

Imagining a Queer and Black Institution

**The Muholi
Institute
Residents**

Preface: Imagining A Queer and Black Institution

“Instant coffee is the hallmark of current rhetoric. But we do have time. We’d better take the time to fashion revolutionary selves, revolutionary lives, revolutionary relationships. Mouths don’t win the war. It don’t even win the people. Neither does haste, urgency, and stretch-out-now insistence. Not all speed is movement” – Toni Cade Bambara.

Revolutions somehow always seem to start at living room tables. On our first day in South Africa, we sat at a wooden round one, facing noon, water, land, a buzzing Cape Town skyline under construction and this question: “Look around you, this is black and queer at its finest. What does it mean to step foot in this fullness?” It was a question that we were posed by one of the guests on our first day of residency. As residents based in Amsterdam, respectively born and partly raised in Kigali (Rwanda) and Kampala (Uganda), it was a reckoning that we had to face. And essentially a questioning of how we sustain our queer existence in the world beyond that room.

The conversation inside that living room brought the intimacy of geography and location into question. It demanded from us a queerness at the political and a personal level, queerness in relation to the world and in relation to kinship. When those around us think about queerness in the same breath as they think of vulgarity, we must ask why there are no ways for them to interact with it both casually and more vastly.

There are a lot of things that the conversation could have done, but what made the conversation truly transformative is that it took place in a room full of queer women and black non-binary people sitting together and thinking with their positionality of being queer within Africa. And before any conversation ensued, there was already this energy, a comfortability, a radical black and unapologetically queer space we entered, that is otherwise not accessible to us in the everyday.

At the scale of the individual – the organism – this queerness we found is mutability: it is the power of transformation; of shapeshifting, fluency, and the freedom to move from form to form; of code-switching, mimicry, flamboyance, delight; of subtlety, grace, and the embrace of fluidity. It plays in contrast to rigidity, permanence, and stasis; to one way of being. It is a metamorphosis and a constant becoming.

At the scale of the collective – the ecosystem – this queerness we found is mutualism: it is symbiotic, in-contact, relational; it is a space of eccentric economies and mutual support; of found families and utopian dreams; of care and connection and the net benefits species gift to one another. It is a world shaped by cooperation. On a rapidly changing planet, queer mutability and mutualism can guide us toward adaptation and survival.

How does posing the question of queerness on these two levels then bring institutional space into practice?

Because it poses a ‘what if’:

“What if I have access to these black queer women on a daily basis? What if this space was repeated?”

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Content of this publication

8 **ENABLING TRANS(GRESSION): Tools for Black Queer Gathering** by **Siv Greyson**

Siv is a black agender-fluid trans dyke Artist, Activist, and Academic. They are most interested in the liberatory capacities of utopias, collective dreaming/resisting/being, anarchy, and surviving capitalism with some of their sanity intact. When they grow up, they want to be decolonized and Free.

12 **RE . MEMBER US: Infra structuring at the Intersection of Black and Queer** by **Musoke Nalwoga**

Musoke was born and raised in Uganda in 1994. She is currently working in Amsterdam as a curator and researcher with a focus on contemporary art. Musoke is the founding director of Motormond Amsterdam, a new art gallery which aims to give a much-needed update to the idea of the 'white cube'. In her position as researcher, she has contributed to the curatorial programs of OSCAM, Fashion For Good, Metro 54, Sonsbeeck20 -24, The Cobra Museum of Modern Art, ParkHuis De Zwijger and Framer Framed. She has also taken on a lecturing position at Sandberg Institute offering an inter-curricular program Making the Overground Underground. Musoke questions how artists and curators in the diaspora represent and reproduce the global South.

16 **All my favorite uncles have a favorite dictator: Exile as a black queer institution in five acts** by **Munganyende**

Munganyende is an author, publisher and performance artist born in Kigali, in 1993. Her practice centers around new modes of knowledge production for digital native audiences. Munganyende teaches Beyoncéology at ArtEZ University of the Arts. Her think pieces on popular culture are regularly revered in national media. She is a recipient of the 2020 UNESCO city of literature CCS Crone and has performed for notable Dutch cultural institutions in correspondence to the likes of Prof. Dr. Angela Davis, Dr. Gloria Wekker and Dr. Brittney Cooper. In 2022 Munganyende was portrayed by Iris Kensmil as part of her series on historic and contemporary voices of gender emancipation "Some of my Souls". Through a world of words Munganyende explores the multiplicity of African girlhood and expansiveness from a migrant daughter perspective. Munganyende's debut novel will be published by Pluim in Amsterdam.

Content of this publication (cont'd.)

20 **QUEER BLACK ECOLOGIES: Instituting Afrocentrism** by **Christie van Zyl**

Christie Van Zyl is a published written and spoken word poet, social entrepreneur, and sangoma (traditional/spiritual healer). Her works speak to inclusivity, diversity and transformation in the light of intersectional & plural identities. Christie is currently pursuing her SAM Diploma in *Healing Science* at the Mhlabuhlangene School of African Medicine. She is also an Indigenous Wellness Consultant at the University of Cape Town encouraging the inclusion of African Spirituality into UCT's Wellness offering aligned with the mental health policies of the institution.

Christie's most recent work is on a public art heritage project titled 'Whose Heritage Matters', hosted by Greatmore Studios and the University of Cape Town's African Centre for Cities, commenting on tangible and intangible heritages in creating inclusive cities. She also recently appeared at the Gothenburg Book Fair in September 2020 in the 'Bodies Under Siege' poetry and jazz production protesting against hate crimes and gender-based violence, realized by the Hear My Voice poetry organisation. Christie recently partook in the Cape Town leg of Power Talks SA 2022, speaking on the erasure of Indigenous Wellness Systems in Urban settings. She is also part of the current WeARE Climate Justice Campaign, with grant funding from Creative Development and Africa No Filter. Christie participated in the Right to Speak 'Poetry Passport' Residency hosted by Hear My Voice and the Belgium Embassy. She has also been featured in the Right to Speak Digital Poets Catalog, as well as the Right to Speak Anthology for 2022, both published by UKZN Press.

