

In the Voices of the Ancestors: *Izangoma* Trance Processes and Embodied Narratives

Towards Decolonization Praxis

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL

FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF

ARTS GRADUATE PROGRAM IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

YORK UNIVERSITY TORONTO, ONTARIO

December 2017

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Abstract

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Izangoma, or diviners, are one type of traditional healer in Southern Africa. Despite colonial efforts to delegitimize and criminalize traditional healing and medicine, there are 300,000-350,000 traditional healers in South Africa alone (Decocoteau, 223.) Central to the Nguni *Izangoma* worldview is ancestral veneration. Ancestors are not only respected, mediated and honoured through ceremonial practices, but also through trance processes. ‘Having the ancestors’ refers not only to those ‘called to heal’ but also to the embodiment of ancestors through co-performative and nuanced socio-cultural processes. Using autoethnographic and narrative writing practices, this interdisciplinary thesis explores the dynamic embodiment of ancestors, and how *Izangoma* trance processes, which includes affective writing practices, informs a revaluing, acknowledging, meditating and resituating of suppressed narratives (Taylor, xvi.) These methods of inquiry and research practices are therefore not just crucial to reconciliatory endeavours but are also synecdochic of the process of decolonization and healing.

Dedication

I offer this thesis to the ancestors, both lineal and collective, those of the past, those in the present, and those to come. You are our teachers, guides and hope.

I also dedicate this work to Maia, Eve and Eli –ancestors in the making, and for Brian, my lasting twin-flame.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the racial and socioeconomic privileges I have which have allowed me to pursue higher learning. I acknowledge those that do not have equal access to resources. I acknowledge colonialism, and the role education continues to play in colonization. I acknowledge inequalities both locally and globally and take responsibility for my complicity. I acknowledge the courage, sacrifices and struggles of Women, Black, Indigenous and Peoples of Colour, as well as the LGBTQQ2S communities who have risked, and continue to risk their lives and safety to foster change.

I wish to thank my committee members who have been supportive, encouraging and long-lasting in this endeavour. I am very grateful to Dr Maggie Macdonald for always valuing me as a healer and academic, and for showing me the potentialities of situated anthropological practice. Her open-mindedness and tactile methods inspired me to find and give my best. My hope is that all women will find this kind of comradery and mentorship within academic institutions. Thank you to Dr Joseph De Souza who brought me, good-naturedly and open-heartedly into 'The Brain', a neuroscientific abyss, of which I believed I was totally ill-equipped to enter. I am grateful for his time and keenness to embark on new journeys. I also wish to thank Dr Pablo Idahosa who has seen me through departures and returns, with (my) wrinkles proving the lapsing of time. I appreciate his kindness and wide-ranging knowledge. Thank you to Fiona Fernandez for her commitment to the Interdisciplinary Program, and to new and old students. We feel her pride.

Lastly, I am grateful to my family, who have endured my pursuit of knowledge without the benefits of being in love with the material. I'm appreciative for their valuing of my enthusiasm, as well as patience for my, at times, an overwrought disposition which surfaced above an ensconced (and seemingly) disorganized pile of papers atop the kitchen table.

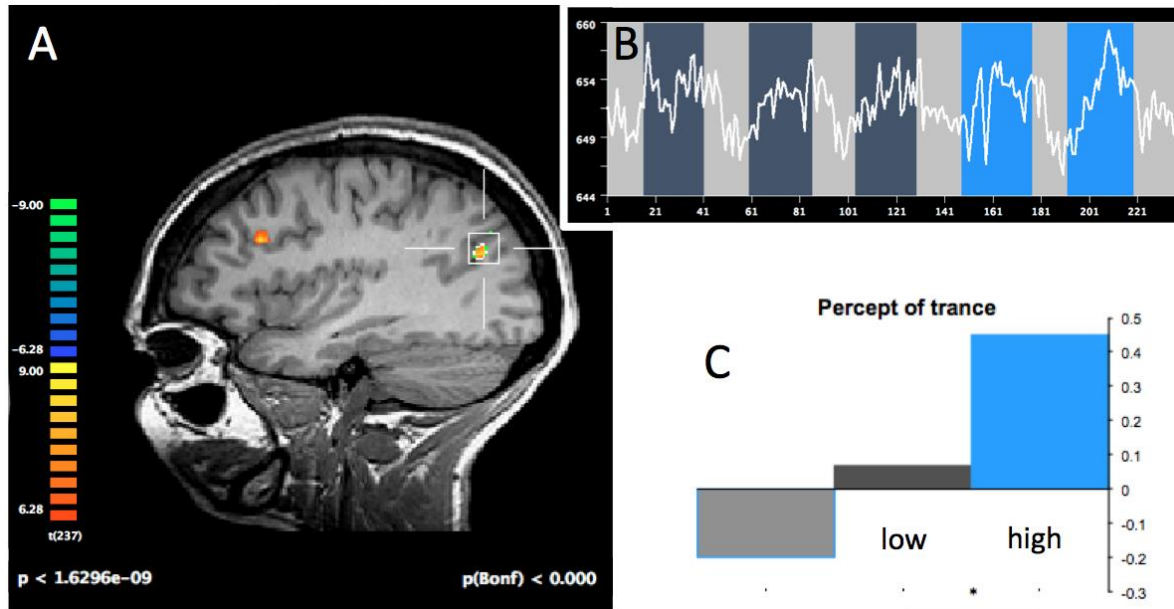
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Figure A

fMRI signal and Trance Perception
(Right Parietal Region - Out-of-Body Experiences Area)



The blue indicates a heightened self-reported perception of trance in the author. Bonferroni parietal activation ($p < 0.002$) based on a BOLD signal comparison between music (5-mins) vs no music (3.5 mins).

Introduction

When I arrived in South Africa in 1994, it was a nation that for the first time in 342 years, was no longer under impudent colonial rule. Transformations seemed to be budding up in every crevice of the nation. Perceptions were being challenged and sexist and racist laws amended. History, however, rears its head at every turn through colonial residues and reminders (Simpson, 74); making the past felt heavily in the present. Evictions, relocations, promises of housing and water, and a striving culture of human rights, were just some of the crucial national issues to be imminently addressed (Desai, 16.)

As a traditional healer, international development consultant and social justice advocate in early post Apartheid South Africa, I was uniquely positioned as an insider-outsider, researcher, educator and foreign traditional healer, and thusly, became beneficial to many community-based and national level programs in Botswana and South Africa. Throughout these efforts, it was clear to me that my racial, socioeconomic and citizenship privileges required responsibility, accountability, reflexivity and direct action against apparent injustices. It was, therefore, over two decades that I contributed to ground-breaking multi-sectoral collaborations, as well as embryonic discourses concerning representation, cultural revitalization, psycho-social and cultural health care, and human rights-based issues.

My personal narratives in *The Way of the Ancestors* are a chronicle of these experiences. As to better understand the nuances of these narratives, it's first crucial to understand the importance of traditional healing and medicine in South Africa.

Traditional healers hold esteemed and powerful positions in South African society. The use of traditional healing and medicine cannot be overemphasized with an estimated 80%

of continental Africans making use of traditional healing and medicine for most, if not all their psycho-socio and cultural healthcare needs (Healthinform.org.) South Africa alone is home to approximately 300,000-350,000 traditional healers, most of which are deemed by South Africans to be trusted-worthy, reliable, appropriate, effective and affordable healthcare providers (Decoction, 223.)

Recognizing their pivotal roles during Apartheid and beyond, many social scientists especially anthropologists, have for decades-long conducted research on traditional South African healing and medicine practices of Southern Africa. Janzen's *Ngoma* in the late 1980's, and Green's ethnomedical research of indigenous theories of contagion in the 1990's, to Wreford, an anthropologist turned *Isangoma* -- who contends that white traditional healers have a key role to play in contemporary South Africa; are just a few of these examples. Yet, trance processes and the quintessence of ancestors and spirits as affective embodiments, have yet to be reflexively explored through interdisciplinary analysis. These investigations are crucial, as *Izangoma* trance processes reveal not only how healers navigate colonialism and its far-reaching effects but are also contributory to reconciliation discourses.

