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The performer as shaman: an auto ethnographic performance as research project

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

> My calling is to be a performer of things. I work on it everyday. Being aware of my calling and nurturing can be complex and difficult. Like other shamans, I also have to negotiate with my source(s). The main source is my ancestry, the invisibles. I have to listen and process what I receive. We meet in a shallow and grey space in my head. There is a bridge between where they are and my world. Sometimes we fight, sometimes we love the aesthetics. Nonetheless, these things must be performed.
> Journal entry dated: 24th October 2014.

This paper begins with me. I see myself as a healer through my artistic offerings. I perceive my gift of storytelling and performance as ways of facilitating learning and self-healing. My recent personal reconciliation with my ancestors and the spiritual world revealed to me that I am in fact a 'performer of healing'. I am in a continuous process of discovering my own transformative powers which manifest through my theatre making and performances.

It is through theatre making and performance that I come to understand and situate myself in the world. My work has had a major impact on how I construct and re-construct my identity as a young black male performer in post-colonial Namibia. It also involves finding a healing language and voice that my body is familiar with. This is a journey of coming to terms with 'my calling' as a performer. It is an ongoing process that keeps broadening my understanding of my 'performer as shaman' role and identity.

My recent work experiences as a theatre maker, performer and educator entailed reclaiming and reconnecting with African heritage and ancient wisdom. Part of this is the great knowledge on African traditional shamanistic practices. This research report is therefore based on the making and performing of '*Eenganga: Translations and Trance-formation.* This is an autoethnographic site-related production that was first staged in September 2014 at the Camel Stables studios in Windhoek, Namibia. The same performance was also re-staged in February 2015 at the Wits School of Arts (WSOA) in Johannesburg, South Africa.

My intention in making and performing *Eenganga* was to develop a new language of making theatre that would give me a voice as a black Namibian theatre maker and performer. By developing a new theatre making language, I am referring to discovering the experimental and experiential potential of theatre and how it can transform the form and transform me as a performer. My experiences of studying drama and making theatre in Namibia have been largely influenced by western and euro-centric theatre traditions. This is because the theatre culture in Namibia is still predominantly Aristotelian. This means that theatre often takes place inside a building that is designed as a theatre and it treats its performers and audiences as mere objects of theatrical entertainment. This has consequently created passive audiences who are objects of the escapism in the theatre.

I have always struggled with locating myself in this kind of theatre. These kinds of theatre productions seem to allow very little subjectivity. This is why *Eenganga* came out of the need to make theatre in which I have a voice as a healing artist. *Eenganga* has been a

narrative-driven journey of personal healing and understanding my role as a performer of shamanism.

My first real encounter with devising and theatre making was when I embarked on my journey for my Master's degree course. I was delighted to learn about how some theatre makers from South Africa and other parts of the world had developed a variety of experimental ways of making theatre. Coming from Namibia where devising theatre is almost non-existent, I immediately recognized the creative freedom these approaches could give me. I was inspired and motivated to make my own theatre using similar approaches.

I pose the following research question:

- How can a contemporary theatre maker use personal and cultural narratives to perform healing?

This being an auto ethnographic project, it relies on my personal memory and experiences about healing. It also relies on ethnographic data collected from black urban traditional healers from Katutura Township in Windhoek, Namibia. This information was about their cultural identities and how they are performed in their respective communities. The conversations and consultations that I have had with these shamans made me realize the complexities and challenges they face. Their challenges which spread across the socio-economic, political and spiritual spheres have been neglected for a long time (Le Beau, 1999; Hiltunen, 1993; Hiltunen, 1986). Apart from the stigma which Namibian traditional healers are forced to live with; there is a lack of adequate representation in spaces of national discourse. It is also not clear what traditional healers are saying about their system of healing, which is also consulted by the country's health sector. As an artist, I could relate to this because the Namibian arts and cultural landscape faces similar challenges. From my personal experience, artists and cultural workers still work in a vacuum due to an incomplete national policy framework. By studying myself as a performer in a healing role, I address my search for a language and voice as performer of healing.

1.1 Traditional healing background

Eenganga is an Oshiwambo word that translates as 'The Healers'. It is also used to refer to the general traditional healing practices. Whenever I heard this word in my upbringing, my body cringed with fear because the first thing that came to my mind was witchcraft. My understanding was that *Eenganga* were dangerous beings who used harmful 'things' to do harm to the bodies and spirits of other people. I grew up in a dominantly Christian urban community where the use of language was always changing. We were encouraged to communicate in English and Afrikaans which made it tricky for me to grasp more of my mother tongue which is Oshiwambo. It was only in recent years that I started gaining some enlightenment on this matter. I gained a broader perspective on what a healer is. I learned that it is actually someone who uses herbal or spiritual medicine in order to enhance the well-being of other human beings.

I looked at numerous sources that provide an overview of traditional healing or shamanism in the context of my research. Most of the sources used are from the region of Southern Africa. This was a conscious decision because of the scarcity of Namibian literature on shamanism and secondly, there are many similarities in the cultural identities of traditional healers in Southern Africa (LeBeau, 1999; Richter, 2003; Semenya and Potgieter, 2014). There are different types of traditional healers in the region. In Namibia for example, a traditional healer could either be one or more of the following; a spirit medium, herbalist, neo-herbalist, homeopath, traditional birth attendant or Christian faith healer (LeBeau, 1999; Lumpkin, 1993).

In many pre-colonial African communities, a traditional healer was considered to be a prominent figure in the community. In some tribes of the Oshiwambo and other Bantu cultures for example, kings and headmen were assigned personal shamans (Hiltunen, 1986; Hiltunen, 1993; LeBeau, 1999, Somé 1993). Ancient healers operated a holistic health and wellness paradigm. They understood and thus treated the human body and the spirit as one component (Floodgate, 2006; Lumpkin, 1993; LeBeau, 1999; Solomon and Wane, 2005; Somé, 1993). Even though this is no longer entirely the case for many communities on the continent, there is still considerable evidence promoting the usefulness of indigenous healing in contemporary society. Moreover, shamanistic practices amongst the Bantu and Khoi-San ethnic groups of Southern Africa share a lot of similar features. Many studies have shown how shamanistic rituals such as initiations and healing consultations are characterized by similar features (Low, 2004; LeBeau, 1999; Richter, 2003; Semenya and Potgieter, 2014). LeBeau captures some of these:

> Common precolonial attributes included a belief in a deity who was aloof and not involved in daily activities, ancestors who were active in the daily lives of the people, malevolent spirits and witches who could cause illness or misfortune, and an intermediary who intervened on behalf of the people when illness and misfortune occurred (LeBeau, 1999: 64).

LeBeau (1999) reveals that despite the diversity of ethnic groups in Southern Africa and their traditions of seeking health, there is a general paradigm that backdates to ancient times that defines the causes of illnesses more or less the same way.

It was illegal for traditional healers to practice under the colonial rule. The German and Apartheid systems implemented laws and policies which controlled black Africans and their cultural practices. These colonial systems labelled indigenous practices as acts of witchcraft and superstition. Southern African countries such as South Africa and Namibia were controlled by the Witchcraft Suppression Act which made divination practices, witchcraft and spirit possession illegal (LeBeau, 1999; Low, 2004). The colonial regimes and missionaries promoted and enforced black Africans to adopt a new medical and wellness system which was initially constructed for a Eurocentric society (Solomon and Wane, 2005; Somé, 1993).

The discrimination of traditional healers and their indigenous lifestyle practices was promoted through the western religious and health institutions set up by the colonial systems. Firth (1969) makes a strong remark about this;

> Local inhabitants were encouraged to attend school to learn to read the Bible, to go to church to save their souls, and to go to hospital to save their bodies. This division further emphasized the western division between spiritual and physical health. Missionaries often found themselves opposed to possession and mediumship as they thought such things were the work of one possessed by evil spirits (Firth 1969:ix as cited in LeBeau, 1999, page 61).

Over the decades, many traditional healers have found ways to incorporate their traditional healing practices into their religious beliefs. This has resulted in the creation of neo-traditional churches which can be found across the region. The Zionist Movement and the Independent African Church are good examples of these. They are symbolized by their stylized ancestral worshiping resembling indigenous African shrines and rituals (LeBeau, 1999; Lumpkin, 1993).

Literature shows us that although the obstacles built by colonial systems still stand firm, many people in both rural and urban Namibia still consult traditional healers for health and wellness matters. According to Le Beau (1999) Traditional healers have been more effective in diagnosing and addressing illnesses and other social problems. Furthermore, most of the remote and poorest populations do not have access to the modern health care; the services of traditional healers remain their only option (LeBeau, 1999; Solomon and Wane, 2005; Lumpkin, 1993).

Solomon and Wane (2005) make strong remarks about why indigenous healers are still in demand in different modern societies around the world. They say;

> It is safe to say that our indigenous healers are interdimensional interceders who carry the responsibility and the directions to intervene on our behalf, with our consent and awareness, to help bring healing, balance, peace, and harmony in the present, with the Ancestors, and for the generations of the future (Solomon and Wane, 2005, Page 54).

Although this is known to be the reality for many societies both in Africa and beyond, many modern religious, educational and health institutions are yet to admit to it. Traditional healers are still struggling to find their place(s) in the formal health spaces (Solomon and Wane, 2005). Many indigenous healers around the world are still not formally recognized by modern health and wellness practitioners because they are still perceived as primitive and backward (Solomon and Wane, 2005; Lumpkin, 1993).

Traditional healing practices were legalized after Namibia's independence in 1990, but there is still a lack of strong legislation in place to regulate these indigenous practices. There have been several reports in the media about traditional healers organizing themselves and negotiating with the necessary stakeholders in order to get recognition. Also, there have been

several reports about the government's redundancy of adopting the already drafted Traditional Healers Bill of 1998 (LeBeau, 1999; The World Health Organization, 2001; Low, 2004; Lumpkin, 1993).

