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(Re)storing and (Re)storying Men with Broken Wrists: Using *Intsomi* as Critical Fabulation to Refute the Notion of Queerness as un-African

by
Freddy Junior Sikhanyiso Nyezi
NYZFRE001

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Supervised by
Dr Mbongeni Mtshali & Mandla Mbothwe

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For Freddy.
Forever.
For all time.
Always.

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ABSTRACT

My research attempts to challenge the contemporary perception of homosexuality as "un-African". This misconception is often grounded in the perceived absence of queer people of colour from the "archive" of black African (hi)stories that shape our collective understandings of who is and who is not properly "African". Given that what we do know of how gender is conceived among African societies comes to us predominantly via the colonial archive with all its attendant elisions and lacunae, there is a strong case to be made for treating these histories and the authority they assume in defining our contemporary politics of belonging with some scepticism.

Accordingly, I (re)turn to the archive of indigenous African folktales as a means to challenge cultural myths of queer black (un)belonging. In my final thesis project, I take the Xhosa ntsomi (folktale) seriously as a mode of producing and transmitting cultural knowledge and appropriate its formal aesthetics to create queer speculative fictions/myths that subvert neocolonial heteropatriarchy and the attempted erasure of black queer personhood from the story of Africa. Using the culturally embedded formal and narrative tropes of intsomi alongside techniques of biomythography and critical fabulations to queer the neocolonial archive, I work to "(re)store" and "(re)story" black queer African personhood, affirming its complicated place in African society and the visions of freedom and belonging animated by our shared histories of anti-/decolonial struggle.

KEYWORDS:

Intsomi, mystoriography, critical fabulation, Postmemory, archive, repertoire, queer, African, (re)store, (re)story

INTRODUCTION: HISTORY IS MYSTORY

> Advisors and scholars will tell you that history is a narrative of strength. They will recount stories of the rise and fall of nations and empires. There will be stories of armies, battles, and decisive victories. But this isn't true strength — it's merely power. I now believe true strength is found in vulnerability. In forgiveness. In love. There is a beautiful, upside-down truth, which is that these moments of purest strength appear as weakness to those who don't know better. For a long time, I didn't know better ('Heart of a Titan', 2019).

As you start this paper, I ask you to "reject history as a narrative of strength, and, instead, have faith that it can be a narrative of love" ('Heart of a Titan', 2019). And, in turn, I will "[r]eject the chains of history … [l]earn from [the past], understand it, and let it go" and then I will "[c]reate a brighter future from [my] own heart and imagination" ('Heart of a Titan', 2019).

The quotes above are from the second season of *The Dragon Prince: Mystery of Aaravos* (2019). I mention this show not because I am sharing a watchlist with you but because, in this *Dragon Prince* world, humanity is not divided by race, gender or sexual orientation. Humanity is banded together by their humanness and shared phobia[1] of the magical creatures of a neighbouring land. This is an unfamiliar sight for me; to see people like me (who are either black, queer or black and queer) not be ostracised. I am consumed by ambivalence. I feel hope because I see a world where my personhood does not make me a target for hate, and I feel sadness because that world is fictional. I want to live in that fictional world.

The reality is that, in the years of my pursuing this master's degree (2023 and 2024), we continue to learn about people being killed for being gay and transgendered. 2023 was quite an eventful year. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni signed a bill that deemed same-sex acts criminal acts punishable by jail time or death (Budoo-Scholtz, 2023). Ghana followed suit (Naadi, 2024). Kenya will likely also do the same as they have had many instances of people being beaten up and killed and safehouses and shelters for queer people being raided (Byaruhanga, 2023). In August 2024, during South Africa's Women's Month, Nombulelo Bhixa and Minenhle Ngcobo, a lesbian couple, were shot dead in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu

[1] fear and great contempt

Natal, in what is said to be a hate crime (Igual, 2024). In 2023, a Turkish-born politician, Mehmet Vefa Dag[2] wanted to become president of South Africa. During June 2023, the United States' Pride Month[3], Dag threatened to paint over a rainbow pedestrian crossing on a South African road in Greenpoint, Cape Town (Tshwete, 2023). He did not make this statement because he has always been openly anti-gay (although, likely, he has always held this view) but rather because he was attempting to attract a following using the same fearmongering and propaganda tactics that American right-wing politicians use (Roper, 2023); he was trying to be less obscure at the expense of queer people's safety and lives.

In a poverty-stricken Africa, political leaders are relying on the demonising of queer people to garner votes. The barometer for their change-making ability does not seem to measure how they plan to combat poverty, unemployment, and hunger. Instead, it is measured by how they plan to criminalise and "justly[4]" kill queer people for being queer. Our African politicians say that homosexuality is un-African and that it is a Western import but when we travel west of Africa, we get to the United States of America where American politicians are signing their homo- and transphobia into laws. Is it not homophobia and transphobia that are Western imports then? "It has been well established that US right-wing Christian groups have helped mobilise politicians in countries such as Uganda and Nigeria to create legislation targeting sexual and non-gender conforming citizens" (E Frances White in Matebeni, 2014:4). This is a tactic we see being used a lot in the United States of America (USA). This tactic has been imported from the USA to Africa via faith-based (Christian) organisations that fund churches in Africa. "The coalitions between these conservative politicians and western-based Christian groups who come with money to distribute have helped divert attention from more critical issues like poverty, sexism, and corruption" (E Frances White in Matebeni, 2014:4).

In March 2023, George Peter Kaluma[5] attended a "meeting of the newly created African Interparliamentary Forum on Family Values and Sovereignty held in Uganda in March" (Byaruhanga, 2023). More than 20 African states were represented at this meeting; "[l]awmakers, religious leaders and campaigners […] sharing ideas on how to tackle what they see as threats to conservative religious and social values" (Byaruhanga, 2023). Although

[2] of the so-called Truth and Solidarity Movement Party
[3] which the world considers International Pride Month because of the Americanisation of the globe
[4] Make into law and call it 'justice'.
[5] A member of the Orange Democratic Movement political party in Kenya

Kaluma claimed the trip to the meeting "was paid for by Kenya's parliament" and even though the meeting was said to be an attempt at protecting the "'sovereignty' of African states", it was co-sponsored by Family Watch International (FWI), an American right-wing Christian organisation (Byaruhanga, 2023). Dr Kapya Kaoma[6] (Byaruhanga, 2023) said that FWI and similar USA-based organisations are targeting African countries, fuelling "militant homophobia" and that the impact of this has been "horrible and inhumane" in those parts of Africa where they lobby. African politicians would rather embrace the mythos of The Word of God, which arrived on their shores by boat and beat them into subjugation, than recognise, acknowledge, and embrace their people. That Word is the same thing they use to justify[7] their hatred and motivations for bashing and killing us.

This is where my research is. Put very plainly, my interest lies in queerness in Africa. I am interested in what queerness in Africa is right now, in the present. I am interested in how queerness in Africa is represented, how the queerness of precolonial and colonial Africa is re-presented[8] and how it is presented. I am fascinated by how the deliberate obliteration of African queerness from the continent's consciousness and public memory, i.e., the mainstream archive and the lack of representation of queer people in (text)books that discuss African histories and life orientations has allowed people to feel justified enough to claim, in their daily discourse, that queerness is un-African.

I turn not only to theory but to creative praxis, to Practice as Research (PaR), in my contention with these social and political realities. I turn specifically to *intsomi*, an oral storytelling tradition of Southern Africa. I deliberately turn to *intsomi* not out of nostalgia but as a methodological intervention. *Intsomi* allows for a coded and layered storytelling where meaning (and its making) is not always overt but is accomplished through feeling, interpreting and remembering collectively. Deflem (1991:5 in Mbothwe, 2008:15), paraphrasing Turner, says that "[r]ituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols ... dealing with the crucial values of the community" and Mbothwe continues to say that "Through rituals, iconographic manipulations, symbolic gestures and popular elements, participants experience a communitas state which aims to touch the hearts of the participants and move them to find ways of reconstructing the spirit of ubuntu, using what they know best" (Mbothwe, 2008:15).

[6] Zambian priest and Boston University academic
[7] Make it into law and call it 'justice'.
[8] Made present again

The performative nature of *intsomi* provides a culturally relevant and meaningful structure and expression for queering the archive. Because of *intsomi* and the repertoire of imagination and embodiment that it offers, I can re-story the redacted queer African histories and contest dominant narratives as *intsomi* is not bound by the rigid limitations of the written colonial records. In this paper and my creative praxis, I rely on *intsomi* as both form and method to think about, and rethink, what it means to be queer and African in the present while simultaneously calling forth the queer pasts that colonialism sought to obliterate and the queer futures that have appeared impossible as a result.

DEFINING TERMS

Archive

> The term 'archive' first refers to a building, a symbol of public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state. However, by 'archives' is also understood a collection of documents – normally written documents – kept in this building. There cannot therefore be a definition of 'archives' that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents stored there (Mbembe, 2002:19)

My research hunch is in the use of critical fabulation (Hartman, 2008b:11) as a means to affect the present. How can we, black queer African people, present, represent, and re-present[9] ourselves within the African archives? By 'the African archive,' I refer to both formal and informal sites of memory, ranging from institutional spaces such as state libraries and museums to more fluid, embodied forms like oral storytelling, folktales, and ritual. As Mbembe (2002:19) notes, the term 'archive' refers not only to a collection of written documents, but also to the building that houses them, both a literal and symbolic representation of state power. This framing illustrates how archives are not neutral repositories, but active sites of authority that produce, organise, and regulate knowledge. In response, I turn to *intsomi* as a mode of critical fabulation, a creative praxis that disrupts archival fixity by reactivating African oral traditions to (re)insert black queer presences into the narrative. Through *intsomi*, I seek not only to engage the archive, but to speak back to it, reshaping its contours through performance

[9] make present again

and re-imagination. How can we use these things to generate 'impossible stories'[10] that will challenge the notion that queerness is un-African? I worry about what fictionalising (f)actual past moments means, but I also acknowledge that telling 'impossible stories' is what archivists themselves do; they archive at a limit. They take fragments from/of the past and piece them together in ways that they can be consumed as a single coherent story. However, archivists do not always acknowledge the cracks and gaps in their putting together of these fragments. Their purported pasts are themselves speculative fiction because of the archivists' "power to interpret the archives" (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995:10). Archives become narratives when they are engaged; when they are read, interpreted, and made meaningful by the subjects who bring their own contexts and desires into the engagement. The act of interpreting an archive is itself a creative act, often shaped by silences, gaps, and the limits of what remains. Subjectivity is invited by narrative, and narrative is invited by the archival gaps. I recognise that my own subjectivity as a black queer African person inevitably informs how I experience and re-story the archive. I therefore embrace critical fabulation not as a deviation from truth but as a necessary intervention: a means of acknowledging that the archive is already a story shaped by power, and that telling 'impossible stories' is a way of reclaiming agency within and against that structure. Thus, I use 'archive' flexibly in this paper to mean the following things: (1) a collection of things, (2) collective memory, (3) things that remain, (4) an institution that houses archival materials, and (5) memory-making.

Queer

I must acknowledge my anxiety around the word 'queer' in this paper, especially when I refer to cisgendered heterosexual Africans as non-queer. As Judith Butler (2008:32 in Baker, 2013:360) notes, "I worry when 'queer' becomes an identity. It was always a critique of identity. I think if it ceases to be a critique of identity, it's lost its critical edge". I understand that the term, in Queer Theory, is a reference to "anti-essentialist arguments/ideas that, at their heart, use sexuality and gender to illustrate the unreliability, and normative tendency, of identifying categories of all kinds" (Baker, 2013:360). However, I use 'queer' in this paper in the same way that the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual etc.) community uses it as an umbrella term for LGBTQIA+. This contempt

[10] A term I borrow from Saidiya Hartman that refers to a story that attempts to narrate the lives of the dispossessed and the enslaved, which are inherently unrecoverable due to the violence and omissions of the archive. Impossible stories seek to imagine what cannot be verified, to amplify the incommensurability between the experience of the enslaved and the fictions of history, and to labour against the limits of the archive to paint as full a picture as possible.

I feel for the word comes from its original denotative meaning; that something 'queer' is strange, odd and unusual, that it is not the norm. I fear that I enforce a binary when I write about queer and non-queer people, a binary that continues to relegate LGBTQIA+ people to the margins of society and the pages I write about them on, that I continue to do what African society does, which is to label them as the abnormal and undesirable other.

(re)store and (re)story

When I use "(re)store and (re)story", I am invoking both meanings of these words. To 'store' is to reserve something within a repository, whereas to restore is to bring back something that has been erased or lost. I am talking here about queer histories, voices and people that have been systematically pushed out of the dominant historical narrative. However, my endeavour is not to just restore these stories as they were, it is also to "(re)story" them – to tell them differently. I do not just want to put old stories back in their rightful place, I want to reshape, rework and reframe them in ways that reflect the truths that the archive purposefully omitted. I am highlighting the act of retrieving what has been lost and transforming it into something new, something that fully represents our experiences, our lives, and our histories. When I invoke "(re)store and (re)story", it is about creating new possibilities for how we understand and tell (hi)stories going forward as much as it is about reclaiming the past.