This thesis examines how *Izangoma* trance processes reveal not only a traditional healer's engagements with ancestors, and spirits, but also how these unique 'forces' of the past are embodied and surface in the present. Consequently, through integrative theoretical and methodological endeavours based in African studies, anthropology, dance and neuroscience, I propose that these dynamic and adaptive trance processes have the potential to inform new ways of engaging, ways that not only acknowledge suppressed narratives and histories but also reveal, resituate and mediate them (Taylor xvi.) I offer that *Isangoma*

trance processes are therefore emancipatory and critical to the decolonization processual in South Africa and elsewhere.

This thesis is in two parts. The first, Section A - *The Way of the Ancestors*, includes both personal and ancestral accounts. These narratives embody and *surface* the complexities of colonization, and are particularly important in neo-liberal spheres, and in spaces which are essentially never-quite-postcolonial (Simpson, 67.) In Section B -The Theoretical Component, I hope to verify how *Izangoma* trance processes, as well as unique writing practices, can potentialize reconciliatory efforts.

In chapter one, I briefly examine governmental efforts to legitimize and regulate traditional South African healers, as well as the role of the ancestors in Nguni worldview. While chapter two explores autoethnography and embodied writing practices as my methodology. I explain my collection of data, as well as the overall structure of *The Way of the Ancestors*, as well as the importance of these unique narratives to the discipline of autoethnography. Chapter three situates the study of trance through an interdisciplinary literature review, reflecting on religious, psychopathological and neuroscientific perspectives. Chapter four explores concepts of the body while applying *Izangoma* worldviews. This chapter also applies affect theory as to expand on the current notions of embodiment. Chapter five looks at decolonization perspectives and reflects on the creative portion of this thesis, particularly *Izangoma* and embodied writing practices.

Chapter One: ‘*Having the Ancestors*’ and Disrupting Coloniality

South African traditional healing and medicinal practices suffered under colonial rule. Under Apartheid, The Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1957, amended in 1970 for example,

sought to delegitimize and criminalize traditional healing and medicine (Decocoteau, 211) by restricting traditional healing practices and making it prohibited for any person to “exercise supernatural powers over another” (Decocoteau, 210.) Despite institutionalized subjugation and enforced relations of domination at every turn (Foucault, 96); practitioners of traditional healing and users of traditional medicine continued to practice and utilize these valued systems (Decocoteau, 211.)

In 1999, in an effort to recognize the oppression of traditional healing practices under colonial rule, the Traditional Health Practitioner’s (THP’s) Bill of South Africa was developed to create “...a regulatory framework to ensure the efficacy, safety and quality of traditional health care services; to provide for the management and control over the registration, training and conduct of practitioners, students and specified categories in the traditional health practitioner’s profession; and to provide for matters connected therewith” (Ministry of Health South Africa, 2.) Although many practitioners fall under more than one category, as part of the Bill, THP’s have been grouped as diviners, herbalists, traditional birth attendants, and traditional surgeons (Ministry of Health South Africa, 20.) *Izangoma* who are the most prolific is loosely defined as diviner’s, but in addition to divining fulfil roles equivalent to psychiatrists, priests, para-psychologists, clairvoyants and ‘diagnosers’ (Mutwa, 27.)

Central to *Izangoma* are *Amadlozi*, or ancestors, who are not to be confused with the recently departed *Amathongo*, or, *Isithunzi* meaning shadows--a deceased person before proper burial rites are conducted (Ngubane, 51.) *Amadlozi* who are made up of both lineal and collective ancestors, shield, discipline, care for, and aid in harmonious

interrelationships, and are central to Nguni worldview and traditional knowledge systems (Ngubane, 51.)

A common term among *Izangoma* is ‘having the ancestors’ and refers to those that specifically carry the healing gifts as well as the processes of embodying ancestors and spirits through co-performative cultural engagement, or *Ngoma*, which involves singing, dancing, drumming and the networking of healers and novice-patients (Janzen, 109, 173.) ‘Having the ancestors’ within western academic frameworks is best understood as trance, spirit possession, altered states of consciousness, or heightened states of awareness.

Chapter Two: Autoethnography as Methodology

Chapter two explores the discipline and reflexive practices of autoethnography, as well as details and reflects on the creative portion of this thesis.

Chang and Heewon define autoethnography as the study of self, with the writing of individual experiences of life within the context of family, work, schooling, and society (2.) This methodology transcends mere narrations of personal history, as it is through the interpretation of the meanings of experiences that situated sociocultural contexts can inform a better understanding of society (Chang & Heewon, 3,4.) As culture possesses us as much as we possess it (Conquergood, 17), narrative writing is central to autoethnography, and allows for a reflection not only of social encounters but also what Wall describes as, a sharing of unique, subjective, and evocative narratives of experience that contribute to better understandings social worlds (146.)

Expanding on these concepts, Spry argues that autoethnography is part of discourses from the margins of dominant culture, providing unique critiques and forms of resistance to representational authority (708, 711.) Resistance to colonialism is evident throughout *The Way of the Ancestors*. Through personal reflexivity as well as broader analysis of racial and socio-economic injustices; authority is critiqued, particularly in relation to colonialization. My typifying of affective *Izangoma* trance processes and embodied forms of writing, also demonstrates the ‘bringing up’ and ‘bringing forward’ of narratives from the margins. I have attempted through these methods not only to write *her* story but in keeping with feminist and anti-oppression agendas, have sought to *show* racial, class, gender and Global South disparities and inequalities.

In McCarthy-Brown’s ethnography *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, she endeavours to go beyond the distanced researcher and to portray Mama Lola and her healing practices as a Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn, or what she calls, “an outpost to the Caribbean” (1.) McCarthy-Brown also reveals the continuum of coloniality apparent in Vodou practices. She endeavours to challenge mind-body dualism and shows how “Vodou is embedded with the vicissitudes of particular lives” (15.) She examines worlds new to her and reckons with her positionality, the academy and Western epistemologies. As McCarthy-Brown engages in Vodou practices facilitated by Mama Lola, she views this as a kind of “bridge building” (14), but it seems, that it is she who is carefully being schooled or trained, in other ways of knowing, by the priestess. McCarthy-Brown’s richly written ethnography is similar to Ochoa’s *Society of the Dead*, which explores his research in Palo in Cuba. Both reposition the researcher, forcing them to examine their situatedness and to become affected by other ways of knowing. McCarthy-Brown however, recognizes through

the aid of feminist scholarship, how to listen and “sit with the rhythm” (17.) It is through the unfolding’s in rituals, and the strengthening of interrelationships, that she recognizes that “the layers of possible interpretation are too dense to be caught in a single telling”. McCarthy-Brown’s ‘afterword’ is particularly significant as it explains how the research and book itself effected Mama Lola’s practice.

The Way of the Ancestors similarly endeavours to provide rich narratives and a comprehensive worldview of *Izangoma*, transculturally. However, unlike McCarthy-Brown and Ochoa’s ethnographies, I provide an insider’s perspective, and go beyond a *telling* of dense narratives—of those living and dead, to a *showing* of experiences. I also strive to have readers become affected by a direct experience of the ancestors, through the ancestral transmissions.

The Way of the Ancestors involved an unusual collaboration with people, cultures, time, somatic and semantic, and liminal spaces between the known and unknown (Spry, 726), and formed a unique type of co-authorship. The narratives of Others in *The Way of the Ancestors* provide a glimpse into early post-Apartheid inequalities in South Africa. Douglas, an HIV positive Zimbabwean man who deals with xenophobia and poverty who volunteers at an underfunded public HIV clinic, or Onica, an overworked and resource-limited maid and ‘second mother’ to David’s family, embodies the embeddedness of structural violence particularly discernible for lower-income black South African women. I have therefore sought where possible, to have my narrative act as a lens into the lives of Others. While in the ancestral narratives, I have attempted to move ‘out of the way’, and to let the ancestors speak on their own behalfs.

Autoethnography and embodied writing practices allows for a weaving together of unlikely interdisciplinary endeavours with the valuing of experience and narrative central to its praxis. I have endeavoured to take untidy detours and to and engage in new genres of expression, or narratives in the making (Gordon, 40, Cvetkovich, 7, 44, Berlant, 8), and to interrupt the cutting off of lived experiences towards a suturing of the felt. My efforts through these embodied writing practices and the sharing of a multitude of narratives are to contribute to “alternative histories and knowledges” (Smith, 33,34), as well as autoethnographic methodologies, and new kinds of writing practices.

Data Collection

Despite Child’s contention that there is ‘something’ about trance that refuses signification, or attempts to break its mystery as it resists ‘the word’ (56); I have endeavoured to capture the ‘*something*’ of *Izangoma* trance processes through the autoethnography and creative narrative as my methodology.