Traditional healing practices are legalized under the Allied Health Service Professions Act of 1993 (46) which gives permission to the Minister of Health and Social Services to create a professional board to promote health and professional training in order to regulate the chiropractic profession (The World Health Organization, 2001). The Namibian Traditional Medical Practitioners Board was created in 1996 in order the carry out the above-mentioned function (LeBeau, 1999; The World Health Organization, 2001).

Compared to other countries in the region and the rest of Africa, Namibia is reported to be behind with formalizing the promotion and regulation of its indigenous healing practices (Mbatha et al. 2012; van Niekerk, 2012). This is because of the political and historical barriers discussed above. These barriers have created a very strong tension between modern Western medicine and indigenous medicine, and hence their inability to meet each other half way (The World Health Organization, 2001; LeBeau, 1999; Lumpkin, 1993; Mbatha et al. 2012; van Niekerk, 2012).

Nonetheless, several studies done by the Ministry of Health and Social Services have reported that traditional healers are practicing in all 14 regions of the country (The World Health Organization, 2001). Namibia being a country with diverse and rich cultures, many traditional healers have become inter-cultural health practitioners. In urban areas for example, there has been an increase in the number of traditional healers coming from the Southern African region and other parts of the continent. The Namibia Eagle Traditional Healers Association (NETHA) was formed in 1990 by traditional healers in order to organize and mobilize traditional healers in the country and give them a voice but due to political and theoretical difference, the association's progress remains challenged (The World Health Organization, 200; LeBeau, 1999; Lumpkin, 1993).

This research report is written in sections that capture and narrate the research process that I undertook. It is written subjectively and yet critically to narrate the journey that I have had with this research. I encountered a form of post-modern academic writing called performative writing which I used to guide my writing.

1.2 **Performative writing**

Performative writing has also roots in feminist and anthropological disciplines. It is characterized to be subjective and evocative. Pioneers of performative writing such as Phelan (1993 and 1998), Pollock (1998) and Denzin (2001) noted that performative writing refuses ontological inscription and therefore is not fixed or definitive. It argues that performance and performativity are intertwined and they define each other. Performative writing is therefore a kind of writing that 'enacts what it describes' (Denzin, 2001). I found this reflexive and

persuasive way of writing to be equally liberating and challenging. It is liberating in the sense that it makes place for my own views, beliefs and biases to surface in the research.

Performative writing is challenging for many reasons. Due to its ever changing dynamics, it can be complicated to write performatively in an academic context. Establishing and maintaining an academically acceptable register while writing subjectively is a challenging experiment. Pollock (1998) thus claims that performative writing is queer. She uses statements such as "critical difference" and "oddly familiar" to describe this queerness. Writing this research report was definitely peculiar in the sense that it was alternative to the academic writing that I have done up until this point.

Subjectivity as a characteristic of performative writing does not mean that it is subject-centred in a way that it excludes or ignores other subjects. It actually refers to the performed relation among the subjects of the research. Performance is both a subject and object of the research. It is vital to continuously reflect on this relationship.

Performative writing has been criticized for being self-indulgent, narcissistic and selfish. This is because it can be therapeutic and expressive (Pelias, 1998). Pelias (1998) suggests that performative writing is not only about the self and yet the self can never be left out of it. Pelias notes that "…the self can be a place where tensions are felt and uncovered, a place of discovery, a place of power, of political action and resistance. One often knows what matters by recognizing what the body feels" (Pelias, 1998: 11). My own performative writing was part of the process of operationalizing the body as a site and instrument of research. The idea of writing creatively yet critically, politicises the personal.

Pelias (1998) argues that writing about one's lived experience alone does not constitute as scholarship. The writing must unearth the complexities of human life. In the case of this project, performative writing was a 'selective camera' which I used to capture the most interesting angles of the research. Writing this paper was not only about giving a detailed and moving narrative, it was also about making an experience for the readers. Performative writing offered me an opportunity to create a space for identification, resonance and recognition for my readers. Writing in first person and sharing my thoughts and emotions as part of the findings of this research is my invitation to the reader to experience how dynamic my journey was (Pelias, 1998 and Denzin, 2001).

The following sub-sections look at my research methodology and data collection process.

1.3 Methodology: From performance as ethnography to performance as auto ethnography

Theatre and performance practices are recognized as ways of making and sharing knowledge. They are being developed by practitioners and scholars around the world as a method of understanding social and cultural behaviour. Ethnographic, verbatim and other performative

methods are being used to facilitate and disseminate knowledge (Saldaña, 2003; Conquergood, 1985; Denzin, 2003).

This research was initially designed as a performance ethnography project in which I was studying and interpreting cultural narratives of black urban traditional healers. I was interested in how they constructed their healing identities and practices. After almost six months of making and performing *Eenganga*, I came to realize that it was in fact an autoethnographic project. The ethnographic material from the consultations that was used to create *Eenganga* was mostly what resonated with my previous experiences and what my body already knew. This means that my consultations and conversations with the various shamans enabled me to engage with their realities so that I could gain a better understanding of shamanism and how it could be represented through performance. It was only after performing the work in two different contexts that I came to a realization that I was the main subject of this work. Having discovered this new site of the research, I also realized that it had always been an auto ethnographic work because it was a process that started internally before embarking on the community fieldwork and eventually internalizing it again.

Performance Ethnography fundamentally refers to the process of collecting and turning ethnographic data into performance. It is a body-centred method of knowing how people recreate their cultures through embodied, reflexive and collaborative ways. It is a method of performing qualitative research data as a way of coming to understand how people construct their realities. Performance Ethnography originates with Erving Goffman's (1959) theory of dramaturgy which points to the idea that life is like an endless play in which humans are actors. Performance ethnographer Alexander (2004) functionalizes this performance ethnography as;

- performance as a method of inquiry
- performance as a way of knowing
- performance as method of reporting knowledge and ideological critique
- performance as a method of critical response
- performance as an act of publication
- performance as an interpretive tool

(Alexander, 2004 as cited in De Castell, 2008, page 1).

Thus performance ethnography is a performative epistemology which facilitates critical cultural exchange. Performance ethnography is strongly characterised as an act of discovering the culture of the other.

Alexander describes performance as an explanatory metaphor because of its qualitative nature of using thick descriptions and experiences as ways of coming to know and explaining a given culture. Performance becomes a means, method and mode of intercultural dialogue. Because it is an embodied epistemology that takes form through critical observation and participation instead of presenting intellectualized research (Alexander, 2004).

Performance ethnographers are concerned with lessening the gap between the known and the unknown. They achieve this through descriptive narratives and embodiment. Therefore every ethnographer is continuously confronted with relational and representational questions when translating ethnographic data into performance. Those who perform ethnographic texts therefore have the responsibility to audiences and cultures that are represented in their texts. Through continuous unpacking, questions around authenticity, intentionality and orientation of the performance will arise. It is important to look at what aspects of the culture are re-enacted in the performance, for what reason and the kind of effect this has on the culture. The ethnographer has to remain accountable to the fieldwork community that makes a contribution to the work. The ethnographer establishes and maintains an ongoing and reciprocal relationship with the community that he or she is sharing (Conquergood, 1985; Alexander, 2004 and Jones, 2002).

Jones (2002) advises that this fundamental relationship should not end with the ethnographic performance. She reminds cultural workers about the challenges of ethics in representation. She contends that even when the ethnographer is accountable to the fieldwork community, the possible power inequalities between the two parties must also be continuously examined. Jones references Conquergood who suggests that a performance ethnography project should lead to "detachment, respect rather than selfishness, dialogue rather than exhibitionism, mutuality rather than infatuation" (Jones, 2002: 11).

This explains why performance ethnography is also seen as a way of coming to know the self, the other and the self-as-the-other. Alexander (2004) also underpins the idea of performance ethnography materializing as singularly conceived performances such as auto-performance. This may consist of autobiographical and autoethnographic work which is also commentary and critique on the self in society and the self as an agent for social transformation. These kinds of works politicise the body and selected aspects of human experience in order to derive meanings from them. Finding and denoting connections between sameness/difference, self/other and boundaries/borders becomes an important consideration in a performance ethnographic project (Alexander, 2004 and Jones, 2002). Conqeurgood's notion of a dialogic performance can be situated between competing ideologies. It is a platform for the self and the other to challenge, question and debate one another. It is an intimate and vulnerable space.

An ethnographic performance is subjective. Jones (2002) speaks of ethnographers as interpreters who need to be conscious of the implications involved. The politics of interpretation must be taken into account when collecting ethnographic data and making the performance. She calls for self-conscious reflexivity (Alexander, 2004). The performer of ethnography is obliged to carry out performer-based reflexivity which is a critical self-examination of his or her intentions, personality in relation to the other. During an ethnographic performance, both performers and audiences should be able to question what

they perceive as truth and examine how their truths are shaped by their perspectives (Alexander, 2004, Jones, 2002 and Conquergood, 1985).

Auto ethnographic performance as a critical performative pedagogy is a body-centred learning approach. It recognises that the inequities in power and privilledge that affect people's bodies and suggests that they must be addressed physically. The body becomes the site of making meaning, ideological struggle and performative resistance. (Alexander, 2004, Jones, 2002 and Conquergood, 1985).

There is no methodical prescription on how an auto ethnographic performance should be carried out. However, the form in which the ethnography is performed is also an important consideration. The ethnographic performance must therefore be shaped in a way that is artistically sound so that it can invite interpretive responses. The aesthetics should be able to evoke emotions and critical thinking. This is what makes an ethnographic performance a 'performance of possibilities' as Alexander (2004) refers to it. It is a critique and commentary of the self as well as the other.

