

Conflict Mediation and *Bungoma* Activism in a South African Townshipⁱ

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Abstract

The following chapter draws on fieldwork with traditional African healers in an urban South African township and examines mediation sessions undertaken by a group of healers with a view to contemporary conflicts that emerged during their praxis. I argue that the healers' mediation practices are a form of activism that addresses the hermeneutical and institutional gap between traditional healing and the magistrates' court system. This activism further presents a social positioning by healers for greater legitimacy, recognition, and integration with governmental structures. The chapter will introduce the township of Alexandra and two different conflict resolution pathways that exist there, which reflect two divergent judicial moralities of reproduction with their respective cultural frameworks. The chapter then provides an overview of the institution of traditional healing and, lastly, describes the healers' mediation as a form of activism.

Keywords

Activism, Traditional Healers, Bungoma, South Africa, Township, Conflict Resolution.

Introduction

On an April morning in the township of Alexandra in 2017, I met with my primary interlocutor Gogo Thambo Lenyoka, a traditional African healerⁱⁱ (*sangoma*), to join fellow healers in front of the local magistrates' court. A bail hearing had been set for a young man charged with the rape and murder of a two-year-old girl. The Agisaneng Domestic Abuse & Training (ADAPT) office had called upon members from allied groups, which included traditional healing organisations, to come and protest. They held up signs that read: 'No bail for the murderer', 'Justice delayed is justice denied', 'Stop child murder!!', 'Our children. Our future. Stop killing them', 'You kill a woman, you kill a nation', 'Tougher and stiffer sentences for rapists!!', 'Violence against children must stop', 'You hurt a child, you hurt the nation'.

After the protest, we left the court and walked to the Multi-Purpose Centre. The Parliamentary Constituency Office (PCO) had agreed for a group of traditional African and faith healers (the 'Forum') to use their boardroom. Upon entering, we were greeted with the usual '*Thokoza*' and two resounding claps from several healers who were already seated around a table. After waiting for a few more healers to arrive, a total of eight were present in the boardroom. This particular group of healers had gathered to mediate two cases. The first involved a young woman, a *sangoma*, who was engaged in a dispute with her mother and aunt. The second concerned a middle-aged woman who was training to become a *sangoma* but instead of receiving the appropriate training, she felt she was being exploited for money and labour.

At the end of the day, I was struck by the healers' two modes of engaging with justice and social change. On the one hand, the healers were concerned with the activities in the magistrates' court and, on the other hand, they were involved with emergent issues within their own praxis. In this chapter, I consider these modes of engagement as forms of activism. According to Rijk van Dijk and Thomas Kirsch, the present Special Issue starts out from a working definition of activism which understands it as a social practice and enacted form of societal agency that is articulated with a view to communal imaginaries, visions and hopes towards a better life and/or against some (perceived) injustice, domination or adverse social development. This working definition of activism can also be applied to 'religion' as a domain of life where models *of* the world (as it *is*) and models *for* the world (as it *should* be) are brought together in a complementary fashion (Geertz 1973; Lambek 2015; Luhrmann 2015).

Michael Lambek (2012) further describes activism in terms of a tension between 'tradition' and 'reform'. The former appeals to an authority and its continuation as something 'good', which are presented in the form of propositions such as 'it is right to do so as our parents and grandparents did' or 'what our parents and grandparents did is right and good' (Ibid., 351). By contrast, the latter locates the 'good' in questioning the former and seeking to correct what are perceived to be mistakes of the past ('it is right and good to question authority, to improve, to correct past mistakes'; Ibid.). In either case, 'tradition' or 'reform', a sense of the 'good' or what is 'right', is implicated within activist practice (Lambek 2010). In other words, notions of 'good' and 'right' are at the crux of tensions in presenting a model *for* the world and the ways to achieve or sustain such a model in response to a model *of* the world as it is experienced (see Robbins 2013 for a discussion on the 'suffering subject' and the 'anthropology of the good' where he

considers the various ways people strive to live in a better world that ‘they imagine and their ways of trying to get to them’ (p. 459)).

In addition, the thematically overlapping anthropological debates about activism, religion, and the good can be situated within the literature on moralityⁱⁱⁱ and its distinction between reproduction^{iv} and freedom.^v Indeed, as noted in the working definition above, any activism predicated on a sense of the good is articulated ‘towards a better life and/or against some (perceived) injustice, domination or adverse social development’. The activists’ concern thereby relates to systemic and institutional forms of injustice. In other words, activists are critically engaged with a ‘morality of reproduction’ that is constituted by a ‘kind of moral action that reproduces already existing patterns of behaviour’ (Robbins 2012, 118), which cultivates a bias of certain groups of people or institutions. In the sequence of events described above, the healers’ enacted forms of societal agency first expressed concern for the ‘good’ by way of participating in solidarity with Agisaneng Domestic Abuse & Training (hereafter, ADAPT) against violence against women and children. Afterwards, they addressed conflicts emanating from the *Bungoma* tradition, its contemporary praxis, and lived experiences within the township. The two forms of activism present a contrast in modes of engagement and social identities between an activism of citizens in solidarity leaning on a government judicial system to reach the ‘right’ verdict, on the one hand, and an activism driven by healers regulating themselves and addressing their own concerns on the other.