The *Way of the Ancestors* has been in the works for two decades and first began as journal entries during my apprenticeship into *Ngoma*. In the past five years, I have spoken to friends, family members, mentors, as well as continuously researched relevant academic materials towards a complete autoethnographic manuscript. *The Way of the Ancestors* is a complete creative work at 93, 232 words. It includes a glossary, preface and forty-one chapters of both chronological autoethnographic sections, as well ancestral-driven narratives, and an epilogue. It begins with the life-threatening second part of my initiation into *Ngoma* in a river in Soweto and then backtracks to the initial stages of the sickness

vocation to the subsequent apprenticeship process. The narrative follows my healing practice, consultancy work and social justice efforts in South Africa and Botswana, and then returns readers to Canada where a mental and emotional break down occurs as a result of early childhood sexual abuse. The story finishes with an amplification of ancestral narratives, as well as a potential healing student who seeks an apprenticeship in the healing arts.

The ancestral narratives are not fictitious. I did not make them up, or choose how they were written. They chose me when years ago the ancestors started ‘writing through me’. I’d simply pick up a paper and pen and he/she/they, would annotate to me, at a fast pace. Sometimes, ‘they’ called me to write. ‘Wake up, wake up. Write this down!’ I would hear in the middle of the night. With each transmission, I wasn’t just given information but experienced it as sensuous knowledge, described by Gordon as a tangle of the subjective and the objective, experience and belief, feeling and thought, the immediate and the general, the personal and the social (207.) Through these sensuous knowledge’s, I saw new kinds of images, smelled odours unknown to me, and experienced other heightened sensations as an ancestor relayed their narrative to me. It was in these spaces, much like during *Izangoma* performative trance processes, that the self-becomes Other. I was *there*, and she or he is *here*, too. In the present. Sometimes I chose a computer to annotate, as it let me type faster, but ‘they’ always preferred paper and pen. I surrendered to this unique methodology understanding it as a kind of hybrid practice, or expansion of *Izangoma* trance processes.

Although the embodiment of ancestral and spiritual forms in *Izangoma* trance processes is customary and described and demonstrated throughout *The Way of the*

Ancestors; less common, however, is the embodiment of ancestors and transmissions of messages through written form. Yet somehow these written narratives carried a similar emancipatory air as those occurring in typical co-performative and communal *Izangoma* trance processes. It's hard to know why embodied writing practices have been used as a methodology in this process, but it does, however, corroborate the unfixed and adaptive nature of *Izangoma* trance and healing practices.

Chapter Three: Trance – A Literature Review: Religious, Anthropological, Psychopathological and Neuroscientific Perspectives

In chapter three, I will apply perspectives from various social science and neuroscientific perspectives for an interdisciplinary review of trance. I will conclude this chapter by critiquing and situating my analysis in relation to these discourses.

I have sought throughout both the creative and critical analysis sections of this thesis to use Nguni-based words and terms, in keeping with what is not only locally appropriate but also as part of decolonization praxis. *Amadlozi*, which is defined as ancestors, can also refer to the process of embodying an ancestor; which involves multifaceted ontological and dialogical cultural communication systems and interrelationships. I use the term 'trance' begrudgingly, as its roots are based in Eurocentric languages with historical tendencies towards the universalizing and reductionism of complex embodied systems of cultural memory and identity (Taylor, xvi.) I share Harvey's view that 'trance' and 'shaman' are Humpty Dumpty words that "should fall from the wall

that academia has built around itself” (Schmidt, 7.) I do, however, make use of the term trance throughout the critical reflection components of this thesis as to encompass the diverse range of phenomena (Cohen, 13), and for improved comprehension for non-*Izangoma* and non-Nguni speakers, for whom this paper is accessible too.

Trance, defines Boddy, is “an integration of spirit and matter, force or power and corporeal reality, where boundaries between the individual and her environment are permeable and negotiable” (407.) Trance varies nationally, ethnically, at a community-level and across *mpande*, defined as a root, or spirit family; with “pure localness” (Ness, 9) existing at the most minute level. Bourguignon suggests that trance and possession states worldwide are oriented towards nurturing, reliability and obedience but *what* will be experienced, and *how* it will be experienced are functions of the intentions, expectations, and beliefs of the individual, as well as socio-cultural contextualization (Morris, 38.)

Trance and Religious Perspectives

Trance processes can be found from time immemorial throughout Asia, the America’s, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. In Judeo-Christianity, examples of trance states are evident in both the new and old testaments. Rabbi Glasner speaks of the Talmud and the creation of the world and that in Genesis 1:2, “God broods over the water,” (34) which represents a hypnotic trance state as a prerequisite to creation. Sleep, dreaming and a state of awe, is apparent throughout the Old Testament as a signifier for trance, hypnosis and altered states of consciousness, as illustrated in I Samuel 26:12, when a “deep sleep from the Lord” (Glasner, 34) falls upon Saul and his soldier’s. Lewis in *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, describes Catholic mystic St. Teresa of Avila,

and her states of union, rapture and love possession (xv.) Remarkably, St. Teresa was legitimized through trance processes which were in fact, “political criticisms of aristocratic powers of the time” (Lewis, xv.)

Divine possessions and rituals were also common in Graeco-Roman times when a prophet/prophetess, who was ‘inspired’ by ‘the Oracle’ found in special temples and locales, was sought for guidance and direction with the deities (Addey, 171-172.) Iamblichus during the third century was one of the first Western philosophers to explain divine inspiration, possession and divination (Addey, 172-174), as well as to inspect trance definitions and their meanings. He also proposed that different embodied deities can create varied processes, manifestations or effects. Therefore, he greatly contributed to the investigation of ecstasy in the ancient world, laying a foundation for Eliad’s dichotomization of possession and shamanism, and De Heusch’s complex schema informal structures (Addey, 173.) In addition, Iamblichus also provided ‘evidence’ of the possessed who claimed to utilize non-human forms of consciousness. These findings later endowed psychoanalytic investigations of trance and consciousness studies.

Many religious notions of trance and spirit possession have been associated with suffering. Contortions and seemingly out-of-control bodies ‘writhing in agony’, were misconstrued by early Christian missionaries as expressions of suffering, creating an association of trance and spirit possession for the European, with pain and evil. Yet, despite a long history of religious condemnation particularly against Indigenous trance practitioners; Judeo-Christian experience continues to value religiously ‘approved’ altered states of consciousness. Garb in his investigation of trance and dissociative experiences in Chasidism, suggests the losing of oneself while in prayer, and divestment of corporeality

for transformation of being; remains apparent and important to specific Jewish Kabbalah practices (11.) Whether its joyous Na Nach Chasidism dancers who ‘arise at midnight’ to spread ‘joy’ and the ‘teachings of Rabbi Yisroel Dov Odeser with blaring music and anarchist-style dancing in the streets throughout Israel (Nanach.org), or, evangelical churchgoers overcome with the ‘power of Christ’; trance or ecstatic states are often considered to be part of supreme religious experiences (Von Furer-Haimendorf, 99.) Judeo-Christian attitudes towards non-religious experiences of trance, or trance states in the racialized or cultural Other, continues to be at best, misunderstood.

The Psychopathologizing of Trance

Psychoanalytic perspectives have assisted in laying the foundation for the pathologizing of trance. For Freud, trance and spirit possession was simply subconscious places of forgotten and repressed contents that were neurotic delusions of the ego’s making (Huskinson, 78.) Whereas Jung viewed the unconscious entirely differently, seeing it as both personal and collective, perceiving the unconscious as a vast and archetypal repository of material that “impresses upon the ego’s universal patterns of constellations of human existence” (Huskinson, 75, 76.) Counter to Freud’s notion of unprocessed memories, Jung believed that the unconscious is best understood as representations to the ego-consciousness and that dialogues with the collective unconscious, informs ego encounters. These encounters, therefore, inform realms of experience, and a discovering of the possibilities and potential of human experience (Huskinson, 77.) Spirit possession for Jung then is about the ego identifying with the unconscious, while disassociating itself from its ‘normal’ conscious mode (Huskinson, 77.)