(hi)story

I write 'history' as '(hi)story' to highlight the narrative aspect of history. By placing '(hi)' in parentheses, I am signalling that history is not just a collection and recollection of objective facts but is a form of storytelling, shaped by those who record and transmit it. This decision reflects my understanding of what we consider 'history' to be a selective interpretation of events, privileging certain perspectives while erasing and/or sidelining others – especially the voices of those marginalised, like queer people in Africa. My use of '(hi)story' places emphasis on the curated and subjective nature of historical accounts, making it clear that history is a story fashioned by power dynamics, biases and cultural forces. This allows me to challenge the hegemonic narratives while advocating for the (re)storing and (re)storying of suppressed and/or obliterated queer histories. Through this, I try to foster an inclusive and multifaceted understanding of the past, where the muted and/or forgotten voices of queer people can finally be heard.

(re)turn and (un)belonging

I use the rhetorical devices “(re)turn” and “(un)belonging” as conceptual shorthand only after thoroughly framing and defining their usage in my work. I then deploy them strategically across the writing to perform a particular function in my argument (in this case, marking the conceptual tension between ‘turning’ and ‘returning’ or ‘belonging’ and ‘unbelonging’).

THE METHODOLOGY TO MY MADNESS

I have explored my artistic and critical interest in black queer representation using my own poetry and prose as well as that of other queer writers; through South African queer argots such as Gayle and isiNgqumo; through the practice of voguing, a queer social dance form; and through performance art. These art forms are part of my repertoire and were my primary access to the archive and research. I used them to investigate, explore, understand and perform my findings, the (hi)stories and the research I had encountered.

Now that I have re-collected all these instances in the archive, I want to use Indigenous storytelling forms, e.g., iintsomi[11] and izicengcelezo[12], as a means of stitching together impossible stories. An 'impossible story' is "predicated upon impossibility" (Hartman, 2008b:2). It attempts to bear witness to moments that we cannot return to. Its duty is "listening for the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, and refashioning disfigured lives" all to achieve an impossible goal: "redressing the violence that produced […] fragments of discourse, which is as close as we come to a biography of the captive and the enslaved" (Hartman, 2008b:2).

Critical Fabulation

My praxis is driven by two methods: (1) critical fabulation/speculative fiction and (2) biomythography/mystoriography. The first method asks whether it is possible to "exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive" and advances speculative arguments by exploiting the capacities of what is imagined, wished for and/or possible (Hartman, 2008b:11). Mieke Bal (in Hartman, 2008b:11) says that 'fabula' is a "[…] series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused and experienced by actors. An event is a transition from one state to another. Actors are agents that perform actions. (They are not necessarily human.) To act is to cause or experience an event". I am reminded of Schechner (1990:100) and his concept of acting as "twice behaved behaviour". The idea is that something has happened before, and the actor redoes it. To have past happenings happen again in the present. Fabula is a way to relate interspersed narratives and turn them into fables. I do this because storytelling is how African people remember, archive and inherit the world (Putuma,

[11] Xhosa folktales
[12] Xhosa nursery rhymes

2020:14, line 1). Engaging in storytelling as a praxis also means that the research works in opposition to the colonial project that values the written word over the spoken word.

The 'critical' part comes in when the fashioning of a narrative is founded upon archival research, a "critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history" to, in a self-reflexive and self-aware way, narrate an 'impossible story' while amplifying the "impossibility of its telling" (Hartman, 2008b:11). Though I speak a lot in this paper, romantically[13] and metaphorically, about reanimating the corpses of past queer people and excavating their remains from the archival tomb, the intention here is not to perform a Lazarus miracle but to tell as full a story of past queer people, of a past – and yet to come – queer Africa as possible. This is a "straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration" (Hartman, 2008b:11).

Though Hartman writes about the context of slavery, her words still ring true though our expressions might be different. While hers is to write a cultural history, mine is to perform it. While she writes about the enslaved, I write about black queer Africans.

Critically fabulating is about disrupting the sustained tellings and "[displacing] the received or authorized account" of (hi)story[14] (Hartman, 2008b:11). This is done through reconfiguring the basic plot points of the (hi)story and presenting again the "sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view" (Hartman, 2008b:11).

My access to the impossible stories is not through a single route. These impossible stories, instead, emerge at the intersections of various fragmented access points with those points being archival gaps, haunting memories that do not settle, folktales that mutate across generations and embodied knowledge passed down through gestures, games, songs and silences. Each entry point, whether it is an archival fragment, an oral recollection or a childhood game, reveals a different pathway into a speculative/speculated past and a possible future. Through critical fabulation, I can treat these fragments not as incomplete pieces of a puzzle, but as prompts for imagining otherwise. Through this, I aim not to recover a single and consolidated truth but to

[13] as in, to have an idealised view of reality
[14] I use this to mean "a storied past" in acknowledgement of history not just as facts but as a story in and of itself

hold space for multiple layered and contradictory truths to coexist. The impossibility is not a barrier, but the very terrain of the work.

Biomythography and Mystoriography

'Mystory' (Bowman & Bowman, 2002:164) is a portmanteau of three words: history, mystery and 'my story' and it is Gregory Ulmer's neologism for "a mode of creative research appropriate to a postliterate age, one that would result in a multimedia text […] rather than a more traditional expository essay" (Bowman & Bowman, 2002:164). Bowman and Bowman proceed to compare this neologism to *herstory* as a remixing of 'history', where herstory "seeks to excavate and represent the collective story of women suppressed in patriarchal history" (Bowman & Bowman, 2002:164). Similar to herstory, mystory attempts to trace and uncover the (hi)story of the self that is "buried or enciphered in a variety of 'other' historical discourses" (Bowman & Bowman, 2002:164). It is precisely through this method that I uncover/discover/recover my history and that of people like me (who are black, queer, African and live in Africa) amidst other (hi)storical discourses.

Scott Dillard[15] defines useful queer mythology (2000:74) as "[…] one in which gay men create meaningful roles and tell meaningful stories that link them to past roles in previous societies" (2000:75). Ramer (1998 in Dillard, 2000:76) says

> We stand between genders. We stand between the living and the dead. We stand between night and day. We stand between matter and spirit. Our job is to scout that terrain for the main body of the tribe, and to bring back all that information for the main body of the tribe.

This is profound to me because the quotes speak of a genealogy and of being connected to a whole, even though the practice itself is singular. It is exactly for this reason that biomythography and mystoriography are a technology[16] for me, the idea that I can work to find that which is outside of me, discover that which precedes me and dream of that which succeeds by simply looking inward. This mode excites me as it means that I do not exist outside of the process as a viewer but as an active participant. This auto-performance, autobiographical mode "compresses into a single presence the protagonist-author-director-performer" so that one may

[15] A professor at Georgia College and State University
[16] 'Technology' and not 'technique' because technology refers to the application of knowledge for a practical purpose.

use performance as a way to survey the self or to explore alternative selves (Linda Park-Fuller and Ronald Pelias in Bowman & Bowman, 2002:161).

Mystoriography is even more fitting a biomythographical approach to this research as it means I get to engage with history as the storied past as well as the thing that both enables and disables how the past is presented and represented (Bowman & Bowman, 2002:164). I get to engage with mystery as an "analogy for the scholarly research […], drawing significant conclusions from seemingly inconsequential clues" (Bowman & Bowman, 2002:164). And I get to engage with my story as critical and scholarly writing that manifests as autobiographical and confessional[17] performance, which I do especially through the one-person show[18] where I juxtapose the five elements of the dance form Voguing to my relationship with my mother and my queerness.

Dr Mwenya Kabwe, a lecturer at the University of Cape Town, facilitated a series of autoethnographic, embodied, and memory-based creative practices designed to excavate affective experience and surface personal narratives. This series of creative practices was called *Story Strategies*. Some of the *Story Strategies* tasks included writing a poem titled "how dangerous they are, the actors/performers," listing influential characters, public figures, personal relationships, and nuclear events that shaped our identities, as well as recalling formative moments through sensory memory, early encounters with water, childhood injuries, or significant spaces. Dr Kabwe also tasked us with drawing an "Island of Childhood," illustrating symbolic terrain shaped by belief, fear, joy, and longing, and then, as homework, asked us to divide our lives into five emotional chapters, steering clear of chronological milestones. Another task was writing the autobiography of our belief systems, encouraging us to reflect on how our personal philosophies shifted over time. These exercises served as entry points to submerged, fragmented, and/or repressed parts of my past; memories that were distorted, forgotten, or intentionally buried in a bid to survive. These exercises allowed me to approach memory not as a linear fact but as a layered, affective terrain to be explored, performed, restored and re-storied. In this way, the exercises became central to my mystoriographical process and informed the development of the one-person performance.

[17] I understand that 'confessional' might steer me towards navel-gazing, but I use this word to communicate an attempt at implicating myself in the research in a critically reflexive manner that excavates from intimate phenomenological data more broadly applicable knowledge.
[18] One of the projects we were tasked with in the master's program

Biomythography, a term coined by Audre Lorde in her 1982 biomythography, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, is a hybridised literary form that combines biography (the factual or remembered self), mythology (the symbolic dimension of story), and history (the collective and temporal context within which the self exists) and this, in turn, makes biomythography "a writing down of our meanings of identity […] with the materials of our lives" (King, 1988:330). It resists strict genre conventions by insisting that the personal is political, and that the 'truth' of a life can be accessed through the affective, the poetic, and the nonlinear. Kate King (1988:325) refers to *Zami* as a "rewriting," one that tells both individual and collective history. She argues that "layers of meanings, layers of histories, layers of readings and re-readings through webs of power-charged codes mark biomythography" (King, 1988:336), and that the biomythographer's job is to "unravel and include all of these layers to tell the most rounded story possible" (Britton, 2017). Similarly, Faith Adiele positions memoir as a corrective – to "wield memoir as the corrective" (Adiele, 2013:78) – and as a tool to set the record straight and cement it in writing (Britton, 2017). Biomythography, then, becomes both a resistant and a reparative method, blending lived experience with mythmaking to challenge dominant historical narratives. In tandem, mystoriography means that I get to lean further into the blurry (and liminal) space between truth and invention, fact and fiction; treating history not as an objective record but as a *storied past*, a space of mystery, ambiguity, and scholarly intuition (Bowman & Bowman, 2002:164). Where biomythography enables the weaving of selfhood through history and myth, mystoriography makes space for the gaps, hauntings, and interpretive leaps, the seemingly incidental clues that allow for the recovery of subdued narratives. Together, these methods allow me to tell stories that are emotionally and politically true, even if they are not always verifiably factual.

The one-person show: Kukwam Apha[19] – Mother of this House[20]

This one-person show marked the first time I intentionally implicated myself in the performance and attempted mystoriography in earnest. Unlike other, more layered and conceptually dense works I staged during the master's programme, this work was deceptively simple in structure: I staged it as a voguing workshop. The audience entered into a space arranged like a rehearsal room. I welcomed them as a choreographer might, and proceeded to

[19] This is something my mom said a lot growing up. It means "This is my house".
[20] A term used in the vogueing scene. When children were thrown out of their homes for being queer, older queer people would step up as parents and take them in. They eventually started forming chosen families for themselves and calling them 'houses' which would come with a house name and the matriarchal figures of these houses would be called mothers

teach the five elements of voguing: hands performance, catwalk, duckwalk, spins and dips, and floor performance. But this was not just a workshop. Interwoven into the teaching were autobiographical reflections, mostly centred on my relationship with my mother. Each voguing element became a metaphor, a container for a specific memory or emotional truth. What emerged was not only a performance but also a methodological approach to storytelling, one where movement, metaphor, and confession coalesced into a form of biomythography.

Through this process, I identified three recurring strategies in my praxis: (1) the presence of vogue and its elements as throughlines across multiple performances; (2) the recurring role I assume as orator, manifesting variously as preacher, game host, emcee, choreographer, or researcher; and (3) the consistent use of audience participation. These are not just stylistic preferences but methodological commitments. Vogue, for example, is not only an aesthetic form or dance form but an archive of queer survival, resistance, and creativity, making it a fitting embodied methodology through which to explore queerness, grief, memory, and power. The orator-figure I consistently embody is rooted in a tradition of story- and truth-telling, one I am beginning to consciously queer by imagining myself as a griot that both carries and disrupts cultural memory. Lastly, the consistent choice to engage the audience directly is a form of co-presence and co-authorship that rejects passive spectatorship where things happen at/to the audience but, instead, foregrounds collective witnessing as a methodology. Together, these elements shape the way I make, stage, and understand performance, not only as a mode of expression but as a deeply reflexive research practice.