Jones also encourages multivocality in ethnography since it helps with mitigating the performer's authenticity. Multivocality in performance ethnography creates diverse and even contradicting perspectives synthesised by the audience. It is through this process that the audience become collaborators in the performance as they engage with the various viewpoints. These voices can speak simultaneously or interactively. Jones proposes that multivocality can occur through performing with an ensemble, or the ethnographer playing various roles and characters, or inviting the audience to share their perspectives during the performance (Jones, 2002).

All in all, performance ethnography provides a liminal space for an embodied and transformative cultural exchange. Ethnographers do not believe in keeping aesthetic or intellectual distance from the other. Conquergood argues that performance is a moral act. This is to say that the ethnographer has moral and ethical responsibilities towards his or her fieldwork community. The moral issues become transparent when the ethnographer works in ethnic and intercultural contexts. Like other types of performers, performers of ethnography do experience resistance and rejection from audiences from time to time. We have to be careful of misrepresenting and fetishizing the cultures that we share (Conquergood, 1985).

1.4 **Data collection**

The external data collection process was made up of one main consultation and several informal conversations with the traditional healers. I went in search of knowledge about them and their work in relation to mine. My reasoning here was that, by learning more about the healers, I could broaden my understanding of my performer as shaman role. I treated the consultation and conversations as experiences. This intrinsically means that I made myself receptive to the situation so that I engaged and absorbed what was offered.

Knowing what it is like to consult a traditional healer, I knew that I had to allow myself to be vulnerable to the situation. At this point, I was in a state of liminality. Because I consult traditional healers on a regular basis, I was familiar with some of the things they do but I did not know what they really involved. I was in an ambiguous space between being enthusiastic and being scared about what I was encountering.

The first consultation was with a group of 7 black urban traditional healers who work in Katutura which is a township where most of Windhoek's black population is located. The name Katutura literally translates as 'a place where we do not want to live' and it was created in 1961 following the forced removal of Windhoek's black population from the Old Location. I was referred to traditional healers by a local community activist who works with them. There were two women and five men. From my observation, their ages ranged between 40 and 70. They were of Damara/Nama, Setswana and Otjiherero descend. Our conversation was partly in English and in Afrikaans. We met at the home of the shaman who is an activist for local traditional healers. She is part of an informal association that lobbies government to officially regulate and promote traditional healing practices, and she also runs an orphanage and a pre-school from her house.

The 3 hour dialogue was very interactive. I had prepared a voice recorder but the interviewees refused to be recorded. I understood this ethical concern because it was the first time we were meeting and we all agreed to treat discussion like an ordinary conversation. Conquergood (1985) is right to remind ethnographers to take moral and ethical responsibilities into account when engaging in ethnic and intercultural contexts. I regarded the first consultation as a good start in developing my relationship with this inter-cultural group.

I was aware that I had entered a traditional healer's space which has its own structures. Whenever I encounter a traditional healer in a private or public space, I greet them by bowing my head and clapping my hands. This is how I acknowledge their physical and spiritual presence in the space. This again has everything to do with my body being vulnerable to this situation and still being critical to it. Negotiating my body into the space of 'the other' and finding a meeting place occurred as our conversation progressed.

My body as the main instrument of research was accompanied by my notebook. My field notes were key words and quoted statements that I thought or felt were necessary for me to remember. This mainly included the views that I resonated and identified with as well as those that I found new, different and strange. My field notes also included creative ideas that were inspired by particular moments in the conversation. Here, I could already recognise the multivocality that Jones (2002) emboldens in an ethnographic process.

The conversation was guided by a few pre-set questions followed by probing questions. The conversation jumped between the various narratives in no pre-defined order. This allowed the

narratives to interact with one another, at times simultaneously. During these simultaneous interactions, I could only capture some particulars from various narratives.

At the end of the first consultation, I felt I had captured considerable volume of data and material to begin my studio process. Although I had more questions, the shamans made it clear that I was welcome to contact each one of them personally if I needed more information.

In the next section, I discuss theatre making as a transformative process.

CHAPTER 2: Making theatre as an act of shamanism

My understanding of theatre making is that it is an embodied process of sourcing and performing material. Ownership is at the centre of theatre making. Theatre makers have the opportunity to explore different ways of communicating and expressing their work as a way of finding or giving a voice (Disele, 2013; Ookeditse, 2011; Freire, 1997). A theatre making process is a process of transformation which carries healing, pedagogical and activism powers. Author Fischer-Lichte (2008) explains that the transformative power of performance occurs by the virtue of performance being an event that takes place within a space.

Floodgate (2006) explains shamanism as

> […a way of accessing spiritual guidance that dates back tens of thousands of years and pre-dates any known religion. Shaman (pronounced Shar-man) is a tungus word meaning 'healer', 'one who sees in the dark' or 'hollow bone' amongst other definitions. The tungus people live in Siberia and Mongolia (page 4).

Theatre and performance have been studied as shamanistic interventions (Schechner, 1994; Turner, 1969 and floodgate, 2006). Kabi Thulo's (2009) study investigated the 'potential shamanic role of a contemporary theatre performer and how ritual and theatre can be synergized'. This was a performance as research project through which Thulo, a Shaman and theatre practitioner was trying to merge his spiritual and theatre making practices. He makes strong links between theatre making and shamanism as well as how the two can find a meeting place in a contemporary theatre.

In 2013 while still a full-time student at the Drama for Life programme, I had the privilege of witnessing and participating in some exceptional and cutting-edge theatre making. From the various shows that I saw, the following stood out for me.

- *The Line*- a verbatim/documentary theatre production by Gina Schmuckler. This is a performance of interviews that were conducted with some of the perpetrators

and family members of victims of the 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa. This show was performed at the Market Theatre.

- *'Influences of a Closet Chant'* by Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza. An auto performance exploring the challenges of otherness in gender, sexuality and shamanism. This is solo piece of performance art. This work was performed at the Wits Theatre.
- *'Afrocartography: Traces of places and all points in between'* a site-specific choreopoem written and directed by Mwenya Kabwe. This work is about migration, displacement and identity. I was part of the ensemble of this production. This production was also performed at the Wits Theatre.

All three of these works were distinct and alternative to the conventional theatre that I was used to. They integrate vocabularies such as soundscapes and visual arts. They were all devised from real life experiences. All these three works had agency because they spoke for subjugated, marginalized and oppressed identities. In many ways, these works also addressed conventional binaries such as self/other, subject/object, stage/auditorium, audience/performers, body/mind, spontaneous/rehearsed, process/product, etc. The theatre makers are aware of these binaries and how they are reproduced in the orthodox theatre. From my understanding, theatre making should avoid encouraging and reproducing these binaries or else it fails to account for the things between them (Fryer, 2013 and Disele, 2013).

Before I started devising *Eenganga*, I had just finished researching, writing and performing a devised theatre project titled *Aluta's Children: Re-visiting the footsteps of the Namibian struggle child through the lenses of inequality and disorder*. This interpretative performance was a collection of some interviews with some young Namibians who call themselves 'struggle children' of the Namibian liberation struggle. This was an multi-disciplinary work which used song, imagery, signs and symbols. While it was performed in a theatre, it was one of the first solo projects that I embarked on as part of discovering and developing my own language and style of making theatre. I was grateful that I had performed this project before *Eenganga* because I could take my exploration into further discovering my language of performance.

Space is one of the main things I had to consider while discovering my theatre making language. The space in which a performance occurs is a contribution to the story. In discovering and using space in my theatre making process, I take source from rites, rituals and festive performances performed in my own culture and other Southern African cultures. These storytelling rituals are such as *Oohungi* and *Oudano.*

Even though these traditional performances are performed for different reasons, they are resourceful for my needed radical change from the dominant and oppressive constructions of orthodox theatre.

Making *Eenganga* was also a lonely process which required me to sit with the 'pieces' and find a way to put them together. These pieces were the answers that I found from my internal

and external data collection processes. I spent time alone imagining and experimenting with textual, spatial and acoustic possibilities of the work. This is how I was going to immerse myself and the work into the site.

In the next chapter, I look at space in detail and how I use it in the performance of *Eenganga.*

CHAPTER 3: Transforming space/becoming relational to space/in healing space

This chapter provides a discussion of the many ways in which a space can be transformed. I discuss how the spaces that were performed in added value and substance to the performance of *Eenganga*. The power of space lies in how and why it is being used. Authors such as Brook (1987) and Schechner (1994) who suggest that we have to engage with the dynamics of a given space in order to discover it's transformative values.

Peter Brook writes: "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (Brook, 1987: 9). Although there is no such thing as an empty space, a performance can happen in any space. Schechner (1994) refers to the 'living space' which is any internal or external space that is not specifically designed as a stage for performances. Performing in the living space is an infinite experiment which reveals that there is indeed no dead space, nor an end to a space (Schechner, 1994).

Author Gleave (2011) writes that "Surely no space is truly empty, as left at site will be traces of what has happened there before, layers of history and meaning" (Gleave, 2011: 1). A space or site cannot be seen as empty because it has had a life before the performance intervention.

3.1 **Site-related theatre**

I understand site-related theatre to be a form of theatre in which the performance has a living and dynamic relationship with the site in which it is performed. In this section, I discuss the concepts of *site-specific, site-generic and site-sympathetic* performance as forms of environmental theatre which share similar characteristics with my work. These discussions provide a clearer understanding of what I put forward as a *site-related theatre* performance.

Literature suggests that a site-specific work is a performance done in "non-theatre locations" (Wilkie, 2002 as cited in Pearson, 2010: 1) and uses the outside environment as its space for performance. It is often about a specific place as the site and what it has to offer as a potential space for performance. It is an interchange between art and place through which meaning can be made (Kaye, 2000; Pearson, 2010).

