Sangoma Boy

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Process and Outcomes: Reflections on Writing *Sangoma Boy*

On inspiration

What is an artist? He's a man who has antennae, who knows how to hook up to the currents which are in the atmosphere, in the cosmos; he merely has the facility for hooking on, as it were. Who is original? Everything that we are doing, everything that we think, exists already, and we are only intermediaries, that's all, who make use of what is in the air. Why do ideas, why do great scientific discoveries often occur in different parts of the world at the same time? The same is true of the elements that go to make up a poem or a great novel or any work of art. They are already in the air, they have not been given voice, that's all. They need *the* man, *the* interpreter to bring them forth.

Henry Miller[1]

I saw this whole thing. I saw what was going to be four or five years' work. Isn't that amazing? But I knew it was there. Many of my stories happen that way.

William Goyen[2]

Sangoma Boy is the first book in an intended four-book series. The series is about three children who are brought together because of their parents' romantic involvement and who, by the end of the first book, come to identify themselves as 'The Bundu Bashers[3].' The idea for the Bundu Bashers series came to me when I was visiting at my parents' house in Cape Town, South Africa, in January, 2008. I had a newborn daughter who had to be breastfed every three hours as well as a ferociously jealous toddler son in tow, so my movements were pretty limited. It was a little difficult to go out to see childhood friends but lots of people dropped by to say hello and share a 'braai' (or barbecue) which is what you do just about every evening in the South African summer.

One evening, one of these informal braai parties included Julia Raynham, my mother's goddaughter. I offered her some meat from the braai and she said yes, but not mutton because she was a sangoma now and there was a restriction on eating mutton.

To say I was astonished is an understatement. A sangoma is a traditional African healer and diviner, versed in the arcana of plant medicine and spirit intercession. But Julia? My mother's *goddaughter*, no less? She was a whitey, just like me. We used to dive spoons together out of her parents' vast and twinkling swimming pool under the oak trees, in our walled-off privileged white childhood during apartheid. How could she possibly be a sangoma? Admittedly I'd been a bit busy in England with starting a career and squeezing out the babies, but the last time I saw Julia she was a keyboardist in a popular lounge band, *The Honeymoon Suites*, we used to go and bop to on Friday nights. I knew that she had been ill and I knew her long-term relationship had ended. But a sangoma?

After a lengthy talk that night I understood a little better what Julia had been through since I saw her last. One doesn't chose to become a sangoma – one gets

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[1] Plimpton, G (ed) (1999) . *The Writer's Chapbook.* New York: Random House, Inc. 90-91.

[2] Plimpton, *Chapbook*,82

[3] A slang South African term for people who like to spend time in the bush.

chosen. The first signs of being chosen are not pleasant, and usually include illness or affliction. With Julia, it was an onset of numbness in her legs, followed by a host of other complaints. Whilst in the grip of the illness, the sufferer sometimes has a vision, where they will be told to go to a certain house or place, or sometimes they just unexpectedly come into contact with a sangoma. Julia dreamt she needed to go to an art gallery in Johannesburg. At this stage she knew nothing about sangomas but the dream was so compelling that she did visit the gallery. At the gallery, a black cleaner put down her bucket and mop, walked over to Julia and asked her if she had been unwell recently, and experiencing peculiar dreams. This is the beginning of *ukuthwasa* – the long period of training before the *thwasa* (the initiate) emerges as a diviner.

I mulled the whole thing over in the long night that followed while I was up feeding my daughter. So white people could be *thwasana* now? That got me thinking. What if you were a person who was mixed-race, both white and black, with roots in Africa but living in England? And you experienced the calling? No wait, what if you were a *child*? In England? No, in Finchley specifically. Because we'd moved to leafy Finchley from gritty Hornsey, a year and a half before on account of my son. The children of Finchley were all over the place all the time. I could watch them and see what they did. And propped up there in the pillows of the bed with my little girl, I had a William Goyen moment. I'd never written a children's novel before. I didn't know if I could. But I knew I was due back at work in a few months. At that point I'd get the baby on a bottle, I'd hire a nanny, and I'd start stealing whatever bits of time I could to write. I had an adult novel to finish but as soon as that was off to the publishers, my whole attention for years to come was going to turn to this young boy in Finchley and exactly what happened to him.

Developing inspiration

I went back to England, finished maternity leave and stupendous busyness set in: raising the babies, a full teaching schedule and finishing the adult novel. I didn't get a chance to fully turn my attention to *Sangoma Boy* until June 2009, eighteen months after I first had the idea for the series. Janet Burroway talks about 'the mystique and the false glamour of the writing profession[4]'; the falseness of the episodic glamour of publication and speaking engagements is in my life always confirmed by the continual battle for the time to write. But during that year and a half certain other elements essential to the series became apparent.

The core theme of the novel would be African spiritcraft and being called to be a sangoma. But it was also going to be a wildlife series and the wildlife aspect would act in tandem with the African spiritcraft theme. And because the wild animals were going to be African animals, it would also be a travel series.

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[4] Burroway, J. (2010) *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft.* New York: Longman Publishing Group USA.

And, apart from spiritcraft, animals and travel, it was going to be a series about relationships and specifically about children's relationships with their parents and with each other. I needed two other kids in the series and I needed them to be connected to my hero, whom I had now called Olly, in such a way that, although it doesn't suit his loner nature in the beginning, he can't turn his back on them and they become completely integral to his life. But how? I chewed over it and at last it hit me. It is a contemporary novel. Two single parents? Internet dating! Of course! I worked on the novel as consistently as possible, from six until nine on the three days a week I wasn't teaching, before turning to other university work. It was often difficult to get up, but that was the time I had available. And I knew the book would only happen with a regular commitment. Aristotle said 'Excellence is not an act, but a habit'[5], what the Nobel prize-winning novelist Kenzabura Oë calls an 'accumulated practice' which allows the writer to 'reveal a landscape no one has ever seen before.'[6]

On animals

The animals I find most fascinating are in order: elephants, lions, whales and gorillas. I knew that each book in the series would require an enormous amount of reading and research about animal behaviour, in addition to field trips to the location of each novel. So it made sense to chose animals that I really wanted to learn about and work with, and natural habitats that I actually like. After I had finished *Sangoma Boy*, on the advice of my then agent I wrote a synopsis for each of the upcoming novels as a marketing tool. But I hit a problem with gorillas because all of the reserves are very, very strict about not letting children into the reserve until the age of sixteen (because of passing on infectious childhood diseases to the gorillas). This made the final planned novel in the series impossible on two counts: the Bundu Bashers children were too young to go into the reserve in the novel, and my own children would be much too young to go into the reserve for the field trip. So I changed the focal ape at the heart of the book to my next favourite great ape, the chimpanzee.

During the writing of *Sangoma Boy* I accumulated a vast store of knowledge about African elephants. Early on in the process of writing I read *Tamburlaine's Elephants* by Geraldine McCaughrean[7], a well-received novel by a renowned children's writer. But, for me, the book was destroyed by a couple of early passages.

'Then Mumu took off and ran- stupid and flat-footed- heading not for home, not even for the hills, but blundering after the Mongol cavalry, bellowing like a cow in labour. Mumu was only young, and rather stupid. In fact, she was the elephant equivalent of a scared boy, caught up in his first real taste of danger. [8]'

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[5] Sher, G. (1999) *One Continuous Mistake: Four noble truths for writers*. London. Penguin Arkana. 18.
[6] Ibid. 16.
[7] McCaughrean, G (2008), *Tamburlaine's Elephants*.London: Usborn.
[8] Ibid. 20

'It was Mumu and it was not. Even those great flapping ears had not been able to shut out the sounds of Tamburlaine's three-day massacre.[9]'

I didn't know as much about elephants then as I do now, but anyone with the most basic knowledge of elephant behaviour will testify that an elephant will never flap their ears when in real danger rather than bluffing (their sensitive ears are always folded back in a real charge) and elephants are not remotely stupid – they are fearsomely intelligent animals with sensitivities in memory and ritual that are still not fully understood. The passages showed a lack of research and care in the representation of the focal animal in the book that made me afraid that all the rest of the plot and detail (it's an historical novel about the Mongol Horde) would also be specious. In his essay on symbolism in *The Art of Fiction* David Lodge picks up on the veracity and detail of D.H. Lawrence's animal descriptions: 'Whatever you think of Lawrence's men and women, he was always brilliant when describing animals.'[10] I decided to be the best informed children's writer in the world about each of my focal animals. I read the encyclopediac Elephant Memories: Thirteen Years in the Life of an Elephant Family by Cynthia Moss[11] and The Elephant Whisperer by Anthony Lawrence[12], and watched the BBC's Secret Life Of Elephants.[13] Whenever an example of elephant behaviour cropped up in *Sangoma Boy* I made sure that my fictional elephant behaved *exactly* as a real African elephant would. I admit that for plot purposes I may have stretched credibility a little in the dramatic rescue scene towards the end of the book, but in general this behavioural accuracy was a point of honour.

On writing for children

Good children's literature appeals not only to the child in the adult but to the adult in the child.

Anon[14]

When I sat down to write *Mary Poppins* or any of the other books, I did not know children would read them. I'm sure there must be a field of "children's literature" [. . .] but sometimes I wonder if it isn't a label created by publishers and booksellers who also have the impossible presumption to put on books such notes as "from five to seven" or "from nine to twelve." [. . .] But I suppose if there is something in my books that appeals to children, it is the result of my not having to go *back* to my childhood; I can, as it were, turn *aside* and consult it (James Joyce once wrote," My childhood bends beside me". If we're completely honest, not sentimental or nostalgic, we have no idea where childhood ends and maturity begins. It is one unending thread, not a life chopped up into sections out of touch with one another.

P.L. Travers[15]

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[9] Ibid. 34

[10] Lodge, D. (1992) *The Art Of Fiction*. England: Viking, Penguin Group, England.141.

[11] Moss, C. (1998) *Elephant Memories: Thirteen Years in the Life of an Elephant Family* New York: William Morrow & Co.

[12] Lawrence, A. (2009) *The Elephant Whisperer: Learning About Life, Loyalty and Freedom From a Remarkable Herd of Elephants* . London: Sidgwick & Jackson (Pan Macmillan).

[13] *Secret Life Of Elephants* (2009*)*. Directed by Sarah Parish. BBC.DVD.

[14] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 261

[15] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 261-262

Anybody who shifts gears when he writes for children is likely to wind up stripping his gears. [. . .] Anyone who writes *down* to children is simply wasting his time. You have to write up, not down. Children are demanding. They are the most attentive, curious, eager, observant, sensitive, quick and generally congenial readers on earth. They accept, almost without question, anything you present them with, as long as it is presented honestly, fearlessly and clearly.

E.B.White[16]

Writing has been the primary focus in my life for about twenty years now so I suppose I am a latecomer in the field of specifically writing for children. But there were antecedents to the decision to write for the children's market. Maurice Sendak was interviewed on television after the success of *Where The Wild Things Are* and asked the usual questions: 'Do you have children? Do you like children?' After a pause, he replied with dignity and rather splendidly: 'I was a child."[17] This recollecting of your own experiences is very important in being able to make children's fiction but I have found my own children growing up equally vital, not least because having children is like a refresher course in being a child: a vivid emotional re-awakening of how stuff actually felt before you had acquired all your adult experience and sense of relativity. It's also a great excuse to lurk in the kid-world (the parks, the playground, the clubs, the schoolyard and *spy*.) Another joyous element of writing for children is that, without compromising the quality of the book, it takes less time to write a children's book than an adult book. My last adult novel took me six and a half years to complete. *Sangoma Boy* took only two summers, even with all the other demands on my time. I think part of the reason for that is, when you write for adults and particularly as a creative writing academic, you often come to write with a sense of dread. It's so easy to get turned off the literary scene: the in-jokes, the brutality of the market, the indifference of the agents, the side-swiping and back-patting of successful writers as they fall in and out with each other. The end result of the 'scene' can be a creatively crippling hyper-awareness of one's own work and whether the chosen project is worth the investment in time and effort. With children's fiction many of the same forces are at play – agents are just as dispiriting and the task of reaching publication even more Herculean. But the process itself is *fun*. At dawn as I stagger out to my writing shed with my flask of tea and my fingers primed to click away, my fictional kids are waiting impatiently for me, with an elephant that needs rescuing or evil-doers that need thwarting. It makes me forget about the agents and the publishers and reach back to the love of books and stories that made me want to write in the first place.

Martin Amis made some remarks on writing for children on the BBC's book programme *Faulks on Fiction* in 2011 that caused a furious reaction amongst children's writers. He said: "People ask me if I have ever thought of writing a children's book. I say, 'If I had a serious brain injury I might well write a children's book', but otherwise the idea of being conscious of who you're directing the story to is anathema to me, because, in my view, fiction is freedom and any restraints on that are intolerable. I would never write about someone that forced me to write at a

[16] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 262
[17] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 262

lower register than what I can write.'[18] In the ensuing fracas author Lucy Coates, whose books include the *Greek Beasts and Heroes* series and the novel *Hootcat Hill*, blogged: 'Children are astute observers of tone – they loathe adults who patronize them with a passion, adults who somehow assume they are not sentient beings because they are children. When I write fiction, I research and plan just as (I assume) Amis does. Then I sit down and let what comes, come.'[19] *Troe Fell* author Katherine Langrish joined the debate, asking 'People who make shoes or clothes, or who prepare food for children, aren't generally considered less skilful than those who do the same things for adults –why is the opposite so often assumed to be true of books.'[20]

Any writer who starts from the premise of 'writing down' or 'writing at a lower register' is already doomed as a children's writer. Because children, as much as adults, deserve what the best fiction does; to 'make powerful affirmations of familiar truths[21].' John Gardner talks about the 'trivial fiction which times filters out' being that which 'either makes wrong affirmations or else makes affirmations in a squeaky little voice[22]'. Children who enjoy reading are very aware when fiction is trivialized because it is aimed at a younger readership. When the writing really appeals, children can be the most delightful of critics, because of the unreserved energy and enthusiasm of their praise. But they are, in general, also very perceptive and as Coates observes, when patronized they can be the least forgiving.

On the title

The Ancient Mariner would not have taken so well if it had been called *The Old Sailor*.

Samuel Butler[23]

David Lodge observes that the title of the novel 'is the first part [of the text] that we encounter and therefore has considerable power to attract and condition the reader's attention.'[24] My novel was initially called *The Bundu Bashers* because that is the name of the collective unit the children form after their adventures, and it seemed (to me) to capture both the spirit of the children and the spirit of the book. But I became aware that the phrase, so familiar to me, is foreign on an English ear – a test reader mentioned that she would not have picked the book from the shelf under this title. So I changed the title to *The Elephant Friends* because it is the

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[18] Benedicte, P (2011) "Martin Amis: Only Brain Injury Could Make Me Write For Children," *The Guardian Online*, , Children Books: 8-12 years. Available from http://resourcelists.roehampton.ac.uk/items/C8D84E6D-35DA-AFF5-94C6-6C1163B24D87.html.1. Accessed 03/07/ 2013

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Gardner, J. (2000) *On Becoming a Novelist.* New York; W. W. Norton & Co.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 185

[24] Lodge. *The Art Of Fiction*. 193.

elephant, Khulu, and the act of saving him that is the catalyst for the children's friendship. However I was never really happy with this title, and finally settled on Sangoma Boy, which I much prefer.

I have historically been in thrall to the definite article when it comes to titles. This is my writing history.

- *The Whiteness Of Bones* (Penguin 1997)
- *The Usual Reign* (unpublished/ not intended for publication)
- *The Beneficiaries* (Penguin 2002)
- *The Lies We Shared* (Penguin 2011)

And now the Bundu Bashers series, finally breaking the pattern.

- *Sangoma Boy* (completed/ thus far unpublished)
- *Desert Lion* (completed/ thus far unpublished)
- *Whales Of The Wild Coast* (still to be written)
- *Chimps of Kibale* (still to be written)

On beginnings

My greatest trouble is getting the curtain up and down.

T.S.Eliot[25]

"The cat sat on the mat" is not the beginning of a story, but "The cat sat on the dog's mat" *is*.

John Le Carré[26]

Lodge talks about the beginning of the novel as being a 'threshold, separating the real world we inhabit from the world the novelist has imagined.'[27] The beginning needs to draw the reader in but the task is difficult because the reader is, as yet, not ' familiar with tone of voice, range of vocabulary, syntactic habits.'[28] The beginning of *Sangoma Boy* was originally the scene where Olly Beyers is diagnosed as a sangoma by Lesedi in Motsumi Lodge. I didn't name the characters specifically – I only described them in general terms: the man, the boy, the old man - although I described the ritual and its outcome closely. Chronologically Olly's diagnosis comes right at the end of the novel and I revisited the scene at this point, using the same descriptions but by now all the characters in the scene and their function in the story are familiar to the reader. The idea behind this structural decision was to raise interest and intrigue about the African spiritcraft element of the story, and to leave some questions about what is actual happening dangling to entice the reader, and then to resolve those questions later.

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[25] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 181
[26] Ibid, 182
[27] Lodge. *The Art Of Fiction*. 5.
[28] Ibid. 5.

Fay Weldon pointed out in consultation that, whilst the dangle was a good idea in principle, I was guilty of overdangling. The initial mystery of the scene on page 1 was a good hook but it wasn't going to work leaving an eleven-year-old reader wondering what had happened in the opening scene right until the end of the book. So I changed the opening pages to the scene where Olly has a calling visit from Sanna and collapses in the playground. I still use the same construction – a mysterious scene followed by a much clarified revisiting of the scene. But now the scene is described (through Olly's perspective) first on page 1 and then revisited (through Emma's and Christopher's perspective) on page 11. So the gap between the two scenes is much narrower.

On names

It seems to me that every character – every person – is an embodiment of a very complicated, philosophical way of looking at the world, whether conscious or not. Names can be strong clues to the character's system. Names are magic. If you name a kid John, he'll grow up a different kid than if you named him Rudolph.

John Gardner[29]

Names are enormously important in a novel. In pregnancy you have about eight months to decide on the name of your child before the birth, children being named with what Lodge calls 'semantic intent'[30]. Equally in novels, 'names are never neutral.'[31] With fiction, one of the primary reasons for having a good long gap between the conception and the execution of the idea (which necessity I will discuss more fully when I talk about plot) is to get the names of the characters exactly right. But you can also have fun with your character s names and even revenge. The crime writer Peter James was snubbed at an awards ceremony by Martin Amis. In the next book James wrote, *Not Dead Yet,* one of the characters is a sleazy villain with a tiny penis who goes by the name of … Amis Smallbone.

NAMING CHARACTERS IN *THE BUNDU BASHERS*	
JACK BEYERS	I had to find a common Afrikaans name (Jacobus) with a common English variant.
OLLY BEYERS	When Olly's mother is dying after childbirth, she asks Jack to name the child Ndlovu (elephant in Xhosa) because she knows this is the name by which his spirit ancestors will search for him. Jack decides to use a similar sounding English name – Oliver.
ABBY BENTLEY	I wanted a soft, feminine name for Emma and Christopher's mother. And for the surname for this family I wanted something that sounded quintessentially English.
CHRISTOPHER BENTLEY	One of my first boyfriends was called Christopher and my cousin is a Christopher. They were both big, cheerful, muscular blonde boys who gave the impression of being a bit dim whilst actually

[29] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 186-187
[30] Lodge. *The Art Of Fiction*. . 36
[31] Ibid. 37

	being quite clever, and much more practical than me.
EMMA BENTLEY	In homage to the wonderful Emma Watson. Her playing of Hermione was a definite influence on my Emma. But I also had a gloriously lippy, ballsy, bolshy swotty brown-haired green-eyed childhood friend called Emma, who is now a leading climate change expert in Johannesburg.
AMBROSE WOOLSON	This was a Peter James moment. A dodgy on-line clothing company called Ambrose Wilson tried to fine me by pretending I had defaulted on a credit card payment.
HUBERT MOOSLEITNER	This name was selected by Albrecht Ritschl, my Bavarian next door neighbour. He felt the name reflected essential Bavarian qualities of being 'kautzig' or eccentric, as well as being from the appropriate Alpine area of Hubert's birth.
THE SPIRIT GUIDE, NOKHANYO	Nokhanyo means 'mother of enlightenment' in Xhosa.
THE SPIRIT GUIDE, SANNA	This was difficult because the San names typically have clicks and would be unpronounceable to an English child. I chose Sanna for its visual and auditory closeness to the San, the people she represents.
KASUKU, OLLY'S PARROT	Kasuku means parrot in Swahili. It is revealed in *Desert Lion* that Kasuku began life in England as a smuggled egg from Kenya.
LESEDI, THE SANGOMA WHO DIAGNOSES OLLY	Lesedi means 'light' in Sesotho.
OLLY'S MOTHER, NIKELWA	Nikelwa dies in childbirth. Her name means 'the offering' in Xhosa.
THE GOOD GAME RANGER, PHINEAS NGALA, AND THE BAD GAME RANGER, RECKSON NYONKA	Their surnames are actually only mentioned once in the text but ngala means 'lion' in Tsonga and nyonka means 'snake' in Tsonga.
OLLY'S GRANDFATHER, THE REVEREND VUSI MHLABA	Vusi means 'builder of the home' in Xhosa and mhlaba means 'earth'.

NAMING PLACES IN *THE BUNDU BASHERS*

MOTSUMI LODGE	'Motsumi' means 'the seeker' in Sesotho.
THE BENTLEY HOME, 17 PARADISE CRESCENT	Meant ironically, because the children's lives get so disrupted by the divorce and Abby's depression.

On style

Men should use common words to say uncommon things, but they do the opposite.

Schopenhauer[32]

The difference between the right word and the nearly right word is the same as that between lightning and the lightning bug.

Mark Twain[33]

For myself [. . .] I suppose style is the mirror of an artist's sensibility … more so than the *content* of his work. [. . .] At the end the personality of the writer has so much to do with the work. The personality has to be humanly there. [. . .] The writer's individual humanity, his word or gesture toward the world, has to appear almost like a character that makes contact with the reader.

Truman Capote[34]

His [the writer's] style is himself, and we are all of us changing every day – developing, we hope! We leave our marks behind us like a snail.

Henry Green[35]

I agree with Schopenhauer. My writing style has noticeably simplified since my first published book. I don't think I changed my style to become a children's writer; my style was always inherently suited to writing for children. I like short chapters, preferably ending in an emotional or action-oriented 'gong', and avoiding words not commonly understood by an educated reader (and I think a literate eleven-year-old can be superbly educated, if education is an interest of his or hers). My previous novel, *The Beneficiaries*[36], was published in South Africa in 2002 and was chosen as the core set text for South African matriculants for 2013/2014. It has now been picked up for publication by Valley Press in the UK for 2017. When I was doing school author tours in South Africa several students in the audience pointed out that they found aspects of the style laboured and unnecessarily ornate. They were right and I have asked for a full edit on the book before its British publication.

On dialogue

[32] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 191
[33] Ibid.192
[34] Ibid. 195
[35] Ibid.198
[36] Penny, Sarah. (2002) *The Beneficiaries*. Johannesburg: Penguin.

It's being listened to in a direct way, like something overheard. It's not voyeurist, not like I'm in the other room. I'm confronted by it, and the confrontational part of theatre is the dialogue. We hear all kinds of fascinating things every day, but dialogue has to create a life. It has to be self-sustaining. Conversation is definitely not dialogue.

Sam Shephard[37]

Sam Shephard's point was made about writing for theatre, but is also rings very true in writing for children. The only way to absorb how children speak is to listen to them. My training ground for acquiring a good ear for North London child dialogue has been Our Lady Of Lourdes Roman Catholic Primary in Bow Lane, Finchley. I find the best time for a catch-up on kidspeak is when school lets out. They all come falling out of the gates and they've been obliged for hours and hours to not say much at all, and at 3:30 pm they have a great deal to say, and, helpfully, they like to say it very loudly. I soak it all up and catch the best bits on my Dictaphone.

Initially I let the Bundu Basher kids use expressions like 'Golly!', 'Jeepers!', 'Blimey!', 'Crikey!' that were drawn more from my own playground days in the 1970s rather than today, and are anachronistic now. Eventually I realized that although I enjoy the energy of those exclamations they detracted from the authenticity of the dialogue. I went through the novel and substituted exclamations that I had actually heard my own children and their friends use like 'Oh my days!' and 'Wow!'

It's also essential to leave things unsaid in dialogue; the unspoken words that hold the things that the characters are not prepared to voice or do not yet know. Mamet calls this unspoken communication 'non-explicit dialogue'[38], but it is also often referred to as subtext. When Christopher overhears Jack's conversation with Lesedi at Motsumi Lodge I restricted the dialogue to a few words 'Special,' 'Spirit-sick' and 'Searching for a teacher.' But Jack's silence and physical aggression reveals the subtext of his fear and rejection of Lesedi's advice.