Performance as Research

I employ both critical fabulation/speculative fiction and mystoriography as approaches to Practice as Research/Performance as Research (PaR). Performance as Research, as posited by Professor Mark Fleishman (2012:28), is "a series of embodied repetitions in time, on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events, productions, projects, installations) levels, in search of a series of differences". These embodied practices that happen repeatedly and over time allow me to oscillate between the physical expression of findings as well as the research that informs those findings[21]. Because my research is interested specifically in storytelling as an embodied practice and its ability to both recover information

[21] PaR, much like Diana Taylor's discourse of the archive and the repertoire (explored later), expresses an inextricable link between archival materials and the embodied experience.

from the archive[22] and to make that information accessible, it is evident that this endeavour can only be explored "in and through performance itself" (Fleishman, 2012:28) and this performing and re-performing as practice "can be both a form of research and a legitimate way of making the findings of such research publicly available" (Painter, 1996 in Fleishman, 2012:28).

I could read and write and re-read and rewrite all I want, but there are certain things that I can only discover when I am a body in a rehearsal space, exploring, or a body performing to (and with) an audience. "[P]erformance ways of knowing propose *different* ways of knowing from those of traditional textual scholarship" (Fleishman, 2012:29) of which these ways of knowing through performance are "close, active, immediate, on the move, embodied, sensual, fluid, interactional and affectively engaged" (Fleishman, 2012:30). I can, for example, only truly learn about the change-making ability of storytelling by telling a story and experiencing it with an audience, witnessing how they respond to it, how our interactions may heighten or dampen the story and how we feel when we are communing with each other.

It is also especially because of the relational nature of storytelling that I turn to PaR as it "break[s] down the separation of subject and object, of body and mind" whereas relying only on reading and writing would upkeep the separation of me from the thing I study, the knowledge on the page existing only in my mind as a "self-contained contemplation" from the lived experience of orating/performing a story (Fleishman, 2012:30). I am both the researcher and a member of the communities[23] implicated in and subject to the dynamics of power that I disentangle and engage critically in my study. There is the doublemindedness of being the outsider who studies, as well as the insider who is the site of the study. Performance as a means of researching is well-suited to work at this intersection.

Although I place a heavy emphasis on embodied practice, I must say that I do not negate the role of reading and writing in this research journey, as much of what I have found and learnt has come to me through reading and writing. The act of writing itself requires the body, whether it be a hand to scribble or a voice for speech-to-text. As Diana Taylor (2003:21) writes, the archive and the repertoire exist in tandem, and so do the reading-writing and the embodied practice in the studio. The archive seems permanent, fixed, and official, but it is incomplete. The repertoire seems to be ephemeral and informal, but it holds what the archive does not. I

[22] Collection of things
[23] African, queer, queer-and-African.

refer especially to this compossibility[24] that calls for "fleshes alongside texts alongside images, sight alongside hearing and touching and feeling and moving" (Fleishman, 2012:30). Performance, representative of this compossibility, allows me to play between the space of the "truth" as insisted by the archive and what the repertoire carries – the silenced, the unrecorded, the embodied knowledge that only gets passed on not through writing but through practice. Through this performance-led research, I subvert the remains of the archive and allow the repertoire to thrive; (re)storying the past, reframing the present, and reimagining the future.

Ubuntsomi: Intsomi as a Queer Liberating Art

'Bonsomi' is a Lingala[25] word meaning 'freedom'. I use 'bonsomi' as part of the title of this chapter for two reasons: (1) for the mere fact that it rhymes with 'intsomi' and (2) because it means 'freedom'. There is an added layer that I appreciate in my conflation of the Lingala 'bonsomi' and the isiXhosa 'intsomi'; 'bonsomi' sounds like 'ubuntsomi'. In isiXhosa (which is another language that I speak), the ubu- prefix refers to the state of being something. 'Ubuntsomi' is then the state of being a ntsomi, and though it is not necessarily a real isiXhosa word, it is one that I invent to describe the ntsomi's ability to liberate. This is the same in Lingala, where the bo- prefix refers to the state of being something; 'bonsomi' as the state of being free. My undertaking then becomes clear that, through my doing this Master's, I aim to accomplish 'ubuntsomi' so that I can reach 'bonsomi'; bonsomi for myself so that I stop feeling like I need to justify my existence as a queer African as if my queerness is mutually exclusive from my African-ness, bonsomi for other queer Africans in countries where their queerness is criminalised and bonsomi for our queer African histories that are either buried deep in the archive or made inaccessible to the everyday person so that politicians can claim queerness to be unAfrican and have no one doubt them.

The Repertoire as Archive

Diana Taylor's concepts of archive and repertoire are intrinsically entangled and should not be viewed as distinct from each other as they both exceed the limitations of one another (Taylor, 2003:21). The archive is characterised by containing "supposedly enduring materials" while the other is the "so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge" (Taylor,

[24] Possible together with another thing
[25] Lingala is a language from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I refer to this language as it is a tongue that I speak, that I have inherited through my Congolese (Luba) father.

2003:19). While Taylor's work primarily focuses on Latin America, her insights resonate in the African context. In Africa, performance plays an important role in the preservation of histories, cultures, and identities, serving as a crucial mode of knowledge transmission for marginalised communities whose stories are often excluded from traditional/institutional/formal archives. Taylor emphasises that performances can be as important as written records in "transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next", challenging the dominance of written history (Taylor, 2003:21). For marginalised groups, especially queer Africans, embodied practices like intsomi become essential for restoring (hi)stories erased by colonial narratives.

As a performed, oral-historical form of cultural memory rather than a written one, intsomi functions in the domain of repertoire as Taylor defines it. It communicates historical knowledge, moral values and ethics, and cultural practices in ways that are accessible to broader communities. By using this oral tradition, I aim to challenge the colonial and hegemonic narratives that frame queerness as un-African. Because I am opposing the notion of queerness as un-African and, instead, positing that homophobia itself is un-African, storytelling offers a way to counter these harmful narratives. By drawing on indigenous concepts and forms of representation, I reinforce the idea that queerness is not foreign to African indigenous traditions but embedded in them. The repertoire allows for a deeper engagement with cultural memory, providing a platform for stories and identities erased from the formal, written archives.

Storytelling, particularly through indigenous traditions, offers an alternative to the written archive, one that speaks directly to African people outside of academia. In this way, storytelling can serve both as an archive and a form of activism, restoring visibility to queer Africans. It provides an imaginative space where dominant narratives can be questioned, and audiences can confront their prejudices. As Martin & Xaba suggest, in imaginative spaces, "dominant narratives hold less sway; possibilities we haven't considered suggest themselves" (2013:vii). Storytelling allows people to see others' experiences and bodies in ways that archival representation cannot.

Just like black-queer-feminist-activist-scholar-writer Audre Lorde titles her 1983 essay, and coincidentally, the point that I make here: The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House. Lorde emphasises that those marginalised by society – be it by race, gender,

or sexuality – must find their own tools for survival and resistance (Lorde in Mbatsha, 2021:34). In this context, intsomi becomes a tool for (re)storing and (re)storying queer Africans, challenging colonial narratives by using African forms of knowledge transmission. As Lorde asserts, "survival is not an academic skill", but a lived experience, and it is through lived experiences that African queerness can be stored and storied (Lorde in Mbatsha, 2021:34).

Historically, colonialists have framed black people as people without history, as if their/our existence only began when Europeans recorded it. Similarly, queer Africans are often viewed as having no historical roots. However, black and queer people have always theorised through music, dance, drama, and art. These "stories are our theories" and methods (Carter, 2003:40). Africans have used these repertoires – myth, language, dance-music-art, and ancestral memory – to transmit knowledge, using them as "stimulus structures of truth" and knowledge (Molefi Kete Asante, 1990:19 in Mbatsha, 2021:35). Theorising through narrative and performance is not new to African traditions; it has always been a part of how African societies stored and passed down knowledge.

Barbara Christian echoes this when she says that "people of colour have always theorised […] in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language" (2000:12 in Mbatsha, 2021:35). This is the essence of the repertoire: dynamic, embodied knowledge that challenges static, written forms of history. Queer people have survived by creating their own archives in the ways that are available to them. In the same way that queer people in 1980s New York survived through the creation of ballroom culture, queer Africans have stored and storied their histories through performance and oral traditions.

Intsomi is a powerful pedagogical tool, as it sharpens people's creativities and imaginations, moulds their behaviour, and trains their intellect (Chinyowa, 2001:18). It is through storytelling that African people remember, archive, and inherit the world (Putuma, 2020:14). Storytelling, particularly through indigenous traditions, helps to construct moral values, shape worldviews, and educate the emotions. I aim to use this pedagogical function of intsomi to foster a renewed attitude toward queerness in Africa.

The histories of queer people in South Africa, while existing in formal archives like the Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA), are not readily accessible to the public resulting in a presumed historical absence of queer Africans. This contributes to the misconception that queerness is

un-African. The public-facing archive often excludes queer histories or, at most, highlights a few prominent figures like Somizi Mhlongo [26] or Simon Nkoli [27]. However, these representations are often surface-level, and deeper queer histories remain hidden in academic spaces, inaccessible to the South African who is outside academia. Mhlongo, for example, is known for his flamboyance, extravagance and celebrity status, which is not necessarily a bad thing but there is little engagement with the politics of his visibility, how it intersects with class privilege, and how his queerness (and performance thereof) is constrained by his marketability and consumption by heteronormative South Africa. Similarly, while Nkoli is rightly honoured as a hero of the anti-apartheid and gay rights movements, the wholeness of his personal life, and the broader ecosystem of queer activists around him are often squashed into a singular story of triumph. These curated depictions do important work but tend to reduce the fullness of queer lives to tokenised, digestible symbols. I do not say this to claim that worthwhile knowledge cannot be found in the popular and the everyday and that it is the domain of 'learned' academies and other rarefied, exclusive spaces. What we need to do is simply allow greater access to this reservoir of knowledge rather than contest the very terms upon which it is conferred its discursive authority. I want to forefront the quotidian knowledge that queer people put into practice daily. This is the knowledge that has been contested and relegated to the margins. The knowledge specific to queer people in their contemporary contexts that is not given the time or space. We can learn as much (if not more) about being queer and African from the quotidian stylings of a black gay man voguing at a township ball, for example, as we can from the scholarly 'archive'. As Taylor argues, the repertoire and archive work in tandem; embodied practices breathe life into written histories. This dynamic relationship allows for a richer understanding of cultural memory.

In the African context, oral performance traditions like intsomi are not just a source of entertainment but are integral to human pedagogy. As Chinyowa points out, oral traditions "not only communicate the African people's philosophy but play an intrinsic role in human pedagogy" (2001:18). By using intsomi, I aspire to create a space where Africans can engage with queerness as part of their cultural identity. Folktales, through their anthropomorphised characters, teach children moral lessons and shape their worldviews. In the same way, intsomi

[26] A gay South African choreographer and television personality
[27] A South African gay rights and HIV/AIDS activist, who was also gay.

can be used to shape new understandings of queerness, challenging the idea that it is un-African.

The relationship between the archive and the repertoire is complex but crucial for (re)storing and (re)storying erased histories. While the archive captures moments and freezes them in time, the repertoire brings those moments to life through performance, making them accessible to new generations. As Junod (1913 in Finnegan, 2014:10) suggests, storytelling makes the past feel immediate, as if it is happening in the present. This reanimation of history is what I aim to achieve through intsomi, using African modes of stor(y)ing to (re)story queer Africans in the collective cognition of Africans.

By using intsomi as both an archive and a repertoire, I hope to contest the erasure of queer histories from African cultures. Taylor's framework offers a way to think about how performance and embodied practices can challenge the dominance of written history, providing an alternative mode of archiving that is accessible, dynamic, and deeply rooted in African traditions. Through this work, I aim to restore queer Africans to their rightful place in our collective memory, using storytelling to challenge the colonial narratives that have sought to erase us.

The Owner of the Tale

I rely on Kennedy C. Chinyowa's work on storytelling in Shona culture to support my claims about storytellers and *iintsomi*. Though the Shona storyteller, the Sarungano, is from a different culture, their role is similar to that of the *intsomi* storyteller in the Xhosa tradition. As p'Bitek notes, "all societies, in all ages, have produced sages who have created the fundamental ideas, values and beliefs that have formed the basis of their social institutions and traditions" (p'Bitek, 1986:38-39). Like other African storytellers, the Sarungano preserves and transmits histories, serving as a "source of entertainment, chronicler of events and collective conscience" (Chinyowa, 2001:19).

In West Africa, griots also preserve social memory, passing down history and values through storytelling. They act as "historians, genealogists, musicians, advisors to nobility, storytellers, advocates, messengers, and ambassadors" (Stephenson, n.d.:2). I find the Sarungano's title, "owner of the tale" (Chinyowa, 2001:19), compelling because in my theatrical work, I too have

taken on the role of "Owner of the Tales." These stories, though not mine, are in my possession, I "have [and] hold [them] as property" and I am the one who (re)produces them (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). As an adjective, I own them as in, I use them to "express immediate [and] direct kinship" as these stories connect and tie me to my queer predecessors (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). As a transitive verb, I own up to these tales by acknowledging them as "true, valid, or as claimed", I take full responsibility for them (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). And when I end my telling, I will proclaim, "Ndipo pakafira sarungano' or 'Ndipo pakaperera sarungano'" because that is where I will "die"/"end" as the storyteller (Chinyowa, 2001:24). I will "die" to allow the story to live on through other people.

