Threading *Intsomi* Elements in Kgafela oa Magogodi's *Chilahaebolae*

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Abstract

The series of events in Kgafela oa Magogodi's *Chilahaebolae*, wherein animal characters are in contention with humans, has often been read through Western genre conceptions, while negating features that are unequivocally reminiscent of African oral storytelling traditions. This work intervenes by evaluating elements of *intsomi* and the supernatural in Magogodi's theatre play, noting how the play is intelligible when Blackness is a lens of focus. Blackness provides a critique of symbolic notions of humanism, civil society, and the political landscape that is predominantly anti-Black. *Intsomi* is evoked as a genre in contrast to realism that is premised on the exclusion of the supernatural and Blackness; thus, each tenet is discussed in relation to how the traditional *intsomi* unfolds, and how Magogodi maintains its historicity. *Intsomi* epitomises Black Optimism, articulating a refusal of fungibility and offering African knowledge systems as a deviation from Western genre concepts premised on the exclusion of Blackness. The (un)critical overreliance in Western genre forms in reading *Chilahaebolae*, as some critics have argued, is perceived as repurposing Western systems in reading African artistic works, which presupposes a Western reader, thus failing to meet the objectives of this play. This work threads elements of *intsomi*, providing a novel interpretation of Magogodi's play.

Keywords: *intsomi*; folklore; Blackness; Kgafela oa Magogodi; *Chilahaebolae*

Introduction

Within Kgafela Magogodi's play text *Chilahaebolae* (2023) are elements unequivocally reminiscent of the traditional southern African oral storytelling genre that is passed down from generation to generation known as *intsomi*, which Gay Morris in "Theatre Possibilities of the Traditional Xhosa Iintsomi: What Do They Offer Here and Now?" (1989) defined as a folktale that incorporates fantastic elements, with a use of improvisation and an art which merits the audience's attention (1989, 92–93). Morris evaluates how *intsomi* has been adapted in several South African theatre performances where she explores the core conventions of *intsomi* aesthetic and how they have been adapted to a theatre stage. This study follows from her work in evaluating the explored and unexplored aspects of *intsomi* in contemporary texts like *Chilahaebolae*. It explores the supernatural as an aspect evidently opposed to Western rational science or the belief in science, which requires an attitude wherein science serves as the sole arbiter of reality, typically excluding any notion of the supernatural and religious beliefs (Haimila 2023, 9). The exclusion of the supernatural in this study is perceived as synonymous with the West's exclusion of Blackness. This is deduced from Immanuel Kant's argument that "humanity has its highest degree of perfection in the white race. The yellow Indians have somewhat lesser talent. The Negroes are much lower, and lowest of all is part of the American races" (quoted in Milazzo 2025, 33) and Friedrich Hegel's assertions that Black culture does not exist, and it has no self-expression both in written formats and otherwise (Hegel 1955, 9 quoted in Snead 1981, 147). Hegel compares Black culture with European culture, claiming that the latter encompasses characteristics and sophistication absent in the former. Frank Wilderson observes that these assertions were premised on "white people and their junior partners' need [for] anti-Black violence to know they're alive" (2015, 144), and the realist genre embodied this anti-Blackness with the exclusion of the supernatural. Raymond Williams substantiated that the realist genre was premised not just as a technique or conventions of art but on "changed attitudes towards 'reality' itself, towards man and society and towards the character of all relationships" (Williams 1977/1978, 2). Hortense Spillers intervenes by critiquing the reductive idea of "Black culture" as defined by Hegel and some anti-Black Western epistemology. She makes a supposition, pushing the boundaries of "Black culture," noting that by Black culture, Hegel suggested Black diasporan and African cultures which are not Western, and which would have arisen out of a world of normative violence and an everyday struggle for existence (2006, 25). The idea of "Black culture" is positioned as an alternative, a counterstatement to Western civilisation and culture—it identifies the vocation of culture and civilisation as "the space of contradiction, indictment and the refusal" (Spillers 2006, 25). Culture is the connections between human development and ways of life and between artistic output and intelligence—thus culture is not inherently "Black" or "white," "African" or "European" when perceived in this way, and the supernatural belief in "Black culture" was a retreat from Western modernism (Spillers 2006, 12, 26). Given that Western culture was enunciated through the realist genre within the literary corpus, how does *intsomi* with the inclusion of the supernatural exemplify Spillers's suggestions that

