

Department of Anthropology
University of the Western Cape

Master Degree in Anthropology (MA Mini-thesis)

Amagqirha Nemicimbi: The Art of Healing



Submitted to the Faculty of Arts High Degrees Committee, 8 December 2021

¹ Traditional healers and rituals

Declaration

I declare that this mini-thesis entitled *Amagqirha Nemicimbi: The Art of Healing* is my own work. It is submitted to the University of the Western Cape in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Anthropology. At no other University or institution has it been submitted as a requirement for a degree or any other qualification.

Signature: Zikhona Kokoma

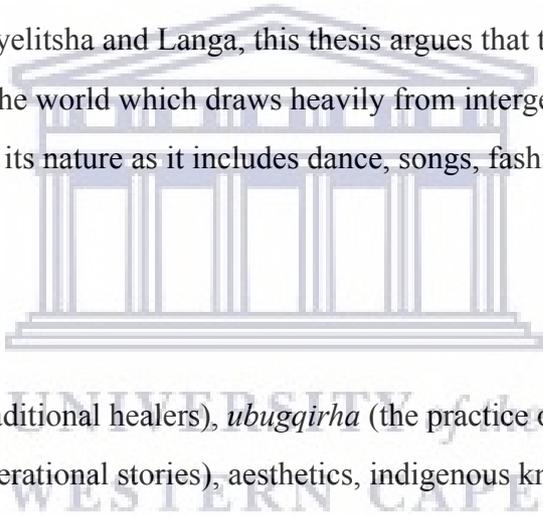
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Abstract

Amagqirha have been understood solely through the framework of health and illness. Their image is tainted and they are misrepresented as clad bone throwers and mystical scammers. There are very few studies that focus on their involvement outside the context of healing. This study seeks to fill this gap revealing the artistic side of *amagqirha*. I contend that by focusing on the ritual space which includes song, dance, fashion, poetry and story telling, allows us to reveal the aesthetics of *ubugqirha*, reconstructing the meanings of traditional healers in contemporary South Africa. Where does knowledge about ritual practice come from? What role do intergenerational narratives play in the meanings of *amagqirha*? In what ways do the rituals of *amagqirha* are grounded in a distinctive aesthetics? With the use informal conversations, close interviews and participating in the rituals of *amagqirha* in the townships of Nyanga, Khayelitsha and Langa, this thesis argues that traditional healing is a complex form of being in the world which draws heavily from intergenerational knowledges. Furthermore it is artistic in its nature as it includes dance, songs, fashion and poetry.



Keywords: *amagqirha* (traditional healers), *ubugqirha* (the practice of healing), *imicimbi* (rituals), *iintsomi* (intergenerational stories), aesthetics, indigenous knowledge, ontology, performance, South Africa.

I dedicate this thesis to Lathitha Nako.

Lala ngoxolo mntan'ethongo!



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Acknowledgements

Kuyo yonke into ndibulela izihlwele zasekhaya- ooZibula ngoku soloko be ndikhokhela kwinto yonke into endiyenzayo. Indlela yam kwinto yonke endiyenzayo imhlophe ngenxa yenu. Ndithi Camagu!

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to the Centre for Humanities Research of the University of the Western Cape for the fellowship award that facilitated the writing of the present dissertation. I am grateful for each and every CHR seminar I have been a part of for continuously inspiring me creatively.

To all of my participants, for allowing me to participate in your spaces and for always reminding me that this project is important, I am immensely grateful for your energy and interest in this research, thank you for making this project a fun one! A special thanks to Vukuz'umbethe for her willingness to always be my first participant. Her wisdom has nurtured this project, Thokoza Gogo! Ntsibazencanda, one of the best poets of our time, I appreciate your efforts in helping me do this project. Your involvement in this project has given me an extraordinary experience I will never forget. You are such a creative and I draw a lot of inspiration from your life. *Camagu mntan'ethongo, ndithi nangamso!*

To my grandmother and mother, thank you for the continued support in my academics and always maintaining an interest in each and everything that I do.

To my friend Florrie: every project that I have done, always started with a conversation with you. I appreciate your interest in my work and I thank you for always helping me out to structure my thoughts and articulate my ideas well.

I cannot express much thanks to my supervisor who has made this work possible. Your support, guidance and advice carried me through all writing stages of this thesis. You are simply the best supervisor one could ask for. You are a true creative and working with you has made realise that pursuing an academic career is not a bad idea! ☺

To myself, for choosing to write about my passion, I am glad that I accepted the calling of writing about traditional healers. This is my true vocation!

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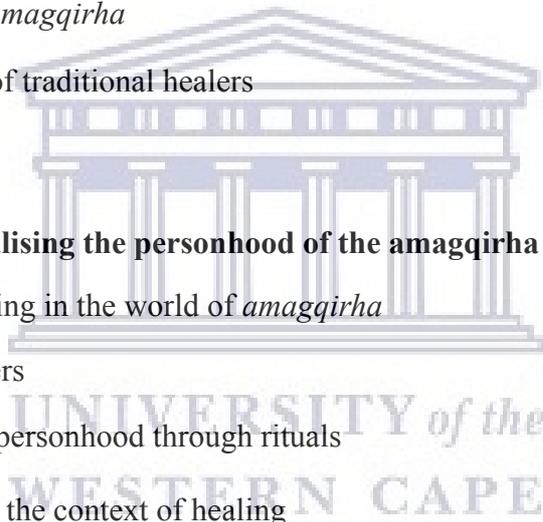
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Prologue

In the evening I arrived at a bonfire. I identified a few known faces amongst the people who were seated in a circle surrounding the fire. Filled with excitement, I joined in, looking forward to whatever was going to take place. The fire was colossal with bright orange and yellow flames. We all sat in silence, waiting and the only sound we could hear was the crackling sound of burning branches. From nowhere, an old man with a hoarse voice shouted “*chos’i ntsomi!*” And we all responded with “*Chos’ ntsomi ndaba zolwimi!*” We were ready for a story to be told!

I grew up listening to stories narrated by grandmother and my siblings before bedtime. I enjoyed re-telling them to my class when I was in the lower grades, mesmerised by their happy endings. But I have never considered the importance of these narratives outside the context of informal learning. Working closely with *amagqirha* has revealed that intergenerational narratives and stories play an important role in sustaining what it is perceived as “Xhosa culture”, and particularly the practice of healing, as story-telling drives the performance of the rituals. This was evident in the interviews I had during my fieldwork. Whenever I asked a question, people would respond by narrating stories. This demonstrates that *iintsomi* are the heart beat of *ubugqirha*. Stories bring meaning to the lives of *amagqirha*. They contain history, heritage and knowledge about ritual performances and *amagqirha* cannot exist without them. These narratives have been circulated across generations and still continue to be told even today. These are stories that young children listen to while seated on the laps of their grandparents, that are shared at large family gatherings, bringing everyone together. They will never get old nor die out; these stories are rooted in cultural experience. Mostly, they are narrated throughout this thesis.

Introduction

“*Sidiniwe ngamagqirha ekuhlaleni!*”² This statement echoes how deeply misunderstood *amagqirha* are in society. In the communities of Khayelitsha, Nyanga and Langa, *amagqirha* are solely understood within the context of healing, yet they have an artistic side. Community members portray *amagqirha* and their practice negatively, strongly believing that they harm and abuse their patients and use their body parts for creating *muti*. They are perceived as random in their healing as they heavily rely on medicinal herbs as their main method of treatment. Many also complain that they are scammers who are not only engaged in witchcraft but are also the foundation on which the occult economy stands. This demonstrates that the artistry of *amagqirha* is not only unappreciated but deeply misunderstood and understudied. The artistic work of *amagqirha* remains confined in the ritual spaces where these people express themselves freely. This study excavates the art that is embedded in *amagqirha* and illuminates the interactivity between art, performance and being a traditional healer.

Traditional healers have been understood only through the realm of health and illness where the majority of scholars (Coopoosamy & Naidoo, 2012; Hewson, 1998; Deutschlander, 2009) have focused on how they understand and manage illnesses with the use of medical herbs. Few scholars have written about the different expressive forms of *amagqirha* such as dance and songs (Gibson et al., 2009; Simelane & Kerley, 1998) however, situating these within the context of healing. Beside Monica Wilson’s *Reaction to Conquest* (1936), more recently Wreford (2005) and Mlisa (2009) have explored practices of healing explaining the pathway to become a healer—from dreaming to the actual training. Yet these works still remain focused on the controversy around the collaboration and the competition between *amagqirha* and Western biomedical practitioners (Rautenbach, 2007; Sidley, 2004; Baleka, 1998; Moagi, 2009). Thornton (2017) and van Dijk et al., (2000) break away from this conventional approach, offering a reflection on experiences of trance, possessions and music experienced

² “We are tired of traditional healers in our communities!”

in the field, challenging the many conceptions that link these practitioners solely with witchcraft and *muti* killings. These works, while centred on healing practices, go beyond the field of illness and the use of medicinal herbs, including the study of songs, dances, fashion and drumming and how these play a crucial role in the healing practices. My research is therefore located in continuity with the works of Thornton (2017) and van Dijk et al. (2000), and I take the debate further through an analysis of rituals.

Rituals are the heartbeat of *ubugqirha* (Stewart, 2011) and healers cannot attain their status as health practitioners without undergoing ritual journeys. To understand rituals merely as acts performed for healing purposes and expressing holistic understandings of illnesses (Hewson, 1998) is limiting. On the contrary rituals express larger worldview that are not only restricted to the ill body, they are the bridge between humans and the realm of the ancestors and spirits and the essential way through which social worlds and relations are created and maintained (Matory, 2018; Mushengyezi, 2003; Hewson, 1998; Machinga, 2011). Therefore, to frame ritual only as a healing practice is misleading. Rituals provide meanings for existence, offering explanations of the world we live in, particular ontologies, histories of migration and movement, and discourses on the nature of life, human action and agency (Matory, 2018) and are also sites where fictive forms of kinship are continuously made. Mostly, they bring into existence the artistic side of traditional healers which is made up of songs, dances, fashion and poetry. These aesthetics are rooted in intergenerational narratives which are stories that have been circulated over different generations. These stories are significant in the practice of healers as they explain the historical origins of their rituals and shape performances. This thesis argues that traditional healing is a complex form of being-in-the-world (Csordas, 1990) which draws heavily from intergenerational knowledges and artistry in the performance of *ubugqirha*.

My research seeks to answer to the following questions: How can we interpret these ritual activities outside the framework of illness? What are the elements of this traditional practice if we look at it in a holistic way, historically? Where does knowledge about ritual practice stem from? What role do intergenerational narratives play in the making of rituals? In what ways do traditional healers' rituals illustrate a specific aesthetics and how can this be understood across ethnicity and race? How can *amagqirha*'s work be understood in relation to

a regional set of contiguous traditional healing practices? How to understand the “traditional”? To which extent rituals are able to articulate particular histories but also speak for the present times? How can they be interpreted as a source of commentaries of postcolonial presents? How to understand the place of *amagqirha* in contemporary societies?

In writing this thesis I have combined different styles of writing to convey the ritual experience and to portray the range of perspectives and voices that take part in it. At the heart of my thesis I focus on what my participants say. I have allowed my participants to narrate their story exactly in the way they have told it to me in their own language, isiXhosa. Also I have chosen to incorporate their voices and what they said in the text and not simply to quote them. Working across two different languages has not always been easy, I have attempted to work through translation throughout the thesis, but at times words failed me. Not all the sections in isiXhosa are fully translated. I have attempted to construct a text through a juxtaposition of languages that hopefully will provide a deeper understanding of the ritual, the stories and the fieldwork. I have also brought in myself in through poetry as a way to narrate my own experiences in the field. At times I have attempted to situate myself in the shoes of *amagqirha*. In doing so, I employ Hartman’s mode of “close narration” (2019), a style which represents the voices of different narrators in an inseparable relation. In my writing I also use thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and speculative writing (Hartman, 2019) as a way of providing an imaginative narration of the ritual, granting the reader a space to be part of these magical experiences. This thesis is structured in two parts, the first deals with the ontological understanding of the *amagqirha* and illustrates how they come into being. The second part focuses on the ritual space and the artistry of *amagqirha*.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

I have never given much thought as to how fun doing ethnography can be. I have always considered it as a draining process where you have to be constantly working hard; a back breaking, burdensome and a difficult task in which one has to struggle throughout. This was due to my previous encounters in the field and through the reading of various ethnographies (Thorne, 1980; Hammersely, 2006, 2008; Tittensor, 2016). I always considered ethnography as a project where one has to face challenges locating participants, troubles gaining acceptance in the field, developing a workable relationship with participants. However, my research project proved otherwise. It was fun, adventurous and for the most part also a therapeutic process. Sometimes, when I think about it words fail me as it was a beautiful experience which continuously surprised me, kept me fascinated, always leaving me looking forward to a next time in the field.

I found myself immersed in an array of amazing places with breath taking scenic views and landscapes. Ginormous sky scrapping mountains with lovely hiking trails, rocky caves covered in artistic paintings and fresh smelling waterfalls. I was in the company of creative minds; I was in constant awe of- my friends in the field- the *amagqirha*. While working with these vibrant individuals, I found myself having so much fun that at times I forgot that I was doing my fieldwork and that we were faced with a pandemic. Ethnography felt like home, everything felt familiar and I felt a sense of belonging with my participants. My engagement in the field, taught me more about my culture, what it means to be a young Xhosa woman, how my culture has changed during the course of time and I found myself learning more about the language of isiXhosa, learning new words and folklore

Conducting ethnography in the midst of a pandemic

My only enemy during this process of collecting data was the Covid-19 pandemic. This life threatening virus made it hard for me to visit participants, worst of all I could not attend rituals which were the main focus of my study as none were held due to lock down regulations. I could not believe how something so small like a virus, which can only be seen under a microscope, could have a colossal impact on not just my project but the entire globe. This meant that I had to conduct my fieldwork online and this was not the ideal for me at all, but with not much option available I had to get used to it. My cell phone was the only resource capable of making my project doable; it was the only way I could reach my participants. The only issue was locating participants around Khayelitsha and Nyanga, the initial plan meant locating participants in a traditional healers' workshop that was going to be held in my township, Langa. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to the pandemic. I had to be patient.

I started my field work in the first week of February this year. I commenced by asking close friends and former research participants to help me locate people and after a month I was able to find two healers from Khayelitsha. This was a great achievement, but there was a part of me that was not satisfied at all. I was in despair and there were times where I felt like deregistering. I kept asking myself if conducting field work amidst a pandemic was a good thing. Also, would healers consider me insensitive? Our lives were completely disrupted and we remained confined in our homes. And there I was, wanting to work with people who were busy healing. As insensitive as this sounded, I was nonetheless determined to do my fieldwork. I interviewed my first participant in March; she was brought to my house out of the blue by a former participant to the research. She was a 20 year old *unomgqana* from Khayelitsha. I identified her as *unomgqana* since she was wearing all white clothes; she was covered in white clay, wearing a white t-shirt matched with a white wrap around skirt with black and white lines in the bottom. She came unexpectedly and showed up at my door. The healer was leaving Cape Town the following day and was not going to be around for quite some time so she had decided to come and speak with me. We sat down in my grandmother's room and we just started having a conversation, all three of us. My interview with my first participant, Mkhonto, went well.

Immersed in the place of our ancestors

My fieldwork climaxed towards the end of March when I was introduced to a 18 year old high school pupil Zanomdiza, a young healer residing in between Nyanga and Langa. I was introduced to him by his sister who is a neighbour of mine. She gave me his contact details and I contacted him on WhatsApp where we had a brief conversation about indigenous studies and art. I sent him interview questions and he would respond through a voice recording, also sending images and videos for clarity. Through the conversation I had with him I learnt that he was a co-founder of a cultural group of traditional healers and together they did a lot of work around high schools in Cape Town fighting for the inclusion of young healers who find themselves permanently leaving school due to the discrimination they face since identifying as healers. His involvement as a healer outside the realm of health and illness made me happy as my project aimed at portraying traditional healers in a different light. Top tier was when he added me to a WhatsApp group chat which consisted of about thirty healers with the same interests as him, from Khayelitsha, Gugulethu and Nyanga. This is when I started believing that I was going to have an actual thesis to write. This is where all the fun began!

In the WhatsApp group chat I was welcomed with warmth and everyone was excited about my study. The group chat was named Eza kwaMoya—Those of the spirit. This is a platform created for young traditional healers who find themselves coming to terms with the gifts they received and the ancestral calling. Its aim is to build cohesion and solidarity among *amagqirha*. Additionally, this platform was also used to address issues they encountered in the field of healing, their goals as healers and to discuss their monthly outings. It was a site for keeping in touch. Most of the healers loved my project and were interested in taking part to it.