Storytelling serves as a "vehicle for constructing, transmitting and understanding a people's worldview", which is why I turn to intsomi, so that I may understand my audience's worldview "at the aesthetic, behavioural, cognitive and emotional levels" so that I may alter it (Chinyowa, 2001:18). Additionally, I want the audience to understand my worldview so, through intsomi, I foster empathy in them. Storytelling balances "traditional continuity and contemporary social change", making *intsomi* a powerful tool for transforming people's perspectives on queer Africans and for presenting queer Africa (Chinyowa, 2001:18). I work to 'queer' the 'archive' of African story that colonial heteropatriarchy 'fractured', thereby making 'visible' (restoring to collective memory by restorying) the black queer histories elided in the 'grand narrative' of African identity and cultural belonging.

Storytellers "proclaimed the moral laws of society through story, song and dance, and in the process, created the mental images and ethical principles that ultimately guided the people's lives" (Chinyowa, 2001:19). This aligns with the philosophy of ubuntu: "I am, because we are, since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti in Chinyowa, 2001:25). *Iintsomi* socialise people into "moral ethics or cultural practices of the community" (Chinyowa, 2001:25). As p'Bitek says, "The artist proclaims the laws but expresses them in the most indirect language: through metaphor and symbol, in image and fable" (1986:39). If the artist's role is to proclaim laws, then this means that I, as an artist and as a storyteller, can also adjust the laws as needed by the times and/or by the community.

My queer *ntsomi* aims to reclaim and proclaim queer histories, putting together lost fragments of the past to remind future generations. The storyteller guides the "minds and hearts of her audience from childhood to adulthood" (Chinyowa, 2001:19) by putting words into their

mouths, "[instilling] reason into their heads, and [filling] their sleep with dreams so potent that when they [awake], they [can] go on living those dreams" (Chinyowa, 2001:19). Intsomi allows the teller to form the minds and opinions of the listeners, to narrate the way they reason and to turn the incredible happenings they credit to fantasy to manifest into their lived experiences as reality albeit not identically to the rules of the fantastical world, the lessons learnt permeate their realities. The impact that story has on its listeners is the impact I wish to employ in Africa regarding people's views on queerness being un-African. I want to tell them so many stories that transcend time so that they can see that we really have existed throughout time. I want the listeners of these restored and re-storied (hi)stories to take these new lessons, allow them to infiltrate their minds, dreams and beliefs and then live them out so that they no longer reject queerness and begin to see us as legitimate Africans.

Intsomi as Technology

A storytelling session typically begins with a storyteller's introduction, using formulaic phrases like "Chos' chos' ngantsomi," which transforms the story into a collective performance (Chinyowa, 2001:23). The storyteller's skill is shown through their use of language, body movement, voice, song, dance, and gesture, creating tension, suspense, and delight to engage the audience (Chinyowa, 2001:23). This ability to manipulate the audience results in "a complete aesthetic experience" (Isidore Okpewho in Chinyowa, 2001:23). It is because of this ability that the storyteller can get the audience to "act, think and feel with her" (Chinyowa, 2001:23).

The Griot in West Africa performs the roles of both storyteller and praise poet, mastering praises, genealogies, songs, and epics passed down through generations (Baba, 2012:5). Unlike writing, which Socrates, in Plato's *Phaedrus,* described as "inhuman" and "destroying memory" (Baba, 2012:6), the art of Jaliyaa[28] is rooted in relationship. It offers a living and dynamic memory where meaning is tied to context (Baba, 2012:8). Storytelling makes memory and remembering a communal act, and so "[w]here there is no community there is no reason for the speaker, or the Griot to exist" (Baba, 2012:8). Sound, as "one of the physical manifestations of thought," creates a deep connection between speaker and listener (Baba, 2012:8).

[28] The West African term for the storytelling practice named after the Jali (another term for Griot).

Sound exists in space and time, and its ephemerality makes storytelling sacred, with the audience committing stories to memory because they cannot return to the moment (Baba, 2012:9). The liveness of storytelling sharpens our awareness of the moment's fleeting nature and, in doing so, asks those present to remember the story in a way that a written text just cannot. There is something about the temporary, the here-and-now quality of a live event that demands a kind of commitment from us. It strikes an interesting and generative balance between the authority and permanence we give to texts or archives and the beauty we credit to performance because of its momentary life. Performance calls on us to remember the thing because it disappears. It strikes a generative balance between the authority and permanence we give to texts or archives and the beauty we credit to performance because of its momentary life. Performance calls on us to remember the thing because it disappears. The Griot uses rhythm, repetition, and patterns to reinforce memory and engage the audience (Baba, 2012:9). The audience, actively involved, becomes an essential part of community and memory building (Baba, 2012:10). This active engagement fosters empathy as the audience identifies with the characters in the story (Chinyowa, 2001:27).

Storytelling is about relationships, not just transmitting information. Unlike writing, which creates distance, storytelling as technology fosters empathy and community (Baba, 2012:10). As an openly queer storyteller, I aim to restore visibility to queer people erased by the archive.

Easter Bunny/Istabane: The Trickster Hare

Judith Butler (2011:384) argues that "the body is always social," shaped by its interactions with others. My queer body, through storytelling, challenges perceptions of queer people as "unlive, unnatural, invisible monsters" (Rademeyer, 2012:272), asserting that our lives are grievable and viable (Butler, 2011:383). The queer struggle is not just for rights after all, but "to be conceived as persons" (Butler, 2004:32). The way queer people have been monstered in the African psyche reminds me of the trickster character in folktales, particularly the hare. The hare, a common African folktale figure, is seen as deviating from social norms and representing "negative qualities in human behaviour" (Chinyowa, 2001:25). Other tricksters include the Zimbabwean Hare, the South African Mongoose, the East African Jackal, and the West Africa Spider (Chinyowa, 2001:26). These tricksters, often regarded as deceptive, are also seen as relying on intelligence to survive in a "survival of the fittest" jungle (Canonici, 1996).

Tricksters use “quick wit, double talk, false contracts, nimble movements, jokes and elusiveness” to outsmart stronger opponents, a survival strategy many queer people, including myself, adopt in hostile environments (Chinyowa, 2001:26). The kind of behaviour that is vilified in the trickster character exists in the storyteller as a storytelling skill set and is what makes stories interesting. Storytellers make use of double talk by deliberately obscuring and reversing the meanings of words; they make jokes to disarm the audience and to keep them entertained; and they are nimble in their movement as storytelling requires the storyteller to make use of gesture, movement and dance to animate their storytelling.

As a queer orator– and the audience’s ability to read my queerness – as well as my action of critically ‘queering’ indigenous story-forms, my storytelling disrupts historical readings of queers, like the Hare, as deviant. Mine and the Hare’s presence challenges social norms by showing a “capacity to effect change by breaking the barriers of social conformity” (Chinyowa, 2001:26). Even when homophobic Africans cannot condone my existence as a queer African, my hope is that my presence as a queer orator forces them to marvel at my “ability to expose the stupidity and foolishness of the larger and more powerful” narratives about queerness (Chinyowa, 2001:26). The hare, like queer people, is rejected for refusing to conform to communal values, which are often enforced through punishment to suppress individuality (Mbele, 1982:134 in Chinyowa, 2001:27). However, the trickster suggests that other values, like “freedom of choice, self-initiative and personal prerogative,” should exist beyond the governance of the community (Chinyowa, 2001:27). Like the trickster, queer people challenge societal norms and test their validity.

While the trickster is clever and subversive, we must acknowledge that the trickster does not always come out victorious. In many folktales, the trickster hare is humiliated, punished, and/or forced to flee as a result of its deviance. The trickster’s display of personal prerogative and freedom of choice is rewarded with expulsion. The trickster’s wit often earns it a temporary survival rather than a long-term acceptance or transformation. Aligning myself with the trickster is then not a romantic gesture but a deliberate positioning within a lineage of figures whose very survival depends on refusal and risk. The trickster’s defeats reflect the costs of non-conformity in deeply normative and often violent social contexts. Queer Africans’ possession of self-initiative, just like the trickster, often challenges the other non-queer-identifying Africans’ view of reality, as they view assimilation – oneness with the whole, *umntu ngumntu*

ngabantu[29] – as the ideal behaviour for their society. Challenging this view is uncomfortable, and so the herd prefers to remove the thing that challenges societal norms and tests their validity rather than pondering the harmful societal norms and how they need to be updated. Queer Africans often navigate a world where visibility can invite both admiration and danger, where your brilliance does not shield you from erasure, "correction", or punishment. By reflecting on the trickster's defeats as much as their cleverness, I engage a more honest metaphor for queer survival in Africa, one that does not seek comfort in a triumphant narrative but rather interrogates what it means to persist, to resist, and to remain legible in a world that is not designed for us to thrive. As a result, the trickster's position is not only a storytelling device but an analogy for queer Africans' methodology for existing, living and surviving: disruptive, ambiguous, and deeply aware of the stakes of visibility and non-conformity.

My queer body acts as an oppositional gaze, borrowing from bell hooks, where the gaze is "direct" and "confrontational, as gestures of resistance, challenging authority" (hooks, 2012:288). This confrontational gaze does not intend hostility but seeks to bring what is hidden into full view, forcing acknowledgement. Through being queer in African storytelling forms and resurrecting queer African (hi)stories, I employ this gaze, one that asserts agency and resists dominant narratives (hooks, 2012:289). As hooks writes, "'Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality" (hooks, 2012:289).

In folktales, animals are used as generalising tropes to portray "stereotypes of behaviour, feelings, attitudes, etc." (Canonici, 1996:90). This distancing technique reflects human behaviour without directly accusing anyone, allowing the audience to recognise their own actions or those around them through the animal's behaviour. This technique is what I aim to employ in my storytelling, using the oppositional gaze to challenge the queerphobic lens on queer Africans, reflecting it back to the audience until the reality is changed.

Queer Africa

Pumla Dineo Gqola (in Martin & Xaba, 2013:1) notes that "being queer in Africa, a queer Africa, and queering Africa are not the same across time, borders, and internal boundaries,"

[29] A Xhosa proverb meaning 'A person is a person through other people' and is used as a definition for 'ubuntu' (humanity).

despite queerness always involving identity and perspective. Stella Nyanzi (in Matebeni, 2014:65) argues that the "South African lenses cannot be the only frames" through which queer Africans make sense of their lives. To queer "Queer Africa," she insists, one must reclaim Africa's diversity and reinsert queerness. This approach guides my mission to re-utter the stories of queer Africans across the continent, avoiding the dominant South African narrative often seen as a queer utopia, despite ongoing violence such as the "corrective" rape of Black lesbians (Rademeyer, 2012:274).

Nyanzi (in Matebeni, 2014:66) raises the question: "Is it my African-ness or my queerness that is lacking?" This highlights the tension between being African and queer, where queer Africans are often labelled as "un-African." Muñoz's theory of disidentification (1999) addresses the marginalised experience of existing both "inside and outside dominant ideology," describing it as a strategy to rethink and re-circuit exclusionary cultural messages (Muñoz, 1999:31). Performance, which he describes as a "utopian blueprint for a possible future" (Muñoz, 1999:200), becomes a way to both retrace fragments of the past and imagine a queer utopia, even if fleeting (Muñoz, 2009:99).

Performance-led research, rather than anthropology or sociology, is my chosen method for envisioning a queer future. Performance allows for moments of imaginings that are real, touchable and can challenge dominant social scripts (Rademeyer, 2012:275). Performance, as "liveness," offers glimpses of utopia – temporary enactments of new social orders, configurations of queerness, African-ness, and queer African-ness that challenge the present while envisioning a future (Dolan, 2005:17).

Munoz refines the idea of utopia as a horizon that constantly recedes, requiring ongoing work. This concept, tied to restoring collective queer memory, presents utopia as a state of flux and a dynamic goal. Utopia, like performance, is "out of time" (Grosz in Dolan, 2005:14) and ideal for imagining new configurations of gender, kinship, and queer African identity (Rademeyer, 2012:276). Through performance, queer Black bodies can reconfigure and realise these new social orders, making utopia momentarily real, where queerness and African-ness are no longer opposites. This allows us to explore "what the limits of imaginability might be," transforming futility into futurity (Butler, 2004:117).