"Black culture" is a space of contradiction and resistance to "Western culture"? The elements of *intsomi* and the supernatural in this work are not innocuous devices but an evaluation of onto-epistemic concepts regarding Bantu culture and African knowledge systems, which stand in opposition to Western epistemes and offer a reimagining of Blackness. As such, genre theory along with Blackness are key conceptual frameworks to navigate the research questions of this study. Blackness is considered as the lived experiences of Black individuals, characterised by pessimism, which articulates the positionality of Black lived experience as a state of poverty and deprivation of plenitude, resulting in a lack of ontology or existence (Moten 2013, 778). Against this backdrop, it explores Black radicalism as a form of optimism, asserting that the absence of ontology equates to nothingness in the contemporary world, and thus it investigates this very nothingness to envision an alternative, a new world that is precisely Black (Moten 2013, 778). Genre theory is the examination of literary works as specialised acts of speech (Fowler 1982, 20). The author conveys meaning through a shared system of expression, which may involve either conscious or unconscious, formulated or unformulated grammatical rules (Fowler 1982, 20). Genre theory is concerned with communication and interpretation more than classification; that is, while classification is genres' modus operandi, the theory is concerned with the meaning carried by a genre (Fowler 1982, 37). When a literary work is assigned to a genre, the immediate aim is to discover its meaning (Fowler 1982, 38); thus, when a work is classified as realist, it carries consciously and unconsciously Western conceptions about reality, which is similar to Williams's assertions above. This work evaluates key tenets of *intsomi*, namely the core-cliche, magic, the communal voice, and the absence of individual names (Bell and Jacobs 2009, 8; Mkonto 2009, 93) as aspects that are communicative of Blackness through which they are an antithesis to Western dominant knowledge systems, thus excavating marginalised African traditions, the historicity of *intsomi*, and Blackness.

Core-cliche

Chilahaebolae is a play of wild animals with humanistic qualities. The tale is largely driven by Mpja (the dog), Phiri (a hyena), and Phokobje (the jackal), who spend the majority of their time searching for food and water since these resources are scarce in the wilderness where they live. The animal representations are in opposition to humans who have an abundance of food and water but rather imprison animals and utilise them for their own means than share these resources. *Chilahaebolae* first premiered in 2017 at the Market Theatre and a recent performance was staged at the Point of Order in Braamfontein in 2023 in the open on Bertha Street. The tension between animals and humans is suggestive of the animals struggling to reclaim their sense of existence. This struggle can potentially be read as an allegory for major liberation struggles and as anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism in drama, Catherine Diamond suggests, conveys parallels between behaviour and the ontology of human feelings, thoughts, and culture with animal species (2023, 77). Magogodi assigns beliefs and cultural practices that are supernaturally inclined to the animals, while humans are motivated by

materialistic desires and a rejection of supernatural practices. With this allegory, Magogodi gestures to two cultural groups that are marked by the acceptance or the rejection of the supernatural, which is synonymous with Western scientific thought and Bantu thought where the former rejects the supernatural while the latter accepts it. The lived experience of the animals who are controlled by the humans can be read through the lenses of Blackness, particularly Afropessimism, which suggests that the present reality is anti-Black and incapable of apprehending the humanity of Black people— "affectively and normatively, black people are not/cannot be citizens of this humanist order" (Hart 2018, 18). In the face of whiteness and influences of colonialism, Black lived experiences are marked by a state of nonexistence and Black people are treated as objects, property that can be exchanged (Wilderson 2010, 58–59). This is a different form of oppression that Black people face compared to other oppressed groups; that is, Black people often face "exploitation and alienation" rather than prejudice. Black lives are fungible, similar to the animals in the text who are traded for fashion leather and denied basic needs for survival (Magogodi 2023, 49). Blackness is the underside of humanism, and when Black experiences are compared to those of other oppressed groups this creates a gap in comprehending Black suffering (Hart 2018, 21; Wilderson 2010, 58–59). These are choices that Magogodi makes to articulate Blackness through the animals. Such nuances can lose their depth when the play is reduced to a "musical satire" with notable "African folktale conventions as the narrative vehicle," as the *African Theatre Magazine* described the play (*The African Theatre Magazine* 2021, 1). Sometimes the play has been described as a fantasy that follows George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or Aesop's fables (Sassen 2017, 2). These terms do not only mark Magogodi's practice, but they misinterpret and forcefully align it to Western conceptual frameworks. Such terms repurpose Western conceptual systems implicitly or explicitly, which presupposes a Western reader (Mudimbe 1985, 150). This work seeks to undo this.