On character

But I'm the boss. I'm the boss but they're on the team. They're "my people," in the sense that a politician might have his people – his in-depth backup. I'm always willing to hear their ideas, although of course I retain the right of absolute veto; I slap them down but I want to hear what they've got to say.

Martin Amis[39]

One of the things I really admire is the ability to write with dignity and understanding about people who are not aware of themselves. I think most people are more intelligent than they are given credit for, but that they don't express themselves in a way people find accessible.

Margaret Drabble[40]

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[37] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 225
[38] Mamet, D. (1992) *On Directing Film.* London: Faber and Faber.
[39] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 208-209
[40] Ibid. 210

There is almost always a real person in the beginning, but then he changes so that sometimes he no longer bears the slightest resemblance to the original. In general, it is only the secondary characters who are taken directly from life.

François Mauriac[41]

' The novel is a form highly dependent from its beginnings on character[42]' yet as Iris Murdoch argued the novel has to be ' a fit house for free characters to live in.' [43] Amis's remarks on his attitude to character are revealing because they go a long way toward explaining the major failing of all his novels for me – his inability to create believable characters. Amis's characters always feel contrived and artificial, reflections of some aspect of his personality or philosophies rather than 'living breathing humans'[44]. Drawing on parts of your own life is potentially a good starting point in creating a character, but Amis's creations never seem to rise above their origins to convincingly become people in conflict resolving conflict. The character has to be allowed to shape his destiny in the novel. All novelists have a sense of their characters taking on a life of their own and not necessarily in the direction that the author envisaged in the preplanning. But if you slap those revelations down, you bully the novel as a whole into a series of false notes.

A discussion of every character in the *Sangoma Boy* would take far too long so I am just going to reflect briefly on Olly, Emma, Christopher, Hubert and Sanna.

When I was first mulling over the child characters I realized that when they are pitched against the baddies in the series, each one will have to play to their strengths. I made the following notes to myself.

- Olly. He's a sangoma with everything that being a sangoma confers. He's the imaginer.
- Emma – informed and bright. She's the thinker.
- Christopher – brave and practical. He's the doer.

Olly, the main protagonist, is only himself. I can't say I really created him – he came into being fully formed. He comes into my head and I do as he says. I don't know anyone remotely like him. Emma did have her origins in memories of my childhood friend. My friend Emma was bookish, incredibly well-read for a young child, perpetually thirsty for knowledge and vociferously opinionated, all of which I drew upon in creating my Emma. She was also astonishingly good at besting adults in conversation, mainly by being so much quicker on the draw than most adults that they got flustered, and then cross, and then forgot what they were trying to say. I was very subdued and obedient around grown-ups and I used to find Emma's exuberant self-confidence enthralling. I've drawn strongly on memories of

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[41] Ibid. 215

[42] Bradbury, M. (2001) *Character In Fiction.* The Creative Writing Coursebook . Macmillan London.Macmillan. 109

[43] Pachuau, M L. (2007) *Construction of Good and Evil in Iris Murdoch's Discourse*. Atlantic. New Delhi.18.

[44] Perabo, S (2001) . *The Things They Carry*. The Creative Writing Coursebook . Macmillan London.Macmillan.

remembered spats with grown-ups in creating scenes where Emma argues with grown-ups. But, as François Mauriac observes, the original Emma did became changed in the writing. My Emma wasn't at all competitive, was the opposite of an all-rounder and wasn't as pretty as fictional Emma. There is also absolutely no way she would have been caught dead doing ballet lessons at nine.

Of the three children, Christopher was the least accessible to me. Olly felt like such a strong presence to me, as did Emma. I could identify with them from aspects of being a kid myself – the swotty girl obsessed with books and the odd kid obsessed with religion. But Christopher? The popular and sporty kid? It was a reach. But this reach is essential in creating the 'fit house' – it is what Joyce Carol Oates alludes to when she argues 'For is biology destiny? Not for the writer or artist, it isn't.'[45] I needed to create a picture of someone who is very capable but appears not to be capable initially, which is why Margaret Drabble's comment rang very true. In *Sangoma Boy* Christopher gets a lot of stick – he is not good at figuring things out, he is consistently patronized by Emma and he is very slow to warm to Olly. But as Julia Bell writes: 'It is only when you know how a character is expected to behave that you can make them defy their own conventions.'[46] Christopher came into his own when he marched off in the middle of the night in the Kruger National Park to save the day. I'd waited a long time to write that chapter and I thought it bought out all the qualities not revealed in Christopher up until that point – his bravery, his resourcefulness, his practicality and his humour.

Hubert was originally a very small flat character called Hans– really nothing more than a vehicle for Olly to get the Devil's Claw. But I asked my eccentric German Jewish Bavarian neighbour for help with the accent and he got really into it, creating Hubert in great detail over the fence on my Dictaphone while both our sets of children romped around our respective gardens. I kept telling him it was enough but he was very insistent that Hubert is a particular type and I had to understand Hubert. At the end of all that I had warmed to Hubert. He still played only a small part in *Elephants* but I was definitely bringing him back for *Desert Lion*.

Paul Magrs writes: ' You've got to put yourself, at a moment's notice, into somebody else's shoes and you need to feel free enough to do that.'[47] But for some characters that freedom only comes with intensive investigation. The most challenging character to create was Sanna, Olly's San great grandmother, because trying to understand what her life would have been involved a good deal of research and networking anyone I knew who had links to the San. I have discussed this process at greater length in Chapter Two.

Although this essay is only a reflection on writing *Sangoma Boy*, a further challenge in writing the first two books in the series has been to maintain consistency of character across both books. This was particularly important with regard to character's habits and mannerisms. For example, when Emma is

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[45] Washington Post Online: Available from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1997/03/16/the-writing-life-tales-out-of-school/58bfe287-9123-47a9-b8c2-a7875d205ef3/. Accessed 07/03/2016

[46] Bell; Magrs. *The Creative Writing Coursebook*. .97

[47] Bell; Magrs. *The Creative Writing Coursebook*. 109

thoughtful she often cocks her head to the side and scrunches up her nose. When Jack is troubled he tends to scratch the bristles on his chin. I made detailed character notes before and during the writing of *Sangoma Boy*. When it came to *Desert Lion,* once I had done the research trip, planned the outline for the novel and was ready to begin the actual writing, I reread *Sangoma Boy* with a specific concentration on character. Then I created a file for each character, which included my original character notes, but also a cut and paste document drawn from *Sangoma Boy* in which I saved every instance where they revealed an emotion or attitude by a physical gesture or characteristic idiosyncrasy. This made an invaluable character reference point during the writing of *Desert Lion.*

On plot and structure

The novelist should, I think, always settle when he starts what is going to happen, what his major event is to be. He may alter this event as he approaches it, indeed he probably will, indeed he probably had better, or the novel becomes tied up and tight. But the sense of a solid mass ahead, a mountain round or over or through which the story must somehow go, is most valuable, and, for the novels I've tried to write, essential. There must be some major object towards which one is to approach [. . .] Something to focus everything up: to engender an event like an egg.

E.M. Forster[48]

I have last chapters in my mind before I see first chapters, too. I usually begin with endings, with a sense of aftermath, of dust settling, of epilogue. I love plot, and how can you plot a novel if you don't know the ending first. How do you know how to introduce a character if you don't know how he *ends up*?

John Irving[49]

It takes me as long to develop the plot and work out the characters as to write the book.

P.D.James[50]

Ashley Stokes wrote that 'plotting is the underside of the stone that no one sees [...] the head labour that makes a novel realize itself on its own terms.'[51] Zadie Smith divides novelists into two camps: macro planners and micro managers. Micro managers (of which she declares herself one), 'start at the first sentence of a novel and [...] finish at the last.'[52] But a Macro Planner 'makes notes, organizes material, configures a plot and creates a structure – all before he writes the title page. This structural security gives him a great deal of freedom of movement. It's not uncommon for Macro Planners to start writing their novels in the middle.'[53]

E.M. Forster, John Irving and P.D. James all make the same basic point. A good novel is a planned novel. And the planning of the novel needs to happen *before* the writing of the novel. I'm an unabashed Macro Planner. I've sometimes heard

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[48] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 203
[49] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 205
[50] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 205

[51] Stokes, Ashley. (2001). *The Creative Writing Coursebook*. London: Macmillan.207

[52] Smith, Zadie. (2010) "That Crafty Feeling." *Prospect*, January edition.55
[53] Ibid.55

writers say that they make it up as they go along but I have never understood how any writer manages to do this and still has a coherent, resonating story. I like to have at least six months to plan, prepare and research before writing the opening paragraph. And I would never write an opening paragraph without knowing the shape of the final chapter.

Ursula Le Guin warns against overreliance on plot. 'Plot is merely one way of telling a story, by connecting the happenings tightly, usually through causal chains.'[54] And for many writers, plot is inseparable from character. For Val Taylor ' rooting your plot in a series of human choices, which are then acted upon, gives you a spine which carries your story.'[55] Chinua Achebe remarked of his writing process, 'the moment a particular idea is linked to a character, it's like an engine moves it. Then you have a novel underway.'[56] For Achebe, plot arises from an alignment of idea to character. F Scott Fitzgerald voiced a similar sentiment in his famous aphorism, 'character is plot, plot is character.' I'm in no doubt about the driving force of character on plot in my own work, except for me there is an irreducible added element – landscape. I'm a landscape plotter. Once I know who the characters are and what the core ideas of the story are going to be, I need to make a field trip to the setting of the story and spend time there – preferably at least a week – wandering about and making notes. While I am in this ambulatory phase, I find the plot comes at me at chunks – almost like memory, except of course, the events are imagined. When I see where my characters ate and slept and the vistas they looked at, it becomes obvious what else was going on whilst they were eating, sleeping and looking. I've practiced the landscape plotting technique with my last three novels, and returned from the field trip each time with a sound plot structure in place.

Text-based research is also a crucial element in plot construction, although I find this stage of research tends to be useful once the skeleton of the plot is already in place. The writer Sally O'Reilly has said of the role of research in creativity, 'Research and creation are not entirely separate: the one feeds off the other and the process is so engaging and engrossing that it can become an obsession. Which means there is a need for fluidity and openness in research, so that not only are the facts that a fiction writer finds open to myriad interpretations, they are also questionable in themselves, in terms of their role within a story.'[57] While I was writing *Sangoma Boy* I read a great deal of material on sangomas, San spiritual practices and elephant behaviour and this research frequently influenced my plotting. One example of this is the way in which young bulls go independent which is revisited at points throughout the novel. The two bulls on the verge of independence are first seen sparring and causing havoc in the chapter, *A Greeting Ceremony*. They reappear in the novel in a later chapter, *Christopher Goes For A Walk*, and are finally seen in Khulu's care in the chapter, *Goodbye Khulu*. The earlier

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[54] Le Guin, U K. (1998) *Steering the Craft.* Portland: The Eighth Mountain Press.

[55] Taylor, Val. (2001). *The Creative Writing Coursebook*. London: Macmillan.213

[56] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 208

[57] O'Reilly, S. (2011) *The Researcher's Aha! Moment*. Unpublished paper presented at The Great Writing 2011 Conference. Imperial College. London.

appearances are necessary to underline one of the plot points of the novel; how by saving the grandfather bull the Bundu Bashers have preserved an invaluable guide and support for the young Kruger bulls.

Finally although *Sangoma Boy* is arguably a moral plot, with the protagonists moving from hostility to mutual support, I wanted to create a plot which would end with a sense of questions being asked, rather than neat solutions being offered. Julia Bell argues that 'challenging plots rely on the interplay between character and events and resist neat conclusions [...] they resist the moral moment of closure, often leaving resolution to the reader.'[58] Although *Sangoma Boy* is a children's book, it was important to me that the conclusion of the plot was ambiguous enough to allow children to interpret the events of the book in relation to their own experiences and world view.

On scaffolding

> When building a novel you will use a lot of scaffolding. Some of this is necessary to hold the thing up, but most isn't. The majority of it is only there to make you feel secure, and in fact the building with stand up without it. [. . .] Scaffolding holds up confidence when you have none, reduces the despair, creates a goal – however artificial – an end point.
>
> Zadie Smith[59]

By 'scaffolding' Zadie Smith means choices you make that act as the infrastructure of the novel whilst you write it. As an example she suggests that the writer might choose to 'read the Old Testament and model each chapter on the books of the prophets. Or the Bhagavad Gita. Or the Psalms,'[60] etc.

My version of scaffolding is historical research. Both of my adult novels had very particularized settings with a strong impact on the plot (apartheid South Africa in *The Beneficiaries*; war-torn Rhodesia, state of emergency Kenya, and Zimbabwe in the grip of the land appropriations in *The Lies We Shared*.) Because of this the temptation was to inundate the reader with information about these different epochs in African history. But most of it was scaffolding. And when the novels were finished I had to strip it all out, leaving only what the reader actually needed to know. With the Bundu Bashers series I have found it much easier not to erect the scaffolding in the first place. Even so, in *Sangoma Boy*, in the chapter *The Very Beginning Of What Matters: Jack's Story*, where Jack talks about his relationship with his Xhosa wife Nikelwa during and after apartheid, the temptation was there. I halved the chapter's word count between the first and second drafts, after feedback from an eleven-year-old test reader suggested 'It's really exciting up til then but this chapter goes on *much* too long about history.' And in a later draft I went back and stripped out every element of backstory in the chapter that didn't answer a question raised within the novel or set up a plot point needed for the future novels.

On vocabulary

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[58] Bell; Magrs. *The Creative Writing Coursebook*. 196
[59] Smith, "*That Crafty Feeling*.".57
[60] Smith, "*That Crafty Feeling*.".57

Some writers for children deliberately avoid using words they think a child doesn't know. This emasculates the prose and, I suspect, bores the reader. Children are game for anything. I throw them hard words, and they backhand them over the net. They love words that give them a hard time, provided they are in a context that absorbs their attention. I'm lucky again: my own vocabulary is small, compared to most writers, and I tend to use the short words. So it's no problem for me to write for children. We have a lot in common.

E.B. White[61]

When writing for children, as E.B. White observes, it is crucially important not to 'write down', an observation I've already touched on in the sub-chapter in this essay, 'On Writing For Children.' With that understanding in place, there were some specific vocabulary decisions I had to make during the writing process.

Both novels are written using a third person limited point of view, with one of the three children as the focalizer. Occasionally it's Christopher but usually it's either Emma or Olly.

When I was a child I was a magpie with words. I would steal them from wherever I could and use them ostentatiously as soon as I had absorbed their meaning. This passage from Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* made me laugh because it is such familiar territory.

Briony changed her mind and faced her sister. 'The whole thing's a mistake. It's the wrong . . .' She snatched a breath and glanced away, a signal, Cecilia sensed of a dictionary word about to have its first outing. 'It's the wrong genre!' She pronounced it, as she thought, in the French way, monosyllabically, but without quite getting her tongue around the 'r'.

'*Jean?*' Cecilia called after her. 'What are you talking about?' [62]

My childhood wordiness was a tiny act of rebellion against the hegemony of the apartheid state and its constant restriction of self-expression. White South African children in the 1970s and 1980s were expected to voice simple and unpretentious thoughts about their simple and unpretentious lives. I liked to provoke the eye-rolling and startled disapproval that usually followed injecting an unfamiliar word into conversation. Emma, the brainy daughter of a sports journalist and a GP, has a similar interest in expanding her vocabulary and her love affair with words act as a through-line in the series. In *Sangoma Boy* her growing lexis embraces 'bewilder' as in 'What *bewilders* me is how you can possibly be interested in that man after Dad,'[63] and 'spectacular' as in, 'The more she learned about elephants, the more astounded she felt that these incredible and spectacular beings existed alongside them on the planet.' [64]

Olly's vocabulary presented some additional difficulties, especially when it came to describing setting. When I was writing from Emma's point of view, the

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[61] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 262
[62] McEwan, I. (2002) *Atonement.* London: Vintage.45
[63] Penny, S. (2016) *The Elephant Friends*, Unpublished novel and component of PhD thesis, Brunel University.39
[64] Ibid. 93

writing could reflect what an English child would perceive and the vocabulary they would use for those perceptions. For example, Emma sees euphorbias and tree ferns on the way up to the Kruger National Park.

'Strange and disturbing trees began to stud the hillsides, although Emma had to admit that, in their own way, they were quite spectacular. One had a brown, frondsy trunk and the leaves formed a wild, spiky hairstyle. Another even more peculiar one, looked exactly like a huge swollen bright-green version of the candelabras her Jewish friends from school kept on their mantelpieces in their homes. Except candelabras were beautiful and this weird other-worldly plant was rather menacing.'[65]

With Olly, it was more complicated to describe setting from his point of view because he *has* spent a lot of time in Africa but he is nevertheless an English child being raised in England. It's always a calculation with him whether he would know the word from having encountered the object in its African context, previous to the point at which I take up his story as a ten year old. As a rule of thumb, I allow the African word or the more precise description if that object would be encountered in the bush or in a field research environment (the premise of the books being that he has been accompanying his scientist father on field trips since infancy). If that seems unlikely, then I change the description from what I know to what he would know. But this is emphatically not 'writing down,' – it is exactly the same process of inhabiting the character's perspective I would use in adult fiction.

On religion

I have always been fascinated by religion and the ways in which people try to have a relationship with God. I was christened and raised as an Anglican when I was a child.   As a young teenager, I got 'saved' and became an evangelical Christian. But it was too excitable for me – all the talking in tongues and falling about after laying on of hands. I'm more of a still-small-voice-of-calm person. As an older teenager I flirted with the Hare Krishna movement. But the syllogisms were a nonsense (our mother gives us milk, and the cow gives us milk, therefore the cow is our mother and we cannot eat the cow) and the worshipping arrangements were sexist (the women had to dance behind the men at the temple, on the far side of the statues of the deities, so as not to distract the men with our febrile sexiness). I also attended Jewish educational classes for a while but Judaism is crammed with rules and ritual and I have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and have an ongoing problem with keeping all my self-invented rituals under control as it is. Eventually at the end of the teenage years I converted to Catholicism, where I have remained more or less happily for the last twenty-five years, although I am not a very traditional Catholic.

Learning about African traditional faiths and meeting and interacting with sangomas has been an extraordinarily interesting journey for a white Catholic South African woman but I will look at the role of sangomas in my research more fully in

[65] Ibid. 49

my essay '*Unscrambling Sangomas: how have the changing roles, identities and perception of traditional African healers been reflected in millennial literature?*
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On reading and intertextuality

Some writers won't read a word of any novel while they're writing their own. Not one word. They don't even want to see the cover of a novel. As they write, the world of fiction dies: no one has ever written, no one is writing, no one will ever write again.[66]

Zadie Smith

The short story writer Susan Minot describes the moment the power of books overwhelmed her. She was lying on the grass as a teenager outside the public libaray in Concordian, Massachusetts reading William Faulkner's *The Sound And The Fury*. Suddenly the 'power of the words rose up and whacked [her] on the forehead' and she 'felt the earth move as if a huge safe were being swiveled open and afterwards felt flushed and stunned as you are after sex.'[67] It seems a short-sighted approach to truncate this wonder simply because you are writing yourself. Julia Bell wrote that while 'anxiety of influence is one of the problems most writers wrestle with from time to time[68]', reading widely will help the writer assess where they are different from other writers. For Francine Prose, this exposure to an array of styles serves to underline 'a difference that will remind you of how many rooms there are in the house of art[69].' And reading doesn't only enhance the writer's ability to write; it is also a way of learning to live more fully and thoughtfully. James Wood wrote that 'literature makes us better noticers of life; we get to practice on life itself; which in turn makes us better readers of detail in literature; which in turn makes us better readers of life.'[70]

Whilst I wrote *Sangoma Boy* my reading was mainly focused on two core areas: books by sangomas about their experiences; and animal-themed children's books and zoologist's field studies. If I had had more time available I would have read more because the wider the net of reading cast, the richer the potential influence on one's own work. David Lodge talks of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as 'probably the most celebrated and influential example of intertextuality in modern literature.'[71] '*Ulysses* is full of parody, pastiche, quotations from and allusions to all kinds of texts'.[72] TS Eliot read Joyce's novel in serial form as he worked on his own

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[66] Smith, "*That Crafty Feeling*.", 56
[67] Minot, S. (2003) Quoted in Marie Arana (ed*). The Writing Life: Writers on how they think and work.* New York: Public Affairs.49.
[68] Bell; Magrs. *The Creative Writing Coursebook*.. 248.
[69] Prose, Francine. (2006) *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them.* Harper Collins. USA. 64

[70] Wood, J. (2008) *How Fiction Works.* New York: Farrah, Straus and Giroux. 28
[71] Lodge. *The Art Of Fiction*. 101.
[72] Ibid. 102.

poem ‘The Waste Land’, and both works were published in 1922. Lodge refers to Elliot’s praise of *Ulysses* as ‘part acknowledgment, and part manifesto’. [73]

The book that I relied on most for accurate information while writing *Desert Lion* was George B. Schaller’s *The Serengeti Lion: A Study of Predator-Prey Relations*.[74] I acknowledged Schaller by having Emma episodically consulting this ‘great yellow doorstop of a book’[75] as the children journey through the Kalahari in *Desert Lion*.

On symbolism

INTERVIEWER: What is the symbolic significance of the birds in so many of your sex scenes – the white bird that flies out of the gondola ...?

HEMINGWAY (shouting): You think you can do any better?[76]

Lodge defines symbolism as anything that "stands for" something else, describing the symbolist poetic style as ‘a shimmering surface of suggested meanings without a denotative core’[77]. Hemingway, as in the quote above was dismissive of the attempts of literary critics, or ‘explainers’[78], as he dubbed them, to locate symbolism in his work. The Soviet film-maker Andrei Tarkovsky said he preferred to express himself metaphorically, not symbolically, defining metaphor as ‘an image possessing the same distinguishing features as the world it represents’[79] and symbolism as containing within itself ‘a definite meaning, certain intellectual formula.[80]’ I published my first adult novel, *The Beneficiaries*, in 2002. When it became the set text for schools in 2012 a study guide was brought out, with several chapters devoted to the symbolism in the novel. I would not have identified, whilst writing, that many of the suggested symbols were in fact symbolic. They were just parts of the story.

On sex

A great friend of mine at the beginning of our friendship (he was himself a poet) said to me very defiantly, “I have to tell you that I *loathe* children’s books.” And I said to him, “Well, won’t you just read this just for my sake?” And he said grumpily, “Oh, very well, send it to me.” I did, and I got a letter back saying: “Why didn’t you *tell* me? Mary Poppins with her cool green core of sex has me enthralled forever.

P.L Travers[81]

[73] Ibid. 102.
[74] Schaller, GB. (2009) *The Serengeti Lion: A Study of Predator-Prey Relations.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
[75] Penny, S. (2016) Desert Lion. Unpublished novel.22.
[76] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 219
[77] Lodge. *The Art Of Fiction*.. 139
[78] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 221
[79] Good Reads website: Available from http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/symbols. Accessed 19/03/2016
[80] Ibid.
[81] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 232

A criticism leveled at the Harry Potter series has been its extreme idealization of relationships and the seeming sexlessness of the young wizards.

'Rowling never gives readers a single detailed description of an adult sexual relationship. The Weasleys seem entirely preoccupied by their children--and they sure had a lot of them, but the process that produced those kids seems, um, long in the past. When Mrs. Weasley finally steps out as a hardcore, badass witch (and utters the only serious profanity in the series) in her duel against Bellatrix Lestrange, her concern is her children, not her husband. The Potters are dead, and so idealized. Harry and company stay with Bill Weasley and Fleur Delacour when they're newlyweds, but there's no description of their married life. Lupin and Tonks' marriage is almost entirely out of the picture, and Lupin seems basically disgusted by his decision to marry, a deep, almost anti-sexual revulsion. And the epilogue to Deathly Hallows, in itself a serious narrative mistake, skips the characters ahead, past their years as young couples, to show them as sedate, infinitely wise, etc. parents.'[82]

I had to make a set of decisions on how to handle the topics of sex and adult love in the series, as one of the core elements of the novels is Jack and Abby's love affair and how it affects their children. So unlike J.K. Rowling, I did want to focus on an adult relationship and how children see that relationship. The Bentley children and Olly Beyers are not used to the idea of adults dating: as far as Olly is concerned Jack has always been celibate, and Abby has only been separated for five months when she starts seeing Jack. Christopher, in particular, finds the idea intolerable in the beginning.

