

Interrogating conceptions of manhood, sexuality and cultural identity

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ABSTRACT

Inxeba revived debates on *ulwaluko* and its attendant social discourses in South Africa. Elided by these debates, which saw the film censored from public view by the Film and Publication Board of South Africa, were formulations of ‘Manhood’ which we maintain are rooted in culture, tradition and custom; formulations that frame homosexuality as abject in our context. Through delineating Manhood from manhood proper, we argue that *Inxeba* reveals the nexus between Manhood, policed sexualities and cultural identity. In detailing the status of manhood proper, we critically unpack masculinity and challenge the ‘*factual*’ position of Manhood. The problematics which arise out of Manhood are informed by a (mis) conceptualised notion of this identity as stable and unchanging, creating dichotomous bifurcations of what constitutes being a man; a framework that is depicted and contested by the narrative of the film. Using feminist theory to interrogate culture, custom and tradition and its imposed silences on feminised bodies in contemporary South Africa, we explore how *Inxeba* subverts and contests Manhood through a propositioning of manhood proper.

Keywords: *Inxeba* (Tregove 2017); cultural masculinities; homophobia, ‘Manhood’, violence.

Introduction

We find ourselves, at the writing of this paper defined as a queer Black man and a Black woman respectively – definitions that are ascribed to us by social categories, and that necessitate a declaration of our intentions in the writing of this paper. We

come to the writing of this paper spurred by the public debate that contests definitions of manhood – contestations that find their genesis in the screening of *Inxeba* in South African cinemas in 2018. Owing to these contestations, we conceptualise manhood¹ as a discursive tool – marred by power dynamics and challenged meanings – owing to our location, which situates us in the philosophical discipline along with public definitions that are constantly shifting in how the concept is understood and applied in public discourse. Our objective thus is to attempt an understanding of the moral panic that characterised the public debate that ensued from the screening of the film. Ours is not to offer definitive prescriptions, as that would be a betrayal of our disciplinary allegiance; rather, we are concerned with deepening our and the reader’s understanding of why *Inxeba* was seen through the lens of social, moral and cultural transgressions which resulted in the film being – briefly – banned from cinemas. This ban was characteristic of prescriptive positions which define the social, political and economic conditions of possibility that permit one mode of life, while denigrating another. The moral panic, which characterised the screening of the film, underscores how we define manhood proper and situates our use and analysis of homophobic discourse in South Africa. We define the concept as action-as-legislation, which transgresses existing social norms in order to constitute new possibilities of being (such as argued by Arendt, 1994). The denigration of one mode of life is further linked to the moral panic that characterised the screening of the film. In an attempt to uphold a *factual, fixed* conception of Manhood, culture, custom and tradition framed *Inxeba* and its attendant aesthetic as demeaning the custom of *ulwaluko*. In this narrative, the proponents of “culture” who wanted to silence, and even expunge, the film failed to realise how the concerted efforts at silencing the film were themselves a manifest expression of the erasures, modes of silencing and violences perpetuated against feminised bodies.

We suggest therefore, that from a philosophical interpretation of these conditions of possibility – what is required is an exercise into deepening understandings to subsequently expand interpretation. The denigration of a mode life defined as “other” is rooted in the South African context and, for the purposes of our analysis, in colonialism(s) that infantilise Black masculinities – a point which complicates unilateral readings of masculinity as violence, and to which we will return. Framing a discussion on masculinities from a philosophical predisposition foregrounds our aim of clarifying the status of manhood proper,² necessitating the question ‘what is the [social] obligation of [men] if manhood is an essential element of being?’ (Louw 2012:181). Louw’s (2012) question catalyses the notion of action-as-legislation, elevating manhood proper to the position of a functionary of the social and its attendant obligations. These obligations signify an alignment of aesthetics with the ethical which denotes a relational life that is non-violent towards an/the *Other* (Cornell 1995:78). This clarification contributes to

our understanding of the moral panic which characterised the screening of *Inxeba* in South African cinemas.

In proffering a suggestion on the status of manhood proper, we begin by positing a working definition of the ontic status, through revealing deceptive bifurcations which locate Manhood³ outside of manhood proper. Manhood in South African, and more specifically in the Xhosa tradition, rests on specific reproductions of “culture” which perpetuate and maintain violent masculinities through ascribing to Manhood notions of virility and sexual prowess (Schneider, Cockroft & Hook 2008). Further ideological constructions of Manhood substantiate the deceptive distinction between nature and culture, with the former being the space of women and the latter reserved for men – as argued by Ortner (1972).