Men With Broken Wrists: Storing Versus Storying

I struggle to claim 'queer' or 'African' because these parts of me often feel in conflict. I explored this tension between black African-ness and queerness in 2021, in my final-year production of my undergraduate Theatre & Performance degree titled *Men with Broken Wrists* (*MWBW*), which veered into performance art. The title came from my fascination with Kopano Maroga's poem *Jesus Thesis* (2020), where Maroga imagines Jesus as a homosexual man: "jesus had wrists so limp they had to nail them straight" (Maroga, 2020:14, lines 10-11). Maroga, a queer artist who is part of my queer genealogy, a former academic tutor and graduate of the same Master's program I am in now, inspired much of *MWBW*. In the production, we explored spaces where black gay men did not feel they belonged, such as barbershops. We queered the church by naming the sermon *No Easter Sunday for Queers* – after Koleka Putuma's poem, performing an essay I had written, and we invoked gay men who were murdered due to their visibility. We also referenced queer South African icons like Simon Nkoli and Kewpie, who are less publicly celebrated than cisgendered heterosexual struggle heroes. Thinking in hindsight, perhaps this action in *MWBW* was inspired by *Woza Albert!*[30], particularly the scene where Mbongeni and Percy call out to and resurrect the martyred heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle.

In 2021, I began engaging with critical fabulations, counter-narratives, and impossible stories. My exploration through *MWBW* was focused on storying moments in time as a means of storing moments in time. Devising at the limit of the impossible, "… of the unspeakable and the unknown", *MWBW* mimed the violence of the archive and attempted to redress it by "describing as fully as possible the conditions that determine the appearance of" queer Africans in the archive and that which dictates our silence in the archive (Hartman, 2008b:1). Because there was not much information to work on, we creatively and imaginatively "filled" in the gaps. We did this not as a claim of what did happen in the past but as a speculation of what could have happened. In starting that process, I thought it was such a radically innovative idea; "… to write our now as it is interrupted by this past, and to imagine a free state, not as the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future" of a queer-friendly Africa (Hartman, 2008b:4). We engaged with our experiences in hypermasculine spaces, queering them in different ways. In the barbershop, we transformed it into a voguing dance sequence. In

[30] A South African play by Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa and Barney Simon.

the church, we queered it through a reading of Maroga's *Jesus Thesis*. We also created a moment of tenderness between two men that was not coded in sexuality. Playing hide-and-seek became a metaphor for seeking queer kinship while in the closet. We even held a party for queer people that ended with all of them being killed, a gesture I continue in the Medium project. We invoked the name of Lonwabo Jack, a gay man who was murdered on his 22nd birthday. Despite creating happy moments, this joy was always tied to trauma—whether it was not being seen as a 'man' in the barbershop, Christian trauma linked to homophobic Bible verses, or the constant presence of hate crimes. We tried to liberate queer people from their trauma, but the joy we found remained inseparable from it. *MWBW* attempted to free queer Africans "from the obscene descriptions that first introduced them to us" (Hartman, 2008b:6), but we ended up reproducing the violence we sought to counter.

Through this master's program, my dream has been to (re)create lived experiences where queer Africans are seen as ordinary, not extraordinary. I long for the mundane, where queer people don't need to be exceptional to gain basic respect and citizenship. *Maybe if I can (re)trace everyday queerness, then I can (re)produce it in the present. Maybe that will qualify my existence.*

Although *MWBW* lends its title to this research, I have only begun to understand the extent of its influence on my current praxis. At the time, I was preoccupied with filling archival gaps through speculative gestures. I now view *MWBW* as my first critical encounter with the limits of representation, especially concerning queerness and trauma. The performance taught me that to "story" queer lives is not simply to visibilise them, but to attend to the politics of how they are made visible and at what cost. The inevitability of loss, violence, and spectacle haunted our attempt to centre queer joy. This tension, between wanting to celebrate queer life and the compulsion to re-stage queer suffering, continues to echo through my work. I now see *MWBW* as the origin point for my methodology, one that initiated my shift from simply storing memory to storying it, and from storying to restorying. Through that process, I began to grasp the ambivalence of critical fabulation, not just as a radical creative tool, but as a risky one – capable of reinscribing the same violences it seeks to unsettle. This recognition did not invalidate the work but sharpened my desire to reframe queer African lives not as tragic exceptions or symbolic sacrifices, but as ordinary, living, breathing presences. That shift (from exceptionality to ordinariness, from spectacle to the everyday) is the heart of my current research and creative practice.

Performing Your Research

For the Master of Arts in Theatre and Performance (coursework and dissertation) at the University of Cape Town, we have to present a series of theatrical events that operate in tandem with the ongoing research that we are conducting. These projects are, namely, the Minor Project, the Medium Project, the One-Person Show (treated as a brief respite/departure from the research) and the Thesis Performance. Earlier in 2023, our Masters class was tasked with performing our research, a precursor to the minor project. We were instructed to use a single item that represented our research. I chose a do-rag, commonly associated with black hypermasculine men in America; men stereotyped as tough, brutish, and hyper-hetero-masculine. However, to me, the do-rag represents softness, care, joy, and patience. This contrast between hypermasculinity and the feminine-coded practice of hair care intrigued me.

My performance was a kind of reprisal of *Men with Broken Wrists* (*MWBW*) and an expression of my research. I used audio from a clip of Ugandan Pastor Martin Ssempa, who spreads disinformation about homosexuality, claiming that homosexuals are corrupting African values and "eat the poo-poo of our children" (W0LFVISI0N, 2010). In my performance, this clip is remixed with Gqom music (a bass-heavy genre from Durban, South Africa), and I, as a queer black person, dance to this satirical track.

The performance starts with me covering my face with the do-rag to create anonymity, symbolising that queerness has no specific face or race. I then doff my jacket, turning its hood into imaginary long hair, evoking childhood memories of playing with clothes and imagining a boy falling for me. I begin voguing along a path where the audience is seated on either side – like a traverse stage, treating it like a runway, staring directly at audience members through the do-rag. This creates a dynamic where they not only watch me but also watch each other as they are seated across from one another, reinforcing a sense of surveillance.

The staging of the performance as a traverse was a deliberate invocation of surveillance, both as a social reality for queer people and as a structuring device of the performance. The moment where I vogued while staring at audience members through the semi-obfuscating do-rag forced them into a kind of relational discomfort where they were not just watching me, but were aware that they were being watched by others watching them. This setup mirrored the Big Brother gaze that queer people often live under; the societal pressure to monitor one's gestures, voice,

clothing, and presence as a means of survival. In this sense, surveillance functioned on two levels: (1) internally, as the self-regulating performance of gender and sexuality, and (2) externally, as the audience's participation in that very act of watching, policing, and being watched. Although surveillance can be oppressive, in this performance, I wield it. For once, surveillance did not erase me but, instead, became something I performed into, reflected back onto the audience, and ultimately reclaimed as a tool of agency. In this performance, surveillance was not incidental or a byproduct, but rather an explicit dramaturgical strategy that highlighted the complicated relationship between performance, identity, and spectatorship.

At the end, I transform the do-rag into a necktie, then a noose. This act is not about glorifying suicide but symbolises control, taking ownership of my life and narrative. It reflects defiance as if saying, *If I'm going to die, let it be on my own terms*.

This simulation of suicide gave me insights into control, agency and resistance, particularly for queer African people. It represented for me, a reclamation of agency where I subverted society's control of queer lives by taking the narrative (my own life) into my own hands, taking ownership. Through that act, I challenged the voyeuristic consumption of queer trauma and queer death, invoking that oppositional gaze and having the audience come face-to-face with their complicity in the spectacle of queer suffering. I used surveillance and complicity to unsettle the audience. I mimed the very real stakes of queer existence under systemic violence and, through this, also confronted the audience with their role in the spectacle of queer death. I cast them as watchers where their looking implicated them as witnesses to, and participants in, the harm that was taking place before their eyes while they said and did nothing. In this way, surveillance and complicity were entangled. The audience's configuration (literally across from each other, looking through me) reflected the daily scrutiny that queer Africans are subjected to. Yet in this configuration, they could no longer look without being seen looking. I bring up bell hooks' oppositional gaze again here, where the gaze becomes a site of resistance, not only for me as the performer but also one that challenges the voyeuristic nature of spectatorship. The performance insisted on holding the gaze until it broke, until the watching became its own kind of violence. Doing this was an attempt at transforming the audience's surveillance into a moment of critical self-awareness, where their complicity in the consumption of queer pain was exposed and, hopefully, unsettled.

This performance was also connected to my interest in futurity where death is not an end by reimagined as a form of resistance and (re)storying, allowing for the possibility of alternative queer futures beyond the current oppressive realities. This is in alignment with José Estaban Muñoz's disidentification theory, where negative representations are repurposed for resistance and empowerment. *Sidebar: I wonder if I should have a character named Jose Istabane Muñoz in the future.* The configuration of the audience invited them to participate in a mutual surveillance, putting them at the centre of the constant scrutinization of queer people. The durag represented an interplay between power and vulnerability, trauma and joy, allowing for a layered understanding of the queer African experience. Ultimately, the insights I drew from this performance were that I should explore the reclaiming of cultural objects and spaces, performative acts of resistance and futility versus futurity.

The Enqueery

The Enqueery was my Minor Project and the culmination of 'Performing Your Research'[31]. In the Minor Project, we continue to perform our research but also present our initial thoughts, feelings, and findings regarding the research interest.

The performance began before the audience entered. The venue, a storage room in the P4 studio, had a sign on the door reading "The Dying Room," referencing Hartman's idea that "the archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body" (Hartman, 2008b:2). However, once inside, the audience found a living room, filled with scattered papers (personal letters from one man to his man lover, magazine clippings, pictures of dead queer people etc.), indicating a space where history is recorded, reconstructed, and (re)stored through the living.

The room symbolised the archive, but in this personal space, my own violated body was on display, engaging with other queer bodies, past and present. Through citations of text and images, I illustrated how I have relied on others' representations of queerness to fashion my own identity and understanding. I cite more than I write because I have limited knowledge. The first act of citation occurred as the audience watched me build a structure using bricks, flowers,

[31] A module in the MA program where we are tasked with performing our research topic, a precursor to the minor project.

and magazine cuttings while reciting, *Intyatyambo iyaphuma engxondorheni*—a reference to both an isiXhosa proverb and Tandile Mbatsha's work on queerness in violent spaces (Mbatsha, 2021:28). Mbatsha is part of my queer genealogy, as is Kopano Maroga, both of whom have graduated from this same Master's program, symbolising the ongoing recovery of queer archives and dreaming of queer futurities. Another key citation was voguing, which, like Mbatsha's work, is a form of queer space-making and resilience, representing "beauty [that] can emerge from unfavourable places" as voguing emerged in the United States at a time when it was dangerous to be queer (Mbatsha, 2021:27).

Figure 2: Fire Pit of Flowers #1. This was a draft of what the fire pit of flowers eventually became. The brown paper was replaced with real flowers and newspaper + magazine cuttings as well as the printed letters of Simon Nkoli

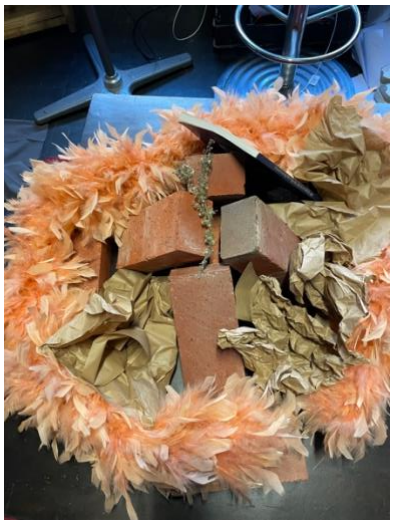

Figure 1: Fire Pit of Flowers #1. This was a draft of what the fire pit of flowers eventually became. The feather boa and brown paper was replaced with real flowers and newspaper and magazine cuttings as well as the printed letters of Simon Nkoli

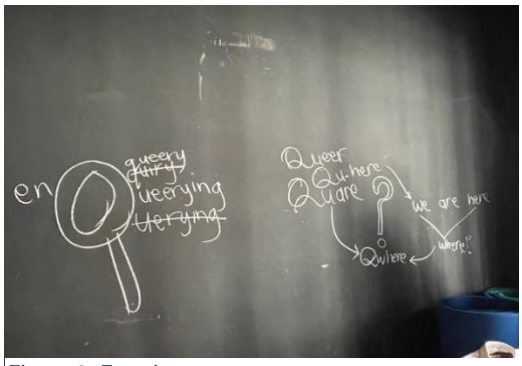

Figure 3: Enquiry, query, queer

After building the flower-filled fire pit, I grabbed a piece of chalk and began scribbling the words "query," "(en)querying," and "queer," experimenting with their spellings (see figure 3). "Query" became "queery," "(en)querying" transformed into "(en)queerying". I played with the

tension between “queer” and its verbalised vernacular forms, such as “quare,” which comes from “the African American vernacular for queer” (Johnson, 2001:2); “queer” morphed into various forms like “qu.here,” “quare,” and “qwhere.” These transformations reflected my current state of research: constantly searching, questioning, tracing, and trying to be present while unsure of where to look.