The core-cliche is a nudge at evaluating southern African folktales versus some Western/European tales. The core-cliche is marked by repetitive songs and chants as its dynamic mainspring, which is contrary to how Sassen characterised this work as seemingly drawing from "George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or Aesop's fables" (2017, 02) (see also Opland 1975, 54). This strategy can be observed with the opening phrase "In the beginning *ko nageng*" (Magogodi 2023, 28)—*nageng* is a Setswana word which means "wilderness." The core-cliche alerts the audience to the setting in which the story begins, and it is meant to evoke participation from the audience in a traditional *intsomi* (Moropa 1986, 92). After this declaration a song follows:

Phiri wa thlabeletsa [starts a song]

Phiri: In the beginning ko nageng Phokobje le Mpja nageng disambenche nageng le botse le Phiri 'na le teng [Jackal and Dog in the wilderness They were close friends in the wilderness, ask Phiri she was around]

> Phokobje, Mpja and Phiri tiptoe into a chicken farm. They huddle together in a crouching position, plotting [...]
>
> Together: (*chanting*) Piki piki siya ba ngena sala sala magwala. ke mang mpja ya game? ke re ke mang mpja ya game? ich ich ich. is one is two. Ag' nix machecha sis tog. Phuma wena. Sala wena. (Magogodi 2023, 28–30)

The core-cliche seems to be a distinction that demarcates, forming the main rule that can differentiate *intsomi* from other folktales, such as in the works of the Grimm Brothers, particularly in *Grimm's Fairy Tales* ([1812] 2013). In these works, songs are also discovered and, as in the tale "Hans in Luck," they function with a clear goal which is worked towards. For example, when Hans trades his silver coins for a horse and rides it merrily singing and whistling, he sings a song that goes as follows: "no care no sorrow, a fig for the morrow! We'll laugh and be merry, sing neigh down derry!" (Grimm Brothers [1812] 2013, 9). The song aligns with Hans's excitement of the trade he made, which is different in terms of functionality from the aforementioned quote from *Chilahaebolae* where the chant has no direct implication to the motivations of characters in the tale. Another example of how this tenet works can be observed from Scheub's text as follows:

> The man again said, "Speak, Boy, so that this ox moves faster!" The child sang: Dubulihasa! Dubulihasa! You must travel, Dubulihasa! Because you can see That I'll be killed, Dubulihasa! The ox bellowed, "Mpoooo! Mpooo!" The man said, "Speak, Boy, so that this ox moves!" The boy said, at a river, Dubulihasa! Dubulihasa! You must cross Dubulihasa! Because you can see That I'll be killed, Dubulihasa! (Scheub 1970, 127)

The core-cliche from the aforementioned quote is marked by the seemingly monotonous song "Dubulihasa!" that the boy sings repetitively. This is also how a traditional oral tale is narrated and the adaptations do not prolong this core-cliche as seen above, but with a careful eye, it can be observed that the technique influences the written texts. Its function both in an oral tale and an adaptation echoes James Snead's "On Repetition in Black Culture" (1981) where he critiques notions of "Black culture" and European culture as a response to Hegel's assertion about the absence of culture in the Black community. Snead writes that unlike in European cultural practices where the intention is consistently clear, linear, and always worked towards, in Black culture, particularly rituals, dance, and songs, the goal is always differed, unmotivated, "with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior series" (1981, 149–150). European culture does not allow accidents while Black culture accepts surprises and accidents (Snead 1981, 150). The core-cliche works in "circularity or ritualised time, that is, a sense of time that seems out of place with progressive linear time" (Mupotsa 2022, 68). Thus, this aspect can be viewed as missing in the Grimm Brothers' tale because the value that it serves in Black culture does not resonate with or hold equivalent value in European culture. The core-cliche is made intelligible when viewed from the lens of "Black culture" while it would be discarded in European culture based on how Hagel and Snead define the

clause of this culture. Here, genre can be appreciated as communicating both cultures' juridical utterances that enable/disable, marking a precedence or a floodgate of what it allows and disallows, that is, epistemic notions that make the world sensible to each culture (Derrida 1980, 65). This study reads *Chilahaebolae* as exuding elements of *intsomi*. Magogodi has described his process in creating and staging his play as "*mogaga*," which is defined as a synergy of street cultural idioms and vocabulary fused with the essence of African spiritual traditions (Magogodi 2023, 20). He writes that the foundations of *Chilahaebolae* are