On the 24 of April I met with them for the first time on a hiking excursion. Together, we travelled to Fish Hoek and among us were also young boys between the ages of ten and sixteen who are part of a hiking club formed by a father together with traditional healers. The goal of the club was to take young kids out of the township and show them that there is actually life outside those spaces, and that they are not limited to the township life- a life filled with many challenges and drug abuse which has increasingly taken over by storm. It

was to show them that the world is theirs and they should claim it. We hiked Peer's Hill and healer Gog'umlomo, along with his two sons was already waiting for us. I could not stop gawking at Gog'umlomo as it was my first time seeing a white traditional healer with the naked eye. She was an old woman in her late fifties with grey hair, she was barefoot and wearing a red and black wrap-around called *ihiya* which signalled that she was from the Ndaun clan of healers. In her hand she held *amatshoba amathathu*. These are cow-tail whisks (Heuser, 2008; Hewson, 2018) which symbolised that she was *igqirha eligqityiweyo*—a completed healer. She had completed her training and was now a traditional healer that could initiate those who are called and become their mentor. Also, her cow-tail whisks indicated that she had slaughtered a cow three times. It was not every day you could see *igqirha* with a whisk alone, and Gog'umlomo had a total of three. Many traditional healers struggled to obtain cow-tail whisks due to various reasons with financial setbacks as the main.

We greeted each other and did introductions and Gog'umlomo led our way with two dogs trailing behind her. First we hiked on sand dunes, on rocks moving past different caves with inscriptions on their walls. Some of the caves we passed through were occupied by people holding religious ceremonies; first we passed a group dressed in white holding a prayer session. Then we went past another group of women who were singing and talking in tongues, praying for what appeared to be water. During this process, we could not use our mobile phones at all, Gog'umlomo instructed us to keep quiet and pay attention to nature. We listened to the sound of nature, the sound made by insects and water flowing from a nearby fountain. Later, I realised that the overall goal of this exercise was to help us in using all of our senses. We had to look and admire the beauty of nature and just take a moment to smell the refreshing scent of plants, flowers and the air we were breathing. Mostly, we were taught to always be in the moment without distracting ourselves. We passed through a series of caves until we found ourselves in a massive cave up on a steep hill. It was a dark cave with huge rocks inside. There were inscriptions on the walls of the cave, some written in permanent markers and there were also drawings in brown clay. In Gog'umlomo's view, these caves used to be the home of our ancestors and this was the main reason we were here, to be closer to our ancestors. The cave was a sacred space and it was one of the few places in which *amagqirha* could just be themselves. This was a space where they did not have to hide who they are, where they did not have to be constantly stared at and have people talking behind

their backs. We sat down in a circle and shared *iintsomi*—folk tales. One of the healers whom I later discovered is also a poet shared with us a fable he made up about the livelihood of our ancestors, also sharing how they coexisted and their life in these caves. With us, we had brought drums, candles, *impepho* (incense), *icuba* (tobacco) and four shakers. They were our offerings to the ancestors. We lit the *impepho* and surrounded it with red, yellow and blue candles. Then we spilled the tobacco on the ground creating *umrhawulo*—the area for the offerings. As the incense burnt it produced a strong aroma filling the entire cave with a herbal scent. Gog’umlomo started a song and we joined in singing and clapping hands. I enjoyed how easy their songs were, healers would sing first and we would join in after they repeated the chorus. Most of the young boys started beating the drums, and Gog’umlomo’s sons were shaking shakers. We had an intimate *intlombe* with traditional healers dancing in the centre of the circle we had formed.

Getting to know each other well

After the song we sat down and had to introduce ourselves. When introducing ourselves we had to speak about why we were there and our vision for the future. Most of the young kids explained that they were there because we now live in a complicated world where a lot is going on, the spiritual sessions helped them to stay grounded and rooted in something other than social media. Most of the healers reflected on being there as an escape to the hardships they face including carrying the burden of other people’s problems and the harsh discrimination they encounter daily. I spoke about being there for academic reasons, further I stated that I was also there to find myself- I considered taking part in this outing as a journey of discovery and an expedition to pursue my great unknown. My wish was to finish and submit my MA thesis before end of the academic year. Thereafter, we had a poetry session, where some traditional healers recited their poetry which focused on their feelings, some spoke about their journeys as healers while others spoke about the importance of culture. It was an open session, no one called anyone to the centre of the circle, people would just get up and express themselves however they felt in that moment. Some started singing, humming and bit- boxing. Everyone was free to express themselves and show us their craft without feeling shy. This group of healers is made of vibrant and colourful individuals full of

optimism. We had lunch and sat together in the same circle sharing our food. Hereafter, there was more singing and we all danced with the *amagqirha* teaching us how to perform *gida* and *xhentsa*, which are traditional dance styles. When we were all tired, ZanoMdiza figured out that I should ask healers questions. I figured that a group interview would do and I asked for permission and everyone gave me a go ahead. We had a discussion which lasted until the evening. Some promised to invite me to their rituals as soon as Covid-19 regulations allowed them.

After this hiking outing I was considered an official member of the group Eza kwaMoya and I was constantly invited to healers' gatherings. They usually hosted poetry jam sessions, musical concerts and heritage film festivals which all centred on treasuring the indigenous Xhosa heritage. My participants went out of the way and even made the effort to connect me with elders of their practice. I had the privilege of interviewing an 80 year old healer, Slosendalo whom I had a mind blowing conversation with. She was my oldest participant and I found her doing bead work with his grandson Mvulane, who was still undergoing his training as a healer. Slosendalo taught me how to weave beads and also showed me how to sew them into cloths. What I liked about her is that whenever I asked her a question, she would respond through a song, she would further analyse the lyrics for my clarity. Towards the end of our interview she asked Mvulane to beat a paint bucket and she taught me how to dance, explaining the importance of letting the body loose and paying attention to the drum. The entire afternoon, we danced and she showed me her bead work and the clothes she made for healers.

Indeed, I enjoyed doing my fieldwork especially being a part of people who are passionate and have a great respect for arts. I marvelled at the way my participants went out of their way to create events and having to introduce me to diverse people who were all concerned with making my project effortlessly fun. They were rooting for me and also had a number of plans that they wanted to pursue with me in future, which involved changing their image as healers and the way they are perceived. They also shared their vision as cultural activists, who are involved in fighting for high school students who are kicked out of their schools because they are wearing their traditional regalia and for identifying as *amagqirha*. It was shared moments like these that constantly reminded me that writing about traditional healers was bigger than

my MA submission, it was something more, and it was my true vocation. Throughout doing my fieldwork I conducted a total of twelve interviews with Mkhonto (20 year old), Zanomdiza (18 year old), Slosendalo (80 year old), Vukuz'umbethe (22 year old), Mvulane (30 year old), Jubihlanzi (29 year old), Dabulilwandle (24 year old), Dlakaz'umhlola (45 year old), Mam'uJwarha (76 year old), Ntsibazencada (25 year old), Radebe (50 year old) and Msilehlosi (30 year old). These interviews all have a huge impact in my outlook on life and have fostered a great respect for diverse people. Above all, the respect I have for nature is unmatched, all thanks to my fieldwork!



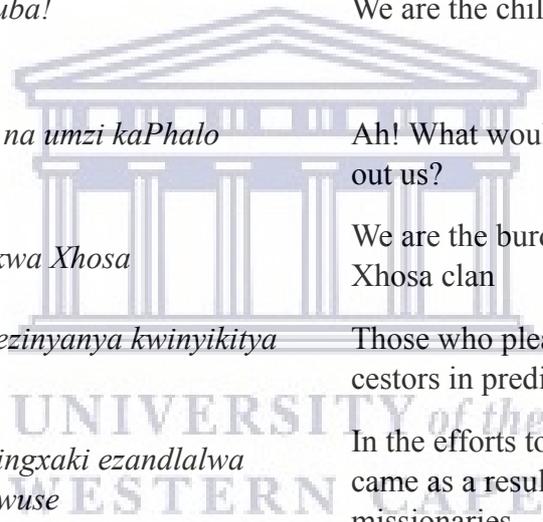
Part 1

The metaphysics of *amagqirha*



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<i>Singobani na thina?</i>	Who are we?
<i>Thina singabantu bentsimbi</i>	We are the chosen ones
<i>Singabaguli besintu</i>	Those who believe in our bones
<i>Sizizinto ezibhodla kudilike iintaba</i>	The traditionally ill
<i>Singabantu abagaxela sibebhanyabhanya de silandelwe na ziinyosi</i>	Those whose burp can destroy gigantic mountains. Those who dress in flamboyant colours attracting bees
<i>Sikwa zizithunywa zikaQamata</i>	We are messengers of Qamata
<i>Sizi nkalanzinzi zomzi kaPhalo</i>	We are the strength of Phalo's clan
<i>Singaba bangaqondwayo kwaye bangaqondakaliyo</i>	Those who are misunderstood
<i>Singabantwana bomgquba!</i>	We are the children of the soil!
<i>Ah! Az'ba ungayi ntoni na umzi kaPhalo ngaphandle kwethu?</i>	Ah! What would Phalo's clan be without us?
<i>Sizizi thwala ngxaki zakwa Xhosa</i>	We are the burden bearers of the Xhosa clan
<i>Aba bathi bacengane nezinyanya kwinyikitya ezinzima</i>	Those who plead with the living ancestors in predicaments
<i>Sizama ukusombulula iingxaki ezandlalwa bubuxoki buka Nongqawuse</i>	In the efforts to solve issues which came as a result of our clashes with missionaries
<i>Thina singaba guli!</i>	We are the traditionally ill!
<i>Ingulo siyiphiwe, bubomi bethu kwaye yimpilo yethu</i>	Healing is our gift. It is our life, our livelihood and wellness
<i>Siyagula de siphile</i>	We must get ill in order to heal
<i>Singaba philisi!</i>	We are healers!



In my honours research essay which focused on the journeys of *amagqirha* in becoming healers and their conceptualisations and management of *impambano*—mental illness—I was able to understand how they acquire the gift of healing but there was still a part of me that felt like I missing something. I understood their journeys but could not make sense of them, other than individuals called to fulfil the duty of healing. Even though I had completed a fifty paged essay I was still filled with questions on the essence of traditional healers. Who are they? Where do they come from? What do they know and how do they know it? What informs their belief system? Who is part of their circle? Is it just humans or are the other non-living forces? What is their meaning of life? Are they just healers or is there more to them outside the realm of health? This part of my dissertation seeks to answer these questions by focusing on the metaphysics of *amagqirha*.

In this context metaphysics concerns itself with the determination of the nature of being (Kanu, 2019). It is the search for what constitutes the reality in the world (Chemhuru, 2016) and reaches for a holistic view of reality without neglecting the unique place of individuals (Etim, 2013). This entails the meaning of the existence of *amagqirha* and relations among different forces that exist in both the physical and spiritual worlds. This is what my opening poem has partially illustrated. Various scholars have linked philosophy to African indigenous knowledge systems and worldview across time, and have taken ritual local specialists' reflections and interpretation of ritual practices as philosophical speculations. In relation to *amagqirha*, the work of Robert J Thornton for instance describes healing as “philosophy of life“ (2017: 2).

What I am doing in this section is to open up a conversation between philosophy and the ways in which interlocutors I interacted with during my fieldwork view and understand the work of *amagqirha* today. This section will unpack what *amagqirha* are and will provide a broad understanding of them as a people. This is a unique approach as *amagqirha* in previous studies have been understood solely through the context of healing. This study shows that there is more to be added to the conceptualisations of *amagqirha* and creates a space for them to be understood through the angle of aesthetics. The first part is divided into three main chapters which seek to unpack the meaning of *igqirha* today and how rituals are central in their understanding. The first chapter will focus on the ontologies of *amagqirha*; it will

provide their epistemological understanding which includes their knowledge systems and what constitutes their practice of healing. The second will focus on the person—*igqirha*. The third and last chapters will explore the mutually exclusive relationship between *amagqirha* and the environment and how this relationship sustains the practice of *ubugqirha*—healing—today.



The ontological understanding of *amagqirha*

Illnesses have always been present in our lives. They may not have been known as illnesses but they indicated a malfunction in the body (Good, 1993). In order to understand and manage them, communities have relied on the use of medicinal herbs and plants (Mokgobi, 2014; Mahomoodally, 2013). This has proved to be effective and has resulted in what we identify today as traditional healing—a crucial therapeutic component of the health of many individuals across the world today. Where do healers and the idea of healing come from? What is the source of knowledge? Does it come from dreams or some kind of spirits? This chapter seeks to understand the epistemological foundation of *amagqirha* and their practice by looking at the mythical roots of the practice. In this chapter I argue that *amagqirha* depart from an ideological space: a traditional healer is not a person, it is an idea which constructs the person known as *igqirha* in society. Furthermore, this chapter will centre on the worldview of *amagqirha*, their belief systems and telos in the worlds they exist in. Mostly, it will focus on their relations with other forces of nature and how these in turn help them make sense of their worlds and recreate their meanings.

Imbali zakudala zithi apho sihlala khona kwakheka ulwimi olutsha kunye nobomi ngoku themba amandla kaQamata. Abantu bakudala babe hamba bayokufuna iindawo bafukuze ngenxa yokuba xa behlala pha bangazinza, bangayakha bekulandawo indlela yabo yokunxibelelana kuba kaloku lomntu bebemkholelwa ukuba ulapho bakhoyo kwaye mkhulu. UQamata ungaphezu konke kwihlabathi lomoya, usingqongile ngamaxesha onke kwaye akangoThixo mnye, ungoThixo abohlukeneyo kwaye bemele izinto ezahlukeneyo. Oku kufana twatse neziphiwo ezinikwa abantu zahluka hlukeno. Zininzi iziphiwo zomoya ezi ziquka; ubugqirha, ubumbongi, amatola namaxhwele njalo njalo kwaye ziza ngokufumana amava kubantu abadala. Bayakwazi ukusikhokhela kwinto ezininzi. Amagqirha ona eze enikwe nguQamata ukuba babe ngaba gcini bamasiko nezithethe. Kuye kubekho imisebenzi apho baye babizelwe khona nje for ukuba ba zojonga babekhona nje ngokomoya wabo. Phambi kokuba ngaba bafike kweli gama funeke bahambe zonke ezi ndlela, zonke ezindawo abantu

abadala bebehllala kuzo, baye kuzo uyokunxibelelana nomoya wabantu nakwiindawo abawele kuzo. Zonke ke ezindawo ziquka imiqolombe, amahlathi, imilambo, amalwandle, amachibi, iintaba kunye neengxangxasi. Kuzo zonke ezindawo kukho abantu abalapha ababehllala phaya, abephila phaya kwixesha lamandulo kwaye basekhona nangoku. Ngoku ke xa besondele nomdali- umveli ngqongi abanye babo basenayo imisindo ebabenayo kwakude kudala. Iziphiwo zabo xa zizakuwela kuwe, wena mntu uzakugcina ukhanyisela umnombho olandelayo ubabuyise, ubaphilise kwaye ubaxolise, ubanike ithuba lokuba mabaphinde baphile kuwe, kunye nawe kwaye kuyoyonke lento ukwa lungisa zonke iingxaki zentsapho zakudala ukwakha ubutyebu apha kuwe, usebenza nemimoya yaba bangasekhoyo .

