UNEXPECTED CALLINGS: Reimagining Ancestors and Queerness in Zimbabwe

RAFFAELLA TAYLOR-SEYMOUR
Duke University
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7215-3175

"You know those old guys who sit in the market—the *okhulu*, the grandfathers?" Anesu asked me.[1] Anesu was a queer woman in her late twenties who described a scene familiar to many in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second city, the capital of the minority Ndebele-speaking region of Matabeleland.[2] The market Anesu described is packed with stalls piled high with boxes containing roots, tree bark, seeds, and animal hides, many operated by the kinds of older people she alluded to. They wear subtle signs that they practice *isintu*, the broad nexus of Zimbabwean customs considered "traditional."[3] Some carry ornamental staffs known as *induku*, while others wear brass bangles or strings of beads signifying the presence of distinctive spirits. "You've probably seen those guys—they're always there," Anesu continued, describing the older men who sit on the curbside near the market. "One time I was walking by on my way to see a friend in Mzilikazi and I heard one of them mutter, 'I'm seeing an old man in this one—that's who's leading her,' and the guy he was with nodded and agreed."

Anesu went on, parsing what the men at the market meant. "They see the queerness in me, walking kind of like a man. And that's how they explain it—that a grandfather spirit is leading me. To them, it's normal," she explained. Here, Anesu indexed both her own queerness—evident in her androgynous style and masculine gait—as well as the profound ways ancestral spirits affect their

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, Vol. 41, Issue 1, pp. 5–29, ISSN 0886-7356, online ISSN 1548-1360. Cultural Anthropology *is the journal of the Society of Cultural Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association.* Cultural Anthropology *journal content published since 2014 is freely available to download, save, reproduce, and transmit for noncommercial, scholarly, and educational purposes under the Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0 license. Reproduction and transmission of journal content for the above purposes should credit the author and original source. DOI: 10.14506/ca41.1.01*

hosts' lives. Powerful ancestral spirits known as *amadlozi* in Ndebele, the most widely spoken language in Bulawayo, are both influential and volatile, literally and symbolically (Nyathi 2007).[4] They are potent presences who watch over their descendants and are called on to bestow gifts like healing, fertility, and good fortune, as well as to ensure balance in relations between people (Mavhunga 2014). *Amadlozi* are inherited from one generation to the next through family lineages, yet the spirits themselves choose which member of a given generation will act as their medium, a role known as a *sangoma*.[5] Each *idlozi*, or singular ancestral spirit, is as complex as a living person. They have names and networks of relations and strong personalities, complete with idiosyncratic likes and dislikes, needs and wants. As they become present in the life of the person they have chosen as their host, *amadlozi* come to influence their personality, emotions, and even their experience of themselves. As Anesu's account suggests, gender expression and intimate desires lie within the scope of things that *amadlozi* are understood to affect. Because of this, queerness can be interpreted as a sign of the presence of a powerful spirit that influences how their host's gender manifests and who they are attracted to.[6]

Anthropologists have often linked spirit-mediumship practices such as these to expressions of gender and sexuality that stray from the normative. In a wide variety of contexts, the medium's role as a vessel for spirits has been shown to give rise to fluid and transgressive articulations of gender (Morris 2000; Palmer 2021; Pinthongvijayakul 2019; Wekker 2006). In Southern Africa, historians and anthropologists have identified spirit mediumship as a site of "local" expressions of queerness that existed prior to colonization, before the imposition of colonial categories of deviance like homosexuality and sodomy or the more recent arrival of the identity-based frameworks of the gay rights movement (Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Epprecht 2004). For some scholars, the existence of such cultural framings underlines the need to provincialize concepts that emerge from Western queer theory and cast doubt on activist efforts to universalize English-language categories (Massad 2007; Strongman 2002). Others have invoked such examples to challenge the homophobic speech that has become commonplace among Zimbabwe's political elite, most notably that of former president Robert Mugabe, who frequently equated queer intimacies with coloniality, modernity, and sinfulness (Chitando and Mateveke 2017). Scholars have contested this rhetoric by showing that queerness can be interpreted as indicative of the presence of ancestral spirits with origins in the precolonial era (Morgan and Wieringa 2005; Murray and Roscoe 1998; van Klinken and Otu 2017; Stobie 2011).

Among young queer people in Bulawayo, however, such accounts of the relationship between queerness and spirits are viewed with skepticism and doubt. Many of my interlocutors recall experiences similar to those of Anesu at the market, when an older relative, spiritual practitioner, or stranger implied a connection between gender transgression and the presence of an ancestral spirit. Although such models appear to affirm queer ways of being in the world, they do not easily align with my interlocutors' experiences of themselves. Many associate these ideas with distressing ritual efforts to alter their gender expression, conducted at the request of family members by spiritual practitioners who claim that a spirit can be negotiated with or exorcised via ceremonial means. Most reject such understandings of queerness and instead identify via the categories of the global gay rights movement, invoking identity markers such as queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and viewing gender and sexual identity as largely fixed and not subject to influence by external forces.

Yet despite their resistance to causal accounts of the relationship between ancestors and queerness, a significant number of young queer people in Bulawayo have experienced ancestral spirits trying to communicate with them. Unlike other young urban Zimbabweans, among whom it is rare to hear *amadlozi* discussed in positive terms, a growing number of young queer people are searching for information about ancestors, and many have experienced *amadlozi* appearing in dreams and visions. Some have sought to foster relationships with these spirits, learning from friends and social media how to strengthen the bond between spirit and host. A small but significant number contemplate the possibility that they may have been chosen by ancestral spirits and pursue initiation to become *sangomas*—an ancestral "calling," in their words. Those like Anesu began to reframe the relationship between spirits and queerness not as one of causality, but instead suggest that the spirits themselves have a particular affinity for queer subjects. In the process, they unsettle hegemonic narratives about the relationship between queerness, Africanness, and coloniality, and at the same time recuperate and reimagine generative forms of queer attachment that are layered in past formations of intimacy.

In this article, I trace the efforts of young queer people in Bulawayo to understand and experience ancestors and queerness within the same frame. My interest is not to identify an original, stable, or authentic account of either ancestors or queerness. Instead, I follow the epistemological explorations of my friends in Bulawayo and their efforts to build intimate relationships with ancestral spirits.[7] I approach *amadlozi* as part of broader webs of sustaining intergenerational

relations that extend from the realm of the visible into that of the unseen, where spirits and ancestors reside (Canham 2023; Nyeck 2020). Queer scholars have framed recent turns to ancestral practices among queer people in Southern Africa as efforts to devise "queer customs" that challenge colonial, nationalist, and patriarchal narratives that have sought to deny or erase queer presence (Hoad 2016; Livermon 2015; Fiereck, Hoad, and Mupotsa 2020; Qambela 2017). I build on this work to suggest that ancestral spirits are not only powerful symbolic and discursive retorts to contemporary and colonial homophobias but also offer deep and intimately felt affirmations of queer ways of being and promise generative forms of queer attachment. This research grew out of my time in queer and feminist organizations in Bulawayo between 2017 and 2022, when many of my interlocutors were scrutinizing the narratives surrounding ancestors and queerness in both their personal and activist lives. As a white queer woman and ally to queer Zimbabweans, my eighteen months of ethnographic research responded to community requests to examine intersections between ancestral epistemologies and queerness.[8]