24 **LEBO AND I NEED NOT FIT IN SHOES TOO SMALL** by **Lebo Diverse Mashifane**

Lebo Diverse Mashifane is a multidisciplinary artist, performer and filmmaker. As the director of LM Diverse – a production company for creative entrepreneurs, they create a platform that bridges the gap between creative/cultural and corporate/commercial industries. They recently published 'Pieces of Expressions', an anthology which is a conversation with the universe and a journey for seven years. Lebo is the founder of SE7EN27, an international collaboration art brand. Lebo has served as a youth developer and facilitator of creative writing and photography. Lebo is a school of thought – a teacher of a black queer institute. In 2021, Lebo exhibited with Manchester International Festival (MIF21) 'Poet Slash Artist'. The exhibition went on tour to Denmark, with SE7EN27 being currently exhibited around Europe in public spaces around Manchester and Denmark. In 2020 when the world was in lockdown, 'Pieces of Expressions' was acquired by Buchhandlung Walther König GmbH & Co.KG and effectively traveled through space and time. In this contribution, Lebo fuses prose and poetry to explore what dynamics of the world we live in normalize extreme circumstances for the human soul to live under - and what it would look like to move beyond them. Lebo argues that the same black queer passion that has been demonised and labeled as, inhuman, unfitting, unrighteous and immoral, has been effectively instituted by the likes of Dr. Bev Ditsie and Professor Sir Muholi by expressing their black queer passions openly and by challenging the idea that black queer being is finite.

ENABLING TRANS(GRESSION): Tools for Black Queer Gathering

by Siv Greyson

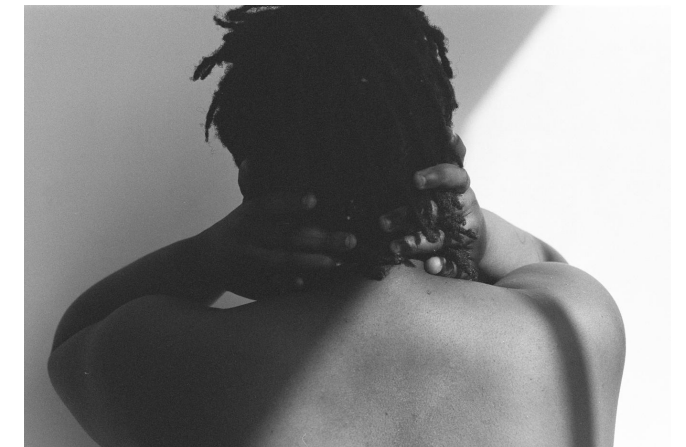
tw / transphobia, gender-based violence

“Trans bodies” (“black bodies” and, the lesser favoured cousin, “femme bodies”) is a heavily debated term in the social justice online echo chambers in which I find relative digital safety. The argument is that it’s dehumanising to speak of *bodies* as lifeless objects that are labelled and sorted into social categories. *People* are complex and unpredictable, *people* have history and agency...*people* have power. It’s unsurprising, then, that white supremacy and patriarchy speak of bodies – bodies that can be surveilled, monitored, controlled, and manipulated; bodies that can be incarcerated, legislated, employed, and buried.

A body is hunched over a laptop screen, barely visible in its silhouette. The only other light, flickering in the corner of the room, is coming from a tall white candle forced into the narrow neck of an empty wine bottle. Floating next to the candle are two deflating number-shaped balloons: a five and a two; barely visible but a fire hazard, nonetheless. Load-shedding is the new potholes; the lights going off doesn’t really elicit the same anger anymore. Scrolling through LinkedIn, the nameless figure occasionally opens job advertisements in new tabs, promising to look at them later. The body has been looking for a job for two months to no avail, still, it considers itself lucky. As much as it’s sick of eating Indomie noodles (bought at the corner shop that often runs out the only paper worth rolling joints with – brown, pure hemp, the long one, with tips), being unemployed is better than being dead, which is what most black transgender people are by the age of 25. With a beep, the microwave in the other room comes to life as Eskom graciously

ends load-shedding early. After rolling its desk chair over to the candlelit corner of its bedroom, the body hesitates before blowing it out. In the harshness of the overhead light, the body looks frail: stained oversized jeans are draping off its hips; nails bitten to the cuticles; dreadlocks in surprisingly good shape. A scar cuts its chest in half. There’s hair growing on its back.

“Being unemployed is better than being dead, right?” the body ponders, out loud to no one in particular, feeling like a younger version of itself that was too naïve to reckon with the sacrifices a person must make to continue living.



A body is sitting, stiff and still, on a bench across from a church that dropped anchor somewhere in suburban Rondebosch hundreds of years prior. The body watches – in a way that goes unnoticed by the arriving families. Church is an event furnished with colour coordinated outfits, care-full-y plastic-wrapped hand-held Bibles, and low-heeled dress shoes. If the building wasn’t from the colonial era, it would look less like the Feather Awards. If there wasn’t an eerie air of presence (something one could easily interpret as holiness, spirit, or magic) hovering above the congregants, the scene would feel less like a séance. Could Holy Water cleanse a generational trauma wound? Can structural violence be exorcised? The body thinks about bread and wine; flesh and blood. About cannibalism. Reaching into its pocket, it drafts a tweet. Within minutes, the tweet is shared publicly:

@trans.gressive.body, “maybe if i was religious, things would be easier? like, if i believed that some Greater-Than-Billionaires deity was looking out for me instead of just like having to build a utopian vision of the future that makes all the suffering worth it?”

Perhaps, thinks the body, this is what heaven is; a utopian vision of the future hinged on the belief of euphoria being attainable...but only as long as you behave. Bread and wine; flesh and blood. Bored of detached religious theorising, the body slides its phone away; continues walking home; as yet unable to remember where home is.