Ngokwamkela ubugqirha unika abantu abangasekhoyo ubomi besibini, ubanika ithuba lokuba baphile kwakhona apha phakathi kwakho. Baphila nawe kuyoyonke into oyenzayo kwaye bakungqongile. Nje nge gqirha uphilela bona, uba lidini eliphilileyo. Kuyo yonke into uqale uba philisi kwaye ubaxolise, kubekho isivumelwano phakathi komzimba wakho, nenyama, nomoya. Kulapho ke ulwazi lwesigqirha luphuma khona, luphuma kwindlela yokuphila nokukholelwa kuQamata. Zininzi ke indawo ezigcina olu lwazi kwaye eziqhubekisa zifundisa uluntu ngolulwazi. Okoquqala, eyona nto igcina olulwazi ngumntu kuba nantoni na eyenzekayo yenzeka emntwini kwaye ayibhalwa phantsi. Umntu uyi mbanci yoqala egcina olulwazi, aphinde abe yile ndawo iphokoza olu lwazi kuba nantoni na eyenzeka emntwini ayibhalwa phantsi, yakukwenzeka umntu uyabuzwa kwaye uyayichaza ngokwakhe. Okwesibini, zikhona iincwadi kunye namathala eencwadi ekugcinwe kuzo ulwazi oluphangaleleyo kuba abantu bakudala babenaso isiphiwo sokubhala. Oku sikubona kwimiqolombe ukuba yona kukho indlela ekubhalwe ngayo kusekho imizobo kwaye lemizobo yindlela ebabe nxibelelana ngayo. Imiqolombe ngezinye zendawo ezigcine khona ulwazi lwasendulo, kulapho bekugcinwa khona indlela yokwenza izinto, kuzobakho abantu abadala ababaliselwayo ngamasiko ngolwazi olusuka kulemiqolombe. Ndingatsho ke ndithi oku kubalisa, ngenye yendlela ezenza ukuba siphulukane nezinye izinto kuba yonke into igcinwe ngomlomo. Zibekhona nezisele zenyathi eziza nolulwazi ezithi ziluphokoze eluntwini. Ezi ziquka amagqirha kuba baphila nathi kwelihlabathi sikulo kwaye baxhomene naba bakwi hlabathi labantu abangasekhoyo. Baza nolwazi olwandileyo kuba bekwazi unxibelelana ngabantu abangasekhoyo ngokwenyama. Kubekho amaziko akhethekileyo kunye nabantu abakhethekileyo apho kugcinwa khona iimbali kwaye zifihlwe. Sibenawo namakomkhulu;

umzekelo ebukhosin abantwana begazi bayafundiswa ngomnombo wabo kwakunye nangamasiko nezithethe kwakunye neembali zakwaNtu ukwenzela ingabhudeki kwaye ingaphosakali. Oku siye sikubone kakuhle xa sinxibelelana nabo naphi na. Kulapho baye bathi xa bezazisa bazithuthe. Bazixelele ukuba bangobani na bekwa chaza iziduko zasemakwabo kwaye belanda umnombo wabo. Izokuba ziimbongi, xa sithetha ngembongi sithetha ngezithethi zomthonyama. Imbongi ke kwaXhosa ifaniswa nje ngenja. Inja kaloku, ngumkhuseli, iyakhusela ngokuthi ilijonge ikhaya kwaye ilihloniphe. Yakuva into emdaka okanye ibone into enobungozi ikhawuleza ikhonkothe kuqala. Ngoko ke iimbongi zinje ngezinja, ziyakhusela, ziyahlonipha kwaye ziyayibona into emdaka. Nabanye abantu abangangumnombo, ukhubave xa bekhahlela, becencezela izibongo zonke. Zonke ndiziqukileyo ziquka imvelaphi yobuqgirha eqalwa bubudlelwana nendalo kunye nento yonke engqongqo abantu enokwenza ukuba baphile.³

It all started with the belief in Qamata and people relying in his power. Xhosa people back in the days wandered around in search of places to stay, this is when they established ways to communicate to Qamata and through this communication they were able to understand the meaning of life. They believed in the super power found in the spiritual world and also discovered that Qamata is not one God, he is different types of Gods who stand for different things and who is also worshipped in many different ways. Likewise, there are many spiritual gifts among the Xhosa people: traditional healing, praise poetry, divinity and herbalism. All of these come into being through experience and knowledge from older generations who guide us whenever we need to perform a ritual or need clarity with anything. *Amagqirha* came into existence to be the gate keepers of the Xhosa culture and to provide guidance in ritual performances. What makes them traditional healers is the experience they get through travelling around and immersing themselves in all the places that once belonged to their ancestors. They communicate with their spirits in the places of their deaths. All of these places include caves, forests, rivers, oceans, lakes, mountains and waterfalls. This is where the spirits of ancestors reside. Some of these ancestors left the physical world with anger, when their gifts are passed on to you, as a healer, your duty is to continue down their pathway and bring them back. You become their living sacrifice and they get the chance to live their

³ Interview with Ntsibazencanda, Langa, 20 November 2021.

second life through you. And you heal them and make them peaceful. By accepting the ancestral call and becoming a traditional healer you give ancestors a chance to live in you and they co-exist with you, protect you and bring you luck. In turn you will live for their sake. Being *igqirha* means to be in an agreement with your body, soul and spirit. It means allowing someone's spirit to live inside of you. This is where knowledge about traditional practices comes from. It comes from the way of life of the Xhosa people and their belief in Qamata. Today, there are many places that preserve this knowledge and which ensure that it is spread for educational purposes. The first preservers of this knowledge are the people because everything that occurs does so to them and they store this knowledge and share it with others. Books and libraries also preserve knowledge about the olden way of life. Even though Xhosa societies were oral ones, the Xhosa people had knowledge of writing and recorded their information down on cave walls. These walls were in-scripted with their way of life and knowledge of Xhosa traditions. Knowledge was later recorded on books and is still stored in libraries, especially in the Eastern Cape region. Additionally, there are also certain individuals in society who preserve the knowledge about *ubugqirha* and share it amongst other people in society. These include *amagqirha* as they live with us but are also connected to our ancestors in the spiritual world. This relationship allows *amagqirha* to acquire knowledge and they use it in their practice and to help communities, not only with health problems but with everyday problems such as family conflicts. Members of the chieftaincy also known as *abantwana begazi*—royal bloods—who are taught from an early age about the Xhosa culture and heritage are also knowledge preservers. We see this when they introduce themselves, they always explain their ancestral lineage explicitly calling out all their ancestors names. They are also taught about folklore which they have the task of passing on to other generations. Praise poets also play an important role of preserving knowledge on *ubugqirha* as they participate in the ritual spaces of the *amagqirha* and have the duty of protecting, respecting and teaching others about the importance of traditions and culture through the poetry.

1. The epistemological foundations of amagqirha and the practice of healing

Traditional healing and the use of medicinal herbs started centuries ago (Mokgobi, 2019).

Eighty year old Slosendalo—my oldest participant to whom I refer to as a living archive—

told me how traditional healing started with the relationship between individuals and their land.

Chosi ntsomi ndaba zolwimi! Imbali zesiXhosa zithi yonke lento yaqala ngomhlaba kunye nabantu abangqongwe ngulo mhlaba. Ukhumbule ke, thina singamaXhosa singabantu bendalo, singabantu abaphilisana nezilwanyana kunye nezityalo. Ngoko ke yonke lento iqale kwindlela yethu yokuphila. Kwabakho ukugula, ukugula ke ntomb'am yinto ekudala yabakho phakathi kwethu. Kwaye kwakuthi ze kwaziwe ukuba umntu uyagula kufundwe umzimba wakhe. Xa umntu enganamandla, kwaye simbona uhlile esiqwini sakhe okanye abe engenguye lamtu simqhelileyo mhlawumbi angakwazi ukwenza imisebenzi yakhe apha ekhayeni, kulapha besiye sibone khona ukuba ayikho enye inkcazelo kukugula qha! Oku kugula kwaye kwabangela ukuba thina nje ngabantu ababenobudlelwane nomhlaba wethu, sixhamle obubudlelwane sibusebenzise senze inzame zokuba siphilise. Andithi nje ngabantu bomhlaba, naxa kufike nayphi na ingxaki, xa sifuna isisombululo sizakuqala apha kuwo. Umhlaba ke lo, uzele ziziqhamo, imifuno nezityalo; kulapho ke abantu baye bazama khona ukusebenzisa ezizityalo ukwenzela ukuba kuzanywe ukuhlangabezana nengxanki zeempilo. Ngamanye amxesha ezizityalo beziye zingasebenzi, kulapho ke kwakuye kuzanywe amanye amacebo. Kulapho ke abantu bethu baye bazama ukusebenzisa amanzi kumachibi, emalwandle nasemilanjani, kunye nezinye izityalo ezifumaneka kwezindawo. Na xa ezi bezingasebenzi besiye sisebenzise izilwanyana ezisingqongileyo. Ngoko ke ukunyanga kuqale ngobudlelwane bethu nendaw esihlala kuyo nokusebenzisa zonke izinto ezisingqongikeyo nokumane sisenza iinzame.⁴

It all began with our land and everything surrounding this land. Remember that we, as Xhosa people, are closely tied to nature; we coexist harmoniously with plants and animals.

Therefore, it all started with our way of life. There was illness, illness is something that has always occurred and in order to understand this illness we had to read the bodies of the ill.

When individuals were weak and we could see that they had lost weight and that they were no longer in their normal state, this is when we could tell that they are ill. As people who are naturally tied to the environment, whenever we encountered a problem, we used our land for solutions. This was the same when it came to illness. Our land is full of plants, fruits and

⁴ Interview with Slosendalo, Langa, 18 March 2021.

vegetables and we used these to encounter our health predicaments. When these proved to be unsuccessful we turned to animals in our surrounding. Thus, healing started with our relationship with our land and us using everything at our disposal. Slosendalo points out that everything concerning traditional healing started with the environment and the relationship those who occupied it had with it. This could be interpreted as a dyadic interaction (Oring, 1984) where the environment provides individuals with land they can use for shelter, food and healing, giving rise to what is known as the traditional healer today. In return these individuals had to take care of the environment as well as of the other occupants such as plants and animals establishing a relationship with them (Alston, 1988; Gau, 2001).

*Kuyoyonke into esiyenzayo nje ngabantu bakwa moya uThixo sisiqalo sethu. Na xa ndizakwenza namphi na umsebenzi ndiqala ndiguqe ngedolo ndibize uThixo namanyange asekhaya kuba bayasebenzisana.*⁵ In everything that we do as people of the spirit we rely on God, he is our way maker, the reason we do everything. Whenever I am going to perform a ritual for any occasion I kneel down and call upon God and my ancestors because they work together, through me.

The theory according to which traditional healing started with the relationship between individuals and their environment is also complemented by the idea of the intervention of God, who is positioned as the real cause of all actions on earth (Pessin, 2000) and the reason of human's will (Downing, 2005). Etim (2013) argues that in order to understand the relationship among the various kinds of being then the notion force is significant as well as the fundamental causal and uniting factor. It is the permeation of force in everything that exists. Force here is understood as life, energy, power or vital force and whatever exists from the lowest to the highest has a force. Thus, every existence then exists in virtue of force (Etim, 2013). According to the African philosophy existence is not limited to the individual persons, it is inclusive of several other beings and forces in the web of the African ontology. Additionally, there is an understanding that it is driven by aims and that everything that exists has a purpose (Chemhuru, 2016).

⁵ Interview with Mam' uJwarha, Nyanga, 24 April 2021.

3.2. The hierarchical order of being

Sikholelwa ekubeni ubomi buquka indidi zemimoya ezahlukeneyo kwaye zonke ezi azilingani zonke zingaphantsi kolawulo nezigaba ezahlukeneyo. UThixo ungaphezu kwento yonke, kubekho izinyanya, kulandele abantu ibe zizilwanyana. Emva kwezizilwanyana ibe zizinto ezinje ngamatye nemithi. Zonke ezizinto ndiziqukileyo ziyaphila, kodwa ke ziphila ngendlela ezahlukeneyo kwaye azilingani ngoku baluleka.⁶

Everything that exists does so in a hierarchy. In this hierarchy God is at the apex, ancestors and other spirits follow and then the human kind, and at the bottom there are the non-living things such as rocks known as lower forces (Etim, 2013). Beings are hierarchically placed according to their power in the order of existence. God is the most powerful also known as the Supreme Being and is regarded as the maker of the world and the ruler of both the physical and the spiritual worlds. These attributes show that the Supreme Being in African culture is regarded as the ultimate reality. All things in the universe are depended on him for existence (Ebeh, 2015; Chemhuru, 2016; Oladipo, 2005). After God there is the presence of spirits and ancestor who are approached through rituals and sacrifices (Etim, 2013).

Ancestors are conceived as individuals that have tasted death and transcended to the spiritual realm. They are above human persons but also occupy the lower level from God. At death, they become unfettered spirits and can interfere into the affairs of the living. They have an influence and play a crucial role in the humans lives by continuously interacting with living beings. According to Dzobo (1992), in most African traditions, ancestors are a kind of distant grandparents watching over living persons. They contribute to the wellbeing by providing good health, guidance and protection. Inversely, human beings have the obligation to acknowledge and respect them through various rituals like cooking, brewing and offering sacrifices (Wiredu, 1992; Etim, 2013). Indeed, this proves that their relationship is an everlasting and unending one, marked by reciprocity. This is evident in Dabulilwandle's sentiments.

Inkulu indima edlalwa ngabaphantsi ebomini bethu, nathi ke sinayo indima esiyidlalayo kubo ngokwenza iimicimbi. Yiyo lonto ndisithi sinobudlelwane obunzima, obubudlelwane

⁶ Interview with Mkhonto, Khayelitsha, 11 March 2021.

*buqala kwasesibelekweni singekabi ngabantu ngokupheleleyo. Zizinyanya esithi zisikhusele side sikhule sibe badala zinxibelelana nathi. Zikwasihlangula nasezinxakini side sibe ngabantu abapheleleyo, nathi sigqithe sibe zizinya ngenxa yazo ebomini bethu.*⁷

Ancestors play a significant role in our daily lives. This is sustained by the active role we play by acknowledging their presence through periodic rituals. Our relationship with our ancestors is a strong one that starts when we are in the womb. It is ancestors that guide us and ensure that we are protected until we become much older and become ancestors too.

Most of my participants have disclosed that not everyone who has died can become an ancestor. African philosophers as well have stressed how individual members of communities must live exemplary lives in accordance to the ethos of the community (Morgan et al., 2020). Living according to the ethos of a group is among the conditions for attaining the prestige of being elevated to an ancestor after one's death. When individuals die they set out on a journey to the spirit world where ancestors reside. Through this process they exchanges their earthly mode of existence with another. Part of man's personality survives after death and what remains is the ancestor which is now a spirit (Morgan et al., 2020). The spirits of ancestors can reside in various locations such as trees, mountains, rivers and animals. These become the home of the spirit and are sacred places where offerings can be made to worship that particular spirit (Wiredu, 1992; Etim, 2013; Oladipo, 2005; Berg, 2003). Those who become ancestors in the opinion of my participants are the individuals who have acted in accordance with the community's sense of morality. These are individuals who have been working agents in their community, who have served the community and played an important role as helpers. Furthermore, it is also those who have demonstrated Ubuntu, who have showed unconditional love, care, respect, compassion and empathy for others.

African philosophers (Kanu 2019) have argued that with the hierarchy of beings, after ancestors, follows human beings. The human person is a vital force endowed with intelligence and will. Although God is the source of vital force, man is the sovereign vital force in the world, ruling the land. Within Christian informed beliefs, human beings are believed to have two components namely a body and a soul (Kanu 2019). My participants

⁷ Interview with Dabulilwandle, Nyanga 16 April 2021.

oppose this dualistic conception of man stating that human beings have three components: a body, soul and spirit. In the hierarchy of being, after humans, are the lower forces. These include plants, animals and other inanimate reality such as rocks, mountains and rivers. Human beings and nonhuman animals are not the only forces that exhibit life, even non-animate reality such as rocks, rivers, seas, the air and soils are alive (Chemhuru, 2016). They are alive in so far as they are beings on their own and possess energy, power and souls just like animate things. However, they are considered “lower” because they possess fewer vital forces as opposed to the other forces within the hierarchy of existence. Despite having fewer vital forces, their wellbeing is significant so far as they are linked to their ontological counterparts—God, ancestors and human beings. They are powerful beings in the ontological order as they contribute towards the wellbeing of human beings and other beings. They are created and imbued with a spiritual dimension (Etim, 2013) which allows them to spiritually link human beings with God and ancestors. For example, certain plants and animals are used as offerings for certain religious purposes. The relationship between humans and lower forces is constructed in a way that promote sustainable dependency on the lower forces and continued existence of all forces. Beings do not exist as in a kind of a vacuum, they are all interconnected. Everything that exists is the expressions of interacting forces. These forces are not solely physical, they are also present in our ideas and emotions. There exists a universe of two realms of existence; the visible and invisible, which are independently real and intrinsically linked to form a whole world of existence. The African philosophical understanding of reality is typically construed as holistic. In Molefe’s (2018) view holism construes all reality as interrelated and interdependent. Everything—God, ancestors, humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects—is connected and interdependent and we are constantly interacting with one another.

3.3. The world view of amagqirha

Singabantu abamhlophe, abantu bomoya. Sithi silapha ngokwenyama sibe ngokomoya singaphakathi kwabantu abadala. Indima yethu apha ebomini kukuphilisa- lona ngumsebenzi wethu esiwunikwe nje ngesipho zizinyanya zethu, nguwo osiqhubayo kwinto

yonke esiyenzayo.⁸ We are spiritual people who can be found in both the physical and spiritual worlds. We exist to heal- this is a duty granted to us by our forefathers, we are driven by this telos in everything that we do. We live, breathe and move because of our gift to heal!

Mvulane's insights are an indication that *amagqirha* are driven by the duty to make society a better place by providing therapeutic healing. Life for them is a communal affair which involves relationships for mutual benefits. They are powerful beings who are socially tied to their community of living beings and have a strong connection with their environment along with other inanimate forces such as oceans, mountains, trees etc. Mostly, they see the world as a space that can be shaped through interconnection with different forces. This connection or chain of forces is essential because its disturbance or disjuncture can result in illness.