The work that emerged complicates anthropological accounts of the relationship between spirit mediumship and fluid expressions of gender and sexual desire. I suggest that engagements with *amadlozi* among young queer people in Bulawayo don't represent a straightforwardly local mode of understanding or expressing queerness or an outright rejection of the Western LGBTQ framework. Instead, in their engagements with ancestral spirits young queer people in Bulawayo seek to reimagine queerness within ancestral epistemologies, respond to colonial projects that have sought to demonize both ancestors and queerness, and articulate novel forms of intimate attachment. I approach queerness not as a stable entity identifiable across time, but as that which pushes up against the embodied and intimate norms of a given context (Ahmed 2006; Macharia 2019; Tallie 2019). At the same time, I follow my interlocutors' own sense that queerness embodies emergent forms of relationality that, in the words of José Muñoz (2009, 130), "signal a desire for another way of being in the world, another way of knowing the world." In forging relations with ancestral spirits, I suggest that young queer people in Bulawayo recuperate historically suppressed relational dynamics imbued with queer potentialities. This involves ongoing epistemological and affective labor to unsettle the dominant narratives surrounding both ancestors and queerness. In this article, I trace how my interlocutors uncover and reimagine the relational affordances that inhere in ties between spirits and their mediums, expanding and troubling understandings of "queer kinship" into the realm of the unseen and the spiritual.

ANCESTORS, AFRICANNESS, AND QUEERNESS

In turning to *amadlozi*—spirits at the heart of precolonial cosmologies—queer people in Zimbabwe find themselves enmeshed in debates about the so-called Africanness of queer intimacies. These debates point to the long history of the suppression and policing of both ancestral practices and same-sex intimacies, which stretches back to the early colonial era. British imperial ideology sought to "reform" the cultures it encountered in the mold of nineteenth-century bourgeois Christian morality (Jeater 1993) and worked to fix identities in ways that inhibited fluid modes of relating (Canham 2023). As a result, efforts to grasp African formations of intimacy and spiritual practice that existed prior to colonization prove complex, given that they are filtered through and distorted by the very categories introduced by colonization (Chidester 1996; Hoad 2007). Nonetheless, many scholars have sought to give shape to these formations, and anthropological approaches have constituted both central and complicating aspects of these endeavors.

Ancestors lie at the heart of the relational worlds that existed before colonization and came to be the racialized and demonized other to Christian worship and European understandings of relationality. Though classical works of anthropology typically depicted African kinship in fixed and structural terms (Radcliffe-Brown 1950), the Nguni term *ubuhlobo* (relation) captures more flexible idioms of relatedness.[9] *Ubuhlobo* describes a fluid, mutable, and elastic conception of relatedness that refers not only to genealogical kin or blood relatives but also to those who have been adopted or incorporated as kin. Ancestral spirits move through lineages in ways that reflect *ubuhlobo*, sometimes manifesting in unexpected hosts or via adopted or surrogate descendants, including those who have come to live on the land they inhabit. In the spirit realm, *amadlozi* continue to age and build on their existing knowledge and expertise (for instance, medicinal or hunting skills) to accrue ever greater wisdom and insight. This enables them to help their descendants identify and correct imbalances in relations among the living that need adjustment (Mkhize 2022), for instance helping resolve family rifts or disagreements. As S. N. Nyeck (2020, 95) has argued, Africana formations of spirituality and intimacy ought to be viewed as "a cauldron of augmented relationality" through which persons come into being through "permutations of experiences with others."

These idioms of mutability also reflect understandings of gender and sexuality in African precolonial worlds. For Keguro Macharia (2019, 10), the hegemony of contemporary discourses about gender and sexuality—in both their

affirmative and phobic guises—obscures "how African and Afro-diasporic intimate structures and traditions generate their own forms of normativity and queerness." As scholars including Ifi Amadiume (1987), Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997), and Nkiru Nzegwu (2006) have argued in relation to West Africa, the colonial gaze could not grasp flexible and non-dualistic understandings of bodies, gender, and power in precolonial Africa and imposed binary taxonomies for conceptualizing gender and sexuality. While these arguments sought to counter claims by Western feminists about the inherent patriarchy of African societies, they also speak to questions of queer presence before colonization. Historians and anthropologists have argued that such fluid idioms of gender and sexuality are reflected in spirit-mediumship practices, which have been identified as local sites of queer expression (Epprecht 2004). These arguments parallel those made by scholars working in other contexts who have sought to grasp gender and sexuality beyond contemporary identity categories (Morris 2000; Reddy 2005; Wekker 2006).

While colonial ideologies were deployed across the British Empire, they played out in particularly violent and devastating ways in the settler colonies of Southern Africa. Zimbabwe was a British colony known as Rhodesia from the 1890s until independence in 1980.[10] In the late nineteenth century, the Rhodesian state began to alienate land on a scale unparalleled anywhere else in Southern and Eastern Africa (Ranger 1967, 89). This was as much an act of spiritual desecration as material dispossession, severing access to sites of ancestral significance and eroding the role ancestors played in mediating relations between people and land. The wrenching of people from rural lifeways, rapid urbanization and modernizing impulses of the colonial state in the early twentieth century further unsettled the role of ancestral spirits in communal life. Christian missions and schools presented precolonial religious practices as "heathen" and "superstitious," encouraging converts to view ancestors as demons bent on inflicting harm on the living (Meyer 1999). Rhodesia's Witchcraft Suppression Ordinance of 1899 sought to legally undermine ancestral practices by outlawing beliefs in so-called witchcraft with diktats so broad they effectively forced all activities involving ancestors underground. At the same time, under laws imported from other British colonies, Rhodesia criminalized and zealously prosecuted both sodomy and interracial intimacies (McCulloch 2000). State and religious institutions worked to inculcate European moral sensibilities, undermining polygamous marriage and configuring the conjugal couple as the foundational unit of society (Jeater 1993).

Nonetheless, ancestral practices became recurrent sites of anticolonial resistance. Scholars have argued that ancestral spirits and their mediums did not remain static or wither away in response to colonization but responded to evolving colonial conditions and frequently became crucial arenas for coordinating resistance (Feeley-Harnik 1984). For the generation that spearheaded the liberation struggle against the Rhodesian state in the 1960s and 1970s, reviving ancestral practices served to anchor anticolonial ideologies stemming from pan-African, Marxist, and Maoist thought in the Zimbabwean context (Lan 1985). After a decade of armed struggle, Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980. While a small number of spirit mediums came to be viewed as national heroes, by the mid-twentieth century, Christianity had become firmly established as the majoritarian form of religious practice, shaping everyday morality and underpinning public life (Charumbira 2013). In subsequent decades, new Pentecostal denominations expanded rapidly and came to demonize ancestral practices as never before, framing ancestors as satanic beings who threaten the health and well-being of the living (Meyer 1998). Those who engaged in the nexus of spiritual practices known as *isintu*—commonly rendered in English as "tradition"—were increasingly imagined as confined to the country's rural areas and the margins of respectable urban society. Despite pronouncing socialist values, political elites increasingly evinced the tropes of conservative Christian nationalism (van Klinken and Obadare 2018).