Gleave (2011) however argues that there have been site-specific works that have been performed in theatre buildings. It is probably necessary to explain why site-specific work rejects the traditional theatre space. Gleave (2011) suggests that it is because the proscenium theatre as well as other types of theatre stages can restrict the spatial and creative potential of the work due to their nature of having a seated audience and a stagnant designated stage for performance. She articulates that, "It seems that in the move from traditional theatre spaces to alternative spaces which offer a plethora of previous uses, layered meanings, histories and interpretations, the theatre practitioner is offered a wealth of creative possibilities and a lack of restrictions" (Gleave, 2011: 4).

In a site-specific performance, the site is at the centre of making the performance as the work is only created for that one specific site in mind. Other site-related performance works are site-sympathetic which refer to using an existing text and adapting it to a certain site and site-generic which generally refers to a performance that is often created for a number of sites that have similar physical or historic features in common. This again speaks to the site in a site-specific performance which often has the role of being the storyteller, the symbol and the structure of the actual performance that is being created (Pearson, 2010; Gleave, 2011 and Wilkie, 2002). "Layers of the site are revealed through reference to: historical documentation; site usage (past and present); found text, actions, sounds, etc.; anecdotal guidance; personal association; half-truths and lies; site morphology (physical and vocal explorations of site)" (Wilkie, 2002: 158). A site-specific work often provides a platform for artists and audiences to engage with and address the multiple theatrical, spatial, socio-political concerns and possibilities of its site. Having defined the different forms of environmental theatre, it is also significant to note that some works may border between or across the various forms which is what I refer to as site-related theatre (Gleave, 2011).

Gleave (2011) references (Kaye, 1996) who discusses the co-existential relationship between a site and a performance in site-related performances. The site is seen as the host and the performance is seen as a ghost. The reciprocal relationship is established as the ghost that 'haunts' the host. The kind of interaction between the found site and performance will also define the work. She also suggests that even though the ghost and the host are meant to engage in some kind of a conversation, they are not "congruent" (Gleave, 2011: 15). She explains that;

> This metaphor for site and performance shows the ways in which the performance does not mask the site but that the site can be seen in the spaces of the performance. It also shows that no matter what is brought to the site the host still remains solid and can always be seen through the transparent nature of the performance (Gleave, 2011: 15).

The process of making a site-specific theatre work requires a thorough exploration of the site that will be utilized. This is important in framing and giving meaning to the performance and to also assure that the performance does not mask the site (Gleave, 2011). This exploration has been termed as "an archaeological investigation of place" (Turner, 2004 as cited in Gleave, 2011: 16). It is the genre of site-related work that will obviously determine the point in the creative process at which the archaeological investigation of the site will take place.

What distinguishes site-specific performance from other environment-based performances is that it makes use of the elements in the 'found space' as the devices for the performance. This means that a site-specific work cannot exist without a site. In other words, the site and the performance are inseparable (Gleave, 2011 and Jina, 2011). Once the work is removed from its original site to a different and general site, its dynamics begin to shift, thus possibly falling into the site-sympathetic and site-generic forms (Pearson and Shanks, 2001; Gleave, 2011 and Kaye, 2000). Gleave nonetheless challenges this specificity by noting that "to restrict the work in this fashion when the nature of site-specific work is to move away from the restrictive seems detrimental… There are a number of site-specific productions in which the move of location has developed the work. David Leddy's production of Sub Rosa (2009) did just this" (Gleave, 2011: 11). Gleave states that the process of moving the work will change it and introduce it to a new dimension which ultimately unlocks new creative possibilities for the work. This argument against the notion of strictly keeping a site-specific performance to its original site and restricting it to other potential sites confirms that there are different understandings of what actually constitutes as a site-specific theatre piece.

It is also understood that site-specific work is not only about the site, it also about the people who are usually in that site and what often happens in that specific site. It engages with the history of a place and also plays the role of mediating the complex identities that a place often offers. Author Harvie, 2005 as cited in Pearson, 2010:9 discusses the usefulness of a site-specific performance,

> Site-specific performance can be especially powerful as a vehicle for remembering and forming a community for at least two reasons. First, its location can work as a potent mnemonic trigger, helping to evoke specific past times related to the place and time of performance and facilitating a negotiation between the meanings of these times. Second, it is effective for remembering and constituting identities that are significantly determined by their materiality and spatiality, identities to do with, for example, class, occupation, and gender (Harvie, 2005 as cited in Pearson, 2010: 9).

This explanation does suggest the possible value and power of a site-related work. Because it is outside a traditional theatre space, it invites a unique kind of interaction between the performance and its spectators. Furthermore, because site-specific work always engages with the social and political dynamics of 'ownership, power, identity, exclusion, memory' of locations, it can change the way people view and understand those specific places. This means that it is not only historical and geographical information that are considered in the

making of a site-specific performance but every other single detail available in the place of exploration often contributes to a good site-specific work (Pearson, 2010).

In brief, this is how Pearson (2010) separates site-related performances from any other kind of performances, particularly those performed in mainstream theatre spaces. He argues that an auditorium is a cloistered space which does not easily allow for new parameters and boundaries to be formed. A site-specific performance is often affected by the environmental condition of a site which is not always stable and has to find a way through which it can adapt. This often affects the theatrical and technical effects of the performance which often have to compete with the existing effects of a place. The performance may be only experienced by those who happen to be in the place and time of the performance (Pearson, 2010). Unlike in an auditorium where it is only the performance happening, there are often other activities happening on the site while the performance has to occur. The performance might often need to establish itself in order to attract attention. On site, the work always looks and feels like it is happening for the first time as opposed to the work in an auditorium which is "designed to facilitate repetition" (Pearson, 2010: 16).

What follows some background information on the two sites that Eenganga was performed in.

- The Camel Stables

The script and theatre making happened at the Camel Stables Arts Studio (The old John Muafangejo Art Centre) which is situated outside the Windhoek Central Business District on a hillside and it is surrounded by some bushes. It is a heritage site, one of the oldest buildings in Windhoek. I chose to use this ancient and special space because I had temporary access to the building which I was using for my other writing and rehearsal projects. This space was convenient because it is where I spent most of my time. The site was loaded and layered with its own narratives. The site was offering me a lot to work with. The awkward and haunting energy of the site offered me a lot to work with. This, I thought was perfect for the work because I am dealing with haunting subject matter. At this point, I had found a site for my performance which was going to contribute to the making of the performance. I started looking into the identity, memory and politics (Pearson, 2010 and Gleave (2011) of the space as a way of making *Eenganga* a site-related ethnographic performance. The process became about finding a link between the site and the narrative.

The Camel Stables Arts Studio is a heritage site even though it is in a deteriorating condition. This building has broken windows, doors, cupboards, floors and outside it is painted a rusty white. The building looks and feels like it is neglected. It is at an intersection of the sites of a school, hostels, a weather station, botanic gardens, sports field, a steep bushy river bed and a church. The building's six rooms are occupied by artworks such as paintings, wall drawings, sculptures, posters, clay work and installations.

In addition to this, some rooms have built-in cupboards and furniture such as chairs and tables. One room has kitchen utensils and a stove. I learned that many artists have been working in this building over the years and that it actually belongs to the National Museum Namibia. I often worked in one of the biggest rooms which was more spacious and had enough ventilation. The room had a collection of music instruments and some luggage neatly packed together in a corner. Following Gleave's (2011) suggestion of developing a reciprocal relationship between the site (the host) and the narrative (the haunting/visiting ghost), I began working towards finding a balance between these two sides of my performance project. They needed to support or even contradict one other instead of masking each other. The studio was more than a host to the performance. Its own architecture, aesthetics and geographic location did also haunt the performance. The space also had 'ghosts' which the performance had to negotiate with.

- The Wits School of the Arts

I performed on three consecutive nights in the foyer of the Wits School of the Arts. Compared to the Camel Stables, I had little preparation time in this site and thus had not completely immersed myself into it. I made use of different levels, corridors, stairs and corners in the building to take the audience through the narrative. The WSOA building is made up of offices, art studios, rehearsal rooms, and lecture halls.

3.2 **Theatre Making process**

After consulting the different healers, I started conceptualizing by making poetic notes and drawings in order to develop story and character ideas. This is how I could begin visualizing the kind of personas, identities, events and dreams that were going to shape this imaginary narrative of *Eenganga*. I came up with a character that I named Nambalakata as a child born with born an ancestral calling who eventually becomes the *Urban Shaman*, the *Christian Pagan* and the *Shamaniac*.

Prior to doing the ethnographic fieldwork, I was envisioning the writing and performance to be in documentary and verbatim forms. This vision had to shift because none of the conversations were audio or video recorded. I was working from my body which had not only 'absorbed' the fieldwork data but had also lived and performed shamanic experiences.

I wanted to make a suggestive, reflexive and multi-dimensional theatre performance. In his paper titled '*The reflexive interview and a performative social science'*, Denzin (2001) discusses the writing of performance ethnographic texts in which he notes that its text is poetic and dramatic. He explains that these texts must make place for audiences to experience their subjectivity while experiencing the theatre performance (Denzin, 2001). This is why it was vital for me to have a range of internally and externally sourced material to work with. During the early stages of my theatre making process, I had to revisit some of my memories and experiences of shamanism and healing practices. This is also how I could create a link between the internal and external data.

I agree with Saldaña (2003) who writes from a context of putting together an ethnodrama/ethnotheatre. He reiterates that, "With ethnographic performance, then, comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative" (Saldaña, 2003: 220). I am cautious of calling *Eenganga* an ethno-drama although it shares some similarities with this genre. One obvious similarity is that *Eenganga* is informed by the range of sources that I consulted as the researcher/ethnographer and theatre maker/performer. The other major similarity is that I also used what Saldana refers to as the "juicy stuff" for "dramatic impact" (Saldaña, 2003, pp. 221). I saw the re-emerging themes, practices and issues in the data as the juicy staff which I used to create aesthetics and significant elements of the story.