The body is sitting on the floor with its back slouching against a wall made of sand, stone, and cow dung. Rondavels are less mystical when one sheds any and all private-school non sensibilities. The body is surrounded by bodies similar and dissimilar to itself; flat-chested and hairy. In all honesty, the body is drunk – it has been drinking umqombothi since early morning. Such is the norm for umgidi. Semi-lucid, the body gazes at the blurry site of another body painted white and wrapped in blankets; being congratulated

for finally “becoming a man”. The body, allowed to sit in the boma, wonders whether any body ever really “becomes a woman”, let alone gets celebrated for it. Slightly less cynical in its drunken state, the body applauds its origins for recognising the ways in which men are made, not born. Tipping over into its old ways, the body laughs at the thought of there being no mechanism, no ritual, to “make a woman” – that this happened, maybe, the first time the body was asked to make tea for the visitors or upon washing the body’s first dish. If flesh-and-blood history was anything to go by, a body “becomes a woman” the moment it is hit. The body hopes Mom is not yet a woman. It thinks, fondly, of throwing its own umgidi on the anniversary of their top surgery. Or perhaps, the body thinks, it would be more appropriate to host umgidi on the anniversary of its first testosterone injection. The body senses it looks for validation in the wrong places. After all, without the day-to-day lessons on how to enact misogyny, the body may never be understood as anything other than “woman”. “Home,” the body thinks, “is where I’m understood and seen”.



The body’s anxiety only kicks in as it lies on the operating table. While joking with the anesthesiologist moments before about the lasting effects of THC, the body momentarily forgot the decision that had been made. Anxiously, in the coldness of fluorescent lighting and latex gloves, the body shivers with anticipation – never *quite* trusting western medicine, unless it has to – but since sangomas are not quite able to perform mastectomies, there the body is...lying, like inkomo exheliweyo, at the altar of biological essentialism and pathology. Chronologically, the ‘decision’ to remove the body’s breasts exists long before the anxiety; long before the surgery is scheduled, long before the money is crowdfunded, long before ‘coming out’, long before the language to name exists. Some things the body just *knows*. Shortly after the operation, all the body feels is pain. Trading dysphoria for pain may seem senseless to a person, but it makes sense to the body.

“Sometimes death happens before life,” the body thinks, “but this isn’t death”. Once it gets a job, the body decides, it will tattoo its chest with a singular word: home. No utopia, but enough.

At birth, a newborn is closely examined by a medical professional who will then exclaim (either) “it’s a girl!” or “it’s a boy!”, depending on visible external genitalia. In the case where the visible external genitalia is “ambiguous” (aka. non-normative), a medical professional and the parent(s)/ guardian(s) of the newborn are able to decide the sex of the newborn. In extreme cases, the genitalia of the newborn is medically altered to fit within the confines of either “female” or “male”. This innocuous occasion determines how the child will be raised. Decades of feminist work attests to the hierarchical ways in which newborns assigned female at birth (called “girls”, later “women”) and newborns assigned male at birth (called “boys”, “later men”) are raised. To tritely summarise a plethora of queer

theory: a human being is larger than the sum of its biological parts. To tritely summarise a nexus of trans experience: the body is yours to modify, embellish, and embody at will. To the institutional forces of Capitalism, Religion, Culture, Medicine, Gender (all always already underpinned by Whiteness and Patriarchy), this kind of sovereignty is destabilising. Given the ways in which all forms of oppression are various limbs of one very fucking hungry monster, being more than the sum of your biological parts *and* daring to alter the composition (or naming and meaning-making) of said biological parts threatens the very heart of institutional oppression. The boundary is clear; to *trans* gender – to take ownership of the body, to build a home out of skin and muscle – transgresses the boundary. To *trans* gender is to defame a money-making machine; sacred in its ownership by God, suspended in webs of meaning in an otherwise meaningless world, and understood only by the sharp eye of a diagnostic lens. *Trans* is to gender what *anarchy* is to institutional bodily dispossession. And it is this very same anarchy, the anarchy of claiming ontological ownership of oneself, that holds liberatory possibilities.

RE . MEMBER US: Infra structuring at the Intersection of Black and Queer

by Musoke Nalwoga

INSTITUTING QUEERNESS:
mining virality to stage queerness

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Virality burns bright and then fizzles out. Virality makes for over exposure which in turn leads to attention fatigue around any given topic. I tend to burn bright and to fizzle into velvet black. I know about the next big thing, I know about rapid change, I know about attention and erasure. I know of women who see me intimately, and I know when their attention is fatigued.

I know of a small curatorial platform that sometimes burns bright and sets a small corridor of Amsterdam's underground art scene on fire. A black queer fem led institution that too deals with fizzling out. It *set up* an offering of the bare minimum of cultural programming half of the year and then it jumped into its performative glory at the end of the year. At the end of the year when all the funding institutions needed their receipts, the curatorial platform set itself on fire. Temporarily. To hack the cis white funding infrastructures. To finance yet another year of sustaining the intersection of black and queer.

I am a 28 year old queer black woman. Born, bred and buttered in Kampala. Currently re.fusing a curatorial practice in Amstersdam's cruel hands. I am writing from 29 years post apartheid Cape Town and I am saying that institutions at the intersection of Black and queer *have to* fizzle out. The 360 degrees of a life at the intersection of black and queer is usually too far removed even from the margins to perform the kind of repetition that is necessary to build an institution over a long enough period of time. People at this intersection are often fizzling out. Burning. Out.

Black being is to be repeatedly erased, to have your personhood removed. To be queer is to both resist the norm and to be removed from the norm. To remedy this erasure I have decided to think along the lines of virality. Moments in the collective memory that brought large amounts of attention to one point. Events of a large number of people paying attention to the same image/video/song/topic. These situations are temporary, although, due their incitement of mob attention around a focused point, they cross the threshold into collective cultural memory, making them permanent (memorable / remember-able).