In this political milieu, struggles over gender and sexuality became increasingly central to Zimbabwe's postcolonial politics. As Macharia (2019) has argued, anticolonial thinkers often highlighted the devastating effects of colonization on African family structures and produced reified images of traditional intimate normativity. Such figures imagined that postcolonial societies might be reconstructed on the basis of hetero-patriarchal family units, implicitly yoking African personhood to marriage and reproductive heterosexuality and rendering queerness "un-African" (Ndjio 2016). In the postcolonial era, the inheritances of these discourses manifested in increasingly vitriolic political homophobia (Boellstorff 2004). As Western gay rights activists sought to globalize identitarian conceptions of gender and sexuality from the 1980s onward, they frequently constructed Africa as a key site of sexual otherness characterized by deep-rooted homophobia and in need of rescue by Western actors (Rao 2020). As Zimbabwe's economy slid into crisis in the mid-1990s, increasingly explicit mentions of same-sex intimacies appeared in the speeches of the country's president, Robert Mugabe (Aarmo 1999), who ruled from 1980 to 2017. By the early 2000s,

Zimbabwe was at the forefront of a new genre of homophobic political rhetoric that spread rapidly across the region and framed queer people as un-African, irreligious, and detached from traditional culture.

ENCOUNTERING ANCESTORS

Raised against the backdrop of these discourses, members of Anesu's generation and demographic—that is, young, urban people who are active members of Christian churches—rarely discuss *amadlozi* in positive terms. The historic suppression of ancestral epistemologies and modes of relating has pushed spiritual practices involving ancestors to the margins of contemporary urban life in Zimbabwe. Most of my interlocutors were raised in Christian congregations that frequently denigrate or demonize ancestral spirits, and many remember either their parents' silence about ancestors or efforts to instill fear of *sangomas*. For these reasons, young people in Bulawayo typically encounter information about ancestral spirits and their mediums in fragments, if at all. However, while the majority of urban people eschew open participation in ancestral spirituality, some consider consulting with a *sangoma* if other avenues—such as churches, priests, pastors, prophets, and doctors—fail (see Adogame, Chitando, and Bateye 2016). In particular, people turn to *sangomas* when they suspect the issue in question has an ancestral origin of some kind. One such "problem" is perceived gender transgression and same-sex desires, which paves the way for the first encounters many of my interlocutors have with ancestral epistemologies.

Bar Taka sits in the center of Bulawayo and is known as the city's unofficial gay bar. It's a space in which queer people can find companionship at most hours of the day and night alongside the "regulars," straight men and women also in search of escape. "It's *our* bar," Anesu told me. "But the straight people there are cool." On a hot Sunday afternoon, I sat on the patio behind Bar Taka with my close friend Mudiwa, a queer woman in her early thirties. She recalled a series of confusing and unsettling experiences with *sangomas* during her teenage years. "When you're LGBTI in Zimbabwe, you're taken to healers and prophets to try to 'fix' you over and over again," Mudiwa explained. Although my interlocutors' parents are for the most part active Christians, many discover that—when confronted with their child's gender transgression—their spiritual allegiances are more complex. Mudiwa became aware of this when she was fifteen and her mother decided that she was too masculine for a teenage girl, refusing to wear dresses and slouching too much. Her mother's first efforts involved a series of Christian churches and pastors—first her own Dutch Reformed congregation, then a number of independent prophets—who suggested remedies ranging from

personal prayer to deliverance ceremonies. "There's a lot of judgement in Christian spaces," Mudiwa told me. "That's why so many queer people leave church."[11] Eventually, her mother became desperate and sought out a *sangoma* to resolve what she had come to perceive as a spiritual problem with "an ancestral link," as Mudiwa put it.

Mudiwa took a sip of her beer and twisted the can in her hands. "Then it began," she went on. "They take you to so-and-so, some healer who's apparently 'cured' people in the past," she said, the cynicism clear in her voice. It was in these spaces Mudiwa first encountered "traditional" accounts of queerness. "She took me to this one guy and he was like, '*There's something about you*,'" Mudiwa said, laughing as she impersonated the *sangoma*'s mystical tone. "I remember another woman was like, 'I'm seeing a *khulu*, a grandfather spirit,' and I had no idea what she was talking about." In these encounters, Mudiwa explained, *sangomas* frequently attributed her queerness to the presence of a male ancestral spirit who had chosen her as their host. She'd had little exposure to ancestral cosmologies growing up and had no framework for interpreting their suggestions. Moreover, these explanations didn't concur with her lived experience or nascent awareness of her sexuality, and she dismissed the interpretations they provided.

As we spoke, our friend Isaki came to join us. Isaki was a trans man in his late thirties who relayed similar experiences. "Have you seen how scary it is?" Isaki asked me as he took a long drag on his cigarette. Isaki worked as a nurse in government clinics in Zimbabwe's rural provinces but had grown up in the city. Describing his memories of the first time he was taken to consult with a *sangoma* by his father, Isaki went on, "They're all dressed up with those feathered hats and the beads and the bones—ahh, scary! They'll be snuffing—you know, snorting tobacco," Isaki continued, describing the process a *sangoma* undertakes to enter trance. Isaki shook his head. "When the spirit enters them, they start shaking and talking in this creepy voice," he said. He was recalling the point in the consultation when the sangoma began to channel their ancestral spirit, speaking a voice quite different to their natural tone. "Honestly, it's terrifying," he said to me and Mudiwa, tapping the ash from the end of his cigarette. "She mostly asked about my dreams. I told her I'd been dreaming a lot about my grandfather. He died a few years ago, but in my dreams he's often there, walking with a snake." At this point in the consultation, Isaki remembered, his father interjected, "Oh, you've got a male ancestor!" Isaki went on, "My dad actually knew what the snake meant!" he said with a look of amazement. "The *sangoma* agreed," Isaki continued. "She said, 'Your grandfather is in you, he has a gift for you—that's why you're behaving like a man.'"

While Isaki recalled this scene with irreverence, he explained that the implication that he needed to be "healed" made the consultation a difficult and wounding experience. In the broadest sense *sangomas* are healers, so taking a young person to consult implies a need for healing. Such healing is not limited to physical ailments but also includes adjusting the mind and improving relations between humans and spirits (Ngubane 1977). Even if the spirit is interpreted as benevolent, many *sangomas* suggest it is possible to gently negotiate with the spirit to allow the person to inhabit a more normalized gender expression, making possible things like marriage and childbearing. Moreover, the healing practices *sangomas* employ can prove deeply distressing. *Sangomas* sometimes use razors to make small incisions in the skin into which they rub medicinal herbs, a practice known as *ukugcaba*, while others instruct people to bathe in animal fluids. While these forms of healing can be nurturing when sought out, many of my interlocutors recalled consultations with *sangomas* as grueling, degrading, and emotionally wounding.