Saldaña (2003) and Denzin (2003) have pointed out that there is a lack of literature that offers guidance in writing ethnographic material into a performance text. Keeping this in mind, I came up with a story about a 'spirit child' named Nambalakata. Nambalakata is an Oshiwambo name often given to albinos. This is the main character that the story was going to evolve around. Reflecting on the character after performing the work, I realized that Nambalakata is a representation of myself as performer of healing. The character's struggles and circumstances are a reflection of what I have encountered in my journey of theatre making and performance.

I am quite fascinated and intrigued by the writing genre of magical realism. I was inspired to make *Eenganga* a realistic yet magical piece of work. Reading the novels such as '*The Famished Road*' by the Nigerian Author Ben Okri (1991) brings me memories of countless 'mythical' and fantastic stories that I grew up hearing and reciting. It was important to make the story identifiable and unfamiliar at the same time. My focus was on creating a world by making natural and supernatural characters and events so that *Eenganga* would be a holistic and metaphysical experience.

There are many reasons why I used Ben Okri's first paragraph from his book *The Famished road* as the opening text for the script. It is fascinating reading *The Famished road*. The paragraph served as a foundation and guide to write the ethnographic text that was going to transport the audience into and through a worldly yet mystical environment. Okri's storytelling is captivating and aesthetically sound. It transports the reader between different realms while narrating 'oddly familiar' experience. I wanted *Eenganga* to embody this. The text presents Nambalakata as a metaphysical character:

A messenger had arrived to this world
A ritual that involved a horse, a dream and long-distance travelling had to be performed
For her to officially enter our world
They didn't hesitate
You see this kind of thing runs in the family
It's those things we choose not to talk about
Ask the elders, they will tell you
They had to take her away for many days
They had to take her far so that they could breathe life into her

For her to live again
Sounds like a piece of magical realism, doesn't it?
(Mushaandja, 2014: 2)

Having a calling is a fundamental element in every traditional healer's life. It is believed that one is born with the calling to heal which she or she must adhere and submit to. This is a common feature in different indigenous shamanistic cultures. The calling can manifest in different supernatural ways such as an illness, hearing of voices and seeing of visions. The data showed that those who have the calling do go through lifelong struggles with coming to terms with their callings because of misinterpretation. Every healer has a unique and deeply subjective story about how they encounter their own callings. Talking to traditional healers made me realize that although they recognize and embrace their callings, they still do not comprehend them entirely.

Relating my calling to those of the shamans, I had to reflect on my calling to be a performer as something I have had to learn to discover and embrace. It is a journey I am passionate about which I equally struggle with on many levels. In creating *Eenganga*, I was looking at storytelling ways that could accommodate my calling so that it could influence the production. The idea was to allow my calling to guide me so that I could find the language and voice that I was looking for.

Describing Nambalakata as the character with a calling was complex to embody. I wanted people to be able to identify with her calling in particular yet still question it. In the Namibian society, callings are often misinterpreted and misunderstood by the families and communities of the shamans. Due to colonial and religious influences as pointed out by Le Beau (1999), it is still common for people to refer to shamans as 'witch doctors'. Everything that is related to traditional healing is equated to witchcraft or black magic. This is why those who have the calling are easily stigmatized and discriminated against by these oppressive institutions.

The text is written in English with parts of it in Oshiwambo and Afrikaans. The stanzas, statements and quotations in Oshiwambo and Afrikaans were deliberately used to give context to the narrative. These included phrases and words generally used to identify and describe things relating to shamanism and otherness. It was important to use all three languages because they are all a large part of who I am. Growing up in a multi-cultural urban space where language changes with space was problematic in the sense that I often felt misrecognised. There was an inferiority complex about my mother tongue because English and Afrikaans were considered superior.

Imagining *Eenganga* as a ritualistic performance was useful for highlighting the creativity and artistry of traditional healers. There is an undeniable relationship between art and spirit which is visible in the work of shamans. Their rituals involve going into trance through song, stomp dancing and storytelling amongst other modes of performance.

It is on this basis the script made reference to some of Namibia's greatest artists whose work possesses healing and pedagogical qualities. In my view, these artists remarkable work is still under-valued in the Namibian society. These artists' are folk musician/guitarist Tate Kwela, singer Nanghili Nashima, visual artist John Ndevasia Muafangejo and musician Jackson Kaujeua.

3.3 **Transforming through ritual**

A ritual often finds its form through secular or sacred characteristics which ultimately creates its structure and meaning (Schechner, 2006; Turner, 1969). By looking at performance as a ritual, the role of the performer differs from the role performed by an actor in a euro-centric theatre performance. The process of the ritual performance is holistic for the performer. He or she is expected to be physically, emotional and mentally present during the process. In ritual practice, the performer liberates him or herself from the conditions and expectations of the spectators. The performer moves from being an object and becomes a subject in the performance and consequently invites the audience to be part of the ritual as well (Boal, 1979; and Kolk, 2005).

The anthropological term liminality is defined as the stage of vagueness or disorientation that transpires during rituals. Participants in a ritual 'stand at the threshold' where they no longer hold their pre-ritual status and have not yet reached the post-ritual status (Turner, 1969, Schechner, 2006 and Markovska, 2008). *Eenganga* is a work of liminality. Its in-betweeness is experienced in its form, aesthetics and the meanings it creates. For example, Nambalakata is a liminal character because of its ambiguous and unfixed characteristics. I described the entire work as 'everything and nothing' at the same time. This simply means that it can mean many things to different people and it can mean nothing to some.

The spectator is not only an observer but can also be a participant in the performance. Spectator participation will often be defined by the meaning, structure and intention of the ritual that is being performed. *Eenganga* does invite the audience into the ritual by asking them to sing along for example. It however does not call for participation. In this first round of performances, the observers were treated as objective witnesses watching me from the outside.

Every ritual process is signified by a 'flow'. According to Pillai, (2010) Flow is "…a kind of holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. In such a state action follows automatically and spontaneously" (Pillai, 2010: 46). When the flow is disturbed or stopped during any ritual process it is described as transportation. In a performance process, both the performer and the spectator are transported to different points of the ritual. This entire process occurs simultaneously for both the performer and the spectators.

> A study of the participant's involvement in a ritual process, again, opens up new avenues for the modern theatre worker. It is found that a participant cannot get all the semantic meaning of a ritual action. But he gets an extraordinary experience, sometimes unworldly or mystical. It is an unworldly experience of communion with metaphysical power or

with his own fellowmen. It is an altered state of consciousness which leads him to a full involvement with the action] (Pillai, 2010, page 57).

At the Camel Stables, the ritualistic experience ends off behind the building where the audience joins me in chanting and drumming before going into discussion. From the *Shamaniac* space, I invite the audience to sit around a fire and reflect on what they just encountered. To expand the multivocality of the work, this is also an opportunity for the audience to voluntarily share their views on how they experience traditional healing in the urban space. This is also a chance for the audience to question and challenge me and the ethnographic performance.

The idea of sitting around the fire and sharing narratives is a common feature in many African cultures. In my culture for example, this kind of space known as *Oshinyanga* is where norms and values are shared between elders and the youth. I made use of this cultural practice to encourage more dialogue, I was also aware of the kind of aesthetic value it could bring to the entire experience of *Eenganga*.

In support of Jones (2002) and Alexander (2004), I also see the audience in my ritual as, witnesses and observer. In *Eenganga*, They had an opportunity to choose how they want to position themselves in the space and views of the performance. They had the freedom to choose how to participate. Through their observation, they formed a community which holds and supports the ritualistic performance.

CHAPTER 4: Performing *Eenganga*

4.1 **The act of 'becoming' and 'being present'**

When the audience arrive at the site, I am already in the first space. I am chanting and preparing myself for the ritual. This is where I change to my make-up and costume. I am dressed in my animal skin, ankle shakers and some beads around my waist. My entire body covered in ash and white powder. I am sweeping the floor while the audience slowly arrive and occupy the space. I burn my incense (elephant dung) to invite my ancestors to come and guide what I am about to do. This is how I begin focusing and tuning into the performance.

Performing *Eenganga* is a sacred ritual for me and my wish is for my witnesses to recognize that as they encounter the work. At the Camel stables for example, the audience members were ushered into washing their hands before they can enter the main building. This embodied approach was to welcome and prepare them for the experience they were about to encounter.

I also realized that my presence also depends on how well I know my site. The more time I spend in a site, the more I get immersed in it. This is what makes each performance a

different experience. Every space has a feel and energy of its own, for example, I found the WSOA site cold as compared to the Camel stables. As a result, audience responses also differ from performance to performance. In some performances at WSOA, some spectators positioned themselves closer to the work.

The temporal use of the found site is part of my vision of exploring the mobility of theatre and performance practices. It is also part of what (Pearson and Shanks, 2001; Gleave, 2011 and Kaye, 2000) refer to as exploring creative and spatial potential of the work. Performing the work in South Africa has been interesting. In this context, the work felt liberated. Even though I found the site cold compared to the Camel Stables, it felt easier to perform the work at WSOA. I think this has a lot to do with the relationship I have with Johannesburg. At home, the work is vulnerable and fragile. I feel that I still have to do more performances at home as part finding the voice I am looking for.

4.2 **Telling the stories/revelations of shamans**

The following are the three characters performed in designated spaces within the found sites.