Christopher appeared with swollen eyes and wild hair, sheet wrinkles imprinted on his cheek.

'Oh Cistoppa. Come here, sweetheart. Come closer, Ebba.'

Those were their dumb baby names from when they were babies and couldn't say Christopher and Emma properly. Mum hardly ever used them anymore – only when something disappointing happened, like Emma not being chosen to represent Year 4 for School Council, or Christopher having tonsillitis for the day of the All Barnet Schools Football Fananza. And now.

Mum shuffled up next to Emma, and Christopher sat down on the other side of her. She put her arms around him and he leaned against her.

'Is it really the very worst thing in the world if I spend some time with a man who isn't your father?'

Neither of them replied. Mum sighed again.[83]

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[82] Rosenberg, A. (2012) "Sex and Harry Potter," *The Atlantic*, July 18. Available from http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2009/06/sex-and-harry-potter/20376/. Accessed 12/12/2016

[83] Penny. *The Elephant Friends* .9

But by the end of *Elephants* he has made his peace with the inevitable.

Christopher felt a bit funny watching that. Emma was right though. Their mum did love Jack, and he definitely loved her back. He could see why too. Apart from being nice, she had a suntan now and her cheeks had a healthy glow. She was really pretty for an old person and she dressed nicely and brushed her hair and went for jogs so her body was a nice shape too. Jack Beyers was lucky to have her. Christopher sighed. He supposed he'd get used to things being this way. As long as once they got back, Jack and his mother never ever ever kissed or flirted anywhere near Finchley Central Primary.[84]

I invented a sexual backstory for both adults that I didn't make explicit in the novel. Jack has had several relationships in the ten years since his wife died but they have all been fleeting, unsatisfactory and he has never introduced anybody to his child. Abby's former partner, Dad, (real name Keith) was unfaithful during the pregnancy with Christopher which Abby discovered but decided to accept given her pregnancy and her dependent nature. The whole marriage has been lived under the shadow of his ongoing infidelities and her submerged unhappiness until the issue of moving to America forces her to confront the reality of what life in a foreign country with two displaced children and a philandering husband would actually be like.

Because of this long period of emotional unfulfillment when Jack and Abby do get together, the relationship becomes serious very quickly. They meet in February, take the children on holiday together in April (in *Sangoma Boy*), get engaged in August and married in September (in the proposed novel *Whales Of The Wild Coast*) and Abby falls pregnant in December (in the proposed final novel *Chimps Of Kibale*).

In *Sangoma Boy* it is a very new relationship and they are not yet sharing a tent or advertising the sexual aspect of their friendship to the children. This was useful as I could send them off to have sneaky sex.

'Em, Chris – Jack wants to go over some of his owl notes with me. When you're done swimming, do you want to invite Olly over for lunch at our tent? There's not much left now but you can see what you can find.'

'Okay Mum'.[85]

allowing the children an unsupervised opportunity to break out of the camp and have an adventure.

Unlike J.K. Rowling, I have not had to deal with the children's developing sexuality as my series is far more concentrated in time than the Harry Potter books, the events taking place in the space of not much more than a year rather than seven

[84] Ibid. 124
[85] Ibid. 124

years. In the final Bundu Bashers novel the children will still only be twelve, coming up to eleven and ten, sparing me any agonizing decisions over whether I should or should not write sex scenes for them.

On humour

Comedy, I imagine, is harder to do consistently than tragedy, but I liked it spiced in the wine of sadness.

Bernard Malamud[86]

I didn't set out to make the novel funny, but similarly to Malamud, I found humour had its place, particular just at the close of a intense and exciting sequence. After the children are lost and find themselves in a life-threatening situation, I wanted the subsequent chapter to be more light-hearted so included Christopher's chat with the hyena. At this point the humour functions as a kind of digestive interval before the pace quickens and the novel plunges towards its final resolution.

On endings

Ends always give me trouble. Characters run away with you, and so won't fit onto what is coming.
E.M.Forster[87]

I hate endings. Just detest them. Beginnings are definitely the most exciting, middles are perplexing, and endings are a disaster. The temptation towards resolution, towards wrapping up the package, seems to me a terrible trap. Why not be more honest with the moment? The most authentic endings are the ones that are already revolving towards another beginning. That's genius.
Sam Shepard[88]

Each Bundu Bashers novel will ends with a proleptic vision of the focal animal of the next book. These visions take place in a calm space at the close of the novel, when all the action is resolved and Olly is back in his ordinary routine, which in *Sangoma Boy* is loitering in the school yard. I use this device to give the reader a bounce of excitement as the novel closes and an impetus to buy the next one in the series. The novel closes with Emma's invitation for Olly to join her and Christopher – an acting out of the emotional bond that now connects the children, in a short chapter which follows the much longer sub-ending chapter in which Jack is forced to come to terms with Olly's sangomahood. All the action in the story has led to this outcome and I wanted this to be an organic trajectory in the world of the story. Elizabeth Bowen, writing about endings, suggested 'Action towards an end not to be foreseen (by the reader) but also towards an end which, having *been* reached, must be seen to be inevitable.[89]' The ending is the final step in a process where, as Lodge observes 'decisions about particular aspects or components of a novel are never

[86] Plimpton, *Chapbook*, 240
[87] Ibid. 182
[88] Ibid. 183
[89] Walter, A (1958) *Writers on Writing*. London. Phoenix House. 178.

taken in isolation, but affect, and are affected by, all its other aspects and components.[90]' The conclusion has to resonate against what Lodge defines at the novel being 'Gestalt'[91]; a German word which Lodge translates as 'a perceptual pattern or structure possessing qualities as a whole that cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts.'[92]

On editing

> When you finish your novel, if money is not a desperate priority, if you do not need to sell it at once or be published that very second – *put it in a drawer*. For as long as you can manage. A year or more is ideal but even three months will do. *Step away from the vehicle*.
>
> Zadie Smith[93]

One of the consolations of being me, rather than Zadie Smith, is that no-one is browbeating me into publishing my novels as I lay down my pen, and I do have plenty of time to step away from the vehicle. It's extraordinary how much objective detachment comes with a period of time away from the novel. This works on a sentence by sentence basis (the little mistakes you don't see when you have just finished the novel), as well as with a much enhanced ability to remove whole paragraphs and pages that simply don't need to be there (what I called scaffolding earlier). Mary Hill wrote 'there is no such thing as good writing, but only good rewriting[94]'; Hemingway claimed to have rewritten the ending to A Farewell to Arms thirty-nine times, stumped until the final rewrite in 'getting the words right[95].' But the greatest benefit of putting away the novel for a period of time is the renewed clarity with which you can examine the structure. Fay Weldon has written about how 'there have to be two personalities in every writer; the writer who produces the first drafts needs to be 'creative, impetuous, willful, emotional, sloppy' but the writer who works on the drafts must be 'argumentative, self-righteous, cautious, rational, effective.[96]' For Dorothea Brande the two personalities need to be in a balanced relationship; 'it is possible to train both sides of the character to work in harmony, and the first step in that education is to consider that you must teach yourself not as though you were one person, but two.[97]' Bell defines this process as 'asking yourself what you were trying to achieve in the first place'[98]; for her the work is only finished when it elicits the same feeling she had when she was inspired to write it. I know Fay's suggestions about changing the beginning of *The Elephants*

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[90] Lodge. *The Art Of Fiction*. 229.
[91] Ibid.229.
[92] Ibid. 229.
[93] Smith, "*That Crafty Feeling*.", 58
[94] Hill, M and Cochran, W. (1977) Into Print: *A practical guide to writing, illustrating and publishing.* Los Altos, CA. William Kaufman. 10.
[95] Newman, J. (2000) 'Redrafting and Editing' in Jenny Newman, Edmund Cusick and Aileen la Tourette (eds) *The Writer's Workbook.* London: Hodder Headline. 163.
[96] Singleton, J and Luckhurst, M. (2000) *The Creative Writing Handbook*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave. 305.
[97] Brande, D. (1934) Becoming A Writer. New York: Harcourt. 99.
[98] Bell; Magrs. *The Creative Writing Coursebook*. 291.

Friends would have fallen on deaf ears had I not asked for her advice some months after actually completing. Similarly, I gave the novel to a test reader very soon after completion – involving test readers for each draft has been invaluable; as Lindsay Clarke says 'a novel is a game for two players[99]', and for Stephen King 'Description begins in the writer's imagination, but should finish in the reader's.[100]' This test reader made the observation that Emma's conversion from hating to liking Olly was too sudden and headlong and there needed to be another step in the process. At first I rejected that advice because plot-wise no more information was needed at that point and I didn't see how I would fill a chapter just with Emma's internal reckonings. Six months later when I reread the test reader's notes, it was obvious they were right. So I wrote the chapter *A Greeting Ceremony*. The chapter as it now stands has two functions. It describes in some detail an elephant ritual, giving the reader more information about elephants and their behaviour. But it also shows a tentative softening of Emma's hostility to Olly, making her change of heart in the next chapter markedly less Damascene.

Up until the fourth draft the novel opened with a lengthy examination of Emma and Christopher's experiences as their parent's marriage fell apart. One of my callback agents felt the novel needed to be shorter, and that whole section needed to be eliminated, getting everyone to Africa faster. I did happily murder twenty-eight pages worth of darlings at that point which I had previously thought vital to an understanding of their situation. But as the agent pointed out, people know divorce is tough on kids and there is no need to elaborate.

A post-colonial studies perspective

South Africa's tortured past is inherent to the plot line of *Sangoma Boy*. Apartheid's divisive policies become focal in the penultimate chapter, *The very beginning of what matters: Jack's story,* when Jack outlines to Olly how the Bantustan policy worked, and the background of his parent's extreme hostility to Nikelwa. It was a difficult chapter to write and I have revised it many times to try to make it illuminating but not laboured.

Children's fiction published in South Africa in the two decades that have passed since the first democratic elections has been oddly silent on the subject of apartheid. Books for younger children often focus on subjects that could be generic to any country in the developed world; Anita Pouroulis's Nina series (aimed at the five plus age group) looks at ballet, birthday parties, dogs, going out to dinner, making pancakes, brushing hair and faulty cars inter alia. In Lauren St John's White Giraffe series, a black character makes a glancing reference to his difficult upbringing in an apartheid-era township but apart from that apartheid barely merits a mention. In their focus on fun and adventure, both of these series manifest strategies of elision, romanticizing an exotic world but actively enacting a repression of memory over the lingering effects of apartheid. In psychoanalytic

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[99] Ibid. 256.
[100] King, S. (2001) *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft.* London: Hodder and Stoughton. 106

terms, Freud described these kinds of elisions as Verdrängung; a process of internal censoring that ensures violence and conflict, unacceptable to the conscious mind, are repressed.[101] The choice to write 'as if apartheid never happened' is potentially, by white writers like Pouroulis and St John, located in a desire to describe a better society than the actual society that serves as their setting. Graham Huggan observes that it is not true that 'all post-colonial writing is about colonialism'; rather 'writers from formerly colonized countries are sensitive to the largely unwanted legacy of their colonial past.[102]

But without reference to the colonial past, to the apartheid past, a book set in South Africa has no authenticity because the abuses of the past are still so inherent in the present. The historian Greg Dening argues 'There is now no Native past without the Stranger, no Stranger without the Native. No one can hope to be mediator or interlocutor in that opposition of Native and Stranger, because no one is gazing at it untouched by the power that is in it. Nor can anyone speak just for the one, just for the other. There is no escape from the politics of our knowledge, but that politics is not in the past. That politics is in the present,'[103]

Publishers of children's texts set in post-colonial societies arguably continue to favour an approach in which the 'feel-good' factor is privileged above an honest exploration of the multiple legacies of colonialism. Yet are children's texts not seminally important within their processes of socialization? Clare Bradford notes that 'the language of children's books performs and embodies ideologies of all kinds, since children's texts purposively intervene in children's lives to propose ways of being in the world.'[104]

I was raised with very few children's books set in my own country, but those to which I was exposed were classic settler society colonial texts. I read books like James Percy Fitzpatrick's *Jock of the Bushveld* and Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm,* told through the perspective of a white protagonist and from an imperial point of view. Fitzpatrick is pervasively and openly racist. Schreiner was publically committed to 'full democracy on the same terms for all people, women as well as men, black people as well as white'[105]. However the black South African writer and critic Richard Rive observed of Schreiner

Schreiner set the tone for white liberal literature: an attitude that favoured non-revolutionary literature and reform for blacks. This implied a freedom of any individual to act or express himself in a manner of his own choosing, as long as this did not overtly challenge the white, civilized power structure. Liberalism in

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[101] Gandhi, L. (1998) *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin. p 9-17.

[102] Huggan, G. (1994) *Territorial Disputes: Maps and Mapping Strategies in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Fiction* .Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, xiii.

[103] Dening G., (1992*) Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. 178.

[104] Bradford, C. (2007) *Unsettling Narratives. Postcolonial readings of children's literature*. Canada. Wilfred Laurier University Press. 6.

[105] Stanley, L.(2002) *Imperialism, Labour and the New Woman. Olive Schreiner's Social Theory.* London and New York. Routledge. 6.

literature proved then, as it did later, to be writing by concerned white citizens read by other sympathetic white citizens, about their moral, social and political responsibilities towards blacks. There was concern, spiced with trusteeship and more than a sprinkling of condescension. Although critical of racial discrimination, it saw the need for benevolent guardianship and understanding from a removed level.[106]

Bill Ashcroft has theorized that postcolonial studies developed 'as a way of addressing the cultural production of those societies affected by the historical phenomenon of colonialism.'[107] Bradford builds on this argument, observing that 'as a field of theory and critical practice it bifurcates into two modes of thought and expression. The first is an optimistic and even celebratory view of postcolonial societies emphasizing the transformative effects of hybridity and transculturation.' [108] Theorists writing in this mode include Homi Bhabha but also James Clifford, Mary Louise Pratt, Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, Gareth Griffiths and Elleke Boehmer, which raises the point that this viewpoint constitutes a more comfortable position for white theorists. The alternative mode is the more 'agonistic and skeptical line' which argues that 'the voices of subaltern people are lost in the noise of Western theorists as they talk *about* the colonized.'[109] Writing in this tradition would include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Can The Subaltern Speak'[110] and Dipesh Chakrabarty's reasoning that 'postcolonial historiography is always incorporated into a Eurocentric historical master narrative.'[111]

Sangoma Boy embodies an ideology that promotes shared individual and national identity, both in South Africa and in the United Kingdom, and constructs a value system in which race categorization is subordinate to personal friendship. In writing a text that casts the apartheid experience in a condemnatory light, I could argue that, as a white South African, I am building on traditions of resistance in white South African culture. In my act of writing about both black and white characters from a limited third person point of view, I am liberating resistance from a binary us/ them perspective and choosing to explore a dialogical relationship which incorporates dissent, but also celebrates Bradford's notions of hybridity and transculturation.

Yet, as a white South African writer, I also need to interrogate the appropriateness of my creating this text. I read Schreiner as a child and considered her enlightened; potentially there is a danger that my own writing could be influenced by liberal humanist assumptions that regard individuals as self-determining and self-actualizing but fail to foreground a historical and political

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[106] Rive, R.. (1988). The Black Writer and South African Literature. In '*Towards Understanding Children's Literature for South Africa* ed Isobel Cilliers Cape Town Maskew Miller Longman. 199
[107] Ashcroft, B. (2001) *Post-Colonial Transformation*. London and New York: Routledge. 7.
[108] Bradford. *Unsettling Narratives.* 8.
[109] Ibid. 8.
[110] Spivak, G C. (1999) Can the Subaltern Speak. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Harvard. Harvard University Press. .
[111] Dipesh, C. (1992) 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?' *Representation* 32. 1 – 26.

interpretation of my character's narrative trajectories. How can I be sure that, despite my worthiest intentions, I am nevertheless reproducing stereotypes about subaltern populations? It could also be argued that it is not co-incidental that in a book focused on *ukuthwasa* and sangomas, both the sangomas who drive the plot, Olly and Lesedi, are male. True, Sanna and Nokhanya are female but they are also dead. Is their deadness as a plot choice an indicator that in painting a picture of the sangoma/ spirit healer's role in Xhosa, San and Tswana societies I am implying that those cultures are endemically patriarchal? A further point that needs to be raised is that I am a creative writing academic. As such, I am continually assessing literature within conventions that are built on the canon of Western literature and that rely on Western conceptualizations about narrative and representation. It is also true that not only *Sangoma Boy* itself but all the texts that influenced the production of my text, were written in English. As Ngugi wrote in *Decolonizing the Mind* 'the domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized.'[112] In privileging English texts as inspiration and then writing in English about indigenous characters, it follows that I am constructing indigeneity within a mental universe crafted in the language of the colonizer. A further consideration is that even where I have read influencing texts by subaltern authors, such as Nnedi Okafor and Patrice Malidoma I have to acknowledge that I may well have failed to accurately access the true meaning of those texts. In the essay 'Ethical Reading and Resistant Texts' Patricia Linton notes 'the fact that an ethnic or postcolonial writer hopes to be read by a broad and varied audience does not mean that he or she invites all readers to share the same degree of intimacy.'[113] Being what Linton defines as a 'cultural outsider'[114], aspects of indigenous-authored texts may have remained opaque to me.

Also problematic is that the plot of the novel is driven by the children's journey from the United Kingdom to Africa. Travel is a common trope in children's literature but in bringing a white family from London to the Kruger National Park, I am arguably reenacting in fiction a colonial journey that my own family undertook two hundred years ago, effectively 'thematizing the many journeys through which individuals and groups of colonizers sought to find or make homes for themselves.'[115] Central to the characterization of Olly is his dreaming. But in describing Olly's dreams, every single one of which revolves around an indigenous character, am I not reducing the dream-revelation, a central and revered feature of *ukuthwasa*, to a mere plot-driver? Dreams are another trope endemic to Western children's fiction which potentially makes my description of Olly's dream visions appropriating and Eurocentric.

In my defense, as I have said earlier, my intention is that the novel celebrates transculturation. While acknowledging the divisive and ugly history that impacted

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[112] Ngugi, WT, (1986) *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.* London: James Currey. 16.
[113] Linton,P. 'Ethical Reading and Resistant Texts,' in *Post-Colonial Literatures: Expanding the Canon*, ed.D.L.Madsen .London: Pluto Press. 32
[114] Ibid. 42.
[115] Bradford, C. (2001) 'The End of Empire? Colonial and Postcolonial Journeys in Children's Books.' *Children's Literature* 29 . 196-218.

on South Africa's diverse ethnic populations at a macrosocial level, the novel is about resolving conflict at an interpersonal level.

From an artistic point of view, the considerations of post-colonial studies are conducted in a theoretical language born in western academia that does not offer many obvious cues for artistic practice in children's literature. If I had to wholly embrace the implications of the questions I have raised, I would never be able to write about my birth country or the communities amongst which I was raised. I reject that conclusion as an artist but also as a South African. I would rather create a dialogue that may have mistakes, than surrender to a sullen silence because I feel I don't have the right to base fiction in the country of my heart.

I also find frustrating the tendency of post-colonial theory to make the subaltern out to be a single position; ignoring the internal diversity and power imbalances of formerly colonised peoples. Olly is mixed race, but the non-white side of his ancestry is both San and Xhosa/ Nguni. These two groups have been in contact for two thousand years as the Nguni migrated southwards from the Great Lakes region of subequatorial Africa. It is a relationship characterized in some instances by assimilation, trade and marriage (the three distinctive "click" consonants in isiZulu, Xhosa, iNdebele, and siSwati have their roots in KhoiSan languages.) But at other periods there was serious conflict, stock raiding and massacre. All of this history is within Olly's point of view and is not reducible to a generic subaltern homogeneity.

Additionally, every reader of the novel will bring their own interpretations to bear on text. As Ashcroft argues 'the written text is a social situation. That is to say, it has its being in something more than the marks on the page, for it exists in the participations of social beings whom we call writers and readers, and who *constitute* the writing as communication of a particular kind, as 'saying' a certain thing.'[116] Mary Louise Pratt's later research focused on what she called ' the contact zone'[117] - areas in which cultures communicate and negotiate shared histories and power relations. Pratt defined contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."[118] My novel is set partly in the UK, but mainly in the contact zone of post-apartheid South Africa. It has been my intention throughout the writing of the novel, in depicting indigenous cultures, that I do so with tact and respect.

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[116] Ashcroft. *Post-colonial Transformation.* 59

[117] Pratt, ML. (1992) *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation Transformation*. London and New York: Routledge. 4.

[118] Pratt, M L. "Arts of the Contact Zone." Profession 91 (1991): 33-40. Available from http://learning.writing101.net/wp-content/readings/pratt_arts_of_the_contact_zone.pdf. (Accessed 20/04/2016)

Unscrambling Sangomas: The Changing Perceptions Of Traditional African Healers In Millennial African Literature

Introduction

Does millennial African literature perceive the role of traditional African healers differently from African literatures of an early period? And if so, how have those perceptions changed? What areas of healing practice have come under scrutiny, and is that focus approving or critical? And how do these changed understandings affect children's literature about traditional African healing? This thesis sets out to answer those questions.

In Patrice Malidoma's memoir, *Of Water and the Spirit*, the Father Superior at Nansi Seminary, Burkina Faso, tells his young charges: 'The bulk of your task resides there among these disciples of evil who are everyday blackened by the blood of satanism, stone worship, false beliefs, and attachments to a world structure devoid of sanity'. [119] The priest is articulating a position about African shamanism that, until recently, went unchallenged in the West. The comparison of traditional religions with satanism has often been adopted by African communities themselves after a conversion to Christianity, with Christian worship and traditional worship seen as mutually exclusive. The Scottish missionary and physician James Stewart was the headmaster of Lovedale Mission Station in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa, whose alumni include the legendary anti-apartheid activists Steve Biko and Govan Mbeki. But Stewart's dismissal of traditional healers typifies European attitudes at the time. Observing that spiritcraft and medicine in African practice were inextricably interlinked, he concluded that, despite the ubiquitous presence of traditional healers in Africa, African medicine was both malign and ineffective. Even missionaries who worked in Africa needed to take measures to avoid a "descent into mere animalism and fixed and hopeless barbarism,"[120].

A hundred odd years after Stewart's death, there has been a gradual but steady sea change in the relationship between the medical establishment and traditional healers, particularly in South Africa. There is a growing understanding that eighty percent of the South African population will consult a traditional healer in preference to a Western-trained doctor, and traditional healers require the same safeguards of facilitation and policing as their mainstream counterparts. Traditional healers were eventually legally recognized as "traditional health practitioners", under the Traditional Health Practitioners Act of 2007, and in 2012 the South African Law Reform Commission initiated an ongoing investigation into the constitutionality of the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1957.

'If you ever see something starting up with *muti*[121], you must stop playing in the huts and come home. It's not for whites.'[122]

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[119] Some, MP. (1994) *Of Water and the Spirit*. New York, Penguin.103

[120] Wells, J. (1936) *Stewart of Lovedale: The Life of James Stewart.* London, Hodder and Stoughton.172

[121] African medicine.

My title 'Unscrambling Sangomas' is a nod to the British-coined term 'The Scramble for Africa': the period from 1881 to 1914, when the European powers competed with each other to invade, occupy, colonize and annex African territories. The Africa I grew up in was a continent tortured by that recent, voracious and unregulated land grab and its aftermath. Nowhere was the tenacity of the white desire for land and power more intense than in my birth country, South Africa. As a white South African, the history of European intervention in Africa and its lasting legacy are not just a series of chronological past events but more a constant reckoning over how to be European in Africa, and, since my immigration to the United Kingdom, how to be African in Europe.

The term sangoma itself is a misunderstood one. Although routinely used in all forms of literature to refer to traditional healers, as will be clarified later in this essay a sangoma is actually a specialist, and not all traditional healers are sangomas.

White African settlers, like my family, are accustomed to seeing fragmented manifestations of traditional beliefs. But we have never understood these fragments because, when we encounter them, we have no contextual insight into how and why they benefit those who believe in them. When my grandfather told me to run home if I ever saw *muti* he, like Stewart and every other white person I ever knew as a child, was a scrambler of sangomas.

This dissertation is an attempt to unscramble those early prejudices by looking at a body of literature on the subject of sangomas written a century after the Scramble. The literature studied includes memoir, paper and on-line journalism, non-fiction, fiction and dissertations inter alia. I refer to these diverse literatures as African because they were either published in Africa or when published elsewhere, focus on Africa, and as 'millennial' because most of my sources are first published and copyrighted between the years 1980 and 2016.