3.4. *The holistic nature of traditional healers*

In African cultures the understanding of illness and healing requires an understanding of the relationship between the gods, the ancestors and humans (Mtshali, 2009). Since the human being consists of three compounds namely the physical body, spirit and soul, healing in this context means restoring a lost unity to an individual's body, spirit and soul. Due to this reason, when traditional healers seek to provide healing, they focus on these three aspects. This is not the same when it comes to biomedical inquiry where the focus is on the physical body. "The body is the object of attending and skilled manipulating, and it is a world of its own that has limitless possibilities for learning" (Good, 1993: 72). In the world of medicine, the body is newly constituted as a medical body. This is quite distinct from the bodies we interact in the everyday life and the intimacy with the body reflects a distinctive perspective and an organised set of perceptions that emerge with the surfacing of the body as a site of medical knowledge (Good, 1993). According to Western biomedical approaches, the body is treated as a machine made up of various organ systems and component parts. Disease manifests itself as a malfunction in a particular area and can be corrected through proper diagnosis. These techniques usually consist of a chemical or biological agent specifically

⁸ Interview with Mvulane, Langa, 18 March 2021.

suited to attack and render harmless germ that caused the disease (Guttmatcher, 1979). Health in the biomedical realm of knowledge is the absence of this disease. In this context the body is only understood in the confined hospital space. The anatomy lab is a critical site, in which the human body is opened for exploration and learning. This is not the same in traditional healing practices as the body is understood through being immersed in different contexts. It is understood in the consultation rooms of *amagqirha* and beyond this site, in ritual spaces in the company of different bodies and this is what Mol refers to as material semiotics (2002). This is a theory that considers practices as a network of a diverse link of webs. This is why I argue that traditional healers are holistic in their healing because their healing practices provide an all-round understanding of the ailment, situating it in different contexts and considering how it is as a result of different causes. Indeed, *amagqirha* deal with persons.

*Xa sinyanga thina siye umntu simnyangisise. Siye siqale sincokole naye, simbuze ingxaki inokuba iphi na. Sandule ngoku hlola umzimba wakhe ngowubamba, xa oku kungasebenzi siye sivumise, sicele izinyanya zisibonise unobangela wengulo. Na xa simnyanga ke umguli, asimnyangi sodwa, siye sibize amanye amagqirha, simbizele kwintlombe ezahlukeneyo apho sizokumnyangela ngamandla omntu wonke okhoyo.*⁹ When we heal we do a thorough job. First we start by conversing with the ill patient in our consultation rooms in the efforts to understand who they are and their knowledge of the illness. We then proceed by inspecting their bodies and touch them as a way to feel their energy. After this we consult our ancestors to show us the root cause of the problem. Healing for us is indeed holistic. We do not heal our patients alone; we work together as different healers and even perform rituals inviting community members and offer sacrifices so that healing can be drawn from different bodies.

It is evident through the above that healing for *amagqirha* takes different pathways. They use a combination of medicinal plants, physical manipulation, energetic healing and the invocation of spiritual beings (McCaul, 2008). Traditional healing systems do not simply match drugs with diseases, but acknowledge the individuality of patients' physiologies and combine different remedies into individual patients (Barsh, 1997). First and foremost, ailment is situated outside the body where it can be conceptualised into different contexts which all construe the illness in diverse ways, allowing for the use of different methods which

⁹ Interview with Zubanyange, Nyanga, 21 April 2021.

encompass songs, dance, prayer, sacrifice of animals and other inanimate reality such as rocks, mountains, waterfalls and rivers.

Additionally, situating the illness outside the body allows the ill patient to be understood as an integrated organism who forms part of a population and part of a set of relationships. As a result, patients do not suffer alone as these methods involve different forces which result in healing drawn from various energies (Guttmatcher, 1979; Thornton, 2010). Throughout this process, the ill becomes the “exposed being” (Thornton, 2015) as their illness is revealed in open. This allows the different forces to suffer with the patient and experience their pain. Since the patient’s pain is also the result of their relationship with other people, the network of pain and suffering links both the healer and patient to a ramifying network of suffering bodies. This is not a population and it is not society that suffers but rather suffering is propagated through people in relation to one another (Thornton, 2015: 367).

3.5. Conclusion

It is evident throughout this chapter that the Supreme Being’s will is the root cause of healing as it establishes the connection between persons and their environment, allowing them to use this environment as a site to understand and manage health and illnesses effectively. A relationship is built marked by the interconnection between these forces, ancestors, animals as well as other inanimate beings which collectively contribute to the whole functioning of this environment, giving rise to what is known as *igqirha*. This chapter has illustrated that *amagqirha* are not singular as they are construed through both the physical and the spiritual worlds. Although, the biomedical realm of knowledge has tried to categorise traditional healers solely as herbalists. This is flawed because traditional healing is holistic. It speaks to the physical, psychological and the environmental aspects. *Amagqirha* go beyond knowing herbs, they have powers and energy that allows them to see, feel, reprimand and punish. Above all, their telos in life is to heal as they alternate as mediums, seers, herbalists and therapists, all in the efforts to provide relief for individuals, communities, clans and communities.

Conceptualising the Personhood of *amagqirha*

The idea of an autonomous person is an Eurocentric one that explains persons as existing independently without the influence of others (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001). Inversely, in the African context personhood is a social construction as persons exist with reference to an array of significant others. According to the Comaroffs (2001) the identity of each and every one is shaped by an ongoing series of activities in the community which include persons continuously building themselves. This is the same with *amagqirha* who play a crucial role in society as health practitioners. They work around the clock with different patients situated in multiple religious backgrounds and are herbalists who have a strong harmonious relationship with their environment possessing extensive knowledge about medicinal herbs and plants. They are also experts in traditional ceremonies providing guidance for therapeutic healing. However, who are they outside their line of work and in relation to the families and communities they form part of? What is their place in these contexts? This chapter will focus on the shifting roles *amagqirha* play outside healing where they work as community leaders, mentors for the youth, art teachers and as cultural and gender-based violence activists. In this chapter I argue that *amagqirha* and their respective practices have a permanent relevance among South Africans.

4.1. The meaning of being in the world of amagqirha

Being remains a fundamental question within the parameters of enquiry in metaphysics (Kanu, 2019). According to *amagqirha* being is to belong; it is to exist through others. This expresses the inevitable presence of not just the family but the community and spiritual world. In Mkhonto's view the society of the living and living dead is intrinsically a network of relations stretching in hierarchical order. The individual life of the healer is not theirs by right or by nature. It is a gratuitous conferment from their ancestors and this shows that the existence of *amagqirha* is not entirely their own nor can they control it. Each member of the

community is born with the moral obligation of participating in the goodness of the community. Thus, the individual's endeavours are strongly pre-determined to conform to the established norms of the community (Forster, 2010).

4.2. *Being through others*

*Ukuba sithi magqirha kukuba yingxalenye yabanye abantu. Singamagqirha ngamnaye, amagqirha, iinstapho zethu kunye nabanye abantu esiphila nabo ekuhlaleni.*¹⁰ Being to us traditional healers means being a part of other people. We are traditional healers through other healers, our families and mostly the communities we form part of.

The community is the centre of gravity that pulls individuals to communal centre. It is the one that gives *amagqirha* their being. This is a community of being that is a collective of distinct persons. In the African context a person is identified by his or her interrelationships and not primarily by individualistic properties. According to Forster (2010) the identity of the person is his or her place in the community. Kanu (2019) states that to be maintained in "being", one must conform to the community's injunctions and ways. This is in accordance to the "African" way of life which puts stress on the group, collective life and social solidarity. Thus, being happy, sick and strong is not individualistic but always concerns 'us' together. It is a communal affair. The society, consisting of living and living dead, is thus conceived as a network of relations, linking to various parts of an organism. When one part of the body is sick, the whole body is affected, and when a member of a family or clan is honoured or successful the whole group rejoices since each member is part of the honour. The reality and autonomy of the individual is derived from the community in a way that one might rightly contend that because the community exists, the individual exists also. My participants strongly affirmed that independent existence has no sense in the absence of the community.

*Xa kugula igqirha elinye, onke amagqirha ayagula. Xa ku phile igqirha elinye onke amagqirha aphilile. Yiyo lonto ke nje ngamagqirha sisoloko sihambelane kwimicimbi kuba kaloku siyanyangana ngobukho bethu. Ngoko ke singama gqirha, ngawanye amagqirha.*¹¹

¹⁰ Interview with Zanomdiza, Nyanga, 6 April 2021.

¹¹ Interview with Slosendalo, Langa, 18 March 2021.

When one healer is sick, all healers become sick. When one healer is well we are all well. This is why *amagqirha* attend each other rituals because when every being is present they are able to provide healing and be healed simultaneously. Therefore, we are *amagqirha* through other healers.

This indicates that *amagqirha* derive their full social reality from their communities and that they and their practice exist in light of others. Because their existence is rooted within the existence of community, there is a basis of moral obligation. This obligation is connected to the harmony of individual interests in the survival of others and prevents the collapse of the community. To act disharmoniously within the community threatens one's personhood. The projects and achievements of persons are interdependent with the community, forming an obligatory tie between persons and their communities. Even one's name which individuates the person as a person is granted by the community (Tschaepe, 2013; Menkiti, 1984).

4.3. *The acquisition of personhood through rituals*

Personhood in African philosophy is not perceived as a simply given at the very beginning of one's life, it is achieved through one's involvement in communal life. It is continuous and attained through different stages overtime. It must be won and defended through behaviors that align with the essential norms and ideals of personhood (Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992). This implies that one can be a human being without being or attaining personhood. Thus, being a person is something that one could fail or be incompetent at as it is attained through incorporation and learning about social and moral rules. The social requirement for becoming a person demonstrates that relationality and embedded interdependence is an ontological practice intrinsic to a person (Adjei, 2019; Ikuenobe, 2017).

*Imicimbi idlala indima enkulu kubuntu bamagqirha. Yiyo ebangela ukuba sikwazi ukuzingomba izifuba sithi 'singamagqirha' kuba kulapho siye sifunde khona banzi ngokuba ngamagqirha. Ndingatsho ke ndithi singamagqirha ngenxa yemicimbi.*¹² Rituals play a significant role in the personhood of *amagqirha*. In these rituals we learn what it means to be

¹² Interview with Zubanyange, Nyanja, 21 April 2021.

igqirha through dance, songs, folktale, praise poetry and feasting together. Thus, we constantly become through being immersed in rituals.

According to Zubanyange, for the *amagqirha* the ritual space is one of the crucial sites for the development of their personhood. Rituals, which include *amagqirha*, their families and communities, create a common ground for participants to learn what it means to be persons through a long process of social and ritual transformation. This occurs through ritual activities such as dancing, singing, drumming, and story-telling and through the preparation of food. Every individual participating in the ritual space has an obligation to fulfil, *amagqirha* play a dominant role as makers of the rituals but their families and communities also play a crucial role, and no rituals can take place without their involvement. Their collaboration plays an important role in helping *amagqirha* acquire their personhood illustrating that indeed “Umntu ngumntu ngabantu”, we are, because of others (Horsthemke, 2018).

*Ubuntu bethu sikwababufuna na kwizilwanyana, ngoku xhela. Qho xa sixhela,sixhelela izinyanya zethu oku kuye kubangele sigqithele kwizinga elahlukeneyo kwaye sibe ngabantu abatsha. Ngoko ke Ubuntu bethu bufumaneka kwizilwanyana kunye nento yonke esingqongileyo.*¹³ Animals also play an outstanding role in the attainment of our personhood. We cannot perform any ritual without slaughtering; we use them as our sacrifices to our ancestors. Thus, we become through animals and the broader environment we form part of. This proves that *amagqirha* attain their personhood through a holistic unit of mutually reinforcing life forces of human communities, ancestral spirits, animals and the natural environment (Ikuenobe, 2017).

4.4. *Amagqirha outside the context of healing*

As much as the community plays a notable role in *amagqirha* attaining their personhood, my participants have revealed their involvement in building their communities. I was privileged enough to work with a vibrant cohort of *amagqirha* that demonstrates remarkable energy for life. My participants work together in the communities of Langa, Khayelitsha and Nyanga, in

¹³ Interview with Zanomdiza, Nyanja, 6 April 2021.

the pursuits to make change in their communities. They are community leaders, cultural activists, gender based violence activists, mentors to young children and sports and recreation coaches. According to the 24 year old Dabulilwandle, it all started with the tainted image of *amagqirha* in their communities.

Akululanga ukuba ligqirha. Ngamanye amaxesha ndiye ndinqwenele ukutshisa zonke iimpahla zam zesigqirha kuba zizo eziye zibonise wonke umntu ukuba ndiligqirha. Ngamanye amaxesha ndiye ndikhulule iintsimbi zam nje ndizifihle kuba abantu abangandaziyo basoloko bethetha kakubi ngam. Baya ndijonga kwaye bayandicalula kuba bengandiqondi ukuba ndiligqirha lamanyani na. Bandiphatha kakubi kuba bendicingela ngobugqwirha, nokuba ndizokuthengisa amalungu emizimba yabo. Andiyazi ukuba zonke ezizimto zisukaphi, kodwa ke zisingqonge kwindawo yonke esihamba kuyo. Ngenxa yazo, saye saqondaba ne tshomi yam masiqale izinto ezizobonisa ekuhlaleni ukuba asingabo abantu ababi. Saqala ngeklasi zemfundo kwaye zahamba kakuhle. Namhlanje senza into ezininzi ezidlala indima

*ebalulekileyo eluntwini!*¹⁴ Being a healer in society is not an easy task. Sometimes I feel like burning my traditional attire because it is the one that alerts everyone that I am a healer. I sometimes just take off my beads, just to hide from everyone, because there are just days where I cannot take the harsh treatment I receive from random people who do not know me. People will stare at me and treat me differently because most do not even believe that I am a legit “traditional healer”. And they react this way because they assume that I will use witchcraft, cast a spell on them or turn them into zombies and sell their body parts. I am not sure where all of these false accusations come from but they are everywhere. So a friend of mine and I decided to make an impact in our community just to show our neighbours that we are not bad people. We started with learning sessions for our community members and they were a success, today we have expanded to greater heights!

Dabulilwandle and his group of healers are cultural activists from Khayelitsha who have established a project that teaches communities about the indigenous knowledge system, this is where they learn more about their culture. This has also helped enlighten many individuals about the relevance of *amagqirha* in society. Now and then, they usually host Heritage film festivals in other communities outside Khayelitsha to ensure that their knowledge reaches as

¹⁴ Interview with Dabulilwandle, Khayelitsha, 16 April 2021.

many people as possible. Furthermore, they help other healers located in different townships around Cape Town to start initiatives that are aimed at bringing change through the art of learning.

Ntsibazencanda was influenced by Dabulilwandle's and other healers' efforts towards community development. As a result, he has collaborated with many community members in Langa building his name through the exceptional work he does. First and foremost, he runs a soup kitchen ensuring that many families go to bed with their stomachs full. He is the cofounder of #LangaForMen—a project that was established in response to the high prevalence of gender based violence in South Africa. Through this initiative they hold marches, workshops and discussion forums which help many individuals to understand the complexities of gender while helping them unlearn gender stereotypes and misconceptions. Moreover, he also works as a drama teacher, a host for soccer tournaments and an organiser for events that showcase talent and hiking trips which center on nature awareness. Indeed, the involvement of *amagqirha* outside their field of expertise is an exceptional contribution to the development of our communities, it ensures that individuals unlearn all the false misconceptions they have held and creates room in their minds to acquire new knowledge changing their mind sets. But is this enough to ensure that the future of *amagqirha* is in safe hands?



4.5. The future of amagqirha

As much as traditional healers help improve the lives of many in society through healing and beyond, there is still a lot of skepticism on *amagqirha* and especially on the source of knowledge. According to Kutesa (2018) traditional healers are becoming famous and considered reliable health practitioners whereas their herbal epistemic foundation is unwritten and there is no documental evidence of their herbal knowledge and sources of their herbal medicine. He poses the question “why is traditional herbal medicine accepted yet its epistemological base is unknown?” Through this question Kutesa (2018) seeks to understand why is it that 80% of the African population consults a practice without a clear understanding on the knowledge of its botanical plants and ecology. Masango (2020) supports Kutesa (2018)

asserting that the mystery and secrecy of traditional medicine is a problem that makes the field misgiving. The issue is that the medicinal knowledge of *amagqirha* is not codified in its entirety through modern research and useful publications. They both argue that healers must reveal secret elements of traditional medicine and reveal the plants they use along with their special spiritual knowledge.

Galabuzi et al., (2010) states that the knowledge of traditional healers is uncodified as it is revealed orally. Healers do not want to reveal the spiritual elements implanted in traditional medicines for fear that their knowledge will be stolen and this will end the market for traditional healers, leaving many jobless as this is their source of income. My participants challenge this view expressing that it is not fear but rather their knowledge comes from a range of different things and codifying it is a taboo in their practice.