To go viral, is to spread or become popular very quickly through communication from one person to another, especially on the internet. What I am suggesting here is that, to use virality to institute the intersections of black and queer requires me to get ready and stay ready. To create parasitic attention relationships with viral moments in pop culture that capture large amounts of attention from the public at large. Even more interesting would be the ability to tap so intensively into a given ecosystem that I can create queer moments of virality from inside the outside of the institution.

Such a viral moment happened when Amsterdam based queer icon JeanPaul attended Paris fashion week in a tightly fitted striped dress. The image of Paris fashion week is usually dominated by skinny cis white bodies. JeanPaul's image announces and archives the memorable facts that there are queer bodies actively participating in the Paris Fashion Week industry. An interesting image on the international scale, but locally, in Amsterdam, this was a moment both the inside and the outside of the Amsterdam queer scene were under the spell of the same image.



JeanPaul Paula for Pride Photo 2022. Courtesy of JeanPaul Paula

Another example that is worth mentioning is an image of JeanPaul posing next to his father in a bikini. JeanPaul is part of the Amsterdam ecosystem and from within it, he tapped into its desires so effectively that he orchestrated an instance of mob attention around a focused point.



JeanPaul Paula at JeanPaul Gaultier by Glenn Martens Photographed by Cris Vidal. Courtesy of Cris Vidal

An image of a black gay man, posing with his father. A familiar tie that most black gay men in Amsterdam don't have. This image then serves to institute the fact that there are black families of queer children that never sent their kids away for being gay and most importantly that there are families that have reunited with their estranged queer children.

Instituting matters. The word institute breaks down into *in* and *stitutuere* giving rise to a meaning that can be summarized as *towards setup*. To institute the intersection of black and queer, I am going to have to move *towards setup*; towards organisation for a particular purpose. To institute also calls upon ideas of establishment, in the material form, as in buildings and also in the immaterial form, which here, I will define as a summation of self affirming principles that are repeatedly pushed into praxis by a group of black and queer sovereigns. Staying with JeanPaul's images, we can view them as instances of identity affirming performances at the intersection of black and queer.

To stay within the difficulty of these linguistics, I would like to zoom in on the notion of *setup*. To set up implies creating infrastructures that allow for a given goal to be reached. The goal of this particular infrustructure would be to reach a place that productively re-produces and prioritises the intersection of black and queer. This would involve the repeated performance of black and queer intersection affirming acts over a *steady stretch of time*. A succesful iteration of such an institution would in essence be a performative infrastructure that survives happenstances and situationships and leaps into space pressing itself into variously cultured times and establishing itself as a norm.

To stand between a door and a latch is

queer nature. A story of slammed hard doors and loveless returns. A sun for a daughter and a daughter for a dike. A multiplicity, a fluidity and a transience of being that is going to have to break out of the infrastructures that move towards setting it up.

Precisely because of its fluidity, I draw upon Vinson Cunningham's understanding of blackness.*Black* as a shorthand for African-descended people everywhere. Although, I am in the dark, muddy waters of an institution at the intersection of black and queer, so I am going to have to move from classification to intimate and experiential re-definition.

So now it feels to me that Frank B. Wilderson III's definition of black as always coterminous with slaveness is warranted. Wilderson III posits that the being of blackness is always in the process of breaking free, always committing disruptions to inch away from the perpetual state of social death; the black person is always a slave and, therefore, a perpetual corpse, buried beneath the world and stinking it up.

On walking the thin line between gender and race without any intention to allude to trans-racialism, queer being and black being are both in the state of breaking free. How does one set up an infrastructure that has to perpetually be broken out of? If being black is in a constant state of erasure from the norm and queerness resists the norm, then how do we institute this intersection?

What I am proposing here is a hack, a scam really. To use virality to help black and queer institutions to survive past a phase of fizzling out. At the intersection of black and queer institutions there is a disappearing. I am proposing that through virality, we can create a formula where these institutions can be remembered outside of themselves. That the various impactful events within

a viral queer moment are so effectively remembered. So that every time a black queer person goes viral they become a performance of the queer institution.

A series of both real and foe identity affirming performances at the intersection of black and queer are set into motion through both active contribution by real participation of black and queer sovereigns. An example of this is for example, the image of JeanPaul is a depiction of an event that actually took place. But what is faux is the type of repeated performance the memory of this viral image carries out. In our collective memory JeanPaul is always present at Paris Fashion week even when he fizzles out sometimes. This mechanism would create for a permanent presence of queer affirming performances in our collective memory. Our histories would be written in ways that are entangled with others specific to queers of colors.

All my favorite uncles have a favorite dictator: Exile as a black queer institution in five acts

by Munganyende

1/

First we buried the television in grandmother's backyard. The one that daddy bought right before returning to Kigali from uburayi, where he had been postgraduating in electromechanics at the University of Mannheim.

"Abazungu barubatse sha!" In between bits of Ousmane Sembène and songs of Miriam Makeba he would try and make his voice rise above the speaker's decibels as he half boasted at the people in the way you can only half boast about things that do not naturally belong to you. He plugged the metallic gray imagebox to a stereo installation inside the makeshift bar-dancery-filmhouse-debatecenter- he had opened with his older brother upon his return. They called the new bar 'Peace Dove', ignoring the warnings of their elders. "Natwe, we must build too!" as if forming an embankment against the treacherous violence that was about to accumulate around them.

Daddy was a brand new returnee. And between brand new daddy and the brand new television we still do not know what beamed more of pride – it even dazzled his older brother. There was something about the air of returning that made you stubbornly optimistic about the malleability of the state of the world you had left behind. Returning to the manyfold wrinkles of elderly parents, returnees carried 'worldly' diplomas underarm together with a misguided sense of belonging to these diplomas more than to the faces that had first held them up to the sky.