In contrast to these understandings of queerness, my interlocutors are overwhelmingly drawn to English-language identity categories. Young queer people in Bulawayo find their way to sexual rights organizations through a variety of avenues—some recall searching for words like *gay* or *lesbian* online as teenagers, eventually discovering the websites of local organizations. Others learn from friends they meet in places like Bar Taka about the existence of the city's queer rights organizations, which began appearing in the mid-2000s.[12] Most members of Bulawayo's sexual rights organizations hail from low-income neighborhoods on the west side of the city, because they lack the private space and mobility middle-class people have access to. Once they become members, they have the opportunity to attend workshops where they are formally introduced to identity-based accounts of gender and sexuality. Unlike the words for gender and sexual transgression in local languages, which are almost universally encountered as slurs, young people generally find that the English-language LGBTQ framework offers a non-pathologizing vocabulary for naming gendered and sexual difference. Equally, the notion that gender and sexual identity are fixed offers a rebuttal to those who have suggested it is possible to alter intimate desires, either via Christian deliverance or ancestral rites. In Mudiwa's words, "When I first heard the word *lesbian*, I was like, 'Wow, so there is a word for this.'" Similarly, a young gay man named Sipho explained, "The older generation, they will say if you're gay, you have a female spirit. But I don't believe that—you're just gay. It doesn't matter if my grandma speaks to me—I'm naturally a cis gay man."

The recollections of Mudiwa, Isaki, and Sipho highlight that spirit-based understandings of queerness don't entail a straightforward acceptance of gendered and sexual difference. Often such accounts imply that intrinsic aspects of the lived experience of queer people—gender fluidity, same-sex desires, their very ways of moving through the world—are produced by the presence of spirits and can be changed. But in time, both Mudiwa and Isaki would find their way back to the spirits first named in *sangomas*' consulting rooms. In doing so, they would seek to trouble understandings of queerness within ancestral epistemologies and begin to develop deeper attachments with their own ancestral spirits.

REFIGURING QUEERNESS

Ancestral spirits make their presence known in people's lives in a variety of ways. *Amadlozi* typically begin communicating through powerful dreams and visions in which they manifest in human form or as significant animals, like snakes or lions. They attract attention more forcefully by producing mysterious illnesses and ailments that afflict the body of their chosen host. In their memoir, the South African LGBTQ activist Nkunzi Nkabinde (2008) details similar experiences as they began to realize they'd been called to be a *sangoma*. Nkabinde recalls enduring a period of profound psychic distress that conventional psychiatry was unable to remedy. Embodied experiences of this kind give ancestors a new immediacy and reality, distinct from the memories my interlocutors had with *sangomas* who were approached to provide a cure for a supposed malady. These kinds of visceral, first-hand experiences make *amadlozi* a real and proximate presence, and many of my interlocutors begin to reevaluate their understandings of ancestors. At the same time, they inspire critical perspectives on colonial ideologies that have demonized both ancestral practices and queer ways of being over the past two centuries.

Mudiwa first became conscious of the presence of *amadlozi* in her life with the onset of powerful dreams and visions that began in her late teenage years. Later, she would look back on these experiences as the earliest sign indicating she had been chosen by *amadlozi* to be their host. "I was nineteen when I started having visions of snakes," Mudiwa remembered. "There was one snake in particular that kept looking for me," she continued. "There are these deep gutters on the side of the road in Magwegwe," she said, referring to her neighborhood on the west side of Bulawayo. "I would feel it looking for me, lifting its head, going from house to house," she recalled. Mudiwa felt the snake pursuing her day and night. "I couldn't say anything to anyone because I was so scared—it was so

frightening. I stopped eating. One night I dreamt of a *huge* snake. It was as tall as the NRZ building in town," she said, referring to Bulawayo's tallest building, a twenty-three-story high-rise in the city's center. "Then it started talking. It said, *I've chosen you*, and I said, 'No, no, no—I'm too young! Choose someone else, please.' And it said, 'No, I've chosen *you*.' Then it tried to plead with me—this huge snake, which could have eaten me, was pleading with me."

In her search for answers, Mudiwa visited hospitals and psychiatric facilities, pastors and prophetic healers. In the end, Mudiwa found that *sangomas* provided the most compelling explanations for the details of her dreams. *Sangomas* invariably heard about the snake and told her it was the manifestation of a powerful male *idlozi*, much as the *sangomas* had when she was younger. This time, however, she had gone to consult on her own initiative and the locus of the conversation was not centered on the prospect of altering her gender expression. "I got many translations for those dreams," Mudiwa explained. "Most of them would say, 'You have your father's ancestors.'" While such explanations tentatively gave meaning to her dreams, it proved a difficult answer for her to accept. "I would be like, 'What?! My father doesn't even care about me, there's no way I have his ancestors!'" She had been estranged from her father since he had left their family when Mudiwa was a few months old, and she recoiled at the suggestion of having inherited anything from him. Nonetheless, these consultations gave her a sense of the significance of the spirit she was seeing in her dreams. She came to appreciate that her *khulu* was powerful and gradually came to feel an attachment to him, distinct from her relationship with her father.

Soon, Mudiwa's understanding of the connection between ancestors and queerness began to shift. Through a sexual rights organization she met a lesbian *sangoma* named Sakhile and the two became close. "Sakhile had just *thwasa*-ed," Mudiwa said, referring to the year-long initiation process people must undergo to become recognized *sangomas*. Through *ukuthwasa*, those with a calling come under the tutelage of an established *sangoma* and cultivate deeper relationships with their spirits and a broader knowledge of ancestral healing and divination techniques. Sakhile emphasized spirits' choice of queer people and reframed their implications. "You do have a *khulu* spirit, but he's drawn to you as you are," Sakhile told Mudiwa. "He's not the reason you're queer." As Sakhile explained to me, "Ancestors are there and different genders are there, but they're not the same thing. An ancestral calling is a gift, but queerness is an inborn thing. It's like the blood that runs through your veins." A similar view was expressed by Ayanda, a trans woman in her late twenties who had had several grandmother

spirits or *gogos*, and had likewise recently gone through *ukuthwasa*. In her words, "I'm not taking advantage of my calling and saying my *gogos* are the reason I'm trans. My *gogos* are my *gogos*, they're not the reason I am who I am." While both Ayanda and Sakhile understood that *amadlozi* have a powerful influence over their hosts' lives, they rejected the notion that spirits fundamentally produce queerness.

Most of my interlocutors asserted a similarly strong sense that ancestral spirits are not the reason people are queer. Nonetheless, many grappled with the question of why so many queer people around them experienced ancestral spirits communicating with them or pursued callings. Over the course of my fieldwork, a large and growing number of members of Bulawayo's sexual rights organizations became interested in ancestral spirits, mirroring a pattern seen elsewhere in Southern Africa (Morgan and Reid 2003), and the reasons for this were much discussed. "That's a question I'm really stuck with," Sipho, the young gay man introduced earlier, expressed to me. "I ask myself, 'What are the ancestors trying to say? Why are they coming in our direction?'" Many of my interlocutors pondered a version of this question, critical of the notion that spirits cause queerness, yet intrigued by spirits' proximity to queer hosts.

For many, the answer ultimately lay in the notion that *amadlozi* recognize something distinct and valuable in queer subjectivities. In the first place, *amadlozi* are uniquely situated to perceive queerness and seem to have a particular reverence for it. Because ancestral spirits have the capacity to see things that are hidden and know people's secrets, *amadlozi* often know who their hosts are attracted to before they do; in fact, they are the only relatives queer people never have to come out to. "Really, they know we're queer before we know it ourselves," Mudiwa explained. More than this, some contend that ancestral spirits recognize a distinct value in queerness. In Sipho's words, "Queer people see things differently. You're already on the other side of the fence, you know? We see things from a different perspective than straight people, just like *amadlozi*." For Zamani, a gay man in his late thirties, *amadlozi* see value in experiences of hardship and survival. In his words, "Queer people go through a lot of hardship and that softens their hearts. My understanding is that *amadlozi* choose the purest of souls and dwell in them, and queer people have pure souls. That's why we're chosen." To Sipho and Zamani, queerness confers a distinct set of experiences and thus a vantage point that *amadlozi* are uniquely placed to both notice and cherish.