*Ulwazi lethu ngamayeza silifumana kiwizinyanya, ziye zinxibelelane nathi kumathongo. Kulapho ke siye siluthathe olu lwazi silunike abo basingqongileyo. Xa izinyanya zisixelela ngala mayeza zineda thina azisiyaleli ukuba sihambe siluchaza kumntu wonke kuba kukho amagqirha obuxoki, ulwazi lwethu lungaphelele ezandlen zawo balusebenzise ekwenzeni ububi. Enye into kaloku asiziphethanga siphethwe ngamanyange anga asithumileyo!*¹⁵ The knowledge of our medicinal herbs comes from our ancestors who communicate with us through dreams. This is the source of our knowledge and we share it with insiders of the practice. This is mainly because when ancestors inform us about these herbs they do not instruct us to publicise the knowledge and put it out there for everyone. This is not safe especially nowadays that we have fake healers. Our knowledge can fall in the wrong hands and be misused. In our practice we are guided by ancestors who tell us what to do.

Mam'uJwarha's perspective illustrates that in the practice of healing, knowledge about medicinal plants and herbs does not remain a secret but is made accessible and available to those who need it, who can consult *amagqirha* in order to acquire it. The main reason the knowledge is not recorded down is because it is preserved orally and this is a significant tradition. Thus, it is not about the financial gain for *amagqirha* but rather their duty as servants of the ancestors. Moreover, Olatoku & Ajagbe (2010) argue that *amagqirha* should be encouraged to attend formal training institutions or colleges of traditional medicines in

¹⁵ Interview with Mam'uJwarha, Nyanga, 24 April 2021.

order to codify their knowledge and to test the efficiency of their medicine. My participants and I refute this viewpoint as we acknowledge traditional medicine as a unique knowledge system that does not need to be a duplicate of any other health and education systems in order to be deemed “legitimate”.

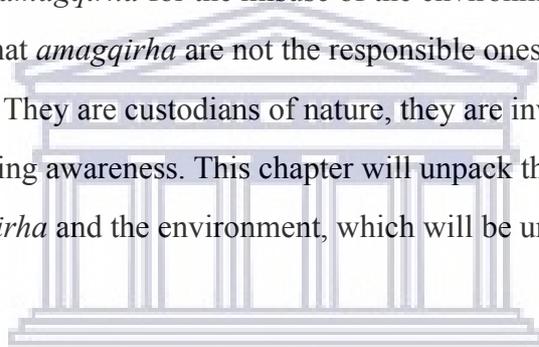
4.6. Conclusion

Ubugqirha continues to face challenges in society mainly because of its nature of existence and its methods. The expectation that the practice of healing should resemble Western biomedicine and go through rigorous testing and experimentation and be codified, is one that understand indigenous knowledge without considering the processes through which it is produced and reproduced. Scholars like Masango (2020) and Kutesa (2018), and the broader society, should change their perspective and recognise *ubugqirha* as an independent and distinct realm of knowledge with its own properties and its unique learning system. This chapter has conceptualised the personhood of *amagqirha* which they attain through interaction with others and their place in their community. *Amagqirha* are an integral part of society and being for them is to participate in the fellowship of the community.

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***Amagqirha* and the environment**

Medicinal plants are central to the culture and wellbeing of many Africans. Currently, over 80% of the African population depends on indigenous healthcare based on plants and the natural environment (Eyong, 2007). Over the past three decades there has been a significant decline in the availability of medicinal plants due to climate changes. This has created a demand for the remaining populations of herbal plants which continues to play a pivotal role sustaining healing systems. Since natural plants are at the heart of traditional healing, this has misled many into blaming *amagqirha* for the misuse of the environment and for causing climatic dangers. I argue that *amagqirha* are not the responsible ones, as their practice does not harm the environment. They are custodians of nature, they are involved in processes of conservation and busy raising awareness. This chapter will unpack the mutual relationship that exists between *amagqirha* and the environment, which will be understood through the notion of Ubuntu.



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5.1. The mutualistic relationship between amagqirha and the environment

There is a mutually exclusive relationship between *amagqirha* and the environment.

Amagqirha are custodians of the environment which sustains their practice through a supply of medicinal plants and herbs. In turn, the environment plays a huge role in shaping their traditional knowledge.

*Asi nakuba nto ngaphandle komhlaba wethu osingqongileyo, udlala indima ebalulekileyo esigcinela izityalo namayeza esiwasebenzisayo. Inene, indalo ingummangaliso; ikhusela ezi zityalo zethu ngokuthi izifihle zingabonwa zezinye izilwanyana kwakunye nabanye abantu. Lento iye iqinisekise ukuba sithi sodwa nje ngamagqirha abanolwazi ngazo.*¹⁶ We are nothing without our environment it plays a vital role as it stores and nurtures our plants

¹⁶ Interview with Mvulane, Langa, 18 March 2021.

and herbs. Indeed, nature is full of wonders; it protects our plants by hiding them from animals and other living beings. Thus ensuring that we as *amagqirha* are the only ones with access to them. According to Mvulane the environment stores and protects the herbal plants *amagqirha* use ensuring that they are the only ones with access to them when they harvest the very same environment that guides their intuition when it comes to finding and selecting herbal plants. My participants have disclosed that they consult mountains, forests and rivers for herbal knowledge, and their intuition is crucial in these places of location for their safety. This is knowledge that comes from their ancestors who are constantly watching over them (Kutesa, 2018). Mostly, it denotes that the intuition of *amagqirha* comes from a web of relationships with the environment. *Xa ilixesha lokuba masivune siye sibone utshintsho apha emhlabeni, kukho iyeza elifumaneka kumthi womngcunube. Ulwazi ngeli yeza silufumana kwizinyanya zethu kwaye xa ela yeza lilungele ukuba lingasetyenziswa siye sibone ngeentaka zimane zingqonga lamthi. Siphinde siwubone ngomane uxobuka apha eziqobweni, nokuba ayililo ixesha lokuba uxobuke. Kulapho ke siye sibone ukuba sikulungele ukufumana iyeza esinolisebenzisa ekunyangeni abaguli.*¹⁷ When it is time to harvest we see this through the environment, it becomes alive and you too can see that it is trying to communicate something to you. For example, there is a type of medicinal herb we acquire from a special tree called *umngcunube*. The knowledge of this tree came from our ancestors and whenever we have to harvest the herbs, this is indicated by the birds that will circle around the tree and make noise while doing so. The bark of the tree will peel off by itself even if it is not the season to do so. This is the message that tells us to harvest the plant and use it for healing.

According to Eyong (2007) this is known as plant communication. It ensures that *amagqirha* acquire information about medicinal plants through observation. For example, when animals eat plants and fall sick, this is noted including their feeding movement patterns. Plants communicate physically and chemically to people. It is believed that God puts plants on earth for their medicinal actions according to their shapes and other properties. The environment is also crucial in the practice of healing as it ascribes *amagqirha* the space to perform their rituals, which mostly take place outdoors. The task of *amagqirha* is to find spaces which are

¹⁷ Interview with Mvulane, Langa, 18 March 2021.

far from most inhabited centres, where they can have tranquility and perform their rituals without being disturbed. Due to this reason *amagqirha* use mountains, forests with rivers and lakes. Indigenous knowledge is also inherently tied to land, and embodies the web of relationships specific to an ecological context (Battiste, 2005).

*Kuba indalo idlala indima ebalulekileyo ekuqhubeni isigqirha sethu, nathi siye siybulele ngokuyi khathalela kwaye siyilondoloze ukwenzela ingabinaminakalo.*¹⁸ Since the environment plays an essential role in sustaining our practice as *amagqirha*, in return we protect it ensuring that it is well looked after and that there are no damages on it.

Amagqirha, as custodians of the environment, have a great respect for the environment and appreciate it by looking after it. Most of my participants have openly shared that when you are initiated into the practice of *ubugqirha* you essentially become an environmental activist. This is not something one is explicitly taught about, but your role as a healer, your experiences and your involvement moves you closer to nature and forces you to protect the environment. As custodians of the environment my participants organise hiking trips around the city of Cape Town regularly. They hike for therapeutic purposes and this is also considered as a way to clean the environment in a rather fascinating manner. *Amagqirha* have built strong relationships with biodiversity and nature awareness initiatives, working closely with other environmentalists, ensuring that natural landscapes such as hiking trails, gardens and forests are safe for those who use them for recreational purposes. During summer seasons they involve young children and take them to the ocean for cleaning. The litter is recycled in the efforts to reduce pollution in the environment and young ones are educated about the importance of respecting the environment which affords us with space. Indeed, *amagqirha* are committed to preserving the natural environment.

5.2. The notion of Ubuntu and the environment

In Behrens' (2012) view point the relationship between nature and persons must be taken into account. This should be done through the notion of Ubuntu which centres on solidarity, respect, interdependence and love. Ubuntu should not be conceptualised solely to human

¹⁸ Interview with Dlakaz'umhlola, Nyanga, 16 April 2021.

relations as it ignores the relationships that persons have with the environment. Nature should be treated equally to human beings and this will allow persons to transpose their humanity and moral obligations to the surrounding environment. This enables persons to empathise with the natural environment and will foster the duty among all individuals to respect and preserve nature, which forms an important element of African ontology and identity (Chibvongodze, 2016).

According to Behrens (2010) the philosophy of Ubuntu should close the gaps among all beings and species and treat everything that exists as an equal. Nature should be treated like humans and likewise, the existence of humans should be understood in relationship with the natural world. The statement “A person is a person through other persons” has misled many into believing that Ubuntu is solely about people’s relations and that persons are understood through others and not the environment. This is problematic because humans cannot be fully realised without the recognition of their belonging to the community of nature, thus nature needs to be recognised and treated as family or a clan and to be loved, respected, dignified, cared for and valued as a member of the community because the wellbeing and continued survival of human beings is dependent on the health of the environment. For example, among Zulu people, the ancestral cow known as *inkomo yamadlozi* is used to communicate with the spirits of the dead through a process known as *pukuthethelela*— the appeasing of ancestral spirits. In this ceremony the spiritual cow is elevated to the level of a human being and is entrusted with the duty of relaying messages from the living to the dead (Behrens, 2010). The cow is treated with utmost respect; it is cleaned, well fed, taken care of and sheltered in a sacred space. During the ceremony, *amagqirha* communicate with it as they would to a person, and afford it the respect they give to their ancestors. Undoubtedly, Ubuntu hinges on the combination of the human, natural and spiritual tripartite; this demonstrates that “A person is a person through other living things”.

5.3. Conclusion

The relationship between *amagqirha* and the environment is a strong one marked by interconnection and reciprocity. The environment affords *amagqirha* with space, food and

medicinal herbs and plants for therapeutic healing. For the most part, it helps *amagqirha* acquire knowledge that sustains their practice. In turn, healers protect this environment and preserve it by educating society about it. This illustrates the need for all forces of existence to be understood and treated equally important as they are all interconnected for the goodness of life.



Part 2

Ritual transformation and aesthetics



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This section focuses on ritual transformation and aesthetics. The first part of this thesis, which explains the metaphysics of *amagqirha* helps us understand their nature of existence, in both the physical and spiritual worlds and as well as the relations they have with different forces of life and how these constitute their practice as a whole, has laid a foundation for this second section. This part will provide a holistic understanding of the rituals and will explain their relevance today. It centres on the creation of *amagqirha* through the aesthetics of dance, songs, fashion, drumming, story-telling and poetry. This part is divided into two main chapters; the first focuses on how *amagqirha* prepare for their rituals and the different things they use to consult in order to perform these. The second chapter focuses on the transformation of *amagqirha* through rituals and how they are constantly created through aesthetics.

Iintsimbi zasekhaya

Ntsimbi zasekhaya!

Namhla ndinqula iminyanya yam ngehunda ndigaxele

Shi-xi! Shi-xi!

Ndixhentse kude kushukume umhlaba

Gqu-m! Gqu-m!

Libe lindikhaphela igubu lasekhaya

Likhupha isandi esingathi ziindudumo zasebusika

Likwa xhonkonxa isihlwele esingaphakathi kwam

Ga-bhu! Ga-bhu!

Ndimana ndirhabula ibhekile yesilawu sasekhaya

Ntsimbi zasekhaya!

Endithi xa ndizijongile ndidizwe ziincipa

Ndicimele ndicinga nzulu elandincamisayo

Ndise Cacadu ndicinezelwe yingulo

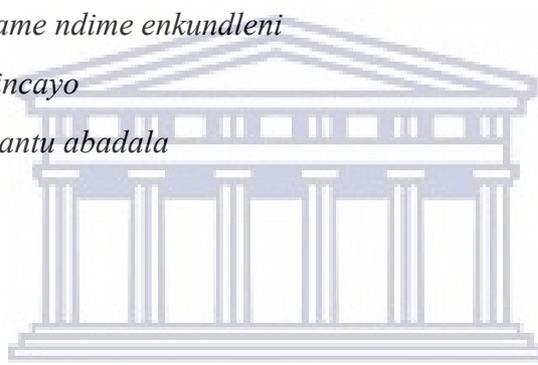
Ndangcambaza ndibuncamile ubomi ndisithi bandigqibile

Bambi besithi ndiyaphambana



*Kuba ndasuka ndaxhomana nabangasekhoyo
Umama wafunga wathi ndithakathiwe
Wangqina utata esithi ndidlisiwe
Yabe yona iminyanya yam indibanga
Indibizela esigqirheni*

*Ntsimbi zasekhaya!
Namhla ndiguqile ndicenga izihlwele
Ndikhanyisa amakhandlela asekhaya
Ndiqhumisa impepho eboph' indlu yonke
Indivule amehlo indibonisa konke ebendingakuboni
Hlas' itshoba lam ndiphakame ndime enkundleni
Kunamhla ndiligqirha elizincayo
Le ngulo ndayiphiwa ngabantu abadala
Yingubo yempiliso
Ah! Ntsimbi zasekhaya!
Tsho-Tsho! Zendigule!*



Ntsimbi zasekhaya is a poem that speaks of the different rituals I have observed during the course of my fieldwork. I could not translate it to English because there are no English words that construe the isiXhosa words I have used. Writing in the form of “close narrative” (Hartman, 2019), I have attempted to take the *amagqirha*’s point of view discussing the beautiful rituals which I have been privileged to be part of. The poem is a nostalgic piece of writing that describes the burdensome journey *amagqirha* go through in becoming healers and how the ritual space allows them to get rid of this burden, freeing them through drumming, dance, music and poetry. Throughout the poem the narrator speaks to *amagqirha*’s beads—*Ntsimbi Zasekhaya*—which is repeated continuously in all the stanzas. The beads are a metaphor for the living ancestors. Thus when the poem exclaims *Ntsimbi zasekhaya!* I call the ancestors and I speak directly to them.

The first stanza describes a room filled with drums, brewery bubbling and bodies dancing while possessed by spirits. The use of onomatopoeia “Shixi-Shixi” is the sound made by

beads clicking while dancing; “Gqu-m Gqu-m”—the beat of the drum; “Gabhu-Gabhu” the drinking of brewed beer—evokes the ritual space. The second stanza expresses the feelings of the healer who closes her eyes and is reminded of her bittersweet journey, and the harsh call she received from her ancestors. She almost gave up on life blaming witchcraft. When she started behaving in a strange manner, people thought she was mentally ill; she was seeing things that others could not see nor hear. Her ancestral call has torn her family apart leaving them in a state of misery and despair. In the last stanza the tone changes and the poem is filled with joy. She has accepted the call; she is honoured and gratified to have been called to be the messenger of the ancestors.



The making of rituals

In the livelihoods of *amagqirha*, rituals are used as transformative strategies that encompass the meaning of life, growth, reclaiming of identity and healing (Mlisa, 2009). Through rituals *amagqirha* intercede between the worlds of the living and non-living to make restitution, binding them together and creating a strong link that allows for healing to occur. The practice of healing is marked by the continuous creation of rituals which create a space for *amagqirha*, their families and communities to come together (Berg, 2003), maintaining health and wellness. What are the meanings of the rituals of *amagqirha*? Are these rituals solely for healing purposes? What is the relevance of preparation and what role does it play in the ritual making process? This chapter narrates the making of the rituals of *amagqirha* focusing on how they prepare for them. In this chapter, I argue that the indigenous knowledge is crucial in the lengthy process of preparing for rituals.