I also look at sangomahood through the lens of qualitative psychology, of anthropology, and finally, as a children's writer, at two very different approaches to incorporating the themes of shamanism into children's novels. My approach is auto-ethnographic, considering my own experience within my investigation of the literature. I undertake this journey to educate myself and my reader toward a greater understanding of sangomahood and its role in contemporary society, and how that understanding can lead to an authentic and artistically truthful portrayal of sangomas in middle grade fiction.

Atheism and shamanism

'The upshot of this brief excursion into human neurology is that the San are no different in the fundamentals of their spirituality from other people at all times and in all places. Their religious experiences and […] closely linked understanding of the cosmos, are situated in the functioning of the human nervous system. This is not a reductionist position because […] each society comes to its own accommodation with the spectrum of consciousness and that accommodation is

[122] Jack King, farmer and my grandfather, personal communication, June, 1977.

socially negotiated and contested. Human consciousness is […] akin to environmental factors that societies have come to terms with. Like the environment it is not deterministic, but rather presents a range of possibilities societies can exploit.'[123]

'Most rural Zulus believe that spirits, in countless forms and guises, are very busily involved in the destiny of man, that they take form in the plant and animal kingdoms, and that the rivers, skies and mountains are inhabited by supernatural beings.

They believe that after death there is no heavenly reward or hellish retribution, only a reassumption of the personality of an ancestor, from where one continues a never-ending role in the eternal symbiosis between the spiritual and material worlds. These deep-seated beliefs are poorly understood and too easily ridiculed by many Westerners who think they know best. That is, of course, until you turn out the lights. For there is nothing like darkness, nothing like experiencing night in the African bush with rural Africans who know strange stories to lead your spirit down the same roads. For surely it was not 'civilisation' that eroded the spirit world, it was electric light at night, the light that took away the dark, blinded us to ghosts, angels and demons, and vanquished our ancestors.[124]

For the anthropologists Lewis-Williams and Pearce, in their study of San cosmology, rock art and trance dance, the starting point of every observation is how the human nervous system processes information in such a way that neurological events can be interpreted by the human subject as being supernatural. The late Anthony Lawrence, a legendary elephant conservationist in Kwa Zulu Natal South Africa, describes rural Zulu beliefs from an outsider's perspective but also acknowledges that, under the right emotive circumstances, the most committed atheist could doubt their stance.

In some ways writing a novel is akin to the sangoma experience, except instead of chanelling from the spirit world, you are chanelling from an imaginary world. But both experiences evoke similar sudden flashes of understanding, ideas of involuntary perception and patterning, and the revelation of an eventual blueprint.

When I was growing up in South Africa I never questioned the existence of God, although I was preoccupied by how to understand the will of God most clearly and spent a lot of time experimenting with Catholicism, Judaism and the Hare Krishna movement. But when I moved to England, a nation where the lights are always on, after some time it felt like God dried up and for the first time it felt like my faith might be deluded. I still move between these two convictions, that God is a delusion we create to comfort ourselves, and that the spirit world is very real and all around us. One position is aligned to my British self and one to my African self. That ambiguity is reflected in my responses to the literature I have studied as I wrote this essay.

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[123] Lewis-Williams, J.D., and Pearce D.G. (2004) *San Spirituality Roots, Expression, and Social Consequences*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.36

[124] Lawrence. *The Elephant Whisperer.* 265

But shamanism has not been totally disconnected from my English life. While writing the novel, I consulted with the sangoma Colin Campbell, a healer from Botswana who now works with clients all over the world and moves more or less continually between the United States, Great Britain and Africa. Campbell, unusually for a white boy, went through *ukuthwasa*, the calling sickness which is the first stage of sangomahood, when he was eleven. He was eventually initiated and trained in the Shangaan tradition. I went to see him so I could observe a bone reading at first hand for the divination scene in *Sangoma Boy*. Campbell threw the bones and spent about twenty minutes mumbling to himself while, it seemed to me, the air in the room became very sluggish and almost sticky. When he looked up he said: ' I don't think we should talk about your children's book like you say you want to. Your ancestors have a message for you. You know, your paternal grandfather also had anxiety and a line of your ancestors before him although they didn't always try to contain it like you do, but it is not a new thing in your family with you.' I said: 'I'm not anxious,' and Campbell said. 'You are – you have been since you were young', and then he methodically went through a detailed list of my OCD rituals. It was eerie because I only ever do those rituals in complete privacy and it made me feel naked, but it was also a prompt to go to the NHS for a course of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which I badly needed and I am grateful to Campbell for the steer.[125]

In another link, one of my career strands as an academic is running an outreach project called Hadithi ya Afrika ('stories from Africa' in kiSwahili) and I am currently working with African communities in the UK diaspora to gather testimony about refusing female genital mutilation for girls. Dominique Powell, one of the dramatherapists on the project, authored a fascinating paper on her experience of being black British and mixed race as a trainee Sesame therapist, particularly given that, in her ancestral mix, are both slaves and slave-owners. 'During my training I have begun to understand the importance of exploring these ancestral wounds. Billy[126] explains 'the African healers of whom I have written have suffered when they were '*thwasa*-called' to be healers. So they understood the troubles of their novices.' The process to becoming a traditional healer can be seen as similar to becoming a Sesame therapist.' [127] Powell's paper outlines the influence of traditional healing practice on dramatherapy, looking at techniques such as 'stamping' – a part of the healing dance that Sesame has adopted as a way of grounding clients in movement. The paper was illuminating because, despite having worked with dramatherapists for years and working with sangomas at the same time, I had not realized how rooted the Sesame approach to dramatherapy is in traditional sangoma healing practice.

Spiritcraft and witchcraft in African traditions

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[125] (C.Campbell, personal communication, June 3rd, 2010).
[126] Marian 'Billy' Lindvist, the founder of Sesame Drama and Movement Therapy.
[127] Powell, D. (2014) *"What's in the bag?" Exploring the wounds of Ancestral Baggage as a black-British Mixed- race trainee therapist.* Available from (http://www.baatn.org.uk/articles.asp. 5

A generic misunderstanding in the First World, is that African traditional healers practice witchcraft. This assumption is deeply offensive to healers. For the purposes of this essay, I will use the term spiritcraft to describe all esoteric practices that are designed to alleviate the suffering of troubled individuals. Spiritcraft includes the use of herbal treatments with curative powers, but also divination and the interpretation of divined revelations. Conceptually, the purpose of spiritcraft, thus defined, is to do battle with witchcraft. The social anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard makes this useful analogy:

'Traditional healers can only be understood when considered together with beliefs in witchcraft, as policemen can only be understood in relation to crime. Just as every policemen is a professional indicator of crime, so is every traditional healer a professional indicator of witchcraft.'[128]

African traditional belief systems have certain core commonalities throughout sub-Saharan Africa. God, the Creator, exists, and is ultimately responsible for all beings, both the living and the dead. But being so vast, God is too remote for direct address by mortals. This being so, the universe is regulated by ancestors, deceased relatives of the living. And the ancestors can make their insights clear through sacred images, rituals and ceremonies. Traditional healers are the servants of the ancestors, and their role is to mediate between the living and the ancestors, so that the ancestors in turn can mediate between God and humanity. The ancestors choose people to become healers so that God's will can be interpreted, and the correct moral choices can be made on Earth.

In the First World, African traditional religion is often referred to as ancestor worship; this is entirely incorrect. The ancestors themselves are never worshipped. Although it is necessary to pay homage to them, and they can manifest in different forms such as baboons or snakes, they are not Gods in any sense. They are vehicles of communication within an intricate tiered cosmology that in terms of spiritual power runs from God at the top, through ancestors, traditional healers to ordinary individuals at the bottom.

It is an impossible task for me to address all the African religions which subscribe to these principles within the confines of this essay, so I will focus primarily on the Southern African traditions practiced in the Nguni, Sotho-Tswana, Shangaan-Tsonga and Venda societies. Although there are some regional and tribal differences, the Southern African traditions, practiced by all four of the major ethnic divisions among Black South Africans, are essentially similar. The Southern African traditions are the customs that surrounded me in my childhood, and are of particular interest to me. I also make some reference to the Malidoma Patrice Some, the Dagara elder and traditional healer from Burkina Faso who has written most prolifically about shamanic experience for a non-African readership.

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[128] Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. London: Oxford University.

It is also important to recognize that the esoteric in Africa is not compartmentalized. Malidoma says of the Dagara 'we have no word for the supernatural[…]. In Western reality, there is a clear split between the spiritual and the material, between religious life and secular life[…] To a Dagara man or woman, the material is just the spiritual taking on form. The secular is religion in a lower key.'[129] In the mind of a villager, the unreal is just a new and yet unconfirmed reality in the vocabulary of consciousness. It is bought to use by the ancestors.'[130] The journalist Heidi Holland writes. 'Because traditional beliefs permeate every aspect of African life, there is little distinction between secular and sacred, material and spiritual. Where you meet the African, there you will find his religion; in a field harvesting maize; at a funeral ceremony; in the market place. [131]

Something that struck me about Dagara culture as described in *Of Water And The Spirit*, is that all the adolescent boys were expected to go through a very intense initiation, heavily focused on spiritual change and growth through trance and physical hardship. In the Southern African traditions people will not routinely be exposed to a period of spiritual testing like this, unless they are called through *ukuthwasa*. Once tested by a sangoma, they may then be diagnosed as someone whose role is help society, and they will learn what their level will be - either as a *nyanga* (a herbalist and diagnostician), a *mungoma* (a more powerful psychic but not a herbalist) or a sangoma (the most spiritually advanced of the three; they channel spirits directly rather than divining with bones). An analogy with western medicine might be general practitioner, psychologist, and psychiatrist. Only after accepting *ukuthwasa*, do the physical and spiritual challenges of training follow.

To colonial administrations witchcraft was one and the same; they took a very dim view of traditional beliefs, describing traditional practices as superstitious and divisive. Healers who exposed witches bought on themselves the punishment of the law as identification of witches in Southern Africa became an offence. The Dutch anthropologist Ria Reis, researching in contemporary Swaziland, has found that this legislation has had the unintended effect of exacerbating public fear of witchcraft – the traditional healers are regarded as disarmed leaving the witches with 'nothing to fear.'[132]

On the concept of ancestors

Jo Thobeka Wreford, an anthropologist based at the University of Cape Town is also a practicing sangoma. Wreford writes candidly that for her the ongoing struggle of being a sangoma has been 'not the existence of spirit, or the reality of engagement with its healing capacity, but with the 'real-life' definition of ancestral spirits - as

[129] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit.* 8
[130] Ibid. 254
[131] Holland, H. (2005) *African Magic. Traditional Ideas That Heal A Continent.* Johannesburg, Penguin.*xvi*
[132] Reis, R (2000) 'The 'Wounded healer as Ideology: The Work of Ngoma in Swaziland', in R.van Dijk, R.Reis and M.Spierenburg (eds), *The Quest for Fruition through Ngoma*, Oxford: James Currey., 70.

other living beings – which is envisaged by my teachers.'[133] Wim van Binsbergen, a Dutch anthropologist and practicing sangoma in the Netherlands, describes himself as engaging with the spirits 'as if they really exist.'[134] In traditional Southern African beliefs, the most accessible ancestors are the 'living dead', those actually known or known of, to the living. The recently dead come from the patrilineal descent line, all tracing their genealogy to a single shared ancestor, such as a great-grandfather. The social anthropologist David Hammond Tooke describes this grouping as a 'lineage or agnatic cluster'[135]. A separate and much wider group are the 'long-dead'. The long dead also descend from a single male ancestor but this ancestor lived generations before and gave the clan its name. Clans are exogamous, even when the genetic relationship is very distant so for example with the amaXhosa the first question put to a stranger is '*Khawuzibonge*?(what is your clan?). Wreford describes how the living dead and the long dead evoke very different recall by their descendants. The living dead are remembered 'with all their human qualities and frailties'[136]; the long dead 'generate oral histories possessed of a mythical, even poetic quality.'[137] A third category is the first people, the original ancestors and is often linked to topographical sites – 'the people of the river, the people of the forests'. Analytical psychologist Vera Buhrman describes how in one session with amaXhosa diviners, the diviners described the original ancestors as being 'white with long flowing hair'[138]; this Xhosa subclan, the *Abelungu* or 'whites' counted among their ancestors survivors from an early eighteenth century shipwreck. With the Xhosa there is a final ancestral remove – the *amakosi* – the highest and most powerful spirits don't have a clearly defined shape or form. The amakosi are the most deity-like spirits, although entirely distinct from the 'Supreme Being.'

Then there are spirits that are not ancestrally connected but nevertheless manifest in divination. Reis writes of these 'foreign spirits', they 'may be interpreted as a reaction to historical processes of social and cultural fragmentation. The transformation of illness caused by foreign spirits into healing capacities […] represents and deals with these processes.' [139] The medical anthropologist Edward Green identifies these spirits as being 'of tribes other than one's own who were slain during the period of tribal warfare.'[140] Social anthropologist Thomas Kirsch, researching in Southern Zambia, analysed the *masabe* spirits which represent 'the 'wild' neighbouring tribes, and aspects of European culture and Western

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[133] Wreford,J. (2005) *Ukusebenza nethongo (Working with Spirit). The role of sangoma in contemporary South Africa*. Thesis presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town, 43.

[134] Van Binsbergen, W. (1991) 'Becoming A Sangoma: Religious anthropological fieldwork in Francistown, Botswana.' *Journal of Religion in Africa* 21(4). .220.

[135] Hammond-Tooke, W.D. (1998) *Rituals and medicines: indigenous healing in South Africa.* Johannesburg. Donker Press. 72

[136] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*47.

[137] Ibid. 47.

[138] Buhrmann, V. (1984), *Living in Two Worlds,* Cape Town: Human and Rousseau. 45

[139] Reis. 'The 'Wounded healer as Ideology. 62.

[140] Green, E.C, Zokwe, B and Dupree, J. (1995) 'The Experience of an AIDS prevention Program Focused on South African Traditional Healers,' *Social Science and Medicine 40* (4),p 509.

technologies.'[141] When first encountered in ritual these spirits are hostile but over time their 'initially afflective influence is altered to beneficence'[142]. This view has interesting repercussions for white sangomas, a subject that will be discussed later in this thesis.

Accepting *ukuthwasa*

Sangoma Boy is a book about a boy going through *ukuthwasa,* the calling sickness. In the past, and still most frequently today, the sangoma tradition is hereditary and runs in families. From early childhood, a child will be apprenticed to a family member from whom she will learn the traditional healing crafts although there might be a considerable gap in time between recognizing the child as a sangoma and starting training. Family support is considered essential to the successful healing of a *thwasa*. Mthobeli Guma, a sangoma/academic at the University of the Western Cape advises 'The family of an initiate should be involved, be supportive, actively participate in the rituals.'[143]

In *Sangoma Boy* when Lesedi diagnoses Olly as a sangoma, he encourages the boy to announce his acceptance of his sangomahood to the ancestors as soon as possible. But the training itself will only start when Olly finishes secondary school.

The ancestral spirits can also follow their own whims and can inhabit any unrelated person, even a white person, like the sangomas Nicky Arden and Rae Graham referenced later in this essay. *Ukuthwasa* sometimes begins as a dream, with the ancestral spirit telling the sleeper that she must go and train to become a sangoma. Alternatively someone might not dream, but might begin to show the symptoms of having the spirit. The commonalities of these symptoms are depression, heavy sensations in the neck and shoulders, untreatable headaches and other physical pains which do not respond to Western medicine. Arden, a white South African from a German Jewish background, refers to her own *ukuthwasa* as 'the time of tears.'[144] 'Once thus inhabited, those possessed must 'take the spirit' if they are to be free of the symptoms; in other words, say yes to the condition and begin the training that takes them on the road to becoming a sangoma.'[145] In the plot of *Sangoma Boy* I used the hereditary principle (both of Olly's maternal grandmothers are traditional healers) and Olly experiences the onset of *ukuthwasa* through epilepsy.

Wreford describes this period as the 'symptomatology of ancestral brooding'[146]: Buhrman similarly calls it 'the brooding of the ancestors.'[147] People

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[141] Kirsh, T.G. *Religious Pluralism and the 'Problem of Belief'*, paper delivered at joint colloquium University of Cape Town and University of the Western Cape, 17 August.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.* 95.

[144] Arden, N. (1996) *African Spirits Speak: A White Woman's Journey into the Healing Tradition of the Sangoma.* Vermont: Destiny Books. 3

[145] Ibid. 34

[146] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*.95-96.

[147] Buhrmann, *Living in Two Worlds*. 69.

affected by *ukuthwasa* need to seek diagnosis. Typically this happens through 'excessive dreaming'[148] in which the *thwasa* will repeatedly envisage details about their unknown teacher. The dreams ordinarily reveal details of the location of the teacher, perhaps other details like his clothing, and *thwasa* then needs to put faith in the *ukuthwasa* visions and make the journey towards the teacher. *Ukuthwasa* dreams are directional rather than symbolic. They may offer up images and instructions of ancestors and spirits but the advice of these spirits is to be practically applied. In a western Freudian-influenced reading of dream interpretation this approach may seem 'simplistic or non-psychologizing'[149] but Wreford argues that it 'makes eminent sense to one who is familiar with, and accepts, the sangoma idiom, and the construct of ancestors.'[150]

Sometimes *thwasa* take a long time to act on their visions; Wreford's teacher Nosibele reveals that when she was *thwasa* she was called to travel from South Africa to Zimbabwe, leaving her husband and her children behind her, and this difficult decision took time. When she finally got to Salisbury (now Harare) her dreams clarified that her teacher's name was Kangai and she was able to trace him. When she met with Kangai, he was indeed the man in her dream, and he told her he had already been waiting for her for five years.[151]

The next step after diagnosis is treatment, specifically cleansing rituals known as *ubulawu* which include steaming, purging by enema and emetic, as well as purifying the home with smoking herbs or washing with herbal compounds. 'The *ubulawu* mixture is associated with the clan of the *thwasa*'s teacher, and offers a channel of communication to the clan ancestors.'[152] *Ubulawu* is ongoing, and cumulates with *goduswa*, the graduation ceremony.

Wreford describes how *ubulawu* is made by pounding roots and bark to powder, and then adding water and whipping up the mixture until a foam is produced. The *thwasa* needs to eat almost all the foam, but leaving a little to administer to each eyelid, each nostril, each ear, and the crown of the head. Wreford explains 'this gesture is to give me access to the spirits through clarity of speech (the eating), clarity of vision (eyelids), of smell (nose), hearing (ears) and spirit (crown).[153]

Ubulawu also makes the *thwasa* vomit. The Swedish cultural anthropologist Berglund records his Zulu interviewees as describing emetic vomiting from *ubulawu* as 'an essential cleansing system as well as a means of outing and eradicating witchcraft.'[154] For Wreford, it represented 'the spirits literally "coming up", a

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[148] Ibid. 69.

[149] Van Binsbergen.W. (2003) *Intercultural encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality,* Berlin/ Muenster: Lit Verlag. 324.

[150] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*114.

[151] Narrated in Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*94.

[152] Berglund, A-I. (1976) *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism,* London. Hurst and Co. 223.

[153] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*102.

[154] Berglund, A-I. (1989), 'Confessions of Guilt and Restoration to Health. Some Illustrative Zulu Examples' in A. Jacobson-Wodding and D. Westerlund (eds) *Culture, Experience and pluralism: Essays*

positive sign of their activity."[155] Another physical sign of spirit presence is belching. Wreford, who before *ukuthwasa* had been a masseuse, as a *thwasa* was invited to massage an sangoma colleague of her teacher, Nosibele. The sangoma belched repeatedly during the massage. Wreford writes 'she was as affected as I was at the turn of events and was more inclined to accept Nosibele's faith in my suitability for *ukuthwasa*.'[156]

Before *thwasa* are considered ready for training they have to become adept at *umhlahlo* or 'finding'. In the finding ritual, which is often undertaken at an *inthlomble* (several elder sangomas presiding) the *thwasa* is told that an object is missing. She is expected first to divine what it is. If she is correct the elder sangomas will confirm '*Siyavuma*' (we are agreed). Then she needs to divine where the object is hidden and return it to her teacher. In this process an incorrect divination is met with silence but a correct divination is again answered by '*Siyavuma*.' The American anthropologist John Janzen initially trivialized this process as 'twenty questions' but later came to describe it as 'not an empirical science based on questioning and the study of empirical evidence; it is held to be a mystical art, based on clairvoyant knowledge and wisdom.'[157] Finding underlines the reciprocity and mutual acknowledgement and loyalty in sangoma/ ancestor/ kin relations and the future sangoma's promise to work on behalf of her ancestors. Berglund describes the process as 'the ancestors wishing to be recognized and heard, almost literally to be fed.'[158] Wreford has written at length on links between sangoma practice and psychotherapy (discussed later in this thesis): for her the finding ritual contains 'familiar elements of western family therapy [...], of negotiation, mediation and ultimately conciliation.[159] Hirst described *umhlahlo* as being 'loose enough to allow for the incorporation of spontaneous intuitions, feelings, deductions.'[160]

A core concept of *ukuthwasa* is that, despite its seemingly mystical nature and reliance on divination, the sangoma's function in society is essential pragmatic. The *thwasa* is being called specifically not only towards their own personal journey but to be an agent who helps in society. The anthropologist Philip Peek wrote of this process: 'All this difference making – the symbolism, complex communications, and elaborate ritual – is finally brought together to help the client formulate a specific plan of action.'[161]

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on African Ideas of Illness and Healing. Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology 13, Uppsalla, Sweden. University of Uppsala.

[155] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*. 102.

[156] Ibid.103.

[157] Janzen, J.M. (1992) Ngoma: *Discourses of Healing in Central and Southern Africa.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

[158] Berglund. *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism*.98

[159] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*105.

[160] Hirst, M. (1993) 'The Healer's Art: Cape Nguni Diviners in the Townships of Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, SA. Curare Vol. 16. 283

[161] Peek, P.M. (1991) 'African Divination Systems: Non-normal Modes of Cognition', in P.M.Peek (ed) *African Divination Systems: Ways of Knowing,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 202.

The exoteric and the esoteric: cultural tensions between Christianity and shamanism

‘Esoteric means the "inner" (eso-), in the sense of the inner consciousness; the contemplative, mystical or meditative transpersonal perspective. This is something different from the ordinary everyday understanding of things, and can only be understood by intuition or higher mental or spiritual faculties. The opposite of Esoteric is Exoteric, which means the "outer" (exo-), i.e. the outer or surface or everyday consciousness. This includes both the scientific-materialistic and the conventional (or literal) religious perspective. As it is based on the everyday understanding of things, and does not require any transformation of consciousness (and indeed considers any such transformation to be harmful), it assumes that the everyday mind alone can understand Reality […] Central to the distinction between Esoteric and Exoteric is that of *states of consciousness*. An Exoteric philosophy or religion is one which is based on the normal waking state of consciousness, or a modified state of consciousness which is still pretty close to the normal waking state. Any aspiration beyond the ordinary state of existence is discouraged.’[162]

Christianity, and Catholicism in particular, with its rigid forms of worship and gendered celibate expectation of its clergy, is essentially an exoteric faith. African shamanism is entirely esoteric. These two different approaches to the relationship between man and God, create an inherent conflict. For missionaries coming to Africa to proselytize, the esoteric nature of African shamanism – its ubiquity everywhere in all aspects of life, its seemingly unregulated access to murky and unidentifiable forces – seems demonic, and needs to be stamped out. There can be no compromise and no fusion. During his priestly training Malidoma wonders ‘how I could possibly go tell my people to drop their age-old traditional habits of belief and be prepared to be saved because some-one had died for them without even telling them.’[163] When he tries to speak to the priests about his confusion, chasms of misunderstanding yawn. Even his own abduction by the missionaries as a four year old isn’t a shared reference point – Malidoma sees himself as having been ‘taken away’; the priests refer to this experience as ‘the beginning of his vocation.’[164] He is also bewildered by the priests’ ambiguous relationship with the indigenous cultures and traditional religions. As an adolescent in the seminary Malidoma writes a play about the centrality of the ancestors to his life, and the need to restore their wisdom and influence. He is taken severely to task by the priest he calls Zeus, the Father Superior of the seminary. Yet Zeus is also an anthropologist who has spent years studying the relationship of the indigenous cultures to the divine, and produced endless articles and theories about indigenous worship.

It is obvious to Malidoma that when his religion is condemned so is his whole culture, and he calls this ‘religious colonialism.’ Under religious colonialism, his proselytized black teachers, his own Dagara tribesmen, become his worst enemies.