- The *Urban Shaman*

When we get to this space, the participants are introduced to Nambalakata as a professional traditional healer in post-colonial urban Namibia, the Urban Shaman. Most Namibian traditional healers in urban areas migrated from rural parts of various regions for employment and education purposes. Urban settings such as Windhoek has had major influences on their identities and healing practices. The Urban Shaman therefore represents a character who is continuously trying to find a balance between the rural self and the urban self. There are struggles of finding and maintaining a balance between the ancient and the modern. The text narrates:

Fighting for his place
In the global space
Subjected to the ghetto
Katutura
'A place where we do not want to live'
This is the urban shaman
Fighting for his roots, her purpose
To be recognized
By the statesmen and legislation
(Mushaandja, 2014: 6)

Being in the global space is also coupled with challenges of fighting for recognition from the government and society at large. The status quo of traditional healers in Namibia continues to be ignored as the government turns a blind eye to them. More so, I also learned that the traditional healers in the urban space are challenged with organizing themselves and speaking

with a common voice. For example, there are some shamans who are not part of the Namibia Eagle Traditional Healers Association due to tribal and geographical differences.

On a personal level, the *Urban Shaman* mirrors my liminal state of living and moving between a village and a city. Here, the question of where I belong has always been a challenging one to answer. I was born in a village called Oshigambo in northern Namibia and I was raised in Katutura township in Windhoek, Namibia. As an theatre artist practicing in an underdeveloped industry, this character also represents my passion to make a successful and meaningful contribution to improve status quo.

Unlike in the rural areas, shamans in urban settings are servants of a multi-cultural community. Their methods of healing are a combination of approaches influenced by various cultures. To depict cross-cultural commonalities in healing patterns and symbols, I use elements of nature such as water and sand which are shared features in many traditional healing processes. This is also how some diviners and herbalists access their own healing sources. *Eenganga* was performed in two different urban multi-cultural contexts and the different audiences were able to make connections with the work. As it is with shamanism, performance is a universal language through which every individual can transform.

- The *Christian Pagan*

It was necessary to speak to Christianity because I have a personal history with this religion. Although I no longer consider myself a Christian, I found the healer's co-existential identities. Christianity has influenced identities in the Namibian society for many generations. Most traditional healers I met were also believers of the Christian faith. One of them runs a bible study from her house where her healing room is also based. The *Christian Pagan* is performed as a character that is located between Christianity and paganism.

The *Christian Pagan* tells the story of the shamans who have created a middle ground for themselves between their religious and cultural identities. Christianity as a dominant religion in Namibia has not stopped healers from recreating their own identities that equally accommodate their conflicting belief systems. This coincides with LeBeau (1999) and Lumpkin (1993) who have noted these neo-traditional identities of healers. The script reads as follows:

Her Shrines meet at a crossroad
Creating an intersection of his medicine room, God and the Church
Built to accommodate the speech of her body
The movement of his tongue
He is the embodiment of spiritual freedom
She said he had a vision of Sangomas dancing to gospel tunes
Screaming 'Hallelujah; Thokozani'
"If every church was built by men then I can also build my own church"
He defends his peculiar identity
(Mushaandja, 2014: 8)

The *Christian Pagan* and *Urban Shaman* are also confronted with the issue of 'fake' traditional healers which is growing rapidly in urban areas around the country. Due to poor regulation and legal framework of the status of traditional healers, some individuals in urban spaces capitalize on the intangible work of traditional healing. There is large percentage of healers who promote and advertise themselves as healers who deal with various health and social problems. The text reads:

This is the other
The other one
The one who solves all kinds of problems you can think of
From sex to money issues
This is a foreigner from a nearby country
Crossed the border to find greener pastures
Now, the locals consult his medicine too
Some have even adopted his business plan
(Mushaandja, 2014: 8)

The shamans that I consulted showed strong objections towards 'the other' healers. They specifically dissociated themselves from the 'fake healers' by noting that they do not advertise themselves. They also argued that the false traditional healers were not only locals but some also came from neighbouring countries and were perpetuating the misrecognition of traditional healers in the country.

During my ethnographic exploration, my efforts to secure consultations with some of the speculated bogus healers were unsuccessful. I therefore referred to them as 'the other' because I was not familiar with who they are and the nature of their practices. The 'fake traditional healer' is the other in the sense that their business is different and unknown to me and the traditional healers that I consulted. I see this as an opportunity for a potential ethnographic performance.

- The *Shamaniac*

Following me to the last space, the audience were transported into the space of the *Shamaniac*. Here I am playing with a white powder which I sprinkle over an elephant skull and a pile of dried pieces of clay. I am enacting the sensitivity and vulnerability of traditional healers. Their bodies are subject to picking up a variety of mental, emotional and spiritual illnesses which manifest in in different ways. Their ancestors can intervene in their lives at any given point. Some of these interventions manifest in destructive ways.

However, the *Shamaniacs* always overcome these 'crazy behaviours' once they access their wealth of knowledge that their bodies and spirits carry. Nambalakata as a *Shamaniac* constantly has to listen and act according to the calls of the ancestors. This is how the

character finds its voice as an emotionally and mentally unstable individual in the world. The *Shamaniac's* aim is to strike a balance between the real and ancestral worlds.

My physical language enacted the energetic and restless character of the *Shamaniac* as a vulnerable and physically disturbed character. This is a knowledgeable yet contradictory character.

4.3 **Embodying the shaman as storyteller**

I learned that regardless of the many cultural similarities among the healers; they still had differences among them. For example, when I asked questions pertaining to the 'hearing of voices and seeing visions' at a young age they all had similar experiences with few distinctions from one another. The narrated experiences were all made up of realistic and magic elements. One notable narrative was that of the elderly shamans whose answer began with "I was born dead". He explained how his family had to perform a specific ritual that was going to bring him to life. Narratives like his strike my thoughts and imagination. Such answers also excited and intrigued me to ask follow up questions. Some of the explanations I received were vague and unclear which I thought was a conscious decision that each shaman made.

4.4 **Embodying two-spirited realms/gender and sex fluidity**

I perform Nambalakata as a gender neutral character. In the text, I use both gender pronouns 'her' and 'him' loosely. I describe Nambalakata as a two-spirit and a unisex creation. The reason for this is that I have observed how some traditional healers have a few characteristics of the opposite sex. Personally, I have met many female shamans who were either bearded, had deep toned voices or a masculine expression. Davis (1994) also speaks about 'homosexual healers' in the ancient Oshiwambo communities. As a queer person, I thought that it is necessary to point out the link between queerness and shamanism as a reoccurring feature. The text describes Nambalakata as:

A flower child
A breed of the universe
A unisex creation
A native queer
A dual vibration
Two by two-spirit
Androgynous by nature
(Mushaandja, 2014: 1)

In an interview, Author and shaman Malidoma Patrice Somé has argued that homosexuals and queer gendered people in indigenous African societies were some the most respected and valued individuals in their communities. He says;

> The gay person is looked at primarily as a "gatekeeper." The Earth is looked at, from my tribal perspective, as a very, very delicate machine or consciousness, with high vibrational points, which certain people must be guardians of in order for the tribe to keep its continuity with the gods and with the spirits that dwell there. Spirits of this world and spirits of the other worlds. Any person who is at this link between this world and the other world experiences a state of vibrational consciousness which is far higher, and far different, from the one that a normal person would experience. (http://www.possessionsessions.com/2010/09/malidoma-patrice-some-part-i.html)

Other researchers such as Singer (2013) also argue that indigenous American communities had two-spirited shamans with queer gender and sexual identities. These identities have been suppressed and othered by colonial systems. None of the shamans from the first consultation said anything about their gender or sexualities. However, As I was contemplating the gender(s) of the character, I remembered the writings of queer theorist Judith Butler (1990) who speaks of gender being performative and as a 'doing'. She writes the following;

> […gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative-that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be (Butler, 1990: 24-25).

It was easy to relate the notions of queer genders and sexualities because I obviously identify with queerness. I experience the fluidity of sexuality as a process that unearths itself to me everyday. I see my gender queerness in the aesthetics of my image and identity as a young black male artist. Some of my hairstyles and stage costumes are not necessarily gender specific or definitive. It was important for me to consider and create such alternative aesthetics during the theatre making process. Namibia is a deeply patriarchal and heteronormative society. *Eenganga* was an opportunity for me to make work that would stimulate critical thoughts on gender and sexuality and help me continue discovering the fluidity in my gender expression.

Conclusion

To conclude this paper, I would like to point out that I see this project as a continuous process which will hopefully assume more lives in the future. At the time of writing this project, I started thinking about how to take the auto ethnographic exploration further, as I did not have enough time to get into the details of my personal memory and experiences.

Thus far, I can testify that *Eenganga* has been a revealing and enriching experience. The details about my process as discussed in this paper provide evidence of my journey of transforming and healing myself from the struggles of finding a language and a voice. I

achieved this by making and performing theatre by using (auto) ethnographic material and exploring non-traditional performance spaces. I performed 'stories of healers' in a ritualistic style as a way of finding my own healing. Finding a relation between my personal and cultural experiences as a performer and those of the shamans was a significant part of this research project. This is beyond the fact that I am also a black person from Katutura. It has more to do with the idea that performance and theatre are also ritualistic and shamanistic practices as Schechner (1994) and Floodgate (2006) have suggested. This research therefore concludes that a subjective and imaginative performance does in fact carry transformative values. This kind of theatre performance can also successfully address the complex issues relating or aiming to heal and transform.

I cannot say that I have fully discovered my language yet because it is a process which I will have to continue unpacking through my future theatre making, performance and ethnographic projects. Through Performing *Eenganga*, I discovered that my theatrical voice is one that speaks for/to me and continuously criticizes how I locate and utilize my body in theatre and performance. This same voice also stands to represent and act for equality and social change.

