstable notion of queerness will open up analysis in the chosen texts and films, showing how gendered identities manifest themselves beyond erotic or sexual domains. In other words, queer is not reducible to sexual or erotic matters, as evident in the work of Lauren Berlant (1996) who reminds us that queer social practices:

try to unsettle the garbled but powerful norms that privilege – including the project of normalisation that has made heterosexuality hegemonic – as well as those material practices that, though not explicitly sexual, are implicated in the hierarchies of property and propriety that we will describe as heteronormative. (548)

In the upcoming chapter, as well as in the succeeding chapters, I will be discussing Berlant's notion of "minor intimacies" as a useful tool to locate queerness in the novels and films. Annamarie Jagose's, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (1996) is a useful general overview of theoretical field, although it does not apply directly to literature. However, her interest is not so much about applying the theory to literature, but what will help is her insight into the concept of queer. Jagose offers a comprehensive observation regarding the relationship between queer and identity. She reminds us that queer is "more than shorthand for 'lesbian/gay' – or even more capacious but still identity bound LGBT" (Jagose xvi).

### 1.3 Literature Review

I have chosen the *Spud* novels as well as *Inxeba* to explore how heteronormativity has failed in a post-apartheid South Africa. The central focus of this study is to examine the representation of gender and how these texts present, reinforce and critique prescribed notions of gender. The *Spud* novels are set during the transition from apartheid to a new democratic order, a period in which traditional notions of gender, masculinity, sex and queerness became subjects of debate. The period in which the novels are set, namely the advent of a new non-racial, non-sexist constitutional order, in particular presents challenges to conventional forms of white masculinity. One of the questions that this thesis explores is to what extent the *Spud* novels reveal a crisis or instability of white masculinity, and how white masculinity relates to other ethnic masculinities. How are other racially differentiated gender practices represented in the novels?

Queer studies on *Spud* are limited. This provides the opportunity to explore the texts in relation to the understanding of queerness without much influence. This research will not only serve to address the aspect of queerness altogether, but it will help address the various aspects that form part of queer identity in the *Spud* texts that are problematically portrayed.

Among the few scholarly studies of the novels, Janice Robertson's two articles are significant. Robertson's first seminal article, "Making the man, keeping the boy" (2010), of

the novel explores the fictional creation through the author's own experience. The novels do not explicitly state whether the setting is Michaelhouse boarding school located in KwaZulu-Natal or not; however, Robertson draws on the similarities of the novel's setting to the features of the well-established boarding school. This serves as a point of departure to exploring the central concern, namely the structure of British imperial schooling system. Drawing on relevant theory she explores how these particular novels resonate autobiographically. In essence, Robertson focuses on analysing the texts to convey the story as a semi-fictionalised autobiographical account of the author's life. Not only does the novel serve as an autobiographical version of the author's life, but Robertson claims that the novel subverts the traditions of British Imperial schooling systems through the parodic atmosphere. Reference to Robert Morrell's study on colonial Natal, Robertson's close reading of the text conveys how the traditions may have been subverted. Overall though, she shows that the institution of making men remains an undefeated tradition.

In a subsequent article, Robertson (2011) similarly explores the essence of British Colonial school systems through expanding on the idea that Van de Ruit's novels further subvert traditional discourse of colonial schools. Her study only touches on the defiance of British colonial school systems through a brief analysis of the characters, but through this analysis, she is able to explore how each character defies traditional discourse. Each character opposes the fundamental notions of being a traditional school boy, subverting the "imperial model's defining discourses" (Robertson 33). Robertson's analysis of the first two novels reveals how traditional models and discourses of the colonial school system are subverted. Her work explores how various practices such as "corporal punishment, acceptable teaching practice, fagging and the correlation between sport and war are not completely subverted, [but] certainly contested" (60). This becomes paradoxical. The *Spud* novels' inherent humour operates through defying the foundations of those specific discourses and this is what subverts from the normative construction of traditional discourses of imperial systems. Robertson explains that Spud "remains a bit of an outsider," and through confronting his daily challenges in diary entry form it creates "a mild sense of alienation" (41). However, the nature of the novel's succession feeds off of the physical, mental and emotional exposure of characters. It is Spud's alienation that causes the novel to impart its humour. It is the strange, otherness, and queerness with which these discourses within and against colonial models, that marks their unconventional divergence. Through her study, she elaborates on how "Spud is becoming a man, but remains a boy" (118). Robertson subtly asks a similar question in

relation to this study: does the novel celebrate the traditional heritage of South African education, or does the text problematize it?

In order to address this question more comprehensively and situate my study and the texts I have selected within the context of what has already been written about South African queer fiction, it is important to note that queerness is a significant theoretical interest in South African literary studies. Gay writing has been well established in South African literature, and also in criticism, but the notion of queerness is a much more recent concern. Post-colonial writers have been concerned with exploring gender identity and have questioned gender binaries and its legitimacy. From 1960 to 1990, gay writing began to persist as a form of resistance to the apartheid regime and the perversity of its gendered constructs. The idea of embracing ambiguous genders, according to Brenna Munro (2012), was an “inherently ambivalent symbol for nationalism because it is so deeply associated with cosmopolitan modernity” (ix). Most notably, the stories of “out” writers, such as Koos Prinsloo with his contributions to anthologies such as *Forces Favourites* (1987), raised questions regarding white militarised heteronormativity in the late apartheid. In my third and fourth chapter, I seek to explore late apartheid culture and the fragile forms of white masculinity under educational, almost militarised, settings.

Furthermore, we see Munro’s idea resonate in Stephan Gray’s *Born of Man* (1989); set during apartheid, that tells the story in a campy form, of a white gay man who has his violent lover’s embryo implanted in him and then miraculously gives birth to it. The baby is nursed by a black farm girl; however, the girl discards the child because she is raped and scarred by the event. This narrative explores the traumatic nexus of race and gender, while also tapping into the ambivalence and uncertainty of gay identity through violence. As the novel progresses, we soon learn that gay love is tampered with by the context in which it lives. The texts selected for this thesis display a similarity, and the forms of violence in *Spud* and *Inxeba* also provide an insight into how queerness is ambivalent and violence is a mechanism in which homosocial bonding is explored, similarly between the protagonist and his lover in Gray’s novel.

Despite the persistence of gay pre-apartheid writings, we begin to see how queer writing becomes a more inclusive space to explore gay and lesbian characterisation, along with a more complex understanding of identity altogether. K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* (2000) offers a critical understanding of subversive identity where binary oppositions are no longer effective within a contemporary South African society. In the novel about survival,

Azure is left wandering the streets of Cape Town as he navigates his life through hardships of racism, violence and sexual exploitation. Azure is described as a prostitute because he has sexual relations with others in order to make a living. However, Azure's clientele consists mainly of "amphigenic inverts as most of them are married men" (Chinyere et al 1370). Duiker's characterisation of Azure, a protagonist who is not sexually attracted to men, in other words lacks gay desire, is constructed as queer as his life complicates the lines of binary sexuality. In this thesis, I seek to explore how Milton also navigates his sexuality, repudiating gay desire yet also asserting queerness, and in this way complicating binary sexualities.

In addition, both Michiel Heyn's *The Reluctant Passenger* (2003) and Mark Behr's *King of the Water* (2003) offer narratives about the complexities of queer identity, as well as a significant perspective about a coming-out journey within a politically fragile society. Novelist Patrick Flannery, an American author, also contributes a significant insight into the complex manifestations of queerness in his debut novel, *Absolution* (2012) set in Apartheid Cape Town; a complex tale of two narratives interwoven through time, which also explores the complexities of queer identity.

The South African transitional period from apartheid to democracy will be read in *Spud* in connection with a period of masculine gender fluidity and confusion. This period can also be read in texts such as *King of the Water* (2009) by Mark Behr and *Thirteen Cents* (2000) by K. Sello Duiker. This period of gender fluidity and confusion is largely because of the "the struggles over masculinities" that permeates conflict in an Apartheid regime (Morrell 25). Louis Vincent (2005) further expresses that it is "ethnicity as well as class democratisation in contrast to personal white masculinity" (356). However, the question is not how cultural diversification identifies hegemonic masculinity; it only serves as a factor in establishing various new forms of masculinities. The South African transition into democracy is thus readable as a period in which conventional gendered identities become open to difference and queering. At the same time as reading for the subterranean traces of queerness in *Spud*, we also need to recognise that the narrative is not gay fiction. But even in such forms of "straight" writing, the figure of the "moffie" or "fag" is increasingly present.

There is a limited selection of films that contribute the questions raised in this thesis, but films such as *Quest for Love* (1988) offer a perspective of queerness in an Apartheid society. *The World Unseen* (2007) is a crucial contribution to queer South African film as it explores queer identity in the beginning stages of Apartheid. A more recent contribution to South African queer film is *Skoonheid* (2011). The film contributes a post-Apartheid perspective of fragile queer identity. *Inxeba* and *Skoonheid* both offer a unique critique

regarding a post-Apartheid perspective of queer identity; however, the latter explores white queer identity and the former explores black queer identity, and both contribute a significant critique of contemporary queerness.

#### **1.4 Thesis overview**

The next four chapters in this thesis will explore how queerness can be used as a framework to re-read South African texts and films, and interrogate the representation of adolescent selfhood and queer desire. The first chapter will explore the theoretical framework of queer and how it will be used to understand how queerness operates within the texts and films. It will also discuss the debates regarding the usage of the term, as well as understand the debates with regards to masculinity in the Southern African context. It will also discuss film theory and how novels can be queered through a cinematic adaptation process. The chapter will lay a foundation for the succeeding chapters.

The second chapter will be an exploration of the *Spud* novels. The focus of this chapter is to understand how queerness operates as a subversive and destabilising force within the novels, which allows for an interrogation and even destabilisation of heteronormative identity. It will largely offer a counter-argument to Robert Morrell's argument by questioning the notions of a hyper-masculine space in the context of the South African transition. Essentially, the chapter will comprise of a close reading of the novels exploring how the texts function as a means of representing a conflict of gender identity in a post-colonial society whereby formerly stable gender norms are no longer legitimate. The chapter seeks to answer to what extent a post-Apartheid text problematizes the Apartheid perspective of a heteronormative identity. It explores this question particularly through sport, showing how it creates a space for a collective homosocial exploration. Reading through various moments concerning sport in the novels, this section will explore how the boundaries of masculinity are subverted through sport. Furthermore, the chapter will explore how queerness is suppressed and how gender is performed in the attempt to analyse various characters. In short, a close study of Van de Ruit's texts shows how they challenge and rework South African perceptions of masculinity, queerness, gender identity and difference, as well as contributing critical insight into debates of social and cultural change regarding national identity.

The third chapter will comprise of an exploration of the *Spud* film adaptations. A comparative reading of the novels and their films adaptations poses the following questions:



how do the films capture the nuances of masculinity? Does the film complicate the way queerness is understood? Does the camera gaze into the audio-visual realities of queerness in a post-apartheid society? Does the film represent the reality of an ever-present queerness that is constantly denied? A close reading of the films' use of mise-en-scène as a means of representing a nostalgic past will help answer these questions. Furthermore, the chapter seeks to understand how the characters are portrayed through the use of space, and how space problematizes character representation. Along with a careful study of various camera shots and angles, the chapter seeks to explore how architecture is foregrounded as a suppressive force. With a large focus of space, the chapter seeks to answer to what extent does the film use memory and space to justify how characters are represented.

The following chapter explores the film, *Inxeba* as a counterpoint to *Spud*, showing how the setting and space of Xhosa initiation school has similarities with an elite Anglophone boarding school. This chapter seeks to explore the fragility of non-normative identities. In other words, it will discuss how queer identities are susceptible and vulnerable to traditional masculinity and modernity. Camera shots will be carefully analysed to understand how modernity infiltrates into a space where the tradition of hegemonic masculinity is practiced. The chapter seeks to explore how the characters are conflicted by a transgressive culture within the confines of a historical tradition. This chapter seeks to answer to what extent the film problematizes traditional practices in a post-Apartheid context through the intrusion of queer culture.

In the closing chapter of this thesis, I will discuss how this thesis has attempted to explore the question of queerness and its validity within the transitional and post-apartheid society. My conclusions will draw on my own understanding of how the authors of these texts have contributed to a discussion about the understandings of gender identity and queerness within South Africa. I will also address the cultural peculiarities regarding the use of these texts in a discussion regarding the mirroring of queer ideas.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**QUEER THEORY AND SOUTH AFRICAN MASCULINITIES**

**2.1 Queer debates**

In order to understand the process of how queerness operates as a disruptive and at times anarchic force, it is important to gain an understanding of recent developments in the field. Queer theory has become a significant field in gender studies, and has been influential in literary studies. The idea of queerness is, I will argue, a productive one to deploy in a reading of *Spud* and *Inxeba* since queerness is not reducible to sexual orientation. Queerness cannot be reduced, limited or contained, but the wide range of definitions can help grasp a sense of the possible meanings. Donald Hall (2003) argues that the concept “emphasizes the disruptive, the fractured, the tactical and contingent” (5). Queerness as a continuous and evolving concept is concerned with the fluidity of identity, rather than reducing identity under binary hetero/homo labels. In a special issue of a feminist journal titled “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay sexualities” (1991) edited by Teresa De Lauretis, it is argued that the idea of queer attempts to avoid binarisms, and questions stable gay and lesbian identities. De Lauretis argues that it is not productive to analyse gay and lesbian sexualities either “as merely transgressive or deviant vis-à-vis a proper, natural sexuality... or as just another, optional “lifestyle”” but rather understand them as “social or cultural forms in their own right, albeit emergent ones and this still fuzzily defined, undercoded, or discursively dependent on more established forms” (iii). In an essay in the journal, Sue-Ellen Case (1991) writes that “queer theory, unlike lesbian theory or gay male theory, is not gender specific. In fact, unlike the term “homosexual,” queer foregrounds same sex desire without designating which sex is desiring” (2). Furthermore, queer theory, Case argues, “works not at the site of gender, but at the site of ontology, to shift the ground of being itself,” while also suggesting that “queer reveals and constitutes a kind of activism that attacks the dominant notion of the natural. The queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny” (3). Thus, queer operates as a kind of system of beliefs in which we lend ourselves to in order to understand identity and how we can associate ourselves against binary constructs of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Thato Magano (2018) claims that the meaning of queer is “the coopted marker of pride and liberation that was deployed by gender and sexuality activists in the gay liberation movement

of the 1960s and 1970s, and subsequently, gender and sexuality scholars in contemporary times” (3). However, Magano also says that queer is used to “locate” homosexuality and same-sex desires, thus queer is suggested to serve a multivalent purpose to understand identity in any form of non-normative desire. Tamsin Spargo states that the term is “perpetually at odds with the normal, the norm, whether that is dominant heterosexuality or gay/lesbian identity,” and concludes that “it is definitely eccentric, *ab-normal*” (40). Leon Cantrell’s (1999) understanding of queer is that it “rests on destabilising fixed identities” (211). Cantrell’s constructionist notion of identity relies on the idea that identity is not fixed, but an ever-changing experience. Culture, sexuality and politics influence the construction of identity. Cantrell says the following regarding the dynamics of identity:

[T]he resonance of conformity, expressed through fixed images, held together by a supra gay, lesbian or sexual identity, displaces, alienates or disowns the subject who is characterised by an understanding that he or she is composed of various diverse elements. In a politics of conformity there is no space for ambiguity. (210)

Cantrell’s notion of the politics of conformity, whether it is the conformity of heterosexual or homosexual identity, reminds us that these identities do not allow space for fluidity. Thus, queer is not just a critique of heterosexuality, but also of various fixed gay and lesbian identities and subject positions. For this reason, queer has diverged from gay and lesbian studies and is now an evolving study that seeks to explore identity beyond rigid and normalising identities. As Elizabeth Meyer (2005) claims, queer theory:

goes beyond exploring aspects of gay and lesbian identity and experience. It questions taken-for granted assumptions about relationships, identity, gender, and sexual orientation. It seeks to explode rigid normalizing categories into possibilities that exist beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, student/teacher, and gay/straight. (15)

Looking into sexuality as expressing queerness, Eve Sedgwick’s work initiates investigation regarding the internal and external aspects of sexuality and identity. Her seminal book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) becomes a point of reference with regards to the exploration of male homosexual desire. There is a distinct and interesting link between Sedgwick and Foucault; they are both interested in the discursive

manifestations of desire. But Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) explores the shift in our knowledge of homosexuality by questioning whether homosexuality is distinct to a small group or if it integral in everyone's sexual development. Sedgwick emphasises the fundamental cultural construct of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: homosexual and heterosexual identity has been the persisting binary oppositions, the "deadlock" of society. She says:

The persistence of the deadlock itself has been the single most powerful feature of the important twentieth-century understandings of sexuality whether hetero or homo, and a determining feature too of all the social relations routed, in the sexualised century, through understandings of sexuality. This deadlock has by now been too deeply constitutive of our very resources for asking questions about sexuality for us to have and realistic hope for adjudicating it in the future. What we can do is to understand better the structuring, the mechanisms, and the immense consequence of the incoherent dispensation under which we now live. (Sedgwick 91)

This becomes evident in *Spud* and *Inxeba* whereby characters navigate their own sense of identity against those binary oppositions. This becomes evident in *Spud* and *Inxeba*, whereby characters navigate their own sense of identity against those binary oppositions. The notion of "queer" was not available to Sedgwick at the time of her exploration of sexuality; but she did later elaborate on it in her preface "Queer and Now" (1993). The term offered an inclusive for modern possibilities:

one of the things "queer" can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonance and resources, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality are made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically. (Sedgwick 8)

Queer, for Sedgwick, depends on the idea that it borrows from many forms of identity, but has to be grounded into a construct because it is continually placing and replacing elements of identity. She further explains that:

The experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures attaching to the very many of us who may at times be moved to describe ourselves as

pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leather-folk, ladies in tuxedos, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divas, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunties, wannabes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men, or...people able to relish, learn from, or identify with such... (ibid)

Experimental identity has become a part of what queerness is, and as Sedgwick explains, expressions through “adventures” construct a new sense of identity. We read these moments of experimentation, whether enforced by others or self-ascribed, in *Spud*. Lastly, Sedgwick explains that:

queer seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which “queer” can signify only when attached to the first person. One possible corollary: that what it takes – all it takes – to make the description “queer” a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person. (8-9)

Sedgwick’s definition of queer hinges on the idea that experimental identity changes one’s perception of themselves. However, far be it for this project to adopt such a philosophy of experimentation in an analysis of the novel, but it is important to note that queer is an experimental process of readjusting rigid notions of gender.