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[162] Kazlev, M. Allen, ‘*Esoteric and Exoteric*,” Kheper Home, 2015
[163] .Some. *Of Water and the Spirit*. 103
[164] Ibid. 125

Religion and culture are inseparable, and all human conduct is culturally mediated with no province of life being more or less cultural that another. The cultural anthropologist Renato Renaldo wrote 'Culture shapes the ways that people eat their meals, do politics and trade in the marketplace as much as it forms their modes of poetry writing.'[165]

However it is not uncommon in Africa for communities to embrace both systems. Christian and sangoma beliefs are combined with no dividing line between them. In Kirsch's research into prophet-healing churches in Southern Zambia she found that 'belief itself is treated as a flexible feast and engagement is dependant on results.[166] South African social anthropologist Harriet Ngubane compared the training for the vocation of both priesthood and sangomahood, and identified distinct similarities, such as seclusion in training and material privation.[167] Some sangomas themselves also identify as Christian. Wreford recalls her first meeting with Nosibele, at which Nosibele remarked. 'Jesus is like us!'[168]

Sangomas, medicine and psychiatry

'Traditional Africa's view of witchcraft is perhaps best described as an analogy with basic medical science. Just as westerners accept that they are constantly exposed to illness through germs, so many Africans believe there is a continual threat of disease and disaster from persons endowed with wickedness. They do not consider what their world would be like without diviners and healers to combat witchcraft any more than westerners wonder what life would be like without physicians.'[169] Witchcraft is not a figment of a lurid imagination but 'chillingly concrete.'[170] Adam Ashforth, describes this attitude as the 'witchcraft paradigm, defined as 'a series of interrelated conjectures, suppositions and hypotheses clustering around a central question: "Why are we suffering?"' .[171] Medical anthropologist Benedicte Ingstad, studying Setswana practice, wrote 'To admit to being a *ngaka*[172] without knowing about witchcraft, would be like a modern surgeon saying he lacked knowledge about anatomy.'[173]

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[165] Rosaldo, R. *Culture and truth: The remaking of social analysis*. Beacon Press. Boston. 1993

[166] Kirsch, quoted in Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*, 52.

[167] Ngubane, H. (1977) *Body and mind in Zulu medicine: an ethnography of health and disease in Nyuswa-Zulu thought and practice*. New York: Academic Press. 55

[168] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*. 52.

[169] Holland. *African Magic.* 7

[170] Comaroff, J. (1993), 'The Diseased Heart of Africa: Medicine, Colonialism, and the Black Body' in S. Lindenbaum and M.Lock (eds), *Knowledge, Power and Practise: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, xxvii.

[171] Ashforth, A. (2002), 'An Epidemic of Witchcraft? The Implications of AIDS for the Post-Apartheid State,' *African Studies* 61 (1),127.

[172] Tswana term for a traditional healer.

[173] Ingstad, B. (1989) 'Healer, Witch, Prophet, or Modern Health Worker?: The Changing Role of *Ngaka Ya Setswana* (Botswana)', in A.Jacobson-Widding and D.Westerlund(eds) Culture, experience, and Pluralism: Essays of African ideas of Illness and Healing, Uppsala, Sweden: University of Uppsala Press., ',263.

Historically, the western medical establishment has not seen itself as being compatible with traditional healing. A 2001 study found that forty nine percent of medical practitioners in South Africa described themselves as 'totally disbelieving' and fifty-one percent described themselves as 'indifferent.'[174]

While there, by contrast, has been a growing acceptance by traditional healers of western medicine, there are still tensions. Although increasingly African healers are referring patients to hospitals and clinics if their own remedies don't work, patients sometime refuse to be hospitalized. An entrenched fear is that hospitals create an avenue for witchcraft. A core belief in witchcraft is that witches need 'bodily exuviae'[175] (nails, hair clippings, urine and stool samples). In hospital patients have no ability to control where their excreta goes, and who might end up with it.

Another complaint from the medical establishment is that very ill patients will consult with traditional healers until is clear that the traditional remedies have not worked. At that point they are referred to hospital but the critical window of time in which they could have been saved is lost and they die. One constant example of this is malaria, which if quickly detected and treated, has a hundred percent success rate in eradication. Nevertheless an estimated 584 000[176] people, mainly children, die every year of malaria, many of whom live within access of a clinic. Another common experience is patients presenting with septicaemia, the result of serious burns to the lining of the intestine. The burns are the result of enemas made as 'cures' for more minor illnesses, from highly acidic and toxic crushed beetles. This is frequently fatal.

But there is a growing awareness in the medical establishment that what traditional healers need is not eradication, but regulation – that disregarding all traditional spiritcraft is a case of throwing out the baby with the bath water. Recent research shows that forty percent of illnesses originate in psychological disorders'[177]. In the West, psychiatry as a recognized culturally acceptable medical science is barely a hundred years old. In Africa healing traditions that innately recognize the harm the mind can inflict on an otherwise healthy body have existed for thousands of years.

Rae Graham was a British nurse who married a South African trader shortly after the Second World War, and relocated to Sibasa in the Venda tribal area in northern South Africa. As an older women, she went through *ukuthwasa* and eventually became a *nyanga* , a spectacularly unusual choice for a white woman in the sixties in South Africa. But she was fascinated by the traditional healers from her first encounters with them, and used to watch an elderly healer, Ralushai, who lived opposite her house. She was accustomed to seeing Ralushai dispense powdered roots for problems like constipation and diarrhoea and tropical sores, but on one occasion she saw him give a man a bone flute. The man blew one note on the

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[174] Peltzer, K. (2001). Attitudes of physicians towards traditional healing, faith healing and alternative medicine in rural South Africa. *The Medical Journal*, 43. 35-42
[175] Holland. *African Magic.* 22
[176] http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2003/pr33/en/
[177] Holland. *African Magic.* .22

flute and then left. Graham was curious and went to ask him why the man had blown the flute and Ralushai explained that the man was having domestic problems and was insomniac and desperate to sleep. She asked him how the flute would help and Ralushai replied 'The flute is made from an eagle, so tonight he will sleep, and when he sleeps he will dream and his spirit will soar on high like the eagle, and his problems will disappear.'[178] Graham had heard of psychiatrists in America and reflected on the connection between psychiatric practice and Ralushai's eagle bone (at this point in the forties psychiatry was very much an American phenomenon; it only really started to gain a global foothold after the World Psychiatric Association was founded in 1950 and the American Psychiatric Association published the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1952, which became the standard professional reference point for diagnoses. In the seventies, when psychology was established in South Africa, Graham, who was by that point very well recognized as a *nyanga* and also serving as a Johannesburg City Councillor, took part in an experiment with the University of the Witwatersrand. In her memoir, Graham recounts how a psychologist from the university spent a three-month period working with a patient, using standardized tests and assessing the patient's development and problems. At the end of this period Graham was invited to read bones for the patient, and they compared notes. The psychologist remarked to her 'It's amazing how quickly you've arrived at the same decisions we have.'[179]

It is important to note here that there is an axiomatic difference between the way traditional healing and psychiatry are practiced. In psychiatry, the patient will present to the doctor and outline what the problem is. In traditional healing, the patient will present to the healer but he is not allowed to explain anything about the problem. The healer needs to arrive at what the problem is through bone throwing and divination, and if she cannot divine why the patient has come to see her, then the understanding is that the spirits are not choosing that healer to work with curing the problem. Successful divination is the fulcrum for treatment.

The South African psychologist, Ingrid Jonker, has made an intensive study of traditional medicine, working with sangomas to try and analyse the discrepancies in approaches and training between traditional healing and western medicine. Her assessment is that traditional healing is not so much an opposing discourse to Western medicine, as a different perspective. 'Traditional healing is a distinct discipline that, in my view, must not be adapted to, or integrated with Western medicine. Although there is often tension between Western medicine, that focuses on material causation for illnesses, and traditional healing that looks at a spiritual origin, these two systems both have something unique to offer and must rather aim at working collaboratively in future.'[180] Jonker theorizes that the discourse of Western medicine receives a great deal of positive attention in the media and

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[178] McCallum, T G. (1992) *White Woman Witchdoctor. Tales of the African Life of Rae Graham*. Florida, Fielden Books.170

[179] Ibid. 203

[180] Jonker, I. (2006) *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative.* Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the Masters of Arts in Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. 47

elsewhere (whereas traditional healers are almost always marginalized) because it has been so thoroughly legitimized as the legally and culturally dominant form of medicine. Through its positivistic epistemology, this discourse creates knowledge through quantitative research whereby its hypotheses and assumptions can be validated. But, from a traditional healing perspective, this approach is too scientific and clinical, and its practitioners need to approach their patients in a more holistic manner, taking into account not only the patient's body but his soul. In a keynote address at a conference at the university of KwaZulu-Natal, Professor Lizo Mazwai (chair of the Medical Research Council Board and specialist surgeon at St Mary's Hospital in Mthatha, South Africa) spoke about the relationship between western and traditional medicine. Her perspective is interesting because she was raised as a traditional Xhosa but trained in Western medicine. Mazwai argues: 'Science cannot explain traditional healing; it is mythical in its very nature. It is a reality for those who have the connection. We tend to look at medicine on the molecular level. There are certain things which are beyond the laboratory that traditional healers understand. Negative attitudes to traditional medicine are mostly due to ignorance; some might even call it arrogance. Medicine and traditional healing is as old as mankind and recognising its complementary role is a positive step forward.'[181]

Jonker's work includes a detailed analysis of the histories and differing perspectives of Western and traditional healing. In Western medicine, up until the Enlightenment (late 17th to 18th century) illness was viewed as the will of God. Illnesses happened because of corruptions in the air but those miasmas were related to human moral corruption. So prayer was regarded as the main recourse for healing; surgeons and physicians were seen only as another variant of tradesmen, and it was unusual for people to seek the help of a medical professional, unless they were wealthy. During the Enlightenment, the ideologies and practices of contemporary biomedicine began to form. Belief in science and the power of reason undermined belief in the supernatural, and new inventions and understandings, like the microscope and chemistry, led to the rapid development and rise in power of the medical profession. By the late 1800s modern laboratories had identified diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera and typhoid, and it was widely accepted that diseases were caused by a hostile invasion of bodily tissues, which had nothing to do with the morality of the host. Excellence in the medical profession moved away from old ways of working with the sick (library-based knowledge, an empathic bedside manner) towards scientific and laboratory research. These changes signified a 'shift away from the person-centered cosmology to an object-centered cosmology.[182]

The origins of contemporary traditional healing are both older, and more speculative. The clinical psychologist and anthropologist Richard Katz estimates that many San healing rituals are 10 000 years old.[183] Dr Mordecai Vusumuzi

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[181] Keynote address by Professor Lizo Mazwai,Dr MV Gumede Memorial Lecture Honours , University of Kwa Zulu Natal, Sep 04, 2012

[182] Jewson.N. (1976) *The disappearance of the sick-man from medical cosmology*, 1770-1870. Sociology.10. 225-244

[183] quoted in Gumede, M.V. (1990) *Traditional healers. A medical practitioner's perspective.* Johannesburg: Blackshaws (Pty) Ltd.

Gumede, a South African western-trained doctor, who also worked extensively with traditional healers offers the alternative view that traditional healing originated in the Arabic Sahara countries between 4500 and 6000 years ago when the area was the centre of African trade and learning. From this region, the arts of traditional healing spread both northward and southward. In this tradition, although Africans have always been a highly religious people, they left no shrines or monuments behind because they did not worship inanimate objects. They worshipped a supreme being, known by different names in different societies, and served by the ancestral spirits. In the tradition, it is necessary to make regular sacrifices to the dead to maintain the vital bond of friendship between the dead and the living. If the customary rites are not observed, the ancestors will show their disapproval through infestations of ill health. 'Health and ill health are held in a state of fine balance through this bond of friendship between the living and the dead.'[184]

From an anthropological perspective, a person's culture will determine how he or she regards and experiences illness since 'illness, the experience and treatment thereof are social and cultural processes.'[185] Westerners see illness purely in terms of germ theory because Western culture promotes a supremacy of scientific proof and expert knowledge. But traditional communities, whose whole experience of daily life is embedded in the spirit world, will automatically link the ancestors to both illness and treatment.

Examining the discourse of Western medicine and the discourse of traditional healing, Jonker looks at the way that both address the commonalities of healer, illness, practice and patient. In Western medicine, there are rigid boundaries between the different types of healers. The medical doctor addresses physical health problems and the psychologist addresses mental health problems. Spiritual issues, should the patient wish, would be the concern of a priest, pastor or rabbi. The medical doctor applies scientific methods exclusively whereas the psychologist takes a personal history that includes the patient's experience, perceptions and any existential issues. Both professions, but medical doctors in particular, enter a very specific training process based on the positive scientific method in which they accumulate facts, based on the notion that 'there is a diagnosis for every condition and that every condition has a set of treatment strategies.'[186] 'Authority and depersonalization is seen as functional for both medical professionals and patients.'[187]

The central premise of Western medicine is germ theory, whereby microscopic invaders infest the human body. Jonker describes how 'the language of warfare and the military metaphor is extremely common in modern medical and public health discourses.'[188] 'The immune system, for example, is commonly described as mounting a 'defence' or 'siege' against the 'invasion' of 'alien' bodies or tumours which are 'fought', 'attacked' or 'killed' by white blood cells, drugs or

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[184] Gumede. *Traditional healers. A medical practitioner's perspective*. 29

[185] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative.* 82.

[186] Simmons, J.G. (2002) *Doctors and discoveries: lives that created today's medicine.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 103

[187] Stein, H. (1990) *American medicine as culture.* Boulder: Westview.. 48.

[188] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative.* 28

surgical procedures.'[189] In the Western paradigm, the patient is expected to respond like a soldier at war – fear and denial are unacceptable; good cheer; strength and a positive attitude are essential. The doctor leading the charge must respond 'with military-like leadership, authority, precision, little emotion and an aura of control.'[190] Patients are also responsible for preserving their own health; there is a moral dimension to patient care with certain patients (for example smokers and the obese) seen as less deserving of publically funded health care that those who did not indulge themselves and lack self discipline.

Western doctors practice medicine based on four ethical principles: autonomy (practitioners will make most of their decisions themselves); non-maleficance (the principal to do no intentional harm); beneficence (necessary to judge potential benefit against use of treatment) and justice (the principle that promotes fairness, equality and access to medical care)[191] Globally the practice of contemporary Western biomedicine has contributed enormously to health and wellbeing, with dramatic and ever-increasing longevity. New genetic understandings both alleviate disease and prolong human life, and enhance quality of life for chronic sufferers, for example children with allergies that would once have prevented them from any semblance of a normal childhood. However in the African context, modern medical care is sometimes criticized because 'it is crisis-oriented and financially-constrained, it provides symptomatic treatment, it depends on technology, it exhausts resources, it is not always available and, if it is, it lacks understanding of the people it serves.'[192]

Patients in Western medicine are depersonalized. With the discovery of DNA, sickness becomes a product of biological destiny, needing the intervention of technology to correct faults in coding, and disassociating illness from any social context such as poverty.

In traditional healing, healers are a mix of psychotherapist, medical doctor and mystic. And 'whereas the Western medical world focuses on the individual and individual empowerment, the traditional healer focuses mostly on the contributions to the community.[193] ' The African path to recovery happens within the community, through actively consulting with others, and a traditional healer is evaluated by how able he is to restore social harmony. Unlike biomedicine which provides no response to the questions 'why me?' and 'why now?' traditional healing offers a 'readily understood moral system in which the right attitudes and behaviours are rewarded with good health.'[194] *Bona fide* traditional healers are called to their vocation by the ancestors and have no choice in the matter. In training they are apprenticed to an experienced healer for a period normally between twelve and

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[189] Lupton,D. (2003) *Medicine as culture*. London: Sage Publications. 65

[190] Erwin,D. (1987) The militarization of cancer treatment in American society. In H. Baer(Ed), *Encounters with biomedicine: Case studies in medical anthropology*. New York: Gordon and Breach. 201- 227

[191] Kubsch, S.M. Hankerson, C.& Ghoorahoo.R. (2005) Content analysis of holistic ethics. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice.*11..51-57

[192] Pretorius, E. (1993) *South African Health Review*. Durban. Health Systems Trust.

[193] Hammond-Tooke. *Rituals and medicines.* 88

[194] Gumede. *Traditional healers. A medical practitioner's perspective*. 36.

twenty four months. Training ends in an initiation ceremony after which they can work independently.

Pretorius et al define a traditional healer as:

'Someone who is recognized by the community in which he or she lives as competent to provide healthcare by using vegetable, animal and mineral substances and certain other methods based on the social, cultural and religious background as well as the prevailing knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding physical, mental and social well-being and the causation of disease and disability in the community.'[195]

Causes of illnesses 'are not sought at a mechanical level but at a spiritual level. Illnesses are a community affair that involve the living and the dead and engages the person as a whole, as attempts are made to find meaning in suffering by linking people's experiences at an external level with their own deepest belief systems and cosmology.'[196]

Illness can be due to primary causes that cannot be explained in physical terms, stemming from supernatural forces and caused by the individual contravening communal morality. But healers will also work on a physical level, taking into account secondary causes (the symptoms of the primary causes). Within this context, a distinction is made between natural and unnatural causes. Natural causes include everyday patterns of life such as the effects of old age, injury, exposure to poisons, exposure to extreme weather and common illnesses such as chicken pox, measles, mumps and whooping cough. These can be treated by herbs and don't need divination. But illnesses can also have spiritual, or unnatural causes. Gumede relates the case history of a child who cried all night and when light broke in the morning, his parents found burnt spots all over his body. The Western doctor he was taken to diagnosed kwashiorkor with skin lesions; the traditional healer diagnosed that a wanton spirit (a spiteful non-family spirit with a grudge against the family) had visited the child in the night.[197]

Overall, 'there are more than fifty conditions that traditional healers deal with, which range from skin problems to stomach ulcers. They also deal with five cultural-bound syndromes for which biomedicine has few answers, namely ancestral wrath, spirit possession, sorcery, defilement and neglect of cultural rites.'[198]

In practice, the traditional African approach is holistic, combining religious, social, spiritual and biological elements. Sangomas throw the bones, engage the ancestors, construct narratives through that engagement and dispense *muti* (herbal medicines), although not all healers use all these methods.

The World Health Organisation defines the practice of traditional African medicine as:

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[195] Pretorius, E. De Klerk, G.W & Van Rensburg, H.C.G (1993) The traditional healer in South African health care. In I. Snyman (Ed*) Co-operative HSRC Programme: Affordable Social Provision.* Pretoria: HSRC. 1- 61

[196] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative.* 76

[197] Gumede. *Traditional healers. A medical practitioner's perspective*. 58.

[198] Pretorius, De Klerk, Van Rensburg, *The traditional healer in South African health care.* 85

'The sum total of all knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental, or societal imbalance, and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation, whether verbally or in writing.'[199]

In Western medicine those who develop theory do not apply it (a distinction between research and practice) whereas in traditional healing the healer both develops and applies his theories. In Western medicine, the 'dominant mode of diagnosis is to establish causality through interpreting symptoms, while in traditional healing the mind-body is not a complex machine, but a self, embedded in social interactions.'[200] Both healer and patient reject a mind-body divide and share a power dynamic where the patient believes that the healer has some supernatural power over him. In this understanding 'with healing, spirit is central and unequivocal […] healing empowers the ecology around the individual by harnessing the resources of the spirit.'[201]

Graham had a mutual understanding with her personal doctor decades before there was any rapprochement between the medical establishment and traditional healers in South Africa. When she detected real health problems in her patients, she would refer them to her own doctor, but he also referred a patient to her on one occasion when nothing had shown up in tests and x-rays and he considered the patient to be psychologically broken.[202] Graham also narrates how, during her training in Venda, a Xhosa woman from the Cape arrived at her trainer's *kraal*[203]. The woman was a nursing sister from a hospital in the Western Cape, and was additionally a nursing tutor. But she had bad bronchitis, and had travelled over a thousand miles at great expense to access cure in the traditional way; through herbal steaming and sacrificing a cock.

In an experiment in Hawaii, documented by medical anthropologists Broad and Allison, the US Department of Health and Human Services were concerned about the toll of obesity and related problems on indigenous Hawaiians. They set up nursing clinics alongside traditional healing clinics in community settings and found that the Hawaiians would use the western services for acute conditions but continued to use the traditional services for chronic conditions. Broad and Allison surmised 'ties to one's culture and sensitivity to the value and belief systems of a person's cultural background seem evident in the selection of health care services.'[204]

Wreford argues that a systemic problem in South Africa is that medical doctors often 'perceive the healing understandings of sangoma as the identical, not opposite, twin of witchcraft, and they dismiss both.'[205] This effectively diminishes

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[199] Pretorius, De Klerk, Van Rensburg, *The traditional healer in South African health care.* 87

[200] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative.* 97

[201] Rudnick, H. (2002) *The links between western psychotherapy and traditional healing.* Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Johannesburg. 170

[202] McCallum, *Tales of the African Life of Rae Graham*. 204

[203] homestead

[204] Broad, L.M & Allison.D.M. (2002) Nurse practitioners and traditional healers: An alliance of mutual respect in the art and science of health practises. *Holistic Nursing Practise*. 16(2). 50-57

[205] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*184

the success of allopathic interventions, because patients are viewing their treatment within a paradigm where 'sangoma and witchcraft are recognized as opposite in effect and motive but umbilically linked.'[206] If western doctors do not take these assumptions seriously, not only are their own treatments undermined, but by so summarily dismissing traditional practice, they prevent the opportunity for a meaningful dialogue between sangoma and biomedicine. Wreford argues that this dismissal of sangoma healing power potentially creates a vacuum, where if biomedicine fails, witchcraft will be assumed to be effective.

Holland devotes a chapter of *African Magic* to an account of a unique integration of western psychology and traditional healing that took place on Josina Machel Island in Mozambique in 1995. This episode resonates particularly strongly against the Benin psychiatrist, Reneé Gualbert Ahyi's observation that western psychoanalysis often fails to effectively treat African patients. Ahyi talks of both the difficulty and the importance of being able to name problems in therapy, because in their naming 'we bring the truth out into the open, and the open truth is hard to admit, to accept responsibility for.'[207] The Josina Machel Island example illustrates an intervention in which traditional healing and western psychology were combined to provide a safe space for open truths.

Mozambique gained its independence in 1975 after a ten-year struggle for independence between the nationalist front, the Frente de Libertçåo de Moçambique (Frelimo) and the Portuguese. After independence, a brutal civil war erupted between the socialist Frelimo and its South African-supported rival, Resistencia Nacional Moçambicana (Renamo) which lasted until 1992. This protracted guerilla conflict claimed one million lives, forty five percent of those children under the age of fifteen. Both sides also kidnapped children to serve as child soldiers.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated that 250 000 Mozambican children were suffering psychological and physical trauma. A project was set up on Josina Machel Island to work with abused children, who had returned to the island after the war. The leader of this initiative, Dr Boia Efraime Junior, says of the project's early hopes.

'We [...] arrived with a certain degree of faith in the diagnostic instruments and perspectives on psychotraumatology we had acquired in our training. Our long-term relationship with the people of Josina Machel has taught us otherwise. It has forced us to expand both our notion of what constitutes psychotherapeutic intervention, as well as its psychic integration. We found that the people of Josina Machel had healing resources whose legitimacy and currency predated our arrival by several centuries.'[208]

The psychologists found initially that the children would not discuss the war. It gradually became clear to them that their efforts were failing because their westernized approach to psychotraumatology was completely alien to the

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[206] Ibid. 184

[207] Gualbert, R.A. (1997), 'Traditional Models of Mental Health and Illness in Benin', in PJ Hountondji (ed) Endogenous knowledge: Research Trails. Dakaer: Codesria Book Series. 237

[208] Holland. *African Magic.* 66

community. Dr Boia Efraime explains that their core initial mistake was that they were wholly focused on individual experience – even when addressing collective trauma the psychologists were treating it as only the sum total of individual responses to traumatic events. 'We learnt[…] that trauma had insinuated itself into the very fabric of community life, but we could only get to the core of this dynamic by understanding the community cosmology or 'world of meaning.' This cosmology underscored people's understanding of what it meant to be healthy and sick, and our first lesson was that illness is not universally seen as an individual phenomenon.'[209]

It also became clear that the child soldiers perceived themselves as being out of harmony with the dead, reporting both spirit hauntings and an inability to make contact with their own ancestors. 'For them, this was taken to be a sign of falling from grace with their ancestors and, by extension, their family and community.'[210]

The psychologists made the decision to work in tandem with the curandeiros – the Island's own traditional healers. The work went on for years with all the Island's traumatized children but I will look at one case study closely.

