Article

The Broken Mirror: A Lacanian Perspective on John Trengove's Film *Inxeba* (*The Wound*)

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Abstract

John Trengove's film *Inxeba* (*The Wound*) was met with public outcry as it represented the sacred tradition of *ulwaluko* ("initiation"). The film was effectively banned in mainstream South African cinemas following a ruling by the Film and Publication Board (FPB) to assign a rating of X18 to the film. Many rights groups and activists were troubled by the FPB's decision and argued that the outcry against the film was due to homophobic reactions to the representation of same-sex sexualities within hypermasculine Xhosa spaces. However, this paper argues for a more nuanced reading of the protests against the film, taking into account the symbolic aggression that the act of "truth-telling" in the film seemed to enact on traditional Xhosa people. I analyse the controversy by using ideas from Lacanian psychoanalysis as it relates to film study. I explore the film itself as analogous to Lacan's concept of the mirror, creating tension between subject (in this case, traditional South Africans) and the image, or the representation of black individuals and cultural practices in the film. Additionally, I explore the radical alterity of the Other in the film, the seat of revulsion, threat and hostility, represented simultaneously by the queer characters and at times by constructs and images of whiteness, the whiteness of the director of the film and the whiteness represented in the text which is seen as threatening to Xhosa culture and values. I argue that the reactions to the film speak to deep psychic tensions in South Africa in terms of culture, sexuality and representation, and I explore how the controversy constitutes a pivotal moment in rethinking and reconfiguring South African queer representations, particularly concerning black subjects.

Keywords: *Inxeba*; African film; queer film; Xhosa culture; *ulwaluko*; initiation; black masculinity

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Introduction

The film *Inxeba* (*The Wound*) received wide release in South Africa in February of 2018, portraying the experiences of Xhosa men who participate in the secretive initiation ritual known as *ulwaluko*. The film focalises the character Xolani, who is tasked with acting as *ikhankatha* ("supervisor" or "mentor") to one of the initiates, Kwanda, an unapologetic gay teenager from an affluent, urban background, who is resistant to the initiation process. Xolani himself has a same-sex affair with another of the initiating elders, Vija, while viewing Kwanda with a gaze of annoyance and a distinct sense of anxiety. It is as if Xolani sees in Kwanda those aspects he actively suppresses about himself and Kwanda's fearlessness regarding his sexuality is perceived as threatening to Xolani, for in Kwanda Xolani sees a reflection and the externalisation of parts he would rather keep a secret.

The film was met with public outcry even before its release, sparking major social media campaigns and protests from organisations like the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) against what was called the film's cultural insensitivity at representing the sacred tradition of *ulwaluko*. The film was effectively banned from mainstream South African cinemas following a ruling by the Film and Publication Board (FPB) to assign an X18 rating to the film; a rating usually reserved for hardcore pornography. Many claimed that they were protesting because the film revealed the sacredness of the tradition of *ulwaluko*, a claim that came from organisations like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and civic groups represented by the Man and Boy Foundation who, along with Contralesa, managed to shut down screenings in the Eastern Cape (Collison 2018).

These widespread protests and calls for banning the film were interpreted by many as fuelled by homophobia (Igual 2018); gay rights organisations seemed to reason that those outraged by the film *must* simply have despised seeing same-sex sexuality depicted as existing (and flourishing) in the hypermasculine space of *ulwaluko*. Many aspects of the reaction to the film are legitimately read as homophobic; constitutional law expert Pierre de Vos (2018) examined the reasons provided by the FPB to classify the film as pornography, calling the move "an embarrassing legal fiasco animated by homophobia." Additionally, public discourse around the film was markedly homophobic, especially under the #InxebaMustFall or #TheWoundMustFall hashtags on Twitter (Siswana and Kiguwa 2018). However, this distillation of the protests to thinly veiled homophobia was contested by many of the organisations involved in opposing the film's release. The chairperson of one of these organisations, Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluva (cited in Collison 2018) of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission), had the following to say about the group's objection to the film:

> People are saying you are opposing the movie because of homophobia. What we need to get is an understanding that this [is] not about gay people, but about misrepresentation

> of the culture. It is a fact that gay people are everywhere. They have a right to live their lives. It’s got nothing to [do] with the objections, I hope.