This chapter focuses primarily on the latter in the Alexandra township. While the healers’ activism is not always visible, nor is it well-known within the township, by addressing concerns that emerge from *within* their praxis and concerns that emerge externally *in relation to* their praxis, this group of healers address two interrelated issues: the hermeneutical gap between the *Bungoma* praxis and the magistrates’ system, and the institutional gap between the lived experiences of *Bungoma* and available conflict resolution mechanisms, which indicate a concern for problems of access to justice. In other words, the healers’ activism is engaged with addressing internal concerns with regard to *Bungoma* and external concerns of institutional relations. Moreover, the overarching aim of this activism is to better integrate healers with official government structures in the city of Johannesburg; not to be dictated and controlled by government but to be granted a platform of legitimacy and recognition beyond ‘lip service’. In

this sense, the healers' activism in conducting mediations is aimed at achieving a 'better life' for the institution of traditional healing internally, and within the urban landscape at large.

Given the religious landscape of South Africa in which, according to the 'Community Survey 2016 in Brief' report by Stats SA, approximately 78 per cent of South Africans nominally identify as Christians (Stats SA 2016, 42) and the discussion of 'Christian activism' in this special issue, I will briefly touch on the issue of Christianity within the context of healers in Alexandra.

The healers discussed in this chapter all identify as both traditional healer and Christian. A few of them identify as 'double-barrels', a colloquial term that refers to those who are both traditional and faith healer (*sangoma* and *mporofiti*). And indeed, the Forum's monthly meetings, apart from their mediation sessions, often begin and end with prayer. However, this is not to say that the healers are uncontroversial. They are received with mixed responses in the township, which I describe further below. The identification of both Christian and healer further indicates an influence of Christianity on the *Bungoma* tradition and its praxis. Such hybridisations make it difficult to discern whether an aspect of their praxis or an emphasis on a certain value is particularly owed to a Christian influence. Similarly, during their mediation sessions, there was little explicit Christian discourse and much more on propriety within the *Bungoma* praxis. That is, the religious content of their mediations was much more explicit about *Bungoma*, and the issues contained therein (including accusations of witchcraft), than Christianity. As one of my interlocutors said, 'we are trying to restore our dignity'. The healers' activism is, hence, about the *Bungoma* institution and collective change internally within their praxis but also externally regarding how they are perceived.

The chapter^{vi} begins by introducing the township of Alexandra and two different conflict resolution pathways that perpetuate distinct moralities of reproduction through their respective frameworks and cultural logics: the magistrates' system and *Bungoma*. It will then provide an overview of traditional healing, which serves to further argue in which ways the *Bungoma* praxis and its contemporary concerns are different from, but not entirely unrelated to, issues dealt with in the magistrates' system. Lastly, I discuss case studies of the healers' mediations relating to *Bungoma* as a form of activism that not only deals with issues that emerge from the everyday lived experiences of *Bungoma* but also as a means for positioning this institution in the wider social field.

Conflict Resolution Pathways in Alexandra

The Johannesburg township of Alexandra (also known as ‘Alex’) was founded in 1912 and spans 6.9 km². According to the 2011 South Africa census, Alexandra retains a dominantly black population of approximately 180,000. However, the World Bank in 2001 estimated the population up to 750,000. In either case, the density of Alex cannot be overstated. The World Bank (2001) further notes that the township’s ‘infrastructure was designed for a population of about 70,000, and that,

[I]ts original stands of size of 500-600 sqm are characterized by sizeable houses of reasonable stock but usually with 3-6 additional separate rooms built in the original gardens, each usually housing an additional family who [may] rent from the main householder. The additional rental units, which provide a significant income to the main householder, are termed “backyard shacks” although may be of brick or block construction of reasonable quality. There are an estimated 20,000 shacks of which approximately 7,000 are located in “backyards” (World Bank 2001).

The population of Alex and the number of shacks has undoubtedly increased since the report was produced. In conjunction with the population density and the sustained income inequality that ‘rendered the black majority abjectly poor during apartheid which remains among the highest in the world’ (Teppo 2011, 225; citing Seekings and Natrass 2005),^{vii} crime is a significant issue in Alex. According to Crime Stats SA, in 2018, among various other crime-related statistics, the township had 90 murders and 191 sexual offences. By contrast, the neighbouring suburb of Sandton had 15 murders and 59 sexual offences.^{viii} In South Africa, according to the Child Gauge Survey, ‘[i]n 2016, a national prevalence study estimated that one in three children are victims of sexual violence and physical abuse before they reach the age of 18 years, whilst 12% of children report neglect and 16% report emotional abuse’ (Jamieson, Berry and Lake 2017, 91).