Others suggested that *amadlozi* not only recognize and value queerness but also view queer subjectivities as having an affinity with those of *amadlozi*. This is because, as Mudiwa saw it, the subject positions and experiences of queer people

and *amadlozi* have certain commonalities. In Mudiwa's words, "Most *amadlozi* were alienated in some way during their lives. They were special, but they were outsiders too." Certain kinds of people become revered and wise ancestors, she explained, and those individuals are more likely to have experienced marginalization and alienation. At the same time, *amadlozi* are increasingly neglected or rejected by their living descendants who follow Christian injunctions to forego the rites and communicative practices that sustain them. Just as Mudiwa knew what it meant to experience social marginalization on account of her queerness, *amadlozi* likewise often found themselves neglected as a result of Christian dictates. As Mudiwa commented, "They understand our isolation and our exclusion. They seek people who understand loneliness as much as they do. I think they feel a kindredness with us, in that sense." Here, marginality offered a certain kind of power and critical purchase on the social world of the living, one shared by queer subjects and *amadlozi*.

The presence of *amadlozi* in the lives of young queer people in Bulawayo led some people to scrutinize narratives around both queerness and ancestors, and to examine their historical similarities. In Sipho's words, "When you look at it, we are actually dealing with a question of colonization. It was the white man that said the Black man is heathen and demonic. Not only did the white man take the land, but he also took the Black man's religion and spirituality, and clothed him in Christianity, so he would see his fellow people as nothing." Ayanda saw things similarly. "It was the same colonialism that brought the notion that ancestors are demons that convinced people being queer is Western," she said. The contemporary marginalization of queer subjects and ancestral spirits shared a common origin and required a similar critique. *Amadlozi* manifesting in the lives of their queer descendants could be read as a lesson from the past, a warning to correct an imbalance in relations among the living—in this case, an imbalance with its origins in the violences of colonization and histories of demonization, suppression, and marginalization. Through their ongoing explorations, young queer people in Bulawayo simultaneously troubled the notion that queerness was caused by ancestors and reframed how queerness was understood within ancestral epistemologies, representing it as always already there, valuable, and parallel to the experience of *amadlozi*.

GENERATIVE ATTACHMENTS

In contexts where Christian nationalists have framed homosexuality as a colonial import, scholars have sought out articulations of queer presence that predate colonization. Ultimately, these studies come up against the complexities

that all projects of queer and Black history-telling involve, particularly in relation to the violences, silences, and erasures of colonial archives (Arondekar 2009; Hartman 2008; Tinsley 2008). Recently, scholars have begun to frame the unknowability of the precolonial as a source of generativity, rather than a straightforward impasse. For Ana-Maurine Lara (2020), for instance, spiritual practices provide access to forms of relational and embodied knowledge that enable connections to Black worlds that predate Christian coloniality. For Hugo ka Canham (2023), queerness manifests through patterns of relationality and errantry that have defied colonial efforts to inhibit solidarity among Black people. In the context of contemporary Bulawayo, I suggest, past formations of intimacy and relationality are being recuperated to provide generative forms of queer attachment in the present that offer a vantage point on otherwise inaccessible pasts.

When examining shifting regimes of sexuality and selfhood over time, Eve Sedgwick (1990, 47) cautioned against thinking in terms of "the supersession of one model and the consequent withering away of another." Instead, Sedgwick encouraged emphasis on "the relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models" and the "performative space of contraction" that plural manifestations create. Sedgwick's perspective underlines that the presence of the LGBTQ framework doesn't have to preclude other ways of conceptualizing the self or of practicing intimacy. Varied topographies of experience and imagination relating to desire, intimacy, relationality, and selfhood endure alongside identitarian models of sexuality. Despite the suppression of relations between ancestral spirits and their descendants, they persist in plural, unrationalized forms and remain available for re-articulation. Pushed to the margins of public life in Bulawayo, they abide in the consulting rooms of *sangomas* and among elders who keep the "old ways." Moreover, structures of relationality between spirits and the living have what Omar Kasmani (2022, 2) terms "unstraight affordances." I suggest that in Bulawayo, these unstraight affordances can be read as queer potentialities that lie dormant in long-standing structures of intimacy and spiritual practice, ones that allow marginalized, subaltern, and minoritized subjects to orient themselves toward objects of desire sitting outside of hegemonic structures of intimacy and normativity.

I approach relations between *amadlozi* and living descendants as suppressed modes of relating that remain available for queer recuperation and reimagination. Isaki, the trans man who recalled a painful consultation with a *sangoma* initiated by his father, eventually found his way back to the grandfather spirit the *sangoma* had identified. For years, he'd remained dismissive of the notion. "I don't want

the gift!" he told me when we first met in 2017. "I'm already a nurse, in the healing industry—what do I need it for?" But a little under three years later, his attitude began to shift. We saw one another periodically and in early 2020 he asked to meet at Bar Taka. Isaki explained that his dreams had become more frequent and vivid, forcing him to pay attention to them. Every night he dreamt of himself in traditional attire, performing ceremonies in a river. "I even saw myself throwing those bones, *amathambo*," he said, referring to wooden blocks that are used as divination tools and are archetypal *sangoma* objects.

In light of this, I reminded Isaki of the time he had told me he didn't want the gift. "I remember that too," he responded. "But now I have to take it." Isaki explained that his dreams and ailments had become overwhelming and that the only thing making him feel at ease was fostering a connection to his spirits and performing the steps laid out in his dreams. Isaki pulled a small, yellow plastic pot out of his pocket with the word *Ntsu* written across the lid, the English translation—"snuff"—below. He took a small pinch of the gray powder it contained, lined it up along his thumb, and discretely inhaled. "It's why I'm craving snuff all the time," he said, gesturing to the pot. Gradually, Isaki began to have a sense of his spirits' personalities. He learned he'd been chosen by several *amadlozi*—not just a grandfather spirit but also three *gogos* and *abanzingele* (hunter spirits) too. Each of them was steadily revealing details of themselves to him, and his acts of care were strengthening their bond.

Many of my interlocutors who experienced *amadlozi* communicating with them worked to deepen these attachments. Mudiwa's *khulu* had first manifested in her dreams when she was nineteen in the form of a snake. After she met Sakhile in her late twenties and came to reconceptualize her *khulu*'s presence, she worked to deepen their bond and learn about the spirits that accompanied him—several grandmother spirits and mysterious *injuzi*, or water spirits. Each of these spirits had their own needs and proclivities. Mudiwa gathered insights into them through dreams, visions, and occasional consultations with *sangomas*, along with dozens of conversations with Sakhile and other friends. Yet her primary guide was her *khulu*, and almost every night she had dreams that provided details and clues about him. To deepen their relationship, she visited mountains and rivers, making offerings and taking snuff—which she craved because of his presence—in an effort to deepen their bond.