Something worth noting is that I keep returning to childhood games as a way to enter this research. This was not a deliberate choice or something influenced by Mbatsha’s work, but rather a recurring theme that I unconsciously revisit. In *Men With Broken Wrists*, I had the performers play Hide-and-Seek. For the Performing Your Research module, I played with tops and jackets as hair, and in the minor project, I used *Is’qendu*. I’m not sure if there’s a non-Xhosa or non-Nguni equivalent for *Is’qendu*, but The DlalA Project (n.d.) describes it as a form of storytelling played across Southern Africa, also called *Ukuxoxa*, meaning “to discuss.” This game encourages children to express themselves freely through storytelling, using stones or pens to narrate stories, while observers can ask questions or seek clarity.

I used this game to channel my frustrations with research, dedicating a house to my supervisors, another to the University of Cape Town, and a third to Zer021, a local gay bar. Each entity is given a house because (1) *Is’qendu* is played by creating a community through drawing houses, each representing someone or something, and narrating the events that unfold. It is similar to *The Sims* – a computer role-playing game, and ‘Sims’ is short for simulations – where I control the narrative. (2) The game is fully improvised, allowing me to dictate what happens, revealing the opportunity to me to consider it an indigenous Southern African form of fabulation where I shape the story. (3) This becomes my chance to “act out” my frustrations. I chose these entities because they represent the stakeholders of my research: the supervisors and institution, expecting academic and artistic output, and Zer021, which symbolises the tension between my queerness, its examination under a microscope and, ironically, to the aforementioned, a space of freedom from my queerness being scrutinised.

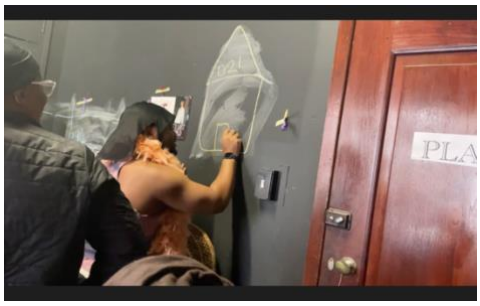

Figure 4: Freddy Nyezi playing Is'qendu using chalk on the walls

One way I wanted the audience to engage with my frustration was through a version of *Hangman*. The plan was to ask them to think of words in their own languages that meant 'homosexual' and then try to guess the word I had in mind. Of course, they would guess wrong, and in true *Hangman* fashion, the stick figure man would be hanged, forcing the audience to confront the fact that it was their fault. Ultimately, I did not include this due to time constraints and the unpredictability of the game, especially since I had not practised it with an audience. I aimed to convey the feeling of "oh, this is rigged" to the audience and share my frustration with not being able to articulate myself fully in my mother tongue. This stems from my experience with non-English words for 'gay' that are often derogatory, like *moffie* (Afrikaans), *istabane* (isiXhosa), and *pede* (Lingala).

Something I hoped to explore further, at this point, in my research is the emergence of "indigenous gay register[s]" (Ntuli, 2009:10) like *isiNgqumo* and *Gayle*, where African queer people have invented or repurposed words in their home languages to articulate their queer experiences. This concept of linguistic self-fashioning is a tool I plan to use in my speculative fiction thesis performance. Exploring *isiNgqumo*, not just in its linguistic form but in its social use, can unearth "relevant and significant stories and lifestyles of Nguni homosexual men that must be told and explored" (Ntuli, 2009:9).

Figure 5: Hang Man on the Wall (a drafted idea during rehearsal that did not make it to the final version of the performance)

I manifested feelings of frustration, futility, and "oh, this is rigged" in the performance using balloons. Each audience member was asked to blow up a balloon. While they admired the bright, pretty colours and felt proud of breathing life into the balloons, I went around and popped each one. This was a reference to something we had done in *MWBW.* The act of blowing life into something references the biblical story of Adam and Eve, where God breathed life into them after forming them from dust. The intention behind this was for the audience to experience the loss of something you have spent some time creating, filling and fulfilling carefully with this being an analogy for the queer lives that get taken abruptly. The colours chosen for the balloons were ones specifically found in both the South African and the LGBT+ flags, which made the ending of those lives even more real for the audience, as the colours were recognisable.

For me, the minor project was about (re)tracing queer histories. This was made clear when I interacted with a timeline (pictured in Figure 6). In a literal sense, it involved looking back and finding moments where queer people existed but were not explicitly documented. Simon Nkoli, for example, an LGBT+ and HIV activist, was present at the Soweto Uprising in 1976, but this is rarely mentioned. Part of this omission stems from the focus on Hector Peterson but also from the respectability politics among freedom fighters who believed that queer issues were secondary and did not contribute positively to the image of blackness, the black struggle, and black liberation.

Figure 6: (Re) Entering the Closet / burying myself in a stor(y)age space / in an archival tomb, appearing only as dates on a timeline

Because the minor project was only the beginning of the Master's program, the journey from searching, re-searching and researching to finding and making is arduous. I expressed this by writing 'isende' on the wall. Just above this, there is a little placard that reads 'touch'. In this context, 'isende' means 'the testicle'. Because of this, the audience reads "touch isende" and they laugh (refer to Figure 7 below). This is an intentional gesturing towards the hypersexualisation of queer people. I add another word below this: 'lendlela' (this road/journey). Now that these two scribbled words are next to each other, the meaning has changed to "this journey is long" (refer to Figure 8 below). 'isende' changes meaning because it is a conjugation of "-nde", or "long". This is now a comment on the journey I embark on to uncover, discover and recover.

Figure 7: Touch. isende / touch the testicle.

Figure 8: Isende lendlela / the journey [ahead] is long

The climax of the performance is me screaming at a fan. Before this moment, I urged the audience to collect with me; "*Ndicediseni, haibo. Qokelelani!*" We collected the papers and collated them on the table where the fire pit of flowers had been constructed. I then switch a fan on. Here, the expectation was that the fan would blow everything away and make a huge

mess, though the execution was the opposite. While the fan is still blasting, I turn to it and scream at the top of my lungs. I feel here that this is not just a performance, I really do feel the frustration and helplessness in engaging in this research: *"Can I really effect change?" "What is this all for?"* The audience is quiet, and I think to myself that they can feel my frustration. They are suspended at this moment in this contagion of frustration. The audience needs to leave. I stop screaming and stand by the door – they heed the non-verbal cue. Warona Seane (a lecturer and supervisor) hugs me. I am alone in the room. The only thought in my mind is Hartman's words: "I am unsure if it is possible to salvage an existence from a handful of words" (2008a:137).

Making, creating and writing at the limit

In that moment of screaming at the fan, I might have been weighed down by the burden of postmemory, grappling with the gravity of engaging in this work. I often use the word "futility" to describe this feeling, and that is exactly what it is. Growing up, I carried the weight of resenting my queerness, being ridiculed for it, and feeling culturally displaced. I also bear the responsibility of re-membering—not just my own experiences of being disowned and brutalised as a queer African but also the lives of past queer Africans who seem to re-live within me in visceral, psychic, and intangible ways. Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as an "imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (Hirsch, 2012), where the "generation after" bears witness to the trauma of those who came before through stories and images that are inherited so deeply that they feel like one's own memories.

This inherited memory leaves me in constant mourning, longing for a time when my existence was not seen as un-African, for a world where our identities were not criminalised. In a world where we are constantly under threat, speculative fiction becomes "a form of compensation or even as reparations, perhaps the only kind we will ever receive" (Hartman, 2008b:4). I now realise that my motives may not be entirely altruistic—I want compensation, reparations, and retribution. I long to "write a new story" that exceeds the fictions of history and the constraints of the archive (Hartman, 2008b:9). My goal is not just about redressing the past politically; it is about seeking closure and finding queer people in history to justify my own existence.

THE MEDIUM PROJECT: YINTO YANGASESE.

Yinto yangasese is a Xhosa idiom said when a matter can only be discussed privately. The idiom finds roots in the term *indlu yangasese* which denotatively means "private house", but the connotation/inference is that it is a bathroom. This is the title that I had chosen for my Medium Project[32] because I wanted to stage the theatrical event in the men's bathroom, where defining lines between private and public were blurred. I felt that this spoke to an aspect of my research (queerness) in two direct ways: (1) bathrooms as popular cruising[33] sites for gay men and (2) homosexuality being treated as a hush-up topic that cannot be discussed openly or, at least, in the presence of children. The latter reason is connected to a significant part of my research interest, using folktales as a way of re–stor(y)ing queer Africans. Beyond just using African indigenous means of stor(y)ing and transmitting knowledge, folktales contain the power to make innocent the things that have been thought to be adulterated[34].

Cistems and cisterns

I borrow 'cistem' from Nigel Patel (2017:51):

> By cistem[35] I refer to the systematised power which oppresses, subjugates, and marginalises transgender people. Hence the structural sex segregation of bathroom spaces creates problems for those who are viewed as being at odds with a cistem characterised by a sex-gender binary.

Not only was the men's bathroom an opportunity to blur the line between the private and the public, but it also produced interesting friction between the genders of the audience and who was 'allowed' in the space. A juxtaposition between two things dawned on me in hindsight: (1) self-identifying 'gender critics' who violently attack and try to expose women in bathrooms as trans, demanding that they either leave the bathroom or prove their womanhood. That is, they

[32] The Medium Project is the halfway stop between the Minor and the Thesis Performance.
[33] 'Cruising' is a colloquial term used in the MSM gay community to describe a man's pursuit of a sexual partner in public spaces, usually a bathroom.
[34] (I use 'adulterated' here deliberately for its root word: 'adult' as if conversations that centre queerness are reserved for adults only). I also use it for its definition; to be impure, contaminated, and corrupt. This is in contrast with 'unadulterated' which is synonymous with being pure, untouched, uncontaminated, virginal and innocent.
[35] Nigel Patel's adapted spelling of 'system'.

need to prove that they were born with a vagina as if *indawo yangasese*[36] defines womanhood. (2) at Xhosa initiation schools[37], abakhwetha[38] declare their manhood before getting their foreskin cut off. In both spaces, you have to be the correct gender to gain entry.

Yinto Yangasese starts with the audience standing outside the men's bathroom. As they enter, they are handed a "church" pamphlet. On one side of the pamphlet is the image of Lonwabo Jack (among others – each flyer comes with its own image of a murdered gay black man), a 22-year-old black gay man who was murdered on his birthday. I chose those men not because their stories are more important than others, but because they represent the many queer South Africans whose lives are cut short by gay bashing, and whose deaths are often reduced to statistics or forgotten altogether. Their photos on the pamphlet serves as a form of memorialisation, an attempt at refusing erasure/amnesia and inserting their faces into a ritual space that traditionally excludes or condemns queer people. The "church" pamphlet mimics those handed out at religious gatherings, but here it subverts the form: instead of salvation, it announces a truth often ignored. It calls the audience into a kind of mourning and recognition before the performance even begins, rooting the work in the real consequences of queerphobia. The other side of the pamphlet is pictured below:

In this offering titled Yinto Yangasese, I search, re-search and research. I am tracing the fragments of the past to discover and uncover the queer people who have come before me, the ones whose stories and lives have been deposited into an archival tomb. Using various modes of storytelling (a sermon, friends chatting, intsomi), I grapple with the pieces of the past that present themselves to me; interlacing my personal experiences as well as contemporary texts by queer authors which help me look back. This offering, laden with citations, is a genealogy of my queer ancestors.

The Preacher for Today's Mass:

Father: Freddy Nyezi

Today's Word:

Songs of Sodomy. The chapter titled Jesus Thesis written by the Prophet Kopano Maroga, peace be upon them.

Collective Amnesia written by Prophet Koleka Putuma.

Venus in Two Acts by Prophet Saidiya Hartman, peace be upon them.

Today's Hymnal:

Hymnal 1 of 1, number 1, the only 1

This is our God (This is our God)

The serving Queen (The serving Queen)

He calls us now to follow Him (to follow Him)

To bring our lives as a daily offering

Of worship to the serving Queen (the serving Queen)

Choristers:

Kewpie (of Seth Cloete)

Pinky Pinky (of Tshiamo Maloka)

Simon Nkoli (of Mahle Dlambula)

Figure 9: The inside of the pamphlets handed to audience members

[36] Xhosa term for 'private part'

[37] A rite of passage for Xhosa boys where they are taken to an initiation school and are taught how to be men. They get circumcised at these schools.

[38] Xhosa term for 'initiates'

The audience enters the bathroom, walking in on me in the corridor, writing on an A3 page that was stuck to the wall. They proceed past me and watch the other cast members[39] playing something that resembles childhood games, which briefly go awry, but the players resolve their issue and continue playing. They repeat this sequence several times. As more audience members enter, there is less space for them to stand and witness as the cast blocks the audience from standing in their 'play space'.