What defines healthy trance processes according to *Ngoma* concepts is the appeasing and amalgamation of one's ancestors, self, family and community into the fully realized *Isangoma*. The healing neophyte enters apprenticeship as an ill and fractured being. The symptoms of the apprentice's sickness vary but are generally understood to be extreme and easily distinguishable through major and culturally-specified, physical, spiritual and mental or emotional imbalances. Disassociation is a symptom of illness or the 'calling to heal', and not indicative of healthy states. Trance processes, through engagement with deemed appropriate ancestors and spirits then, facilitates the integration of collective consciousness and the forming of a healthy personality. This recalibration or re-associating of a person is not about returning a student to their pre-ill state, but to a wholeness which is in "harmonious working coordination with the universe" (Ngubane, 28.) Child, in keeping with Jungian analysis, supports this notion suggesting that unconscious is 'translated' into a communicable language, and is canalized into the consciousness of a possessed group, where the ego can begin to have "a redeeming effect upon the communal attitude" (92.)

Trance defies diagnostic criteria, and the narrowing of disassociation cannot, however, be explained away as pathology, even with the attempts to place it under 'health', asserts Huskinson (73.) The removal of spirit possession under psychopathologizing labels is indeed needed asserts Child, as these states are part of complexes which affect us all, in spite of mental dispositions or cultural biases, and are in fact, "the normal phenomena of life" (83.) Psychology, however, hasn't yet fully recognized trance as transcendent, or "normal" phenomena, but continues to conflate trance with "undesirable and maladaptive behaviours", including generalized disassociations (71,72.) The psychopathologizing of trance as dissociative isn't what is most crucial at all to the discussion of trance contends

Child, but rather, trance's effects as healthy or unhealthy on the development of the individual personality, as well as the communal group ego (74.) This depends largely on a person's disposition, conditions and encountering (Child, 85), and is not, supports Huskinson, a pathological phenomenon but a "self-care system of the personality" (92.)

Despite the 'revamping' of disassociation, trance continues to be psychopathologized. Part of the reason for this may be because the impossibility of a singular defining neurophysiological or specific state of consciousness (Jureidini, 260.) Even with the acknowledgement of the vast continuum of disassociation, which includes daydreaming 'ordinary experiences' and immersion in the fictitious (Jureidini, 260); disassociation is at best, still related to a numbing, lack of, or a reduction of feelings, sensations and pain blunted with a mind 'emptiness' (Jureidini, 263.)

Spirit Possession or Trance: Is there a Difference? And, does it Matter?

Trance has a long history as a cultural phenomenon. Ward, in her efforts to move trance enquiry from religious view into more biomedical paradigms, contends that physiology plays a role in trance processes, and is in fact "a ritually-induced therapeutic defence induced by a person's stress" (Boddy, 411.) Her psychopathologizing of altered states of consciousness underwrote 'diagnosable' disorders, such as Multiple Personality Disorders which Boddy suggests focused on rationalistic and reductionist views towards complex socio-cultural, spiritual and embodied trance experiences (411.) Moving away from biomedical and psycho-pathologized views, Boddy proposes that trance should be discussed on its "own terms" (410) and not be naturalized or limited to religious behaviour. Additionally, Boddy notes that unlike biomedical concepts which constructs the body as

collapsing into itself, trance and spirit possession widen the body (412, 413.) Crapanzano supporting this view also contests religious and biomedical notions of trance, suggesting, rather, that the range of experience, the context in which it occurs, and the existence of spirits in the lives of their host, are all central to the study of trance (Boddy, 412, 413.) Boddy and Crapanzano's consideration of embodied knowledge and experiential domains (414), aided in the redressing of trance and spirit possession in anthropology.

Anthropologist Michael Lambek, like Boddy, provided extensive descriptions of trance, as well as made distinctions of trance from spirit possession. Lambek advocates that both are part of daily phenomenon, and are interwoven with selfhood, ethnic, political and moral identifies (Boddy, 414.) In *Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspective from Africa and Melanesia*, Lambek and Strathern compare Melanesian and African possession forms in relation to social and religious experiences, as well as the impacts of capitalism (McDowell, 627.) Rejecting early anthropological reductionist approaches, they call for more appropriate accounts of possession and trance inquiries which are both culturally and socially mediated and attuned (Boddy, 411.)

Bourguignon in her cross-cultural research over many decades and locales and building on trance definitions and descriptions sought to distinguish between possession and trance states. Possession exists, she contends when the presence of a spirit entity or power, other than a person's own personality, soul, or self, occurs (Cohen, 60); while possession trance, dissimilarly, accounts for "alterations or discontinuity in consciousness, awareness, personality, or other aspects of physical functioning" (Cohen, 60.) Possession, possession trance and trance Bourguignon argues in keeping with Lambek's assertions, are confirmed through ethnographic enquiry as to discover how altered states are interpreted

and understood within their local cultural contexts (Cohen, 10, 14.) Cohen supporting Bourguignon suggests that global identifications through ethnographic descriptions of people's social activities and meanings are crucial to the identification and systematic comparison of widespread similarities (60.)

As an *Isangoma* practitioner, who has engaged in trance practices for two decades, I identify with the 'symptoms' of possession, possession trance and trance, as laid out by Boddy, Bourignon and Cohen. However, I am left wondering how and why *Izangoma* trance processes are meant to 'fit' into these confining categorical models. For example, would the ancestors whom I experience as embodying me regularly and in nuanced ways, be considered possessive? And, how would trance focused anthropologists define when I embody collective energies versus a singular spirit, is that considered trance versus possession? ¹ And what about when I experience all three of these 'states' sequentially, or in an overlapping manner? Lambek problematizes the categorization of trance, asserting that trance is not prior to spirit possession in either a "logical or causal sense...where it is meaningful, like any other human activity, is shaped by culture" (Cohen,13.) Therefore the 'possession' and the 'trance' in any given system of 'possession trance', cannot be isolated from each other in practice (Cohen, 13.) Nonetheless, efforts to disentangle trance processes through 'cultural models', whether firmly or loosely constructed, can become repeated scientific reformulations which try to capture "autonomous human behaviour" (Boddy, 408), with tendencies towards the conflating of culture. Boddy suggests that these

¹ I would also add that the word possession in *Izangoma* practice is thought of more closely with negative spirits or energies, which have 'gotten in' through forms of pollution or the ill-will of someone else, or as a result of physiological imbalances.

ideological and preconstructed valuations occur as a result of the underpinnings of academic trance inquiry which seeks to exceed folk-epistemologies and offer ‘objective’ frameworks for analysis (409.) Boddy argues that the weighing of local trance against what is deemed ‘normal’ modes of functioning” (40), should rather seek to acknowledge the multiplicity of paradigms (36) opposed to the treasuring of materialism, and binary classifications, which further “validates” Western social scientific paradigms (Boddy, 408.)

Neuroscience: The Brain - I think, therefore I... Trance?

From Hippocrates’ early investigations in 400 B.C, and Di Vinci’s first casts of human ventricles, to Pratensis’ early book about neurological diseases in the 1500’s and electroconvulsive therapy in the mid 1700’s (Milestones in Neuroscientific Research), the brain, and understanding “how we work”, has been a scientific focal point in Western cultures for millennia. Western-based scientific researchers from diverse disciplines have made breakthroughs in brain circuitry, neuropsychology and creative capacities, with the cerebellum as a driving force (Psychology Today.) Groundbreaking work, including Todd’s work in the mid-1800’s with the cerebral cortex and corpus stratum in movement and midbrain emotion, and Sherrington’s work on synapses and motor cortices in the 1900’s, paved the way for greater emphasis on the brain. With the 1990’s coined as the “Decade of the Brain” (Milestones in Neuroscientific Research), fascination with ‘the brain’ has increasingly entered popular public domains. Best-sellers about brain advancements continue to captivate readers, promising to help them “effectively capitalize on the latest advancements in cognitive science to regulate emotions, sharpen focus, and break old habits and develop new ones!” (Fabritius & Hagemann, 140.)

With the growing recognition of potential changes in brain circuitry during altered states of consciousness, the Max Planck Institute (MPI) conducted research in 2015 with fifteen self-identified German and Austrian “shamans” to see how brain networking reconfiguration and perceptual decoupling occurs during a trance state (Boas, 2015.) MPI endeavoured to “capture something fundamental about our human experience and the capabilities of the mind”, as well as to locate the neurological and physiobiological origins, or effects, of trance (Hove et al., 2015.) Using trance-inducing music in eight-minute intervals, they found that the effects of drumming on sensory input created auditory disconnection, providing greater disengagement from the local environment and promoting a more absorptive state (Hove et al., 2015). Using seed-based functional connectivity and a second seed-based analysis, they investigated the functional connectivity within auditory pathways (Hove et al., 2015.) Their findings revealed that functional connectivity, as well as clustered activity in the caudal pons, occurred, while large-scale network connectivity was enhanced during trance states (Hove et al., 2015) MPI concluded that trance involves more sustained task maintenance and cooperation of brain networks associated with internal thoughts and cognitive controls, coactive defaults, control networks, and decoupled sensory processing than previously thought (Hove et al., 2015).

