

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/3151634> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Hooghordel, G.J.

**Title:** Reeds in the wind of change: Zulu *sangomas* in transition

**Issue date:** 2021-03-30

Reeds in the wind of change



# **Reeds in the wind of change** Zulu sangomas in transition

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van  
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,  
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,  
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties  
te verdedigen op dinsdag 30 maart 2021  
klokke 13:45 uur

door

Gerda Jeanette Hooghordel

geboren te Ermelo in 1962

**Promotores:** Prof. dr. R.A. van Dijk  
Prof. dr. W.E.A. van Beek

**Promotiecommissie:** Prof. dr. M.J. Spierenburg  
Prof. dr. K. Stroeken (Universiteit Gent)  
Dr. J.A.M.M. Jansen

Photo front cover: healing session in progress

In memory of  
Bongani Ntshangase



## **Preface**

This thesis investigates the changing healing practice of Zulu sangomas in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. It seeks to detect where transformations in healing practices originate and why adaptations are implemented.

Several of my fields of interest converge in this study; (indigenous) religion, health, psychology and philosophy. Although not all these spheres surface equally, they are part of my mode of thought and my way of observing people and society. Since I was a teenager I have been fascinated by the phenomenon of religion. Not in the doctrinal ways but in the way people believe, in relation to their character and their attitudes towards social issues; the (discipline of) psychology of religion. In the 1990s during my theological studies, I was introduced to African indigenous religions and how these are intertwined in daily life; I was captivated. My major thesis however dealt with the views on illness and affliction in orthodox Christianity and of western 'holistic healers' (Hooghordel, 1996). In this research both those themes converge.

In Zulu landscape, reed is a frequently encountered phenomenon; near shores of lakes, in swamps etcetera. It is there, firmly rooted in the bottom of the river, whatever storm may pass. Reed is an important feature in Zulu culture as well. The Zulu Creation myth relates of Mvelinqangi creating people out of the reeds in a Northern valley (Knappert, 1977; Schipper, 1999). Makhosi Mbuyisa provided me with the thesis' title, by using the metaphor of 'reeds bending in the wind' for sangomas' lives. While they are exposed to all kinds of dynamics and influences, sangomas execute their practices in an experiential, pliable way. Their healing practice is firmly embedded in Zulu indigenous religion and well-rooted in society. Enduring the winds of change in contemporary South Africa.

As most Zulu sangomas are women, in general descriptions I refer to the sangoma with 'she' and, for clarity reasons, to the patient with 'he'. All pictures are taken and published with permission and are part of the author's private collection, unless otherwise indicated in the caption.

The bottlenecks that I describe in this study are genuine dilemmas for (associations of) indigenous healers, the choices they make will possibly have their effects for the next decades. I hope my analysis will be valuable in the light of the westernisation of South African legislation and society at large.





# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	vii
<b>Contents</b>	ix
<b>List of Figures</b>	xiii
<b>1 The origin. Introduction and Theory</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Four snapshots</b>	1
In the rural area	1
In a township south of Durban	2
Where the river meets the sea	3
In a township north of Durban	4
<b>1.2 Research questions</b>	5
1.2.1 Definition of terms and perspectives	10
‘Traditional’ healing	10
The diviner, a sangoma	11
African cosmology	11
<b>1.3 Methodology and Operationalisation</b>	13
Women and men	13
1.3.1 Internal dynamics: The healing practice	14
The genealogical sampling method	15
1.3.2 Internal dynamics: Knowledge transfer during training	15
<b>1.4 Interpretative Theories: Modes of Religiosity</b>	17
1.4.1 An interpretative theory of religious knowledge transfer	17
1.4.2 An interpretative theory of tradition	18
1.4.3 External dynamics: Mimetic Desire theory; medicine and religion	20
1.4.4 Interpreting historical, social, and political developments	22
<b>1.5 Relevance</b>	25
<b>1.6 Trajectory</b>	26
<b>2 Methodology. Field study and Method</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2.1 Method and design</b>	30
2.1.1 Genealogical sampling	30
2.1.2 Interpretative research design	31