Once everyone is in, I join the rest of the cast at the bottom of the stairs, we look at the audience and say, "*Yithi ndiyindoda*,"[40] a sentence said to Xhosa initiates which they must respond to with "*Ndiyindoda!*" in this moment of symbolic and physical transition into manhood as their foreskin gets cut off. The experience is the same for this audience, sans the foreskin cutting. Declaring that they are men means being granted access to the rest of the playing space (whether they identify as such or not). This did two things:

1. It barred the non-men people in the space and meant that they had to declare something that they were not to get access. This would yield interesting instances of creative resistance, where, for example, once Warona Seane[41] responded with "Uyindoda[42]." This statement validated my own manhood instead of ascribing ubudoda [43] to herself, even after seeing other people claim it. This could be read as a tension between who she is and who she was being asked to be. This was also an interesting linguistic moment because "Yithi Uyindoda" can be understood as:
    i. "Say the words: 'I'm a man'" and,
    ii. "Tell me that I am a man."

I was staging a ritual of gendered access by asking audience members to say "*Ndiyindoda"*. To be granted access, audience members had to speak into a system that they may not believe in or belong to, mirroring the everyday demands placed on people who do not conform to gender norms to *declare* themselves legible within cis-heteronormative systems. Seane's response became a radical refusal to self-identify while still participating in the moment. Seane's response, which I can only refer to as a radical refusal to self-identify, meant that she was still

[39] Seth Cloete, Mahle Dlambulo and Tshiamo Maloka
[40] Translates to: "Say 'I'm a man'" in isiXhosa.
[41] a lecturer and supervisor
[42] Translates to: "You are a man" in isiXhosa.
[43] manhood

able to participate in the moment, destabilising the power dynamic by both acknowledging my manhood (or, rather, the performance thereof) and side-stepping her own misidentification. This linguistic slippage revealed the instability of the declaration itself: who gets to speak, who is spoken for, and who is left outside. The scene thus exposed the violence embedded in institutionalised rites of passage, where only certain bodies are granted access when they perform the "correct" identity. But it also opened up space for creative, queer resistance where complicity was not the only option. In this way, the politics of declaration in *Yinto Yangasese* were not just about accessing space, but about challenging the conditions under which one is allowed to *belong*.

2. It barred people who outwardly expressed themselves as men (and may have gone through the Xhosa cultural practice of initiation) and required them to declare their manhood. Here:
    a. It was read as a doubting of their manhood that they had to reassert
    b. As per feedback I received from Mandla Mbothwe[44], it returned and re-placed them in a moment where they once had to do this rite of passage and now were re-performing it.
        i. There is a lot of secrecy that is maintained around what happens at initiation school, and my requesting that they declare *ubudoda babo*[45] was me making public this secret private thing within a private-public space designated only for men.
    c. They were only allowed access to the space once they announced that they were men (even though it might have seemed obvious to some).

[44] One of two of my supervisors
[45] Translates to: "Their manhood" in isiXhosa.

No Easter Sunday for Queers

Figure 10: The Beginning of the church fragment. 'The Serving Queen' is being sung and the pastor is conducting.

The church service that I stage (and this chapter) draw their name and provocation from Koleka Putuma's poem *No Easter Sunday for Queers*, which critiques the church's violent erasure of queer lives through its doctrine, rituals, and silences. Like Putuma, I stage the church not as a sanctuary but as a site of exclusion, where queer people are simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible and are present only to be condemned. While Putuma's poem is text-based, my iteration reimagines this critique through embodied performance (I do not mention her play of the same name as my influence was from the poem and not the play). The performance queered Christian liturgy by integrating voguing, testimony, and the reading of queer texts like Kopano Maroga's *Jesus Thesis*. While honouring Putuma's influence, *Yinto Yangasese* departs from her poem in form as it uses the church service itself as a live, participatory critique. By making referece to her work, I situate my own work within a lineage of black queer South African resistance and show that the critique I offer is not unique or new, but ongoing and shared.

After everyone is initiated into the space, we transition into a church fragment and start singing a hymn borrowed from Seth Cloete's church. The church and its themes of ritual and offering operate as a key performative element in my research, particularly in how it intersects with the vulnerability of sharing one's story. By adapting the familiar structure of a hymn, we disrupt traditional religious spaces and their attendant meanings and "queer" spiritual practices, which

resonates with the broader framework of my research. The hymn ("This is our God") is reworked to emphasise a "Serving Queen" rather than a King, subverting the view that the Christian God is a (heterosexual) man, another instance of queering. The church setting itself is a culturally loaded symbol, especially in Africa, where religious narratives are often used to marginalise queer Africans.

Handing out toilet paper as the "offering" and using a hand-drying machine (pictured below) as a collection box is a deliberate subversion of traditional church practices. Instead of typical tithes, the congregation is invited to offer their secrets, vulnerabilities, or personal stories; materialising the act of sharing and exposing one's identity in a queer space. The offering becomes both a metaphor and a literal act of communal vulnerability, central to my research's focus on how we (re)story and (re)store queer narratives through performance. The balloon blowing, an act of breathing life – like God blew life into Adam and Eve, further ties to my exploration of how African queer identities can be revived and reclaimed. This section also enacts the tension between surrender and control as the audience is asked to participate in a ritual but is unsure of its direction. In a way, they are asked to surrender to the narrative and to have faith in me, the narrator. This mirrors the relationship that people have with formal archives and their custodians, except our performance is a repertoire. I explore how queer people can reclaim spiritual and cultural spaces that have been used to oppress us, and I do this by queering the church. This is in line with my larger endeavour of (re)store and (re)story African queer histories.

Figure 11: Offerings in/and the Hand-Dryer

Balloons are a central motif in these theatrical events, appearing across *Men With Broken Wrists*, *The Enqueery* and now *Yinto Yangasese*. In each of these projects, the balloons represent

the precarity and the fragility of queer life; the ease with which precious life can be destroyed, evoking the reality of queerphobic violence and the systemic erasure of queer people's histories. The act of inflating and popping balloons remind us viscerally how quickly life can be taken, much like the precarious existence of queer individuals who face constant threats to their identity and safety. The balloons as a motif are a metaphor for the fragility of survival for queer people and highlight the themes of vulnerability and loss that underscore my research.

I intentionally chose balloons for their material properties, preferring them over other soap bubbles that are ephemeral and have short-lived lives. Balloons require a conscious effort to inflate while bubbles form effortlessly and, when they disappear, they do so silently. I especially appreciate the tension that comes from inflating a balloon: the fear of watching the balloon stretch and worrying that it might burst if overinflated. With the inflation of balloons, the concern with their very loud disappearance is present from the moment they are given that breath of life. This mirrors the fear of the precarity of their lives shared by many queer people from the moment they recognise their queerness. The balloon's potential to explode also represents the volatile intersection between visibility and vulnerability. Unlike the bubbles, the balloon does not pop and disappear by itself; it disappears because someone overinflated it. When the balloon pops loudly and violently, it implicates the person who was blowing into it and subjects them to judgment for causing the balloon harm and not knowing how to handle its life. The sudden, startling and violent pop of a balloon is not just a sensory event, it is a radical refusal of the quiet disappearance that often accompanies the deaths of queer people. The balloon's loud burst is a queer death that refuses to vanish and demands to be heard whereas bubbles disappear silently, weightlessly, gently, unremarkably and without a trace. I needed a prop that would rupture the space. Balloons were not an incidental feature in my performance but a methodological choice that encapsulated the themes of resistance, disruption and precarity that are central to my work, and the balloons operated at both an affective and an intellectual level.

In *Yinto Yangasese,* Kopano Maroga's *Jesus Thesis* is treated as scripture rather than as a poem. It is the scripture that we inherit, preach, and pass down. It shapes the world we have built inside the bathroom. By presenting Maroga's poem in the form of religious preaching, much like how a black Nguni preacher would deliver a sermon or praise poem, I blur the lines between the sacred and the speculative. This mirrors how queer African narratives, often relegated to the periphery, can be repositioned at the centre of our lived realities and spiritual

frameworks. The invocation of *Jesus Thesis* as the Word reflects the transformative power of (re)storying queer narratives as central to collective memory and cultural legacy. The treatment of this text as religious scripture is an affirmation of the legitimacy and sanctity of queer stories within African traditions, making it a foundational part of my exploration into how we (re)story and (re)member queer lives within our cultures. This process of turning queer speculative fiction into a guiding narrative reflects my larger goal of reimagining African queer futurity through both performance and storytelling.

Hang Man Homocide[46]

After the church-service fragment, the performance shifts to a modified game of Hangman, where the audience participates using bathroom mirrors and whiteboard markers. While the rules of Hangman remain familiar, there are critical differences: as the audience guesses letters incorrectly, corresponding body parts of the performers begin to shake and "die." With each mistake, the performers lose control of a body part, visually demonstrating the stakes tied to the game. When the stick figure on the gallows is completed, the chorus collapses, symbolising the death of queer lives through being forgotten, erased or murdered. The word to be guessed was *skesana*, meaning 'submissive gay male,' drawn from an isiZulu-based gay argot, isiNgqumo (Ntuli, 2009:11).

Skesana was used intentionally as the word is a linguistic identifier within isiNgqumo-speaking queer circles, signalling sexual role and identity. Asking the audience to guess this word within a game of Hangman positioned them to either recognise queer cultural knowledge or recognise their failure to recognise queer cultural knowledge. The audience struggling to identify the word resulted in the symbolic death of the performers, highlighting the consequences of queer lives being misunderstood, misrecognised, and/or linguistically excluded from hegemonic narratives. This moment was a reminder of how language functions as both a bridge and a gatekeeper, especially because I had, earlier in the performance (i.e., through the earlier "Ndiyindoda" declaration), used language to stage a conditional access to space and manhood. The audience's guessing became a metaphor for society's hesitant and often clumsy engagement with queer existence, where the failure to know or speak our names leads not just to exclusion, but to symbolic (and at times literal) erasure.

[46] This deliberate misspelling of 'homicide' gestures towards the murdering of queer people; it is a portmanteau of 'homosexual' and 'homicide'.

The audience's failure to guess the word prompts my question, "*Nihlekela ntoni? Nibabulele ngoba akhange nifune ukuwakhumbula amagama wabo*" (Why are you laughing? You killed them because you didn't want to remember their names). This moment highlights the audience's complicity in forgetting or misrepresenting queer lives, echoing the ways in which queer histories are buried in the archive. In a later fragment, we have a conversation in another queer South African argot, Gayle. It is "an English and Afrikaans-based argot used primarily by English and Afrikaans-speaking gay men in urban communities" (Ntuli, 2009:4). The point of this was to (1) speak Gayle, a language that was created by gay men for gay men and, (2) to alienate the audience in the same way that we have been alienated as queer Africans.

As the performers lay lifeless, I move between them, calling their names (Kewpie, Pinky-Pinky, Simon), each an invocation of a queer or mythological figure. This symbolic resurrection through naming emphasises one of my research's central aims: to re-utter the names and lives of queer African people, insisting on their visibility and the need for their stories to be remembered. I end this fragment by starting a game of Hide-and-Seek, another tie to play and storytelling as ways of reclaiming queer African histories.

The Intsomi Ball

The cast disappears into the stalls, leaving me with the audience. I doff my blue overalls, revealing myself in nude tights and a top. I pull out a mannequin from the first stall, and the mannequin is wearing an incomplete balloon dress (a reference to Athi-Patra Ruga's *Future White Women of Azania Saga* but also connecting back to my consistent use of balloons in the work). I don this while the same audio from my minor project[47] plays.

The gqom beat drops, and the Intsomi Ball officially starts. The Intsomi Ball is set up like a vogue ball would be set up; there are categories and people 'walk' them. In hindsight, I should have included the audience in this section, but it felt easier to control and conclude if I kept it presentational. The three categories were:

1. Igongqongqo: This is a stock character in isiXhosa folktales. It is a monster. In *Yinto Yangasese*, this category is about the re-animation of the dead. Zombies, mummies and the undead are some of the things that I chant during this time. These are all metaphors for when I take gay men who are buried in the archival tomb and re-present (making

[47] Pastor Ssempa from Uganda talking about anal licking which transitions into a Gqom track

present again) them. When I excavate their stories, they become undead – not alive because they no longer live but they get to return to life.

2. Auto-ethno-graffiti: This name is a portmanteau of 'autoethnography' and 'graffiti'. 'Auto' refers to the self and the personal narrative in public space, 'Ethno' refers to the social/cultural context that the work exists in, and 'Graffiti' refers to the writing and artistic expression of the research.
3. Tired of this shit: This category was an expression of frustration in a comical sense. The frustration with the seeming futility of this project has endured from the minor project.

Ouroboros

As the ball continues, I walk into the audience with my balloon dress and start hugging people individually. With each hug, a balloon is intentionally popped, and I can be heard saying 'Amen,' 'Camagu', and 'Hallelujah' at each pop. This is a callback to the balloon-blowing moment during the church service fragment. Every time a balloon pops, someone's breath of life escapes into the (n)ether, and the choristers are affected physically.