The significant word in Mkhwanazi-Xaluva’s statement is *misrepresentation.* I argue that there might be something more at play in this cultural moment than the instances of homophobia or the sense of cultural protectionism. Looking at the film in terms of psychoanalytic theory is useful to unearth some of the roots of this tension, particularly in the contestation around representation.

The Lacanian concept of the mirror stage in many ways illuminates the dimensions of the deep psychic attack that this film seemed to signify to some Xhosa people in South Africa. This theoretical framework is further useful for an exploration of the interplay between film and society, race and sexuality in South Africa contemporarily. While a great deal of research has focused on the contestations resulting from same-sex relationship depiction in the film, I aim to explore the film as a mirror to a particular cultural and gendered identity, perhaps a *broken* or distorted mirror that has sparked many valid and fruitful discussions, even as these were interwoven with restrictive discourses of homophobia and regressive moves towards censorship. These ideas are explored first in relation to the history of psychoanalytic thought in film study and how this film deviates from that history, which served to disempower the observing ego with an imposed body-image, to use Lacan’s (1953) terms. I then look at psychoanalytic elements within the film itself which speak of psychic wounds and anxieties that are pressing issues in South Africa today: the contestation around land and spaces, the idea of black cultures being diluted or threatened by imposing Western traditions and influences, and the invasive white gaze objectifying the black body-image. The discussion then uses these threads to explore the significance of the film as a contested mirror, where a type of “slip of the tongue” or subtext has been created even in the way that protesters have reacted to the film and where the text might speak to the uneasiness around representing black queer subjectivities in South Arica. I conclude my discussion by pointing to the question: how is the (marginalised) subject reflected in image, and how is this image conflated into (dominant) subject identities in ways that further serve to marginalise?

Film and Psychoanalysis

Scholarship on film has a long tradition of engagement with psychoanalytic theory. Scholars borrow useful terms and techniques from the psychoanalytic tradition and use them to show the link between image and identity, representation and self-presentation. Barbara Creed (1998) explains the rich interplay of cinema and psychoanalytic thought: “Psychoanalysis and the cinema were born at the end of the nineteenth century. They share a common historical, social, and cultural background shaped by the forces of modernity. Theorists commonly explore how psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the importance of desire in the life of the individual, has influenced the cinema” (1998, 77).

Creed adds that not only was film study influenced by psychoanalysis, but that psychoanalysis might also have been influenced by filmic developments in cinema; she traces how Freud's theories and practices were cinematic in their approach, and shows how film theorists like the Surrealists explored cinema as giving access to dark desires: "the death drive, the compulsion to repeat, and the uncanny" (1998, 78). Film was seen to reflect the Jungian idea of archetypes (2) and to speak, through subtext which could be read as "slips of the tongue," of repressed desires or fears.

Lacan (1953) has been significant in these intellectual borrowings, and his concepts, especially the idea of the mirror stage of development and the construction of the ego as spectator, are deeply filmic concepts that lend themselves to the analysis of visual media. The film scholar often examines the link between text as confession or text as cultural artefact; the text approximates a truth-telling, and says much through what is said and (as much, if not more) through what is not said. For Lacan, the subject is constructed through "the problematic nature of one's address to the Other" (Malone 2000, 84); similarly, the filmmaker or *auteur* writes herself or himself into the image they construct, through what she or he frames on screen and through what is left outside of the frame.