From a feminist perspective, we maintain that Manhood has been encountered and theorised as violent/ce in the South African context, necessitating a consideration of manhood proper which holds in tandem, and in check, identities premised on Manhood. In our discussion we complicate violent masculinities using Gqola (2009:71), where she notes that ‘masculinities in the South African context are contested, contradictory and varied over time’ – thus complicating a binary understanding of violent masculinities through revealing that manhood proper, whose constitutive element is inclusive of Manhood, was a rejection of the infantilisation of Blackness by colonial impositions such as apartheid. This rejection acted as a mode of ontological reclamation on the part of Blackness from a self-referential perspective. However, we argue that the act of reclaiming Black ontologies through heroism and bravado birthed violent masculinities.

In the first section, our concern is with violent masculinities in South Africa which are experienced, historically and contemporarily, through violence against feminised bodies.⁴ This allows us to interrogate it while exposing how Manhood and its imbrications of cultural identity and policed sexualities births violent masculinities, thus necessitating that we foreground the false dichotomy that exists between Manhood and manhood proper. This distinction reveals and subverts the false dichotomy between Manhood and manhood proper (as implicitly explored in the film), and requires a contextualisation of historical narratives that led to the contemporary dispensation. Black identity – both private and public – in the current dispensation is inextricably linked to historical conceptions of manhood proper and African *cultures*, which were undone by the colonial project and the infantilisation of Blackness during apartheid. A brief historical overview contextualises South African social identities which continue to grapple with the ‘dysfunctions, disjunctures and discontinuities’ (Abrahams 2003) wrought by colonialism and apartheid with effects lasting to the current day.

The second section considers what was held as aesthetically displeasing about the film, which further substantiates our claim of a moral panic. From this interrogation, we highlight the nexus of Manhood, policed sexuality and cultural identity and its subversions as it relates to *Inxeba*, framing the consequent social reactions as moral panic. Our analysis here moves between theoretical articulations that use *Inxeba* as a tool of theory generation to a discussion that considers the engendered meanings of an image.

Ulwaluko/circumcision, Manhood and manhood Proper

Manhood, in the Xhosa tradition, is framed as the process of transitioning from boyhood to manhood proper through *isiko lokwaluka*. This transition is seen to happen through an initiation custom that is understood as a continuous learning process. The specific event of *isiko lokwaluka* is the liminal stage of the process wherein one enters as a boy and loses this identity to gain manhood proper. We argue that there is a concerted effort on the part of those who wish to continue the tradition to preserve what is held to be an *authentic*⁵ process of attaining the ontological status of manhood in the cultural milieu of Xhosa identity. In the process of attaining an *authentic* status of Manhood, cultural practices and tradition appeal to violences – such as the policed sexualities of feminised bodies, the exclusion of women in cultural practices – that create and recreate violent masculinities manifesting as Manhood. In its ideal structure, the custom of *ulwaluko* teaches young men the values of discipline and integrity, while inculcating a laudable moral position – which we understand here as manhood proper. The perception by non-Xhosa speaking people has been that this practice is exclusively for men. The demarcation of this site of culture as a space for men alone is false; the discursive exclusion of women and gay men – who are, inherently, part of the process – reveals that the practice is not exclusively reserved for the cis-gendered, hetero-normative male body. We wish to contest the claim that the process of Xhosa initiation is both ontologically and linguistically male. In its uses of masculinist language in the process of initiation, (mis)conceptions of the custom produce Manhood, which is then inculcated in initiands while bodies existing outside of these masculinist demarcations are disallowed from that cultural space. In this is found substantiation for the moral panic surrounding the screening of the film. *Ulwaluko* through social discourse is exclusively preserved for men, albeit on premises that are false and are aimed at sustaining identities that are fixed, unchanging and violent. Thus Manhood rests on specific reproductions of *culture*, which perpetuate and maintain violent masculinities through ascribing to it virility and sexual prowess (Schneider, Cockroft & Hook 2008),

which can be detailed through reference to dialogue in the film that pivots around the prized social position that the circumcised penis holds in Xhosa cosmology. Such an analysis draws out the tensions between manhood proper and Manhood. A detailed consideration of manhood – through delimitations that showcase how Manhood is a constitutive part of manhood – shows an apparent tension between these two categories, or even how, in Moolman’s (2013) suggestion, the male body oscillates between these two categories *entabeni*.⁶

The status of manhood proper

In articulating manhood proper, we are careful in being non-prescriptive. Rather, we follow a delimitation process through revealing apparent tensions between Manhood and manhood proper. We subsequently take a cue from Louw (2012:181), who writes on the aesthetics of manhood that inform South African political life, and asks for a consideration of ‘what is just, what is right and what our obligations’ are. These questions suggest a working definition of manhood proper, with constitutive elements of Manhood, and are central when considered against the political and social inquiries suggested by, for example, *Inxeba*. In raising these social and political questions, and thereby challenging the facticity of Manhood, the film sparked a moral panic. By foregrounding discussion on the political and social realities that reveal the status of manhood proper, juxtaposed conceptions of manhood are seen in the film. These positions are not only captured in the articulations of the Oldman when he advises the initiands on their re-entry into society as *amakrwala*, but also in Kwanda’s final musings on Manhood and the penis, which subverts Manhood in order to articulate a conception of manhood that breaks away from the policed sexualities, economies of desire and the dictates of culture:

Oldman: young men, you have crossed the first of many rivers of manhood. You must be patient and persevere, my sons. The deepest river is the one you cross when you leave this place. *As men you should be proud*. Grow a family. Build a kraal and let it not be hollow! Open your ears, open your eyes. Reject the foreign ways of the city. And beware the temptations of the white devil that attacks the womb of the black woman.