> a trinity of song, incantation and physical storytelling, the production is conceived as *mogaga* play-making or an anticipatory dance drama. Various skills, from vocal agility, acrobatic dexterity to physical elasticity, are required of players who must morph into different animals and features of the landscape. (Magogodi 2023, 25)

Mogaga is a herb with potency to "end bad luck that can be suffered by the community" (Ntsoane 2003, 23). The potency of this herb gestures towards Norbeck's description of an "impersonified" supernatural entity that can "be handled like a material object [and] in some religious beliefs it is given by one mortal to another, may be purchased and sold in whole or in part as a human economic transaction" (Norbeck 1961, 36). This is a force, an energy that exists in all living entities that people can possess and control; it can act in many ways either for good or evil (Norbeck 1961, 36; Osei 2003, 101; Petrus 2009, 51). A personified supernatural entity is associated with projected human qualities such as a deity that can judge humans, feel anger, be benign, pleased, and frightful (Norbeck 1961, 37). The invocation that Magogodi makes to categorise his work with the potency of a herb that is normally used in a ritual captures historical and cultural agency, that is, Setswana culture. The reader of Magogodi's work is forced to consider the healing properties of the herb and how his work prompts a healing of the afflictions endured by Black communities. The origin of some genres rests with individual writers and their achievements (Fowler 1982, 154), and it is important to consider epistemic notions of *mogaga* when reading *Chilahaebolae*. However, "every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres" (Derrida 1980, 65), and the codes according to which *Chilahaebolae* operates are suggestive of *intsomi*, which this work is concerned with. The core-cliche is equally noticeable in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995). In the beginning of the text, it is stated that:

> When in our orature the storyteller begins the story, "They say it once happened…", we are the "they". No individual owns any story. The community is the owner of the story, and it can tell it the way it deems fit. (Mda 1995, 12)

Mda emulates the core-cliche, which in a traditional *intsomi* performance would feature a skilful performer and an audience that would be gathered around the fire with the performer at the centre of the circle—this is coupled by repetitive, rhythmic gestures, and songs that set up the core-cliche alerting the audience of the convention of *intsomi* (Scheub 1970, 121). Magogodi and Mda arguably portray an evolved and modern

version of *intsomi*, thus suggesting that the genre is in a state of motion—it is developing. By observing the core-cliche principle it is evident that *Chilahaebolae* maintains the historicity of the genre in this contemporary era.