Indeed, externalising the self is at the centre of the psychoanalytic process: the psychoanalytic subject constructs a version of the self in order to unearth deep-seated anxieties, identity-markers or versions of what the subject is at their core. The archetypal patient offers a re/presentation of the self to be witnessed by the empathetic other, putting into the symbolic that which was once repressed so that it can be examined, exorcised, and exhumed—or perhaps tenderly appreciated, validated and integrated. The filmmaking process can act as a dynamic analogy for these psychoanalytic processes.

Lacan's mirror theory has been especially influential: he theorises the mirror stage of development, where the toddler first recognises the self in the mirror and seems to be a *whole self*, an idea which immediately reads as false to the fragmented emerging subject (Saville Young 2011). Lacan sees this as an imaginary self that is never fully trusted, as "the ego or the 'Imaginary' self emerges from the child seeing him- or herself in the mirror as a unified surface. This ego is a distortion or misunderstanding, covering over the child's experience of him- or herself as an uncoordinated conglomeration of emotions and sensations" (Saville Young 2011, 49). The mirror, the reflection of the self, is always a distorted image, something alien and outside of the self that seems to belie what lies beneath. No image can capture the complexity of the self or the fragmented nature which the subject experiences psychically.

In this moment, the self is turned into an object of observation. When the self is objectified, reflected outside of the body as a body-image, the self becomes something imaginary. Through this process the ego is born, located in the imaginary (or later, the Symbolic), but never integrated fully. The mirror stage, Lacan (1953) explains, is no longer simply a developmental stage which has an end, but is a permanent state of how the self relates to the body-image. As Lacan explains, "In the first place, [the mirror stage] has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image" (1953, 14).

Psychoanalytic film scholars like Laura Mulvey, Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry used these ideas to great effect in linking the processes of viewing and producing a film as psychosocial and psychodynamic processes. They "emphasized the crucial importance of the cinema as an apparatus and as a signifying practice of ideology, the viewer-screen relationship, and the way in which the viewer was 'constructed' as transcendental during the spectatorial process" (Creed 1998, 80). In other words, the viewing-self, through the camera's lens acting as the observing subject, is identified with, and the image on screen becomes the alien, mirrored object to be consumed.

Despite the utility of psychoanalytic theory in studies of filmic representation, there are important distinctions which open the space for points of resistance. If we are to think of representation as a psychodynamic process, then there are necessary questions in this equation.

First, who is the speaker of an identity? Who is constructing the externalisation of an imaginary of self—or, is some imposter constructing an idea of a self that they do not embody, understand or truly empathise with? Second, who acts as the psychoanalyst in this relationship? Who is this "truth" about oneself being communicated to? Who is consuming the image, and is the intention truly to heal and to empathise, or is it to construct a body-self *only as image* and object, and thus to make the confessed-self that is (re)presented on screen the Other?

Contested Representations of the African Body-Image

These questions have been particularly contentious for representations of African bodies on screen, not only through the interpretive lens (the camera's and the theorist's) that might in many ways be colonial in approach and in perspective, but also in the question of white filmmakers representing black subjects. Kgafela Magogodi holds that films are constructed from a "politicised vantage point" (2002, 247) where the filmmaker inscribes meaning and ideas onto images. Jordache Alben Ellapen notes that the "outsider" filmmaker might approach the subject in an "anthropological, ethnographic or voyeuristic manner" (2007, 135). This in turn is in line with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's position which seems to favour the insider voice, arguing that when Africans represent Africans, they need to "hold the camera so that [they] are both behind the camera looking in but [they] are also inside the very society at which the eye of the camera is gazing" (Ngũgĩ 2000, 94) so that this can lead to, in Ngũgĩ's view, authentic representation. Ellapen adds that "[t]he current trend in post-apartheid South African film still appears to be one that feeds a western imaginary of Africa that is dark and dangerous, uncivilised and only on the threshold of modernity" (2007, 135). There seems to be an imposition: the person gazing at the image or framing the image in the lens of the camera is white, empowered, outsider, while the person reflected in the mirror, that *psychically unsettling, alien* body-image, is black, disempowered, voiceless insider. The mirror is broken, self and image are misaligned and incongruous, and what results from this representation is something still unknown, something theorists have been wrestling with (Bogle 2001; Ellapen 2007), but something that seems to immediately discomfort the black subject in these films (or the black viewer observing the black subject and having a *misrecognition* of body-self).