Kwanda: This is South Africa not Uganda or Zimbabwe. We’re not led by Mugabe. Like Africa doesn’t know gay love? I’m sure Shaka and his warriors all wanted each other. Probably Jesus and his disciples were the same. How can love destroy a nation? *What’s the purpose of a dick anyway?* Sure it’s nice. But is it really such an important instrument? What are you waiting for?

Xolani: This way.

Kwanda: People think they're so smart. Men follow their dicks around likes it's the most important thing. A stupid little tip. It's completely irrelevant.

Xolani: He's a good man.

Kwanda: Who Vija? *He's a little boy posing as a big Xhosa man.* Like all the rest of them. You need to free yourself from this bullshit.... I don't give a shit! Someone should expose him. As a liar and hypocrite. You think he loves you? You think you're the only guy he fucks? Fuck! I'm so angry! Aren't you fucking angry? Doesn't he make you mad?

Xolani: You can't speak of what happened on the mountain.

Kwanda: You said there was a path... (Tregrove 2017)

We are principally interested in the distinction that births a dichotomous tension between Manhood and manhood proper. The first – Manhood – describes the cultural ascriptions that define Manhood while in turn reproducing and maintaining violence against feminised bodies. A working definition of Manhood, which is adapted from social discourses that create bifurcations between the two categories, denotes an oppositional dichotomy to an alignment of aesthetics with the ethical. This oppositional inclination would see the violence meted out against feminised bodies continue unabated, for as stated above, the alignment of aesthetics with the ethical denotes a non-violent relationality between the self and the *Other* (as developed in Cornell, 1995). Such alignment creates requisite social conditions that permit all modes of life to flourish, thus truly emulating manhood proper, which is action as legislation undergirded by the alignment of the ethical with the aesthetic – fashioning that which is just and that which is right. This conception of manhood is vividly conjured in the juxtapositioning of the two categories through *Inxeba* and the social, moral and ethical questions that it inspires. Fundamental to the social, moral and ethical questions raised by the film is Kwanda's question '[h]ow can love destroy a nation?'. Implicit here is the requisite demand that aesthetics be aligned with the ethical so as to inspire a just social obligation, which sees manhood existing coevally with feminised bodies.

[m]anhood proper can further be understood as that which defines the social in the normative sense: an ethically just ordering of society. In the knowledge that even this position can be viewed as problematic in its presuppositions about that which is ethically just, we leave the interpretations of an ethically just society open to our reader, as we are cognisant of the continuous social changes that define and re-define society. Continuous changes are expressed in the shifting meanings placed on the social *achievement* of building a family, and the wholehearted embrace of the ways of the city, changes that are starkly expressed by the contradistinction between Kwanda and the Oldman. As indicated earlier, philosophical considerations are neither prescriptive nor definitive, as this approach would undermine the philosophical

enterprise of understanding the social, political, economic conditions of possibility. Socially contested meanings ascribed to the ethical particularly demonstrate the shifts and changes which come to define manhood proper as action as legislation; succinctly captured through Kwanda's final (dying) speech of what it means to be a man.

We are of the view that the words of the Oldman centre Manhood, along with the attendant imbrications of cultural identity and policed sexualities feeding on and into tradition and the attendant conceptions that accompany this static ideal of manhood. Against this, manhood proper is neither fixed nor factual, but changing and constantly negotiated and reimagined in line with the social conditions that allow it to respond from a position that is just and ethically aligned with aesthetics. What is revealed about manhood through questioning the centrality of the penis foregrounds manhood proper. This foregrounding appears in Kwanda's critique of the penis and the prized position that that bodily ligament holds within society.