Judith Butler’s body of work is to question identity – how to disrupt identity, how to change it – and therefore, disruptive performances of gender and sexuality are a crucial interest. Her investigation of the performance of identity resonates with the argument that queerness is merely an imitation, repetition of various aspects of identity as a whole. In her essay “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (1991), she argues that:

Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalised, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. (Butler 21)

Butlers argues that drag exposes gender as an impersonation; a form of repetition that warrants us to consistently play with. As a result, those who “do” gender, who wear, perform, or repeat the genders they select are impersonators. She further explains that:

If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequences of the imitation itself. In other words, the naturalistic effects of heterosexualised genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation of its effect. (ibid)

The use of imitation here is to say that it acts as something secondary, a copy of something to the original. However, this imitation - the copy - is itself the originator of all copies, but is it not a copy of anything. Butler’s notion of imitation and the copy of gender that imitates a gender that does not exist conveys the complexity of how if there were no homosexual as a copy then there would be no construct of heterosexuality as being the original gender. She further says that:

In this sense, the “reality” of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin and the ground of all imitations. In other words, heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealisation of itself – and failing. Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavours to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself. Indeed, in its efforts to naturalise itself as the original, heterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only produce the effect of its own originality; in other words compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontological consolidated phantasms of “man” and “woman” are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real. (ibid)

In short, Butler questions how the origins and the copy are both unstable and confounds the stability of any performing gender. She uses the example of drag – drag encapsulates various genders by performing them. However, she challenges this notion by arguing that everyone is

appropriating and performing gender whenever. In addition, Butler argues that the only way heterosexuality can be the original is that homosexuality is a copy. Butler says the following:

[I]f heterosexuality is compelled to repeat itself in order to establish the illusion of its own uniformity and identity, then this is an identity permanently at risk, for what if it fails to repeat, or if the very exercise or repetitions redeployed for a very different performative purpose? If there is, as it were, always a compulsion to repeat, repetition never fully accomplishes identity. That there is a need for a repetition at all is a sign that identity is not self-identical. It requires to be instituted again and again, which is to say that it runs the risk of becoming de-instituted at every interval. (24)

In short, Butler argues that because heterosexuality is continuously repeating itself then it never fully accomplishes its goal, and it can never be static and entirely stable. In my second chapter, Butler's idea of imitation and the ever-changing gender will be discussed by looking at how the character's ever-changing heterosexuality is failing to accomplish the ideals of heterosexuality. Moreover, the second chapter will discuss how imitation of gender proves radically unstable as each position inverts into the other and confounds the possibility of locating heterosexuality or homosexuality, ultimately regarding the character's identity as queer.

Furthermore, Butler's (1991) argument hinges on the idea that heterosexuality is fragile and writes later on that the "parodic replication and signification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frames bring into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original" (23). She later continues to say that "every performance repeats itself to institute the effect of identity, then every repetition requires an interval between the acts, as it were, in which risk and excess threaten to disrupt the identity being constituted" (Butler 28). Her argument that there are "intervals" between acts of performing gender seems to suggest that there are subversive moments of gendering – what happens to the person who doesn't perform a gender? In those moments, is it possible to say that there are queer gaps between gender performances whereby gender is disrupted; are these moments frail because acts of queerness disrupt binary gender performances? This line of questioning becomes crucial in my analysis of *Spud*. In the upcoming chapter, I seek to explore how those moments where gender is disrupted through the gaps that seem frail and fragile. Therefore, Butler's assertion, at the very least, suggests that heterosexuality is fragile. In this case, my reading of the novel and film explores, and what Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* (1990),

“strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them” (188). In short, it seeks to locate how the characters contest the conditioning of their conditions by discussing the displacement of gender norms that enable repetition.

While terms such as gay, homosexual and queer are fluid and are used interchangeably, it is also important to distinguish between these terms more carefully. Annemarie Jagose offers an insight into the relationship between queer and identity. In *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (1996), she claims that:

Queer...is an identity category that has no interest in consolidating or even stabilizing itself, queer is always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming...Instead of theorizing queer in terms of its opposition to identity politics, it is more accurate to represent it as ceaselessly interrogating both the preconditions of identity and its effects. Queer is not outside the magnetic field. (Jagose 131-2)

For Jagose, queer is represented as unstable and needs no explanation other than anything it chooses to take on at any given time. Queer identity moves in and out of whatever possible remnants identity it can hold onto. It “interrogates” forms of gender by disrupting how they operate.

No theorist has been as central to queer theory as Michel Foucault. His contribution to queer theory foregrounds insights that help many activists and academics. I will only examine a few basic concepts in Foucauldian analysis and return to him in the next chapter alongside exploring episodes from the novel. The first critical concept is that of “discourse”. For Foucault, in discourse unspoken beliefs and prejudices are communicated in a naturalised manner and reproduced. Discourse is constructed and perpetuated by those who possess power and means of communication. It asserts a way of constituting knowledge and forms of subjectivity and as a result it creates power relations. For Foucault, it is about what can be said by those who speak with an authority. Furthermore, Foucault also suggests in his essay *Subject and Power* (1982) that a subject is created through the internalisations of the discursive categories that they reflect:



This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (781)

In the above, Foucault articulates the notion that discourse acts as a form of discipline that regulates and constitutes ourselves and others as subjects. Therefore, his interest is about understanding the mechanisms of conformity. As my analysis of *Spud* will show, discourse functions as a mechanism to help understand the structure of institutional ideology, and helps readers to understand the way the characters understand their own sense of sexuality. It helps to uncover the pathways in which characters create new realities regarding their own sexuality by exploring behaviour assigned to sexuality floutingly.

Foucault's idea about the regulatory function of discourses of sexual normality is crucial to this discussion. Foucault's *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976) examines the rise of sexual science of the Victorian era. He addresses that society has repressed sexuality, but that the repression has taken discursive forms whereby writers, authors and scientists have spoken about it at length and volume. Foucault argues that:

There was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex – specific discourses, different from one another both by their form and by their object: a discursive ferment that gathered momentum from the eighteenth century onward. (515)

According to Foucault in his chapter titled “Incitement to Discourse”, discourse paradoxically becomes a function of the repression of sexuality – the physical acts of sex are replaced by talking about sex. The sexual energy is converted discursively into a web of regulatory language and normalising conversation. Foucault further says the following:

But more important was the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail. (18)

In *Spud*, we read that there is endless discussion and pervasive talk of sex, as well as an obsession with the male genitalia that is coupled with a repression of actual sex. In addition, Foucault explores how sexual categories such as “homosexual” and “heterosexual” become categories by which people identified themselves. David Halperin, in his study *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (1995), makes a crucial point about Foucault’s assumption of queer as a theoretical position:

Unlike gay identity, which though deliberately proclaimed in an act of affirmation, is nonetheless rooted in the positive fact of homosexual object-choice, queer identity need not be grounded in any positive truth or in any stable reality. As the very word implies, “queer” does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. (61-2)

While much of the dramatic action and conflict in *Spud* novels can be read as adolescents attempting to rebel against traditional authority and power, a set of disruptive engagements that can be read as a queering of coloniality, the narrative also concerns itself more directly with sexuality. As mentioned before, society had taken on discursive forms of sexuality, and for this reason, a crucial analytical concept that Foucault argues is the “Incitement to Discourse”. He argues that “putting into discourse of sex” is “far from undergoing a process of restriction” (15). He further claims that it has been:

subjected to a mechanism of increasing incitement; that the techniques of power exercised over sex have not obeyed a principle of rigorous selection, but rather one of dissemination and implantation of polymorphous sexualities, and that the will to knowledge has not come to a halt in the face of a taboo that must not be lifted, but has persisted in constituting – despite many mistakes, of course – a science of sexuality. (Foucault 15)

In the above quote, Foucault emphasises the ever incomplete process of sexual repression and argues that the laws against sex do not necessarily extinguish the desire, but there is only a proliferation in new discursive forms – an “increasing incitement”. Sex, as a physical, material act is private, hidden and therefore dangerous, difficult to control – discourse, on the

other hand, is social and opens to everyone. Repressive societies, such as the one represented in the novels and films, craft discourses in which “deviant” sexuality is named, and thereby controlled. Foucault allows us to understand how set and stable ways of talking about gayness (words such as moffie and fag) produce a stabilised, fixed discourse that normalises ways of thinking about homosexuality. Such discourses, in order to assume their stability and persuasive power, need to be endlessly repeated, which is what we read in *Spud*. Such set discourses concerning homosexuality, or about girls in the novels do not allow any other ways of thinking and talking to emerge. But by endless talking about moffies and fags, in order to contain and police actual homosexual desire, the school becomes queer – the characters constantly talk about non-normative sex, both boys and teachers. In this way, the school space becomes pervaded and queered.

The queer interrogation of gender forms in moments that are subtle. Queerness disrupts binary genders by distorting them. A particularly interesting understanding of these moments of fluidity and interrogation is a concept by Lauren Berlant called “minor intimacy”. In a special journal issue, “Intimacy: A Special Issue” (1998), Berlant explores how minor intimacies might appear too amorphous and obscure to grasp, because, according to Berlant, they embrace “energies of attachment” without stable and designated places, and desires too elusive for heterosexual or homosexual conventions (285). For this reason, the subversive nature of minor intimacies is congruent within a queer project. Berlant explains that minor intimacies can often not be grasped within the sexual imagination: they are intimate affective relations outside the couple form. For Berlant, “desires for intimacy that bypass the couple or the life narrative it generates have no alternative plots, let alone few laws and stable spaces of culture in which to clarify and to cultivate them” (ibid). Berlant explores this concept regarding the intimacies which happen in non-sexual, non-normative, non-penetrative ways; in other words, these are intimacies in opposition to or alongside sexual intimacies. In an attempt to paraphrase, Berlant explores how intimacies played out between relationships and emotions are indeed a fascinating framework to locate how normalised relationships display intimacies that are minor, but peculiar. These intimacies are seen as suspicious in relation to how society has generated an ideology of heteronormative relationships and the way interactions have been constructed to play out within the confines of these so called relationships. The heteronormative logic of intimacy, Berlant notes, “generates an aesthetic, an aesthetic of attachment, but no inevitable forms of feelings are attached to it” (ibid). In

other words, it is Berlant's assertion that even outside of institutive forms of coupling – whether it is homo/hetero coupling – there are forms of attachments that are shadowed and minor. Looking within this logic, the idea of minor intimacies looks to see what happens in the shadow of these heteronormative intimacies. And for the purpose of this project, these minor intimacies that are played throughout the novels and films are queer moments. Accordingly, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998) note:

Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation. These intimacies do bear a necessary relation to a counter public – an indefinitely accessible world conscious of its subordinate relation. They are typical both of the inventiveness of queer world making and of the queer world's fragility. (548)

Queer, according to the above quotation, explores forms of intimacies that are non - normative, not imaginable within the frameworks of conventional domestic partnerships such as heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Queer or minor intimacy may not even be thought of or recognised as intimacy, remaining under the radar, invisible. These forms of minor intimacies do not follow established scripts.

## 2.2 Masculinity and Colonialism in South Africa

In South Africa, histories of colonialism and apartheid are deeply entangled with gender and sexuality. Robert Morrell's seminal study *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in the Colonial Natal 1880-1920* (2001) is especially helpful to understand the ideological underpinnings of the context of *Spud*, and how the novels both illustrate and trouble heteronormative culture. Furthermore, Michaelhouse, a traditional colonial boy's school which explicitly features in Morrell's study, is the setting of the *Spud* novels. Morrell's argument examines the many ways that colonial Natal operates as a hyper-masculine space. Morrell's study traces hegemonic masculinity struggles in England, the source of Natalian ideology, and also that hegemony is "bound up with class and gender identity" that infiltrate schools such as Michaelhouse (2). The ideology, for Morrell, is that men are only made through the "toughness process" (63). However, what is problematized through various practices of toughness is explicit through initiation. Morrell iterates that those who were weak

had a “grim fate in store” (65). Masculinity is only constructed and accepted when “difference is suppressed” and “uniformity championed” (66). Routine gendered tasks were a tool to construct masculinity without fault. For Morrell, what was significant to gender practicing was sport, arguing that “[i]n learning and participating in sport, boys developed a relationship with their bodies as well as the social world” (78). His analysis stresses the importance of colonial sports routine, as such sport allows one to interact with others, but also with oneself. The interaction between oneself and others then preferably relates to the idea that the only way to discover one's body is to participate in sport actively. Morrell considers two levels that create an understanding of how the “impressive spread of rugby” is enforced. The success of masculinity is achieved through the individual level, as well as the social level. The individual level concerning sport, Morrell states, is “attributed to the way in which boys respond to the challenges of adolescence” (78). These challenges are therefore reproduced in adult males whereby they “experience their sense of male physicality” (78). The significance of the social level is predominantly evident in the novels whereby it is “understood as the result of conscious, collective strivings of groups and individuals who sought to realise a particular conception of society” (78). Moreover, the traditions of the school create and produce the boy in conflict with other boys. Morrell states that:

[s]port provides a context in which boys measure themselves (literally and figuratively). It is also the site in which certain masculine values are created, understood, disseminated, perpetuated, and challenged. Sport becomes important for reasons beyond the game itself. (73)

This measurement is comparative and relational. Positions in sport are given to those who may be more physically competent to execute those positions efficiently, and the others are then cast to the bench. Competitive sport is not just the game itself, but expresses a set of hegemonic masculinities thus becoming important “beyond the game itself” (73). Morrell also explains that “rugby is a violent game: it pins men in symbolic combat against one another, it gives vent to deep psychic male violence” (79).