These findings support similar outcomes in dreaming and meditative states. (Hove et al., 2015). In a hypnosis study with 57 people through the Stanford University School of Medicine in 2016, distinct sections of the brain showed altered activity and connectivity, with decreases in activity in the dorsal anterior cingulate, and increases in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the insula. These results are relevant for brain-body connections and

the processing and control of ‘what the body does’. The implications of the study for pain and anxiety management is also seen to be significant for future research (Williams.)

In Tracking Plasticity: Effects of Long-Term Rehearsal in Expert Dancers Encoding Music to Movement, Bar and De Souza’s research explores brain activation patterns and the continual learning effects of long-term rehearsed complex dance motor using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans to measure Blood-Oxygen-Level-Dependent (BOLD.) They found that pre-and post-dance rehearsals lead to increased brain activation in task-related regions of the brain (journals.plos.org.) This research suggests that the neural underpinnings of complex motor tasks, such as learning a new dance, has the potential to be a fruitful model for studying motor learning “in the real world” (journals.plos.org.)

As *Izangoma* trance processes often involve dance and movement, as part of Bar and De Souza’s research project, on June 21, 2017, I underwent a fMRI with the aim of exploring the BOLD signal, in regions associated with trance (Hove et al., 2015).

Following the scan, I completed a questionnaire reporting on my visualization of movement and trance experience.² Two tasks of interest were performed while I was in the scanner,

² All functional and anatomical data were acquired using a 3-Tesla Siemens Tim Trio MRI scanner (Siemens Medical Systems, Erlangen, Germany) with a 32-channel head coil at the Sherman Health Sciences Research Center at York University in Toronto, Canada. High-resolution T1-weighted anatomical images of each participant were obtained (spin echo, matrix = 256 x 256, voxel size = 1 mm³, repetition time (TR) = 1900 ms, echo time (TE) = 2.52 ms, flip angle = 9°). T2*-weighted images were acquired using generalized autocalibrating partially parallel acquisitions echo planar imaging, with a 2x acceleration factor (slices = 32, matrix = 56 x 70, field of view = 2100 mm x 168 mm, voxel size = 3 mm x 3 mm x 4 mm, TR = 2000 ms, TE = 30 ms, flip angle = 90°). The stimulus was heard through MRI-compatible headphones (MR Confon, Magdeburg, Germany), with their heads padded with foam in order to restrict movement artifacts. A vitamin E capsule was placed on the right hemisphere for localization.

including one visualization task and a motor localization task.³ During the visualization task, I was instructed to keep my eyes closed, keep my entire head and body as still as possible, and to visualize *Izangoma* dance. The stimulus used was a one-minute excerpt on YouTube, taken from a healer, ‘having the ancestors’ during a Swaziland Cultural Group performance. During this scan, I visualized dancing with a group of *Izangoma* and entered a trance state. For the second part, the motor localization task, I was asked to move my feet between dorsal and plantar flexion at a frequency of 1 Hz, according to a visual stimulus (the word WIGGLE). The preliminary analysis revealed BOLD activity in the temporal lobes (both right and left), as well as the right fusiform gyrus, right frontal (BA9), and some cerebellum activity. These areas of activity differed from The Max Planck Institute trance research paper which found activity predominantly in the cingulate cortex and insula regions.

In his research of out of body experiences (OBE), Blanke suggests that OBE is experienced in 2-5% of the population. His research, which focuses on the elusive right hemisphere region of the brain, reveals that fundamental function disruptions occur with the automatic integration of signals in the brain which creates a splitting or, “body as the observer” mode (Blanke). Blanke notes that the parietal zone is a key area of the brain which seems to have enhanced activity for those who experience OBE. Interestingly, my fMRI also reveals that the parietal zone was also boosted during the perceptual trance state.

³ Both tasks were presented in a block design (ABAB), with five one-minute activation A blocks where the stimulus was presented, separated by thirty-second baseline fixation blocks B. The scans began and concluded with thirty-second baseline fixation blocks. Before scanning, I was familiarized with the experimental conditions and the tasks that would be required of me.

Post fMRI, I reported to Dr De Souza my experiences during the trance process, identifying that the last two intervals as heightened points. These slightly higher signals were evident in the scan and can be seen in Figure A. This significant data, supports Blanke's OBE research, as well as potential investigations regarding the right hemisphere of the brain.

While OBE and trance both fall within the realm of consciousness analysis, it is difficult to draw comparisons between these varied states because trance processes involve sociocultural factors and *other* kinds of embodiment. Blanke's groundbreaking investigations have greatly contributed to neuroscientific investigations of the brain. He has brought OBE out of basic physiological frameworks by suggesting that OBE is not pathological or only related to brain diseases or severe epileptic episodes (Blanke). Co-activation plays a role in having an extending trance processes with levels of consciousness, awareness and sensory patterning (or lack of) occurring (Boas, 2015, Samuel 39). Whether it is dance, trance processes, or hyper-focused and absorptive practices, brain circuitry is seemingly altered for the duration of the activity.

It is important to note, that although the use of the fMRI device provides measurable brain activity, it remains a limiting tool for understanding many parts of the brain. Also, as many trance processes incorporate dance or other movements, with the highly restricted movement during a fMRI, comprehensive brain activity may not be fully captured. Therefore, brain circuitry plays a role in trance processes but there are many immeasurable factors that cannot, not yet, be captured with the use of Western scientific technologies.

In his 2008 popular book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Csikszentmihalyi argues that regular 'practicing' and engagement of absorptive activities

may result in a flow state, which he defines as an automatic, effortless and highly focused state of mind that occurs when self-reflexive consciousness is harmoniously ordered (6, 9.)

He suggests that this *optimal experience* creates a sense of exhilaration and deep enjoyment, and is a “landmark in the memory for what life should look like”

(Csikszentmihalyi, 6.) These experiences he proposes, occur when skills match opportunities for action, or, there is an integration of actions (Seligman, Kirmayer, 34) resulting in a “forgetting of all else” (Csikszentmihalyi, 6.)

It is virtually impossible to provide a concise understanding, or ‘belief’ framework for how the brain is conceptualized within *Izangoma* paradigms. At the very least, there is a variance in perspectives. Further analysis would require an interdisciplinary team of researchers doing a large-scale qualitative and quantitative research project throughout Southern Africa. What remains interesting regarding studies of the brain, and relevant to this discussion, is how the brain is culturally and medically perceived. Sakatani suggests that in modern Western medicine, the brain is the most important organ, acting as a control centre, whereas in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the brain is not included in the organs but its functions are seen to be scattered all over the human body (222,223.)

Therefore, he argues “brain diseases are regarded as systemic diseases rather than disorders of a single organ” (224.) Crossley also disrupts Western notions of dualism by suggesting that the mind is simply the brain. This, he contends, solves the problem of dualism, as the brain is simply a part of the body, an organ, which makes issues of mind-body dualism inconsequential (3.)

If neuroscience seeks to contribute to what Jureidini describes as “robust physiological markers of trance states” (261), then there needs to be consideration not only of what can

be learned about the brain during trance processes but also if these investigations are contributory to wider trance discourses. Additionally, the unnerving of Cartesian dualism, foundational to these biomedical inquiries should be sought. To this end, cultural neuroscientific investigation along with anthropological interdisciplinary efforts could be beneficial to establishing new kinds of clinical approaches and research projects (Seligman, Kirmayer, 32.) My trance-based fMRI conducted as part of Bar and De Souza's research is a step towards these kinds of interdisciplinary and collaborative endeavours.

Contributions and Fragmentations of Trance Analysis

In this interdisciplinary literature review, the social scientific acceptance of trance inquiry is highlighted and is, for the most part, understood as part of complex socio-cultural systems which are not limited to psychological, pathological or physiological markers. Child's contention that the healthy development of personality and the collective ego is an important shift away from trance as pathology. While Boddy, Bourguignon and Lambek's anthropological efforts to differentiate types of trance is important for grasping how trance is understood; neuroscientific analysis of brain circuitry during altered states of consciousness is of increasing interest to neuroscientists. Yet, the foci are all too often only on physiological changes, with other immeasurable factors negated. Therefore, neuroscientific trance investigations should recognize the limitations of analyzing trance processes from only biomedical perspectives, and should rather seek out interdisciplinary and collaborative research endeavours that incorporates and contextualizes trance, Indigenous and socio-cultural worldviews and experiences. These collaborations must also be mutually beneficial.