To highlight these competing positions, a systematic analysis is necessary of what is sustained in both positions. As we are concerned with manhood proper, it becomes necessary to answer the question raised by Kwanda, when he asks, '[h]ow can love destroy a nation?' (Tregrove 2017). Kwanda's question points to the fragility of Manhood, which is posited as *factual* and unchanging through tradition and social ascriptions that fix Manhood in time; a fixity witnessed in the incapacity to adapt tradition even as society bears witness to the death of many young men because of (what is termed) 'botched' circumcision (Gqola 2007b:147). The facticity of Manhood is entrenched through admonishing any form of femininity in Manhood, seen in the social reproductions of conceptions of Manhood in Ratele, Fouten, Shefers, Strebel, Shabalala and Buikema's (2007) study of conceptions of Manhood among boys in local schools in the Western Cape of South Africa. Ratele *et al* (2007:116) studied constructions of masculinity among boys and found that even at an early age, masculinity is defined through its oppositional status to femininity. To return then to the question, '[h]ow can love destroy a nation', we suggest that the destruction emanates from the fragility of a Manhood constructed as incapable of expressions of love and affection. Delimitations that ascribe love and affection to the realm of femininity find their legitimacy in the notion that Manhood is fixed, *factual*, unchanging and cannot express vulnerability. Such expression renders this social category as contestable and changing, thus leading to the tendency to establish Manichean strictures that demarcate the parameters between feminine and masculine social identities.

The words of the Oldman espouse notions of Manhood insofar as he talks to the pride of being men; a pride that emanates from the deferential status of not being feminine. The space of *entabeni* is curated using masculinist language that defines feminised

bodies as erroneous within that space, centres notions of nuclear family life, and maintains cis-gendered heteronormative conceptions of Manhood. The topography of the Xhosa rite of passage to manhood through *ulwaluko* is flattened by equating the ritual to the act of cutting off the foreskin (Gqola 2007b). Such social discursive acts have two implications; first, it allows for the tradition and/or custom to be closely associated with the phallus while eliding the broader social implications of *ulwaluko* i.e. inculcating morally virtuous values in young men. The second implication centres the notion of the all-powerful, invincible and infallible phallus that conquers and tames those defined as subjugated by it. As Schneider *et al* (2008) point out, these entrenched ideals of the phallus are a fallacy, with men continuously trying to fulfil some elements of it as they can never fully become the prototypical embodiment of Manhood – which reveals an aspect of the fragility of Manhood, which when inverted towards itself shatters and manifests as violent masculinities.

In the incapacity to fulfil such a prototypical embodiment – a failure that arises owing to the fact that Manhood is a construction that is premised on abstractions of *authentic* cultural identity which manifests as the policing of sexualities and the economy of desire – Manhood becomes violent as a mode of asserting its legitimacy. [m]anhood proper, on the other hand, would suggest critical reflections on the status of manhood while acknowledging its fragility as socially negotiated. Manhood manifests violent masculinities through its imbrications with cultural identity and policed sexualities, as it assumes a position of purported facticity and factuality through tradition. This could be resolved through a redefinition of Manhood from a position of manhood proper, which allows for its incongruences to be confronted from a predisposition that attends to manhood through an alignment of aesthetics with the ethical. The alignment of aesthetics with the ethical attempts to resolve these incongruences and negate the manifestation of violent masculinities.

The manifestation of violent masculinities is witnessed in the final exchange between Xolani and Kwanda. There is fragility in Xolani's plea to Kwanda that he 'cannot speak of what happened on the mountain', a plea premised on the self-abjectification of Manhood. Kwanda's response is premised on a critique of the sacredness of the penis and its revered status, and reveals the fragility of Manhood resting on such status. Schneider *et al* (2008: 144) argue that the 'penis can be seen as an organ that can represent and threaten masculinity' in how it is perceived, located and used, both in discursive means as well as in the very real biological sense – as detailed in Gqola's (2007b) work on botched circumcisions. The exchange toward the end of *Inxeba* reveals supposed oppositional definitions of Manhood and manhood proper, asking the viewer to consider what the social obligation of manhood is, and what is right and just (to echo Louw 2012:181).

Manhood, liberation and social identities

This narrative suggests an urgent consideration of social discourses that maintain and perpetrate violence through violent masculinities by appealing to social identities constructed using definitions derived from Manhood, surfaced when considering the rejection of subordinated Black ontologies through infantilisation by systems of oppression. The Oldman's articulations of Manhood appeal to cultural identity, ontic-ontological foundations premised on custom and tradition and the role of the initiands as part of a community that upholds and maintains these traditions. Analyses of Manhood cannot divorce its formation and enactment from the wider social discourses associated with South African nationalism, liberation and unity, which are always linked to cultural identity. Robins (2008:420), who writes on sexual politics and the politicisation of sexualities during the Zuma rape trial of 2006, contends that this case exposed the deeply entrenched nature of patriarchy in South Africa and revealed the failure of a national political leadership in addressing sexual violence and HIV/Aids. Robins (2008: 420) further highlights that, during the liberation struggle, 'questions of sexuality and sexual rights were generally sidelined [...in] anti-apartheid political discourse', substantiating a view of violent masculinities as underlain by the fragility of Manhood and its appeals to culture, policed sexualities and cultural identities. Further to this, Robins (2008:412) contends that rights-based advances in sexual autonomy, same-sex marriage and anti-sexist legislation all reveal a sexual conservatism in South Africa. These advances are met with resistance from the political leadership of the country as well as ordinary South Africans, suggesting that such advances result from the work of a minority who are educated and middle-class (Robins 2008:412). The act of contesting the ontological framework of advancement from a position of marginality through locating queerness in the space of culture, custom and tradition further fuels the fires of social and moral panic which leads to films, such as *Inxeba*, being banned through a petition of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa. The Zuma trial offers a brief, yet disturbing, glance at the reality that constitutes South African society. This reality exposes unresolved gender politics that define feminised bodies as subjugated (see Waetjen & Marè 2010) through public discourses that ascribe the power of directing and commenting on social issues of political urgency to men.