Later, Morrell says that “homophobia was the chief weapon against too great an intimacy in male friendships” (71). His second chapter, “Schooling: making men out of boys” begins to unravel the deeper structures of socialisation in hostels which imprint and elicit sexist and racist notions through humiliation, routine and corporal punishment, but also regulate queerness where sexuality is controlled as well as suppressed. In other words,

through a state of institutionalised homophobia, queerness has a limited space, and therefore becomes suppressed except perhaps through minor intimacies. In relation to gendering same-sex environments, Morrell states the following:

Gender values were not produced by some mysterious or impersonal force. The repetition of gendered tasks, themselves predicated on entrenched hierarchies, was one way in which a particular reading of masculinity was created by the institution. Another, equally important, contribution to school masculinity derived from the complex relationships between the people operating within the gender regime of the school. The relationships between masters and boys, between prefects and juniors, and between the boys themselves all impacted on the received masculinity of the institution. The boys were not obedient choristers of an existing gender order. They actively contributed to the creation of masculinity. (49)

Morrell's claim that the "repetition of gendered tasks" is a similar claim to Butler's (1996) notion of a "compulsory repetition that can only produce the effect of its own originality" as discussed in the previous section of this chapter (21). Morrell persuasively shows how routine gendered tasks structure the lives of school boys, creating a particular normative masculinity. But his study does not show how, at the same time, such closed, disciplinary and hyper-masculine institutions also repeatedly stage and foreground queerness (this is Butler's (2011) claim whereby the repetition of gendered tasks in itself masks deeper anxieties). Morrell (2001) claims that for "boys wishing to develop close relationships the challenge was to present themselves as good, pure fellows" (72). However, the matter of being gay, a "moffie" or a "fag" is continually set up as an undesirable model of behaviour, a continual naming that foregrounds it even as it seeks to disallow it. The obsessive focus on the supposed sexual deviance constitutes a paradoxical queerness of such institutions that is clearly visible in *Spud*. Foucault (1990), as I have mentioned earlier in this section, elaborates on the discursive strategies for people to discuss and thereby regulate sex. In the novel, Foucault's concept of an "incitement to discourse" becomes a useful analytical tool whereby the discursive strategies begin to queer the hyper-masculine space. The compulsively repeated references to "moffie" and "fag" are examples of how discourse queers the paradigm of controlled masculinity, which will be further explored in the second chapter.

### 2.3 Transition: Gender in South Africa

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century in South Africa was a period of pivotal social and political change. The apartheid regime (1948-1991) was the evolution of a patriarchal “African political milieu, and associated rights [that] were fundamentally influenced by colonialism,” which Uchenda (2008) says “left it considerably masculinised and appropriated as a male sphere” (16). South African literature explored these patriarchal social norms of a colonial past, and the texts of the transition to democracy also reflect a break with this past. The transitional period has brought previously unknown and hidden queer practice and behaviour into public notice.

*Spud* and *Inxeba* construct masculinity in a significantly problematic way. In a South African literary context, it is essential to understand that ‘otherness’ in the apartheid period was established, according to Louise Vincent’s study “Destined to Come to Blows?: Race and Constructions of “Rational-Intellectual” Masculinity Ten Years After Apartheid” (2005), as anything besides “white masculinity” (354). Vincent explores, how even after apartheid, South Africa perpetuated white, male norms. Vincent further explains this notion by elaborating that white masculinity is in contestation with other masculinities and that “some men are in a position to impose their particular notions of masculinity on others to legitimate and reproduce the social relations that generate the social dominance” (355). “White masculinity” is associated with superiority (354), and Vincent further expresses that “ethnicity, as well as class, are implicated in contrast of white masculinity” (356). It is largely “the struggles over masculinities” that have permeated and structured conflict during the Apartheid regime (Morrell 25). The South African transitional period from apartheid to democracy will be read, in these texts, as correlated with a period of increasing gender fluidity. The South African transition into democracy is thus readable as a period in which conventional gendered identities become open to difference and queering.

In his more recent work, *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (2001), Morrell explores how masculinity has changed in the 1990s, the democratic era in which the *Spud* novels are set. It is a study that portrays masculinity as the construction of political, racial and social agendas. In a sense, the conceptualisation of masculinity in the transitional period of apartheid to democracy regards any new forms of masculine identity as a “new man” (Morrell 25). The acceptance of a “new man”, perhaps a developing man<sup>2</sup>, already implies

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<sup>2</sup> A developing man relates to the idea that “becoming a man” is a continuous process. A developing man suggests that one can never become the ideal manly figure because of this process. There are always external

the desire to change. This change in the transitional period may have been noted, but it is essential to understand how the change or the desire to change our current ideas of masculinity is challenged through Van de Ruit's texts. Vincent furthers this notion by explaining that white masculinity is in contestation with other masculinities and that "some men are in a position to impose their particular notions of masculinity on others to legitimate and reproduce the social relations that generate the social dominance" (355).

In short, I argue that the cross-over between the apartheid history and the South African present left a gap that allowed space for the emergence of queerness. This argument will be explored through various events in the *Spud* novels because it is set during the gap between the past and the present. I also argue that it is not the only racial separation that causes conflict between men in search of their masculine identity; it is also the conflict between white masculinities in search for hegemony that shall be explored in the series of Van de Ruit's novels.

Furthermore, the result of conflict and hostility in the battlefield of masculinities is more costly, primarily through the transitional era of South Africa. Morrell argues that there is a link between the various forms, levels and modes of violence to the historical construction of masculinity. Violence, according to Morrell, is suggested through the connection between "colonialism and apartheid [that] provided fertile ground for constructions of masculinity that endorsed and legitimised the use of violence in a variety of public and private contexts" (18). However, Robert Connell (2001) argues that "[h]egemony did not mean violence, although force could support it...achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (832). Although Connell suggests that violence is not as significant, he contradicts this perception in "The Social Organisation of Masculinity" (2001) to conclude that violence "becomes important in gender politics among men" and is "part of a system domination" (261). In the context of post-colonial thought and violence, Brandon Hamber (2009) iterates that there were "progressive forms of masculinity alongside the more violent forms of masculinity, and these too, have found expression in society today - amongst progressive groupings of men and men's organisations working for social transformation" (35). The contestation of masculinities is governed by erasure and violence and results in the "extreme pressures of conformity" (Vincent 364). In this thesis, I will attempt to track the forms of violence and erasure inflicted on the subordinate masculinities, and how hegemonic

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generational forces trying to rigidly define what constitutes as a man, which prohibits the concept from remaining stagnant.



masculinity asserts itself. I argue that coloniality has an influence in the consciousness of the characters in both Van de Ruit's *Spud* series and *Inxeba*.

## 2.4 Adaptation Theory

Since this thesis will also look at the film adaptation of *Spud* – and *Inxeba* can also be regarded as a film version of Thando Mgqolozana's novel, *A Man Who is not a Man* (2009) – it is important to sketch out some theoretical approaches to adaptation. What is the relationship between the novel and its film version? How can these different media, print and cinema, tell the story differently? What forms of representation are possible in the film that is foreclosed in the novel, and vice versa?

These films add to the on-going dialogue of South Africa's current political, racial and economic discourse. Robert Stam in his book *Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptations* (2000), regards film adaptations as additional "readings" that form part of the continuing conversation. His arguments regarding literary works and adaptation has become a "receptacle open to all kinds of literary and pictorial symbolism, to all types of collective representation, to all ideologies, to all aesthetics" (61). Addressing adaptations poses various issues, and the most pressing one is the issue of its faithfulness to text. Adaptations such as J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (2008), Alan Paton's *Cry, My Beloved Country* (1995) and, of course, *Spud* have significantly shaped and reflected South Africa's transition into democracy – films that have seduced the public with varying degrees of fidelity to the original novels. Linda Hutcheon states that adaptations are always "reworking of other texts" (Hutcheon 16). Despite adaptations being "compared to [literal] translations," Hutcheon claims that "there is no such thing as literal adaptations" (16). A concern regarding the production of adaptations for Hutcheon is that film is not a translation of text, but rather a "paraphrase" in order to "reimagine" fictional texts (18). Because the process of adaptation involves the "subtraction or contraction" of text (19), the idea of "cutting" is what is often seen to compromise the text's originality. The subtraction of particular moments, and the shifts of scenes may be necessary for the film, but do not necessarily travesty the original text. The production and process of film has its own set of authority which is not subordinate to a limited sense of fidelity. This authority presents its own set of resources in order to convey a meaning. Malgorzata Marcinaik (2007) notes this particular idea of reworking and explains that:

An adaptation or interpretation does not have to capture all the nuances of the book's complexity, but it has to remain a work of art, an independent, coherent and convincing creation with its own subtleties of meanings. In other words, it has to remain faithful to the internal logic created by the new vision of the adapted work. (61)

Adaptation is thus not a form of imperfect copy, but rather a creative reworking that presents its own originality. The question of fidelity, or how faithful the film is in relation to its accompanied text, is thus a limited idea. Linda Hutcheon (2012) discusses how adaptations should not be judged in relation to the original text; rather, they should judge on their own terms as autonomous creative works (445). Marcinaik furthers this idea and says that the interest lies in how filmmakers

respond to the significant parts of the literary work, how they transform the relation between the characters, structures and objects, how they mold the characters, how they add richness to their portrait, how they reconstruct the latent subtexts and how they shape visually and aurally all that lies beneath the surface of the verbally articulated work. (62-3)

In this case, the representation of film should not be limited to a narrow faithfulness to the text, but rather recreate it in order to convey its own meanings and readings, in dialogue with the text.

These particular issues surrounding adaptations are brought forward by Judge Edwin Cameron's response to his view of the first *Spud* film adaptation. He addresses the producer of the film, which he states that "despite [his] pleasure in [his] experience, [he] was kept awake by one aspect of it – which [he] guess[es] faithful derives from the books". This study addresses the question of whether the film follows the novel in its treatment of homosexuality, and to what extent it problematizes queerness. Does the film reproduce the gender politics of the novel, or does it allow space for a more differentiated treatment of sexual difference? Cameron's letter addresses the same issue; however, it focuses on the interpretation of the adaptations rather than the text. Cameron concludes by questioning whether "it is still acceptable for gays and lesbians to be derided and sneered at in movies in South Africa in 2010". Through Cameron's response, there is an understanding of how text and films are blurring the lines of interpretation.

The need for films to be assertively true concerning its source is what can be understood as heritage genre. To say this I mean that the director's aspiration to be faithful to the nature of the text, to represent it as close as possible, is what Andrew Higson, in *English Heritage, English Cinema* (2003), describes as "discourse of authenticity". His concept describes how accurate a film creates the impression in its representation of a literary text or a historical event. Higson's says that:

a critical perspective is displayed by decoration and display ... a fascination with style displaces the material dimensions of historical context. The past is reproduced as flat, depthless pastiche, where the reference point is not the past itself, but other images, other texts. (112)

Essentially, it doesn't matter how the imitation of the literary text is conveyed, according to Higson, it is always doomed to fail. For Linda Hutcheon (2012), the film is not a translation of the text, but rather a "paraphrase" to "reimagine" fictional texts (18). However, the process of adaptation involves a process where the "adapter's job is one of the subtraction and contraction; this is called 'a surgical art' for a good reason" (Hutcheon 19). Film is presented and portrayed as a visual medium and somehow so much more can be shown than what has been written. Moving beyond the discussion of fidelity, Hutcheon sets adaptation apart because it offers an "extended...revisitation of a particular work," from "allusions to and brief echoes of other works," which "would not qualify as extended engagements" (9). Charles Musser (2012) similarly makes this distinction for adaptation: "Citation, limited (or literal) quotation, allusion, evocation are not, in fact, forms of adaptation as we should strictly define the term. They mobilise connections between two texts that insufficiently sustained to involve adaption" (231). Considering adaptations as "extended" or "sustained" distinguishes how we should understand adaptation. For example, the comparison between the *Spud* films and the novels concludes an extended engagement or a sustained connection between the two works.

In his book titled, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996), Brian McFarlane observes that there is one common trait between literature and film, and that is narrative. McFarlane argues that the adaptation does not only mean to replicate or reduce, but it also adds to the original narrative of a "battle of codes, both cultural and cinematic" (16). Francesco Casetti (2004) argues that adaptations add to the meaning of literary texts, that there is something deep occurring. Casetti says:

There is something else going on, something deeper: the fact that the source text and its derivative occupy two entirely different places in the world scene and in history. Therefore, when we talk about adaptation, transformation, remakes, and so on, we should not simply focus on the structure of those texts – their form and content – but on the dialogue between the text and its context. Evidently, adaptation is primarily a phenomenon of recontextualisation of the text, or even better, of reformulation of its communicative situation. (83)

My fourth and fifth chapter in this thesis explores how adaptations reformulate events by analysing the characters through the way they are cinematically staged and through reference to camera techniques. It is important to look beyond fidelity, and as my film chapters will convey, the relationship between the novel and film become intertwined.

But if adaptation always involves a form of disturbance, violation and disruption of the original literary text - a set of modifications and transformations that a simplistic notion of fidelity mourns - it may be useful to regard the adaptive enterprise as a form of queering itself. As argued in Pamela Demory's book *Queer/Adaption* (2019), both

adaptation and queerness suffer from the stereotype of being secondary: to identify something as an adaptation is to recognise it in relation to something to something else that seems more original, more authentic. Similarly, to identify something as queer is to place it in relation to what is assumed to be "normal" or "straight". (1)

In order to adapt something, we need to modify it, change it, and sequence it in different ways that it does not classify the same product. To queer something means to make it strange and off, mould it differently than the original – it means to transform it, imitate, a parody of the sorts. This queer process, "the third meaning", is activated in the same manner as a Venn diagram. Two arts come together to create an intersection of meaning. The morphing of one genre into another constructs a queer genre that takes on its own meaning. Essentially, to queer is to adapt. This thesis raises the question of how film adaptations are queer in nature through the process of transformation; the imitation parodically shifting the way the film creates meaning. Pamela Demory (2018) explains that both adaptation and queer are stereotypically classified as being "less authentic" (1).

Repetition is a recurring theme within adaptation and queer theory. Judith Butler (1996) explains that queer is constituted through a series of repetitions: “all significations take place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat” (198). She argues that gender is a “kind of imitation” (361). Hutcheon (2012) echoes the same sentiments regarding adaptation as she defines it as “repetition, but repetition without replication” (7). Both call into question the idea of the binary identity of its respective representations. Using the same idea, this thesis considers how both *Spud* and *Inxeba* are queerly replicated to showcase something different, a product of resistance. In this case, it is the film adaptation’s resistance to conform to the literary text. In short, the fourth and fifth chapter will explore how the films move beyond fidelity to re-work the literary text in a non-conforming manner.



## CHAPTER THREE

### TALKING ABOUT DICK: CONTRADICTING GENDER AND HOMOSOCIALITY

#### 3.1 Overview

This chapter turns to a more detailed analysis of *Spud*, a novel series which depicts relationships among teenage boys within larger social groupings. This group of boys (the Crazy Eight) are primarily a homosocial ensemble; with female characters standing outside of this configuration and sometimes threatening the stability of their relationships. Throughout the narrative, we witness how the characters are exposed to queerness, which threatens heteronormativity. As the narrative progresses, we also witness how their relationships form in queer ways. Therefore, this chapter seeks to explore the novels in four ways. The first is an exploration of how gender practices are queered. This will be explored through a character analysis of the protagonist, as well as other characters, and how they queer gender practices. This will lead to a discussion of the sexualised nicknaming process which the Crazy Eight undergo. This will help create an understanding about how gender practices are queered by deviating from gender norms. Secondly, the chapter will apply Foucault's thinking about sexually saturated language being an "incitement to discourse". More specifically, this section will engage with the text to explore how sexual talk proliferates in the novel. Thirdly, I will explore the novel by applying Lauren Berlant's notion of "minor intimacy". This will be used to discover ways that normative gender regimes, such as sport, ostensibly aimed at the creation of heterosexual identity, can also be read to create a less visible homosocial environment. Lastly, the chapter will discuss how queerness in a same-sex environment is suppressed by coloniality.

To begin my discussion into the queer thematics of the *Spud* series, let me introduce a peculiar incident in the novel that captures the nuances of queerness:

The rugby gods stood up on the rim of the fountain with the school tightly crowded in around them. Captain Gillson made a fantastic speech about pride and passion that made absolutely no sense whatsoever. It still managed to whip us all into a frenzy of bloodlust. The warcry shook the walls and set scores of dogs barking around the place. The school song was sung in unison of sheer passion that, although terribly off note, seemed to please the huge rugby captain standing before us. At one stage Bert

became so overwhelmed with the proceedings that he let loose a volley of punches into the air. Unfortunately, the big lock lost his footing and stepped back into the fountain. Gillson silenced the sniggers and guffaws with a nasty glare and set off on another speech about honour. After about half an hour of speeches and shouting the crowd dispersed with much hooting and shrieking. Nobody, surely not even the great Linton Austin, would dare open a book tonight. (Van de Ruit 249)

In this scene, the crowd is full of “pride and passion” as they sing together. The sound conveys a sense of unity and togetherness, which is enhanced by the “tightly crowded” space. There is a physical closeness as the boys are tightly pressed together in the courtyard, and inevitably brush up against each other, bonding together in the “bloodlust” of the moment. What is emphasised here are the cries of passion, the burst of bloodrush and the physical connection that connects the boys in a tight space: all in ecstatic worship of the “rugby gods”. Rugby, and the virile masculinity that the sport embodies, is a higher power that the congregation here adores and worships. The main protagonist, Milton, witnesses a ritual celebration of sporting prowess within a same-sex environment where masculinity is worshipped. The practice of the warcy draws on the particular notions of sport, masculinity and gender performance that Robert Morrell (2001) characterises as a form of tradition through which men were made. But the scene can also be read against the grain as a queering process. As the boys are intimately and passionately thronging together, the scene becomes open to queer readings: a homoerotic encounter in which scores of young boys and men bond together in ecstatic passion. To recall, Lauren Berlant (1998) argues that subversive intrusions of intimacy can exist beyond the logic of a binary relationship. In other words, interactions between people that may seem normal somehow can also be read a minor intimacy that are possible and permissible, even in the homophobic institution in which they occur. In the above episode, we witness a seemingly normative celebratory practice, but one that is also pervaded by homoerotic minor intimacies.