As I lay in the fMRI machine in a sterile and controlled environment during the trance process with Dr De Souza, I felt that I had more to offer science than it had to offer me. Yet, I still wanted to ‘show’ what I already knew and understand through indigenous epistemologies to be true; which is that *Izangoma* trance processes work on us and through us as to meditate and mend fragmentations of ourselves, our families, communities and worlds. Embodiment then goes beyond the physical body, and in the next chapter, I will utilize *Ngoma* worldviews and affect theory to explore and expand on concepts of embodiment.

Chapter Four– Bodily Matters, Affective Embodiment and *Becomings*

Bodily Matters

In the autoethnographic portion of this thesis, I have sought to show the various kinds of embodiments that occur through *Izangoma*. Whether it’s a more spectacle-based cultural trance co-performance, or through ancestral-driven narratives and subtler ancestral presences - as is the case in chapter thirty with the presence of *Dungamanzi*, a ‘foreign’ ancestor, who ‘sits beside me’ intermittently for months; ancestral embodiments are part of stratified and co-relational ways of feeling and knowing.

It is through the descriptions of *Izangoma* trance processes and the ancestral-transmitted portions of this thesis, that I have shown not only bodily practices but affective embodied experiences. In the succeeding chapter, I shall discuss bodily matters and academic concepts of embodiment, as to recognize sensory and felt experience (Stewart, 16), and as legitimate knowledges.

Spinoza's proposition that the body is not a unified entity but has the "capacity to affect and be affected" (Leys, 442), was a theoretical shift away from Cartesian dualism - the mind as separate from the body. Husserl's attempts at a "phenomenology of reason" also disrupted ideas of dualism. Borrowing from psychoanalytic theory, he examines consciousness in the pure ego while exploring transcendental consciousness and structures of "pure consciousness" (Moran, Cohen, 155,156.), as well as the intersections between lived experience and transcendent perception. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological 'habit', building on Husserl's 'habitus'- the dispositional basis for human activity (3), which was also theorized by Bourdieu, and remains comprehensively used throughout social sciences; is foundational to embodiment because it informs a centering of agency, and allows for an overcoming of dualism through the recognition of the body as an "existential condition in which culture and self are grounded" (Csordas, 136, Moran, Cohen, 3.) Habit is also important, argues Crossley because "Others live on within our bodies, not just as memories but in the form of the habits which they put" (4.) *Izangoma* trance processes as affective embodiments, therefore expands on Crossley's ideas of memories and Others living on in our bodies.

Csordas richly deepens ideas of embodiment, particularly in relation to trance, with his proposing that embodiment be best understood as an indeterminate methodological field which is defined by perceptual experiences and modes of presences and engagements in the world (135.) Unlike Merleau-Ponty however, Csordas contends that there is no distinction between the subject and object and that perception is indeed part of cultural worlds, with embodiment as the starting point for truly understanding human participation in cultural worlds (135, 137, 140.) Bourdieu's view of the body, as a symbol of expression and locus

for social practice (Csordas, 135) informed Comaroff's concept of the socially informed body of practice (Csordas, 136), while Scheper-Hughes' integrated view of embodiment with the individual body, the social body and the body politic, edifies Ahmed's *inter-embodiment*, the always already social experience of dwelling with other bodies (4.)

Building on the sociality of bodies, *Izangoma* trance processes, in much the same way that Brazilian dance practices which include Capoeira, Samba and dancers of Candomblé for example, shows "survival gestures" (8) due to generations of political, cultural and racial suppression; these movements express a freedom in the body to think, to say "what cannot be spoken" (Browning, 1, 8,9, 15.) Trance then, observes Csordas is not just about embodied forms of knowledge but also shared somatic states (147.) The body for *Izangoma* is an existential ground of belief, and locus of engagement, with ancestors and spirits, often expressed somatically (Boddy, 410), yet the body is not bound by flesh, or a naturally bounded substance but rather, is affected by many more elements (Latour, 11.) Therefore, I propose that these elements or 'states' which are central to *Izangoma* trance processes are affective embodiments.

Affective Embodiments

In this section, I will also explore the early stages of the affective turn, as well as embodiment specifically apparent to *Izangoma* trance processes. I will focus on two areas of inquiry as to narrow the scope of this expansive analysis. Firstly, I will recognize the felt experience between an *Isangoma* and the ancestors, or unseen forces, with particular attention to the final stages of the initiation. Secondly, I will explore socio-cultural collectivist philosophies concerning embodiment. I will also address how the traumatized

remains of erased histories (Clough, 3), or what Gordon calls, “the wounds of modernity’s violence” (19) surface with the potentiality to inform new ways for encountering. In this section, I will reflect on my *Izangoma* initiation process as well as a ground-breaking public *Izangoma* event, as described in sections of *The Way of the Ancestors*, as to situate my analysis and methodologies.

Social scientists turned their attention to matters of the body in the 1980’s and 1990’s, shifting away from the body as singular, towards discourses of bodily intentionality versus non-intentionality, which Blackman argues was a shift towards an “emancipatory politics of change” (xi, iv.) These points of inquiry were foundational to the affective turn, which was marked by greater reflexivity of systems, memories and biopolitics; and were the result of a shift in critical thinking and theorization of the social (Clough 2.) In an attempt to define affect, Shouse suggests that it is not a personal feeling but a nonconscious experience of intensity; a moment of unformed and unstructured potential which cannot be fully realized in language. (5) He adds that the body has a grammar all of its own, with affect...adding qualitative dimensions of intensity to the quality of experience (Leys, 442.)

From the earliest stages in the *ukuthwasa* process, the initiate is physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually dismantled. There is a reconceptualizing of the ontological self, with situated and embodied dimensions of learning occurring, contends Naumescu and Halloy in *Learning Spirit Possession: An Introduction* (156.) From living in a state of servitude by constantly kneeling, sleeping on the floor and 24-hour rituals which involve steaming, washing, emetics, enemas and prayers; the neophyte faces a multiple of selves through the process of learning to be affected (Latour, 207.)

The physical body in the early stages of the *Izangoma* training process is often a site of pain and discomfort because of the ongoing laborious physical, emotional and spiritual demands which occur throughout the lengthy process. Yet, it is through this arduous progression, that the *thwasa* succumb to new kinds of embodiment processes, and where knowledge is sought and obtained. The *thwasa* must learn to attune to when the ancestors are ‘coming on’, and once surfaced, she does *otherwise* by embracing countless indeterminacies. She can’t be sure what the embodying ancestor might demand, for example, a cup of traditional beer, for example, a cigarette, or, to simply be heard and acknowledged. She learns to share somatic states and social experiences, or a “manifestation of rapports” (Ness, 150) with both the community and impalpable energies throughout this process.

In chapter two, I detail the final part of the three-day initiation into *Ngoma*, when a healer is required to demonstrate a comprehensive fluency in the language of spirit. This involves a lingering in the senses and a comfortability with *other* kinds of embodiments. As part of the final ‘exam’, I enter the waters of transference, which are felt before cognitively recognized (Ochoa, 483), I sense all that the river subsumes...ancestral forces, urban pollution, and a completion of demonstrating *how* I am affected. It is through these vibrational or tonal shifts in bodily sensations and engagement with *other* kinds of materialities, that I am at-one-ment (Laubscher, 30) with both revered and feared forces in the waters. Laubscher beautifully articulates this interrelationship when he writes: “...the water through which the *Isangoma* goes to reach ancestors, and a water which often leaves a dead body behind, but a water from beyond which comes the calling...this is a call of life from another world to which those in the changing process of *ukuthwasa* go, only they go

there with bodies that live like a fish in a world of water, in a world different from the one on earth” (27.)

The *Isangoma* throughout the training process and thereafter are required to move with ease between worlds, or, what Lugones terms, code switch (Madison, 123.) These worlds are multiple and inclusive of the socio-political present...Soweto, early post-Apartheid South Africa, ancestors of the past, and those embodied through *Izangoma*, in the present. This in-betweenness is a working together of the senses, creating embodied connectivity that solidifies interrelationships as well as works indirectly against oppressive social relationships (Showell, 8.)