Aligned with this is the debate on *ulwaluko*. Despite being a process where through '6000 initiands [*abakwetha, abafana, amakrwala*] [were] hospitalized between 1995 and 2007, while 300 were declared dead in the same period' (Gqola 2007b:145), and with women featuring in this rite of passage as the mothers of the young initiands, public and political debates which define the contestation of this ritual regularly sees men silencing women on the premise that this is a site of culture reserved for men.

This undergirds social identity formation processes, which, as Robins (2008) suggests, are not only conservative, but further ascribe public pronouncement on matters of political urgency to men.

Furthermore, appeals to culture, which seek to silence women, are challenged by women such as Dr Mamisa Chabula, who actively lobbied for the drafting and adoption of the 'Application of Health Standards for Traditional Circumcision Act of 2001' (Gqola 2007b:158). Chabula's comments on the debate of *ulwaluko* rested first on her role as a medical professional who dealt with what became known as 'botched' circumcisions (Gqola 2007b:147), and secondly as a traditional Xhosa woman whose comments on the matter saw her gaining support from the traditional royal leaders of the Xhosa clans – Rharhabe and the Gcaleka – (Gqola 2007b:158). This brief exposition of the contestations that surround the nexus of Manhood, sexualities and cultural identity reveals the ambiguities of Manhood while underscoring the debate of gender parity in democratic South Africa. This furthermore showcases the lengths to which Manhood will go to maintain its facticity and factuality, while attempting to control every aspect of social and political life in our context. Attempts at controlling political and social life in South African society require a consideration of the gender politics at play against the backdrop of constitutional democracy that enshrines equal freedoms to all. Against this, the Zuma trial highlighted gender disparities and framed feminist debates and concerns as a matter of the elites (Hassim 2009:61), which detracts from political inroads which remain unrealised and obscured by the demand for gender parity. The farce of pressing political gains arrests Manhood, through dismissing feminist perspectives which would facilitate the realisation of manhood proper, expressed in Chabula's concern that '[a] custom is supposed to heal' (cited by Gqola 2007b:158). As Suttner (2009) notes, this phenomenon reveals how political discourse in South Africa is framed by 'big men' and their appeals to Manhood, a position substantiated in Gqola's (2009) analysis of the Zuma rape trial, which highlights the links between Manhood, virility, heroism and cultural identity, and builds on earlier arguments (Gqola, 2007b) in which it is noted how colonialism and apartheid had interfered with the self-construction of Black masculinities. Using Suttner's (2004) work, Gqola (2007b:153) maintains the need to 'rethink whether participating in (reshaped) initiation rituals can carry varying meanings under conditions in which manhood is denied, as in the minoritisation of Adult African men as boys under apartheid'. In response, we maintain that reshaping tradition, custom and culture begins to respond to the intimation that manhood is indeed negotiated, changing and a social construct. It is only once we have acknowledged this reality that manhood proper can begin to attend to the realisation of an all-inclusive manhood.

However, we acknowledge that this confrontation with the reality of manhood – as a negotiated, changing and constructed identity – is not an easy one. The work of Salo (2007:160) explores the notion of being a man as opposed to being a “moffie” in the Cape Town township of Manenburg. Salo (2007:161) traces the socio-economic and historical legacies of the construction of masculinity and analyses the struggle that ensues as masculinity and femininity are negotiated through place and belonging in a space defined by gang violence, unemployment and the Group Areas Act of 1950. In spaces defined by such historical reality, gender is still an identity constituted through stylised repetitive acts (Butler 1988:519). As Butler (1988:520) argues in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, our gendered selves become compelling illusions and objects of belief, subsequently rendering it difficult to question and challenge these constructions – as that would suggest questioning and challenging our very performed “essence”. However, we maintain that in order to articulate manhood, we ought to confront these fixities and factualities for the purposes of understanding and refining the meanings attendant to the category.