Many of the healers in Alex became acquainted with the ADAPT initiative, mentioned above, when they were invited to a programme that discussed counselling in traditional healing for domestic abuse and violence against women. This programme was intended to be complementary rather than antagonistic to the healers' approaches. The aim was to build alliances and work together on issues of gender-based violence and domestic abuse. Since then, many have joined ADAPT's list of stakeholders and have subsequently attended workshops, meetings, and protests held by the organisation. For instance, several healers invited me to join them at a public meeting organised by ADAPT during which the organisation presented preliminary research about child protection, bullying, and sexual violence in Alexandra high schools. The healers' attendance is not, however, simply in their role as healers – which they unmistakably represent at such meetings – but also as residents and citizens^{ix} of Alex concerned about issues of moral and ethical behaviour, such as gender-based violence and crime.

In addition to the reported crime statistics and widespread concerns relating to gender-based violence, there are injustices that go unreported and unaccounted. The latter pertains not only to cases of domestic violence, in which a survivor may recant a police report out of fear of losing the household's primary 'bread-winner' to undesirable consequences such as imprisonment (also see Bae et al. 2018 on a community court in Namibia), but also to cases of injustice and various disputes from within the *Bungoma* healing tradition, its contemporary praxis and lived experiences. For instance, in the first mediation case mentioned above, the two elders in the dispute (the mother and the aunt), stated that the young woman (*sangoma*) had been disrespectful to them. One example they provided was that the young healer invited friends to sleep at the house without permission. By contrast, the young *sangoma* complained that the aunt had disturbed her space of healing practice (*indumba*), which is usually a designated place within a house or a separate hut. I was told that one should not be disturbing such a space. Taken together, this case presented a dilemma of 'respect': a respect for one's elders and family members versus a respect for traditional healing practices and sacred spaces. During the mediation session, the healers emphasised both but chastised the young healer since they deemed moral discipline to be a component of any healer's training. The mediation court recommended the family hold a meeting to discuss the issues further. The second case was brought by a middle-aged woman who was a student (*thwasa*) learning to become a *sangoma*. She claimed that she had been training with her teacher (*gobela*) for roughly two and a half years – a training

that, I was told, normally does not last longer than six months. The student had already spent a considerable amount of money on her training. Yet, instead of being allowed to focus on the process of becoming a healer, she was expected by her *gobela* to do all the household chores and much of the other work around the *gobela*'s home. After the mediation process was completed, the *thwasa* was released from the verbal contract and training with her *gobela*. She eventually found a new *gobela* who could provide her with the proper training. I was later informed that she completed her training in a few months thereafter. During the mediation session, the healers in charge expressed concerns that those who were unfamiliar with traditional African healing and the training process, but had received a 'calling' (*ubizo*) from their ancestors, were often susceptible to exploitation. These are examples of cases from lived experiences within the *Bungoma* tradition that go unreported in crime statistics. Moreover, the cases illustrate nuances that lead complainants – those who are involved in or adjacent to the *Bungoma* praxis – to bring their concerns to a group of healers ('Forum') to assist in mediating the conflict rather than adjudication from the local magistrates' court. I will discuss some of the reasons for this later on.

The two forms of conflict resolution and justice-seeking pathways discussed thus far (and indeed, there are additional pathways for conflict resolution, for example Community Policing Forums) are exemplary of two different moralities of judicial reproduction. Before exploring the healers' mediation practice in more detail and noting some of the cultural logics – in terminologies, hermeneutics, and heuristics – that differ from the magistrate's morality of judicial reproduction, the following section will briefly discuss the status quo of traditional healing in South Africa as well as some of the reasons for why traditional healers are seeking to draw on their own morality of reproduction separate from the dominant, or publicly recognised, health and judicial institutions of the state.

The Social Role of Traditional Healers

According to the chairperson of the healers' Forum, in 2016, there are approximately 300 to 500 traditional and faith healers in Alex. Across South Africa's contemporary landscape, an often-quoted statistic reports that an estimated 80 per cent of black South Africans are frequenting traditional African healers (Mbatha et al. 2012; Burchardt 2017 citing Decoteau 2013). This statistic, which has been unofficially confirmed (Thornton 2017) and is disputed (Nxumalo et al. 2011), indicates that healers are playing a significant role for black South Africans when their

well-being, health and issues of justice are concerned. In these areas of social life, many South Africans engage with both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ institutions of healing and justice. The engagement with traditional healing practices, such as *Bungoma*, has also compelled Marian Burchardt (2017) to note the paradox of a ‘minoritarian majority’: ‘a majority by numbers since the majority of Africans expressly support indigenous spiritual traditions, including belief in witchcraft and the need for protection against it [Comaroff and Comaroff 2004], but minority understood as a “product of particular ideological, social, political and economic processes [Cowan 2001, 156]”’ (Burchardt 2017, 271-272). The minoritarian majority paradox is also indicative of problems concerning the accessibility, resources (namely, issues of affordability and availability) and efficacy of treatment and healing as well as different ideas about the cultural logics of ailing and suffering (in other words, issues of cultural acceptability). For example, there are many cases in Alex where a person goes to a clinic, waits for the whole day without being received by a nurse or doctor, returns the next day and is then treated for an ailment. However, the treatment may not alleviate the ailment so s/he will go to a traditional healer (or vice versa). In other cases, the patient may interpret his/her physical ailments in the light of a recurring dream or certain circumstances in the family, which are dismissed by the health practitioner at the clinic (see Carel and Kidd 2017 on epistemic injustice in medicine and healthcare) but are acknowledged by a healer (Van Binsbergen 1991; also see Janzen 1995 on the technical vocabulary of the ngoma tradition as a ‘misfortune managing institution’).