### **3.2 Homosociality and Contradicting Gender**

A significant feature of the novel is that its characters perform, play with and even contradict gender norms, especially Milton. The novel is narrated by John Milton who is nicknamed “Spud” because of his delayed onset of puberty. His nickname becomes his frame of reference regarding his gender, and as the narratives progress, he questions his gender

identity. *Spud* as a whole is pervaded by an attentiveness to gender: what it means to grow up to be a proper man, how to avoid being a ‘moffie’ or a ‘fag’, what proper relations to girls should look like. In an episode in Milton’s first year, the Guv says to Milton that if he does not have sexual relations with at least three girls, he would have to consider himself a “closet homo” (Van de Ruit 213). Later that year, Milton is accused of being a homosexual because he is a “spud” and thus is unable to have “sex with a woman, but somehow able to do it with a man” (247-8). Throughout the text, the general gender practice is the need to have sex, or a girlfriend, and thus having either qualifies one to be a man. In addition, having longer hair is also deemed contradictory to the male gender roles. In the texts, Milton is deemed to be girl-like and is called a “moffie” because he has longer hair (286). In Milton’s third year, he is called a “fag boy” and is accused of having had a “perm” (93). Moreover, Milton is often accused of being less of a man because he does not have any nether hair and is reassured by Rambo that he is still a “spud” because he manages to acquire only one strand of pubic hair in his second year (83). We learn in the early stages of his high school journey that Milton becomes the first character to acknowledge his own nickname as he confesses to the readers that everybody calls him Spud because he is physically undeveloped (11). As detailed in the next section on nicknames, Milton is named “Spud” on account of his underdeveloped genitals. His entire identity is in this way reduced to his supposedly deficient male physiognomy. Almost every episode of the novels turn on the question of gender, policing the boundaries of masculinity. In such a highly charged environment, gender is conceived of in strictly binary terms: male and female, with no possibilities of any in-between identity. In other words, *Spud* as a whole persistently delegitimizes queerness – even as it parodically asserts it.

How do we see these gendered contradictions play out in the novels? One key way in which gender is made apparent in the everyday is the different nicknames of the boys. Who decides these names and how do they assert authority? In an attempt to uncover these questions, Milton documents the following:

Instead of dragging me into a toilet stall, I was dropped onto the cold concrete floor and it was only then that I realised that I was completely naked in the stark white light in front of so many prying and demented eyes. My hands instinctively tried to cover my groin but strong arms pinned them to the floor. Above me was Rambo with a black shoe brush, and suddenly he was polishing my balls! Then there was somebody else viciously scrubbing my spudness. I screamed and screamed. A hand clamped my



mouth shut but still I kept screeching. Then Pike was there with a huge toilet brush and I could hear ugly laughter and then felt more pain. I closed my eyes – I couldn't look. (196)

The extract reveals the conjunction of invasive bodily violence and the assertion of power dynamics. A hierarchy of masculinity and power is set up by the other boys of the group and their ability to use violence and withstand violence against Milton. Rambo's impulse to "polish" Milton's balls, which is touching another boy's genitals, is at the same time violent as well as homoerotic. We also need to consider that this particular rite-of-passage is a form of rape. Milton is "pinned" to the floor where his body is physically exploited. It is as if the people who surround Milton forcefully suppress him, and the "black shoe brush" features as the tool in which Milton is stripped of his innocence. The phrase "male homosociality" is used to describe practices of male bonding that are often defined in part by homophobia, while homosociality and desire oppose each other's co-presence, at least on the surface. Eve Sedgwick (2015) argues that "to draw the homosocial back into the orbit of desire, of the potential erotic, then is to hypothesize the potential brokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1). The previously mentioned episode refers to the potentially but not necessarily erotic bond between the boys in a homosocial relationship. Sedgwick also argues that there is a present possibility of slippage between platonic and erotic homosocial desires. Therefore, this particular moment can be identified as a queer moment where we are presented with a group of boys who strip Milton of his clothes leaving him naked, and gazing at his genitals. The senior boys are voluntarily touching Milton's "balls". This initiation ceremony marks a heterosexual rite-of-passage, but is also at the same time readable through a queer lens as the boys exhibit an obsessive interest in each other's genitals. It becomes evident in this scene that Milton's genitals do not conform to the standard size that denote the male gender, and therefore he is subjected to ridicule. Milton is "dropped" and presented "naked" in the above episode. His state suggests a sense of vulnerability and this is exploited by the other members of the Crazy Eight. The forceful nature of being "pinned" to the ground implies a violence that is not only portrayed through the physical exploitation of Milton's body, but the exploitation of his sense of being. For Milton, his "spudness" makes him vulnerable to the other boys' authority over him, which violently alters his identity in this particular episode. This moment is ritualised through the "prying and demented eyes" that forcefully constrain Milton's sense of self and denigrate his masculinity as inferior as suggested by his "spudness". The act of "polishing" or "scrubbing" his genitals with a black

polish shoe brush suggests that Milton is inadequate for the role of a man; furthermore in fact, by blackening his genitals, he is also racially altered. The episode is pervaded by the ethos and initiation practice of colonial British schools where blackness symbolises an inferior status. In this case, the blackening of his genitals thus implies that Milton is not only unfit to be a proper man, but also cannot exemplify whiteness. In short, Milton's non-conforming gender (his inadequate genitals) makes him a fragile target where others enforce their power and authority over him.

In another moment in the novel, Milton's penis is described by Julian as "a runty silkworm with an eating disorder" (Van de Ruit 9). The imagery of the silkworm implies a metaphor of fragility, softness, and the lack of masculinity, one of the frequent references in the novels to male genitalia. In this case, the image suggests Milton's change and physical growth and thus we learn that the body functions as a mode of representation, a signifier that traces and shapes a character's identity. His gender, which is represented through the body, as well as his high voice, somehow categorise him as unconventional within the norms of the social setting where "difference is suppressed" and uniformity is championed (Morrell 66).

His unconventional gender is again replayed when Milton documents the following event from his second year:

The bastards did it again! Like something out of last year's birthday nightmare, I was carried down to the bogs by a mob of marauding Spud attackers. This time I kicked and bit and scratched and shouted until I had no more strength left. I managed to injure about three people before. Fatty sat on my chest and nearly crushed me to death. I looked around the mob and saw the triumphant face of Thinny, who was watching with glee as Rambo shaved my ball hairs off with an electric razor. I have stubble for the first time – unfortunately it's in the wrong place. (Van de Ruit 114)

Again, Milton undergoes another violent attack that is suggestive of rape. However, what is different is that what he has achieved as a symbol of his masculinity – his "three ball hairs" (89) – is stripped from him by the razor. As in the previously mentioned episode where Rambo was found polishing Milton's balls, he seems to display an interest in Spud's genitals. Going against the heteronormative grain, Rambo's interest in Spud's genitals relates Sedgwick's argument that there is a slippage between platonic and erotic (also violent)

homosocial desire. In the so-called heteronormative tradition of the birthday ritual, there seems to be an underlying queerness that is contained and incited by the colonial context.

Spud's evident physical inability to be recognised as a man also finds its inevitable correlation in his supposed sexual orientation. Since he is not recognised as a proper man, he must be gay:

A rumour about me and Gecko being fags is going around the house. (It seems that a spud, while not being a real man and able to have sex with a woman, is somehow able to do it with a man.) Have decided to ignore it and hope it goes away. Boggo's porno debut. Rambo and Simon were invited to watch the premiere of Randy Racks with Boggo in the AV room. All three said it was a wicked experience. Being a spud, Rambo said the porno would be wasted on me because I 'fire blanks'. I felt the blood rush to my face and sank low into my mattress and desperately tried not to be curious. No matter how many times I'm teased about it, my spudness still kills me! (Van de Ruit 247-8)

Again, we read that Milton's spudness, that is the small size of his genitals, prohibits him from being a "real man"; however, it also paradoxically makes him able to have sex with men. In this case, Milton's anatomical sex in the above episode results in others deciding his performative gender, and the rumour of being a "fag" is a result of Milton's spudness. Milton identifies himself as "a spud" in this particular episode and therefore is able to compare himself and a "real man". Milton reflects that he has a lack of masculinity because of his inability to "have sex with a woman". Milton's comparison of a "real man" and his "spudness" showcases his idea about how he contradicts heteronormative gender. Milton's sense of reflection suppresses what is deviant and underdeveloped in him in the hope that his nonconformity will somehow disappear. Milton's pessimistic perception of his "spudness" is so disabling that it "kills" him. Milton's use of the word "kills" suggests how extreme he feels the disabledness of his "spudness": he is socially dead with a non-existent identity in the hypermasculine colonial space of the boarding school. The sense of being killed off as a social being by his own insufficient body implies that his identity is restricted by corporality; that his identity can only be resurrected by becoming a "real man" on the outside. His physical body limits his social inclusion. This particular episode questions Milton's perspective as he begins to become aware of the limitations instead of understanding his own unique gender expression which is a result of suppression.

There are many areas in the novels that refer to Milton and his “spudness” such as the previously discussed episode. The link between his nickname and his genitals further typecasts his role. Nicknames exemplify the gendering of characters, specifically pointing to their sexual shortcomings or strengths. Nicknames are part of the extended masculine socialisation, and a necessary rite-of-passage. His teacher, the Guv attempts to use Milton’s proper name, but Milton himself has by now accepted his socially bestowed identity, and mentions that “everyone else calls me Spud” (29). Milton documents the following in a discussion with the Guv:

‘So, Milton,’ he said, ‘welcome to paradise lost.’ With that he roared with laughter and told me that anybody named after the greatest writer that ever lived must have fine literature in his blood. He presented me with a play called *Waiting for Godot* written by an Irishman called Samuel Beckett. He prodded the book with his finger and said, ‘Nothing happens, old Johnno, but it’s a raving blast. Now piss off, it’s breakfast time.’ I couldn’t help smiling; it’s the first time I’ve been called by my name since I’ve been here. (Everyone else calls me Spud because my willy is tiny and my balls haven’t dropped yet.). (30)

Milton thus accepts his denigrating nickname, thereby acknowledging his “spudness” or inadequate masculinity. Benedicta Windt-val (2012) argues that “pet names and nicknames are often used as a means to control, manipulate or degrade other people” (289). The books are also called *Spud* which seems to indicate an idea that nicknames are more significant in a same-sex environment. Because nicknames are significant, there is an indication that nicknames offer a platform of social control.<sup>3</sup>

### **3.3 Let’s Talk About the Dick: Obsession with Male Genitalia**

As evident in the previous discussion, references to the male genitalia pervade the text, and appear to be foundational to heteronormative gender practices. Throughout the novels, there

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<sup>3</sup>Milton’s anecdote about his generalised nickname suggests that he knows his place as a gendered contradiction. The anecdote seems to imply that he understands social control by referring to himself as a Spud. By associating his nickname to his “willy” only reiterates his place within the same-sex environment as inferior to masculine standards.

seems to be an obsession with the male body; from how it looks, to how to use it, and it is this obsession with the male body that opens up to queer possibilities. The novels feature a group of boys talking about how they touch themselves and also tell others how they should touch themselves. An episode that exposes Milton's "wanking" abilities encapsulates this particular obsession:

Boggo has a dirty magazine but has refused to say where he got it from. We all pored over the pictures of large breasted women in naughty poses and sexy underwear. Rambo told me I was wasting my time looking because I was only a spud and the only hope of wanking was with a pair of tweezers. (Van de Ruit 42).

The objects of interest and desire are not necessarily about the erotic pictures displayed in the "dirty magazine", but more about masturbation. By sharing this desire, a private autoerotic act becomes a homosexual scene. A heated, erotically charged queer environment is created through lusting women entangled with a shared masturbatory fantasy. In short, the space creates a possibility for many of them to be fully aroused as they look at the objects of their desire: both heterosexual desire for the woman in the sexualised images, as well as an homosexual awareness of the sexual arousal and desire of other boys. An erotically queer space is created as the boys witness other boys' erected penises. This, then, encapsulates Berlant's (1998) notion of minor intimacies: the idea that their common interest in the magazine showcases the way that they form an intimacy that is not happening in a penetrative way, but nevertheless creates a sexually charged environment that exceeds heteronormative practices. To recall her argument, Berlant explains that minor intimacies can often not be grasped within the heterosexual imagination: they are intimate affective relationships outside the couple form. These "desires for intimacy ... have no alternative plots, let alone few laws and stable spaces of culture in which to clarify and to cultivate them" (Berlant 285). This form of subversive desire is suggested in the way they lust over the same object of desire, but closely participating in a private sexual practice and sex talk.

As discussed in the introduction, much of the dramatic action and conflict in *Spud* novels can be read as adolescents attempting to rebel against traditional authority and power, a set of disruptive engagements that can be read as a queering of coloniality and the established order. But nowhere in the novels is there any suggestion of actual acts of homosexual sex: gay sex remains completely contained and limited within discourse. So while the boys may endlessly talk about homosexual activities, such sex does itself not

feature in the narration as acts that take place. As discussed in the previous chapter, Foucault (1990) refers to this obsessive and pervasive talk about sex as an “incitement to discourse”. It is through discourse that the potentially disruptive and transgressive force of sex, especially homosexual sex, can be discursively managed in society. Talking about sex is, for Foucault,

a mechanism of increasing incitement; that the techniques of power exercised over sex have not obeyed a principle of rigorous selection, but rather one of dissemination and implantation of polymorphous sexualities, and that the will to knowledge has not come to a halt in the face of a taboo that must not be lifted, but has persisted in constituting – despite many mistakes, of course – a science of sexuality. (15)

In short, placing sex into discourse helps stabilise its disruptive potential into stable binaries shifting it out of its queer or “polymorphous” arena into categories that can be easily named and policed. Sex itself, as a physical act, is private, hidden and therefore dangerous, difficult to control – discourse, on the other hand, is social and open to everyone. Repressive societies, such as the one represented in the *Spud* novels, craft discourses in which “deviant” sexuality is named, put into binary categories (man vs moffie) and thereby controlled.

Indeed, the characters in *Spud* talk about sex and sexuality obsessively, and the major discursive “work” here is the containment of all non-normative desire, and marking it as deviant. Through conversations, it is clear that much of the sexual talk is less an expression of erotic desires but a persistent discursive policing of sexual difference, and of heteronormativity. In an all-boys boarding school, Milton, the protagonist, forms part of a group of boys who are beginning to develop socially, as well as explore their emerging sense of masculinity. This exploration is primarily conveyed through talking about sex. Not only is there a continual talk about sex, for example when they spend “an entire double English lesson talking about sex” (Van de Ruit 65), or opening “sex bets” (78) to see who can score the highest with a girl, but there also an latent obsession with the male body: from how its genital anatomy looks like, to how to use it. The very name of the novel, *Spud*, is derived from a description of Milton’s penis.

This obsession with the male body offers possibilities of a queer reading. For example, Milton witnesses a “strange looking guy” who is “stark naked, with a towel draped over his head and his willy pointing to the ceiling” (Van de Ruit 13). Before continuing, we should acknowledge that the unnamed boy’s penis is suggested to be erected through the image of it “pointing to the ceiling,” while in the space occupied only by other males. Later

on, in the toilet area that “consists of ten showers,” Julian “comments on everybody’s willy” (ibid). Milton then acknowledges that Robert Black “has the hugest willy” (ibid). Later in the novel, Simon encounters Boggo in the very same bathroom “wanking in his [Boggo] rugby sock” (39). This space then becomes a frequent locus for erotic looking and suppressed desires. These boys are in spaces where they are exposed to each other’s naked bodies. They are constantly witnessing nudity. The space narrated by Milton is on the face of it, or at least discursively, pervaded by heteronormativity, but this is also at the same time a queer space where boys are surrounded by each other naked and exposed. This creates a homosocial space that allows each of the boys to exhibit themselves and engage in voyeuristic looking. The locker room or communal bathroom also allows the boys to discuss their genitals and what they can do with it. In another classroom episode where there is no explicit nakedness, the boys participate in a religious group discussion about sex where Boggo asked the Reverend Bishop if his “willy would fizzle up if you had sex with a Satanist” (126). Rambo then asks the Chaplin if he had ever “had a threesome with two lesbians” (ibid). Another incident that emphasises this obsession with the male body is the resistant attitude that a prefect has towards Milton:

FATTY: Okay, he looks a bit like a fag...but he scores a surprising amount of chicks.