A false tension: Manhood and manhood proper

Briefly referring to the characters of Vija, Xolani, the elders (*amakhankatha*) and Kwanda, the initiand (*umkhwetha*), also reveals apparent tensions between Manhood and manhood proper, interrogating the positionality of these characters in a space defined by culture, Manhood and policed sexualities. Invariably, *ulwaluko* is constructed through language as a cultural practice. The use of language in cultural practices and custom entangles these men in a patriarchal practise that is committed to the reproductions of Manhood. Furthermore, language and its uses *entabeni* frames this space as fundamentally masculine. On this, Gqola (2001b) writes about the masculine structure of language which explicates our position; the subject defined through and by masculinist language – the male cis-heterosexual – is constantly entangled in dominant heteronormative language constructions which determine one mode of life while denigrating the *Other*. *Entabeni* as a space can be seen to be defined by hypermasculinity, the language of the space and its attendant discourses which are patriarchal and masculinist, subsequently excluding queer and female bodies. Thus revealing the apparent tension between Manhood and manhood proper vis-à-vis the language *entabeni*.

South Africa, as a socio-political space of transition, provides the opportunity for the re-negotiation and contestation of social identities such as manhood proper (see Moolman 2013). Defining manhood proper as action as legislation reveals that this

definition provides a lexicography that holds in tandem competing conceptions of manhood, in turn allowing manhood to fashion, refashion and renegotiate itself. This allows for irresolvable incongruences to be the genesis of the aesthetic being aligned with ethical. Moolman (2013), in her discussion on *Rethinking Masculinities in Transition*, advances this concept with the understanding that certain macro-social processes and social institutions affect(ed) and continue to influence our conceptual understanding of social identities such as race, class and sexuality. The Xhosa cultural practice of *ulwaluko* is not exempt from the macro and micro-socio-political institutions which affect change in cultural practices.

Ulwaluko has succumbed to change adhering to medical requirements, as discussed in Gqola (2007b); she discusses how the practice has been forced to adhere to legislation such as the Application of Health Standards for Traditional Circumcision Act of 2001. These changes evince how practices of manhood are conversant with socio-political discourses while being forced to take seriously the voices of women in the practice of *ulwaluko*. While these changes have been gradual in the broader social context, *Inxeba* has shown – through the moral panic that surrounded the film – that processes of re-negotiation and contestation of social identities and practices is still to some extent rejected by those who cling to notions of Manhood, cultural identity and continue to police sexualities.

We suggest that, in the ideal practice of *ulwaluko*, the realisation of manhood and the subjectivities brought to the tradition which cling to Manhood, enunciates an apparent tension. The conception of Manhood as suggested by the cultural practices of *ulwaluko*, and the consequent reactions to *Inxeba*, is at odds with Moolman's (2013) understanding of South Africa. Manhood, within this cultural practice is stable, unchanging, attached to male bodies in the bodily organ of the penis, and is associated with power, privilege and tradition (Moolman 2013). Additionally, as subverted in *Inxeba*, this conception of Manhood manifests as strength, sexual zeal, heterosexuality and that which is oppositional to femininity. Manhood is hegemonic in nature and is legitimised by tradition. Contrariwise, manhood is the ever-changing subjective understanding of the self. It is the multiple, shifting, fluid practices, and performances of gendered bodies and identities that Moolman (2013) refers to. Manhood in this sense recognises subjectivities as multiple, continuous and in a process of contestation and negotiation. [m]anhood proper allows for social subjectivities fraught with incongruences to be negotiated and refashioned. Renegotiation suggests that social identities are practiced and performed through broad social processes and solidified through and by social institutions, in this case the cultural practice of *ulwaluko*.

Such renegotiation is encapsulated in the character of Kwanda – revealing the dichotomy between tradition and the ways of the city, suggesting that social identities are performed through broad social processes. Kwanda is sent *entabeni* to become initiated into Manhood, an initiation which proves to be fatal as he does not return home post-initiation. We wish to stress a variance at this point, as his failure to return is not predicated on Gqola's (2007b) botched circumcisions, but rather on the narrative's need to keep Manhood as fixed, factual and unchanging. Traditional initiation is imposed on him, it is a prerequisite rite by virtue of his being born into Xhosa tradition. We see from the sentiments his father expresses at the beginning of the film that this rite of passage acts as a catalyst to force him into Manhood, because he does not behave in a “manly” fashion. Thus, sending him to the mountain is aimed at “fixing him” – demonstrated in his fathers' words to Xolani: ‘I want you to be firm with my son. The boy's too soft. If you ask me, it's his mother who spoiled him’ (Tregrove 2017).