In an attempt to bridge this gap, in 2004, the healers were the primary object of concern in the Traditional Health Practitioners Act (‘THP Act’). Policymakers ‘presented [the THP Act] as a project of the recognition of cultural diversity, [but it] was also inspired by the desire to regulate and control healers and protect people against “fake” healers and harmful practices’ (Burchardt 2017, 277). The THP Act, however, is still not implemented to this day. In the spring of 2019, the Traditional Healers Organisation gathered members to march and protest to ‘end medical apartheid’. In the autumn of that same year, according to one of my interlocutors in Alex, the Traditional Health Organisation called a meeting to address its concerns relating to the amended 2007 THP Act and to make additional recommendations to government (a report from this meeting has yet to be produced). And indeed, when I read the legislation, I found many incongruencies between the Act and the contemporary practices of healers on the ground in Alex. While the specific discrepancies and cultural politics represented in the THP Act is beyond

the scope of the present chapter, the existence of this Act affirms that the common understanding of healers is through the lens of South Africa's biomedical healthcare system and further complicated by discussions within the judicial sphere about religion, culture, and tradition (Burchardt 2017, 259; also see Chidester 1996).

The work of traditional healers draws on an operative understanding of well-being that goes beyond the conventional paradigm of biological 'health' (Van Binsbergen 1991; Janzen 1992, 1995; Thornton 2017). In addition to addressing physical ailments, which tend to be associated with ancestral spirits, they also 'offer a wide range of counselling, divination/diagnostic' services that address 'anxiety and depression' (Thornton 2009, 17; see also Reis 2000 for discourse in 'Swazi healing' on suffering and recovery). Further, they provide advice during a person's decision-making processes, such as the ones concerning business issues and job promotions, but also protective services from 'motor accidents, theft, witchcraft, infection, unemployment and loss of love, lovers or spouses' as well as consultations for 'lost or stolen objects' and persons (Thornton 2009, 17). Beyond personal consultations and enhancements, healers are involved in the community through their engagements with youth and educational issue, domestic abuse, violence, and crime, as well as interfaith gatherings and mobilisations. In this regard, the healers are involving themselves in various aspects of social life concerned with individual and communal well-being which is tacitly predicated on the idea of a contract that people have with one another, also known as 'connective' or 'relational' justice (Wielenga 2018, 6; citing Graneß 2017; see also Thornton 2017). For the above reasons, the healers and their patients/clients operate with reference to a morality of reproduction that is different from the morality of reproduction that is pursued in formal government institutions and structures. This is not to say that healers do not refer^x their patients to health clinics and, indeed, the healers themselves will go to the clinic for some of their own ailments, nor is it to say that the issues involved within the *Bungoma* praxis are entirely unrelated to government institutions but rather highlights different forms of understanding the issues.

The status of *sangoma*, however, is far from uncontroversial in the township. While healers practically 'remain outside the [daily] experience of many South Africans', they are nevertheless 'fully part of South African life and consciousness' (Thornton 2009, 17). During my fieldwork, I asked several individuals what they thought about *sangomas*. Their reactions were mixed. Some praise them and state that 'we wouldn't be here if it weren't for healers', while

others gave a mixed response by saying that they were aware of them and appreciated their cultural value but ambivalent about actually visiting one. Still others specifically denounced traditional healers in the Gauteng province because, according to them, the healers were crooks. Yet others denounced healers altogether, followed by a declaration of their Christian identity. For example, when I asked why a taxi driver had not been to a traditional healer, he told me: 'I do not need the ancestors! I only need Jesus and my pastor to protect me!' He then proceeded to tell me about his car, emphasising that it was in good condition, all of which he took as evidence of the blessings and protection he received from his church. In another instance, responding to the question of traditional healers, born-again pastors quoted scriptures from the book of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, or Isaiah: the 'Bible says' we should not consult with the dead or anybody who does. Taken together, the *sangomas* I met during fieldwork preserved a sense of distinctive 'African identity in an increasingly globalized and "Westernized" country. By contrast, African Christians reviled them as "primitive", dirty and spiritually dangerous' (Thornton 2009, 17; Van Dijk 2000 on the attitudes of born-again Christians in Malawi; Werbner 2011 on attitudes of African Apostolics in Botswana).