MATRIC: Hot chicks or growlers?

FATTY: His last chick had huge tits.

I tried to jump into the conversation at this point but the matric told me to shut up.

MATRIC: How big?

FATTY: I dunno...a grapefruit?

I suddenly had an image of Mermaid’s grapefruit and started feeling a little unsteady on my feet.

MATRIC: What’s he got – a huge dick?

FATTY: Nah, his balls haven’t even properly dropped yet.

MATRIC: Blind. (230-1)

The conversation between Fatty and the prefect excludes Milton, and we must assume that he does not qualify to participate in this conversation on account of his underdeveloped genitals. But even in this conversation about heterosexual sex and the anatomy of girls, heteronormativity is undercut by a much more prominent discussion about male genitalia. A detailed discussion discloses the way other boys take interest in other boy’s genitals, thus

creating an openly subtle queer possibility. This “incitement” to a sexualised discourse then offers a unique insight into the queerness that subtly pervades heteronormativity. In the novels as a whole, there is an obsessive talking about sex with a focus on the male sexual organ.

### **3.4 Conclusion: What’s the big dick idea?**

My reading of the *Spud* text suggests that the narrative can be read, against the grain, as indicative of the brittleness and inner fractures that pervade heteronormative discourses and identities, and that a latent sense of queerness pervades the text. In this contrapuntal reading, heteronormative gendered roles are asserted even as a sense of queerness disrupts them. However, queerness never fully comes into its own as a force on the surface, except perhaps in isolated performative scenes where they can be staged in the “safe” space of the theatre. In a sense, Van de Ruit’s texts suggest that the supposedly formidably stable heteronormative order is under threat, and continually in danger of collapsing into a queer zone. The texts, read through the lens of queer then offer a critical understanding regarding the way that the established norms around gender in South African societies are disrupted in a post-transitional world. Gender has become more fluid, and despite the pervasive and overt homophobia in these novels, there is an emerging world of queerness that cannot be contained.

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**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**PUNY SUBJECTS: ARCHITECTURAL NOSTALGIA AND HOMOSOCIAL**  
**BONDING**

**4.1 Overview**

As established in the preceding chapter, queerness, despite its subversive presence, is relentlessly delegitimized in the novels. The question that this chapter seeks to pose is to what extent the film adaptations reproduce the misogynistic sexual politics of the novels, and to what extent they make an attempt to represent a more inclusive gendered diversity. Do they reproduce clichéd tropes of the *moffie* or *gay*, or do they recast these figures in ways that exceed their marginalised and derided status in the novels? The novels feed off a residual colonial discriminatory culture in which nothing except straight heteronormativity is valued, but the films, produced in a period marked by increasing awareness of gender equality and diversity, are possibly more open to queerness. In short, this chapter will explore how the novels and their film diverge in terms of sexual politics.

The subject of this chapter will be the films with the same names as the novels discussed in the preceding chapter, namely *Spud* (2010), *Spud: The madness continues...* (2013), and *Spud: Learning to fly* (2014). The first two films were directed by Donovan Marsh who also wrote the screenplay for both. The third film was directed by John Barker, with the screenplay written by John Van de Ruit himself. All three films were produced by Ross Garland. The first two films differ from the last film because they have a different cinematic approach. The lighting is slightly dimmer and the film resolution is far less defined in the first two films, which seems to be inspired by a more nostalgic 90s aesthetic. The third film, however, captures a more sophisticated, contemporary approach, with a more up-to-date cinematic aesthetic.

As this chapter will show, despite the attempts of the film to portray gay characters in more sympathetic ways, the deep structures of heteronormative straightness continue to pervade the films. As Judge Cameron has reminded us, the films' use of innocent jokes are playing into the larger issues of intolerance, violence and oppression in South Africa. On the surface then, the *Spud* films appear to portray a more diverse, inclusive approach to gender difference, but they cannot ultimately delink themselves from the deeper homophobia that pervades the books. The films also portray homosociality displayed through the subterranean queerness that pervades the films. Homophobia is a tool which controls homosociality, and

the relationship between these homosocial dynamics is patriarchal. These are some of the ways the chapter will explore the films that will help represent male teenage dyadic homosociality through the “emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality” (Sedgwick 1). Sedgwick is crucial here to understand how male bonding forms subtle homoerotic expression through identifying patterns and forms of bodily contact. This chapter will also explore the intimate connections of male power to race and class differences.

The focus of this chapter is to understand the general representation of queer characterisations. In this case, this chapter seeks to explore the intrusion of post-apartheid colonial nostalgia and how it is connected to a suppression of queerness. The films interpret the novels, giving visual cues to viewers that allow them to understand apartheid society, and register signs of an emerging queerness. The reference to apartheid, as well as the emerging post-apartheid society, begs an interrogation with regards to the way that the films convey history, as indexed by conflict between and within the characters. The nostalgic references to a post-apartheid South Africa, according to David Medalie (2010), “should not be construed as solely a resistance to the present or as a conservative clinging to the past,” but as “forms of nostalgia with vastly discrepant purposes” (36). In this case, the purpose in this chapter is to understand how the meeting between a colonial past and an emerging present creates an intersection that reveals ambivalence that also becomes “a unique engagement with the past” (ibid). To pay close attention to Medalie, he begins in his essay “The Uses of Nostalgia” by questioning the utopian idea of a new beginning in post-apartheid culture. He questions Andre P. Brink’s (1998) notion of the “regenerative powers of South African literature” whereby Brink claims that literature itself must not simply “escape from the inhibitions of apartheid” but to “construct and deconstruct new possibilities” (27). Medalie problematizes the ways in which the utopian desire for newness limits the imagination, and focuses on the recurrence of an idealised past, stripped of all overt negative, apartheid political content. All of this is encompassed by what Medalie identifies as a genre, “My Apartheid Childhood Revisited”. This genre expresses the ambivalent relationship between the past and the present, and is characterised by what Medalie terms “unambitious and utterly lacking in self-consciousness” (37). Much of the examples that Medalie uses in his analysis of nostalgia are narratives that reflect back on a childhood past. He references Anne Landsman’s *The Rowing Lesson* (2007), but focuses on Jo-Anne Richards, *The Innocence of the Roast Chicken* (1996). Although much of his analysis hinges on literary works, it is possible to interpret the *Spud* films as a part of this genre as they convey how the narrator navigates and reflects on his own

childhood through and after apartheid. The film acts as a medium whereby the crossing between the past and present results in the ambivalence of a character's progression. This ambivalence is seen whereby Milton is first portrayed as a naïve, innocent child, but as he gradually moves through into a post-apartheid narrator he becomes more conforming. His conformance is showcased through his quest to become a prefect in his third year. This form of nostalgia is represented in the film through contentious moments, such as Judge Cameron's argument regarding the casual denigration of gays, and also covers the films' uncritical engagement with a colonial past and presence. I read this particular film series to add to the tension between the past and the present; I will explore how the *Spud* films' most contentious moments are visible sights of intersectionality between the past and the present.

## 4.2 Laughing at Queers

Since its release, *Spud* has sparked world-wide interest with largely positive reviews. However, there have been some negative responses, the most significant being a letter that was addressed to the producer of the film, Ross Garland from Judge Edwin Cameron. As detailed previously Cameron highlights significant problems with the representations of queerness through the LGBT<sup>4</sup> representation in the film and describes it as casually homophobic. As previously discussed, the sounds of laughter, which is a significant anti-queer soundscape that is intradiegetic and not evident in the novel, is what largely contributes to Cameron's argument regarding the "casual denigration" of queer figures. Cameron's particular point of homophobia is described through incidents of the film, which aligns it with the same incidents described in the novel. Cameron's knowledge of the denigration in the novel, the suppression of queerness, seems to be limited, but does call out the significance of the audio-visual representations of queerness. The focus in this chapter is then the analysis of how audio-visual representations in the film and contain both suggest queerness. As John Milton continues to struggle through his school career to find acceptance, as discussed in the previous chapter, my focus here is to understand how a cinematic medium helps reinforce his battle with queerness.

In order to illustrate the potential of a filmic medium to dramatize the denigration of queer identities, a closer look is given to an episode in the second film (Figure 4.1). Milton has an erotic dream about two of the leading females, Mermaid and Amanda, and as the

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<sup>4</sup> The acronym LGBT refers to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community.

dream continues he encounters the “evil prefects” (qtd from the film’s dialogue). This episode is significant because it does not correlate to any similar episode in the novel and emphasises the details of queer suppression in the film. As Milton attempts to save Mermaid, portrayed as the damsel in distress, the size of his penis becomes the chief object of ridicule. The prefect named Anderson says, “Bugger off, Spuddy”, while gesturing with his fingers at Milton’s small sized penis. After Anderson’s gesture, the two other prefects laugh, and the expression of Mermaid's face suggests that she pities Milton. The dream ends as Christine interjects and the three girls begin to attack him.

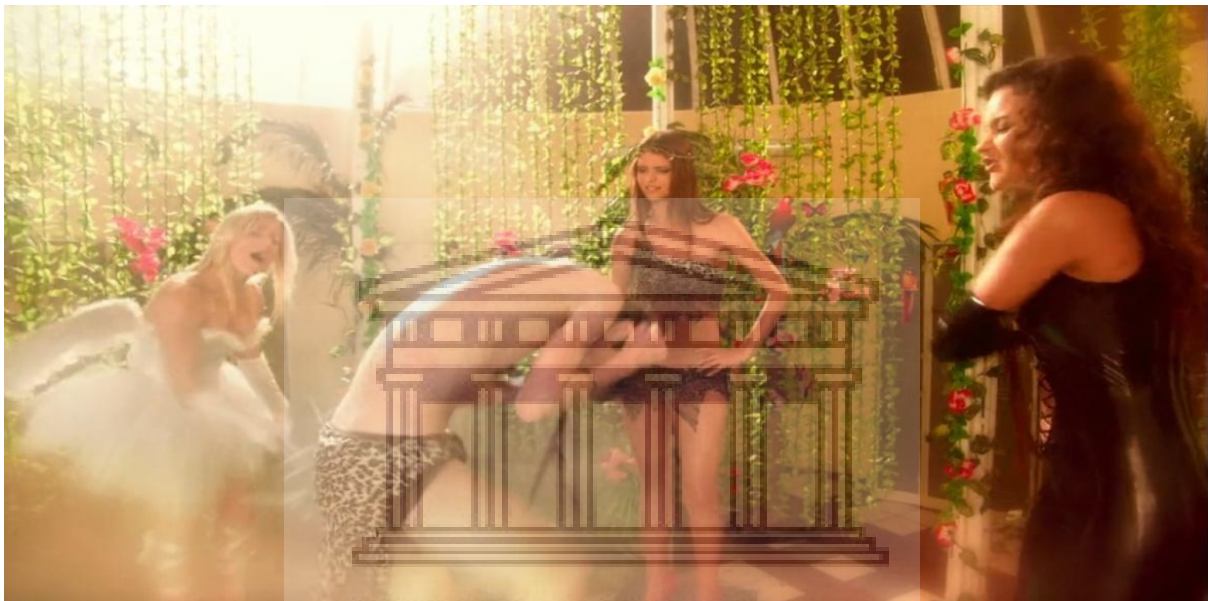


Figure 4.1

As displayed in figure 4.1, Milton is crouching down, making him look small and inferior compared to the girls. Milton is further portrayed as inferior and small because the female characters are depicted as bigger than him, while whipping him. There are distinct Tarzan and ape intertextual and intermedial references in this scene. The chimpanzee-like audio in the background suggests that Milton is being treated like an animal whilst being whipped. He also appears to be almost naked, and despite the fact that his genitals are covered, his dignity has been stripped from him. Milton’s dream captured in this episode also seems to suggest that Milton unconsciously plays out scenes in which his masculinity is denigrated. The dream clearly represents an episode of masochism. In Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), subjects have reoccurring sexualised dreams or fantasies about being beaten as a child. The fantasy is can be referred to as masochism because one would fantasise or dream about being beaten for pleasure. Freud claimed that the male masochist subject desires to fulfil a passive and feminine role. Freud writes:

The suppression of women's aggressiveness which is prescribed for them constitutionally and imposed on them socially, favours the development of powerful masochistic impulses, which succeed, as we know, binding erotically the destructive trends which have been diverted inwards. Thus masochism, as people say, is truly feminine. But if, as happens so often, you meet with masochism in men, what is left to you but to say that these men exhibit very plain feminine traits. (172)

In this case, Milton's position as a masochist conveys the inner desire to be passive, and, in the film's narrative, conveys a deeper fantasy to become feminine in a way that he seems prohibited on a conscious level. His dream further suggests that his inner desire or fantasy conveys his already inferior position, but helps him articulate his possible desire to be more feminine. His dream helps perform a queer identity contradictory to the already prominent male power that dominates his world.

Another significant form of analysis that helps us understand Milton's dream as queer is Freud's insights in his book *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Freud believed that dreams function as a wish fulfilment. Dreams, for Freud, are only partially censored expression of a particular wish that is only fulfilled within the unconscious of an individual. Freud expresses these wish fulfilments as an:

Impression of infantile experiences; like dreams, they benefit by a certain degree of relaxation of censorship. If we examine their structure, we shall perceive the way in which the wishful purpose that is at work in their production has mixed up the material of which they are built, has rearranged it and has formed it into a new whole. (497)

Dreams offer a space whereby a subject is able to express a certain desire or wish in a safe space. The space within the dream is partially shielded and insulated from the outside world. In this case, Freud believed that there were two ways of interpreting dreams. The first would be the manifest, which is the literal meaning of a dream. The second, which Freud focused on, was the latent content of a dream. The latent content refers to the symbolic meaning within the dream (160). These are events that have a hidden meaning that the dreaming unconscious would bring to the surface. The latent content in Milton's dream, depicted in figure 4.1, suggests that there is a desired erotic wish for occupying the subject position of a

woman, as is showcased in the way that both prefects laugh at him, and also in the way he is whipped by the female characters. The scene is erotically charged by the presence of half-naked, sexually aggressive women, as well as by the way Milton is represented in the dream – he appears half-naked. Freud’s theorisation would suggest that the dream is a disguise for Milton’s erotic desire for both the prefects and the female characters. The dreams seem to borrow from the act of symbolization in which the whipping and the laughter are symbols of erotic desire. According to Freud (1899), the dream is a “symbolic” interpretation that is presented as a sexual act that fuels some type of desire. The humiliation that is directed at him from both the female and male characters seems to suggest how Milton displaces his own feelings of sexual desire through their act of ridicule. Freud explains that displacement is the distortion of one’s feelings for people or objects (332). In short, Milton is humiliated in two ways: first physically, through objects such as the whips, and secondly, psychologically, in how the prefects witness this masochism and laugh at his first humiliation. In this sense, not only does the S&M scene between him and the girls become a conveyance of his desire to be submissive to them, but the scene of laughter also becomes a queer insurgence of desire towards the boys who are supposedly not his objects of desire. If Freud’s idea of masochism relates to how males desire to be beaten, it should be possible to interpret that the laughter also symbolically becomes a form of violence – a form of aural beating directed at his ears. In that sense, it is suggested through the transition from the girls beating him to the boys laughing at him that there is a complex desire to be passive, both to the girls and boys. His desire to be submissive to the females in his dream may appear to be a heteronormative act, but we cannot discredit the fact that there is a possibility that there is a desire to be submissive to the males in his dream, therefore portraying Milton as a masochist in both instances, and therefore essentially queer.

Another example that could be considered as suppressing and denigrating queerness is Milton’s third year performance as a female character. Norman Whiteside, a character who appears in the third installment places a sign on Milton’s back that states “I am a late developer”, and while the camera closes in with a medium shot, Milton is laughed at by the audience. The laughing is first intradiegetic, but as the screen transitions to a wide shot of Milton as he turns his back to the audience to show this sign, the laugh becomes louder, enhanced in the film’s soundtrack. The camera then transitions into a medium shot before cutting to a shot where the audience is seen laughing. Thus a mixture of intradiegetic and synthetically produced laughing sounds curate Milton’s position as a queer performer. The

combination of being dressed as a female character, as well as the sign that conveys that his physical development is “late” further denigrates him.