Abantu bakudala bathi kudala sabangabantu abasondeleneyo kwindalo. Nje ngabantu bakwaNtu siye senze imicimbi ukuhlonipha indalo, kuba nathi siyindalo, imizimba le yethu ikwa yimifuziselo yendalo. Umzekelo, amabele entombazana afuzisela izilwanyana zekhaya ezisinika ubutyebi, amasi, ubisi kwanezinye. Zona iinwele zokukhula zibonisa uqaqaqa, amagophe omzimba ona abonisa iintaba zakwaNtu. Ngoko ke oku kubonisa indlela esisondelene nayo nendalo yiyo lonto zethu sizenza phakathi kwendalo kuba siyindalo. Umzekelo, xa umntwana omncinci esandakuzalwa uye aziswe phakathi kwabantu bakowabo abadala kwenziwe imbeleko ezakuthi imkhusele. Sikwabulela uQamata ngesisipho sobomi sitsha. Ngoko ke senza imicimbi ukubulela uQamata nokubonisa ubukho bakhe ebomini bethu. Sikwaphinda senze imicimbi ukubonisa ukukhula kwethu nokudlulela kwamaziko obomi ohlukileyo. Oku siye sikubone xa amakhwenkwe efakwa esuthwini ahambe ayokuhlala ehlathini iinyanga ezimbalwana abuye sele engamadoda enza izinto ezibonakalayo emakhayeni kunye nasekuhlaleni. Amakhaya kanti akwa nawo nemisebenzi yawo eyahlukeneyo eyokubonga neyokwenza iminikelo kwabangasekhoyo kweli. Zonke ke ezi zenzwa ngendlela ngendlela ezahlukeneyo. Umzekelo, amabhaca achaziwe ebusweni yindlela

yabo nje ngabantu abathi bazahlule ngayo kwabanye abantu, kwaye yindlela yokhusela iimbali yawo nje ngabantu. Emayirheni kukho ingqithi oku ikwa kukubonisa ukuba amakhaya ngamakhaya anendlela zokuba ngabantu. Yonke into eyenziwayo imalunga nokuphila komntu nezokubopha, zikhonze umntu nomdali wakhe, abantu abangasekhoyo kweli ngokwenyama nangokwasemoyeni kwakunye nomveli mngqangi. Eminye imisebenzi ngeyokuba singabantu balapha emhlabeni abanengxaki oku sikubona xa kukho iingozi naxa kusenziwa uxolelwano kumntu ongasekhoyo. Yonke le misebenzi yeyokudibanisa okwenyama, nokomoya kunye nomveli mngqangi. Eminye imisebenzi yenziwa ukubonisa uxolelwaniso kwabantu abangasekhoyo kulapho kufuneka siqale siyokwenza uxolelwaniso kuwe ukuze ungabino laka. Xa unolaka awunako nokusebenzisana kakuhle ngoko ke kufuneka sixolise kuwe kuqala sikubuyise ukwenzela nawe nokwana uthambe. Kulapho ke siye sidibanise ubuhlanti kubekho amahlahla kubuyiswe abantu bekhaya senze umcimbi. Nawuphi na umsebenzi kwaXhosa wenziwa ngesizathu, awunako ukwenza umcimbi ngoske ufune okanye kuba urhalela. Yonke into esiXhoseni uyenza ngenxa yesizathu, kufuneka kubekho unobangela, kwaye kufuneka lo msebenzi ukwazi ukuthetha ngawo nje ngomenzi wawo. Ukwazi ukuphakama phakathi kwesidlangalala phakathi kwabantu uchaze usingaye; ukhankanye izizathu zokuba ude ufikelele ekwenzeno lo mcimbi uthe wawenza. Ngoko ke xa ume phambi kwabantu kufuneka ucacise kakuhle abantu bacacelwe ca, bangazibhaqi sebesitya into abangayaziyo kwaye besela ubutywala obungathethiyo okanye abantu bayakusuka bawushiye lo msebenzi. Ndiyaphinda, nawuphi na umsebenzi kwaXhosa uyathetha, singabantu bezizathu. Umsebenzi ke funeka uqale uwuboniswe, ube ngumsebenzi onentsinngiselo enzima kwaye ebanzi. Amaxesha amaninzi singabantu abathi bafumane amathongo. Kuba kaloku singabantwana bethongo ngoko umntu uvuka namathongo asuka kwabantu abadala. Mathongo lawo siye siwahlalutye ukwenzela sizokufumana ukuba uthini umyalezo wawo. Ngoko ke siye siphendule le miyalezo siyifumeneyo ngokuthi sixhele kwaye sisile umphanda sinikele kwanamacuba sikwaqhumisa neempepho. Kulapho ke siye sihlangabeze abantu bekhaya sidibanise nabantu basekuhlaleni beze kuxovulula lo nyewe ikhoyo.¹⁹

This opening story is one of the many Ntsibazencanda grew up listening to every night before bed time. He would sit down on his grandparents' laps and they told him stories about their

¹⁹ Interview with Ntsibazencanda, Nyanga, 16 June 2021.

heritage. This story narrates about the emergence of rituals and the production of the indigenous knowledge. Ntsibazencada's grandparents received this knowledge orally from their parents. They have passed it on to Ntsibazencada who has in turned passed it on to me—and I will pass it on to my own generations; I have started to do so with this thesis. The Xhosa people began performing rituals because of their intimate relationship with nature. Back then, they were people who had a strong relationship with nature and they performed rituals to acknowledge the role the natural world played in their lives, and mostly to show respect to it because they too regarded themselves as a part of it. Their bodies were a constitutive part of nature and this is how they were described. The woman's breasts are a metaphor for the animals in their surroundings which gave people wealth and food. The pubic hair stands for the plants, trees and grass which constantly grow. The curves represent the mountains surrounding the villages and offering protection. Rituals were a way to enjoy nature and give thanks to it. As time passed they became part of the everyday lives of the Xhosa people. During the course of time, the Xhosa people started showing gratitude specifically to a being that existed outside the natural world, someone whom they believed was the giver of their lives and their creators. This was uQamata—their God and they performed rituals to acknowledge his continued presence in their lives.

People were gifted with children who were regarded as a gift from uQamata and so the ritual of *imbeleko* was created. This occurred after the birthing of new born babies, whom are introduced to their families made up of ancestors in spiritual form and the family found in the physical world. This ritual also ensured that children were put under the guidance and the protection of ancestors. Eventually, children grew old and the Xhosa people felt like showing gratitude to Qamata again. Qamata ensured that the children were protected and were growing and progressing into adulthood. And therefore, rituals that mark our growth and which indicate our transitioning to different stages in our lives were created. The ritual of *ulwaluku*—circumcision—was instituted to mark the passage from boyhood to manhood. It was decided that young boys should be taken to the mountains, far away from everyone. Boys left their homes for a few months and went to live on the mountains where they were taught about what it means to be a man. After the training, they were transformed into men and were returned to their communities as changed individuals with new masculine identities. As they were incorporated back into society, they married, they built homes and they became

husbands and fathers. They were also involved in the running of their communities. In time, as children grew and people got married and more children came, more rituals were performed. This made rituals a norm and whenever there was significant occurrence in the lives of the Xhosa people they would celebrate this through rituals, with the belief that Qamata was blessing them. Each blessing had to be accompanied by the performance of a ritual until each part of their everyday lives had a special ritual to celebrate.

By and by, these rituals started to incorporate offerings as the Xhosa's felt like they should offer things to Qamata, who was also gifting them in return with things they could feel, touch and see. Since they were people who had livestock and cultivated the soil, they decided to use these as their offerings. They sacrificed their livestock and used their crops to brew *umqombothi* and to make food and these were their offerings to uQamata. This became the norm among the Xhosa but differed according to villages, homesteads and clans as all individuals hold different beliefs. The Bhaca Clan ended up doing scarification on their faces. They established the ritual of *ukuchaza* where all family members are marked with vertical lines made with a sharp blade. In this way they marked their belonging to the same clan. This made them unique amongst all the other tribes and still does today. After them, more clans started making rituals which set them apart from other clans. The Yirha clan started differentiating themselves through the ritual of *ingqithi*. In this occurrence the little finger is amputated at the joint leaving one's pinkie with no nail at all. This reveals that all people, homes and members of the same clan have different ways of doing things. Everything that is performed is done to heal, bring people or forces of life together and to acknowledge and worship the creators of life.

Rituals were also performed back then because people existed in a world filled with problems, when an accident occurred or when families or individuals had to make peace with those who had passed on already. When death occurred, they had to first ask for peace and forgiveness so to connect to the physical, spiritual and the creator of life. Rituals were performed to bring peace to those ancestors who left the physical world unsatisfied and made furious by an event in the physical world. When these ancestors were dissatisfied and unhappy they messed up the lives of the living members of the clan who could not cooperate with them. Therefore, peace was made with the deceased in order for things to go well. This

is when a ritual is performed to bring them back and restore their peace. One cannot just wake up randomly and decide to make a ritual; there must be a valid reason. The ritual must have meaning so that the maker of the ritual can be able to explain the main reason behind the gathering of people. Mostly, everyone participating in the celebration must have a clear understanding of the purpose of the meeting. This is important and if it ever occurs that participants do not know why they are gathered together in a ritual they cannot eat nor drink the brewed beer as they do not know why they are there. Many will grow skeptical and this will result in them leaving. Therefore, the purpose of the ritual must be clearly stated so that everyone is aware of it.

Commonly, ancestors are the purpose for the performance of rituals as they convey messages to them through dreams. Xhosa people would attend to these as they hold the belief that they should be understood as soon as possible. If one wakes up with a dream in the morning, by the afternoon the dream should have been interpreted and the family members would know what to do. The dreams were usually interpreted by diverse individuals ranging from chiefs, seers, rain makers and especially *amagqirha* as they are the messengers of the ancestors, working closely with them. *Amagqirha* interpret the dream by making it clear enlightening families about what is required of them. People would respond through rituals by getting together, spilling blood- slaughtering animals and offering them as sacrifices, brewing *umqombothi*, burning *impepho*.

6.1. The preparation for rituals

*Ukulungisela imicimbi yesigqirha kuqala mhla umntu eqala ukugula, mhla umntu ebizelwa esigqirheni ngabantu bakowabo abadala. Amalungiselelo aqala kule ngulo apho xa umguli enemibono ayibona yedwa, apho aye abonwe nje ngomntu ophambanyo naxa esoloko engekho apha emhlabeni ngokwengqondo ekho nje ngoko mzimba. Ngoko ke amalungiselelo aqala apha engulweni!*²⁰ Preparations for rituals start the day healers are ill and this illness is caused by their ancestral calling. When individuals start acting abnormal, where they start seeing and hearing things that are not there, this is when they are perceived to suffer from

²⁰ Interview with Mam'uJwarha, Nyanga, 24 April 2021.

impambano—mental illness. Thus, when illness is caused by an ancestral calling it is where preparations for the rituals *amagqirha* start!

Preparations for the rituals begin when ancestors who want to come back and gain a second life through the ill person. This starts when *amagqirha* are still ordinary persons who have not attained the title of being traditional healers yet. Most of them are unaware of the calling and this causes hardships in their lives. They start seeing and hearing things that others cannot recognise and this is problematised and interpreted as mental illness.

Mna eyam Ingulo yayondibeka kwiziko labantu abagula ngengqondo, ndandise ndibuncamile ubomi ndivuyela ukunabela uqaqaqa, ndandivuyela ukuya kumhlamba wabantu endingabaziyo kuba ndandingayazi ukuba yinton le yayindisokolisa kangaka. Ndathathwa ndayakuhlaliswa esibhedlele nabanye abantu abagula ngengqondo. Andinoze ndiyilibale lento tu kuba yandilimaza kakhulu. Into yokufuneka ndihlale phakathi kwabantu abangaphilanga kakuhle ndibe mna ndizazi ukuba ndiphilile, qha ikhona kodwa into engalunganga. Kulapho ke ndaye ndaboniswa konke kuba ndandisoloko ndiyinto ehleli ebhedini ndisoloko ndilele, kulapho ndaye ndafumana amathongo asekhaya. Ndaye ndatyhilelwa yonke into ekufuneka ndiyenzile, ndandula ngoxelela umama owathi wahlangabeza usapho. Kwabakho indibano kwesisibhedlele ndandikuso ndaxelela wonke umntu imiboniso yam, kulapho ke abantu abadala bosapho baye bayiqonda kuqala ukuba yingulo yesigqirha. Benza iinzame zokuba ndikhutshwe kwesisibhedlele sabantu abangaphilanga ndaze ndasiwa kugqirha wesintu owathi wangqina nyani ukuba ndibizelwa esigqirheni. Sakhawuleza ke saphuthuma yonke into kulapho ke saxelelwa ukuba sizakufuneka sivume intsimbi senze umcimbi wokuqala ozokundifaka esigqirheni. Lo mcimbi wawubizwa ngokuba yimvumakufa. Kwaye saxelelwa ukuba uzakukhokhelwa yintlombe ekuzakufuneka siyilungiselele ngokuthi sisile umqombothi kwaye sipheke nokutya. Ndingathi sathatha iveki ukulungiselela lentlombe yemvumakufa kulapho ke ndaye ndahlanjwa ngamayeza esintu ukulungiselela oluhambo lutsha, ndaya kudibana notata endiphantsi kwakhe nje ngegqirha ndaphinda ndayakuthenga impahla zam zokunxiba kunye neentsimbi ndaze ndafumana umntu ozokundidibanisela zona ukwenzela lamini ndizawnxityiswa ngayo.

*Namhlanje ke ndizingomba isifuba ndizibiza igqirha eliphelelyo kuba ndaqala kulamalungiselelo.*²¹

The ancestral calling resulted in Dabulilwandle to be admitted into a mental institution. He had given up on life and was ready to die because he could not understand what was wrong with him. He would never forget the day they took him away from his home, shaved his head and kept him confined in an institution with mentally unwell people. He remained under strict surveillance and this wounded and damaged him psychologically. He knew that he was not mentally ill but that there was something wrong with him, something he too could not explain. He spent most of his days sleeping and this is when he started getting visions and dreams that revealed to him all that he was going through. After some time, he decided to inform his mother about these visions upon a visit and she responded by calling a family meeting. Discussions were held and they centred on his dreams which were analysed and discussed. The root cause of the problem was identified to be an ancestral calling.

Immediately after this he was discharged from the institution and brought back home- A healer was consulted to help the family to understand better and clarify the situation and also to firmly attest that indeed Dabulilwandle had an ancestral calling that needed to be answered through a ritual urgently.

According to the healer, Dabulilwandle and his family had to prepare for *imvumakufa*—a ritual that would initiate him into the practice of healing. He and his family worked together helping each other with the financial costs. It took them a week to prepare and these preparations included a cleansing with herbs that were supposed to wash off the bad luck and negative energies surrounding him. He needed to be cleaned in preparation for the new journey. They brewed traditional beer, bought chickens to slaughter and shopped for groceries to host and feed all the people that were going to come for support. Dabulilwandle also had to purchase his traditional clothes and beads. The task was to find a bead maker for his beaded necklaces, anklets and bracelets. Today he prides himself as a traditional healer and this could not have been possible without these preparations.

The preparation for rituals starts with the dream interpretation by *amagqirha*. Dreams come from ancestors who communicate with persons calling them to become traditional healers.

²¹ Interview with Dabulilwandle, Nyanga, 16 April 2021.

They can become traditional healers by helming themselves through rituals. Dreams also contain weighty messages and knowledge about the purpose of the rituals and how they should be performed and completed. When persons understand the kind of rituals they are required to perform they proceed by informing their families about the ancestors' message. The initiation of persons into *ubugqirha* traces their family lineage and involves both their paternal and maternal families. They must be present in each and every step of the way, from the beginning till the end because through *ubugqirha* the two families are enjoined in a union.

Together, they draw up a financial budget for the duration of the ritual and those who can afford help with financial costs. Moving further, a date is chosen, one that best fits everyone's schedule because every member has a vital role to play. There is allocation of the roles of slaughtering livestock, cooking, serving food and cleaning. Every family has an *intlabi*—the individual chosen by ancestors who performs the duty of slaughtering. The role of cooking and serving food is carried out by the women of the families who will serve *amagqirha* with meals during their course of stay in place where the ritual will be made. Family members are informed beforehand about the ceremonies and the ways in which they will take place as to ensure that the ritual is performed in an organised manner. The circle of *amagqirha* who practice *ubugqirha* together is informed earlier as well in order to make preparations as no ritual can occur without them, they need to be involved as they provide guidance. They are present as witnesses to attest that the ritual is authentic and well performed. This is why *amagqirha* will contact as many healers they can get to come as witnesses when a new member is initiated into their practice. Planning in advance for them is crucial because most of them are constantly travelling around different regions across Africa providing healing. Additionally, contacting *amagqirha* is important because they have knowledge about the kind of resources one will need in the ritual and especially the clothes that should be bought.