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the *Bungoma* mediation practices in Alexandra township. I show that the deliberations in this context not only exemplify a specific hermeneutic approach to conflict resolution, but also that these practices can be understood to constitute a form of activism that aims at the integration and legitimation of *Bungoma* within justice-related governmental structures.

***Bungoma* Mediation Practices**

During the many conversations I had with healers in Alex, many of them stressed the pre-colonial role of *sangomas* as counsel to chiefs and traditional leaders. More importantly, for this chapter, they mention their role as deliberators in customary courts (also noted in Hund 2000, 367; Burchardt 2017 citing Harnischfeger 2003).

Customary (or 'indigenous') law is recognised in section 211(3) of the Constitution of South Africa. And yet, despite the pre-colonial heritage of customary legal structures and its inclusion in the constitution, the predominant morality of judicial reproduction enacted through South Africa's present-day governmental structures are predicated on the 'Roman-Dutch system

of law which centres on the [idea of a] contract between the state and the individual' (Wielenga 2018, 6).

I was told by my interlocutors in Alex that towards the end of Thabo Mbeki's presidency traditional healers were encouraged to organise themselves in formal association (also see Czeglédy 2008; Africa Union 2007). During this time, the healers in Alex established the Alexandra Traditional and Faith Healers' Forum, which was part of a more encompassing institutional framework^{xi} in Gauteng Province. For the healers involved, democracy was a guiding principle to run their organisation and to navigate existing legal structures. In 2017, the Forum consisted of two elected representatives from four different healer organisations^{xii} in the township; the elected representatives decided amongst themselves on who would fill the other leadership positions (Chairperson, Deputy Chair, Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and four coordinators).

For the past decade or so, the Forum has conducted mediation sessions in Alexandra. They address two to seven cases a month dealing with, among other things, issues of witchcraft and bewitchment, domestic abuse and violence, property disputes, family and neighbourly concerns, and malpractice by healers. They are also engaged in settling financial, social, and disputes between healers and their students such as issues of financial exploitation, duration of training, or even violence (see case below).

At large, however, the Forum is marginal in many respects. It lacks resources, visibility, and formal legitimation. At present, it is without a physical office and, apart from the use of a PCO boardroom, lacks not only meaningful access to resources for record-keeping and storage, but also administrative and technological capacities (for instance, no computers or audio-recording devices). The elected members of the Forum convene voluntarily to engage in the cases brought to them, which they sometimes do from morning until late afternoon. Thus far, they have managed to liaise with the Parliamentary Constituency Office (PCO), Alexandra police, ADAPT, and the *pro bono* office of a major law firm in the township. But when I joined them in approaching the magistrates' court to build up cooperation, the healers were met with resistance. 'Don't you know how law in South Africa works?' was a memorable response from one of the magistrates.

In conjunction with their controversial status, noted above, the response received from the local magistrates' court reflects why the healers of Alex perceive their institution in a

marginalised light. According to my interlocutors, similar expressions of reluctance have been conveyed by the Department of Health and health clinicians discouraging their patients from visiting local healers. In a 2016 workshop organised by the Department of Health, medical doctors and nurses came to the township to speak with Alex's healers. I joined my interlocutors at the workshop. The healers appreciated the information on TB but did not appreciate the speakers' dismissive attitude toward the healers' practice of 'washing' or 'cleansing' their patients. Referring to government officials, health clinicians and officials in the magistrates' courts, one of my interlocutors said, 'They do not respect us' and added that the healers require 'status' and 'representation' in order to receive further recognition and support from government.

A mediation process in the Forum is usually initiated by a complainant who has either taken a case directly to the PCO or spoken to a healer, who then referred the complainant to the PCO. The PCO then provides a summons for the secretary and deputy secretary of the Forum to be delivered to the parties involved as well as to all witnesses. When a party does not show up on the summoned date, the PCO contacts the local police for retrieving the absent party. In case the party cannot be reached, the Forum secretary coordinates with the police to redeliver the summons on a later date. Any additional assistance from the police is by request through the PCO and considered on a case by case basis. In other words, the PCO is the primary intermediary between the Forum and the police. According to my interlocutors in the Forum, the alliance with the PCO is owed to Thabo Mbeki's initiative (mentioned above) as part of the African National Congress (ANC) government and the PCO's willingness to provide resources.

For the clients, mediations in the Forum do not cost anything, and they are also much less time-consuming than proceedings in the magistrates' court. Once a case is noted by the PCO, it is often heard as early as the following week and discussed in one of the local languages spoken in Alex. When there is at least one case to be dealt with, the healers convene once a week (in addition to their general meetings) to deliberate matters.