<b>2.2</b>	<b>Field study, first part</b>	32
	2.2.1 Realisation	34
	Topic list	34
	The sangomas	35
	<i>The eldest</i>	35
	<i>The middle generation</i>	36
	<i>The youngest</i>	37
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Field study, second part</b>	40
	2.3.1 Healing sessions	41
	Mks Gasas	41
	Mks Mkhize	41
	Mks Gasas again	42
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Reflection and basis for choices</b>	44
	2.4.1 Ethics ad privacy	44
	Personal data	44
	Other data	45
	2.4.2 Key informant	45
	2.4.3 A polished reality?	46
	2.4.4 Field study in three periods	47
	2.4.5 After field study	48
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Concluding remarks</b>	50
<b>3</b>	<b>Go with the ancestors' flow. Healing</b>	51
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Mr Mbele's healing, part one</b>	54
	3.1.1 In the rondavel	54
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Healing process</b>	58
	3.2.1 Communication with the ancestors	58
	3.2.2 The diagnosis	63
	Throwing bones	63
	Example of basket divination	64
	Using essence	67
	Example of using essence	69
	The whistling sounds	73
	3.2.3 The closing	74
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Mr Mbele's healing, part two</b>	75
	3.3.1 At the compound	75
	3.3.2 At the beach	79
	3.3.3 Like the granny said	83

3.3.4	At Mr Mbele's house	85
3.3.5	Back to the granny's words	88
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Concluding remarks</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Indigenous knowledge transfer in sangomas' training</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Mks Gasa: School, differences, and transformations</b>	<b>94</b>
4.1.1	Method of knowledge transfer	98
4.1.2	<i>Muthi</i> knowledge	99
	Secrecy	100
	<i>Muthi</i> school	101
	<i>Muthi</i> trade	103
4.1.3	'Perpetual private revelation'	106
	Mks Gasa, perpetual private revelation	107
4.1.4	Diagnosis and healing identity	108
	Mks Gasa, diagnosis and healing identity	109
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Analysis: How to train a healer?</b>	<b>112</b>
4.2.1	Programme and practice	112
4.2.2	Imagistic and 'tradition'	112
4.2.3	Power and knowledge	113
4.2.4	Indigenous	114
<b>4.3</b>	<b>From networks to associations</b>	<b>116</b>
4.3.1	In KwaZulu Natal	116
4.3.2	Organisation	119
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Concluding remarks</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>A treatment one believes in</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Health and illness</b>	<b>128</b>
5.1.1	Patients' perspective	129
5.1.2	Professionals' perspectives on the systems	130
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Analysis: Why (not) cooperate?</b>	<b>133</b>
5.2.1	Cooperation	135
5.2.2	Training	138
5.2.3	Model and mimesis	139
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Religion and healing</b>	<b>141</b>
5.3.1	Christian churches and healing	143
5.3.2	Churches and indigenous healing	145

	Mainline churches	145
	African Independent Churches	145
	Recent developments	148
	5.3.3 Bongani Ntshangase, churches	148
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Concluding remarks</b>	150
<b>6</b>	<b>Indigenous healing in contemporary society</b>	153
	Bongani Ntshangase, a present-day sangoma	155
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Historical dynamics</b>	158
	6.1.1 Apartheid era: Health, rich and poor	158
	Bongani Ntshangase, education	160
	6.1.2 Apartheid era: Health, rural and urban	161
	6.1.3 After apartheid, attempt to legislate	165
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Social dynamics</b>	168
	6.2.1 Accommodations to a changing society	168
	Bongani Ntshangase, changing society	169
	6.2.2 Stand against a changing society	172
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Analysis: Why (not) accommodate?</b>	179
	6.3.1 Revaluation and re-invention	179
	6.3.2 Glocalisation	182
<b>6.4</b>	<b>Political dynamics</b>	185
	Bongani Ntshangase, association	186
	6.4.1 Legislation and association	187
	Registration, a quality mark?	187
	Knowledge standardisation	190
	6.4.2 The 'calling' a business?	191
	Mks Gasa: Legislation in the individual healing practice	192
<b>6.5</b>	<b>Concluding remarks</b>	196
<b>7</b>	<b>Reeds in the wind of change. Final reflections</b>	199
	Overview	201
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Reflections on internal dynamics</b>	202
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Reflections on external dynamics</b>	205
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Methodological analytical perspectives</b>	210