As soon as individuals have communicated with their families and *amagqirha*, they need to do some shopping starting with their traditional clothing items and the different beads they will wear. There is a large store called Emakhubeni in Bellville which is popular amongst *amagqirha*. This is a store that sells traditional items such as African print materials, *iibhekile* (beakers), *iintsimbi* (beads), *amakhuko* (mats) and enamel cutlery. Additionally, they must hire large drums, or repair old ones if they have. Hereafter, bottles of brandy and 10kgs of

King Korn brew malt, Impala maize meal are bought for the brewing of umqombothi and the making of cultural foods like *umngqusho* (samp) and vegetables. The brewing will take an entire week to be ready as the fermentation process is a lengthy one. The same week ginger beer is also brewed along with *amarhewu* (liquid maize meal porridge) for those who do not drink alcohol. On the last day before the ritual, the males of the family will go to the farm to select whatever animal that will be slaughtered. *Amagqirha* cleanse themselves in preparation for rituals using herbs for strength so that the ritual can commence.

*Apha kumalungiselelo emicimbi, sikwanayo nemicimbi eyenzelwa ukulungiselela eminye. Oku ndakubona ngoku ndandizokwenza umcimbi wam wokudlulela esigqirheni kwanyanzeleka ukuba ndiqale ndihlambe isimnyama kuba kalok ndandisando kushiya ngumakhulu wam. NgokwesiNtu ndandinesinyama kuba ndandizilile, ndandingeno kwazi ukwenza namphi na umcimbi nesisinyama. Ngoko ke kwathi kokhululwa izila ekhaya mna ndenza lomcimbi webokhwe emnyama nje ngendlela yokuhlamba isimnyama. Ndaye ndahlanjwa ngamayeza ndaze ndaxhela nebokhwe emhlophe ndibonisa intoInpho kwabaphantsi ngokwenza izinto zabo ndikwi simo esilungileyo. Ndaye ndafuneka ukuba ndinikele kwa nangempahla zam zakudala, kuba kalok bendibonisa ukuba ndilungiselela uba ngumntu omtsha.*²²

In Vukuz'umbethe's view the preparation for rituals can also take place in the form of other smaller rituals laying the foundation for the construction of the main large ones. This occurred when she was preparing for *umcimbi webomvu*—a ritual that demonstrated her transition to a different stage of healing. She was now continuing her formation as a healer but through fetching her Ndau lineage. Previously, she was initiated into the practice and acknowledged her Xhosa ancestors; this was indicated by the white traditional attire she wore. Now she was going to acknowledge her Xhosa ancestors along with the Ndau ancestors in a union and was going to transform into uGogo/ uMkhulu and this was going to be represented by the colours red and black of her traditional outfit. However, because she recently lost her grandmother, she had to cleanse herself and get rid of the dark cloud hanging over her. Thus, she had to perform a small ritual of purification and this was known as *umcimbi webhokhwe emnyama*—the ritual of the black goat. For this ritual she had to slaughter a goat, not necessarily a black one. It could be of any colour. On the day of the

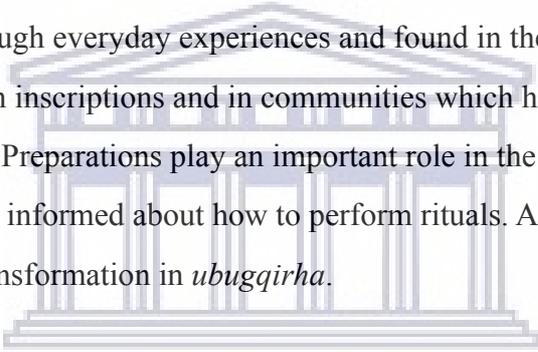
²² Interview with Vukuz'umbethe, Langa, 4 September 2021.

ritual her family went to choose one as she was busy organising other things for the successive larger ritual. She was nervous and panicking, thinking that things were not going well. But when she arrived home, outside, by the gate she was greeted by a brown goat covered in white patches, when the goat saw her it started bleating and she smiled. This reminded her that all was going well and she started singing: “Yangena incamazane ndazombelela, yangena incamazane ndazombelela”. This is a song sung in ritual ceremonies that translates “A goat is home, I am singing to rejoice”. This expressed her excitement and her readiness for the ritual. Inside her home her family helped her pack old clothes; these were items she was giving away. Some were even thrown away and burnt. Because she was not anymore her old self, she had to give away what previously belonged to her. According to Van Gennep (2009) separation is the stage of isolation from a cultural condition or a social structure or state. It is when one is disconnected from the past, place, time and social position that was owned and is going to experience transformation (Mahali, 2016). This was evident when Vukuz’umbethe had to remove some of the traditional clothes she wore upon her first initiation ritual into *ubugqirha*. Also, she had to let go of some aspects of language she previously spoke like the phrase “*camagu*”. The moment was also her last day of being called Msimelelo—a name she received when she accepted her calling. She drank herbs that would cleanse her internally as she was now getting ready for her transformation. The last part of the ritual was the slaughtering of the goat and this was done by her uncle who was chosen by their ancestors. As the goat was slaughtered, it made a low bleating sound and everyone remained quiet. This is unusual because in the Xhosa tradition when an animal is slaughtered it has to make a loud sound and this indicates that the ancestors have acknowledged the ritual. In response to this, those present must respond by exclaiming “*camagu*”. However, in this instance the goat was slaughtered for *umsebenzi ongathethelwayo*, a ritual where members of the family must remain quiet. The goat was prepared and served to all the participants at the ceremony. The ritual came to an end when the entire goat was eaten and all the bones were burnt and not a single one left in sight. ²³

²³ Interview with Vukuz’umbethe, Langa, 4 September 2021.

6.2. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the essential role played by rituals in the practice of *ubugqirha*. It is worth noting that ritual practice moves *amagqirha*, giving their practice direction and this assures that they honour and acknowledge their ancestors, transition to different stages of life and gratify their natural environment. This creates a space for *amagqirha* to build their families and communities and to express themselves through hardships and triumphs in the pursuits to recreate themselves and sustain their identities. Mostly, it ensures that the indigenous knowledge is preserved through continued ritual practice. In turn the knowledge that is produced and conserved plays a crucial role in the preparations of rituals as it contains the understandings and meanings that drive ritual performances, thus guiding the experiences of a people. Knowledge is not preserved solely orally, it is maintained through everyday experiences and found in the natural environment; in trees, rivers, and caves with inscriptions and in communities which have been a part of us since the beginning of life. Preparations play an important role in the journeys of *amagqirha* as they ensure that they are informed about how to perform rituals. Also, they make them ready for the process of transformation in *ubugqirha*.



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The ritual space

Siyapheka emicimbini yethu, uthi ungena nje ubuliswe ngumsi neembiza ezinkulu ezimnyama tsuu ezizele kukutya. Ufike kukho izilwanyana zibe zikhala, kukho amadoda ebuhlanti ezincokolela elola iimela zawo elungiselela ukuxhela. Udibane noomama bexakekile bebhinqe iifaskoti zabo, bethwele iiqhiya zabo ezinkulu benqunqa imifino bekwa ngqusha belungiselela ukupheka. Uyakufika abantu abadala, iinkondekazi zakwa Xhosa zihleli phantsi zixakathile ziqhumisa iinqawe zize kuzimasa bekwa nika umcimbi isidima. Uthi usajonge konke oku, iintombi zihlabele zisitsho ngesandi esimnandi zibizela wonke umntu ngaphakathi endlini. Kuthi gqi abachongwa zizihlwele, begaxele kwaye bebhanya-bhanya zintsimbi. Zithi gqi ezazinto zithe chuu zitsho ngentsholo emnandi. Ubone nawe ukuba, hayi aba bahamba nezinto ezinzima, abahambi bodwa bahamba namanyange kwaye bayavakala xa befikile. Hayke, umcimbi ube sencochoyini sibe yimbumba nje ngabantwana bakaQamata, sixhentse, sibethe amagubu, sicule, sitye, sisele, sihleke, sikhale kude kutshone ilanga, liphinde liphume ngemini elandelayo. Hayke emfuthweni womcimbi siyakhala, sitsiba-tsibe, singxole, sihleke, sicule, sinqule kuba kaloku sonwabile. Amaxesha amaninzi aph'emhlabeni asikwazi ukuba ngababantu singabo. Kaloku sihamba nezinto ezinkulu, siphethe abantu abanzima yiyo lonto kungekho lula ukuba ngababantu singabo. Ngoko ke, xa sidibene emicimbini na kwiintlombe zethu siye sikhululeke kuba amaxesha amaninzi sizibambile kuba siyoyika. Soyika imdlela esizakujongwa ngayo ngabantu. Ndizakuthi ndakubhodla ndihletywe kuba ndiyangxola, ndibe ndinga zenzi ke, yilento iphakathi kum. Sisajonge leyo, ndithi xa ndivele ndibe nomoya okanye kuhlokome isihlwele apha kum, kuthwa ndiyathakatha. Sibe sona isihlwele sifuna ukuphuma, nam ke kuba ndisoyika ndingakhululekanga ndizobe ndingulowo unoxanduva lokucengana nesihlwele. Apha ke emcimbini siye sonwabe sibe yiyo yonke lento sifuna ukuba yiyo.²⁴

Zanomdiza describes the ritual space as a busy one filled with lots of activities. Outside, you will be greeted by black ginormous pots full of food on the fire. You will find animals

²⁴ Interview with Zanomdiza, Nyanga, 6 April 2021.

bleating, men seating in the kraal busy sharpening their knives in preparation for the slaughtering. In a corner, the young women seat in a circle with aprons on, peeling vegetables and crushing corn. Inside the home, the old women are covered in traditional blankets seating on their woven mats, drinking beer and smoking their pipes. Their presence graces the ritual with dignity. In another room you will find young girls singing, their lovely voices invite everyone else to come inside. A group of *amagqirha* will arrive walking barefoot and wearing dazzling attires, carrying their tail whisks while singing in a low chant. Just by looking at them admirably, you can tell that they are accompanied by larger spiritual forces. The ritual will come to a climax because of this unity amongst people who had being working together as the children of Qamata. They will dance, beat drums, sing, praise their ancestors and narrate their stories. According to Zanomdiza, *amagqirha* are fond of the ritual space. When in this space they cry, jump around, enter trance states, scream and make all sorts of noises because they are joyful. This is because the majority of the time they cannot exist in the ways they desire to as they are their ancestors' vessels. When entering the ritual space they become free. On the contrary, most of the time they feel afraid of how society perceives them. Their social surrounding conditions them and largely problematises their being and their lifestyle. For *amagqirha* burping is a spirit, but when they do so loudly people gossip behind their backs and criticise them. When suddenly spirits inside them want to come out positioning them in a trance state, people accuse them of witchcraft. They will have no option but to calm the spirit down in fear of how society will react in such occurrences. Thus, the ritual space is their happy place as it allows them to be who they really are. This chapter will unpack the ritual space illustrating its components and what goes on in it. Vukuz'umbethe's *umcimbi webomvu* ritual that I have assisted to will be used as a framework to understand how the transformation and identity takes place during rituals. This ritual was made to mark her transition to a different stage of healing that includes her Ndau ancestral lineage in her journey. In this chapter I argue that the ritual space made up of the aesthetic features emerging from practices; dance, song, fashion, drumming and story-telling, ascribes to the *amagqirha* their identity as healers. Furthermore, this chapter will focus on how kinship relations are fostered in this ritual space.

7.1. *Umcimbi Webomvu ka Vukuz'umbethe*²⁵

On a Monday evening I went to Vukuz'umbethe's home accompanied by my two friends that I had invited for moral support. Like I have previously mentioned in the chapter four, this ritual was performed to introduce Vukuz'umbethe as a healer under the Ndaun lineage and she was now going to wear *intsimbi ebomvu* (red beads). The ritual took place for a whole week starting on Monday, the 27 of August. We all had to dress up for the ritual; this was an obligation that concerned especially women. I wore a black long skirt and my friend wore a long scarf wrapped around her lower body, we also wore head wraps. This was to show respect to Vukuz'umbethe—who had invited us, her family, ancestors and everyone who was going to be present in the ritual.

It was a cold evening; my friends and I were filled with mixed emotions because we had different expectations. First and foremost, I was nervous. I am an over thinker and that entire evening I kept on creating multiple worst scenarios that could occur resulting in me not doing my field work. My stomach kept turning and twisting and due to this I brought a bottle of water for drinking. My friends on the other hand were excited; they had never been part of a ritual for an *amagqirha*. This was their first time attending a healer's ritual and they were looking forward to the experience. We walked together to Vukuz'umbethe's home, in a very slow pace trying not to be early. As we approached her house, we could see different tree branches that were used to make the *ibhoma* outside. The *ibhoma* is one of the liminal spaces that were necessary for Vukuz'umbethe's transformation. When we arrived, it was empty outside the front yard and it seemed like everything was happening in the back yard because we could smell the smoke of fire and hear people chatting. The front door was open; this is the norm for all rituals as it allows ancestral spirits to enter. We walked into the sitting room and were greeted by a beautiful family full of women and a few children. We were welcomed open heartedly with warm hands and by friendly faces. In this sitting room all the furniture was removed, there was a huge mirror and a few chairs were arranged a meter apart for social distancing. We introduced ourselves upon the family's request; this is a significant tradition among Xhosa people. When doing introductions, you are expected to mention your clan

²⁵ Interview with Vukuz'umbethe's, Langa, 4 September 2021.

name, your family's surname and where you live. We did so and discovered that some of the family members knew our families; they either had worked or went to school with them.

Introductions lasted for more than thirty minutes and around half past eight the conversation in the room steered to the Covid-19 pandemic and how it was making life difficult. Most participants shared their views on the vaccine; many revealed their skepticism on it while others spoke about their experiences in taking it. Some were making fun of our president stating that he was not strategic enough in handling the pandemic. As we were still settling in, talking and laughing; we heard a car stopping outside and one of the children informed us that *amagqirha* have arrived. A few members of the family went to help them with their bags and as they approached the house, they started singing; "*Bavumelen bangene abantu balapha, Bavumelen bangene!*"— "Allow the home owners inside". They got inside and put their bags on the centre of the room forming a circle while singing and dancing. We remained seated on the outside of the circle clapping hands singing along with them. During this time I could not help but notice that most of them were women in their early fifties, the youngest in the group were only two healers, a male and female who were roughly in their early twenties. They were dressed in red and black, had colourful cloths wrapped around them. Two were draped in blue but most were wearing red and black. They were all wearing head scarves and their faces were covered in *imbola* and *inceye* (brown and white clay). Those of the Swati lineage were draped in blue cloths and were wearing white towels on their heads. They had beads on their necks, wrists and ankles. There were also a few with fur necklaces and bracelets which were made of sheep wool. After singing their song which was their way of introducing themselves, they were taken to a room prepared especially for them. This was going to be their room for the duration of their stay.

Supper was served, prepared by Vukuz'umbethe's family; rice, vegetables and chicken. *Amagqirha* were served first using enamel cutlery only and we could hear their dishes clanking from the sitting room. After supper when the *amagqirha* were well rested, *intlombe*—which is a group therapy session of dancing, singing, drumming and clapping (Buhrmann, 1981)—commenced around midnight. They came out of their room singing and began to dance in the sitting room; we remained seated while they stood in the centre of the circle praising their ancestors. It was in this moment that Vukuz'umbethe entered the room. This

moment of the ceremony marked what in anthropological terms is called the liminal space—the in between stages where individuals involved are understood to be “no longer” and simultaneously also “not yet” transformed. This is where the process for cultural change occurs (Turner, 1977; Turner, 2008; Howard et al., 2011). One of healers was beating a large round drum covered with animal skin. They sang in beautiful voices; their singing was filled with joy. Through the music, one could feel that they were in the process of elevating their co-member into a new stage, transforming her into umNdau. Vukuz’umbethe’s healer introduced the ritual briefly to let everyone in the room be aware of why they were there. She signalled one of her initiates to start a song and a young boy in a soprano pitch led with these words: “*Phakamani nonke; sibheke emayezeni, sicele impilo*”. “Get up all, we are on our way to the herbs to request healing”. This means that everyone who was gathered in the ritual was participating in the path to provide healing for Vukuz’umbethe. The drum was played with so much force, the rhythm was accelerating. Indeed, it was the sound of the ancestors who drove the ritual for us. The *amagqirha* fastened their pace as they started jumping around and dancing in a rapid pace. All of this took place in the centre of the circle; we were seated on the outside of the circle clapping hands and singing along.