The Lack of Individual Names

The lack of individual names is a tenet of *intsomi* that has often been overlooked in discussions about the makeup of this genre, yet it often makes a critical commentary about characters in the story. The lack of individual names is present in traditional and modern *intsomi* productions. By the lack of individual names, this article suggests that characters possess improper names, which are connected to the kind of species they represent; that is, they are named as a collective and their actions in driving the plot are directly connected to who they are. Mpja is described as a dog that is overcome by greed and enjoys a comfortable life, and this is enunciated when he chooses to be in bondage to Motho (the human) who turns Mpja into his house pet (Magogodi 2023, 24). A proper name would denote individual identity, personhood, and a constitution of social persona (Nagy 2012, 139). Characters in *Chilahaebolae* refuse individuality by their nomenclature, a phenomenon not unfamiliar in folktales. Mkonto explains that the lack of individual names is a rhetorical technique that is frequently used in isiXhosa storytelling when a specific name is required to convey a message; it gently advocates for a fundamental understanding of human identity as a collective and the violation of proper names as an anchor for individuality as a social norm (2009, 93; Nagy 2012, 139–140). This technique has the ability to deftly unveil the ideal values of society when used skilfully, as demonstrated by the Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp whose use of some character names in his tales signified key Russian leaders (Gervás 2016, 188; Mkonto 2009, 93). The Russian Formalists were concerned with a folklore that portrayed political developments praising political leaders who were connected to the socialist project and the Soviet Union. This entailed that writers reject "abstract mythic-religious ideas, but must deal with concrete historical reality, work processes, and real interhuman relations" (Oinas 1973, 46). Magogodi views this kind of government-sponsored artistic work as uncreative and only serving the sponsor that is a "*moreki*" (Ravengai and Magogodi 2025, 202). He continues to observe that "you are disinvited if your conduct upsets *Moreki*'s definition of patriotic artistry" (2025, 202). Magogodi can be argued to write for the subaltern. Although folklorists may adopt a similar structure of names that refuse individuality, the values which they communicate may directly be concerned about their societal values, as seen with the formalists. For Magogodi, his characters portray the lived experiences of Black people wherein the animals are an allegory for Black people and their encounter with whiteness—humans in his text. At this point, the animals embrace *nageng* as a place of absence and unmet survival needs—nothingness as an absence of ontology defined through whiteness; thus, nothingness equates to an unrecognised value in the contemporary world (Moten 2013, 778). This is a subversion of ontology and a recognition of the Black individual as a shadow of themselves. The contestation of current definitions of ontology relates to pumping back "life into [the Black individual's] empty shell; to infuse him with pride

and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth" (Biko 1996, 62).

Proper names as ontology signify a social moral value, and anonymity as shame, thus the lack of individual names dismantles notions of individuality with preference for a collective identity (Mkonto 2009, 93; Nagy 2012, 139). Phokobje is a wild dog that cannot be trained or restrained, which is a complete opposite from Mpja. He is a trickster with a rebellious spirit, and he highly values his freedom (Magogodi 2023, 24). There is a tongue-in-cheek commentary that Magogodi offers with Mpja and Phokobje, and by extension every character in this tale. He makes a commentary about the polarisation that arises during the liberation struggle where "the population [comes] to be driven into binary opposition […] patriots versus sellouts, witches versus upright citizens and so forth" (Chimuka 2015, 103). Mpja epitomise sellouts as he renounced their original aspiration for freedom, whilst Phokobje's tenacity precluded him from yielding to become a pet for a human. Motho represents the institutions of oppression, and the volatile encounter between the humans and the animals represents the liberation struggle—illustrating that the lack of individual names in *Chilahaebolae* represents abstract ideas.

Phiri is often associated with her ability to tame the environment and produce potent medicinal substances (*lechemi*) that enable her and her peers to overcome adversity. This phenomenon is depicted in the eighth scene when Phiri commences a ritual that will bestow on Phokobje and other animals the strength to confront humans. She draws a circle around Phokobje, chews a branch leaf and pierces his skin, then applies the branch residue inside the cuts that she made. This ritual is followed by a chant which leads to "*dilo tsa naga*" spirits of the wild pouring into them (Magogodi 2023, 66). This ritual is a careful process that evokes and endows the animals with the spiritual strength of the wild, a technique which reveals ideals of the Bantu culture. In this culture the body is a mnemonic piece of spirits and ancestral consciousness, and a site where the supernatural resides—a body composed of *ntu*, that is, a force, an energy that manifests in all living entities—*mu-ntu* (Dyer 2024, 121; Mudimbe 1985, 189; Norbeck 1961, 36). Phiri is a direct reference to this cultural worldview. The reference that Phiri makes alludes to the kind of verisimilitude of *intsomi*, that is, what its readers believe to be true. In this case, it can be deduced that *intsomi* assumes a reader who understands the notions of reality that are believed by traditional Bantu communities. Often the notion of verisimilitude is used to communicate realism; however, Steve Neale suggests that each genre has its notions of verisimilitude (1990, 47). He writes,

> we realize that a work is said to have verisimilitude in relation to […] what we call rules of the genre: for a work to be said to have verisimilitude, it must conform to these rules […] Aristotle, however, has already perceived that the verisimilar is not a relation between discourse and its referent (the relation of truth), but between discourse and what readers believe is true. (Neale 1990, 47)