For the film *Inxeba*, much of the criticism stemmed from the fact that the film had a white director, creating tensions around representation or supposed "truth-telling" about Xhosa culture from a white gaze. Ellapen has theorised this discomfort with representation in film, seeing historically black spaces like the township as "fetishised" in film, and explaining that "white South Africans have been in control of an image that has been accused of being refracted through a colonising camera (or gaze)" (2007, 134), reproducing a type of colonial violence that takes away power from black subjects, black bodies (in film) or black voices to tell their own stories. Indeed, the moments of intimacy between the two lovers in *Inxeba*, Xolani and Vija, are viewed from an almost fetishised lens, in one scene angled from above as they embrace as if to say, "Look at these black bodies doing what they should not be doing in a space that is sacred in *their culture*. Isn't it strange?" In the first sex scene between the two men, the darkened room that they are in and the close-up shots of their almost pained expressions, their bodies glistening with sweat in the faint light, paints an image of something transgressive, something hidden that allows for libidinal release, almost unmistakably *fetishised*. Or, at least, this is one way of reading it which might speak to this paper's concern of the potential disempowerment of representation in film about Africa and especially film about queer African bodies.

Achille Mbembe examines representations of Africa from Western perspectives as being "radically other, as all that the West is not" (Mbembe 2001, 11). Mbembe suggests that Africanness is a counterpoint to Western identity construction similar to how Edward Said (1979) traced Orientalism as fundamental to constructions of the West through creating an Imaginary of the East. Othering, through image and text, is the way in which the *ego* of the West was and is constructed, in the view of these theorists. This might link to a psychoanalytic form of repression as expressed by theorists like Dalal (2013) and Saville Young (2011), as the latter explains that constructions of whiteness and blackness in racist discourses function through "repressing sameness between our in-group and the out-group and of repressing difference between ourselves and others in our in-group. These repressions work to steer away any threats to our sense of belonging which maps directly onto our sense of identity" (Saville Young 2011, 47).

In this way, films like *Inxeba* might be argued to serve a colonial purpose, psychoanalytically speaking, legitimising whiteness and white same-sex sexualities for the rational observing self, just as these images Other blackness and fetishise black same-sex sexualities, the very libidinal relationship with the mirror that Lacan emphasises. In this sense, the mirror tells the observing self who she or he is by reflecting everything the self is *not*: irrational, repressed, Other. Ngũgĩ notes of African cinema, which utilises the medium formed in the West, born of Western ideology that Lacan might call the narcissistic ego, "If we live in a society where the image of the world is itself colonised, then it becomes difficult for us to realise ourselves unless we struggle to decolonise the image" (2000, 95). The film *Inxeba*, this image of particular South African subjectivities, might in part have been resisted as, despite its intentions, despite its desire for "truth-telling," it re-enacts these colonial exercises of imaging and misrepresenting the Other. As Peace Kiguwa notes, many black South African critics responded to the film with "affective and psychosocial attachment and investments" (Siswana and Kiguwa 2018, 55), highlighting the way that the film was seen as a psychodynamic mirror to the self, a mirror that was felt to be inaccurate by many who protested the film's release.

However, Ellapen (2007) asks the question: "If an image is constructed by a black South African filmmaker would it be freed of the colonial mentality that has oppressed Africa for centuries and represent black identity 'authentically'" (134)? To extend on Ellapen's question, would the image constructed in this film somehow become less offensive, less stereotypical and less Other if a black director had been at the helm? The answer is unclear, but again can serve to expose the tensions between subject and image. When black subjects see themselves represented in a mirror constructed by a white director, there is an inherent struggle; not only is the body-image alien, it is also imposed.