Hayke xa sele sisemfuthweni womcimbi siyayeka ukuba ngabantu siba yimi moya siphophezele, siphaphatheke nje. Siye singabonakali, uyawbona ngomntu seyesithi tshe! Siba namandla, amandla ezilo zasemakwethu. Esa sekhaya yingonyama, ngoko ke xa ndisesifuthweni, kuye kugqabhuke idlozi apha kum hayke ingonyama yasekhaya iye ihlokome. Cinga ingonyama xa izingela, cinga amandla ayo ke indlela etsiba ngayo idlokome. Nam ke ndiye ndibe nje, ndibe ndiqhutywa ligubu. Igubu ke lona lilo elibangela ukuba sihlokome isihlwele kuba esasandi salo sivele sikwenze uvakalelwe. Ibakhona into eyenzekayo apha phakathi kwethu, into endingena kuyicacisa ngamagama ndingakubonisa qha wena. Hayke, uyabona khe kwahlatyelwa uThongo lam ndivele ndiphambane ingakumbi xa sisisthi ‘Andizenzanga ndenziwe ngabalele’, ndivele ndixhuma xhume ke ndilile, ndikhale, ndingxole kuba lento ingaphakathi kwam inkulu. Sibe sibilelana, sisondelene, kube shushu kuba imizimba yethu isondelene. Asisekho kwalapha ke ngokwenyama. Simka lamzuzu kundumzela igubu, impepho iqhume side singaboni ibe ngulowo wenza eyakhe. Impempe itsho njalo itswine, izinxibo zethu zibe zibhanyabhanya nentsimbi zethu zibe zisincedisisa. Ngala mzuzu ke,

*ayikho enye into eye ibaluleke ngaphandle kwale ntlombe sikuyo, sibalapha ngokwenyama, ngokwengqondo nangokomoya.*²⁶

When we are in the spirit of the ritual we cease being people instead we become spirits. We fly, float and flow around in the air. You will see us moving around in a flash. We become powerful as we possess the strength of our ancestors. My totem is a lion, so when I am in the ritual space I become a lion. Imagine a lion when it is hunting, the size and the strength! This is me in the ritual space, driven by the sound and rhythm of the drum. As soon as we hear the rhythm of the drum as *amagqirha* something inside of us occurs, we can never explain it; it is something we can show you. For me, this occurs when my favourite song “*Thongo lam*” is sung I just go crazy especially when I hear the words “*Andizenzanga ndenziwe ngabalel’ukthula*” which translates to English as “I did not ask for this gift I was chosen by my ancestors”. I just do not know how to express myself, I find myself crying, hopping around, jumping and screaming because of what lies inside of me. In the ritual space we also sweat due to the close proximity of our bodies. The smoke from herbs burning makes our space dim allowing us to travel in between the physical and spiritual worlds. Mostly, we are in the spiritual realm, it is just our physical bodies that remain. In this moment nothing else matters but this ritual space we are immersed in.

In Jubihlanzi’s view when they are in the ritual space they enter an altered state and this is because of the synergistic energy produced by the drum, the clapping of hands and the sheer energy of songs. This musical experience touches *amagqirha* deeply and allows them to *xhentsa*—this is a form of dance which is indicated by pounding feet on the ground (Buhrmann, 1981) (Hirst, 2005). Song in particular gives *amagqirha* the energy to float and flow as they call out their ancestral spirits who are alive during the entire musical experience. They possess their bodies causing them to enter an altered state of consciousness (Boddy, 1994). Trance dancing privileges the body as site of a gathering of the spirits. Therefore, when *amagqirha* dance they are no longer aware of their bodily existence for they are no longer themselves. It is not them that dances but their ancestral spirits. In this instance they can be said to ‘be there by way of those away’ (Friedson, 2010). This indicates that they have entered a trance state and are possessed by spirits.

²⁶ nterview with Jubihlanzi, Khayelitsha, 6 April 2021.

*Uye uve ukuba awusenguye lamntu unguye, uba namandla kuba awukho wedwa. Umzimba wakho sowuxubene nento engaphezu kwakho. Nagamanye amaxesha uye ungakuva oku, ngamanye uye ukuve ulahleke phakathi kwayo. Xa ndibanjwe yimimoya ndinamaxesha okuthetha isiSwati, kulapho ndazi njalo ukuba ndinabantu abaphila ngaphakathi kwam, izihlwele zasekhaya ezazingamaSwati.*²⁷ You can feel it, you are no longer yourself, you become powerful because it is not you alone, and your body has been taken over by something bigger than you. You are not aware sometimes, at times you become lost in between. During trance possessions there are times where the spirits inside me speak SiSwati, this is how I identified that there are people living inside me and I am their vessel.

Vukuz'umbethe further explains that entering a trance state and being possessed changes the being of through the presence of a power and energy that is greater than them. Entering this state for them is allowing themselves to be driven by something else. This gives them strength and detaches them from their normal selves manifesting them into a spirit which means they are no longer in the physical realm, they are overtaken by powers stronger than them and are conscious and unconscious simultaneously. According to Vukuz'umbethe this takes up a lot of energy; this is why preparation is important.

The *intlombe* lasted for about three hours of dancing, singing and drinking brewery and bottles of brandy in between. At 3AM in the early morning we all made our way outside singing, we went to the minibus van and travelled to *emzini omkhulu*—the ocean which is believed to be the home of ancestors. We arrived at Muizenberg beach to an ocean that was angry. The waves were fighting and this made me realise that the ocean is indeed alive and it is the home of ancestor. The waves were too strong and they kept crashing against each other. It was dark and the only light came from street lights. A part of me was terrified but the company of *amagqirha* made me feel safe, because I knew they could protect me no matter what the circumstance is. As the ocean was angry Vukuz'umbethe and her leader had to calm it by talking to it, addressing the ancestors.

Ndandingoyiki tu, ndandikulungele ukujongana nantoni na nangona ndandibona ukuba abanye abantu babesoyika, besoyikisela mna. Kodwa mna ndandingoyiki tu kuba ndandiyazi

²⁷ nterview with Vukuz'umbethe, Langa, 4 September 2021.

We rested after this day, while brewed beer was passed around while we chilled and carried random conversations. The following day on Wednesday, the ritual of *Ukuwisa incamazana yomcimbi* was performed; Vukuz'umbethe was draped with *iingqwambu*—white goat skin—all around her ankles, wrists and upper arms. There was a feast over beer and brandy. On Thursday all healers left the home and went to the mountain for a few days performing the ritual of *ukunqonqoza*. Vukuz'umbethe went to stay in the mountains for two days. She left wearing *ihiya*—a type of traditional cloth that she had envisioned. It was a black and red *ihiya* with white patterns. She remained up in the mountain with other healers; this was a barren area in the middle of nowhere. It was full of trees and she had *ibhoma* as her shelter. Being immersed in this space allowed her to dream and see things that ancestors revealed to her. Her family kept bringing food around the clock, also bringing along visitors like me. Additionally, this is the stage where she was granted the name Vukuz'umbethe. A name she acquired from her trainer's ancestors. This was proven on her last day on Friday. Upon their departure as they were awaiting their transport ten monkeys approached them. There were eight adults and two baby monkeys. Out of all the monkeys there was a huge one that appeared to be the leader, it came close to her and she was afraid of it, but her trainer told her not to run. The monkey was close to her face almost as if it wanted to whisper something. It kept on inspecting her face, staring her right in the eye and as it did she heard it utter the words “*Thokoza, Camagu!*” All the other *amagqirha* acknowledged the ancestor by saying “*Thokoza Gogo*”. Vukuz'umbethe's trainer got close to the large monkey and started speaking to it because she recognized it as her paternal ancestor uMfene, Jambase uLisa. The Mfene clan is guided by monkeys who are their totems. Together they brushed the monkeys playing with them and also fed them their left overs. Vukuz'umbethe found this stage as a therapeutic one as she was immersed high up in the mountain alone mostly. This gave her the chance to ponder about her life and allowed her to connect on a deeper level with her ancestors and understand her journey as *igqirha*. Indeed this stage transformed her.

Hereafter, she entered Van Gennepe's (1987) third stage of initiation rites- incorporation- which indicates that she has now completed the rite and came back into society with a changed status and identity. She came back dressed in red. Her face was covered in brown clay and she had red and black beads. Additionally, she was known as uGog' uVukuz'umbethe and had grown spiritually and was powerful. They came back home and the

car stopped in the nearest corner from her house. Everyone walked towards her house and stood by the gate. This indicated that she had transformed into someone new and was now walking in as a changed person. Her trainer got inside and hid *itshoba*—a tail whisk, which is a decorated stick with an ox tail fixed to one end (Burhmann, 1981). She was instructed to find it and until she did so, no one was allowed inside. This *itshoba* was her award for progressing into a different stage and she could also use it for healing purposes. *Amagqirha* use it when they are not feeling well, they can drench it in a mixture of herbs and water and whisk it on themselves and sometimes around their homes for cleansing. Vukuz'umbethe got inside the yard and went straight to it guided by her intuition. Everyone got inside and there was singing and dancing. The following day another goat was slaughtered, the final ritual was performed which introduced her as uGogo in her community. Throughout the journey she has learned to be a firmer believer in her ancestors and to never doubt their powers.

7.2. Bodies and kinship ties

As much as rituals are a space for healing purposes, the production of social values and transformation they are also a site where kinship relations and connections are fostered. This is what Leyton (2018) refers to as fictive kinship and these are relations beyond blood ties and affinity.

Kaloku nje ngokuba ligqirha uzalana namntu wonke oligqirha, xa sibonana ngesinxibo sethu nokuvana ngemimoya yethu siye sithi Camagu, oku kukuqala kwethu ukukha ubuhlobo nje ngezithunywa zikaQamata. Kwalapha ke esigqirheni, ukuzalana yinto exhaphakileyo kuba siye sibeneziduko ezifanayo, ibe kukuqala kwethu ukuzalana, oku kuye kubangele ukuba abantu basondelelana bazane ngcono. Siphinde ke sizalane ngokamagqirha esiphantsi kwawo. Xa ungena esigqirheni uyaboniswa igqirha lakho elizkukhokhela, eli gqirha ke iba ngumzali wakho wasegqirheni kwaye nawe xa ulibiza wandula ngokuthi 'mama' okanye . 'tata'. Gqirha elo, linabo abanye abakhwetha, aba ke uzakubabona njengokuba umane usiya kwigqirha lakho. Abanye bayebahlale neligqirha babengabantwana balo de bagqibe yonke into yabo. Xa ninonke niba ngabantwana beligqirha, nibe nikwizigaba ezahlukeneyo zesigqirha, nibe ngathi nizizalwane ezizekelanayo. Niyahloniphana ke

*nincedisana, indima yabo ke iye ibonakale xa omnye enentlombe. Wonke ubani kuyanyanzeleka abekhona, azokuzimisa kwaye azokubalingqina. Ngoko ke esigqirheni asinyangi qha, sikwakha ubuhlobo nokuzalana.*²⁹

In Zubanyange's opinion kinship is central in the practice of healing. Just being *igqirha* one is related to each and every one who is part of the practice. *Amagqirha* identify each other and are identified by the larger society through their physical bodies especially through their style of dressing. It is their behaviour and dressing that allows for their bodies to be read as a cultural performance thus demonstrating the cultures and ethnicities that *amagqirha* form a part of. For example, through socialisations when *igqirha* is dressed in the colours red and black society already knows that they are part of the Ndau clan and identify as Zulu. When they are dressed in blue and white, they belong to the Xhosa and Swati ethnicities respectively. Scheper-Hughes and Locke (1987) refer to this as the body social, the enacted self that becomes a symbol for society and culture. The body in this instance becomes a site for social constructions and creates meaning in society.

Their dressing also exerts a form of control on them, as this they are required to wear their traditional attire every day. They are allowed to wear their normal clothes, but their traditional clothes should always be worn wherever they go or else they will be punished through behaving in ways that society perceives as abnormal like shaking and making loud noises. According to Scheper-Hughes & Lock (1987) this is body politic; it is the surveillance of the bodies of *amagqirha* by their culture which controls their behaviour and ways of dressing to ensure that they act in a good manner. Moreover, Zubanyange states that *amagqirha* are also related through their clan names. Among the Xhosa relation through clan names is significant and it according to folktales, it illustrates that once upon a time we belonged to the same clan but divisions occurred due to a number of reasons displacing members of the same clans in diverse locations. This creates a bond for *amagqirha* sharing clan names to establish a strong relationship regarding each other as a family.

For the most part, being trained by the same *igqirha* is the foundation for fictive kinship among *amagqirha*. According to Zubanyange *amagqirha* are divided into different groups, everyone belongs to a certain group and they are assigned accordingly by their ancestors. In

²⁹ Interview with Zubanyange, Nyanga 21 April 2021.

this group the trainer becomes the parent whom initiates must refer to as Mama or Tata. Likewise, the trainees become the children of the trainer, who are provided for guidance and are taught more about the practice by their trainer. Training takes place for over a period of a year and in some cases initiates leave their homes to stay with their trainers. This way a strong bond is established which is sustained by the rituals of the practice requiring everyone's presence. A bond also occurs among the initiates who become the trainer's children, this makes them siblings who get to know each other, establish connection and help each other in the making of rituals. At times groups of *amagqirha* may include healers from different ethnic backgrounds, in a single group there can be members from the Xhosa, Zulu and Swati ethnic groups, like in the case of Vukuz'umbethe where there were healers from different ethnic groups. This is why *amagqirha* have groups of healers they regard as family from different places because majority of the time they travel to different regions around Africa and wherever they go, they find themselves creating bonds with other healers and these individuals become their family and assist them in understanding their vocation and spiritual powers. This is how fictive kinship is fostered, made and reproduced.

7.3. Conclusion

It is evident throughout this chapter that the liminal space is the one that creates *amagqirha*; this is where their transformation occurs through ritual practices. It is worth noting that the ideas and practices of *amagqirha* such as dance, songs, style of dressing and behaviours that are instilled in the bodies of healers come from the ritual space. According to Bourdieu the ritual space is the structure because of the ideas in the space which shape *amagqirha*. In this space they acquire *habitus* and dispositions which are their ways of being; behaviour, ideas and ways of speaking. In turn, these also shape how *amagqirha* perceive the world and the ways they act.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that being a traditional healer is a complex form of being which draws heavily from the intergenerational narratives and the artistry of the practice of healing. The participants to this research have illustrated that their existence as healers and their ritual practice are a product of stories that are passed across generations and that root subjectivities, world views and sacred practices. These are the stories that they and I have narrated together throughout this thesis. These stories have explained who *amagqirha* are as people, where they come from and also hinted at the shape of their futures. Most of these stories have sparked laughter, while others have evoked sadness especially when *amagqirha* tell us about the life of hardship they live because of their gift and the burden they carry. People expect them of always having a solution to all problems. Even if there were some stories that are deemed sacred, which my participants at first thought they could not share with me, they ended up doing so considering the goal of this study which aims at changing the narratives about healers and their practice.

Amagqirha exist because of these narratives which have been passed down since long time ago. These are stories which they have listened to, growing up as kids, they are also the stories that they have heard in communal rituals. They themselves have become parts of these stories. There is no traditional healer without these stories; these narratives give meanings to the *amagqirha*, they explain their heritage and unpack the historical origins of their practice. In the first part of the thesis I explain how *amagqirha* came into being through the knowledge from the ancestors. They were able to turn toward their environment and make use of trees, plants and animals; this gave rise to the practice of *ubugqirha*. Sacred knowledge made them a special kind of person and shaped their way of life as communal people. The knowledge is derived by these intergenerational narratives that they received together with their gift. In the second part of the thesis we have seen that the very same narratives give form to *amagqirha* ritual performances. In order for a ritual to be performed *amagqirha* must be in communication with the ancestors, fellow healers and families. These rituals are grounded in

the intergenerational narratives, that evoke mythical beginning and stories of communion with nature, and the aesthetics of dance, fashion, songs and poetry. Mostly, these rituals demonstrate that healing is an artistic process and *amagqirha* are artists. This was evident in the rituals I have participated in where we all surrounded the ill in an *intlombe*, clapping hands, singing, while others were dancing and calling upon their ancestors. Healing was drawn through art, as *amagqirha* danced the dances of their ancestors, sang their songs, wore their clothes and recited their poetry. Thus *amagqirha*, their rituals and their practice are shaped largely by intergenerational narratives.

Taking part in this exciting journey with *amagqirha* has been a wonderful mystical experience. It was not an easy one especially since we were faced with a pandemic. The field had to change in its setting; we had to maintain social distance, use sanitisers and wear masks. Most of all, for a period of time, ceremonies of religious nature were not allowed and didn't took place. At times researching in times of pandemic, placed us in awkward situations but working with a vibrant group of *amagqirha* made everything easier. In understanding the artistry of *amagqirha*, we had to travel all around Cape Town attending art exhibitions, talent shows, hiking trips. In all of these adventures *amagqirha* were alive with their colourful attires, powerful songs, loud drums and creative dance moves. Having to write the experiences I had witness in the field was not an easy task. There were moments where I had to go back to the field for clarity and to ask further questions. My participants always assisted me. I wrote this thesis filled with an end of year fatigue, but the thought of the colourful and vibrant *amagqirha* of Langa, Khayelitsha and Nyanga gave me the energy to continue writing. Working with *amagqirha* for this study was exciting learning experience, always accompanied by many stories. These stories have been crucial and have helped me understand *amagqirha* holistically. They have made this project unique and mostly I have also become a part of them. I, too will continue passing them down to other generations, I have started to do so with this thesis!

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