We put the television inside a plastic bag. The hole we dug had to be deep enough for a dead body to lie at rest. Then, we took a mattress, a spoon, two pans, three tablespoons, a blanket burned in two separate places by a flatiron, our white Suzuki jeep, kilometers from grandmother's house, and our feet. I do not know how long we stayed in that camp, only that we lay on

a damp floor, sometimes the three of us, other times sharing the mattress with other couples with other children, sometimes sharing the mattress with fear. I do not know how long we stayed. Long enough for the insects in the ground to start eating away at the plastic and eventually start tearing down at the device we had buried back home.

2/

The year is 1989, Brenda Fassie is sitting inside a hired limousine with her bridesmaid Yvonne Chaka Chaka, chatting before the lavish wedding ceremony erupts with Nhlanhla Mbambo. Both women are famously captured by Mbuzeni Zulu. In this moment, we see Brenda Fassie mischievously winking into the camera. At a first glance, it is unclear to the viewer who exactly Fassie, rumored to be bisexual, has promised her love to. Almost a decade after this image appears, in 1997, the first recorded queer wedding took place in Meadowlands, Soweto. Two queer people take part in a seemingly first rogue celebration of the institution of marriage in South Africa. A news report from that day reads: "In the week that Dullah Omar rejected decriminalising relationships between gay men, Ferial Haffajee attended a street wedding. The lobola had been paid. The blue and white striped tent was up. And as good old tradition dictates, the bride was three hours late. But when she emerged from her Meadowlands home in Soweto last Saturday, she was worth the wait."

More than 5000 km away, a young queer Rwandan girl dances – I dance – to the melody of Vulindlela: make way, make way.

Keepsake is like an insect. Sometimes it gives you butterflies, other times it stings like a wasp. It is the stuff that a life in exile is made of: the core foundation of exile's institution. I keepsake those images: this news.

3 /

All my favorite uncles have a favorite dictator. That is, at least, something I was convinced of as a child of decolonisation, democracy and first time voting; “freeborn” as the adults around us gushed. We were children, school smart and gleaming with achievement, mixed in hands with Vaseline and warm water – and adults – who are uncles with big fat newborn babies they left in the slot of corrugated iron with a torn fabric curtain as a front door to live out the dreams of a free nation, instead. Elsewhere in the world, they become the heroes of a girl’s life that takes place in a bustling political living room. They were brand new black men from brand new black nations living in exile. Brand new, here, means pants with legs so wide you could hide an illegal army underneath. Brand new, here, means mini skirts and knee boots and gently kissing your teeth as a potential lover walks by in their brand new freedom skin. Brand new, here, means a hydrated afro parted on the right side and a brand new university degree funded by the Soviets; often, the first in the family. The Cold War was being fought on foreign soils and under strange circumstances and the brand new parents of freedom kids were eager to take advantage of it. All my favorite uncles tell me to love in silence, but to never do so for suffering and to try and not confuse the two.

4 /

There were many of us: Ernestine, Yvette, Gentil, Thierry, Evelyne, Angelique, Fabrice, Big Arsene, Kay, Aimé, Sam, Little Arsene and me. Grace and Felicite lived in Malawi. Officially we came from four different households, but in the summers we formed one together. I mostly moved on the edge of the pack, drying my tears, keeping my mouth shut. I would listen to my cousins’ stories about the past and wish I could fling myself into the near future,

and, in doing so, become retroactively older in the past, so that I too might inhabit their same, sharp memories. The past was the only thing we had at that time that was home. We lived in Cyangugu, Kigali, Dar, Nairobi, Kampala, Lomé, Verviers, Brussels, Terneuzen, Eindhoven, finally Zaventem and Schiphol. We filled the blanks that we had not spent living together with the stories we told each other.

“At home nobody is waiting for you anymore”, I say to Ebony Janice in the sankofa restaurant in Accra. We are both back on the continent where our roots lie for the first time in a long time. It is a vow of mourning, we experience our journey back from the perspective of alienation, she as a descendant and American and I as a first generation migrant who left for Europe with her parents during childhood. We’re both here for answers that we won’t find here. Yet the broadly smiling service that deftly switches between table, order and lafa would have you believe otherwise. And because they speak lafa, a high English accent acquired through contact with people who think they are high English, we are as much of an attraction to them as they always were to our BBC and TV5Monde 8 o’clock news. I sigh, thinking of the exhaustion of being desired. Not the desire of the one who left, but the story of the one who stayed and still had to learn to speak high English from the television. The restaurant is located in the ambassadors hotel on independence avenue. Everything around us shines. The floor, the high walls, the sleekly carved marble reception, the glass buffet warmers, the continental breakfast in the glass buffet warmers, the sweat on our foreheads, the coming home we are expecting. What I mean by no one waiting for us at home is the longing for home that feeds you in the diaspora, only to come home to a place, in a continent that would have long since moved on without you. Babies were born after you and laundry was hung out every day, men in suits with

eyes behind brown-tinted prescription sunglasses were busted, and new elections took place. Your cousins went to school and got married, people loved and your grandparents died and naively enough you expected it all to be different, did you think they would all remain as young in the pictures and as familiar as in your memories, I say, did you think your absence would be felt, says EJ. Homegoing is a sand castle and it’s too fragile for us to play in after building it.

5 /

Keepsake is the critical role of picking a date in space and time that produces identities, praxis, communities, subjectivities, and embodiments¹. When I think about black queerness in space and time, I naturally think about its location and how that location can come to define its history and collective imaginary. Considering the positionality of exile as black queer geography is the large well from which this collective imaginary pulls. It is this collective imaginary that reminds us to rethink migration, fugitiveness and exile through the queer body.

Now, from displacement, I reflect often on the queer contagiousness of these moments of keepsake and of how historic and culture-specific happenings cross-borderally organise the ecosystems that are the driving forces behind black queer institutions. When we pick a date in space and time within the black atlantic, we learn from those who have successfully attempted at building a black queer institution.