Eventually, Mudiwa felt him with her most of the time. How important her *khulu* had become to her was evident in his influence over her relationships with others. Sometimes she would learn he didn't like certain of her friends, and she would seek to distance herself from them. For Mudiwa, this proved

useful—*amadlozi* can see things that are hidden and are wiser than the living, so he was in a position to guide her away from those she shouldn't trust. At one point she dreamt that he didn't want her to be with a woman she'd recently begun to see romantically. Mudiwa waited some time to learn what he was trying to warn her of and eventually decided it was right to end the relationship—he had perceived their incompatibilities before she had. Ultimately, her *khulu* came to be one of the most central relationships in her life—an attachment that shaped and often came before relationships with family, friends, lovers, and acquaintances, enmeshed with a host of other spirits and living people.

Ties between *amadlozi* and young queer people offer a distinctive quality of relation. Scholars have long been drawn to the idiom of kinship to explore the kinds of relations and intimacies available to queer people, examining how queer subjects both draw on and trouble established norms and family-making (Borneman 1997; Weston 1991). Yet kinship makes for an ambiguous idiom that indexes both regimes of normalization and the affects and intensities inhabiting those structures (Ramberg 2024). While these affects can be channeled toward non-normative projects of kin-making, scholars across queer, Black, and Indigenous studies remain skeptical of kinship's uptake. This is in part because conventional anthropological representations have obscured more flexible idioms of relation like *ubuhlobo* and formed part of broader colonial structures that inflicted violence on Black and Indigenous modes of relating (Spillers 1987; TallBear 2018). Equally, given that marriage, reproduction, and binary expressions of gender have proved central to anthropological understandings of kinship, queer subjects have always implicitly been a problem (Freeman and Bradway 2022). In the words of Macharia (2019, 7), "I remain convinced that kinship refuses forms of intimate innovation."

To most of my interlocutors, *amadlozi* in an obvious sense already constitute family. At the same time, idioms of family are often invoked by those who seek to discipline and persecute queer subjects by narrowly defining "authentic" families in either their liberal or conservative guises (Mupotsa 2020). My emphasis moves away from the double bind of the language of kinship to focus on the generative forms of queer attachment that relations with *amadlozi* offer my friends in Bulawayo, and the subjectivities, affects, and experiences that emerge through these practices of relating. Relations with *amadlozi* offer a distinctive texture and quality of relation—a sense of being known and embraced in a particularly deep and full way. *Amadlozi* are able to perceive beyond the outwardly visible. They anticipate future iterations of the self, patterns of relationality, and contours of events. In this sense, they offer a quality of relation—a generative

attachment—that exceeds those typically imagined under the sign of kinship, extending to encompass unseen beings and reflecting the fluidity of *ubuhlobo*.

For Isaki, building relationships with *amadlozi* meant being known in a new way. "You know Sakhile?" Isaki asked me, speaking of the *sangoma* Mudiwa was close to. "She told me, 'When *amadlozi* see you are a good host, they all come,'" he recalled. "Maybe I'm a good host—I don't know! I don't see the goodness in me, but maybe they do." Ayanda echoed this sentiment. "Being a healer is a journey towards healing yourself," she told me, reversing the dynamic in which the *sangoma* provides healing to others. "For the first time I feel worthy," she said. "When you're chosen by *amadlozi*, they see all these things about you that you don't know about yourself. They don't ignore the parts that are damaged—they help to heal them." Sipho felt similarly, expressing the particular qualities of care and intimacy *amadlozi* offer. "They shield you with their love," he explained. "They guide you. They're harsh sometimes—like, 'You're not doing what we want.' But they will tell you directly. They're honest." For many, the objects they collected at their spirits' request—brass bangles and cloths and strings of fine beads and carved wooden bowls—allowed them to experience material intimacy with their spirits. When things proved difficult, Mudiwa told me, she would find her *khulu*'s most significant item—an *induku*, a staff delicately carved from jacaranda wood—bring it to her face and breathe in the scent of the wood. "It calms me," she said. "He knows I need him close. It's saved me many times."

Through their spiritual explorations, many of my interlocutors discovered that *amadlozi* perceive and value queer ways of being and offer generative forms of queer attachment. Ties between *amadlozi* and their mediums thus make it possible to move beyond the bind of conventional invocations of kinship by examining how historically suppressed relational dynamics—including those with spirits and the unseen—might have queer potentialities and be available for recuperation in the present. In the context of Zimbabwe, relations with *amadlozi* provide a sense of how queer presents might be augmented through engagements with past formations of intimacy, and how purportedly modern understandings of gender and sexuality might not straightforwardly foreclose engagements with the ancestral. In this sense, they demonstrate how the inaccessibility of precolonial pasts—at least via conventional archival methods—creates space for contemporary queer subjects to find in the realm of the unseen and the otherworldly fresh resources for the present. These rediscoveries and reimaginings in turn enable my interlocutors to articulate more penetrating critiques and, ultimately, refusals of the legacies of both coloniality and homophobic nationalism.

CONCLUSION

Among Zimbabwe's political and religious elite, queerness is frequently made the symbol of highly individuated forms of personhood, detached from—and a threat to—the stability of hegemonic narratives about culture, tradition, and religion. For some, this means that queer liberation entails a departure from pasts that ostensibly cannot accommodate queerness. Others imagine queer liberation to entail a return to supposedly authentic formations of precolonial intimacy. By embracing the presence of *amadlozi* in their lives, young queer people in Bulawayo refuse either conclusion by asserting enduring forms of queer presence and the intrinsic value of contemporary queer subjectivities. As my interlocutors learn about and cultivate relations with *amadlozi*, they challenge and ultimately reject colonial and postcolonial efforts to suppress both ancestors and queerness. In doing so, they disrupt notions of queerness as either alien to African culture or the manifestation of a spiritual presence in need of alteration. For those like Mudiwa, Isaki, Ayanda, and Sakhile, queerness is always already there and, moreover, especially valued by spirits uniquely placed to recognize it. At the same time, in the past they find forms and modes of critical traction on the present, in the process reviving and retelling histories suppressed by both colonization and contemporary Christian nationalism.

Ancestral pasts and the spirits that animate them have long been potent arenas for historical imagination and the reworking of social relations in Southern Africa, responding to and providing a critical vantage point on shifting contemporary realities. The spiritual explorations of my friends in Bulawayo complicate anthropological approaches that have taken spirit mediumship as a straightforwardly local or traditional site for the expression of queerness. While *amadlozi* are not queer in an identitarian sense, they are voices of the more-than, the beyond, the otherwise, and the unseen, and in this sense offer a queer vantage point that emerges from the past and orients to an always-in-motion present. My interlocutors draw on identitarian accounts of gender and sexuality and use them to articulate novel visions of the kinds of relations that might be generative to queer subjects in the contemporary moment. Their spiritual explorations underscore that to disrupt coloniality does not mean to return to pure, authentic, or static representations of the customary or the familial. Instead, embracing these generative and open-ended attachments works to reimagine modes of relating that coloniality sought to foreclose. In doing so, my interlocutors rearticulate how queerness inhabits ancestral epistemologies and demonstrate how long-standing Southern African intimate formations, suppressed yet enduring, become crucial and generative sites of queer spirituality and relationality in the present.