The aforementioned assistance by the police is noteworthy when seen in the light of the history of Community Policing Forums in South Africa. According to Richard Wilson, Community Policing Forums were set up in 1994 as a means of eradicating township courts and vigilante groups (see Bapela 1996; Lekalakala 1996; see also Kirsch 2010) while 'making the police seem more accountable to the community' and create 'more legitimacy for the criminal justice system' (Wilson 2001, 198). In theory, at Community Policing Forums, 'the police would

meet with community members, hear their problems, explain their own efforts and come to a common understanding of how to fight crime together. Communities were to become the eyes and ears of the police, and in certain areas this has happened' (Ibid). However, Wilson notes, 'the Community Policing Forum strategy has met with mixed results. There has been a tendency among police officers to show "limited commitment to substantial change" and to see community participation as an irritating waste of time, as politically-driven social work which detracts from the main aim of catching criminals' (Ibid.; citing Schärf 1997, 21).

When both parties of the conflict are present for mediation, the eight members of the Forum first hear the complainant's side of the story and then ask questions for clarification. The defendant then shares the other side of the story, which is again followed by a series of questions. Once both sides have presented their cases, along with any statements from witnesses, members of the Forum deliberate on the cases, either with or without the parties present in the room, and finally recommends a course of action such that both parties may move forward from the dispute. Often, the Forum will convene a second time to hear additional witnesses or schedule a follow-up meeting to check whether or how the conflict has progressed. Prior to presenting a mediated solution, the healers will often speak at length, offering advice and guidance to both parties about what had transpired and their recommended course of action.

In the past, the Forum has made recommendations for conflict resolution such as payments through monthly instalments, family or yard meetings, the release of a student from a verbal contract with a teacher (*gobela*), or the enactment of a particular ritual. But the healers may also refer the parties to the magistrates' court, ADAPT, or the local *pro bono* law office. There are cases, where the Forum, ADAPT, and the law office mutually seek each other's assistance, thus acknowledging the respective case as a cooperative endeavour. For instance, I observed a case that was brought to the healers by a middle-aged woman who was being harassed by her ex-husband to evict a shack. The woman brought a notice from a law firm, and the healers recommended that she proceed to the *pro bono* office and file with the magistrates' court system. However, unlike the *pro bono* law office and ADAPT, the magistrates' court does not consider such a case as a referral from the Forum but rather an isolated registered complaint by an individual. In another case, ADAPT sought the Forum's assistance with one of their youth who was having 'fits', or convulsions, which were understood to be symptoms of a 'calling'

from the ancestors. One of my interlocutors, Gogo Mamlambo, provided counselling to the child and spoke with her family.

In this way, the healers can be said to be intermediaries between conflicts on the ground, *Bungoma*, and formal judicial structures. The Forum provides a service to local people that addresses not only concerns of witchcraft and *muti*-related crimes,^{xiii} but also issues within the *Bungoma* praxis itself which are not dealt with through the magistrates' court. For instance, toward the end of 2018, the Forum received the case of a young woman who, together with two younger sisters and a younger cousin, was living with her grandmother in the township. The grandmother was a *sangoma* and had been training a 17-year-old student (*thwasa*) to whom the complaint related to. The young lady stated that the *thwasa* was being abusive to the grandchildren, taking money, slapping the grandmother, and claiming to be the grandmother's deceased husband. On another occasion, she even claimed to be channelling 'God' (*Unkhulunkhulu*). On the surface of it, the case evoked issues of child welfare and domestic abuse, which was a partial aspect of the case. But the specific circumstances and the substance of the complaint was complicated not only by the fact that it was a *thwasa* who was being abusive to the children and the *gobela*, but also by issues pertaining to *Bungoma*. More specifically, in this case, the Forum raised issues about student-teacher (*thwasa* – *gobela*) relations, which may have become sexual; they raised questions about how the *gobela* herself was trained and why she had deviated from her own *gobela*'s teachings and 'roots' (*impande* or *mpandze*, see Thornton 2017, 78; Thornton interprets as a 'guild, college or lodge' (2017, 1)). In response to these questions, the *gobela* answered that she was starting her own *impande* separate from her *gobela* but when the Forum pressed her further, it was revealed that she did not undergo the proper procedures and rituals for establishing her own *impande*. Additional issues pertained to the manifestation of spirits which included discussions about the agency and violence exhibited by channelling spirits and *Unkhulunkhulu* – a claim at which the healers of the Forum scoffed. When seen from the healers' perspective, this case presented a range of concerns within the *Bungoma* praxis and its lived experiences that would have not been considered relevant or significant in the magistrates' court.

In this regard, the Forum engages in a form of activism that aims to redress these gaps in the township by resolving conflicts and addressing concerns that emerge from a contemporary *Bungoma* praxis through its own cultural logics and approaches. Though there are instances