When I imagine a black queer institution, I imagine it to be a black nation, the one that as a child I would find myself in every other

weekend, at wedding ceremonies held in exile. Not the 19th-century European phenomenon as we have come to understand it through the violent history of nation state politics, but “orbiting African-ness, not as a category of exclusion, but as fluid and open, its significance deriving from meanings that mutate, and definitions that carry the codes of their own revisions and expansions.”²

When in exile we center blackness and queerness as a long memory to return to. A keepsake of the deepest kind.

QUEER BLACK ECOLOGIES: Instituting Afrocentrism

by Christie van Zyl

What does it look like to build institutions for Africans, by Africans, in Africa?

I started this Afrocentrism journey in 2018 after completing my first bout of spiritual training, as a sangoma. Now a licensed health practitioner, recognised as an African doctor/Inyanga and Diviner/ Sangoma, with the Mhlabuhlangene School of African Medicine¹. I am currently pursuing their S.A.M (South African Medical) Diploma in Healing Science, Facilitation and Psychology.

In 2011 when I started experiencing psychospiritual² stress because of an ancestral calling, I was not able to write exams, and was academically excluded from the University of Cape Town. I did not know what was wrong with me because there was barely any knowledge around me pertaining to it. When I found out that I did in fact have a spiritual calling, I spent most of my time trying to understand how and if at all that narrative fits in at this institution.

We sit in South Africa, still needing to sensitise our academic and corporate institutions on the importance of the connection between spiritual health, its connection to mental wellness, and their effects on our productivity. These are institutional and structural changes that should have been made when democracy became a reality for our country. Yet we are still actively trying to gain restitution after the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1957. An act that stripped us South Africans of the right to openly practise our spiritual, cultural, and traditional customs in South Africa. *The Union Gazette Extraordinary* of 1957³, listed that the Witchcraft Act subjected us to whippings, fines, and death if we practised our cultural customs such as spiritual rites

and rituals that contribute to our holistic wellnesses. This has led to us inheriting this social erasure as a cultural construct, we are needing to reconcile our values against the voices of our education, whilst fighting for the space to safely do so.

The other greatest downfall we are experiencing in Africa is that we are not documenting and archiving the methodologies used to build institutions created by our own, for our own, in our own homelands. I can envision the use of Queer Theory as a modality of disruption and interactive archive, intentionally for inclusivity and representation. We are experiencing a post-colonial setting where we, mostly young BIPOC humans, struggle to find a safe space to engage our Indigenous Wellness Systems without the laws of urban setting calling our practices savage, noise pollution, fire hazards, and invasive. We are a young nation that is still struggling to relate to the practices of their predecessors, in search of our historical identities in our daily lives.

In all of my practices as a sangoma, artist, and activist. I develop works that are questioning the lack of space that is given to certain aspects of my identity. I speak vastly on the effects of the periodic social climate changes that consistently affect our abilities to be completely comfortable and vulnerable within our identities. This is the reality of our spiritual landscape as native South Africans.

This Afrocentrism enlightenment that I am experiencing is influenced by the school of thought that centres African ecological knowledge systems. Led by thought leaders such as Dr. Khanyisile Litchfield-Tshabalala, who mentions creating an African

1 – Mhlabuhlangene School of African Medicine: <https://www.mhlabuhlangene.org/>

2 – Psychospiritual Integration: <https://www.cfccmarietta.com/post/what-is-psychospiritual-integration#:~:text=Psychospiritual%20Integration%20is%20the%20process,not%20full%20developed%20or%20healed.>

3 – Witchcraft Suppression Act: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201505/act-3-1957.pdf

4 – #Unpopular Opinion: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2oHYYP8LIE>

Psychology for the building of institutions. She alludes to Afrocentrism always locating Africa as the centre⁴ for all that we do when developing our own institutions. So, in 2018, when I was invited by the University of Cape Town's Office for Inclusivity and Change (OIC) to introduce traditional healing to the institution, it was the perfect opportunity to try changing the policies from the inside.

We have been raised to shrink the relevance of our customs in context to our surroundings, a perpetuation of systematic erasure. We are a society that is yet to address the effects of the damage of bills like the Witchcraft Act on our psychosocial spheres. We are attempting to normalise engaging our indigenous wellness capacitor toolsets, as a means of wellness based on our own belief systems.

In 2018, the University of Cape Town changed their mental health policy to be more socially inclusive, especially as a global institution that prides itself in transformation as a fundamental institutional value (UCT Mental Health Task Team, 2018). Students who subscribe to Indigenous Wellness systems felt unsupported as the institution had taken to a referral process, where students would have to seek external assistance on their own. The SWS provides students basic access to doctors, mental health specialists and general health care professionals, but no basic offering for those patients needing access to the indigenous wellness methods to which they subscribe.

The case of the University was a lack of recognition of the impact of plural and intersectional identities on our daily lives, and how that contributes to our holistic wellness. An oversight that the institution is now looking to correct through asset based community development. This oversight is called the School Ethos gap, a term coined

by the Cohesion Collective; an organisation that specialises in

providing training for the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity challenges that schools face. "This is the gap between what the school says they value on paper and the behaviour that is actually valued in the real world".

It has taken me working with UCT for 4 years for them to officially offer me a contract as a traditional health practitioner for SWS, on an ad-hoc basis. It is unsettling how long it has taken to convince them of a need for this kind of transformation. For example: the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) in Durban has had a traditional healer as part of their wellness offering since 2008. The traditional healer is a member of staff, as the institution is aware that a large demographic of the institution needs this access as a basic form of self-care.

This is a step in the right direction in decolonising our education system and part of the reclamation of our cultures. Indigenous healing is rife within the communities students come from and it is convenient to them to receive such assistance on campus. It saves them time and money to return home for healing. After consultation they can still attend their lectures, he concludes.
- Professor Sihawukele Ngubane, UKZN, 2020

Introducing traditional healing as an offering of the wellness service started out with conducting a meeting with UCT's wardens, department heads, OIC officials, student reps, as well as Student Wellness Service (SWS) staff. This meeting was intended for engaging the upper management of the institution which influences the policy structures of UCT. In this meeting, I had to address the social rites, rituals and cultural ceremonies that affect our psychosocial and holistic states of being.