Spatiality, Identity and Invasion

In addition to the tensions of representation in terms of identity and race, the film also sparked tensions in terms of space. The traditional *ulwaluko* ritual is a heavily protected space, shrouded in secrecy. The mountain is symbolic of this secrecy; not easily accessible, removed from society and a space that is elevated both physically and seemingly also metaphysically to the realm of the Imaginary or the Symbolic, this is where these men can achieve ideal, archetypal *maleness*, and this is where they can have communion with *izinyaya* ("ancestors"). According to Foucault, space and spatial organisation are important in delineating the self and the other, and policing and distinguishing aspects like rationality, desire, and the natural. Rob Shields (2013) summarises Foucault's concept of spatiality: "The conventions whereby one separates the real from the unreal, the natural from the supernatural, the reasonable from the insane are expressed through the spatial logic of inclusion and exclusion" (2013, 39). Ellapen adds to this idea by noting that "[i]t is through such spatialisations that people define themselves and others and create notions of 'belonging-ness' or alternatively, 'otherness'" (2007, 120). Ellapen links this specifically to representation of spaces in filmic terms when he explains that "[p]articular spaces become the mise-en-scene where appropriate or inappropriate activities and behaviours become ritualised […]

(Re)production of space through (re)presentations are important to 'forms of knowledge' and 'claims of truth' that establish the manner in which space is perceived, ordered and ideologically structured" (2007, 120).

The mountain spaces in the film are almost otherworldly, spaces where psychic dramas can play out in ways that seem removed from reality. What is interesting about the mountain space depicted in the film is that it is deeply liminal in its construction and orientation (it is the space where boys, through ritual, become men, and while they are in the space, they are neither boy nor man). Additionally, it is a space that actively excludes femininity, whiteness and same-sex sexuality, even when it somehow is consumed by these constructs, intimately linked to them, and in fact facilitates or reinforces their prominence and centrality in many ways. Siseko H. Kumalo and Lindokuhle Gama assert that women and gay men are "inherently […] part of the process" (2018, 4) of initiation, both socially and discursively, which is reflected in texts like *Inxeba*. The mountain space is where Vija and Xolani can meet for their sexual encounters, away from their families and the superego in the form of the society that judges them. At one point in the film, they even embrace around the campfire, seemingly in a (dream-like) trance as the repressed can be let loose, at least to a greater extent than they can find expression for in their everyday lives. The initiands constantly speak of women in the space and of how their initiation would make them more attractive to women. Importantly, whiteness constantly penetrates the space, and the characters show much tension around white people and the threat that they embody (Andrews 2018). The space thus is not the sole domain of Xhosa, heterosexual males whose identities are meant to be negotiated there, but involves dynamic interactions with so-called "excluded" groups in the process of becoming; the outsider seems to be intimately involved.

But what happens when these intimate, sacred, secretive spaces are invaded by the outsider through representation and viewing on screen? This invasion links in many ways to Metz's idea of voyeurism (1982), which might explain some of the discomfort around the film. Metz (1982) holds that the cinematic gaze is necessarily voyeuristic because the subject (or object) represented on screen cannot *gaze back*. The viewer has access to spaces where they would have been excluded, and the subject on screen cannot close the door, push the viewer out or voice their discomfort. There is something invasive about representing the Other which is disempowering to the subject reflected in that mirror. Metz argues that the "viewing process is voyeuristic in that there is always a distance maintained, in the cinema, between the viewing subject and its object" (Creed 1998, 84). Thus, while the viewer might sympathise, they do not need to empathise; they cannot help or interact with the object on the screen, and they can judge while remaining blameless as the story unfolds.