In chapter twenty-three the embodiment of socio-cultural relationships and resistance to oppressive forces is apparent. Set in Church Square Pretoria on the first National Traditional Healers Day, the mere presence of *Izangoma* alters states of social being (Thrift, 61) through the redressing of issues of cultural agency and colonialism. The expansive square once the legislative ‘home’ to colonial structural violence, is encircled with white and oppressive effigies. Yet the cobblestone square is a shared site of resistance (Hughes, 43) and is embedded with Nelson Mandela and his comrade’s legacies from the Rivonia Trials.

I am welcomed at this occasion, like all events and ceremonies, as a fellow healer and activist by the organizer and the larger community. This welcoming, and acceptance of me as a white foreign *Izangoma* corresponds with the cross-ethnic Southern African principles of *Ubuntu*, meaning *ntu* - universal force and *hantu* - spirit in time and place, which is defined as the collective nature of being (Washington 32, 34.) *Ubuntu* is commonly connected to ideas of togetherness or human-ness, with concepts of the self as

communal (Washington, 37), and is exemplified in the love, care and acceptance I received while training and practicing as a healer in South Africa. Nolwazi's expression of concern at the Traditional Healer's Day event, with regards to me going into trance while pregnant in the last trimester: "I am not happy with this, you shouldn't be dancing, you should be resting" she contends in a motherly tone.

The embodiment of togetherness or bodies with a shared destiny (Latour, 2009) is apparent throughout various sections of *The Way of the Ancestors*. In chapter twenty-five when *Ntate* Koka, a prolific elder who has taken me under his wing, demonstrates the principles of *Ubuntu*, not only through his personal cultural practices but also in his co-founding of the Black Consciousness Movement. Therefore, *Ubuntu* and other intercommunicable ideas inform collective kinds of embodiments which are oppositional to predatory individualism and Western political values (Smith, 20, 92.) *Ubuntu*, and similar epistemologies then, not only informs and strengthens cultural agency but also disorganizes, reflects and addresses empire (Imada, 127.)

Becomings

Izangoma trance processes are culturally reflexive, punctuating, interpreting and endowing meaningfulness to experience (Conquergood, 19.) Situated in subjugated knowledge's, these processes seek to fix and transform troubling situations (Gordon, 22.) An example of this is in chapter forty when Onica, David's 'second mother' and shares her felt experiences of surviving Apartheid. It is here, suggests Ahmed, that bodies 'surfaces' as an effect of impressions left by others, both individual and collective (10.) Onica's "words of knowledge" (Csordas, 141) surface to reveal the violence of coloniality. The

presence of ancestor Ama J for example, who relays her experiences of mission schools, and the changing tides of coastal towns, as well as being deemed a ‘witch’ under colonial rule; reveals how ‘the dead’ are seething social figures in the present (Gordon, 8, 19.)

In the epilogue, I encounter unsettled spirits in a small-town graveyard in Southern Ontario. These traumatized ghosts⁴, the ‘vanquished’, hesitantly call me to encountering. I move beyond my European ancestor’s gravestones towards the Indigenous Peoples and animals of the small forest, towards the phantom subjects of history (Gordon, 196.) Here, the colonial and degraded present is felt (Gordon, 207.) The unequal relationships between settler and Indigenous Peoples, relations brought into existence as a construction of colonialism (Smith, 25) resurfaces.

I engage in an ongoing manner in the sociality of living with ‘ghosts’ and it is in these cultural contact zones that I not only have a heightened awareness of past and present but that I step into new encounters which are made up of permissions and prohibitions, presences and absences. It is here, in these moments, that I strive for recognition-based ways for encountering (Gordon, 6, 15.) I approach the *un-visible* and apologize for not being, in this case, what the spirits may require, an Indigenous medicine person to sing their songs and carry them home. I bear witness and engage in confounding encounters; and in so doing, I strive towards individual and collective response-ability (Barad, 214.) I am

⁴ I am using the word ghost two-fold. The first refers to *isithunzi* or shadow, that which is unpassed, unsettled, or in a continuous place-less-ness between realms. Unlike an ancestor who has had the necessary funerary rites, and is seen to successfully reside in ancestral domains. The second way I use ghost, is in keeping with Gordon’s concepts of the ghost not as the invisible or ineffable but as a presence which demands attention and is inextricably interconnected with domination and how power operates (Gordon, 24, 10.)

affectively present with narratives informed by the past (Blackman, x) towards reconciliation in the present.

Chapter Five: Solidarity and Decolonization

In this chapter, I will speak to colonial recognitions by Canadian and South African governments through the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC), as well as academic and social justice-based decolonization ideologies and praxis; which are not always in sync with said governmental reconciliatory endeavours. I will also reflect on personal, *Izangoma* and theoretical notions of solidarity, differentiating it from neo-shamanistic trends, which highlights coloniality. I contend in this concluding chapter that Indigenous Knowledge Systems are valid and transformative epistemologies.

European colonialism was the most extensive of the numerous kinds of contact, and although varied and multiple, key features are shared (Loomba, xiv, 17.) Suppression, assimilation and annihilation, are all indicative of European conquest which has been particularly impactful on Indigenous Peoples and continues to be an all-encompassing presence in the daily lives of many Indigenous Peoples (Waziyatawin, Yellow Bird.)

As to recognize the devastation of the Apartheid regime on People of Colour, in 1994 the South African government conducted a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Due to mounting local and international pressures, Canada's TRC was held twenty-one years later in 2015. The purpose of the Canadian TRC was to nationally inform all Canadians about what occurred during Indian Residential Schools (TRC.ca.) as well as to

stimulate reconciliatory relationships between settlers and First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples. The TRC and recognition by local governments for said reconciliatory purposes is long overdue, yet, these acknowledgements are not necessarily simpatico with decolonization ideologies and praxis.

Decolonization is an ongoing marginalized-people led effort not only to heal from colonialism often through sociocultural and Indigenous based practices and epistemologies but also demands the attainment of socio-economic powers which involves self-sovereignty and the repatriation of lands as to benefit Indigenous Peoples. Decolonization then is not simply about individual empowerment or improved relations with settlers but is about the analysis of power relations and systems of oppression, as well as the disruption of imperialism and colonialism on a multitude of levels (Smith 10.)

Post Colonialism and Indigenous Epistemologies

In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, the term ‘postcolonial’ covers all of the worldwide cultures affected by imperial processes from the moment of colonization to present day (Ashcroft et al., 194.) For early postcolonial theorists, postcolonialism was most concerned with the contestation of colonial domination as well as the legacies of colonialism (Loomba, 12.) Said’s *Orient* was crucial to early postcolonial theory, with the notion of Orientalism troubling the West’s sense of superiority over the “East”, and opposition to imperialism, along with its expressions and representations which are seen to support Western vocabularies, scholarships, imagery, doctrines, and colonial bureaucracies and styles (10.)

One criticism regarding postcolonial theory, however, is that its foundations are poststructuralist, with tendencies to create vague conditions of people anywhere and everywhere, often negating the details of locale, as well as the tendency to eulogize the precolonial past (Loomba 12, 18, 18.) The term ‘post-colonial’ also remains contentious, as most former colonies have not escaped colonial dominations and remain under foreign control (scholarblogs.emory), which begs the question when does postcoloniality begin and when does it end? Loomba contends that this is superfluous and that the real issue isn’t about ‘post’ or ‘colonial’ but rather how the analysis of ‘postcolonial’ societies too often considers colonialism as the *only* history of a society, negating the Indigenous ideologies and practices that have existed alongside or interacted with it (17.)⁵

‘Postcolonial’ then, is at best, a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome (Loomba 19), with areas of study providing for broad investigations of power relations (scholarblogs.emory.) Whereas decolonization, suggests de la Cadena, is about liberatory efforts and radical redistribution of power which requires the transformation of all coloniality of power, capitalism, and Eurocentrism (294.)

During the 1950’s-1970’s an emancipation of epistemologies surfaced throughout North America, with new, interpretive and exploratory research occurring throughout the social sciences (Loomba, 22.) “Difference-centred theorizations” (Loomba, 48) which valued Indigenous epistemologies over or alongside Western theories, emerged. Indigenous ways of knowing which are interrelational and intergenerational and

⁵ I have sought throughout the creative portion of this thesis, to demonstrate how local histories, expressed through the ancestral narratives, have worked in opposition and ‘alongside’ colonialism.

encompass, “the spirit of collectivity, reciprocity and respect” (Loomba, 27-28) were part of these alternate theorizations and methodologies. Indigenous epistemologies came to be synonymous with the valuing of experiential knowledges, dreams and visions (Loomba 27) which remains counter to Eurocentrism and Phallocentrism.