Neale delinks verisimilitude from realism and he states that it is a general rule of a genre. What is deemed plausible by a certain genre is an enactment of verisimilitude. It would be absurd if there was no music in a musical theatre; thus, by having music it is adhering to the verisimilitude of the genre—musical theatre (Neale 1990, 46). The direct reference made through Phiri adheres to the culture of a people who view reality as a constant interaction with the natural and the supernatural. Therefore, Phiri's supernatural abilities are most intelligible when associated with *intsomi*. Magical realism, which is a genre that is immediately considered when the supernatural and the natural share the same realm without one overpowering the other (Bowers 2004, 03), has a verisimilitude which is constructed upon realism, "as it performs a fundamentally mimetic representation of a given reality" (Moudileno 2006, 30). Magical realism critiques realism by ridiculing the fundamental principles that define the realist genre, which dismisses the supernatural, while simultaneously acknowledging those principles. It is not disconcerting that Faris defines magical realism as directly opposed to "European realism." It is because the "magic" in magical realism is considered to be simply fictitious, not having direct influence on the extratextual world (Faris 2004, 22). This affirms Stephen Hart's argument that the supernatural is political, that it is an attempt to grapple with conceptions of reality (Hart and Ouyang 2005, 19). It is possible that people's conceptions of reality will differ based on culture. In this case, if the genealogy of magical realism is considered it will be evident that it arises from a culture that views the supernatural and natural realm as bounded entities; this is contrary to *intsomi*, which arises from a culture that considers the natural and the supernatural to have a symbiotic relationship and not as bounded entities (Petrus and Bogopa 2007, 2).

The role of names in *intsomi* conjures a particular association, sometimes of a ludic nature, or they produce onomastic allusions, similes, and metaphors (Nicolaisen 2008, 94). The lack of individual names in *intsomi* conjures a sense of Black Optimism wherein improper names equate to an ontological freedom; thus, it is important to view this tenet as providing clues about the southern African Bantu culture which contests the belief in science.

The Communal Voice

The communal voice narrates and controls the movement and pace of *intsomi*. The communal voice creates a mimetic effect that makes it seem like a collective mind that performs a collective action, expressing shared emotions and perspectives of a selfless "individual who functions as a group and loses [their] individual properties" (Bekhta 2017, 177). In a traditional *intsomi* performance, there is usually the storyteller and the audience to whom the story is told—the communal voice denotes the storyteller who improvises the narrative and uses repertoire of core-cliches (Scheub 1970, 119). *Intsomi* storyteller possesses an understanding of the community's narratives akin to that of the West African *djeli*/griots, recognised as the oral historians within the traditional Manding society. They are skilled orators who document marriages, births, and funerals across the village's generations (Keita 2014 cited in Ebine 2019, 4). Like the sole

performer in *intsomi*, the griots in the traditional Manding community were considered the custodians of the oral heritage, necessitating a custom of improvising the oral history by incorporating embellishments and intriguing words, images, themes, and object names (Ebine 2019, 02). A *Liala* in Yoruba suggests one who holds legacies and secrets in a narrative form (Baraka 2009, 5; Eaton 2021, 52), thus emphasising how the communal voice is developed from a setting of a *djeli* and the sole performer that carries memories and collective identities. While there are similarities between the duties of a *djeli* and the sole performer of *intsomi*, the difference is that a *djeli* is accommodative of broad duties associated with musicians, historians, and praise poets who are selected through blood relations, thus limiting who can hold the role of a *djeli* (Ebine 2019, 3; Kertzer 2025, 1). The sole performer is only limited to the performance of *intsomi*, as their roles do not extend to other professions. Naturally, an adaptation of this style in performance entails that the imaginary fourth wall that demarcates the performance and audience space is breached—performers will constantly interact with the audience: "the play's plot and the opinions of the protagonists developed in the arms of the audience" (Morris 1989, 96). Plays like Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa, and Barney Simon's *Woza Abert!* (1981) and Refiloe Lepere's *Postcards: Bodily Preserves* (2025) that workshopped their storyline and constantly breached the fourth wall can arguably be considered as borrowing from this style of *intsomi* where the story develops from several people. Morris reads the reanimations of Morena in *Woza Abert!* as espousing *intsomi* and how the genre has influenced major South African theatre productions. The sole performer of a traditional *intsomi* is substituted with the communal voice in literary texts and a theatre text/performance is devoid of a single author. Although the adaptations of *intsomi* to a written text are not neat, the communal voice is best explored in *Ways of Dying* with Toloki and Noria as the focus. The communal voice occasionally creates the impression that the reader witnesses Toloki's or Noria's inner voice when in fact it is conveying a deeper understanding of Toloki's or Noria's emotions. It is stated that "we live our lives together as one. We know everything about everybody […] We are the all-seeing eyes of the village gossip" (Mda 1995, 12). It can be inferred that to be communal accounts for everyone's emotions, similar to how the sole performer of a traditional *intsomi* accounts for every character found in a tale—the narrative voice coexists with the affairs of the community and those of Toloki and Noria. In a theatre performance, this technique requires a level of exceptional improvisation skill, expanding the role of the sole performer to "deal in close empathy with the experiential nuances, the subjective energies of the people, constituted as an audience" (Vaughan 1988, 16 cited in Morris 1989, 96) into a group that workshops the story or creating impressions void of a single author. Magogodi adeptly navigates the delicate balance of this adaptation, employing a communal voice while integrating stage directions, making the main characters of the story narrators who give different accounts of the same story.