References	213
Appendix A   Zulu words	219
Appendix B   Manual for interviews, in English and Zulu	220
Summary	223
Samenvatting	231
Curriculum Vitae	240
Acknowledgements	241

## **List of Figures**

Front page	Healing session in progress	
Figure 1.1	Mks Bhengu (m), her pupil (l) and Bongani in front of the consulting room, 2012	2
Figure 1.2	Mks Bhengu in her pre-school/orphanage 2014	2
Figure 1.3	Offerings at display	2
Figure 1.4	Healing session in the river	3
Figure 1.5	Throwing bones	5
Figure 3.1	Mks Gasa's consulting room, interior	54
Figure 3.2	Mks Mbuyisa burning essence	59
Figure 3.3	Stirring the <i>muthi</i>	60
Figure 3.4	Basket divination by Mks Mkhize for Zanimvula	65
Figure 3.5	Healing session Dladla family, notice the white chicken	70
Figure 3.6	Offerings for the ancestors	72
Figure 3.7	Mr Mbele greeting the ancestors	76
Figure 3.8	Mr Mbele dressed up for the session and Bongani	76
Figure 3.9	Mrs Mbele (centre) between Mks Ntombi and Mks Dudu (l)	77
Figure 3.10	Start of the healing session	77
Figure 3.11	In a procession to the car, Mks Zinhle leading	78
Figure 3.12	<i>Amathwasa</i> dressed up for the occasion	79
Figure 3.13	Map KwaZulu Natal	77
Figure 3.14	Help to light the <i>imphepo</i> in spite of the fierce wind blowing	81
Figure 3.15	Mr Mbele eats the foam	82
Figure 3.16	Again stirring the <i>muthi</i>	83
Figure 3.17	In Mr Mbele's bedroom	85
Figure 3.18	Mr Mbele and his mother in the bedroom	87
Figure 3.19	Sangoma dance	88
Figure 4.1	Mks Zinhle in the consulting room	94
Figure 4.2	Mks Zinhle (l), Mks Gasa (c), Mks Dudu (r)	95
Figure 4.3	Mks Zinhle, Bongani and <i>amathwasa</i>	95

Figure 4.4	Mks Mkhize's <i>muthi</i> book	100
Figure 4.5	Baba Cele's school	102
Figure 4.6	Baba Cele's pharmacy exterior,	103
Figure 4.7	and interior	103
Figure 4.8	Cubicle interior	104
Figure 4.9	<i>Muthi</i> market in Durban City Centre	105
Figure 4.10	Animal parts for sale	105
Figure 4.11	Kneeling while singing	109
Figure 4.12	Kneeling while preparing the dance at Mr Mbele's	109
Figure 4.13	The executive committee (right) listens to one of the members' contribution	120
Figure 4.14	Bongani explains the committee's endorsement of this research	120
Figure 4.15	Mks Mbuyisa and the teenagers wearing beadwork	122
Figure 4.16	Membership booklet THO	122
Figure 5.1	Cooperation THPs and Edendale hospital in 2004, poster at Mks Bhengu's	136
Figure 5.2	Room at Mks Bhengu's where medical doctors can see patients, 2014	136
Figure 5.3	Referral form	137
Figure 5.4	Mks Mgadi's church	148
Figure 5.5	Interfaith Symposium in The Legislature in Pietermaritzburg	149
Figure 6.1	Palm reader advertising	163
Figure 6.2	Advertising enlargement cream and pills	163
Figure 6.3	Gandalf has a remedy for everything	163
Figure 6.4	Mks Ngidi's consulting room	169
Figure 6.5	Bongani always carried his <i>muthi</i> bag	170
Figure 6.6	Marikana	177
Figure 6.7	Mks Ngidi shows the skin of her <i>inyamazane</i> , a python	188
Figure 6.8	(left to right) Mks Ntombi and Mks Gasa watch Mr Mbele while <i>thwasa</i> Mngadi is securing the leopard skin, a <i>thwasa</i> fetches items for the next healing session and a <i>thwasa</i> cleans up the offerings' display of the former healing session	193
Figure 7.1	'Cattle' (money) for the ancestors next to the <i>ishobas</i>	199
Figure 7.2	Mks Zinhle plays the drums, <i>amathwasa</i> dance	200