A former child soldier, Jonas, was tormented by nightmares. He was invited to participate in a ritual called Ku Femba in which the healer, acting as a medium, is invited to make contact with bad spirits who are regarded as responsible for disturbances in the family. A curanderio called Macuacua began the ritual and, as it progressed, entered a trance state in which he identified himself as the spirit who was disturbing Jonas's sleep. He instructed Jonas to tell Jonas's mother, who was also present at the ritual, how Jonas had killed him. Jonas's account recounted how he had been recruited into a group of guerillas responsible for hijacking cars on the national road. During one of these attacks they took a captive to serve as porter, a man from an area called Xinavane. A three-day forced march ensued. Among the prisoners was a woman with a baby, but when the infant slowed the pace of the march, a soldier killed her by smashing her head against a tree. At this point the man from Xinavane attacked the soldier but was struck to the ground by the soldier's rifle. The commander coming to investigate ordered Jonas to kill the man from Xinavane and Jonas, although reluctant, complied to avoid being killed himself.

In the transcriptions of the Ku Femba ritual Jonah points out that he would have been killed himself if he had not killed the porter. But Macuacua says to Jonas . 'But you killed me. I cannot take care of my family now. How do you want me to leave you in peace?'[211] An agreement was reached whereby Jonas would make reparations by staying with the porter's family for a year, and assisting them with farm labour. On his return, he participated for a further six months in psychotherapy sessions with the psychologists, but by this time, he also regularly referred to his ancestor, his paternal grandfather, after whom he was named, as helping him in his daily life.

The American psychiatrist George Engel, writing forty years ago said: 'Nothing will change unless or until those who control resources have the wisdom to

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[209] Ibid. 69

[210] Ibid. 69

[211] .Holland. *African Magic.* 73

venture off the beaten path of exclusive reliance on biomedicine. In a free society outcome will depend on those who have the courage to try new paths and the wisdom to provide the necessary support.'[212]

The anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere highlights the unacceptability of the assumption that before Western psychotherapy Africans 'went our muddled ways in the abysmal dark of ignorance'.[213] Buhrman conceptualizes that there is a credible equivalence between sangoma practise and the Jungian concept of 'collective unconscious.' [214] In sangoma practise Jung's 'collective unconscious' are the 'living dead', which manifest to support and aid sangoma healers. Sangoma view this engagement as taking place with a 'collective of spiritually living, tangible beings while Jungian imagery presents a more ephemeral unconscious collectivity.'[215] Van Binsbergen, both academic and sangoma, revealed that in his own practise 'eclectically, themes from the more dominant Western therapeutic traditions seep through, especially the psychoanalytical and the Jungian-analytical traditions.[216]' Speaking of working within both traditions he enlarges:

'Many problems in a person's life stem from the selective acceptance and repression of the past – some aspects of the past are simply so painful that we cannot face them, and instead warp our lives and personalities around ignoring them or compensating for them. Even if the information content of the sangoma oracle comes mainly or exclusively from the client's subconscious and not from the universe at large, then this readdressing and rearticulation of the past is likely to be immensely important and powerful as a redressive therapeutic tool.'[217]

Buhrman also reflects on how the paradigms of sangoma and psychotherapy differ in that psychotherapy typically focuses on solving an individual's problems, whereas sangoma practice sees a client's distress as relating to the family or community as a whole. An interesting development is the rise in popularity of Family Constellations Therapy (also known as Systemic Constellations and Systemic Family Constellations) - an alternative therapeutic method which draws on elements of family systems therapy, existential phenomenology and Zulu attitudes to family. This approach works in single session units and attempts to reveal previously unrecognized systemic dynamics spanning multiple generations in a family with a focus on resolving the negative effects of that dynamic by encouraging the subject to imaginatively contact representatives of the past and in so doing come to terms with the factual reality of the past. But even with Family Constellations Therapy, the emphasis is still on a single client. In contrast, sangoma concentrates on the broader picture – the individual as part of the whole with the ancestors playing an integral role in that cosmology. Burhman concludes that 'the relatedness

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[212] Engel, G.L. (1977) The need for a new medical model: a challenge for biomedicine. *Science*, 196(4286).129

[213] Obeyesekere, G. (1990), The Work Of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 21.

[214] Buhrmann, V. (1996) 'Views of Healing and the Healer', in M/Steyn and B.Motshabi (eds) *Cultural Synergy in South Africa*, Randburg, S.A. Randburg Knowledge Resources.

[215] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*.47.

[216] Van Binsbergen. *Intercultural encounters*. 228.

[217] Van Binsbergen. *Becoming A Sangoma* .269

of all participants in the ancestors contributes to the therapeutic success of sangoma.[218]

Buhrman also considers the impact of ancestral schism. In Western cultures the reality of death and dying are an almost taboo subject. The living are permanently separated from the dead, and coming to terms with the absoluteness of this loss is a cornerstone of bereavement therapy. Kubler-Ross's famous five stages of grief model was designed to help understand personal reactions to trauma, including bereavement. In Kubler-Ross's model the dying person, as well as the family and friends they will leave behind, go through a process of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance[219]. In sangoma societies the separation from a deceased love one, although still painful, is not a time for prolonged grief but rather a time for acceptance, and the pragmatic prospect of establishing a relationship across the boundaries of death. The subject of death and the dead are not avoided in day-to-day life, or regarded as an uncomfortable discussion. But on the other hand, 'a breach with the ancestors is seen as life-threatening, literally cutting the victim off from ancestral protection, rendering them vulnerable to illness or worse.'[220]

Reflecting on all of this, as a white South African, the core issue in creating a sustained integration between western medicine, western psychotherapy and traditional healing is addressing white language incompetency. South Africans live close to trauma – a Global Peace Index survey in 2014 ranked South Africa as the eighth most violent country in the world with a murder rate of thirty-one per 100,000 people. Violence disproportionately affects black people because they disproportionately live in poverty, and do not have the economic resources to protect themselves. Yet the country's psychologists are predominately white and predominately bilingual in the white languages of English and Afrikaans. 'The talking cure' is inaccessible if people cannot talk in their own first language. White South Africans often express a helplessness at 'what to do' about violence and trauma in the nation, a trauma experienced at close hand by the cleaners, nannies and gardeners who come in daily to raise their children and service their homes. A starting point, and something I was deprived of, would be to make every South African schoolchild fully trilingual in English, Afrikaans and their regional African language, so that they can carry those language skills into their professions and truly respond to their fellow South Africans without the language barriers that are a remaining legacy of the blight of apartheid.

Concepts around the importance of family, names and identity

Malidoma explores the cruciality of family to wellbeing among Dagara. There is a complex web of relationships, some of which are entirely foreign to a Westernized understanding. Malidoma's father blames his inability to use spiritcraft effectively on his poor relationship with his own father, but he doesn't

[218] Buhrmann. *Living in Two Worlds.* 96
[219] Kubler-Ross, E. (1981) *Living With Death and Dying.* New York. MacMillan.
[220] Buhrmann. *Living in Two Worlds.* 37.

put that down simply to not having got on with his father, but rather to his not having known his grandfather. In this view the grandfather, an arguably peripheral figure in the West, is completely central – with the grandfather removed, father and son cannot bond. Another unfamiliar concept in Dagara custom is the figure of the 'male mother.' As the boy approaches manhood, the father needs to distance himself from the child – Malidoma calls it 'a natural need for transfer of reference.'[221] At this point the male mother – the boys' mother's brother – is expected to step in. The idea is that this person, by his direct association with the mother, embodies the feminine in the male and is therefore someone who 'carries water'[222] – who can teach the feminine qualities of peace, quiet, reconciliation and healing.

I have spoken about the Southern African tradition's hereditary principle in connection with healing powers being passed from parent to child. This concept is embedded in *Sangoma Boy.* Olly has two spirit guides: Sanna and Nokhanyo. They visit him and guide him throughout his *ukuthwasa*, but it is only in one of the final scenes of the novel, when he succumbs to a dangerously prolonged epileptic fit, that his father Jack reveals that they are actually his maternal grandmothers, and that they were both shamans. Jack also tells Olly that his own mother fled from *ukuthwasa* and died. The series also explores the concept of mending relationships between family members, both living and dead. Jack has turned his back on his Afrikaner family, after they rejected his Xhosa wife. But the third book in the series, *Whales Of The Wild Coast*, begins when Olly's estranged Afrikaner grandmother visits him as a spirit. The context of this is that she has just died of old age, and she is begging Olly to effect a reconciliation between her husband and her son.

The name Malidoma means 'be friends with strangers and enemies.' Malidoma explains that the Dagara believe that every individual is born with a specific destiny and, because of this, Dagara names are programmatic. The name outlines the task of its bearer and 'constitutes a continual reminder to the child of the responsibilities that are waiting up ahead.'[223] A person's whole purpose is implicit in the name he or she carries.

The process of name selection is very specific. A few months before the birth the Dagara convene a hearing, involving the mother, her close male relatives and the village shaman. The child's father is excluded from the hearing. During the ritual, the mother enters a trance (later she cannot recall anything from the ceremony) and the soul of the new person she bears speaks through her and responds to questions asked by the shaman.

The Dagara believe in reincarnation. The shaman assesses who it is exactly who is being reborn, why it has chosen to return and what gender it has chosen. Souls in turn ask for preparations to be made for their arrival – 'talismanic power objects, medicine bags, metal objects in the form of rings for the ankle or the wrist.'[224] The purpose of these objects is to remind the incoming soul, once born,

[221] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit.* 163
[222] Ibid. 12
[223] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit.* 1
[224] Ibid. 20

who they are and what they have come to the world to do. After the hearing, a name is chosen for the foetus that reflects its life purpose.

As I discussed in my reflections on writing *Sangoma Boy*, names are important to a novel and need to be appropriate to the character. But for certain characters, who have a specific purpose within the arc of Olly's young life from his birth to his diagnosis, I chose programmatic names. His mother is Nikelwa. The name means 'the offering' in Xhosa. She dies in childbirth, offering her life for Olly's.

On the first night that Olly spends at Motsumi Lodge he suffers a severe epileptic fit during which his spirit guide, Nokhanyo, tells him: 'If you want to learn, you need first to speak to your father. Where you are now, the One of the Light is close and can help you. He is waiting to help you. You must ask the One of the Light to help you with your father.' When Olly returns to Motsumi Lodge and again has a severe fit, both his guides urge him to summon the One of the Light. Olly sees an image of the person they mean, and calls for the night watchman, Lesedi, who diagnoses him as a sangoma. Lesedi is the seSotho word for light, and his purpose in the novel is to illuminate for Olly the fact that he is not randomly ill or delusional, but is undergoing *ukuthwasa*.

It is customary in African society to give people descriptive nicknames, which might describe either their physical attributes, or their role in life. While we were growing up, the Sotho nannies on my grandfather's farm always called one of my brothers 'Mafuta' – the fat one - because he was a plump sturdy little boy. Graham was given the Venda name 'Mashudu' meaning 'the lucky one' but when she became a *nyanga*, the name was expanded to 'Mashudu Muratho' – 'Mashudu, the bridge.' The Chief of the Venda gave her the honorary title 'Makahdzi', which means literally 'my sister by another mother', but indicates a debt of service.

Names hold power and truth, and deceit or confusion over names can break the channels of communication with the ancestors. Graham narrates an anecdote about a young white man who came to consult with her and Phineas, but although they both threw their bones separately neither of them was able to obtain any kind of reading at all. They told the man they couldn't help him, and he asked them if they thought it mattered that he had given them a false name. He had not wanted to reveal his actual identity.

When moving between worlds, different names can bestow different identities on the same person. In South Africa, Mandela is referred to by five alternative names. His programmatic birth name, given to him by his father was 'Rolihlahla'. It means 'the one who is going to make trouble.' But in that era, black children in the mission schools were routinely assigned an English name on the first day, and Rolihlahla became Nelson. He is most commonly known at home as 'Madiba', which is actually his Thembu clan name (the Thembu are a Xhosa sub-clan) but is an affectionate, informal name. And even more informally he was referred to by the people who worked alongside him, even by some of the whites, as 'Tata' (Xhosa for father) if they were one generation younger than him, or 'Khulu' (a contraction of the Xhosa word '*uBawomkhulu*' - grandfather), if they were significantly younger.

Malidoma describes how, after his grandfather's death, the old man came to him in spirit to talk to him about his life's purpose. 'Later [...] you will be forced to

make up a new world for yourself. It will be a world where Patrice will be very present, and Malidoma very absent. Do not be confused when this happens.'[225] All the boys at the seminary are known only by their French names, but when Patrice runs away to return to his village, he becomes Malidoma once more.

Spiritcraft objects and their functions

Shamans collect totemic items that are kept in a pouch- these function as symbols or spiritcraft tools in divination. Each spiritcraft tool added to the pouch contributes to the divination abilities of the healer but you can't just add spiritcraft tools to your pouch willy-nilly – the spiritcraft tool needs to summon you. Spiritcraft tools themselves can seem very insignificant to an outsider. When Malidoma goes to consult the diviner Guisso after his return from the seminary he remarks of Guisso's medicine objects that they were 'a collection of the very things that an uninformed person would normally overlook because they were too natural, too trivial to attract attention.'[226] But for Guisso 'power was in the trivial-looking thing, the thing that looked weak and valueless.'[227]

In *Sangoma Boy* Olly visualizes his first spiritcraft tool – an ivory amulet with an elephant etching carved into it - at the beginning of the book, and then, after Sanna[228] tells him where it is hidden, finds the amulet under the roots of a sycamore tree towards the end of the book. In *Desert Lion* Lesedi gives Olly his own spiritcraft pouch after Olly's announcement ceremony, and one of the through lines of the whole series is that in each book Olly will find a spiritcraft object that he adds to his pouch and that will then serve an important function later in the book. This concept doesn't play out entirely in *Sangoma Boy* as, in the Southern African traditions, you will only start to collect for your spiritcraft pouch after you announce your intention to train. But in *Desert Lion* Sanna leads Olly to a quartz crystal that he later uses to calm an angry lioness, and he also adds a lion knucklebone to his pouch, from the paw of the lioness who is murdered in the book. One of my consultant sangomas, Julia Raynham, gave me a lion knuckle bone myself, after a consultation, to keep as a totemic object. She explained that the bone would symbolize my African community but also would energize me toward an easier pathway in life because lions famously follow the path of least resistance, being phenomenally patient and cunning about expending energy only when there is a very good chance of a successful outcome to a hunt.

Raynham said of my lion bone 'If you fall asleep holding it, it will direct your dreams in a particular way.'[229] She chose the knucklebone for me because, as a finger bone, it represents the collective, a path of planned action achieved by working together. 'When you go back to London, if you feel isolated the bone can be a guide back to home thoughts and memories.'[230]

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[225] Ibid.40
[226] Ibid. 164
[227] Ibid.164
[228] Olly's great grandmother and San spirit guide.
[229] (J. Raynham, personal communication, January 3rd, 2010)
[230] (J. Raynham, personal communication, January 3rd, 2010)

Graham writes in detail about the process of collecting spiritcraft tools. In the Southern African traditions, all spiritcraft tool kits must contain four wooden divining dice, which have a carved side and a plain side, and a head end and a feet end. The *limnana* dice represents a young woman; the *twalima* dice represents an older woman. A *tshilaumi* dice represents a young man; a *lwhame* dice represents an older man. These dice are the basics, and it takes about six months to learn how to work with them. Once that skill is mastered, objects are added to represent the extended family until the furthest extended family is reached. These objects, at the initial throwing, will indicate group behaviour and circumstances in the family, and whether an individual needs to be singled out for a specific reading. Also basic to the kit is a conch shell with a frilled edge, which is known as the house of *Amalozi* (the house of the spirits). This is used to describe a person's house and how to enter it. It is used in conjunction with two pebbles – a river pebble to show where the water-place (the bathroom) is and a land pebble to show where the fire-place (the kitchen) is. An ocean shell indicates travel away from Africa (i.e. across the sea). In Graham's particular kit there were also baboon bones, which she choose as baboon patterns of behaviour are closest to human behaviour, to divine the relationship between man and wife, and problems within a marriage. When Graham was putting her kit together she was also told by her teacher Phineas to find certain shells that represented gender – a large womb-shaped tiger cowrie for women, a conch shell for men, a ringed cowrie for a baby girl and a spotted cowrie for a baby boy. Sometimes when she was instructed to find a spiritcraft object, it took a long time. For example, when Phineas said she needed a fire symbol, a period of two years passed before a package arrived unexpectedly in the post, containing a burnt cowrie shell from a 3000 year old Bushman fire midden. There was a note in the package from the sender who explained that she was an archeologist who had heard that Graham was searching for a fire symbol, and she had found the midden on a dig and thought of Graham.

These objects also needed to be prepared. Phineas gave Graham a particular root and with new objects, she needed to shave the root into a bowl with water every night for a week and then whip up the water and root into froth and bathe with the froth morning and night. This *muti* water would make the new objects strong.

The healer's spiritcraft objects are also a way of determining her status and the level of her expertise. On one occasion Graham, while still in training, was divining in Botswana. After the reading a local *nyanga* gave her an antbear snout. The antbear snout is a graduation bone – you are not allowed to collect it yourself, and it must be given by a member of the profession who is not your teacher if her or she perceives that you are ready. For Graham the gift of the snout was equivalent to having a degree conferred. Levels of expertise are also indicated by the kind of stick the healer carries – a healer in training uses an ordinary wooden porridge stick. Next is a wooden stick covered with glass beads, then the tail of a cow and then the tail of a horse. The most experienced healers use the tail of a wild animal.

When the spiritcraft objects are to be thrown, the healer gives the patient the bag to hold and breathe into, so that the patient's personality and experiences will enter the spiritcraft objects. Then the healer takes the bag back and shakes it,

banging on the floor a couple of times before emptying the objects onto a reed mat. The stick is twirled in the healer's hands as she pores over the objects, looking for patterns and meanings in the placement of the objects.

Sangomahood and herbalism

Arden began her sangoma training with a domestic worker referred to only as Joyce in her memoir. It is fairly common for sangomas to support themselves by working in domestic service in South Africa. I built this into the plot of *Sangoma Boy* - one of Olly's spirit guides, Nokhanyo, was both a sangoma and nanny to Olly's father Jack, whilst living. Arden recalls how, early on in Arden's training, Joyce takes her out to scavenge middle class hedgerows in suburban Johannesburg, collecting *imbozisa* (fenell), *isidletshene* (kalanchoe), i*sikhothokhotho* (sansevieria), and *payi bashimane* and *inyanthelo* (different kinds of roots). Joyce explains the uses of the different herbs. Some uses are acceptable to Arden – fennel for a stomach ache and kalanchoe for an ear infection. But she baulks at the explanation that *payi bashimane* will help an illegal immigrant avoid the police and *inyanthelo* will enable some-one driving without a license not to get caught. But Joyce is adamant about both these outcomes. Arden – caught between her eagerness to embrace sangomahood and her incredulity at what she is being taught - rationalizes to herself: 'If, together, we all believe that this will work, or that something has power, then indeed it has power and it will work. Is this no less true when, for example, we celebrate the Eurachist? There too, we have an agreement. We have agreed that the wine and the wafer represent the body and blood of Christ, and are an expression of His continuing presence. It is a communion, a possession in common of a deep understanding. And their understanding, although different, is no less common and less deep.'[231]

Malidoma's memoir includes the notion that plants can actually converse with humans about their healing properties. He recalls a blind healer from his village who was particularly adept at obtaining plant medicines. According to Malidoma this healer worked at night and slept during the day. In the middle of the night he would order his patients to follow him into the bush, at which point he would speak to Mother Nature in a 'strange language'[232] and the plants and trees would buzz back at him. 'For the witness it was gibberish, but for the blind healer it made sense. He would translate, telling each patient that such and such a tree said his fruit, dried and pounded and then mixed with salted water and drunk, would take care of the disease in question. Another plant would say that it couldn't do anything by itself, but that if the patient could talk to another plant (whose name the healer knew) and mix their substances together, their combined energies could kill such and such an illness.'[233]

Working with sympathetic spiritcraft, rituals and trance

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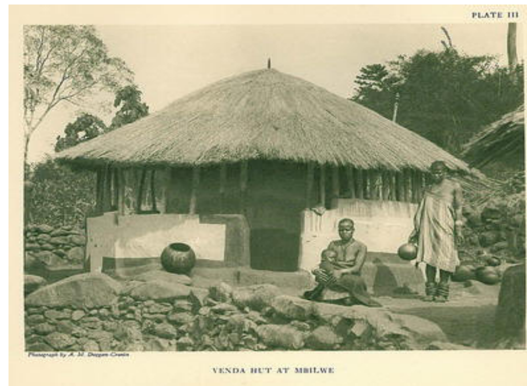
[231] Arden. *African Spirits Speak*..66
[232] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit*. 263
[233] Ibid. 263

Healing in the Southern African traditions, both through ritual and herbal remedies, has a performance element and the healer himself, in relaying utterances from the ancestors, will have a performative function. This concept of performance also manifests in what Holland calls 'sympathetic magic'[234], when remedies carry a clear signal from their source to the intended patient of the properties captured in the remedy. So, for example 'to ensure a good journey, the prescription is made from a root that sends out runners and therefore knows its way. Belief that qualities can be transferred means that a cream made from the beautifully sleek skin of the python will make the hide of cattle gleam, or lion's fat smeared on the arms and legs of a soldier will make him feared by his enemies. To give a person security, the herbalist might administer a portion of the body of the steadfast tortoise; for swiftness, the sinew of a hare.'[235]

Performance is built into a shared understanding of the process in which a consultation takes place. For example in Venda, when a patient arrives for a consultation he has to take off his shoes and leave them outside the healer's hut before he alerts her to his presence by stepping inside the hut and shouting 'Avum'. (signifying 'knock'). As illustrated by the picture below traditional Venda huts don't have doors or even necessarily fully daubed walls (in this sub-tropical region average winter temperatures are twenty degrees Celsius rising up to forty degrees Celsius in summer, so the ventilation is welcome). So the verbal 'knock' announces the visitor.



Traditional hut in Venda

Once the healer has replied 'Savum' (signifying recognition of 'knock') the patient again calls out 'Avum' and the healer again calls out 'Savum.' At that point the patient sits down and shouts 'Vhumani' (basically, do you agree?) and the healer and anyone else working with the healer in the hut might say 'Siyavuma' (We are agreed). This formality connects everyone present in the performance that is about to take place, and only after this invitation is the patient given the bag of bones so he

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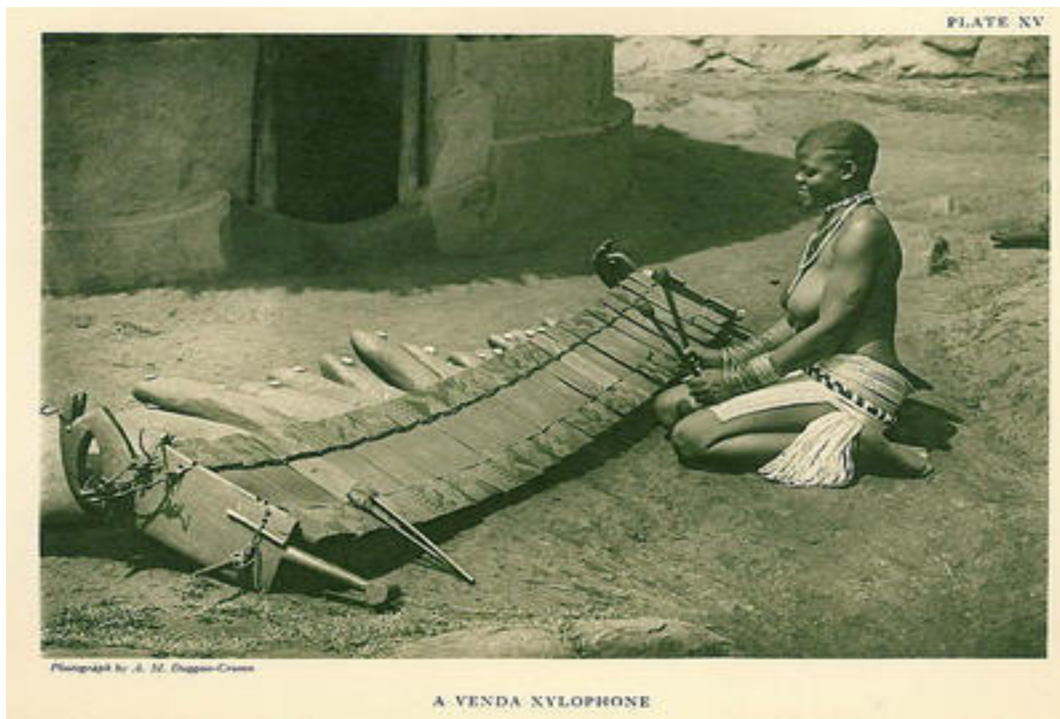
[234] Holland. *African Magic.* 15
[235] Holland. *African Magic.*15

can breath into it, blending his personality and experiences with the objects in the bag to personalize the throw for himself.[236]

Music is also very important in ritual in Venda, in healing rituals but also in everyday life and special rituals. Graham describes the wide range of instrument used; stringed instruments, flutes, drums, calabash rattles, seed rattles, small *mbilas* to be held in the hand and played by one person, and large floor-standing *mbilas* used by two musicians. A person's status affects what instrument they are allowed to play so, for example, only married women can play the stringed instrument called a *lugube*. Each chief has a horn-player, who blows his horn made from a kudu horn, wherever the chief goes. The most revered instrument is the *tshikona* flute, made from reeds, which is played only by men. The flutes are made from an indigenous bamboo which only grows in Venda. Each flute plays only one note but a melody is created when a group of men play together. This music is the soundtrack for Venda's national dance, also called the *Tshikona*. Only men dance in the *Tshikona*.