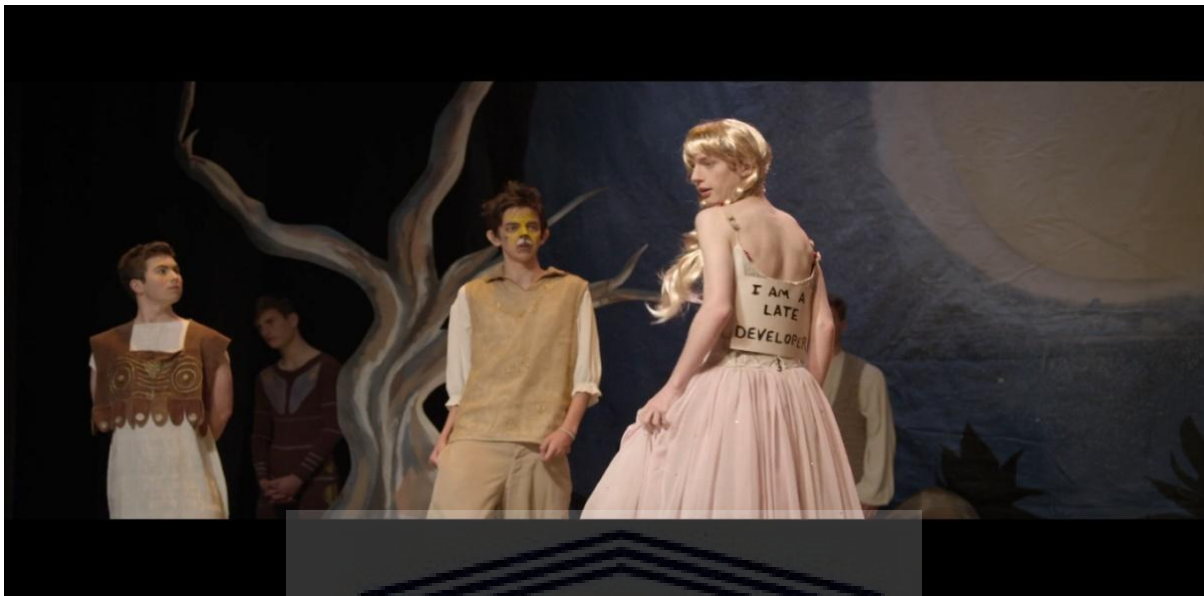


Figure 4.2

This particular episode displayed in figure 4.2 also has no correlation in the novel and thus delivers a different perspective of Milton’s character. The film uses this episode to deliberately cast doubt of Milton’s gender identity. With the character selection as being Flute, the effeminate bellows mender in William Shakespeare’s play, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Milton is already subjected to the complexities of a character that plays both a male and a female role in a play within a play. The intertextual reference to Shakespeare’s play links the title of the play to the previously discussed idea concerning dreams. There seems to be a suggestion that dreams can act as a screen on which modes of queer expression can be projected. It is only through some form of dreaming that a subject can truly come to consciousness about desire and wish fulfilment. Furthermore, like Milton, the Flute character reluctantly portrays a female character. His character then continues to portray a female by impersonating a female’s voice, thus also linking itself to how Milton’s voice is ridiculed in the first film before his voice breaks. The use of a queer Shakespearean character that cross-dresses helps emphasise how gender binaries are destabilised. The name “Flute” given to Thisbe seems to suggest homophobia with regards to the way the flute resembles the look of a penis, and the act of placing the flute in the mouth is suggestive of oral penetration.

These particular episodes are examples of how the films diverge from the novels and shape queer characterisation into a laughing matter. These particular moments reflect on the

film's larger idea that queerness is suppressed and contained to emphasise a normative and hegemonic masculinity by showing how others marginalise queerness through their laughter. In a sense, the laughter suggests how audiences, firstly within the film, and also we as viewers, become interpellated by what they and we are seeing.

This pattern of laughter can also be observed in another episode that takes place in the first film, and has been discussed in the previous chapter. When Milton is initiated on his fourteenth birthday, he is carried in by a group of other boys who scrub his balls with shoe polish. The event features in the novel, but in the film it is given additional significance through visual and aural features that are not articulated in the text.



Figure 4.3

The point of view in the above shot (Figure 4.3) establishes the film viewer not just as a witness but as the subject of a traumatising event; a rite-of-passage that inducts him into his social circle through humiliation and erasure. As discussed earlier, the violent induction into the dormitory symbolises a rape. The boys are celebrating this event, which is suggested through their laughter, as Milton seems to be pinned down on the bathroom floor. Noticeably, the event plays out cinematically through the use of mirrors (Figure 4.4).





Figure 4.4

The camera alternates between the boy's faces, which seems to display their sense of satisfaction and disturbance, and Milton's face, who appears to be crying from pain, and then the camera gazes into the scene through the mirror. The use of a mirror to capture the nuances of an episode is fairly common in films and seems to create a partially fragmented sense of the character and what is being reflected. The mirror acts as a mediator of the events for the audience, and refuses simplistic first person subjectivity. Alongside the sombre sound playing in the background, the mirror image in figure 4.4 engages with a violent encounter, and refuses a sense of self-reflection because the boys have turned their backs towards the mirror, almost to counteract the effect of the reflection. Julian Hanich (2011), in commenting on the use of mirroring devices in film, argues that "what can be glimpsed inside the mirror remains the only *moving* part of the image, and the viewer therefore does not have to divide his or her attention" and "what counts is the moving mirror reflection of the characters, accentuated by the rectangular mirror frame" (137). And thus, Hunich concludes to indicate that "complex mirror shots, in other words, allow the spectator to become consciously aware of his/her own *act of viewing*" (152). But for Milton, having his testes rubbed with shoe polish portrays the intense moment of trauma which only partially reflects in the mirror. Witnessing the movement of bodies, the screeching and Milton's legs kicking towards the mirror, the viewer assumes knowledge of what is being inflicted, but cannot directly witness and empathise as it happens. Witnessing this event occur through the mirror not only removes the empathy from

the audience, but also destabilises Milton's subjectivity into refracted and fragmented shots. The viewer is confronted with something unseen. The image of the symbolised rape is distorted by the surrounding white walls, and the mirror acts a distancing device for the viewer. It refracts the event so that the viewer somehow cannot relate to the intensity of the trauma, and can only partially understand what is taking place. The group of boys' laughter bounces off the mirror and acts as an echo to help cover up the sounds of pain. The echoes of their laughter are contained within the space of the mirror. The shot therefore produces us as an audience, not as direct witnesses to a particular act of violence. Nevertheless, the world in the mirror can give us a glimpse into the private world of a same-sex environment, even though the mirror prohibits us from seeing the severity of this event thus leaving us perplexed by a partial understanding, but also disturbed by the sense of self-reflection that we must interpret this act.

### 4.3 Nostalgia and Architecture

Taking up Medalie's discussion of nostalgia in the opening section of this chapter, I wish to explore the relationship between past and present more closely in this following section. Linda Hutcheon (1998) argues that nostalgia has never been about the past as such, but it grapples with the present realities:

[Nostalgia] is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense ... nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an 'historical inversion': the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected into the past. (20)

Jacob Dlamini (2009) similarly claims that the "irony about nostalgia is that, for all its fixation with the past, it is essentially about the present. It is about present anxieties refracted through the prism of the past" (16). For this particular series of films, nostalgia is a reflection of a historical narrative that has a complex relationship with the present. What does it say about the present and how does it idealise the content? This film imparts a certain anxiety about the realities in a post-apartheid context because of the utopian reflection. In addition, the term "nostalgia" is an attractive term to describe the "suffering due to relentless yearning for the homeland" (Sedikides et al 304). According to Sedikides et al (2008), nostalgia is also

a theme of Odysseus's journey when he sets sail from Ithaca to reunite with his wife. Through this tale, Odysseus is constantly yearning for his homeland. To long for something, as discussed by Sedikides, becomes a central idea in Homer's *The Odyssey* (1488). In response to Sedikides' romantic approach, Fred Davis (1979) claims that this is not so much about yearning for a past, but for a "sentimental yearning of any object, event, or place in the past" (13). As Sedikides et al and Davis regard their romantic notion of nostalgia in the state of loss, something that was, but is not appeared to be in the present, Medalie claims that the poignancy of yearning for the past is a "nostalgia rooted in loss, particularly in the loss of an irrevocable world, closed to the present" (39). The romantic approach ties into the way Medalie explores how yearning for the past through nostalgia confirms the loss of something sentimentally valuable. Medalie refers to Jo-Anne Richard's novel *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (1996) where the narrator yearned for the food she remembered having while she was a child. In this case, nostalgia will be used in this section to refer to the sentimentality created through a visual image of a past that intrudes into post-apartheid contemporaneity in the film. The concept of nostalgia previously discussed helps form the idea that there is a past that is being yearned for, but it does not yearn through the memory of the past, but rather through a place that symbolises the past.

The *Spud* films use the traditional Michaelhouse College setting to evoke nostalgia for colonial schooling. This place in the film is referred to as the school in which Milton undergoes a journey that tests his gender identity. Through the use of the cinematography, the film foregrounds how the architecture, the space, and the buildings operate as a larger colonial force that continues to reappear. The buildings and architecture also constantly remind the viewer that the school, Michaelhouse, is also a representation of forceful masculine traditions. The school was founded in 1896 in the years of the Natal Colony. The school slogan declares "Boys today. Men of principle tomorrow" ("About Michaelhouse"). In addition, the school is a powerful symbol of colonial Anglophone education because of "red-brick quadrangles" where you will hear "the sounds of the chapel bells", which resemble European architecture (Van de Ruit 14). In this case, the reason that I stress the importance of nostalgia is that it refers to the way in which architecture is portrayed. What connects nostalgia and architecture? According to Alexander Antoniou, nostalgia is the "extension and attribute to memory [which] has a definite attachment to experience: experience through event. Where this event takes place is just as vital" (qtd in Rossi 81). Prior to this claim, Antoniou also suggests that "Architecture is, after all, a response to conditions, irrelevant of

whether this is in an embracing or rejecting manner” (qtd. in Rossi 57). Therefore, a place becomes a reference in relation to its deeper representation and operates as an agent of nostalgia. Architecture creates a landmark of where everything that was before clings to the halls and on the walls.



Figure 4.5

To analyse how nostalgia is represented in architecture and space, the first film uses an establishing long shot (Figure 4.5) from a downward angle to emphasise the school grounds where Milton will begin his coming-of-age. The figure above gains a significant amount of coverage as the story progresses and will operate as a place of contestation. To begin, the architecture of the school here dominates with an empathic presence. Moreover, it appears to overwhelm the setting by limiting what surrounds it. Figure 4.5 portrays a cultural symbol of heteronormative tradition and we see how it unfolds as a space of heteronormative ideals. The historic link between space and time is emphasised through tradition, and thus when viewing the image above, the sense of an overwhelming colonial force becomes evident. In addition, what appears to contradict the presence of colonial power of tradition through this image is the soundtrack playing in the background. The published song, “Once in a Life Time” (2005) by Petit Cheval plays as Milton drives into his new school, and as the camera carefully follows the picturesque scene. This particular song plays in the background because the Pretorian band is known for their music to defy conformity and norms. In this case, there is a distinct sense of conflict between the music that plays and

the setting. The music that plays in the background draws focus to the harsh drums and trance-like sounds to ease into the historical setting.



Figure 4.6

Figure 4.6 depicts the setting of Milton's arrival. The Victorian inspired buildings suggest a traditional atmosphere: their upright symmetrical shape suggests rigidity and conformity. This already signals a linkage to colonial and traditional aspects of the setting. This colonial architecture also presents subtle gothic elements that emphasise the disturbance in the shot. The shot captures the historical aspects, and lacks contemporary elements (period cars), which also suggests a deeper connection to the past. These buildings become a setting which enforces colonial and traditional norms: they do not only physically loom over the protagonist's head but also operate as a way of suppressing him further but portrays him as inferior.

#### 4.4 Punified Subjectivity

Architecture not only conveys a deeper meaning about the space it occupies and its contribution to a larger historic force, but it is juxtaposed alongside the characters to highlight their queerness. For the purpose of this section then is to examine the relationship of architecture and space to the characters. In this case, a striking feature of the *Spud* films is how the mise-en-scène constructs Milton as small relative to his surroundings. The notion of mise-en-scène, according to Bordwell & Thompson (1993), is the stage that is used by the

camera “to signify the director’s control over what happens in the film frame” and “includes those aspects of the film which overlap with the art of theatre: setting, lighting, costume, and the behaviour of the figures” (145). The film suggests a sense of Milton’s “puniness” much more forcefully than the novels and through a number of cinematic techniques, as elaborated in this section. In the *Spud* film, we see that the subject is punished by the overwhelming Gothicism and horror. The subjects of queer and non-normative gender appear in a shrunken and diminished form next to the buildings and location, thus conveying the power and authority that the buildings have in the context of the film. The way in which the film captures the scenes reinforces the power of the setting and overwhelms the characters. This particular technique is subtle because the shot transitions in and out quickly. In this case, the image below (Figure 4.7) captures the nuance of how space creates a smaller subject, therefore leading to the smallness of the characters.

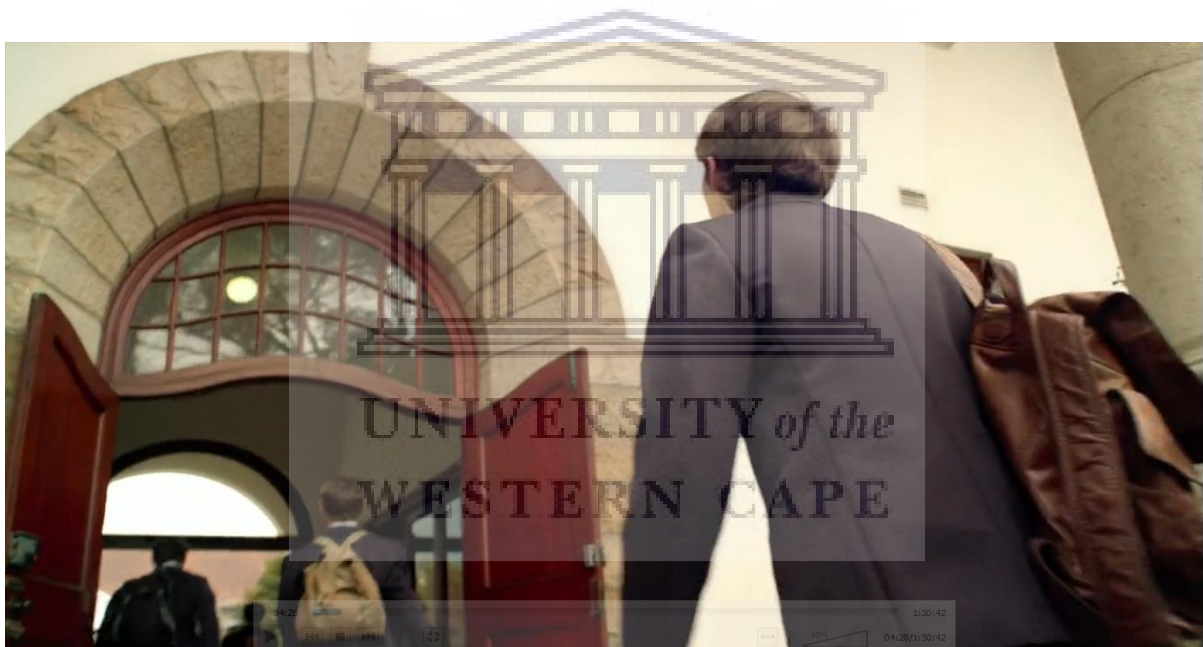


Figure 4.7

On the one hand, as seen in figure 4.7, the camera captures the protagonist with a medium shot but taken from below as if to follow the same view as the subject itself whilst looking up. In this scene, the camera, as well as the subject, looks up at the building almost as if to reintroduce him to a larger power. Milton’s introduction to the school is visualised by an upward tilting angle whereby the camera remains in that same position and slowly moves upward. It appears as if the camera focuses more so on the building and showcasing their height, making Milton seem small and diminished in comparison. The upward movement and tilting of the camera portrays the building as superior, but also suggests that Milton’s

character is vulnerable and fragile as he comes face-to-face with his new, intimidating surroundings. This technique, according to James Monaco (2009), is used to create “such an important effect on the relationship between the subject and the camera (and therefore the viewer)” (98). The effect created through this technique displays the power relations between the building and the subject in the shot. Because the building is higher and bigger (bigger in the sense that the camera cannot fit the entire building into the shot), and Milton is walking slowly towards it, a moment of power struggle is portrayed. Milton’s gradual movement towards the building suggests a sense of impending doom: he has no choice but to move forward and subject himself to the space of institutional power.