Yet the valuing of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) within educational environments, remains a challenge. In speaking specifically to African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS), Osman contends that the Western domination of knowledge and disregard for Indigenous knowledges is problematic (2,3.) What is required he argues, is a comprehensive evaluation, rigorous planning and watchful implementation of policies as to ensure the recognition and provisions of space for local political, economic, and cultural pedagogies and epistemologies (Osman, 3.)

Browning, however, in *Samba: Resistance in Motions*, brings knowledge back to the body and embodiment processes in her ethnography, where she challenges Western epistemologies as sole knowledge systems. She argues that Brazilian dances write their own meanings, with their own kinds of “bodily writing” (xxii.) These dances, Browning contends, can potentialize the healing of the divided body from its “intellecto hook up” (xvii.) Brazilian dance then, in much the same way as *Izangoma* trance processes is embodied, containing corporeal intelligence; are not only repositories of culture and tradition but is scholarship (xiii.)

Situated Investigations Versus “Shamans”

Becoming a “shaman” is increasingly popularized among white Westerners who exploit unequal power relations to engage in culturally appropriating and consumptive

behaviours of Indigenous socio-cultural and spiritual practices, for their own benefit. From online “shaman training” to Ayahuasca adventures in Peru; Indigenous practices and belief systems are exoticized, romanticized and commodified. “Shamanic practices” are becoming the remedy for the perils of Western life, for the curious and privileged white Westerner. Counter to these “quests” in the “third world”, I have sought through *The Way of the Ancestors* to be in solidarity with decolonization ideologies and endeavours by unsettling ‘settlements’ through affective writing practices and *Isangoma* healing methodologies. The first step towards this has been problematizing my own positionality as a white, middle-class settler, specifically in context to post-Apartheid South Africa, and what is now called Canada.

Through the creative and theoretical portion of this thesis, my aim has been to embody and engage in new kinds of dialogic and diasporic encounters. Further, it is my hope that these encounters can confront hegemonic forces by revisiting colonial sediments and settlements (Ahmed, 192.) Through situated investigations and radical expressions (Cvetkovich, 33) comprised of dense narratives of seemingly diminished lives; I have sought to take up issues around visibility while acknowledging and redressing social and collective memory, oppression and psychic pain (Gordon, 2, 22, 92.)

‘Having the ancestors’ communicate and transmit through me has deepened my understanding of historic and present-day colonialism. Most importantly, however, is the emancipation or “liberation of human capacities” (Turner, 44) through the surfacing of suppressed narratives. These narratives should not fall within “third world literatures” (Spivak, 164), but are in fact extensions of *Izangoma* worldviews and are important “ontologies in the middle of things” (Zournazi, 77.)

Solidarity

Solidarity suggests Gaztambide-Fernández, is about a mutual attachment between individuals and communities and encompasses two levels, an actual common ground level between individuals, and a normative level, whereby there are mutual obligations to aid each other, as needed (Gaztambide-Fernández, 47.) Solidarity, however, is not only between human beings. The grassroots movement, Idle No More, like many Indigenous-led decolonization efforts is a good example of this. Idle No More focuses on the honouring, solidarity and protection of land, water and creatures. Similarly, *Izangoma* solidarity is not only concerned with individuals or the communities they serve as healers and often social justice advocates, but also with lineal and collective ancestors, as well as all living things. Gaztambide-Fernández in this vein, calls for an imaginative constructing of new ways of entering into relational, transitive, and creative solidarity which recasts and strategizes all kinds of relations (41.) Solidarity he contends isn't just about political ideologies that move against European colonial structures but about social relations (Gaztambide-Fernández, 46) and what occurs in those interrelationships.

In receiving the calling to heal, and being 'authenticated' as *Izangoma*; I have been offered the gift of reconciliatory engagement. It is not something that I have earned, yet, I am given the opportunity to mend and heal a variety of lineages and spaces. Being *Izangoma*, therefore, is an ethical responsibility, and solidarity with those that went before, those in the present, and those to come, is crucial to its worldview.

Solidarity for me hadn't just been about participating in protests, speaking out against, and educating where possible on the injustices and varied forms of historic and present-day oppressions. It isn't only about working in 'the field' either. It has been most

strongly felt through active listening. Listening to the suppressed narratives of the ancestors, and active listening to patients before facilitating measures to move them through systemic trauma and pain. I also listen to ancestral narratives and community-based discourses as to be shaped and led by Indigenous Peoples who seek reclamation over themselves, their knowledge's, their families, communities and lands.

As borders and boundaries between self and others are fluid, permeable and porous; attuning to different kinds of listening suggests Brydon, is essential to learning alternative modes of voicing (5), as well as the resonances of different kinds of silences (Blackman, 162.) I of course recognize that as an allied scholar, I still benefit from what Homi Baba terms, powerful master discourses (Madison, 165.) I have access and utilize systems and structures built on stolen lands which manufactures Eurocentric knowledges; however, it is my hope that by disrupting these systems through affective writing praxis and *Izangoma* healing and trance practices, that I will contribute to individual and collective changes in the conditions of the lives of those on the margins (Smith, 10.)

Conclusion

In *The Way of the Ancestors* and in my theoretical analysis, I have sought to revalue and re-centre the narrative of Others, towards reconciliatory and decolonization efforts. I began by providing an *Izangoma* worldview based on Nguni practices, as well as an interdisciplinary literature review as to situate trance analysis. I applied anthropological ways of thinking about bodies and embodiment to explain my own creative descriptions and experiences of trance. I also made use of affect theory as to support notions of *other* kinds of embodiments. The neuroscientific assessment of my “brain in trance” allowed for

not only an accentuating of corresponding research but also the intersections and potentialities for interdisciplinary collaborations.

Despite the structures of colonialism with rules by which encounters have been 'managed' (Smith 8); trance processes have historically defied and navigated oppressive colonial systems through complex and valued sociocultural knowledges and healing methodologies. Part of decolonization praxis is not just the unsettling of these 'managed' encounters, but also a reshaping of them. Who initiates these encounters, and how are they explored and mediated? Are all important questions if there is to be sincere solidarity and social justice centred efforts for healing?

With globalization and the noose of late capitalism tightening around the necks of those on the margins, traditional healing and medicine, including the process of apprenticeship, is becoming lucrative, depending of course, on which side of the process you are on. The 'anomalous' in my story is fast diminishing in the wider narrative of South African healing. Therefore, future analysis of *Izangoma* trance and healing might explore the implications of non-Black or non-South African's training and practicing as *Izangoma*, as well as how *Izangoma* cultural practices are 'moved', in-placed or transculturally shifted? And, what for example, are the implications of these shifts on traditional healing, traditional medicine and Indigenous Peoples in Canada, South Africa and elsewhere? Further, how might legitimate reconciliatory endeavours take shape, and how might they be navigated in spaces and places that are often simultaneously engaged in, and resistant to decolonization endeavours?

“Ah, you must know, must know where you are going. This is very important. Do you hear this? Why! Why do we put this down? Ah, we have what you call ‘reasons’ for all we do. You believe this is a story. That this is a story she [referring to the author] is telling. Ah no, you are wrong, very wrong with this. These, these are not stories. They are lives, our lives, our long lives, ah, they do not end. You [she says speaking directly to readers], you believe it ends. Ah, no. These stories, they go on. On for so long. I am here, right here. Right now, with my daughter [she refers to the author.] I am here, beside her. She puts this down, as I ask her to. Don’t worry about how she looks, is she young...? Ah no. She is Sangoma. She is my daughter. She shares this story and the story of many. She is gifted with this, ah, and what you call, responsibility. She knows this. Ah, she can feel this. We are giving this to you, even though you are not Isangoma [she speaks directly to the reader.] You haven’t even come and give us beer! Or anything! [she is referring to readers not making offerings.] Ah, we are forgiving, we love you anyway. We haven’t forgotten you. No. And you must not forget us. This is why, why these stories of our lives are here. We must never forget each other. This is how it is meant to be. Now, do you remember?” Ama J.

October 4, 2017.

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