ABSTRACT

This article examines how young queer people in Zimbabwe rework understandings of the relationship between ancestors, spirit mediumship, and queer expressions of gender and sexuality. In Zimbabwe, many traditional practitioners argue that gender transgression and same-sex desires are caused by the presence of ancestral spirits known as amadlozi. Anthropologists have often identified spirit-mediumship practices such as these as local expressions of queerness. Young queer people in Zimbabwe view such explanations with skepticism and doubt, yet many experience amadlozi *communicating with them and in some cases cultivate deep and meaningful relationships with them. This article argues that engagements with ancestral spirits work to reimagine queerness within ancestral epistemologies and respond to colonial projects that have sought to demonize both ancestors and queerness. At the same time, it shows how young queer Zimbabweans' relationships with spirits articulate novel forms of intimate attachment that expand anthropological understandings of "queer kinship."* [ancestors; spirits; mediumship; queer; kinship; intimacy; Zimbabwe]

ISIFINQO

*Leyincwadi ihlaziya ukuthi intsha yabantu abathandana lobulili obufanayo eZimbabwe baguqula kanjani indlela okucatshangwa ngayo ngamadlozi, ukufikelwa kanye lobulili. EZimbabwe, abanengi abalandelana lamasiko baphikisa ngokuthi izinkanuko zobubili obufanayo lokungalandeli imikhuba yobulili evamileyo kubangelwa ngamadlozi. Abaphenyi bezamasiko bathi nxa abantu bekhuluma lamadlozi ngalendlela, kuyindlela yamasiko endawo yokutshengisa ukuthi umuntu ongowesilisa uthandana lowesilisa kumbe owesifazane uthandana lowesifazane. Intsha yabantu abathandana lobulili obufanayo eZimbabwe kayikholwa kakhulu ezichasisweni lezi, kodwa inengi liyake likhulumisane lamadlozi njalo abanye bakha ubudlelwano obujulileyo lawo. Leyincwadi iphikisa isithi imikhuba le iyaguqula indlela abantu abaqonda ngayo ukuthandana kwabantu bobulili obufanayo ezinkolweni zabokhokho, njalo iphikisana lembono yamakoloni eyayenza amadlozi labantu abathandana lobulili obufanayo babonakale njengababi. Leyi ncwadi iyaphinda ikhombise ukuthi ubudlelwano lamadlozi buvulela indlela entsha yokuzwisisa "iqueer kinship" ezifundweni ngezimpilo zabantu (*anthropology*).* [amadlozi; imimoya; ukufikelwa; umuntu ongahambelani lemikhuba yobulili evamileyo; ubuhlobo; ukusondelelana; iZimbabwe]

NOTES

Acknowledgments Most of all, I would like to the friends who appear in this article and have thought through questions of queerness, ancestors, and coloniality with me over the past decade, especially the person known as Mudiwa in these pages. Thanks also to Nkosi Siziba for assistance translating the abstract. For engaging with drafts of this article, I am deeply grateful to Jennifer Cole, Kathryn Takabvirwa, Susan Gal, Kris Trujillo, Kristen Schilt, Angie Heo, and Sondra Hausner. Nikita Simpson was an especially generous companion in thinking through the theoretical knots of this article. Writing partners Kelsey

Robbins, Harini Kumar, LaShaya Howie, Steven Schwartz, Agnes Mondragon, Ilqua Lutfi, Emma Gilheany, and James Wintrup all provided helpful feedback. Feedback provided by anonymous reviewers significantly shaped the article's development and I am very grateful for their time and suggestions. Funding for ethnographic fieldwork was provided by the University of Chicago Social Sciences Division and the UK-US Fulbright Commission, and I wrote it under the auspices of a Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship and Junior Research Fellowship at Pembroke College, University of Oxford.

1. All names are pseudonyms. Interviews were conducted in both Ndebele and English. Given the high levels of English fluency among people in Bulawayo, many interlocutors were more comfortable speaking with me in English.
2. When describing gender or sexual identity, I use the terms my interlocutors use for themselves.
3. I use *tradition* in the way it is used colloquially in Zimbabwe, which refers to things perceived to originate in the precolonial world.
4. The term *amadlozi* refers to the spirits of powerful ancestors, with gifts like healing, hunting, and rainmaking, who exist in the spirit realm alongside other ancestors known as *ukhokho*. Most literature on Zimbabwe uses the equivalent Shona term, *mhondoro*. The semantics of *amadlozi* differ slightly from those of *mhondoro*, reflecting influences from Nguni cultures to the south, as well as from Shona, Tonga, and Venda cosmologies.
5. I use the Ndebele terms *amadlozi* and *sangoma* (diviner) as a gloss for ancestral spirits and spirit mediums, respectively. In my usage, the term *sangoma* encompasses the related role of the *inyanga* (herbalist).
6. Following Sara Ahmed (2006), I use *queerness* to describe orientations away from the norm. Hugo ka Canham (2022) has argued that in this sense, queerness is intrinsically African—present in both precolonial life and colonial framings that figured Africans as "queerly oriented to normative codes of being." See also Zethu Matebeni, Surya Monro, and Vasu Reddy 2018.
7. I use the terms *epistemology* and *epistemological* as a shorthand to describe systems of knowledge and people's engagements with them, with the recognition that the language of Western philosophy carves up the world in ways that do not easily map onto African philosophies (Mudimbe 1988).
8. This research arose from conversations about the paucity of research on intersections between queer and religious life, specifically in relation to ancestral epistemologies. Alongside my research, I supported community-led research programs on the topic and received feedback on drafts of this work from friends in Bulawayo at various stages of its development.
9. Nguni is an umbrella term that refers to a group of related languages and cultures, including Ndebele, Zulu, Xhosa, and Swati.
10. Zimbabwe was colonized by the British South African Company in the 1890s and became the British colony of Southern Rhodesia in 1923. In 1965, the White Rhodesian minority unilaterally declared independence from Britain and created a segregated state that lasted until independence in 1980 (Mlambo 2014).
11. I described queer explorations of Christianity in a separate article (Taylor-Seymour forthcoming).
12. The circle of interlocutors in this article reflects the distinct historical experience of the generation of queer people in Bulawayo who are mostly under forty. Older queer people often came of age before these organizations appeared, are less likely to identify via the LGBTQ framework, and have largely devised modes of living apart from them. For these reasons, the experiences of older queer people in Bulawayo are harder for me to depict with subtlety.

REFERENCES

Aarmo, Margrete
1999 "How Homosexuality Became 'Un-African': The Case of Zimbabwe." In *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices across Cultures*, edited by E. Blackwood and S. E. Wieringa, 255–80. New York: Columbia University Press.

Adogame, Afe, Ezra Chitando, and Bolaji Bateye, eds.
2016 *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa: Emerging Trends, Indigenous Spirituality, and the Interface with Other World Religions.* London: Routledge.

Ahmed, Sara
2006 *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Amadiume, Ifi
1987 *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books.