Above, floor mbila, and below, hand mbila

[236] This sequence of events is described in McCallum, *Tales of the African Life of Rae Graham*. 184-185.

Above, married woman playing a lugube, and below, men dancing the Tshikona[237].

237 Photographs from African History and Photo Gallery:http://www.reunionblackfamily.com/apps/photos/photo?photoid=163580210

Rituals can also involve physical pain. In the Dagara initiation, the boys were buried alive, horizontally, with only their head above ground. Having witnessed the screams of other boys the night before his own burial, Malidoma had expected fear. But when he himself was interred, 'the ordeal of being buried alive had nothing to do with fear, but it was filled with pain.' He experiences the pain both through the unrelieved weight of all the soil on his body, to which he had to be completely submissive, but also through an intense heat.

Although unable to move, Malidoma found he could alleviate the pain through screaming. 'Screaming outwits pain because pain is one of the body's languages. To speak back at pain is to scream. While you scream the pain listens or waits till you're done in order to speak back. That way there is an endless dialogue of stubborn entities talking to each other.' This notion of screaming as a dialogue with pain struck a chord with me from my memories of giving birth. I give birth very rapidly, with a time lapse of about two hours from first contraction to crowning. With my firstborn I was so shocked by the sudden drama of intense pain and vomiting (it hadn't been described like that at all in the NCT classes) that I asked for an epidural as soon as I got to hospital. But with my middle child, Charlotte, I was a bit more on top of things and elected to go to the natural birth ward. Unfortunately there wasn't a midwife available so I sat in the bath in the dark for an hour, with only my anxious husband in attendance, while Charlotte pumped herself down the birth canal. When I knew I was about to crown her I insisted my husband get any available midwife to come and help and got myself out of the bath and onto the bed and the midwife arrived and I crowned Charlotte. But the combination of fear from the chaotic birth and not having any pain relief made it really sore, and I

remember with some astonishment hearing my own screaming, and a sense of wonderment that I was capable of making such a primal and otherworldly noise. And then I realized that her head was out and all that was left was the relatively easy part of expelling her shoulders and lower body and the placenta. In the ritual of the birth, my crowning screams had been so all-consuming that they swallowed the climax of the pain.

Graham narrates an anecdote in which both theatricality and the idea of possession were built into a ritual to diffuse tension in a South African factory during the apartheid era. The factory owner, a white man, was politically progressive and had tried to introduce into the life of the factory more equitable and polite ways of operating. However because he was young and because his manner was so different from the white management the workers were used to, he was perceived as weak and there was an epidemic of stealing. He called Graham and Phineas, her mentor, to help him to deal with the situation and they arrived at the factory, Phineas in a suit and tie, and Graham in Venda tribal clothes, and they conducted a bone reading in the middle of the factory floor with all the staff present. Graham describes the staff as being 'agog at a black and a white *nyanga* in their factory.'[238] In the reading, Phineas and Graham picked out the workers who had stolen from the factory and separated them from the group. But the factory owner had already made clear to them that he didn't want any job losses; he just wanted the stealing to stop. So Graham and Phineas told the workers that they had been stealing because they were possessed by a bad spirit and they needed to go through a cleansing ritual. In the ritual itself, which involved mopping the walls of the factory, Graham held the bucket and Phineas did the mopping, with Graham walking behind Phineas. This was also done to harness the power of theatre in a ritual act; at that time in that country for a white woman to carry a bucket for a black man, and walk behind him, was unheard of and they wanted the workers to perceive the significance of two people of different races co-operating respectfully, and to make that connection to the factory owner's way of running the factor. Graham reports that after the ritual cleansing, although no-one was sacked, there was also no more stealing.

Malidoma describes how during his initiation he experiences states of trance. These states are vividly heightened and also induce synaesthesia. 'The way this life expressed itself was otherwordly: sounds were blue or green, colours were loud. I saw incandescent visions and apparitions, breathing colour amid persistent immobility. Everything seemed alive with meaning.'[239] Holland looks at the phenomenon of healers using trance states to exorcise possessed people by absorbing the demon into their own bodies. She narrates the story of a Namibian Himba woman called Katjambia, who specializes in healing possessed cattle herders. Using rhythmic music (created by drums and a calabash rattle) she induces the patient into a trance. This angers the possessing spirit who unmasks himself, allowing Katjambia to identify the nature of the curse. At this point she commands the spirit to possess her instead, but being stronger than the spirit, she then

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[238] McCallum, *Tales of the African Life of Rae Graham*. 215
[239] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit*. 201

exorcises it from her own body, 'at which moment a celestial light is said to flash from her body.'[240] Trance is arguably the most dramatic aspect of sangoma experience, and, connoted within a Christian understanding of diabolical possession, often regarded by westerners as a negative and frightening state. The social anthropologist John Beattie described trance as 'usually, (though not always) a bad thing'[241] . This attitude typifies much of the anthropological response to trance states for most of the last century although in Katz's work with the Kalahari !Kung he describes positively how !Kung healers enter 'kia' which he calls neutrally 'an altered state of consciousness' in order to access 'num' energy.[242]Katz recognizes that kia has a psychotherapeutic purpose and serves as a healing intervention for the whole community. In African millennial literatures attitudes to trance become more celebratory. Buhrman focuses on the healing power of *inthlombe* gatherings, detailing how these events slowly build intensity through songs, music and dancing until 'the guiding spirit of the officiating *igqirha*, or healer, comes to his aid.'[243] The psychologist Professor Tholende Sodi, studying trance rituals among the Northern Sotho, emphasized the Jungian therapeutic role of ritual trance, arguing that the movement of spirit in and out of a human host provides an opportunity for 'role play and release.'[244] The psychoanalyst Rene Devisch, studying spiritual practices among the Yaka of the Congo, describes Yaka trance as 'evocative of an astonishing, dreamlike transport to an extraterritoriality of world of uncanny strangeness … constituting an initiation into the virtualities of an elsewhere.'[245]

Wreford details her experience of trance possession at her *godwusa*. She describes how she heard a voice telling her to dance on her knees, which she did. Her trance state was activated and intensified by the hand clapping and choral singing, as 'the possessing spirit spoke quietly, but urgently, unheard except by me, but the furious knee dancing was enough to offer the provenance of my enhanced state'[246] (her teacher, Nosibele, later revealed to her that she had danced on her knees because she embodied an elderly ancestor, one whose legs were too unsteady to support her). During the trance, Wreford describes her 'real self' as 'elsewhere, temporarily absent.'[247] For Peek the host-mind is this state of trance 'is shifted to the side'; existing in a liminal space suspended between human consciousness and spirit directive. The possession has a staged quality.[248] Wreford identified trance as

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[240] .Holland. *African Magic.* 21

[241] Beattie, J.(1966) *Other Cultures: Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology,* London: Routlege and Kegan Paul. 229-230.

[242] Katz, R. (1982) *Boiling energy: community healing among the Kalahari Kung*. London: Harvard University Press. 95

[243] Buhrmann. *Living in Two Worlds*. 57-58

[244] Sodi, T. (1998) *A Phenomenological Study of Healing in a Northern Sotho Community,* PhD Thesis, Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

[245] Devisch , R (2001) 'Sorcery Forces of Life and Death among the Yaka of Congo,' in G.C. Bond and D. Ciekawy (eds) *Witchcraft dialogues: Anthropological and philosophical exchanges.* Ohio: Centre for International Studies. .106

[246] Wreford. *Working with Spirit..* 145

[247]Ibid . 145

[248] Peek. *African Divination Systems.* 205.

a ‘dramatic evocation’[249] in which no-one can foretell the plot, but a drama is anticipated by the audience. The possessed person takes the stage and performs ‘according to ancestral direction to enact a symbolic representation of an ancestral self.’[250]

Trance is an act of human submission. Melanie Reinhart describes the spirit taking possession as finding ‘a temporary residence […] a platform in the material world, from which to seek validation.[251] Reis outlines that in the trance condition the human occupied is ‘literally on the brink, messages are transmitted, illnesses are diagnosed and remedies offered, things lost (including emotions) are retrieved, and things wrong, or out of balance are discovered, and the means to resolution presented.’[252] But she also adds the caveat that ‘mediums have to learn how to handle the powers of the spirits possessing them.’[253] Wreford’s description of possession includes an example of a ceremony where one of the sangomas began to appear disturbed and then collapsed, completely inert except for the clenching and unclenching of her hand. The presiding sangoma intervened to bring her back to consciousness by moving her arms in circular motions and shouting in her face. For Wreford this incident illustrated potential danger in trance, sometimes showing that the possession had gone to far and it was ‘time for a return.’[254]

Occupation by animal spirits

A recurring theme in the literature of sangomahood is the concept of being occupied by an animal spirit. Arden describes ‘And one day[…] from the base of my spine, from a place deep where I sit, the snake uncoils. She rises through me, through my spine, through my diaphragm.[255] Later in the training she experiences herself as a leopard – ‘my front legs tread in sure footfalls, shoulders rolling […]. All is consumed in the motion, in the liquidly repetitive padding, in the smooth sweep of the shoulders.[256] She has a second leopard vision at the end of her training, just before her graduation test, when she had to divine where hidden animals have been tethered. Joyce tells her she will find the animals more easily, because the vision means she is strong like a leopard. In *Sangoma Boy* I also explored the idea of identifying with animals, in the scene where Olly has the sensation of being bitten on the lip by a viper at London Zoo which leads to him preserving the pregnant okapi from the same fate.

Light and darkness; spirits and sorcerers

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[249] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.* . 146
[250] Ibid.146
[251] Reinhart, M (1990) ‘Zimbabwe Remembered.’ In G. Saayam (ed), *Modern South Africa in Search of a Soul,* Boston Massachusetts: Sigo Press. 199
[252] Reis. ‘The ‘Wounded healer as Ideology. 67
[253] Ibid. 67
[254] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*. 151.
[255] Arden. *African Spirits Speak.*.66-67
[256] Ibid. 101

Anthony Lawrence talks about electric light having vanquished European's ancestors. Malidoma endorses this idea. 'Among the Dagara, darkness is sacred. It is forbidden to illuminate it, for light scares the Spirit away. Our night is the day of the Spirit and of the ancestors, who come to us to tell us what lies on our life paths.'[257] Jonker picks up on this theme, explaining that whereas all sorcerers are believed to have the power to harm others, to send mythical animals and to change shape 'night-sorcerers' are the most feared because they are believed to be indiscriminately evil and will place harmful medicines on objects that others will use. Day sorcerers by contrast will only 'operate in response to someone with whom they are in conflict[258].' Berglund's Zulu informants echoed this view: 'It is because they work in darkness […] There is no shade that appears very much in the light.'[259]

White sangomas

An increasing number of whites are openly training and graduating in South Africa. This development has caused considerable tension between black sangomas who support white *ukuthwasa*, and black sangomas who feel *ukuthwasa* is inauthentic and impossible for a white person. Nokuzola Mndende, a Xhosa sangoma and former lecturer in religious studies at the University of Cape Town argues: 'An *igqirha*[260] is someone who has been called by their ancestors to heal, whether from the maternal or paternal side, they can't be called by [somebody else's] ancestors.'[261]

Mrs Mndende takes as her principle the idea of ancestral lineage, as described by Hammond Tooke and outlined earlier in this thesis. Central to this principle is the concept of clan ancestors, and their direct genetic link to living clan members. Of *ukuthwasa* graduation Mrs Mndende says:

'You must perform certain rituals to show you have accepted the call; your family plays a major role in this. When you perform the acceptance of the call, there are people responsible for certain duties. In the case of the Xhosa, the first born male at home slaughters the sacrificial goat and uses the sacred assegai; the paternal aunt makes the sacred necklace – the hair from the sacred cow is woven together with *usinga* – the ligament found in the vertebral column. When that goat is slaughtered, there is a portion of meat taken first and roasted inside the kraal. It can *only* be clan members who perform this; all those things should be done by your own people in your own home.'[262]

There is much argument over whether white people actually do have

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[257] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit.* 175
[258] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative.* 52
[259] Berglund. *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism*. 72
[260] healer
[261] Bosworth, B. (2010) "Testing time for white sangomas". *The Big Issue South Africa.* 26 July.
[262] Chidester, D. (2012) *Wild Religion: Tracking the Sacred in South Africa.*California. University of California Press.201

ancestors in the African sense (i.e. living dead who are pro-actively and concernedly engaged in their day to day lives). But even if they did, to what clans would those ancestors belong? The rituals described by Mrs Mndende are proscribed to anyone who is not a clan member. In this conservative but widespread view point a white person cannot become a sangoma because they do not have a clan and therefore they cannot complete the rituals necessary for graduation. Since those rituals legitimize their status as a sangoma, they cannot ever be considered sangoma.

But this viewpoint is repudiated by Dr Philip Kubukeli, director of the Traditional Medical Practitioners, Herbalist and Spiritual Healers Association, and Phephsile Maseko, publicity officer for the Traditional Healers Organisation. Both healers have publicly declared that there is no issue with white sangomas, and that traditional healing knows no colour.[263] In Dr Kubukeli's narrative of sangomahood, being a traditional healer is a construction built on interaction with the social world and is subject to change. Kubukeli's attitude embraces the possibility for profound societal change by changing the wider narrative of belief surrounding *ukuthwasa* and sangoma. The American psychologist Donald Polkinghorne wrote: 'The realization of the self as a narrative in process serves to gather together what one has been, in order to imagine what one will be, and to judge whether this is what one wants to become.'[264] . Kubukeli has addressed the contentious question of the white lack of clanship by acknowledging that the role of the ancestors, both as catalyst and as ongoing support, is crucial to a *thwasa*'s progress. But he also suggests that white *thwasa* can be readily absorbed within the kinship boundaries of their black sangoma teachers.

Kinship patterns in poverty-struck urban areas like Khayelitsha outside Cape Town are already striking dissimilar to traditional structures. While a web of relationships and a supportive social network remain essential to people's wellbeing, when nuclear families have moved to the city, they are far removed from their traditional clan i.e. those people connected to them through a patrilineal link such as a great great grandfather. So, in contemporary urban South Africa, clan relations have often shifted to an 'as if' evocation of clanship. In Spiegel and Mehlwana's study of the effects of migrancy in Khayelitsha they surmised that: 'People utilize the norms of kin-based relationships between people acknowledged to have no a priori genealogical kinship link.'[265] For Dr Kubukeli, making a white *thwasa* a nominal kin member is simply an extension of a societal reordering of kinship boundaries that is already taking place.

The 'no white sangomas' side of the debate also raise the issue that a white sangoma, however well-meaning, could potentially introduce ancestral contamination into the community. If a community accepts a white *thwasa*, they open up their lines of ancestral communication not just to that single *thwasa* but also to an entire foreign lineage of whom the community knows nothing. Given the

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[263] Sibanda, M. (2004) "Are white sangomas fake or real?". *City Press.* 7 March.

[264] Polkinghorne, D. (1998) *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.154

[265] Spiegel, A. and Mehlwana, M. (1997), 'Family as social network: Kinship and sporadic migrancy in the Western Capes's Khayelitsha', Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria: HSRC. 2

historic treatment of blacks at the hands of whites in South Africa, one can appreciate that these fears run deep.

An interesting perception on this debate is offered by Dr Nhlavana Maseko, founder of the Traditional Healers Organisation. Dr Maseko theorises that ' a foreign or alien spirit can call one to become a traditional healer, especially if there is a significant extreme relationship between one of the healer's biological ancestors and the foreign spirit that occurred in the past.'[266] If one accepts that colonial conquest, followed by apartheid, generated multiple 'significant, extreme relationships', then, within a traditional healing cosmology, it makes sense that in South Africa so many white sangomas, claiming to be guided by African spirits, have emerged since the first democratic elections in 1994.

De Bruyn acknowledges that there is a possibility in South Africa that black sangoma are taking on white thwasa to 'seek compensation, monetary or emotional[267], for the colonial deprivations of their ancestors. Wreford concurs that it is possible that her teacher, Nosibele took her on as a *thwasa* 'precisely (if subconsciously) to process some of her difficult personal distress[268] . But Nosibele also told Wreford 'In this life you are white, and it is the white ancestors you are working on behalf of. There may have been others at some time, but for this work – remember your white ancestors.'[269] For Wreford this observation hinted at what the amaXhosa call the *ndiki amndawu,* Reis's 'foreign spirits'[270], so powerful and so old that they 'inhabit a landscape of spiritual heritage of sufficient depth to transcend clan and even race.'[271] Wreford herself believes that there is a specific, important and urgent task for white sangomas. White sangomas are equipped with a superior education (thanks to the apartheid legacy of Bantu education) are often multilingual (English, Afrikaans and the African language within which they trained) and understand sangoma practise. This positions them perfectly to advance the cause of medical pluralism in South Africa, to answer 'the need for a mutually respectful dialogue between sangoma and biomedicine.' [272]

Negative aspects of shamanism, spiritcraft and witchcraft

'As a sangoma and vehicle for the spiritual world you are thus never 'off duty', which to me emphasized that sangomahood is a way of life, rather than an occupation.'[273] 'The spirits are always like this. They do not care whether we need rest or not.'[274]

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[266] Broch-Due, V. (2005) *Violence And Belonging:The Quest For Identity In Post-Colonial Africa*. Psychology Press. 97

[267] De Bruyn, P. (2004) 'Wounded Healers,' M&G Leisure, *Mail and Guardian,* Dec, Johannesburg:M&G Media Limited.

[268] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*. 194.

[269] Ibid. 167.

[270] Reis. 'The 'Wounded healer as Ideology.,62.

[271] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*. 167.

[272] Ibid. 170

[273] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative.* 89

In Jonker's study, her sangoma subject tells Jonker a narrative of her life. What strikes Jonker, again and again, is how choiceless the sangoma seems to be as the narrative unfolds. 'Tradition and culture are primary discourses in your life and must be adhered to above all else.'[275] In the beginning, the sangoma is choiceless in the face of her calling. Her vocation is bestowed on her by the ancestors and she has to respect their wishes. Jonker reflects that, from Jonker's perspective, it seems that the sangoma has been forced, out of fear, into a lifestyle she does not seem either to have chosen or be ready for. Jonker contrasts this to her own career experiences; her early training as a lawyer, followed by a shift into journalism when law proved unsatisfying, and finally, after growing disillusioned with the negativity and sensationalism of the newspaper industry, her decision to become a psychologist. Jonker's experience is typified by her freedom to explore the world, make mistakes, but define and reinvent herself. The sangoma's experience, by contrast, is typified by choicelessness.

After calling, the sangoma needs to train. Although she is married with three young children, she has no say in the duration or location of her training, and is forced to leave them for six months at the whim of the ancestors. When Jonker, also mother to a young child, decides to become a psychologist, she understands exactly at the outset what she should prepare for; the Masters course followed by a year's internship.

Jonker also explores how this choicelessness applies to the interpretation of a physical problem. Both women as teenagers suffer chronic headaches. Jonker is taken to a paediatrician who diagnoses her as being stressed, hormonally imbalanced and having a high sugar intake. She is put onto an exercise and diet program, and the headaches stop. But for the sangoma, within her specific and cultural social setting, the headaches are interpreted as a sign of her 'chosenness.' Another difference that Jonker theorizes must leave the sangoma feeling 'extremely powerless and one-dimensional'[276] is the extent to which the sangoma does not exist as an individual outside the discourse of sangomahood. The ancestors demand her utmost loyalty and her relationships with old friends deteriorate, a process she describes as 'killing' her. Jonker, by comparison, describes how, with friends and family, she can choose to leave her role as a psychologist behind and interact merely as a human being. Even within her work sphere, Jonker can create clear boundaries; the patients have one hour appointments, and do not know anything about Jonker's private life or where she lives. It is their responsibility, outside of therapy, to control their own destinies. The sangoma's professional practise is unboundaried; patients stay with her in her home until they have been helped. For Jonker this practise is 'frightening and intrusive.'[277] The aspect of no choice extends even to material things. The sangoma wanted to buy a house and expressed interest but was told by the agent after a time lapse that the sellers didn't want to sell anymore. She interpreted this information to mean that the ancestors did not want her to live

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[274] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit*.
[275] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative*. 84
[276] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative*. 84
[277] Jonker. *A Study of how a Sangoma Makes Sense of her 'Sangomahood' through narrative*. 86

in that particular house. She eventually moved into a house that she understood as chosen for her by the ancestors. Her whole life is defined by her sangomahood and she has no individual narrative outside of her sangomahood.

Malidoma also picks up on the idea of choicelessness. 'If you do not abide by the ancestral law, you tacitly ask for your own punishment.'[278] Part of this choicelessness, is the necessity of confronting extremes of fear. 'One must travel to the other side of fear, crossing the great plains of terror and panic to arrive at the quiet one feels in the absence of fear.'[279] Without this re-education through fear, a Dagara boy cannot metamorphosize into an initiated man.

Anthropologists have often struggled with how to interpret the realities of witchcraft, particular when their own experiences sit at odds with rational or empirical thought. Evans- Pritchard worked extensively with the Azande in Sudan and admitted later that, whilst in Sudan, he accepted their *mangu* spirits and belief system, experiencing difficulty once away from the field in 'shaking off unreason and returning to a clear view of how things really are.'[280] Social anthropologist Isak Niehaus characterized witchcraft as 'growing from feelings buried deep and made malevolent by social and family disruption, bitterness, anguish, distress.'[281] The anthropologist Misty Bastian, enlarged 'Instead of letting go of the 'stinging thing' [...] the witch embraces and keeps it in. The witch accumulates her pain and is goaded by it to seek solace in the pain and the exploitation of the life force of others.'[282]

A further negative issue is the harm accruing to healers if ceremonies are not conducted properly. Graham, in her capacity as Mashudu 'The Bridge' used to give lecture/ demonstrations to whites, together with her mentor, Phineas. On one occasion in 1980 they were invited to demonstrate to a large group of influential wealthy whites in Randburg (an industrial satellite town to Johannesburg) who wanted to better understand this aspect of their worker's lives. Phineas and Graham decided to take a third healer, Michael Moeketsi Moeng, to the demonstration. Although Phineas and Graham were actually working with the bones, at one point in the lecture Moeng leaned over them and focused on one woman in the audience. He diagnosed her as being very concerned over two health problems; a fractured skull from an earlier car accident, and whether there were still cancerous cells in her lymphatic system (she was a breast cancer survivor). He told her that both her skull and her cancer were entirely healed. Although the woman herself became tearful but grateful, Moeng withdrew completely after the diagnosis and asked to be removed at once. When Graham questioned him about what had happened he explained that although 'that woman needed me to help her

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[278] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit.* 42

[279] Ibid.226

[280] Winch, P. (1972), *Ethics abd Action*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,9

[281] Niehaus, I.(2001a) Witchcraft, power and Politics: Exploring the Occut in the South African Lowveld, Cape Town: David Philip; London: Pluto Press.

[282] Bastian, M.L. (1993) 'Bloodhounds who have no friends': Witchcraft and Locality in the Nigerian Popular Press'; in J.Comaroff and J. Comaroff (eds) *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 141

[…] I am now left still inside of her, because it was not done the right way. And now I shall have to go home for three days. I cannot work now.'[283] Graham had put him in a situation that was not acceptable to him, and that hurt him.