Appendix

Script

Eenganga
'Trance/formation and trance/lation
Writer: Jacques Sakaria Mushaandja

“IN THE BEGINNING there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry. In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn. We could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries. There was much feasting, playing, and sorrowing. We feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity. We played much because we were free. And we sorrowed much because there were always those amongst us who had just returned from the world of the Living. They had returned inconsolable for all the love they had left behind, all the suffering they hadn’t redeemed, all that they hadn’t understood, and for all that they had barely begun to learn before they were drawn back to the land of origins” (Ben Okri, *The famished road* , March, 1990)

Moons came and went
Seasons changed
It was the great circle of life
One generation after the other
Nambalakata spirit child was born
A flower child
A breed of the universe
A unisex creation
A native queer
A dual vibration
A Two-spirit
The third gender
Androgynous by nature
I know this because my alter ego is a lesbian. Her name is Joli, she comes from the Eastern Cape and she is a dancer.
A gift to humanity
Contrasting beautiful Nambalakata
Special child
Met die helem gebore

My name means
The work of freedom be done and dusted
This here is my work process
I am a researcher
I am a performer
I am not a Sangoma
I am a son of song
I recite and sing ethno-stories
I am a converse in conversation
Consulting
Eenganga

Nambalakata was born dead
Her lifeless body came with a memo from the ancestors
A messenger had arrived to this world
A ritual that involved a horse, a dream and long-distance travelling had to be performed
For her to officially enter our world

They didn't hesitate
You see this kind of thing runs in the family
It's those things we choose not to talk about
Ask the elders, they will tell you
They had to take her away for many days
They had to take her far so that they could breathe life into her
For her to live again
Sounds like a piece of magical realism, doesn't it?

A singer
An artist
Griot
Jeli
Jali
Onkulungu
A village poet
Foreteller
Enyakwa
Who remembers John Muafangejo?
Ndevasia
Do we still have the chronicles of Kaujeua, Tate Kwela and Onghili ya Nashima?
The diaries of Namvula yaMkatha
Mother of rain
Gatekeeper

Let me tell you a short story about my phantom comrade, Namvula
When Namvula still came, everyone would perform praise chants and celebratory dances in her name because everybody knew that she was us and we were her
When Namvula still came, Meme would hurry into the just ploughed field with a little basket in her one arm and sprinkled the Omahangu seeds into the air, across the whole field, because she knew that Namvula fed us and we fed Namvula
She would ululate as loud as she could, she would ululate for hours on end, she would ululate gracefully so that Omandengu Gomuuzilo would hear her and be rest assured of the arrival of their gift to earth.
Meme would shed a tear or two and say out loud "Nailoke, Nailoke, Nailoke, Nailoke, Nailoke!", and Namvula would simply put on her generous, gorgeous and gracious smile and continued sharing more of herself with us.
Meme would never sleep on the night of Namvula's arrival; she would spend the entire night brewing beer of which Namvula would have to taste first before everybody, of course
The festivities would continue the next morning when a goat was slaughtered to feed the entire village and give thanks to those that came before us, those that carry us, those live in us
We, the children of the village would all come together at once to play with Namvula all day long in her midst, in the omuzimbi. We would play games such as 'Block Block My Pampiere. No, no! until such a time that she would mysteriously disappear.
But she wouldn't disappear forever. She would always appear again, again and again.
That is why on dry days like this one, when Namvula had probably forgotten about us or taken too long to come back, we would ask our neighbours and their neighbour's neighbours

if they may have seen or heard of Namvula's footsteps around them. We would ask each other, Yakwetu omwalokwa? or Aaholi mbili, omvula ina muyuuvako hono? Because we understood that the world was connected and that nature was one
We would then all come together to beat the mother drum and sing songs like this one which called on her name, we would say Namvula, Mvula, Namvuleiii … and eventually, she would come.
The praise chants, the celebratory dances, the brewing of the beer, the slaughtering of the goat and the playing would happen all over and over and over again.
But not anymore, not any longer or at least hardly ever often does Namvula come to us these days.
The praise chants, the celebratory dances, the brewing of the beer, the slaughtering of the goat and the playing do not happen anymore because we forgot about her and what she meant to us, we forgot how to call on her name, we forgot her name, we forgot her
We forgot how to speak in tongues that she understands, we picked up foreign languages like the one I speak in now and chose to forget our language, the language that Namvula would understand
So, I have a feeling that she might have forgotten us too and maybe that is why she doesn't visit us anymore.

Nambalakata is the Seer
The chosen one
That child at home who hears visions and sees voices
I call her VoiceSeer
The child who tells us when there are snakes at home
The snakes that nobody sees
Because they are under the bed, in the closet
Concealed in the laundry

I see her
I see his internal battles
Her resentment towards life for choosing her
His bitterness in her belly reproducing itself
She is at war with her skeletons
Always in search for a way to run from her shadows
Her ghosts make her sick
They are misinterpreted and confused by his society
She says what he sees
Invisible realities to those in her presence

The stigma is not light
Nevermind the naming and shaming
Everyone has something to say about the poor child
They are the cause of her unstoppable anxiety
Some even call her the ugly child
The evil child
The dirty child
Okanona kena elaka lyapya
They have all kinds of names for her

They take her to different churches and hospitals
To find a cure for her obscure illness
But there seem to be no effective treatment for the diagnoses
Priests said she was a witch hunt
Doctors said she was mentally disturbed

Nambalakata is a loner
She talks to the flowers and plays with the dogs
When she was by herself
She was a free spirit
A creative creature
Singing like a bird
A flying eagle
Meditating on her dreams
Fantasizing about tomorrow
Free from oppressions

The voices in his head followed him to the Catholic School
But there was no place for them
Nobody ever heard them, except Nambalakata of course
They would talk to him whenever they pleased
Inviting him to go with them

One day, one of the voices
The highest of them all
Was calling him to return home
Nambalakata was determined to ignore
The voice decided to ring the bells of church
Driving Nambalakata out of the school
Directing him to the Namib dunes
To the mountains of antique wisdom
To the conservatoire of his craft
It was time for his initiation, his education

Fast Forward
Play
Let's see
Ladies and gentlemen I present to you Nambalakata, a professional spiritualist.
Herbalist, a spirit-medium, a therapist
A traditional medicine man from sub-Saharan Africa
Tangled up in post-colonial culture
The modern product of our heritage

Be warned!
Nambalakata is accused of being Omulodhi
Toor dokter
Witch dokter

A name he got from the European
Still valid in the 21st century
“You can’t trust him, not all the time” they say
Yet they all go to see him
Privately after their church sermons
To consult his black bag of magical possibilities

Shifting roles depends on circumstance
Tomorrow she is the Christian Pagan
Yesterday he was the Shamaniac
Today he is the Urban Shaman

The Urban Shaman
The Urban Dweller
A nomad from the countryside
An urban villager
A migrant labourer
A servant of a multi-cultural community
An educator, a health practitioner
Fighting for his place
In the global space
Subjected to the ghetto
Katutura
‘A place where we do not want to live’
This is the urban shaman
Stressed at home
Fighting for his roots, her purpose
To be recognized
By the statesmen, legislation and relevant authorities

They all consult her
One after the other
For strength and advice they say

His herbs come from the veld
She knows how they smell especially after the rain
Medicine
Omiti
Iiti
“Ek gebruik net dagga, finish en klaar” she says
She shows me a picture of a newly born infant who looks like he had Kwashikor or malnutrition.
“Hierdie kind was so siek gewees. Ek het net dagga en brandewyn gebruik. Finnish en klaar.”

The urban space is not for the faint hearted
Pap en melk for breakfast
Vetkoek en Kapana for supper

It is normal to fall, because you will stand again
It's full of grey areas and matters
A million pieces, particles and particulars
Found between a township and a village
Between a desert and a forest

The Christian Pagan
A Christian pagan
With a subjective denomination
One which finds harmony between his ancestors and Jesus Christ
He smokes the Bible
From Revelations to Genesis
It is in the back of her head
His way of accessing the special world
Transporting him into the other realm
Making her dance like a real shaman
Among the elephants

Her Shrines meet at a crossroad
Creating an intersection of his medicine room, God and the Church
Built to accommodate the speech of her body
The movement of his tongue
He is the embodiment of spiritual freedom
She said he had a vision of Eenganga dancing to gospel tunes
Screaming 'Hallelujah; Thokozani'
"If every church was built by men then I can also build my own church"
He defends his peculiar identity

They burned down her shack
His Indumba
This is an episode she never forgets
Yet she stands undefeated
Undefended
Unheard
This is what they call a city of justice

Undefeated
Undefended
Unheard
He is mobile
You can't kill knowledge
She is a travelling worker
Ovamboland, Hereroland, Damaraland
Katima Mulilo
Katutura Hospital
'Good morning, you have reached Katutura hospital, how may I help you?