Kwanda is portrayed as an outsider to the traditional world and characterised by difference. His persona is one influenced and marred by the ways of the city, manifesting as radical individualism in contrast to the cautionary words of the Oldman advising the initiands as they prepare to re-enter society as men; he warns that young men should ‘reject the foreign ways of the city’ which we maintain are embodied in the character of Kwanda. Kwanda comments on the constitution of this space outside of society and the codes of their everyday lives, revealing his status as an outsider who is unfamiliar with and challenges the curatorial mechanisms which are premised on masculinist restrictions. This masculine space signifies different norms which can be understood as toxic while advocating for repression, both of himself and that of the social reality that characterised him. His actions disrupt this social institution and unearth some glaring contradictions premised on an ethics devoid of an aesthetic, subsequently constituting moralisms and fanaticisms (see Louw 2012) that define Xhosa masculinities as premised on fixities of ideal Manhood. Kwanda is guided through the initiation ritual by Xolani, who comes to the mountain every year, to sustain a sexual relationship with the hyper-masculine character of Vija. Xolani oscillates between wanting to protect Vija and the cultural practices of the mountain, which echo Kwanda's question at the end of the film, ‘[h]ow can love destroy a nation’. Vija is depicted as the embodiment of the hyper-masculinity that characterises *entabeni*. He is constantly repressing his feelings and negotiating his self-image, which signifies an element of the contestations and negotiations of manhood proper, allowing a brief purview that intimates towards the claim that Manhood and manhood proper do not exist in a binary.

The key questions that arise then are why does being a Man exclude being gay, queer or other more inclusive modes of gendered being? What do these exclusions reveal

of gender conceptions and constructions amongst Blackness? Could this possibly be the reason why there was a homophobic reaction to the screening of the film? Below we offer a possible, speculative, answer.

Before suggesting a speculative answer, however, we wish to highlight that the deceptive dichotomy that exists between Manhood and manhood proper snubs a genuine confrontation with homophobic discourses. This speculative project begins by tracing the reactions which express inter-cultural tensions to the movie being screened abroad. When the trailer was released on July 17, 2017 the controversy seemed to be about the exposition of the initiation rite of *ulwaluko*; an exposition which we contest in this paper as these objections to the film maintain Manhood through the discourse of culture, subsequently reinscribing homophobic discourses.

The criticism lay initially in the claim that the traditional practice, through the film, was being exported to the global north and the sentiment was that the cultural practices of “Xhosa people” were being lent to the white gaze. We understand the men who were objecting to the film being shown abroad to be referring to something akin to what Fanon highlights in *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1967] 2005). Fanon argues that the experience of Blackness as difference, as a phenomenological response to Merleau-Ponty’s use of the corporeal schema, can only be understood through the proverbial eyes of whiteness i.e. the white imagination (Weate 1996). That is, Fanon was ‘content to intellectualize these differences’; however, once he entered the white world and felt the weight of the ‘white gaze’, he experienced his otherness and became aware of pre-theoretical racial attitudes which, up to that point, had not existed for him (Weate 1996:134–151). These men were essentially arguing that the movie was being understood for the purposes of and via the white imagination. The second more salient move lay in negating the existence of homosexuality in a space defined through and by masculinist language that excludes feminised bodies. The phenomenon of masculinist language is associated with the deferential status of Manhood being oppositional to femininity; a deferential position which sustains homophobia and homophobic discourse.

A number of Xhosa men, who are seen as the custodians of culture, tradition and custom within the cosmological schema of Xhosa identity, seemed to initially feel that the film was not an accurate portrayal of *ulwaluko*. Misrepresentations here denote the association of a masculinist space with effeminate beings, who sully the deferential status of Manhood. As we suggest above, this deferential position maintains salient modes of homophobia and homophobic discourse. One of the premises of this line of thinking asserted that the film was simply a commercialised portrayal that packaged cultural practices for the global north – essentially lending Xhosa tradition to exoticism.

These responses mutually reinforced each other, the one speaking to the exoticisation and the exportation of custom and tradition to the “western” world and the other claiming misrepresentation through locating queerness in a space of culture and tradition; a space sullied by colonial imposition which “brought” queerness to Africa.⁷ Many Xhosa men saw this as a form of cultural neo-imperialism. As Mqhayi (1914:v) reveals in his seminal work *Ityala Lamawele*, the history of amaXhosa in South Africa is marked by the theft of their land by European colonialists, the disintegration of indigenous communities and languages emblematic in the assertion that ‘*intetho nemikhwa yesiXhosa iya itshona ngokutshona ngenxa yelizwi nokhanyo [...] oluze nezizwe zasentshona-langa*’⁸, a position which would undergird the visceral responses which saw the film as a mode of colonial voyeurism and perversion. Further still, the colonial project was one that [did] not benefit their communities. More so, there is a history of disciplines treating and depicting amaXhosa and their culture as an exotic other and ahistorical – largely from a colonial and modernist lens, which is limited in its scope of truth and comprehension. In view of these historical realities, which validate particular responses while allowing homophobic discourses to remain unabated and couched in appeals to the protection of culture and tradition, we pose a parting consideration of the alignment of aesthetics with the ethical as a mode of curating socially requisite conditions which permit all modes of life to flourish. This consideration facilitates a concerted effort at defining manhood.