The outcome of addressing the shortcomings of the institution's policies

was a government official admitting to the fact that they were struggling with capacity to give licensing to traditional healers, which gives traditional health practitioners recognition by the Department of Health,. UCT was then advised by Fhatuwani Bruce Mbedzi (Director: Traditional Medicine), to accept letters from traditional healers that are not in possession of a formal practitioner's licence until the government advises otherwise.

The University also hosts an event called 'Wellness Week', which takes place twice a year. I brought more traditional healers to UCT campuses so that students can see that the institution is aware of the shortage of representation for stakeholders that subscribe to indigenous wellness systems. Students would query spiritual alternatives that they could practise because the institution has rules that consider our wellness practices as noise pollution, fire hazards and invasion of other stakeholders' belief systems. The more the institution realised that more students are needing space to engage their belief systems, the more that wardens, student leaders, SWS social workers, doctors and nurses were pushing for space for it to exist within the institution's policies.

My favourite part of the journey was involving the stakeholders of this offering, which are the students. I engaged the Student Representative Council (SRC) to include me in Student Parliament, which approves student societies that exist as forms of the social representation of different social groups of the institution. Having the movement run by stakeholders that benefit from it, will ensure that students are no longer isolated in their navigation of the institution when needing academic concessions due to an imbalance in their wellness options at the institution. A sense of extended community automatically creates a safe space for the navigation of our belief systems within an institution that is

still learning how to include our voice in its expansion.

If we are documenting and archiving the process of how we are disrupting social settings for expansion of space, we will continue to have blueprints that are speaking to how we navigate institutions when we think about disrupting them from the inside. For the sake of feeling safe and represented within the moral fibre of the institution. This becomes the manner in which we get to actively archive our ways of being, and how we then get to influence the foundational structuring of institutions that no longer alienate us.

LEBO AND I NEED NOT FIT IN SHOES TOO SMALL

by Lebo Diverse Mashifane

It's Diverse
It's diverse
It's identity
It's reality
It's us

The cosmic shift has opened for anything
to happen and there is the human race
of reckoning

If only you knew
If only

If only you knew
What your condemnation is doing to me
I mean who made you judge of character
anyway
As if my existence was ever reason enough
for you to hate
I only have love to give
And maybe we should all give us some love

I mean my life, let me tell you the reality of my
queer life
Firstly I respect women and appreciate
them so much
As much as I could be gender non-conforming
Oh I love women and complement them all
the time. Jesus, what would the world be
without women?
Damn it, I don't even want to think about it
Mother
mother nature

That created you
Created me too
In the spectrum of light
I don't need to conform to norms of one shade
I am plenty
I am Diverse
I am colorful
I am bright
And I need not fit in shoes too small for my
being
And certainly don't belong in your shallow
shadow
Shame on you for condemning my world
It seems you're losing yours

Come again
Come back

To actualisation that LOVE is a beautiful
language and we all speak it
know it

Queer as commodity
It's global market baby
It's exquisite gender
It's gender dynamics
It's androgynous

Hello I'm already part of this anthology
It's waking up to a beautiful reality
That a collective of likelihood
could
Bring reality to a black queer Institute
A seed that is yet to tell tree years in time
to come
Voices of black queer schools of thought
Because that's who we are
Defining
Deconstructing
Decolonizing
Re-imaging
Our identity

We are strange
We are beautiful
We are free

What is
What is institution
Black Queer Institution
When as an artist
The art space can be anti queer
Can you believe that
Hala if you know homophobic artists
Art space can be anti black too
Open doors for more black queer creatives
Literally the revolution will be revealed
It is conversations with the inner child
It is conversations with the many selves
They them all exist here
within
They are plenty
They are any gender any age
Dancing freely without sabotage
Can you feel in-between the
message

They are colourful and colour shades
They wear no facades
Their words are sharp as blades

It's love
It's intimacy
It's feelings described
It's emotions articulated
It's pure love
It's free gender love



This image stems the foundation of this publication

The black queer institution opposes the current systems of institutions that are immensely patriarchal and that compromise personal well-being. We have evolved into beings that are sensitive to their state of mind, body, heart and soul. We are conscious of our mental health, spiritual selves, we listen to our bodies and know what work environments make us happy and productive. This is all possible with a black queer institution as diverse as human kind that embraces elements that could differ from being to being. It's time we create our desired working and living modes and environments. It's possible to

live a purposeful life, doing what you love and having your passion sustaining you. We can do away with these notions and narratives that have been drummed into us for so long that we no longer have a clear sense of self. We are constantly unlearning and re-writing the aspects of genuine living.

When we speak of queer institutions, it goes beyond people of a queer sexual orientation. We are addressing the do's and don'ts that have labeled us as misfits for doing what sits just right in us even though it contrasts with practiced norms. Norms of what is gender and how it is to behave, norms of what sets different classes of people – keeping one superior; another inferior. With all the multiplicities of knowledge and practice that exist and are fitting for humankind, to label any as inferior! This says a lot about how we can still stretch our minds and allow our hearts to feel love without deprivation.

Nowadays, being black, female and queer is like a combination from hell. According to who's pettiness did we all fall victim to this identity crisis? So my life as a black queer being assigned female at birth has to be decreased and compressed into a curse, regardless of my capabilities and the right to live? I am capable of loving, providing solutions, and living a meaningful life. But because of my skin color, my assigned gender and my sexual orientation I have to be reduced to scum? As if I don't have a heart? As if I don't breathe air and bleed red blood? But when I have to pay bills, my money is just as valid as any other, irrespective of race, gender and whether heteronormative. What if I don't identify with normal? Is that only acceptable if you are Einstein or Elon? Am I allowed to voice my disapproval of a patriarchal system that has oppressed people and their identity? It's amazing what institutions are doing to us. Dr Beverly Palesa Ditsie, has tirelessly served as an activist for gay and lesbian rights and has, through the years, witnessed the evolution of queer identity. Dr Ditsie has

gone as far as leading a radio slot to educate about gender non conforming pronouns.