Destructed by his copy

The fabricated version
The opportunist, her competition
“Ons soek nie daai mense hier nie. Hulle mors met ons se besigheid” He argues.
“We don’t advertise ourselves. The people know us. How can an outsider be stronger than my ancestors” she asks.
I smell negrophobia
Black on black hatred
OmaZaiZai
The fear of the self
The other
The other one
The one who solves all kinds of problems you can think of
‘Bring back your lost lover, money problems, winning of tenders, penis enlargement, protection from your enemies, attract customers’
This is a foreigner from a nearby country
Suspected trickster, con artist
Crossed the border to find greener pastures
The locals seem to love his medicine
There is a long que at her Kambashu
She can’t talk to me
I am told that many locals are also in the business
They have picked up her theatrical methodology for a quick buck
The others call her a scam
I can’t tell if he is really one
She won’t talk to me

The Shamaniac
He can be verbally and physically violent
Otherwise too
She is angry
Very angry
Kwaai
Contradictions
There is an absence of inner peace
Her body is a spiritual battle field
He is restless
Schizophrenic
Anxious
Paranoid
Paralyzed
Bi Polar
Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick disorder. Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick disorder. Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick disorder. Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick disorder. Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick disorder. Tick tock tick tock tick tock tick disorder.
Kwaai
Contraditions
I think Aathithi are at work
Aathithi mba hayathitha

Uuyuni uukwanampwinyuka
I am not sure if its bad omen
It's just her ancestors, the ruthless ones, dealing with her
It's just her voice fighting with the invisibles
She is being punished for something he didn't do
Something she did do
She is a drunk
Kaal gat,
Home brew
Old brown cherry
It's time for her check up
Every helper needs a helper

You see, she is not a kaal gat
This is an interdimensional human being
Make no mistake
She is a walking archive
Autoarcheologist
From day one
Have you ever heard of a BantuKhoi Encyclopaedia?
A natural heritage site
Shapeshifting from this to that
Trance forming
In space and sound
Evolving
Remembering the future
Her body knows many things
It's been to many places
"Their nurses and doctors have a thing or two to learn from our medicine. We are the wisdom of this land" she says.
He doesn't walk alone
She stands on the shoulders of the giants who give her keys to the many doors ahead

'How long shall they kill our prophets while we stand aside and look?'
Hear their voices
They voice guidance
They call your name and you will answer
Answer child; answer the call; it's from the great ones

You know them voices
You have seen them before
They throw bones
Burning elephant dung
Telling you to read the past
To be the Afro-Chant Shaman of your people

The voices are suppressed
Called savages

Weapons and instruments restricted from doing their work
Colonial ideologies
'Colo-mentality'
But gatekeepers will always be born
With melodies and remedies to wash away our sins
The healing of a nation
The therapy for our broken dreams
Spiritual cleansing at your service
Though tattered and shattered
Gatekeepers will always be present

Nambalakata teach the children
Songs of Bi Kidude
Tell them about the world that exists beneath the Welwitschia mirabilis

Photographs of *Eenganga* in performances



Photograph by Vilho Nuumbala



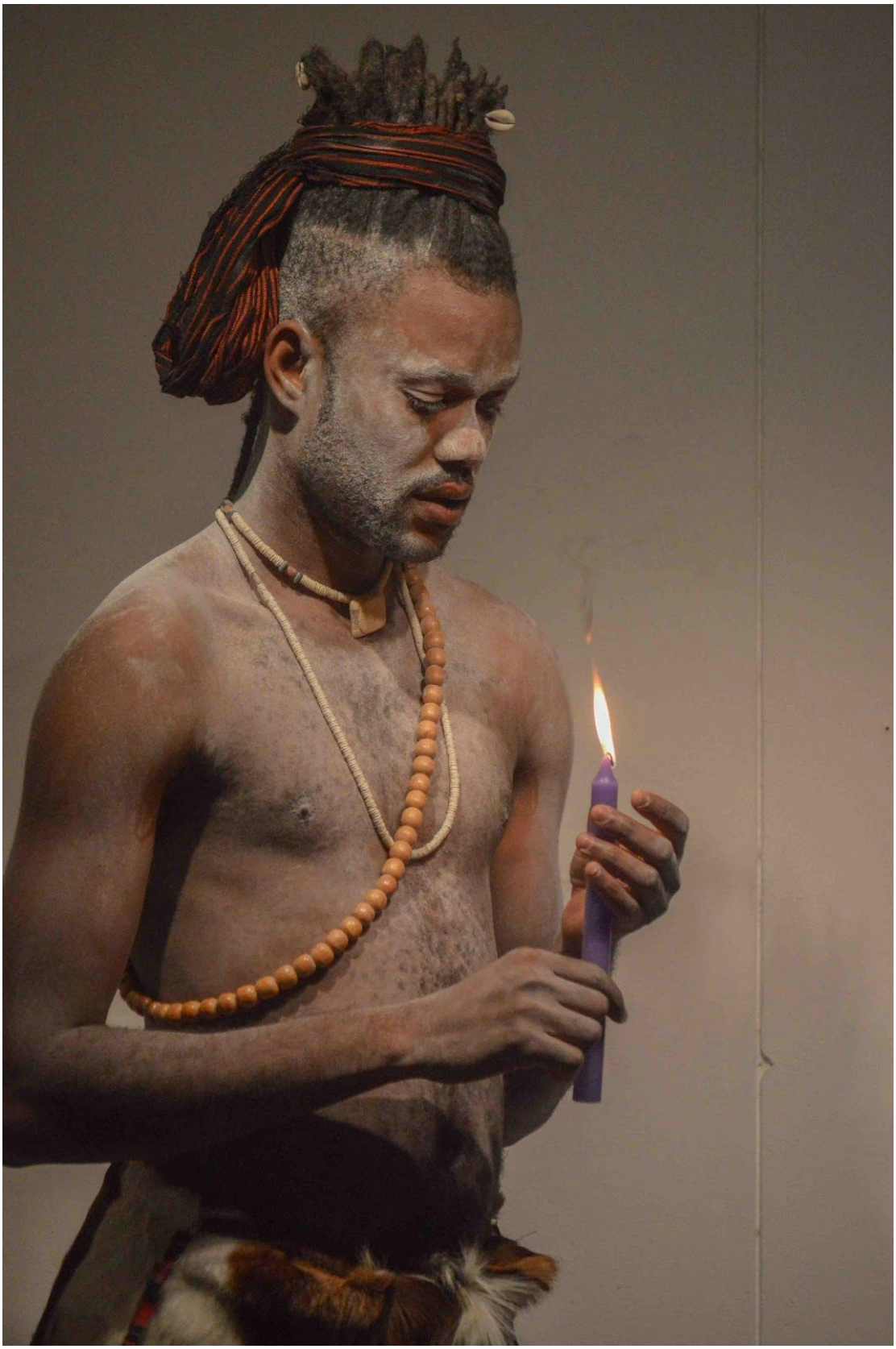
Photograph by Vilho Nuumbala



Photograph by Vilho Nuumbala



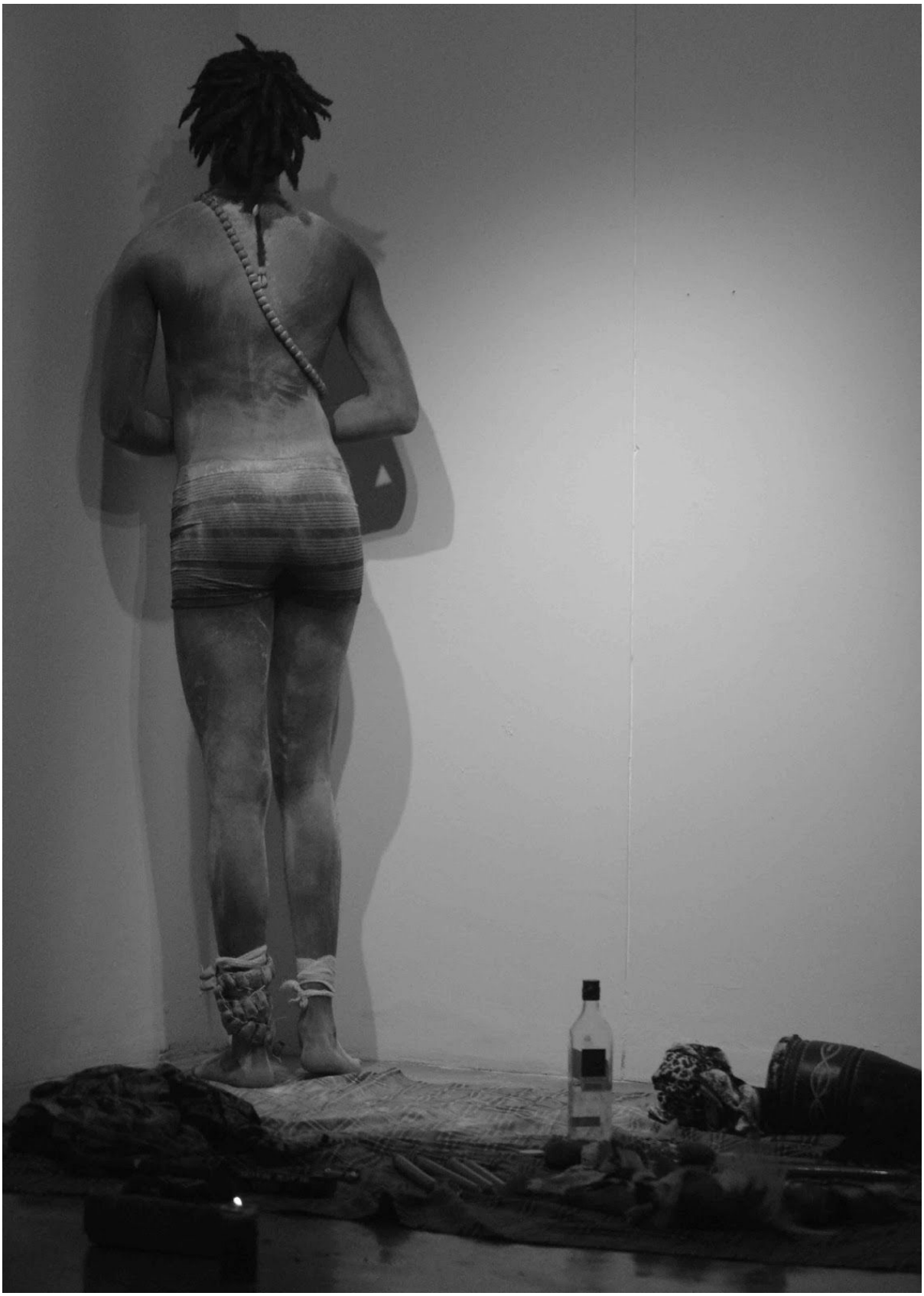
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