when the Forum suggests a complaint is better suited for the magistrates' court, the majority of the Forum's cases aims to mediate any conflicts without referring them to the formal judicial system and before any conflicts escalate into violence. As mentioned earlier, while the Forum does have working relations with various local non-profit organisations, such as ADAPT, the *pro-bono* law office, and the Community Policing Forum, the Forum does not have a working relationship with the magistrates' system and police assistance is provided only upon request from the PCO. This also entails that the Forum does not have the authority to enforce any course of action that emerge from mediations. Subsequently, the scope of the Forum's efficacy is limited. In other words, cases may not reach a satisfactory resolution to the conflict or an experience of having accessed justice. For example, in the case above, the grandchildren eventually left their grandmother while the *thwasa* remained in the home despite her abusive behaviour. This contrasts with the recommendation of the Forum that the healer, as a caretaker, should look after the grandchildren and ensure their safety as well as make amends with her own *gobela* by undertaking the proper rituals for starting her own *impande*. However, this particular healer, while acting complacently during multiple mediation sessions decided not to adhere to the Forum's suggestions nor did she take any particular interests in the welfare of her grandchildren. According to my interlocutors in the Forum, there was nothing else they could do. In short, this was a case in which the healers of the Forum felt a lack of authority, legal recognition, and power to do anything about this particular healer. This made them worry about more serious cases in the future and what they could do when dealing with problematic healers beyond merely making suggestions.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that the healers' mediations constitute a kind of activism. On the one hand, in conjunction with their participation in protests and interfaith prayer gatherings, the mediations address the controversial reputation of healers in the township. Not only have they been called 'crooks' but the mediation cases above illustrate that healers are capable of engaging in dubious practices or criminal activity as well. In this regard, the healers aim to bring further accountability to their practice and present a form of activism that engages internal issues with the view towards achieving greater recognition and representation of their praxis. On the other hand, despite a long-standing pre-colonial tradition and ubiquitous presence across the country,

the healers feel that the *Bungoma* institution has been marginalised by government and public institutions. In other words, the healers of the Forum in Alex are engaging in an externally oriented activism for ‘a better life’ and against the ‘adverse social development’ (Van Dijk & Kirsch, this volume) towards healers in the country as well as their lack of inclusion in departments of government. There are 47 governmental departments in South Africa, several of which are relevant to the praxis of healers (such as Health, Justice, and Constitutional Development; Traditional Affairs; Arts and Culture), and yet the primary locus of engagement is with the department of health. In the absence of a meaningful THP Act, coupled with the government’s lack of engagement with the *Bungoma* institution, the Forum’s activism is, in this respect, institutional. The pursuit of ‘status’ and ‘representation’, associated with the pursuit of ‘respect’ and ‘recognition’ noted above, not only translates as an attitude towards government but also pertains to how the Forum has been organised and the designated roles within its governing structure that reflects an appeal for recognition and legitimacy.^{xiv}

The healers’ activism further engages the distinction between ‘tradition’ and ‘reform’ (Lambek 2012) in a manner such that the former is a means for the latter. The sustained reproduction of the *Bungoma* tradition by healers and the reinvention of their identities – by conducting mediations to resolve conflicts and building alliances with organisations like ADAPT – have enabled healers to draw on their tradition as the primary vehicle for reform and social change. In other words, the healers’ adaptive praxis and tradition – as a form of what is ‘right’ or ‘good’ – is a means ‘to question [government] authority, to improve, [and] correct past mistakes’ (Lambek 2012, 351). Not only does this pertain to the imbalance of development for the *Bungoma* institution and townships across the country, but also with respect to the ‘minoritarian majority’ population who engage with African traditional healing practices in one form or another (a model *of* the world *as is* coupled with a model *for* the world *as it should be*). In this chapter, I have highlighted the healers’ mediation as an activism that addresses the gap, as well as the differences, in conflict resolution pathways between the ‘minoritarian majority’ and the magistrates’ system (see Bozzoli 1998 and Wilson 2001 for discussion regarding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Human Rights hearings and the two expressions of justice that emerged in Alexandra). This is also to say that the two pathways engage in different cultural logics and different expressions of justice. Hence, different moralities of reproduction; the short-term engagement with individual cases contributes to the long-term reproduction of their

respective frameworks for engaging conflict (see Parry and Bloch 1989 for discussion on morality of exchange).

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ⁱⁱ ‘Traditional healer’ is an umbrella term in South Africa which includes several types of healers. A *sangoma* is traditional healer who practices divination; an *inyanga* or *igedla* is an herbalist; an *ababelethisi* or *umbelethisi* is a traditional birth attendant; an *inacibi* or *umkhiphi wengoma* is a traditional surgeon; and *umthandazi* or *mporofiti* is a faith healer. Moreover, many healers I came across during fieldwork were both *sangoma* and *umthandazi*, which presents concerns with standardizing attempts by the ‘Traditional Health Practitioners Act’.

ⁱⁱⁱ Anthropology of Morality (Howell 1997); Anthropology of Ethics (Faubion 2011; Laidlaw 2002); Anthropology of the Good (Robbins 2013); Moral Anthropology (Fassin 2012); Ordinary Ethics (Lambek 2010; Das 2010)

^{iv} In his essay, ‘The Determination of Moral Facts’, Emile Durkheim fashions a view of morality in terms of external ‘system(s) of rules of conduct’, which we adhere and obey not only ‘because they command’ but also because there is an interest and desire to oblige (Fassin 2012, 7; citing Durkheim 1974[1906], 35-36). Durkheim’s notion of morality broadly includes the ‘social’ and the mundane, such as traffic laws or dining etiquettes, as well as ‘cultural’ and ‘subcultural’ perspectives on what one *should* and *ought* to do.