We cater for our black and queer selves that have been silenced and condemned. Our elders were once free and one with nature; over time, generations became slaves to white patriarchy. Now generations have evolved to rainbow nations, conflicts and relationships of different lineages. Where there is still resistance and repentance, new resolutions are in place. We are multicultural, multi-layered and we are still becoming – constantly to ourselves and to the world around us. Queer institutions become part of the eco-system for queer people in the workplace, creating an industry of environments for queer beings – THE QUEER-LOGY

Imagine a world where gender and sexuality are not questioned. Where the work environment does not have to be daunting to mental health due to high levels of stress just to get by and by. A world where you can do what makes you happy and live a meaningful life.



Best friends for 20 years getting to collaborate for the first time through this publication

My name is woman
My name is woman who loves women
I am created in the image of human
Seek I not in the hells nor heavens
for I exist
only in the midst

of the haves and the haven'ts
of the world
To define me, love is the word
For all I ever practice is to love
and need to be loved
Not to be abused, extorted or raped

Today I lay in bed
drowning in tears of extortion
What happened to the concern of my liberation?
Today I lay in a hospital bed
my body aches from being abused
What happened to allowing me to explain
instead of being wrongfully accused?
Today I lay in a coffin, dead
being raped
I could no longer tolerate

I have been raped for being a woman
I have been raped in "correction" of loving a woman
I have been raped over and over again
by so many men
one at a time
and many a time!
I have been killed and dumped
in trash cans, toilets, open fields, you name it

I have been buried with no justice served
a case trial that comes to no conclusion
My name is woman
I am created in the image of human
Do not even try
to diverge my mind
from the truth it seeks
for itself it speaks
The only war I know is to protect
my loved ones and those you neglect
Why do you feel the sudden urge
to engage me in your violent war?
I wish not to know nor
practice; this skill I was not naturally given
How is your sin deserving to be forgiven?
Why deem it fit to prove your manhood
upon me?
Don't you know and trust your value
without enforcing it on me?

My name is woman who loves women
 I am created in the image of human
 I am capable of bearing children
 as I am of loving my own caliber
 My soft skin is not for your rough hands
 My beautiful body is not for your sexual trends
 My healthy heart is not for you to hate
 My lady lover is not for you to bait
 My heart and hands are to love her
 My body and belly are to feel her
 My face and feet are to stand for her
 My mouth and mind are to save her
 If you too
 were to
 focus on she
 who loves thee
 you would be able to embrace
 the blessing in your embrace!

* This is dedicated to the women that
 carry us, cry for us, care for us
 depend on us, defend us, die for us.
 LOVE, PEACE & HAPPINESS to you.
 Stay beautiful, brave and blessed!!!¹



When we begin to wash our skin
 with intensely hot water
 With the intention to penetrate deep through
 our blood, our veins, through our souls
 Just to wash off the
 sins, sorrows, sadness and stupidity
 of the day
 till our skin changes colour from burgundy,
 mahogany
 We still can't give in
 as we are driven
 by powers of good and evil conflicts

Salt gushes in a liquid form, acidifying the
 hot water
 but it still feels cold
 Cold from the very depth of our hearts feel
 empty
 Surrounded by Antarctic cold
 that is not affected by global warming
 Warning
 Temperature rising in our heads
 khanda shisa - Grandpa just lost its magic
 It can't numb this pain

In such dark days, sunlight is missing
 in a form of warmth, light and soap
 Bare, sesepa sa 'o tlhapa se fedile

You intoxicate our minds in the name of
 "brainwash"
 Screwing us over, backwards, sideways
 forward we go
 for as long as we follow your dirty lead
 Drowning us in dirty waters
 we've become helpless
 How do you intend to cleanse us of such
 experience
 These waters run deeper, beyond skin
 They are engraved in our visions, in our
 nightmares
 In this lifetime our souls are soiled
 and reek
 ka'bane, sesepa sa 'o tlhapa se fedile

When you left and never returning
 The first few days are toxic without you
 The first few months made me realise that
 I can't stop loving you
 The first few years proved that
 I cannot forget you
 Tell me, how do I get rid of you
 the way you did of me

The love that dies with my dependence
 on you
 The love that buries my innocence
 I can recall your caress
 I still remember the taste of your kiss
 your breath, your skin
 It won't wash off because
 sesepa sa 'o tlhapa se fedile

For we are gods
 ruling our heaven and hell on earth
 We watch them separate God from self
 and call it religion
 Obeying their sins creators' laws
 and deem their own customs ungodly
 Do they not know who brought religion
 upon them
 Don't they realise the constant slavery of
 manipulation
 Can't they see how they are set to be
 divided
 despising due to dominance of destruction
 They say God is love
 yet love for a home gender is a sin
 Believing in
 a male figure that has long hair and wears
 a robe
 They say they have fear that we'll go to hell
 Yet the same book of scriptures
 that speaks of heaven and hell says "fear not"
 They cry tears of terror that our "free spirits"
 need cleansing
 Mara, sesepa sa 'o tlhapa se fedile
 sesepa sa 'o tlhapa se fedile
 Insipho yoku hlamba iphelile
 sesepa sa 'o tlhapa se fedile²

1 – My name is woman (from the book Pieces of Expressions pg 19 -22)

2 – Sesepa sa 'o tlhapa (from the book Pieces of Expressions pg 25-28)

Sesepa sa 'o tlhapa se fedile means Soap is finished - there's no soap to wash off things experienced

Imagining a Black and Queer Institute

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