Holland explores a concept she calls the Image of Limited Good, which she suggests lies at the heart of all witchcraft accusations. There is a set amount of good fortune available to a community. If one person is overly fortunate, then someone else has to suffer. 'The pie is limited.'[284] So prosperous individuals run the risk of having others believe that they have used witchcraft to achieve personal progress, and in doing so have harmed someone else, meaning that witchcraft must, in turn, be used against them. Holland also looks at the frequency of witchcraft accusations against prosperous blacks, while it never happens that a witchcraft accusation is made against a white employer or enemy. Holland surmises that African 'magic', as she calls spiritcraft, is not considered powerful in an alien environment; to work, a witch has to be an insider. She also reflects that witchcraft is a theory of power, as well as a theory of evil. 'Most whites, being more powerful than the majority of Africans, are unlikely to envy Africans, and are therefore antithetical to the concept of witchcraft.'

Ashforth theorises that witchcraft is a way of 'answering questions about evil'[285] but also the opposite of evil – inexplicable financial gain or good luck. The unpredictable and disruptive dynamics of globalism fuel these residual tensions. Niehaus, studying neighbour relationships in the South African Lowveld, examines how post-apartheid South Africa has produced sudden discrepancies in wealth and opportunity at the same time as traditional belief structures in the rural communities have eroded, creating 'fertile ground for the production of new discourses of witchcraft.'[286]

A deeply negative corollary of the Image of Limited Good, apart from any direct association with witchcraft, is that it promotes a culture of mediocrity and a resistance to change. In traditional African communities in central and Southern Africa, historically, wealthy and successful people who have clearly bettered their lives from humble beginnings, are liable to raise questions about witchcraft. So there has been a behavioural premium on not standing out from the crowd. It is important never to boast or discuss success, or to express anger, or to fail to sympathize with the misfortune of others. It is essential to attend burial services, even of distant relatives, and also not to leave home, particularly to gain money through employment, if a relative is sick or dying.

Ashforth observes that the people afflicted by witchcraft are 'in more or less intimate relationships with the perpetrators – lovers, relatives, neighbours,

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[283] McCallum, *Tales of the African Life of Rae Graham* .228
[284] .Holland. *African Magic.* 12
[285] Ashforth, A. (2001), 'On living in a world with witches: Everyday epistology and spiritual insecurity in a nodern African city (Soweto)', in H.L.Moore and T.Sanders (eds) *Maginal Interpretations, Material Realities*, London/ New York: Routledge. 127
[286] Niehaus, I.(2001a) Witchcraft, power and Politics: Exploring the Occut in the South African Lowveld, Cape Town: David Philip; London: Pluto Press. (a)

schoolmates and workmates top the list of the usual suspects – and the motive of witchcraft is typically said to be jealousy.'[287]

Traditional obligations to clan are further stressed through the extreme kinship fracture that apartheid engineered. Black South Africans were obliged to track back and forth between the Bantustans (designated homelands) and the industrial centres where they could actually find employment, an ever-shifting dynamic in which familial and clan relationships were constantly strained, and children frequently raised almost entirely by grandparents and extended family. In a society where witchcraft is related to a disruption of home, family and interpersonal relationships, this colonial legacy is toxic. Ashforth describes these pressures as an environment of 'spiritual insecurity'[288]. Wreford observes in such an environment, witchcraft discourse has continued to operate and adapt,[289]particularly in the densely populated and dangerous conditions of the townships. The discourse of witchcraft, rooted in family and home, scales up to respond to metropolitan foreignness and insecurity, creating what anthropologist Peter Geschiere has called 'a modernity of witchcraft.'[290]

Customs around sickness, death and burial cause enormous tension between black workers and white employees in South Africa. I have a very clear memory of my paternal grandmother complaining about her gardener, Shorty, who also worked for my mother.[291] 'He seems to have a thousand relatives and every time one of them goes, he's back off to the Transkei[292] for a month.' [293] I went to my first funeral when I was eleven, which was for my great-uncle who had a bad war (fighting Hitler) and shot himself eventually. Everyone was very depressed at the funeral and for a long time afterwards, and it occurred to me that Shorty was always equable when he returned from funerals and I asked him why funerals didn't upset him. He only said it was very important to go to funerals. I never really considered the matter in its whole context until writing this essay. Holland surmises 'Any examination of the effects of witchcraft beliefs, particularly those factors contributing to the lack of material progress in Africa, needs to consider whether those beliefs are so intimately woven into everyday thinking that they endorse conformity to the detriment of change.'[294]

Another negative aspect of African traditional healing Holland explores, is the phenomena of witch-cleansing cults. She argues that witch-cleansing cults follow a predictable and cyclical pattern. A charismatic leader arises, and announces a need to neutralize the evil powers of witches in the community. There is a propaganda drive to spread this message, which may metastasize across

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[287]Ashforth. *An Epidemic of Witchcraft.* 126

[288] Ashforth. *On living in a world with witches. Passim.*

[289] Wreford. *Working with Spirit.*

[290] Geschiere, P. (1997), *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

[291] I don't know what his actual name was; no-one ever told me and I never asked. He was a small man, thus Shorty, and died of tuberculosis when I was eleven.

[292] The then Xhosa Bantustan.

[293] Overheard communication, Gretel Penny (grandmother) to Shirley Penny (mother); 1979.

[294]Holland. *African Magic.* .23

national and ethnic boundaries, followed by a cleansing procedure in which witches are detected and subjected to trial by ordeal. The witches confess, which endorses the effectiveness of the leader and the campaign in flushing out witches, the whole community are given doses of protective medicine and the witches are reabsorbed into the community. The witchcraft that has affected the community is considered vanished, until the next episode. Holland observes that the witch-cleansing cults are difficult to understand because they seem to have no clear motivation or effect although they could be seen as 'reinforcing harmony and unity in traditional communities.'[295] Interestingly, the two large ethnic groups which have no recent history of witch-cleansing movements (rather than isolated incidents of 'smelling out' are the Kikuyu of Kenya and the Bantu of South Africa, although the tribal belief system of both groups retains witchcraft as a core explanation for misfortune. Holland theorizes that this is potentially because 'Kenya and South Africa have been acutely affected by political changes involving social and economic reforms. Witch cleaning cults tend to arise in those parts of the continent that are remote from reformative processes such as the influence of political parties.'[296] Graham is frank about her intolerance of witch-hunts, saying 'I do not believe in the possession world and the smelling out and that whole format […] In everything in life there's a good and a bad slice, and the slice I cannot accept I now speak of in my lectures to whites and blacks.[297]

Ashforth, considering the phenomena of smelling out witches, details how destructive these purges are potentially. 'The suffering caused by witches can only be alleviated by repelling the forces of the witchcraft and protecting against further attack, either by mystic means of healing or by acting against the person … to neutralize their threat (by killing them for example.)'[298] Wreford also concedes that although potentially motivated by good and the desire to heal, the sangoma nevertheless 'treads an exceedingly fine line […] between defensive and offensive action'[299], a situation in which Wreford describes the healer as being 'umbilically bound' to the harmer[300].

'Like Leaves in your Hands': Authentic Portrayal of the Shamanic Experience in Children's Fiction

''This is not a game," he says slowly, "this is not play. This is serious." I am startled. He repeats it again, and since I don't know what else to say, I repeat back what I heard from him. "Yes," he says, "you understand.'

Then the other man speaks. He is taller and bearded. "This is not something for you to play at," he says, reiterating what the other man had said. And then he adds his own thought, one that will stay like a mantra in my head." You hold our

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[295] Ibid.32
[296] Ibid.33
[297] McCallum, *Tales of the African Life of Rae Graham*. 228
[298] Ashforth. *An Epidemic of Witchcraft.* 129
[299] Wreford. *Working with Spirit..* 180
[300] Ibid. 180

people like leaves in your hands," he says, cupping his hands. " You must treat them gently."[301]

The Zulu men speaking with Arden are advising her in the context of becoming a white sangoma. I am not a sangoma and never will be, but working with the theme of sangomas in fiction also brings responsibilities. For me, an authentic portrayal, not just of sangomas, but of all the tribes and cultures presented in the Bundu Bashers series is essential.

Colin Campbell raised this with me. 'In the Shangaan tradition, refusal to *thwasa* results in death. If a spirit possesses you and you don't listen to the spirit you will die eventually. How are you going to handle that truth in a children's book?'[302]

Adult test readers have expressed concern at the scene where Olly is diagnosed as a sangoma and Jack reveals that Olly's mother, Nikelwa, died in childbirth after refusing to *thwasa*. Dr Rebecca Webb, course leader for the Department of Education at the University of Sussex, said: ' This is one of the most unusual and fascinating novels for children I have ever read. But I can only imagine the horror from school boards in Michigan and Pennsylvania. They'll just see it as an argument for witchcraft.'[303] But I felt in the end that softening the brutal aspects of *thwasa* would be to do a disservice to the intelligence and maturity of my child readers. The American author Natalie Goldberg wrote: 'The things that make you a functional citizen in society - manners, discretion, cordiality - don't necessarily make you a good writer. Writing needs raw truth, wants your suffering and darkness on the table, revels in a cutting mind that takes no prisoners...'.[304]

Although Goldberg is writing in the context of memoir, her advice also holds true for children's literature. I felt confirmed in my authorial decisions when one of my test readers, an eleven year old, offered this feedback.

'This book feels really true because you never pretend away the horrible bits to make the story a fake story. I feel like I learned something about a real Africa, not a fluffy pretend Africa written just for children.'[305]

Campbell was also concerned that the novel would mingle San cosmology with the Shangaan tradition, as that fusion links two completely separate approaches to shamanism and he had never heard of anyone working with both traditions. I recognize his concerns but ultimately I think this is excusable because I have written a novel. I am not pretending to be a sangoma or inviting anyone to undergo a bone reading with me. Ten year olds in the UK are not going to be authoritative about which aspects of Olly's spiritcraft experiences are San-rooted and which are Shangaan-rooted, but they could potentially be interested and informed by both. What I am offering is art, not healing, and that gives me some leeway. As long as I portray both experiences respectfully, I have artistic license to imagine a boy rooted in both traditions and drawing on both traditions.

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[301] Arden. *African Spirits Speak.*.87
[302] C.Campbell, (2011) personal communication, August 2nd.
[303] R.Webb, (2010) personal communication, November 9th.
[304] Goldberg,N. (2009) *Old Friend from Far Away: The Practice of Writing Memoir.* New York. Free Press.
[305] G.Reilly,(2010) personal communication, September 9th.

There are not a plethora of children's books about African shamanism, but to bear out this discussion about the crucial need for authenticity in portraying shamans in children's fiction, I am going to examine two very different novels written during the millennial period.

The White Giraffe is a children's novel by Lauren St. John, first published in 2006. It is the first in her African Adventures series and was the winner of the 2008 East Sussex Children's Book Award. There are some compelling elements to the book, and the series as a whole: engaging plots, powerfully realized settings and numerous reviews on Amazon about how much child readers have enjoyed the series. Seventy two per cent of reviewers give the book five stars with only two percent giving it a single star (and one of those criticized it primarily for its 'scary theme of tribal mysticism and myth conquering western mores')[306].
But when it comes to the portrayal of sangomas and *ukuthwasa* in the series, the author's treatment of the subject is so light that the whole theme become specious. The protagonist Martine leaves England for Africa to live with her grandmother on the Sawabona Game Reserve after her parents are killed in a housefire. She is picked up at the airport by Tendai, a Zulu gamekeeper working on the reserve. This aspect of the novel is also very unconvincing – all the staff at Sawabona are Zulu, and the name itself is Zulu (meaning 'I respect you'), yet it is close enough to Cape Town, a Xhosa tribal area, for Martine to visit the city with her school on a day trip. Tendai's first port of call with Martine is to his aunt Grace which is when the implausibility of the novel goes into full thrust. Grace somehow contrives to be half-Caribbean, which presupposes that the apartheid-era government was quite happy to give tourism permits to Caribbeans during the regime. Grace presumably was also one of the few black South Africans during apartheid to enjoy a passport and foreign travel as she has acquired toecurlingly rendered modes of expressing herself. On spotting Martine she exclaims: 'I tole him you would be hungry […] and I see I'm right. Look at you, chile, you just skin'n'bone.'[307]

Although every black character in the novel continually tells Martine she has 'the gift' she is happily exempt from any suggestion of *ukuthwasa* suffering, although she does find a wounded bird mid-novel and heals him through a rapid heating up of hands. This episode is also a little problematic because the concept of *n'um* (healing through an intense heat experienced in the body) is a San tradition and completely remote from the Shangaan tradition that the Zulu characters are meant to be identifying in Martine (and I know that must sound a little hypocritical in the light of what I have just said).

Martine later finds a cave of rock art depicting the future. Towards the end of the novel she revisits the rock art cave and Grace, who has now been outed as a sangoma, presents in full Zulu tribal regalia with more weird speech: 'What you got to understand, chile, is that this arl started a long time ago.'[308] Dastardliness has

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306 http://www.amazon.com/product-reviews/1842555634/ref=cm_cr_pr_btm_link_1?k=The+White+Giraffe&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=helpful&reviewerType=all_reviews&formatType=all_formats&filterByStar=all_stars&pageNumber=1
307 St John, L. (2006) *The White Giraffe,* Great Britain: Orion Children's Books. 26
308 Ibid. 132

been underway involving poachers and animals, and Martine's help is required. But having been exempted from *ukuthwasa* she is also not expected to undergo formal sangoma training. Grace is happy to give her a crash course in tribal medicine on the spot 'Grace is gonna teach you a little magic'[309], followed by a homily on becoming more socially adept at school. 'Now I want to ax you somethin'. I got a cousin of mine who works down at your school and he tells me that you are arl the time arl by yourself […] It ain't good to be alone.'[310]

In the world of *The White Giraffe,* and St John's African Adventures series as a whole, if you are black you are kind, wise and good. If you are black and shamanic, in addition to your other positive qualities, you can draw from an arsenal of magical properties to fix things but you never ever use those same properties for harm. Malidoma remarked: 'For those of you who have begun to construct a romantic picture of indigenous life, let this be a warning. For the indigenous world is not a place where everything flows in harmony, but one in which people must be constantly on the alert to detect and to correct imbalances and illnesses in both communal and individual life.'[311]

The series is unsatisfying because imbalances happen only because of outside non-shamanic agencies (invariably corrupt whites) and there is no real exploration of the tension between spiritcraft and witchcraft. St John, perhaps afraid of those same censorious schoolboards in Michigan and Pennsylvania of which Dr Webb warned me, has only allowed herself to address the theme of African shamanism in an entirely romanticized and idealized approach.

A children's book dealing with the same themes but utterly different in approach is *Akata Witch* by Nnedi Okorafor. The struggle between spiritcraft and witchcraft is at the very heart of *Akata Witch*, and within that is a clear acknowledgement that the shamanic experience can be brutal. Okorafor is a professor of creative writing at Chicago State University. She was born and raised in the United States but is the daughter of two Nigerian Igbo parents. In 2011 *Akata Witch* was nominated best book of the year by both Amazon.com and the Young Adult Library Services Association, and was a finalist for the Andre Norton Award for Best Young Adult Science Fiction and Fantasy. The novel is a highly imaginative and riveting example of the emerging genre of African science fiction, but in envisaging a future/ alternative contemporary Africa in a Nigerian setting, it remains very faithful to a recognizable contemporary Nigeria.

My only quibble with *Akata Witch* was with its structure – the villain Black Hat Otokoto is introduced very late (appearing in person only on page 318 in the 349 page novel). It doesn't give the character enough time to build up in the reader's mind, which lessens the drama of the ultimate battle between good and evil. But in every other respect it is a wonderful novel, able to engage both children's and adult's attention.

In the world of *Akata Witch* there is a Harry Potter style division between magical and non-magical folk, with the non-magicals known as Lambs and the

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[309] Ibid. 135
[310] Ibid. 136
[311] Some. *Of Water and the Spirit.* 62

magicals known as Leopards. Also like Harry Potter, the Lambs don't know the Leopards exist but, unlike Harry Potter, Leopards are very integrated into Lamb society and need to organize their Leopard activities into the frame of ordinary daily Lamb-like lives which involves Lamb obligations such as going to school and holding down jobs. Most of the action takes place in the real Nigerian city of Aba, but there is a parallel city, Leopard Knocks, which only Leopard people can access. Leopards also have a parallel currency, chittim, which can only be spent in Leopard shops. Chittim are bronze, silver and gold rods and in contrast to Lamb money are spiritually uncontaminated. They are earned through learning and understanding, and fall spontaneously from the sky at the feet of the learner after an impressive act of learning. The book narrates the experiences of Sunny Nwazue, a twelve-year old Albino girl born to a Lamb family, making her what Leopards call a Free Agent. The narrative arc 'traces Sunny's discovery of her Leopard self, her integration into Leopard society, and her ultimate challenge to save the world as part of a Leopard safeguarding coven.

I haven't been able to visit Nigeria yet, but I have read a number of recent books set in Nigeria: all Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels and short stories, as well as Chinelo Okparanta's debut short story collection, *Happiness, Like Water.* Additionally I've also become familiarized with Igbo culture from chatting to mothers at the schoolgate pick-ups for my older two children; the school is Catholic and the student intake is about ten percent Igbo because of the large number of Igbo families who fled during the Biafran war and settled in North London (seventy percent of Nigeria's Catholics are ethnically Igbo). The book felt like it painted a real Nigeria, whereas the world of South Africa in *The White Giraffe* always felt fake. Okorafor is also very skilled at evoking humour out of this familiarity; she sets the tone in the opening passage when she reveals that PHC (Power Holding Company of Nigeria' is always 'taking the lights' (unpredictably load-shedding) so 'people like to say it really stands for Please Hold Candles In Nigeria.'[312] There is also a wry humour and dig at the rapacious Nigerian oil industry in the construction of Black Hat Otokoto himself. Otokoto is a serial killer who preys on children to use their spirit energy in devilish rituals, but he is also a Nigerian oil dealer. When he does finally manage to call forth Ekwensu (basically Satan) she is described as giving off 'an oily, greasy smell, like car exhaust.'[313]

Matching this authenticity in setting was a superbly realized authenticity in the handling of themes of spiritcraft and witchcraft. So many elements of the book reverberated in a detailed and satisfying way against my non-fiction based research into African shamanism. In *Akata Witch* there is a constant tension between good and evil. Personifying evil is Ekwensu. Chichi, the teenaged Leopard girl who invites Sunny to join Leopard society, explains to her that Ekwensu is 'what Satan is to the Christians […] but more real, more tangible. She's not a metaphor or symbol. She's one of the most powerful masquerades in the wilderness.'[314] Masquerades are explained in the book as powerful spirits of the dead, who manifest in the physical

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[312] Okorafor, N. (2011) *Akata Witch*. New York, Viking.1
[313] Ibid. 324
[314] Ibid.312-313

world by rising up out of termite mounds. Lamb society has sensed the presence of the masquerades, and put on 'masquerades' at weddings, birth celebrations, funerals and festivals where they pretend to be them. But in Leopard society, masquerades are real and terrifying. There is also a Supreme Creator, but there is no concept of a close personal relationship with this being, as in Christianity. In the instruction manual for Free Agents that Sunny is given, the writer explains 'You are a Leopard Person only by the will of the Supreme Creator, and as we all know, She isn't very concerned with Her own creations.'[315]

Sunny is a programmatic name. All Leopards have a spirit face, which they have to call forth when they want to practice spiritcraft, a purer and ageless form of their human face. Sunny's is a representation of the sun, and her function in the novel is to save the world from darkness and deliver it towards light. There is also a genetic and hereditary principle to shamanism, as there is in the Southern African traditions – most Leopards come from Leopard families, although not all. It is revealed eventually that Sunny's dead grandmother was a powerful Leopard warrior.

Leopards practice juju. When Sunny hears this she asks 'Isn't all juju bad?' and Chichi tells her 'It's like anything else: some good, some bad, some just is.'[316] Juju practice is strictly regulated with different limits for different levels of learning: *ekpiri* (which follows initiation); *mbawkwa* (for more difficult and dangerous juju), *ndibu* (for very advanced juju) and the scarcely attainable and hugely prestigious final level, *Oku Akama*. Leopards have their own special medicines, and spiritcraft objects, including their juju knives, an *Akata Witch* version of a wand and essential to a Leopard's ability to use juju.

Coincidentally, as in *The White Giraffe*, there is a Caribbean character, but he only appears briefly in cameo, as a taxi driver, and he actually sounds Caribbean, remarking of the toddlers whom the Leopard Orlu has just retrieved from the spirit world: 'Pickney dem resilient likle tings.' This humorous flat character brings some light relief after the climatic scene in which Black Hat Otokoto is killed.

There are many elements to Akata Witch that are obviously not realistic, or intended to be realistic, because the book is fantasy. I approach spiritcraft differently in the Bundu Bashers series; Olly uses spiritcraft strictly in line with the San and Southern African traditions. The books are intended to explore a concept that many people disbelieve (that the living and the dead can interact, facilitated by certain chosen people), within an imaginative understanding of how that interaction could work. So there are no *Akata Witch*-style transformations, such as birds becoming human, except where that happens in vision. Olly's spiritcraft manifests through divination, interpretation and herbal medicine. Without compromising the creativity of the series, I have tried to be as faithful as possible to my San and Southern African tradition influences.

One of my proudest moments in writing and editing this series was when I sent a draft of the second book in the series off to Roger Chennells, the legal advisor to the South African San Institute (SASI) and head of the team who negotiated the

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[315] Ibid. 96
[316] Ibid.35

restoration of Khomani San land claims with the South African government. My character Sanna is Khomani, and I wanted to make sure that her story felt 'real'. Chenells replied.

'Greetings. I started to read with great trepidation, as my 'bullshit detector' is usually rampant when people translate culture in various ways for western consumption and I am asked to comment... There are just so many ways one can patronise, oversimplify, puerilise (new word!) overdramaticise etc etc. Within a very short time I felt comfy and began to enjoy the story, My detector did not go off once. I have nothing to add (not that I could not add anything or did not have many thoughts) but you have put it all in the context of the past book and your existing vision, which as it stands is to me coherent, serious enough, fun enough, educational enough and in short, great![317]

Conclusion

'Even as blacks become more urbanized, there is an increasing need for *nyangas, mungomas* and *sangomas*. They are needed to help ease the stress of the transition from Third to First World, Western Life. I don't see that need going away, any more than the need for psychiatrists and their forms of treatment will disappear from Western Society.'[318]

Graham argues that traditional healers are essential to a healthy society and, far from abandoning traditional healing, black Africans should remain rooted in a healing practice that is organic to Africa, as Africa adjusts to rapid development. But, as I have shown, the identity of the healers themselves is fluid and responsive to change. Traditional healing was once anathema to Western medicine; now there is increasing cooperation and recognition of the fact that traditional healing and Western medicine can co-exist. Millennial African literature about the role of sangomas in public health challenges modern biomedicine , not only to discontinue its historic discourse of reading sangoma as witchcraft, but also to find ways by which a fruitful symbiosis between the two systems of healing can be achieved.

Until recently a white sangoma was unheard of; now an increasing number of whites are openly training and graduating in South Africa. This dissertation has examined the uncertainties and conflict surrounding this profound change in the way *ukuthwasa* is traditionally perceived to be authenticated. But the reality is that, in the future, the incidence of white sangoma is only set to increase as young white South Africans reject the systemic race categorizations that the colonial era and apartheid enshrined. South Africa is a society in flux, riven by economic and social conflict, and still, twenty-two years after the coming of democracy, marked by deep hostility and gulfs of misunderstanding between races. It is my perception, echoing Jo Thobeka Wreford, that there is a specific, important and urgent task for white sangomas, and they potentially have a crucial healing role to play in our country. I applaud Dr Philip Kubukeli for his inclusivity, his vision and his bravery in his

[317] Chenells, Roger (2011). E-mail. Subject: RE: Children's novelist would love your help in creating character. To: "'Sarah Penny' Sunday, 5 June. 14:45
[318] McCallum, *Tales of the African Life of Rae Graham*. 233

ongoing battle to support white sangomas.

In this dissertation, my task has been to map how the changes in the roles, identities and perception of traditional African healers have been reflected in African millennial literature. I have also considered my own practice, in relation to the body of literature studied, with my primary concern being to create an authentic and artistically truthful fictional portrayal of a young sangoma, for a middle grade readership.

In closing, I would like to thank the sangomas who have worked with me, both to write *Sangoma Boy* and *Desert Lion*, and to inform the reflective and analytical components of this PhD. I also thank my literary 'ancestors', the, novelists, sangomas, psychologists, social scientists, doctors, journalists, anthropologists and others, on whose wisdom I have drawn to educate myself in this journey.

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