On the other hand, as we witness Milton enter the school building for his second year of schooling, the shot suggests that the building is represented as something significantly larger through the motion of looking upwards. It seems to imply that the subject, the observer of the object, is somehow portrayed as someone insignificant. This particular moment becomes a point of reference to how the characters, more specifically Milton, are captured, and cinematically represented as insignificant. The *mise-en-scène* of the shot expresses a limitation in what the viewer sees, but through the limitation the shot draws focus on the wide arch door that Milton soon enters. He looks at the door as if it is larger than him; a door that seems to punish him and make him smaller, which functions as its own mode of suppressing Milton. However, the *mise-en-scène* of the film begins to disown the past in the sense that it grapples with the present reality that the characters cannot conform to the historic meaning. There is a continuous disconnect between the characters and their surroundings. It almost seems as if the characters do not belong to its history. In this case, I propose the film uses the *mise-en-scène* to continually delegitimise queerness, but also helps highlight those moments where queerness occurs. Queerness is thereby foregrounded because of its stark contrast to the *mise-en-scène*.



Figure 4.8

Therefore, the film uses architectural space to express social ideas. For instance, if we look at figure 4.8 we see that the larger portion of the long shot of the building overwhelms the viewer, whilst also creating the subjects as smaller than the school. The group of boys are standing in line, which seems to create a process of purification. The image showcases how the characters are juxtaposed to the buildings, which makes them small, almost as if they are conforming to this ritualised idea of purification. They are placed next to the building to establish the contrast between a past that almost seems to dominate them. However, as Milton runs across the courtyard in juxtaposition to the building there is a subtle disturbance in this process of purification. Milton almost seems to disappear from this long shot, almost as if the building rejects him as your eye loses sight of him. Again, we are invited to think about how the power of the past inhabited in the mise-en-scène rejects Milton in response to the disturbance.

Overall, this creates a naturalised understanding that the school is far bigger than the subjects; moreover, it plays a critical role in purifying the subjects as insignificant. The space overwhelms and overpowers the students, whilst they stand in uniform below it. However, as the other students stand still, Milton runs away from the building, but inevitably is met with the other side of the building suggesting that there is no escape from what surrounds and overpowers the subjects. In this episode (Figure 4.8), Milton is reminded of Gecko's death. He is distraught and runs away. The music of the violin overpowers the scene through the focus of its melancholy and also, at this point of the first film, functions as a reminder of the distress that has been caused. The scene together with the music creates a



sense of sadness and mourning, not only for the loss of Gecko, but also subtly, and what we already know about Gecko from the previous chapter as a representation of rebellion against hegemonic notions of masculinity. This moment of Milton's futile flight also displays how different he is from the mainstream ethos of the school.

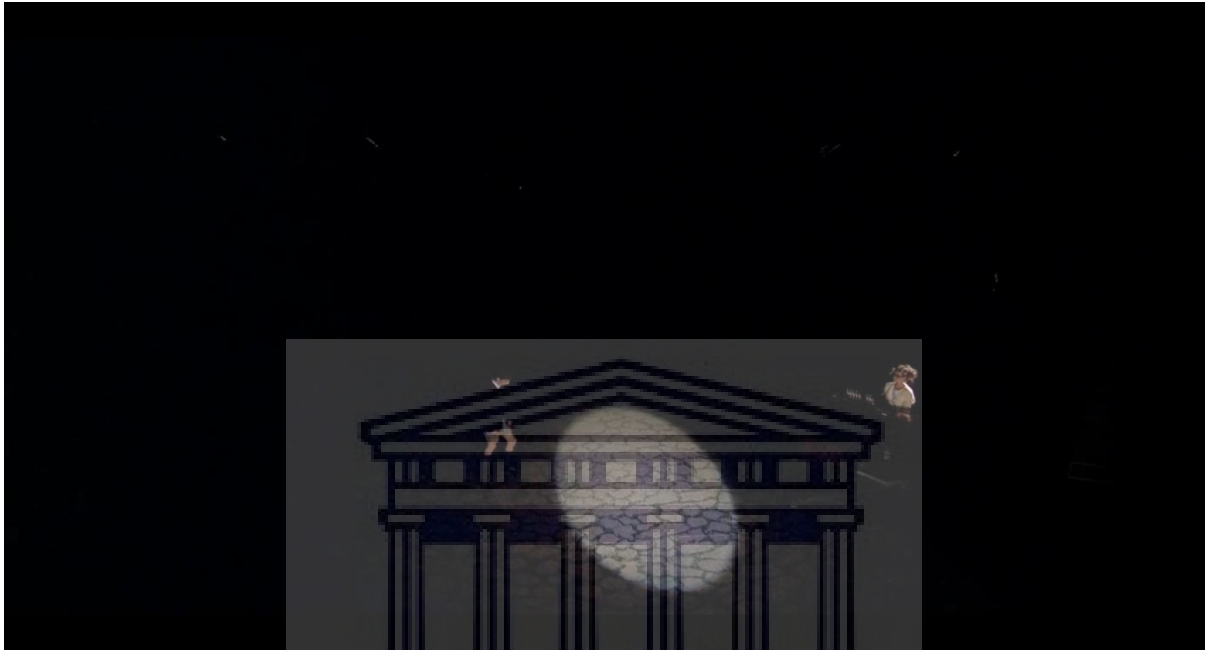


Figure 4.9

In the above screen shot (Figure 4.9), the camera has captured the subject, Milton, from above using a long shot. What has been displayed shares a common understanding with the way that architecture diminishes the subjects, but in this case, lighting is used to reinforce this idea. The technique used here has a significant impact regarding Milton's inferior position throughout his journey. The above screenshot takes place in the first film where Milton auditions for the role of Oliver Twist. In Charles Dickens's 1868 novel, *Oliver Twist*, the protagonist is portrayed as inferior because he is classified as lower class. In this case, the camera emphasises Milton's outsider status and inferiority. In addition, the lighting that surrounds Milton complicates his character by somehow creating an idea that his character is aberrant. In this particular moment, the camera doesn't give Milton the opportunity to move from the dark margins into the spotlight. Instead, the scene moves away from Milton and abruptly shifts focus to the teachers who are auditioning him, therefore not allowing him the opportunity to stand in the light. This further suggests how his queerness is never acknowledged in the way that allows a significant representation.

#### 4.5 Homosocial bonding

Much of this project has asked the question regarding queerness and its effects in the novels. In the film, we witness the subtle forms of queerness through the way that the boys are positioned around one another. The following section will analyse one particular scene in the film, analysing the way the film visualises intimacy among the boys.



Figure 4.10

The figure above (Figure 4.10) presents the image of the Crazy Eight in close proximity, while Milton's voice over says that if he is going to have any chance of surviving school, he is going to need to get into the "in-crowd". The camera portrays the group's physical closeness, a closeness that is emphasised by the zoom. The boy called "Mad Dog" is in close proximity to Rambo who looks down on him. The camera unconsciously queers the way that Mad Dog lies in front of Rambo where he is in close proximity to his genitals. We see this occur again while the Crazy Eight are watching a film in the common room before the head prefect approaches. Milton appears, in figure 4.11, to be in close proximity to Rambo's genitals again.



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Figure 4.12

Similarly in another episode (Figure 4.12), the prefects simply tune in to the conversation had on the other side of the wall. They continue to listen in, while not knowing that the way that they have positioned themselves creates a queer possibility. The pairing of the prefects within the frame plays on the practice of undermining heteronormativity in the film and queers them by having their body's touch, which is beyond the bounds of heteronormative friendships. The same is suggested in figures 4.10 and 4.11, where Milton and Mad Dog's face is positioned closely to Rambo's genitals. If we take a closer look at the above image, the boy on the right-hand-side's genital area is in close proximity to Anderson's rear, while he is touching his back. Eve Sedgwick (1998) notes that touch demonstrates the inability to separate "agency and passivity" as "to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself" (14). In other words, touch is an intimate experience which allows the acknowledgement of intimate and queer practices other than sex. This position resonates in another episode in Milton's journey where he is found signing up for religious studies.



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The boys are in a homosocial environment because they occupy spaces that are erotically charged. Places that provide space for homosocial bonding set an atmosphere to exchange certain values without necessarily graduating into sexual acts. In a sense, the way in which the boys operate and set themselves within an atmosphere, they share certain values that are queered. Figure 4.14 depicts the boys watching a self-made video tape that Boggo filmed. He had filmed himself next to Christine, a girl who presents herself in a bikini that exposes her cleavage. The camera then shifts from a glimpse of the self-made film to expose the boys and their excitement as they lean in on this video. Therefore, the common room becomes an erotically charged space. Adam Green (2010) argues this about atmospheric analysis:

Atmospheric identifies the ways in which space and place work together in the formation of sexual space, inspiring and circumscribing the range of possible erotic forms and practices within a given setting. The atmospheric qualities of a given locale are thus both hard and soft, immediate and (potentially) diffuse: location (what sort of area is it?), architecture, décor, history and site-generating official and popular discourses merge into a singular entity (though there may be multiple interpretations of it). The immediate properties of a given space's atmosphere suggest to participants the state of mind to adopt, the kinds of sociality to expect and the forms of appropriate conduct. They also facilitate or discourage types of conduct and encounter. (12)

The space that is presented to the viewers becomes an erotically charged place where the boys' fantasies are shared. It also becomes queer as they share these fantasies with one another. Furthermore, erotically charged spaces are also conveyed through the form of exhibition. A space which occupies an erotically charged atmosphere is the bogs (toilets). We see this when Rambo (figure 4.15) walks confidently into the showers while stripping his towel away. Before he lathers himself with water, he turns around while exhibiting and exposing his genitals to the other boys. The boys surrounding him are murmuring in the background, while Rambo smiles with confidence about his penis size.



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the boy in the black underwear. In a sense, this becomes a queer moment that is passed as “silly”. This represents another moment where mere heteronormative practices are homosocialised. However, the spanking is almost overlooked by the portrayed innocence. The above scene draws attention to the male-on-male spanking that occurs. Both of the unknown boys are almost nude, and the one in the red speedo is chasing the other in the black speedo in a childlike manner. They are both giggling aloud, but Milton is partially central in the image. He is watching this scene carefully as his eyes are narrowed on the two unknown boys. This event is similar to the dream Milton has about being dominated by the prefects and the two female leads. However, we are witnessing it from a different perspective. In this episode (Figure 4.16), Milton witnesses how the boy in the red speedo portrays a dominant role, while the boy in the black speedo portrays the submissive role by being spanked. In this case, we are confronted with Milton’s inner desire re-enacted in the physical world, where he is merely the spectator. Here, the spanking is not portrayed as corporal punishment, but more so in an erotic manner because of the boys’ laughter. According to Rebecca’s Plante’s study on sexual spanking, “erotic spanking is a form of bondage/domination and sadomasochism” and can be performed “over clothing, undergarments, or on the bare buttocks” (60). Therefore, the erotic spanking becomes an existential experience that is similar to Milton’s dream where he is being dominated by both female leads and the prefects. There is then a theme of erotica in the form of sadomasochism.

#### **4.6 Conclusion: What’s the big queer idea?**

In closing, the film’s use of *mise-en-scène* is a significant tool throughout all three films to enhance the Victorian Gothic, where it establishes a connection to a deeply rooted sense of heteronormative tradition. It is almost as if the sense of tradition is represented as something horrific in the film. The *mise-en-scène* also helps to determine the subjects as queer because it captures each character as queer to the setting. However, Lauren Berlant’s concept also helps to determine the visual ways the characters become intimate with each other that moves beyond the couple form. The series of films represent a new form of visual queerness whereby the past is introduced to an evolving present that allows the space for the past to be questioned and the new to be explored. We see that the past is questioned through the visuals of architecture, but the evolving present is the introduction to possible queer moments as seen in the episodes discussed above. Overall, the films represent the way we see traditional heteronormative societies are under siege as queer possibilities are being produced.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### A CONTENTIOUS QUEER IDENTITY: ATTEMPTING TO EXIT THE CLOSET

#### 5.1 Overview

The 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 at the Sundance Film Festival, saw the premiere of one of the most controversial South African films of recent times. *Inxeba* (2017), directed by John Trengove, depicted the queer love of a young man, against the backdrop of the sacred and traditional Xhosa initiation ritual. Despite the fact that the film featured no nudity or explicit sex, it ignited a heated controversy in South Africa. Most adverse comment centred on its gay themes and its supposed disrespect for Xhosa culture. Critics slammed the film for disclosing details about initiation that had been kept secret for so long. But it was less the film's portrayal of traditional rituals, but that it brought these elements together with homosexual relationships. Political parties, churches, and cultural organisations claimed that the film is "blasphemous to the sacred rituals of initiation" and said that the use of Jesus Christ and King Shaka Zulu "poses a concern in our young democracy and the film may incite violence" (Twanda). One commentator, who obviously had not seen the film, charged that *Inxeba* "exposes teenagers to sexual conduct and exposes women to violence such as rape" (ibid). In this highly charged atmosphere, cinemas were forced to cancel shows. As one reported, "Nu Metro have since been forced to remove the flick from their original schedule, as have their counterparts in Port Elizabeth" back in 2017 (Head).

The controversy extended itself over into debates across all media platforms. *The South African* reported that social media had taken on a discussion on the film, and a Twitter post made by an anonymous writer, argued that the film "must be burned" and also claimed that "the film is an insult to us The Amakhosa tribe" (Citizen reporter). The film's content impinged on very sacred rituals and traditions, and according to a reporter, the film exploits "the ritual [that] is meant to be incredibly secretive. The mere mention of it is strictly forbidden. So a taboo-busting film that is garnering international attention on the ceremony has obviously not gone down well for South Africa" (Head). The film sparked the controversial interest of Justice Raulinga who, in his ruling for a highly restrictive classification, "stressed that *Inxeba*, which depicts the homosexual relationship between two men at an initiation school, violated the rights to dignity of Xhosa people" (Maughn). Protestors gathered their pitchforks, including the EFF political party that came together

outside The Hemingway's Mall in East London to demonstrate against the movie after its initial release; however, no official statements were made by the political party. But what has the filmmaker; John Trengove had to say about all of the controversial debates? While there has been very little said by Trengove after the film's release, he was asked how he thought the film would be received. Trengove responded:

Ukwaluka is a taboo ritual and representing it in the way we have is contentious. We knew from the start that we'd spark strong reactions from traditionalists. But there was also a lot of encouragement from a younger Xhosa generation who seems eager to break the silence around the initiation which is seen to perpetuate some of the dangers associated with it. It's a vast and very nuanced practice and there remains a lot to be said about the ritual that is not my place to talk about. Things that need to be said from within the culture. Hopefully 'The Wound' could spark some of that. Maybe a gay Xhosa kid will look at it one day and go, 'actually, that wasn't my experience at all', and be inspired to write his own story. (Dercksen)

In April 2018, Trengove was interviewed and asked to comment on the backlash the film had received. Trengove responded:

We have a very painful history of racial imbalance and race discrimination and so this idea of representation and who gets to tell stories is obviously something that is highly contentious and highly politicised. The film really steps into that conversation, and that means there is a lot of heat around it. There is a very strong homophobic subtext to a lot of the backlash that we have received, particularly from traditionalists who have not seen the film. The idea that we are speaking about sex between men in this very sacred space is certainly inflammatory and I would argue is the real cause for a lot of the backlash. (Dercksen)

Trengove does not seem to be naive about this particular taboo, but he wanted to create a space to discuss the realities of this so-called sacred tradition. These debates and outcries have raised some interesting questions, according to *South African History Online*:

Does identifying as gay mean one is less of a man? Does being a man mean you cannot identify as gay? What does being a man entail? What are the detrimental

attributes and contradictions of this subscribed manhood? What pressures do human beings face in upholding their manhood? (Khoabane)

However, not all criticism attempted to discredit the film. According to the *Sunday Times*, the film was set to be nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language film. Azad Essa confesses that the film is “after all, a story about love, especially self-love and healing” and proclaims that “there won’t be a better South African film for some time” (Essa). On the night of its release, the Sundance review described the movie as the director’s “hard-edged but beautifully wrought study of clashing Xhosa models of masculinity [that] will be an eye-opener to outsiders – and some South Africans too” (Lodge). Kyle Zeeman reported that despite the threats to withdraw the film from mainstream viewing, it is said that it was one of the most popular films to have hit screens on its release weekend and “was not going to be removed entirely” (Zeeman).