Creed explains that many psychoanalytic film scholars have viewed film media as "exhibit[ing] an Oedipal trajectory; that is, the (male) hero was confronted with a crisis in which he had to assert himself over another man (often a father figure) in order to achieve social recognition and win the woman" (1998, 80). However, this type of trajectory is missing in *Inxeba*. The male protagonists in the film do not overcome the ego-pressures they face; they do not challenge or find self-expression in their oppressive surroundings. While the heroic filmic text hinges masculinity on the subjects' ability to self-actualise and to "win the woman," overcome "crises" or "assert themselves," this film seems to strip its Xhosa males of heroism. These male characters are unable to overcome the imposition of powerful forces that symbolically castrate them, and they are unable to resist the stifling father figures who curb their ability to recognise themselves as "men" in their own right, ironically the very purpose of the initiation ritual. As Kumalo and Gama assert of black masculinities in South Africa, the construction of these identities involved "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" (2018, 3). This involved a process of "reclaiming Black ontologies through heroism and bravado" (2018, 3), an idea closely aligned with Creed's Oedipal trajectory which defined filmic identity construction. This framing allows Kumalo and Gama to consider *Inxeba* in relation to the "engendered meanings of an image" (4), where the film is read as threatening and undermining black masculinity by stripping the protagonists of their heroism.

One of the powerful moments that demonstrates this is when the group encounters a white farmer on the mountain who is the "owner" of the land they wish to cross. There is a rich, dynamic moment of symbolic castration in this scene, and the symbolic impotence of the male characters is highlighted. Xolani seems meek as he approaches the farmer, adopts an alien tongue (Afrikaans), and the Xhosa male characters behind him look on in fear and uncertainty as Xolani politely asks if they can cross the land. With the current contestation and debates around land in South Africa, this moment is especially affecting, as it speaks to the colonial practice of claiming white ownership of land that was forcefully taken from black subjects. This symbolic castration on screen has no resolution; the ego is wounded, the masculine heroism stripped away. Vija steals one of the farmer's goats to counteract his sense of shame, but it is apparent that this does not have the intended effect of reinforcing his masculinity, and ironically the character who is often framed as an outsider, Kwanda, is the one to kill the goat. This moment again reinforces a symbolic impotence for the traditional Xhosa males in the film. While the space of the mountain and the initiation ritual are seen as protected sacred elements of cultural construction for Xhosa cosmology, this narrative humiliation undermines the significance of this space. If film is to be seen as a reflection of the Oedipal hero-journey, then this moment reinforces the castration of the subject and his inability to fulfil the masculine heroic journey. When the physical space that enables this journey is already invaded by an outsider, and then subjected to an external gaze, the humiliating wound is compounded.

Ego Protection Mechanisms and Rejection of the False Body-Image

At the end of the film there is an act of violence premised on Kwanda's threat to expose the relationship between Vija and Xolani. Xolani strikes Kwanda with a rock and he falls from a cliff presumably to his death. The moment is distinctly psychoanalytic—the Id, the carnal desires and the freedom to express parts that are detested by society that are repressed and compartmentalised, is represented by Kwanda in this moment. Kwanda symbolises the freedom from social pressure, the ability to be authentic, to resist the chains of gender normativity and sexual conformity. But that authenticity is a threat, a problem to be eliminated. The society, the superego that dictates and prescribes Xolani's self-perception and how he understands his desires, triumphs. The ego has to take action to protect itself, and Xolani lashes out in violence. The moment could be read as a reflection of homophobia within *ulwaluko* spaces, a sign that queer individuals are outsiders to be eliminated in traditional African spaces. This is rooted in the problematic thinking that their gaining power and the ability to speak and act is somehow a threat to traditional Xhosa masculinity. The deeply psychodynamic nature of the film is highlighted in this moment, where Xolani protects himself from exposure and rejection from the society he is a part of. At the same time, Xolani commits a cowardly act, unable to accept his desires or to have his "truth" unveiled. The heroic journey is thwarted, and the psychodynamic processes of revelation and self-acceptance are simultaneously undermined.