Although the three characters give an account of the story, there is a subtle suggestion that the story is about creatures of the wilderness (not just three animal kinds)—thus emphasising the community. The three characters are vessels through which the story unfolds. Mda says "no individual owns any story. The community is the owner of the

story, and it can tell it the way it deems fit" (Mda 1995, 12). Here, the roles of *intsomi* performance and the *djeli* converge. As the play progresses characters experience life in the story as individuals, demonstrating how Magogodi fails to fully adapt the communal voice into a theatre play. This can be attributed to the fact that plays in general utilise stage directions as opposed to narrative voices. Magogodi infuses in his play what Koliswa Moropa describes as visual effects which can be absent on a written paper but can be emulated through interjectives and ideophones (Moropa 1986, 92). Interjectives are words used to convey shock or surprise, for example through exclamations such as "*owu*!" and sometimes to demonstrate pity; for example, "*kowu*!" would demonstrate emotions of pity. Ideophones are words depicting dramatised action like "*nyi*" (to put), "*gqi*" (to appear), and "*dyumpu*" (to fall into water) (Moropa 1986, 92). Interjectives are evident in scene six when an interested circus trainer, Maslamos, volunteers to purchase a chained Phokobje:

> Maslamos: (*bursting in*) Iyo yo yo! Three for a live jackal? E latlhile mos. I hear the jackal can talk. The Circus could use a clever creature like that. He'll be a hit all over the land (rubbing hands together in anticipation.) (Magogodi 2023, 50)

Maslamos's exclamations in his opening speech reveal dramatic emotions of surprise that Moropa characterised as an interjective. An ideophone can also be identified in the same scene from the stage directions with the words "*jiki-jiki*," which are suggestive of a sudden turn of events. Magogodi employs these devices in *Chilahaebolae* and creatively manages to bridge the gap between the traditional sole performer of *intsomi* by using language that is mimetic of the verbal images created by the sole performer. As such, Magogodi employs embellishments to the communal voice while maintaining the historicity of the genre.

Conclusion

Black lived experience is constantly marked by myriad forms of dispossessions and a negotiation of symbolic senses of humanism. *Chilahaebolae* begins by demonstrating through an allegory of animals the amputation and fungibility of Black bodies, and the implications of these processes for Black being and peoplehood. *Intsomi* tenets and the supernatural epitomise the Black Optimism approach to challenging anti-Blackness, as they provide an alternative to dominant Western epistemologies in reading African art. The elements of *intsomi* consisting of the communal voice, the core-cliche, and the lack of individual names have been evaluated, demonstrating how the historicity of the genre has been maintained. This study interrogated the form, content, and style of *intsomi* as exuding African knowledge systems with the desire to uncover marginalised African traditions, as exemplified in Magogodi's work. Magogodi examined each tenet distinctly, indicating the genre's evolution over time. The core-cliche is the main thread of *intsomi*, and Magogodi explored this tenet by use of songs that are recurring in the text, a chant and a saying found in the opening scene. Drawing on how many scholars have written about *intsomi*, it was evident in this article that Western genre forms can

misinterpret African art forms; thus, comparative studies that focus on *intsomi* and other African genre forms could be conducted in future research.

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