Arondekar, Anjali R.
2009 *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Boellstorff, Tom
2004 "The Emergence of Political Homophobia in Indonesia: Masculinity and National Belonging." *Ethnos* 69, no. 4: 465–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/0014184042000302308

Borneman, John
1997 "Caring and Being Cared For: Displacing Marriage, Kinship, Gender and Sexuality." *International Social Science Journal* 49, no. 154: 573–84. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.1997.tb00046.x

Canham, Hugo ka
2022 "The Water Oriented Away from Normativity." *Africa Is a Country*, January 27.
2023 *Riotous Deathscapes*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Charumbira, Ruramisai
2013 "Gender, Nehanda, and the Myth of Nationhood in the Making of Zimbabwe." In *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*, edited by Gérard Bouchard, 206–22. New York: Routledge.

Chidester, David
1996 *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Chitando, Ezra, and Pauline Mateveke
2017 "Africanizing the Discourse on Homosexuality: Challenges and Prospects." *Critical African Studies* 9, no. 1: 124–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2017.1285243

Cruz-Malavé, Arnaldo, and Martin F. Manalansan IV
2002 *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. New York: New York University Press.

Epprecht, Marc
2004 *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*. 2nd edition. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Feeley-Harnik, Gillian
1984 "The Political Economy of Death: Communication and Change in Malagasy Colonial History." *American Ethnologist* 11, no. 1: 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1984.11.1.02a00010

Fiereck, Kirk, Neville Hoad, and Danai S. Mupotsa
2020 "A Queering-to-Come." *GLQ* 26, no. 3: 363–76. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-8311743

Freeman, Elizabeth, and Tyler Bradway
2022 *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Hartman, Saidiya
2008 "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2: 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1
Hoad, Neville
2007 *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
2016 "Queer Customs against the Law." *Research in African Literatures* 47, no. 2: 1–19. https://doi.org/10.2979/reseafrilite.47.2.02
Jeater, Diana
1993 *Marriage, Perversion, and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia, 1894–1930*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kasmani, Omar
2022 *Queer Companions: Religion, Public Intimacy, and Saintly Affects in Pakistan*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
Lan, David
1985 *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*. London: James Currey.
Lara, Ana-Maurine
2020 *Queer Freedom: Black Sovereignty*. New York: SUNY Press.
Livermon, Xavier
2015 "Usable Traditions: Creating Sexual Autonomy in Postapartheid South Africa." *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 1: 14–41. https://doi.org/10.1353/fem.2015.0005
Macharia, Keguro
2019 *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press.
Massad, Joseph A.
2007 *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Matebeni, Zethu, Surya Monro, and Vasu Reddy
2018 *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism*. London: Routledge.
Mavhunga, Clapperton Chakanetsa
2014 *Transient Workspaces: Technologies of Everyday Innovation in Zimbabwe*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
McCulloch, Jock
2000 *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902–1935*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Meyer, Birgit
1998 "'Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 3: 316–49. https://doi.org/10.2307/1581573
1999 *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Mkhize, Nokulinda
2022 *Ancestory: Ancient Lessons for Modern Life*. Self-Published.
Mlambo, Alois S.
2014 *A History of Zimbabwe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Morgan, Ruth, and Graeme Reid
2003 "'I've Got Two Men and One Woman': Ancestors, Sexuality, and Identity among Same-Sex Identified Women Traditional Healers in South Africa." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 5, no. 5: 375–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050110000 64146
Morgan, Ruth, and Saskia Wieringa
2005 *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men, and Ancestral Wives: Female Same-Sex Practices in Africa*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.
Morris, Rosalind
2000 *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Mediums in Northern Thailand*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Mudimbe, V. Y.
1988 *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Muñoz, José Esteban
2009 *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.
Mupotsa, Danai S.
2020 "Conjugality." *GLQ* 26, no. 3: 377–403. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-8311758
Murray, Stephen O., and Will Roscoe, eds.
1998 *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies in African Homosexualities*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
Ndjio, Basile
2016 "The Nation and Its Undesirable Subjects: Homosexuality, Citizenship, and the Gay 'Other' in Cameroon." In *The Culturalization of Citizenship: Belonging and Polarization in a Globalizing World*, edited by Jan Willem Duyvendak, Peter Geschiere, and Evelien Tonkens, 115–36. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Ngubane, Harriet
1977 *Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice*. London: Academic Press.
Nkabinde, Nkunzi Zandile
2008 *Black Bull, Ancestors, and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma*. Auckland Park, South Africa: Fanele.
Nyathi, Pathisa
2007 *Traditional Ceremonies of Amandebele*. Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press.
Nyeck, S. N.
2020 "Poetics: Queer Recesses of the Heart and the Spirit of Intimacy within the Africana Household." *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 26, no. 2: 91–110. https://doi.org/10.14426/ajgr.v26i1.63
Nzegwu, Nkiru Uwechia
2006 *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
Oyěwùmí, Oyèrónké
1997 *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Palmer, Seth
2021 "Divine Monarchy, Spirited Sovereignties, and the Timely Malagasy MSM Medium-Activist Subject." *GLQ* 27, no. 1: 61–84. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-8776862
Pinthongvijayakul, Visisya
2019 "Performing Alterity of Desire: Bodiliness and Sexuality in Spirit Mediumship in Northeast Thailand." *American Anthropologist* 121, no. 1: 101–12. https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13160
Qambela, Gcobani
2017 "Usable Traditions: The Queering of Xhosa Men's Initiation." *Mail & Guardian* (blog), October 20.
Radcliffe-Brown, A. R.
1950 *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Ramberg, Lucinda
2024 "Kinship and Kinmaking Otherwise." In *Unsettling Queer Anthropology: Foundations, Reorientations, and Departures*, edited by Margot Weiss, 99–115. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
Ranger, Terence
1967 *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–97: A Study in African Resistance*. London: Heinemann.

Rao, Rahul
2020 *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Reddy, Gayatri
2005 *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky
1990 *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Spillers, Hortense J.
1987 "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2: 64–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/464747
Stobie, Cheryl
2011 "'He Uses My Body': Female Traditional Healers, Male Ancestors, and Transgender in South Africa." *African Identities* 9, no. 2: 149–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2011.556792
Strongman, Roberto
2002 "Syncretic Religion and Dissident Sexualities." In *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*, edited by Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, 176–94. New York: New York University Press.
TallBear, Kim
2018 "Making Love and Relations beyond Settler Sex and Family." In *Making Kin Not Population*, edited by Adele E. Clarke and Donna Haraway, 145–64. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
Tallie, T. J.
2019 *Queering Colonial Natal: Indigeneity and the Violence of Belonging in Southern Africa*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Taylor-Seymour, Raffaella
Forthcoming "Dreaming of Snakes: Relations and Queerness in the Study of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.
Tinsley, Omise'eke Natasha
2008 "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage." *GLQ* 14, no. 2–3: 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2007-030
Van Klinken, Adriaan, and Ebenezer Obadare
2018 "Christianity, Sexuality, and Citizenship in Africa: Critical Intersections." *Citizenship Studies* 22, no. 6: 557–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2018.1494900
Van Klinken, Adriaan, and Kwame Edwin Otu
2017 "Ancestors, Embodiment and Sexual Desire: Wild Religion and the Body in the Story of a South African Lesbian Sangoma." *Body and Religion* 1, no. 1: 70–87. https://doi.org/10.1558/bar.33129
Wekker, Gloria
2006 *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Weston, Kath
1991 *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press.