In light of the discussion in this paper the film's title becomes even more significant, a signifier that carries an *excess of meaning* above those intended. The concept of the wound is used in physical ways (the cutting of foreskin, committing murder) and symbolic ways (being a queer person who is *out of place*, suffering the subjugation and violences of landlessness, poverty, the increasing pressures to disown traditional practices). Furthermore, the film itself *inflicts a wound* and *exposes a wound* that might have been festering for a long time. The film is seen as creating a false body-image, an image that horrifies the subject-viewer both because it counters the heroic Oedipal journey by showing hopelessness and impotence for the Xhosa men in the text and because it shows an image that *should never have been seen*, an image that gains its very power from secrecy, namely the Xhosa initiand existing in liminality between the modes of boy and man. This is how the film might be a new wound. The wound that was already there is the wound of colonialism and apartheid, the wound of being the Other who is objectified through a white gaze and a Western perspective. For the few moments that a white character is shown in the film, namely the farmer encountered on the mountain, the wound is exposed and ego protection mechanisms are employed.

This is a tension captured in the work of Frantz Fanon, who analysed black subjectivities in terms of psychological wounds born of colonial contact and the recognition of the self as the demonised Other. Fanon (1970) explains in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country" (1970, 9). This "culture" which instils inferiority manifests in various ways, and Fanon's concept could be applied to the filmic representation of *Inxeba*. As Kumalo and Gama explain, using Fanon's psychodynamic perspective, the film was contested as it was seen as operating "for the purposes of and via the white imagination" (2018, 14). The body-image is reflected through an outsider's eyes.

While this contestation about representation might seem to suggest a desire for an insider voice, an African perspective in filmic representation in order to restore dignity which the Western gaze might rob the subject of, there are many disheartening fractures and policings of this "insider" voice. Anele Siswana and Peace Kiguwa (2018) demonstrate how queer people are viewed as outsiders often in ways that are conflated with whiteness, something which happens in the film with the character of Kwanda and also in social media reactions (2018, 54). Siswana and Kiguwa quote users on social media to show how queer people are scapegoated as traitors to culture and tradition, like the queer actors involved in the film who received death threats. One quote from their discussion reads: "these GAY Xhosa are the ones selling our story to these WHITE OPPORTUNISTS … GAY ppl (sic) don't take part in this custom … they go to hospital, I have never seen it happ[e]n " (54). In this construction, gay people are outsiders to the physical space of initiation and to the cultural understanding or insider perspective of the practices reflected in the film. Kumalo and Gama explain that claims of "misrepresentation" were often reactions to the film "locating queerness in a space of culture and tradition; a space sullied by colonial imposition which 'brought' queerness to Africa" (2018, 15). Thus, while there might have been more at play in the reactions to the film, an underlying homophobia in many spaces cannot be denied.

While looking at the film through a psychodynamic lens could offer insight into the hurt and offence that the film has caused, it is important to consider the limitations of this perspective. There is incredible irony even in the construction of this paper: once again, Western theories like psychoanalysis are used to explain an African phenomenon. This is the tension which the academy in Africa often wrestles with and needs to acknowledge. When Western ideas are given prominence in knowledge production, there is the inherent stifling of African perspectives. In fact, Rantsho A. Moraka (2018), in his critique of the gender constructions in the film, explains how concepts of gender that were used to criticise the film, and indeed that underpin Western conceptions of gender relations and patriarchy, are themselves resultant of colonial impositions and violences which might erase African realities or perspectives. At the same time, it is vital not to ignore valuable criticism of the structures within traditional practices that might be oppressive and might still lead to large-scale homophobia and the exclusion of queer voices. While the wound inflicted by the film *Inxeba* might have been multidimensional and while there are valid oppositions to the historical exploitation and misrepresentation that the film might form a part of, this does not negate the important role which artistic representations can play in sparking reflection and social change.

Perhaps, even when the mirror is seen as distorted or broken, it can still show elements that need to be questioned and addressed.

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