^v In contrast, the ‘morality of freedom’ is characterised by Max Weber’s emphasis on ‘intentional rather than obligatory’ dimensions of action and agency focusing on ‘thought (or meaning) over ritual’ (Lambek 2012, 349). This view of morality, which has also been defined as ‘ethics’ (although I will not be making a distinction between the two; see Taylor 1996, Kleinman 2006, Lambek 2010, Faubion 2011, Das 2012), is largely understood through the lens of Michel Foucault and ‘the ways individuals might take themselves as the object of reflective action, adopting voluntary practices to shape and transform themselves in various ways’ (Laidlaw 2014, 111); it is ‘characterized by a sense on the part of social actors that they need to make moral choices, often between competing goods, and that it can be difficult to do this well’ (Robbins 2012, 119).

^{vi} The chapter draws on fieldwork with traditional healers in Alexandra, attending various protests and social engagement events, semi-structured interviews, and observation of their mediations, from February 2017 to December 2018 as well as consistent online communication with my interlocutors throughout 2019.

^{vii} In April of 2019, protestors in Alex staged a #TotalShutDown which resulted in burning tires to serve as roadblocks for any traffic going through the township to highlight the lack of service delivery and a demand to speak to the mayor. As Burchardt notes, ‘So engrained is the belief in the vocabulary of legal entitlements that failure to fulfill service delivery rights on the part of the state seems to justify service delivery riots in the eyes of many’ (2017, 265); although the #AlexTotalShutDown was hardly a riot.

^{viii} The statistics of such crimes are necessarily partial and indicative. They do not represent crimes that were not reported nor do they convey various sub-categories within conventional categories of crime.

^{ix} Here, I do not simply refer to citizenship in terms of legal status or legal rights (Marshall 1950) but rather in terms interpersonal practices as expressions of community which enable issues of social justice to become visible and brought forth for discussion and action (Oosterlynck et al. 2016; Fraser 2010). In other words, interpersonal practices are practices of citizenship when a collective gives recognition and visibility to issues and raises them into the domain of public concern (ibid.). In this regard, the healers of Alex are both practitioners of a diverse *Bungoma* tradition and also citizens concerned with what is happening in the township.

^x According to my interlocutors, there used to be an agreed-upon cross-referral system between healers and health clinics in which both would refer patients to one another along with a report of what was being treated. However, the cross-referral system would quickly become one-directional from healers to clinics. The healers would send their patients to the clinics, but the patients would not return to engage with the healers. I was informed that when the healers inquired why their patients did not return to them, they learned that the clinicians were advising patients not to do so. The healers in Alex discontinued the format for referring patients. While the formal referral system dissipated, the healers in Alex will send a patient to the clinic if they assess they are unable to treat the patient's concern.

^{xi} The healers of the Forum, however, think the Gauteng framework is disintegrating due to the lack of leadership. They often mention the lack of communication between the Gauteng Forum and the Alexandra Forum. The Chairperson of the Alexandra Forum confirms the lack of communication. He also noted that other Forums across the province are not as stable as Alex.

^{xii} The Forum, in 2016-17, consists of five women and three men. However, the gender dynamics are subject to change because of the role of the healers' ancestors during deliberation. I have been told that the ancestors sometimes advise the healers during their deliberations. For example, one healer noted that the ancestor may vary from day to day. On the mother's side, a great grandmother or grandmother may avail herself. And on the father's side, a great-grandfather or an uncle may whisper into the healer's ear. In other words, any one of four ancestral spirits may speak to this particular healer during a case. Hence, the gender dynamics within and amongst the healers may vary as will the deliberations of a case. That is, the gender of a physical body may differ from the gender of what is spiritually expressed. In this regard, the argument about patriarchy and male-dominated structures – a concern often mentioned by civil society organisations, non-government organisations, embassies, and related institutions – with regard to the healers' Forum becomes ambiguous and unclear. Furthermore, the members have since changed in 2018 and, an interlocutor recently informed me that, there are now more than four as well as many unaccounted healer organisations.

^{xiii} See Witchcraft Suppression Act 1957 (Comaroff 1993; Ralushai Commission 1996; Minaar 1997, 2003; Hund 2000; Niehaus 2001; Ashforth 2005; Burchardt 2017), which has been under review since 2012 by the South African Law Reform Commission; Also see THP Act 2007; Willoughby 1899; see Vaughan 1991 for East and Central Africa;

^{xiv} The organisational structure of the Forum and how the meetings are carried out through designated roles convey an element of mimesis as a pathway to legitimacy. This was further compounded with the increasing momentum of appeals to 'Indigenous Knowledge Systems' as a means for development and community engagement in South Africa's government. This notes an interesting shift from the conventional paradigm of 'Africa as a site of knowledge excavation' to 'Africa as a site of knowledge production'.