In conclusion: aligning aesthetics with the ethical

Our attempt at detailing the concept of action as legislation, the definition which we gave to manhood in this analysis, has centred on highlighting the ostensible distinctions made between Manhood and manhood proper. We now wish to suggest a consideration of the aesthetic reception which characterised *Inxeba* as a site of contestation in society. Our discussion on the characteristically displeasing aesthetics of *Inxeba* is premised on an analysis that reveals a false distinction between Manhood and manhood proper. Further to this, we understand the displeasing aesthetics of *Inxeba* to be premised on the moral panic which ensued when the film was aired in South African cinemas. Our brief consideration of the aesthetics of *Inxeba* is concerned with highlighting how an alignment of the aesthetic with the ethical provides a social framework that does not uphold a fanaticism, for, as Louw (2012:191) suggests, ‘ethics without aesthetics leads to fanaticism, legalism and moralism’, going some way to elucidate the moral panic that characterised the screening of the film in and around South African cinemas, eventually leading to the film’s temporary ban.

That which was ethically displeasing about the film was the location of femininity/ queerness/ feminised bodies in the space of culture, tradition and custom; in essence, the ethics of culture, custom and tradition were confronted by an aesthetics which has forever been relegated to the periphery. This relegation postulates that Manhood is factual and fixed, while in fact Manhood is a constitutive element of manhood proper – which itself is ever-changing, negotiated and reformulated. We would therefore suggest that further research look closely to the relationship between aligning aesthetics and the ethical as a mode of clarifying how culture, custom and tradition can begin working concurrently with manhood, so as to deliver on the promise suggested by Mamisa Chabula's note that 'a custom is supposed to heal' (cited by Gqola 2007b:158).

We have argued that manhood is denotative of action as legislation, subsequently accommodating the constitutive element which is Manhood. This clarification has allowed us to dissipate a deceptive distinction between Manhood and manhood proper which maintains systems of injustice and oppression through homophobic discourses that locate feminised and effeminate bodies outside of the space of culture, custom and tradition. Furthermore, we have attempted to untangle the nexus of Manhood, cultural identities and policed sexualities – which all function to maintain the fixities and factualities of Manhood. As a continuation of this analysis we would suggest investigations which are committed to understanding, in more detail, the role of aligning aesthetics with the ethical as a mode of attending to the deficiencies of Manhood, and facilitating a processual understanding of tradition wherein 'a custom [can begin healing]' (Gqola 2007b:158). We hope to initiate a conversation which allows Manhood the possibility of confronting itself without the fear of the incongruences of personal identities. It is only in confronting these incongruences that we can begin to address the complexities of identity that facilitate the creation of dichotomous bifurcations in social relations.

Notes

1. The concept of manhood has been debated and theorized in anthropology (Ortner 1972), and sociological theory and genders studies (see Jackson 2006).
2. [m]anhood, as we use it in this paper, is in line with the Arendtian ([1954]/1994:441) suggestion which posits action as legislation. Action, in terms of manhood, denotes acting in such a way that the principles of an individuals' action could become the general law, and to be a man of goodwill represents a constant concern – not with obedience to the existing laws but with legislating through ones' actions.
3. In our argument, we highlight a false distinction between Manhood and manhood proper in order to showcase the lexicographical nature of the latter, while further troubling Manhood as maintained by appeals to culture, tradition and custom. We ought to make it clear that our discussion centers

on manhood and not on masculinities. We maintain that there is a distinction between manhood and masculinities, but see the latter as a categorical result of manhood.

4. Feminised bodies here denotes women, queer, transsexual and gender non-conformist bodies, which as per Moffett's (2006) suggestion are 'reminded' of their place in society through violences such as curative rape – and, as Gqola (2001a) notes, through strategies such as slut shaming, as well as through 'the cult of femininity' (Gqola 2007a).
5. In our discussion we wish to trouble the concept of authenticity. Appeals to cultural authenticity reproduce essentialisms that undermine manhood proper as we advocate it here. Authenticity continues to prop-up the *facticity* and *factuality* of Manhood, and posit Manhood as fixed and unchanging. In challenging authenticity, we direct our reader to the work of Mamdani (2005) and Linnekin (1991), who both showcase how inventive the misconfigurations of African cultures/identities were owing to the colonial project.
6. *Entabeni* is a term used to refer to the spatial or geographical space in which the initiation process occurs. Directly translated, this means "at/on the mountain".
7. For a detailed analysis on the false claim of the un-Africanness of queerness, see Khumalo (2018).
8. We wish to stress our protest in translation, as this political moment in the history of the intellectual project on the African continent calls for the unapologetic use of African languages as a mode of legitimating Blackness in the contemporary academy, specifically in the South African context. However, for the purposes of cross-cultural understanding we will translate Mqhayi's work. Mqhayi (1914:v) writes 'the customs, traditions and cosmological mores of the Xhosa people are dying owing to the colonial imposition which came with the colonising nations of the western world'.

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