Eventually, I hug the choristers individually and when the balloons pop while hugging them, they die. Once all three are dead, I grab an A3 page from the top of the bathroom and wrap it around a dead body to try to pack it away in one of the cupboards but with little avail, I leave them on the floor. These bodies being packed away like cold cases is a reminder that this moment, this fragment, or *Yinto Yangasese* as a whole, returns the dead to us 'in the very form in which they were driven out of the world' (Foucault, n.d.:284 in Hartman, 2008b:5). Except they are not packed away, they are discarded on the floor along with all the other paper that I (do not) write on.

These past 30 minutes have not been about watching a linear drama happening before your eyes, they have been about the different fragments that have been lifted from the page and (re)staged. "Given the condition in which we find them, the only certainty is that we will lose them again, that they will expire or elude our grasp or collapse under the pressure of inquiry" (Hartman, 2008b:6). And so, "… this is the manner in which they enter history. The dream is to liberate them from the obscene descriptions that first introduced them to us" (ibid.).

Costuming

The costume was a blue overall and a tutu. In the picture below, the tutus are worn over the shoulders to resemble large capes worn by choristers and pastors. If there is a pink item, it is always born by Tshiamo Maloka as his character is Pinky-Pinky. Pinky-Pinky is a figure from South African urban folklore, often described as a malevolent or mischievous spirit, particularly feared by children and young women. The legend of Pinky-Pinky typically centres around school environments, where it is said to prey on girls in bathrooms, often targeting those wearing pink underwear, hence the name. The descriptions of Pinky-Pinky vary, with some tales depicting it as a monstrous creature and others as a ghostly figure. The story of Pinky-Pinky serves as both a cautionary tale and a means of explaining unexplained phenomena or fears in school settings. It has become part of the cultural narrative, illustrating how urban legends can reflect societal anxieties and be used to enforce behavioural norms among children. The blue overall and tutu combination is also interesting to me as takes something that is associated with arduous black male labour and juxtaposes it with something that is associated with delicacy, softness and lightness.

Figure 11: Seth Cloete as Kewpie

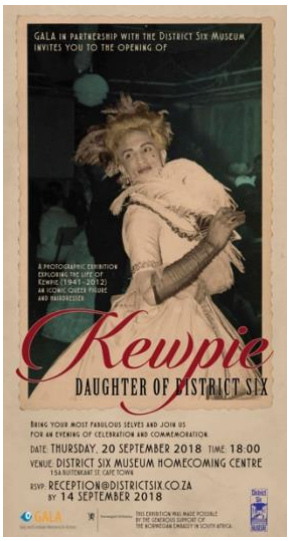

Figure 10: Vision for Cloete's Costume

Figure 13: Tshiamo Maloka as Pinky-Pinky

Figure 12: Mahle Dlambulo as Simon Nkoli

Figure 14: A condom dispenser in the men's bathroom stuffed with plastic plants and flowers.

This installation is a shrine to Simon Nkoli (anti-apartheid, gay rights and AIDS activist) who died of HIV/AIDS. This shrine is also linked to Tandile Mbatsha's *Intyantyambo Iyaphuma Engxondorheni* as it is about flowers growing in an unlikely place. The first time I referenced Mbatsha's work, I used live flowers, but I went with plastic ones this time because they do not die so that, even if Simon passed before he could even see the turn of the century, his legacy and memory will not die.

THE THESIS PERFORMANCE

Diane Taylor (2003) defines the repertoire as encompassing "all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge" (20), such as "spoken language, dance, sports, ritual, [and] gesture" (18). Through this research and in my thesis performance, I employ *intsomi*, in a Taylorian sense, as a living, embodied and performative mode of knowledge that simultaneously exists alongside and contests the colonial archives that have deliberately altered, obscured and obliterated queer African (hi)stories. *Intsomi,* as a storytelling tradition that is performative and orally transmitted, preserves cultural memory through embodied narration, voice, rhythm and gesture. In this performance, *intsomi* does not just form part of the content but is a methodological framework, a way of (hi)story-telling that refuses fixity and, instead, allows for play, metaphor, and multiplicity. *Intsomi* is then positioned as a counternarrative – a counter-archival practice that challenges the hegemony of the colonial archive that has rendered queer African (hi)stories unintelligible. Through *intsomi*, as a repertoire, past queer African lives are not just re-membered but re-performed and re-imagined. They are stored not within written texts but within a body, voice and performance that resists capture and erasure.

In this *ntsomi*, the okapi[48] represents the liminal space that queerness occupies, defying binary classifications imposed by colonisers. Zombies, representing queer people murdered for their identities, are cast as symbols of queer Africans whose legacies persist despite being erased from collective memory. These zombies are "undead," reanimated but not resurrected, challenging the boundaries of life and death. They are an allegory for the undead legacy of queer Africans erased from the collective memory of Africa yet persisting through embodied and spiritual forms of knowledge. They offer an oppositional gaze, a disidentification and a (re)storying of queer African histories. Kristeva's notion of the abject, which disrupts identity and order, plays into this concept. Abjection, Kristeva explains, is connected to bodily fluids and waste, the "defilement" that threatens our boundaries of identity (Kristeva, 1982 in Raine, 2023). Kristeva says that "the abject has only one quality of the object and that is being opposed to I", and so whatever falls beyond the boundary of self is to be "radically excluded" (Kristeva, 1982 in Raine, 2023). The abject is the reaction of disgust and/or horror we have – retching, squirming, holding our breaths, looking away – when we happen upon something that poses a threat to our sense of self. The casting of zombie characters and the okapi speaks to the thing

[48] an animal found in the DRC is related to the giraffe but looks like the combination of a zebra, giraffe and deer.

that those who should be radically excluded are, instead, radically included. The oppositional gaze here is in the community being forced to confront the existence and presence of the zombies. Similarly, non-queer Africans need to reckon with the existence and presence of queer Africans. They need to reckon with the thing they feel threatens their sense of self. While Kristeva's theory of abjection is rooted in psychoanalytic discourse and is often applied to the analysis of (horror) films, I repurpose the concept to draw on its symbolic and affective power. In this ntsomi, the zombies are not mere horror figures but are, instead, affective disruptions (just like the abject), and their role is to unsettle the perceived coherence of the social body. My application (or adaptation) of Kristeva's abjection to the domain of performance and queer African (hi)storytelling explores how queer people (and their bodies) are rended unspeakable, are cast out, and are deemed deviant, monstrous, and a threat to the sense of identity that people have for so long held on to. Even though these zombies, these queer Africans, are radically excluded, they persist within the cultural imagination and remain unresolved and incontainable. This adaptation of Kristeva's abjection is a tool for confronting the normative boundaries around belonging, identity and memory in African contexts.

The tale is framed within a kangaroo court system, where kangaroos represent the biased social judgment that African queer people face. This mob "justice" demonstrates how even in nations like South Africa, where the constitution protects queer people, violence still erupts as people take the law into their own hands. Nursery rhymes and traditional songs, exemplifying the repertoire, are used as tools for transmitting African knowledge while discussing contemporary issues like corrective rape and violence against queer Africans. The okapi is taken to court and judged by kangaroos who represent the term "kangaroo court." One kangaroo even expresses concern for their children, referencing the moral panic created by people like Pastor Ssempa, who claim queer people will "eat the poo-poo of our children". The final lesson is that it is crucial to preserve and honour people's histories because their erasure has real-world consequences; people get killed when their histories are rewritten. Restoring and re-storying history is essential to survival.

The kangaroo court in this *ntsomi* is a metaphor for the informal systems and structures of social control that operate extrajudicially, both alongside and in defiance of the legal system and its protections. In South Africa, and other African contexts, communities take the law into their own hands and consider it their civil right/duty to "discipline" queer Africans as they seem to violate the normative values around sexuality and gender. This instance in the *ntsomi* also

mirrors mob "justice" in that mob violence is often justified by moral outrage. The kangaroos, as self-appointed judges, are metaphors for the perpetrators of hate crimes who believe that their beliefs and actions are morally justified, even though they may contradict the law (and even the references for their own morality). The inclusion of these kangaroos and their court is also to highlight the gap between the lived realities of queer Africans and their constitutional rights, especially within a South African context where religious doctrine, sociocultural perceptions and community enforcement override constitutional/legal protections (which seem to only exist on paper). Thus, the kangaroo court is an allegory for the public and extrajudicial display of judgement where queer Africans are not only denounced but deemed killable through a collective adjourning of justice and empathy.

The idea of staging this *ntsomi* within a creche setting is a juxtaposition of the innocence of childhood and the brutality of queerphobic violence. The performance could follow a day in the life of a creche, where the audience, cast as children, participates in songs, *intsomi*, riddles (iiRaai-Raai), and nursery rhymes (izicengcelezo). This is a Trojan horse as the audience enters the space feeling a kind of familiarity with it as it is coded as innocent and playful only for them to be unsettled by the confrontation of the realities of violence and erasure committed against queer Africans. These Xhosa oral traditions are used to reflect black African ways of transmitting knowledge. The song "Umzi Watsha (a house is burning)" is transformed into a story about an immolated queer couple, while "intloko, amagxa, amadolo neenzwane (head, shoulders, knees and toes)" could recount the brutal violence of corrective rape and dismemberment. These reworked nursery rhymes act as grim restatements, reinforcing the impact of the stories they follow. They are also performative modes of knowledge transmission as they are rooted in affective memory that employs rhythm, melody and embodiment – central components of the repertoire.

The inclusion of Xhosa oral traditions like *izicengcelezo* is central to reclaiming queer African identity and disrupting colonial legacies. Rather than using an accusatory tone or sloganeering, the oral traditions allow me to engage audiences without direct confrontation, fostering a space for dialogue and challenging misconceptions about queerness in Africa. By distancing the audience through *intsomi*, I can layer critique through form, tradition and metaphor, inviting the audience to engage critically while avoiding hostility, knowing that direct confrontation might close people off to change. This fosters a space where the audience can reckon with harsh truths while being held within the container of familiarity of cultural memory. The ultimate

goal is to restore queer Africans as part of Africa's cultural and collective memory. Not only does *intsomi* allow me to reinsert queerness into African narratives but it allows me to reveal that queerness has always been present, just spoken in different metaphors, codes and silences. Drawing on intsomi and oral tradition is not just a methodological choice but a political and spiritual one, too, reconnecting queerness with Africanness in ways that resist colonial and/or hegemonic epistemologies.

I no longer want to be queer first before I am African – my aim is to reinsert queerness into the African narrative, not as an outsider, but as an integral part of it. Through Xhosa oral traditions, I want to emphasise the importance of preserving histories to prevent real-world violence, aiming to (re)store and reinsert queerness into Africa's cultural memory. I speak about the work like this because I imagine it outside of the academic context, where it can actually bring about change; in people's beliefs, in their attitudes, a decrease in the number of queer people who get murdered, a new/renewed understanding of queer Africans as African. I no longer want to be queer first before I am African. If anything, the world reads me as black (African) first before it reads me as queer. I no longer want to feel like a visitor in my own home.

CONCLUSION

In reflecting on my research, I have come to realise that my motivations are not entirely rooted in abolition or the dismantling of oppressive structures, though that may be a by-product. Rather, my aim is to belong, to say, "Hey, see me and accept me as part of this world." My intention has not been to radically queer the world but to reveal that queerness is already an intrinsic part of it. It has been about "a fuck you to the canon" and "a middle finger to the erasure" but not to the archive (Putuma, 2020:81). Archives do not have agency and do not construct themselves. If anything, through this research, I have found myself turning to the archive as "medicine […] to heal years of silence", as a weapon "to exorcise a lineage of silence", and as a site to write, make and create a doctrine that will deliver other African queers and me from the ills of silencing" and archival death (Putuma, 2020:81). My research is not simply a protest against the exclusion of queer people; it is a reclamation of space and visibility, a request to be written into the narrative, not erased from it.

The central question I am grappling with is: how can we use folktales and *intsomi* to challenge the narrative that queerness is un-African? How can African storytelling traditions help us not only to (re)insert queer people into our archives but also to legitimise ourselves and our identities? These are questions without easy answers, and I pose them here not to conclude but to open up new pathways for further exploration. This is not an ending but the beginning of the next phase of my (and, reader, your) research. Moving forward, I will use folktales, storytelling, and performance as part of my artistic praxis, prioritising African forms of knowledge transmission to engage with and challenge the archive. By coupling critical fabulations with postmemory, I aim to (re)discover and (re)animate the lives of queer Africans who have been erased from our histories.

"The loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them," writes Saidiya Hartman (2008b:8). "So it is tempting to fill in the gaps and provide closure where there is none" (Hartman, 2008b:8). In this spirit, my work seeks to fill those gaps through performance, storytelling, and other African means—opposing Western modes and perhaps, in doing so, affirming my own African-ness. I end this paper by shifting from the term "queer Africans" to "African queers." This subtle but significant change centres my African identity first, recognising that I am not simply a queer person who happens to be African, but an African who happens to be queer. It's a reordering that, for me, affirms my place in the world, both as African and as queer, without compromise.

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