After all the uproar concerning this film, one of the questions then is what caused such an intensive and emotional backlash? It is after all a cinematic, fictionalised representation of the traditional ritual of circumcision that signifies the process of becoming a man in the culture of the isiXhosa – *Ulwaluko*. The key suggestion in this chapter is that the controversy centred around the foregrounding of queerness in the film’s depiction of *ulwaluko*, not its representation of the initiation rituals *per se*. The film explores the protagonist, Xolani, a young factory worker and his ambivalent relationship with tradition while he participates as a “nurse” or caregiver in the annual circumcision rites, taking place in the rural landscape of the Eastern Cape. It is there that he oversees and initiates a group of young boys in a process of becoming men. As the film progresses, it is soon discovered that Xolani has an on-off homosexual relationship with another initiator, Vija. Xolani’s initiate, Kwanda, who is himself queer, unearths the relationship and threatens its secret status. The film stages a conflict between a supposedly timeless tradition and the intrusion of queerness. It has said to “cause much controversy” with its “alleged offence to cultural traditions,” and according to Nkateko Mabasa, “[i]dentity is a prominent theme explored by the film as characters’ attempt to reconcile how they see and feel about themselves with the demands that family and community have over them” (Mabasa). Exposing this film to cinema audiences has not so much questioned the tradition of initiation – or has exposed the secrecy of its rite-of-passages - but has shaken viewers by allowing them to witness a queer reality that was unknown. In this case, the tradition of *ulwaluko* can also be read in itself as a queer ritual whereby men are

centrally concerned with other boys' penises, thus questioning traditional notions of heteronormativity. The film further questions the toxic and negative public perceptions of queerness. More specifically, this continued controversy has catalysed public conversations about how individuals understand tradition, and the relationship between traditions and the constitutionally enshrined freedoms of a modern South Africa.

However, what is not discussed by critics is that the film, despite its progressive stance, is also problematic in its attempt to represent queer desire. The intimacy shared between the two characters is entangled with violence and humiliation. Two out of the three episodes where we witness Vija and Xolani's sexual intimacy represents a distorted sense of queer desire as the two men become violent with one another. A key argument in this chapter will be to investigate how the liberatory potential of queerness is distorted in the representation of the relationship between Vija and Xolani. Through what I deem is an invisible relationship, humiliation and pain further corrupts the sense of queer identity. This analysis will be pursued through a close attention given to the *mise-en-scène* in which queer desire is staged, as well as the representation of Kwando, a minor but key character who exemplifies a confident queer identity that straddles the divide between tradition and modernity, but who eventually needs to be sacrificed in order to maintain the closet. Queerness erupts at various moments in the film, but eventually must remain closeted, at tragic cost to both Vija and Xolani's lives, and with fatal consequences for Kwando.

## **5.2 Symbols of Power**

One of the transgressive ideas in the film is that queerness is not just a feature of supposedly corrupted, Westernised urban modernity, but is also at home in rural, traditional environments, and even in the heart of most sacrosanct space of Xhosa masculinity, namely the initiation school. One of the ways in which the film represents the entanglement of modernity with traditional spaces is, literally, through the depiction of high-voltage electricity power lines that traverse the site of initiation. They are a powerful reminder of the impossibility separating nature and industrialised modernity. These power lines, significantly, also mark the space where Xolani and Vija come together in moments of intimacy.



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smaller in relation to the power structures. While the high-tilt camera angle focuses on the electrical lines above, on the ground there is an intense, high current of tension between Xolani and Vija. As the scene plays out, we learn that Xolani confronts Vija about his real motives about returning every year to the bush. One of the key reasons for his own returns is because it allows him to continue seeing Vija, therefore allowing them to pursue a homosexual relationship. The isolated and dark space under the high voltage electric power lines forces an acknowledgment of the powerful and enduring sexual current of desire in their relationship – a relationship they have tried, ironically, to deny and hide from their traditional family and leaders. As they discuss their feelings, an overwhelming mechanical sound disturbs the natural sound of before. This sound is synthetically mixed into the scene and almost disturbs their conversation. The intrusive sound, an amplification of the hum of the electric power lines, drowns out their speech leaving them inaudible for a moment. Therefore, this scene possibly represents Xolani's attempt to escape the "closet" in the sense that he chooses to confront Vija about his true feelings, but because of the synthetic sounds, the dialogue is confusing to understand. The confusion created by the inaudible speech also represents how Xolani's emerging queerness is confusing for him, and therefore he cannot resolve his feelings for Vija. Overall, this intimate moment is left unresolved and further complicates Xolani's ability to confront his queerness. His attempt to exit the closet is left at an abrupt end as Vija tries to avoid the conversation.

Xolani's attempt to exit the closet and confront his queerness is continuously thwarted, and he is forced to keep his queerness hidden and isolated. Throughout the film, we see time and time again how Xolani's need for intimacy and connection with Vija is restrained by external structures that keep him repressed.



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noise mentioned before and the overwhelming presence of the power lines. In that particular scene, both characters are covered by the noise that leaves them almost silent. In this case, it is not a mechanical noise; it is the structure of the house. Vija is also the one who leads Xolani to the house, therefore reiterating how strongly he wants to keep their secret hidden. The fact that Xolani has no control over where they have sex suggests that he also has no control over his own queerness.

We see a similar idea explored in figure 5.4 through the shadow that hovers over Xolani and Vija. Xolani's journey to come out of the closet is not foreclosed by the walls of the house; it is Kwanda who reminds Xolani that someone has witnessed his queerness. Vija flees the scene when he wakes up, and Kwanda also runs away. Xolani attempts to run after Kwanda to explain the scene - to shut down queer possibilities. Both Xolani and Vija are caught in this force field, being reduced to the coercive "closet" – in an old house, or in secluded and dark hiding spots. The film displays how Xolani is in search to confront his queerness, but is continuously contained. His struggle to come to terms with queerness is reiterated through moments of wanting to express feelings, but is either isolated, which maintains its secrecy, or he is caught in a trap of denial.

### **5.3 Sexual Violence in Closeted Spaces**

Xolani's struggle to express queerness and his attempt to refuse the closet is also represented through the way the film represents their sexual intimacy. Much of the film depicts acts of sexual intimacy to be violent. Alphonso Lingis (1994) argues that sex needs to be distinguished from love, and that the sexual act is "not guaranteed in one way or another, neither as a proof of love nor as a gauge of indifferent exchangeability, that love, that, intensity, slip in fortuitously, and that conversely intensities may withdraw from the skins of bodies" (96). Lingis' argument pertains to the fact that love and sex are not intrinsically or causally linked, and that love may only derive as an afterthought: the primary goal of sex is not love but pleasure. Lingis's argument helps us to see how Xolani and Vija construct the intensity of their sexual relationship outside the context of love, tenderness and affection. Throughout the film it is clear that queer desire is explicitly being expressed through an obverse of tender love, namely through sadistic and violent intercourse.





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be interpreted as an intense moment that is caused from the frustration of being misunderstood.

Kwanda is portrayed as rebellious against tradition throughout the film and this is evident in his reaction towards the others taking his shoes. His perspective and approach to the initiation suggests that he is less concerned with becoming the ideal form of a man, and more concerned with understanding what makes him different as he begins to explore his identity on traditional soil. For instance, in a heated conversation between Xolani and Kwanda, Kwanda interjects to test Vija's ideas regarding manhood and confronting sexuality:

**Kwanda:** *Ndiyakubona ukuba uyintoni kodwa wena kutheni ungakhe uyivume lonto. Undixelela ukuba mandibe yi ndoda kodwa wema awukwazi nokuzenzela lonto ngokwakho ...* (I can see what you are but why are you accepting that? You want me to be a man and stand up for myself but you cannot do it yourself) (qtd in *Inxeba*).

In this scene, Kwanda questions what it means to be a man by referring to the idea that 'real men stand up for themselves'. We are confronted with the ambiguous nature of what it means to be a real man – the consequence of expressing sexuality in the nature of Kwanda's statement is regarded being a real man – the idea that if you can stand up for what you believe in is what it takes to be a real man, while at the same time questioning complacency as he asks if Xolani "accepts that". This statement suggests that his identity is far more embracing than the other two protagonists through questioning normative models of manhood. Peace Kiguwa et al (2018) argues that Kwanda brings to the forefront "conflicting dynamics of heteronormative and hegemonic surveillance of gay masculinities" (54). By confronting Xolani with his struggles with his queer identity, Kwanda already poses a threat. Kwanda challenges Xolani to "confront his repression and question the authenticity of his sexuality" (Siswana et al 2).

Kwanda's queerness and rebellion is put to death and we see this in the concluding scenes of the film. In one of the last scenes in the film, the viewer sees Kwanda and Xolani climbing up the mountain in search of a road to lead them back to the city. As they reach the top of the mountain, Xolani expresses how Vija is a "good guy" and implies that telling others of Xolani's affair with Vija will destroy Vija's family. However, Kwanda denounces Vija as a "liar and a hypocrite" (qtd from *Inxeba*). As the conversation draws to a close, and before Kwanda can finish his final words, Xolani takes a rock and hits him over the head leading him to fall off the mountain and into the river. Their conversation uncovers how

Kwanda pressures Xolani to reveal his queer identity by threatening to expose Vija. The consequence of Xolani's action at the climax of this film suggests that Xolani fears about what will happen to Vija, but most importantly, it suggests that he is in denial about his queerness and pushes queerness back into the closet. His choice ultimately silences queerness and any possibility of accepting his identity. Although he rides off into the city, a space where people are free to express their identity, he also protects his relationship to tradition. This is to say that the possible implications of Kwanda exposing his secrets, the secret of his queer identity, will have further implications on the notions of traditional heteronormativity. This 'push over the edge' scene is symbolic to understanding the confusion of Xolani's identity and Kwanda as the key figure of disturbance. In this sense the ending undermines the progressive queerness of the film. In the article written by Anela Siswana (2018), she points out that the film's ending is a "powerful commentary on the ramifications of the affective economics of fear and shame that are central to the reinforcements of heteronormative practice at play" (2).

### **5.5 Conclusion: Queerness back in the Closet**

At the end of the film, viewers are left unsettled and without any resolution. The complexities of same sex desire, including secrecy, self-denial and a deep frustration that intimacy could never be openly acknowledged and embraced, all work together so as to place queerness back into the closet. Xolani's journey is a complex one because he is shown to be proudly and comfortably traditional from the outset. However, his struggles with queerness create an anxiety about his journey. His attempts to come out of the closet and express true and authentic queer feelings come to an abrupt end. There is a sense that he cannot find the resolution he needs. At the end of the film, he kills Kwanda, which ultimately leads to him pushing queerness back into the closet.

However, the film itself invites us to think about how the traditional ritual of ulwaluko is in fact itself suffused with queer practices and meanings. An idea that is overlooked by the many critics is the true function of a care-giver; a man who nurses the initiates is in fact centrally concerned with touching and caring for other boys' penises. Similarly to incidents mentioned in the *Spud* chapters, touching is fact regarded as queer, a minor intimacy that opens up queer possibilities.

This chapter's aim was to explore how Xolani's attempts to come out of the closet fail, a denial prompted by the fear of never being socially accepted by people in this tradition.



His commitment to tradition complicates his relationship with Vija and his struggles with his queer identity showcased his ambivalence towards Kwanda. On the one hand, his relationship with Vija displays a masculine violence that attempts to foreclose queerness even as it expresses it. Through moments of such sexual violence, Xolani is trapped in self-denial. On the other hand, this chapter explored how Kwanda indeed unsettles Xolani's journey of acceptance by placing a pressure that Xolani ultimately fails to act on. It is Kwanda's queerness that unsettles Xolani's connection to tradition. Overall, the film fails to resolve the possibility for change and development in Xolani.



## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how “queerness” is both represented and suppressed in select South African fiction through various forms of social judgements, erasure and violence. The study explored and analysed how under the Apartheid and post-Apartheid regimes queerness has been constructed as deviant, and how normative South African masculinities were enforced through its suppression. The study investigated to what extent a post-colonial form of education reinforces the colonial and apartheid normative traditions of South African masculinities in a same-sex environment.

These aspects were explored and investigated in John Van de Ruit’s *Spud: A wickedly funny novel* (2005), *Spud: The madness continues...* (2007), *Spud: Learning to Fly* (2010), and was complemented with an investigation of the recent South African film, *Inxeba* (2017). The series of novels and films demonstrated how the contestation between queerness and traditional masculinity threatens heteronormativity and how various forms of violence try to enforce a dominant South African masculinity.

Milton’s journey highlighted the fundamental ways in which queerness has intercepted into a predominantly masculine society, while in a transitional period into South African democracy. The thesis discussed how the group of boys (the Crazy Eight) are primarily a homosocial ensemble, with female characters standing outside of this configuration and sometimes threatening the stability of their relationships. Throughout the narrative, we witnessed how the characters were exposed to queerness, which threatens heteronormativity. As the thesis explored, we also witness how their relationships form in queer ways. The relationship formed through minor intimacies, which Lauren Berlant argued was a way in which queerness could be located in places that were deemed heteronormative. Through an obsession with talking about sex, the thesis explored how Foucault’s “Incitement to Discourse” was useful in exploring the ways in which the boys were participating in queer discussions about their own genitals.

Therefore, my reading of the *Spud* text suggested that the narrative is a representation of the fragile transition, and is conveyed through an emerging queerness. In this reading, heteronormative gendered roles seem futile while an intruding queerness disrupts it.

However, queerness never seems to fully emerge. There is always a force that overcasts it such as violence or erasure. In a sense, Van de Ruit's texts seem to suggest the supposedly formidable heteronormativity is under constraint. Van de Ruit's texts offer a critical understanding regarding the way the societies are emerging in a post-transitional world, but also questioning the fundamental institutions of gender. Sexuality has become more fluid, and so has gender. One can simply not understand gender as specified, but one must understand that there is a constant pervading that occurs that will eliminate a rigid understanding of living. Queerness offers us this understanding. In my reading, I like to think that queerness eliminates constant notions of gender and how it is practised. In other words, queerness offers me a way of understanding how in all instances of gender tasks there are minor ways in which gender cannot be understood as bulletproof. But also, it is offered to me as a way of understanding how, in a transitional society, there is an emerging world of difference that cannot be contained. Milton's journey readdresses the way we think about heteronormativity as a constant citation, and begin to understand that in a post-apartheid society, rigidity has lost its effect.

As the film chapter on *Spud* showed, despite the attempts of the film to portray gay characters in more sympathetic ways, the deep structures of heteronormative straightness continue to pervade the films. As Judge Cameron reminded us, the films' use of innocent jokes are playing into the larger issues of intolerance, violence and oppression in South Africa. On the surface then, the *Spud* films appear to portray a more diverse, inclusive approach to gender difference, but they cannot ultimately delink themselves from the deeper homophobia that pervades the books. The films portray homosociality displayed through the subterranean queerness that pervades the films. Homophobia is a tool which controls homosociality, and the relationship between these homosocial dynamics is patriarchal.

The chapter on *Inxeba* explored how the protagonist could never fully express his queerness. The structures of heteronormativity and the literal structures contained his sense of queerness, which left him in self-denial. What was established is the tradition of ulwaluko is in fact a queer ritual whereby men touch other boys' penises, thus further pervading traditional notions of heteronormativity. A key argument in this chapter was to investigate how the liberatory potential of queerness is distorted in the representation of the relationship between Vija and Xolani. As the chapter discussed, the relationship was distorted through acts of violent sexual encounters. Both characters could not express their queerness due to traditional

heteronormative pressures. This analysis paid close attention to the mise-en-scène in which queer desire is staged, as well as the representation of Kwando; a minor but key character who exemplifies confident queer identity that straddles the divide between tradition and modernity, but who eventually needs to be sacrificed in order to maintain the closet.

In these texts, as well as their film adaptations, heteronormativity is threatened by the presence of other emerging *masculinities*. Gender studies and queer theory formed a theoretical framing, with particular attention given to the representation in the texts of the South African context and social interactions, behaviour and speech within a same-sex environment. New forms of masculinities emerged in post-apartheid South Africa which, as we have explored in the preceding chapters, allowed for individualism and the acknowledgement of difference.



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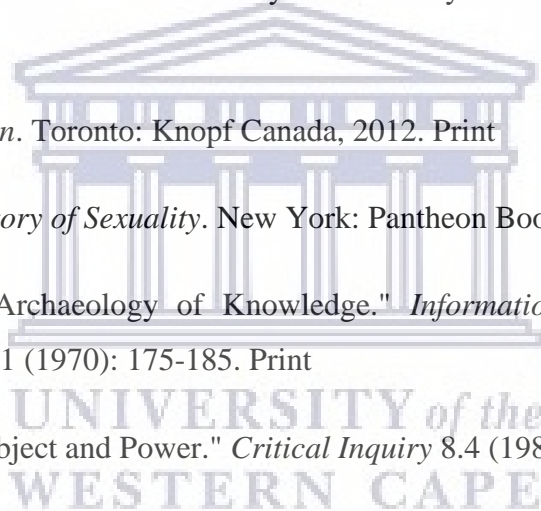
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