



Exploring Intersex and Homosexuality in Sibiya's isiZulu Novel Inkululeko Engakhululekile (2020): A Literary Analysis

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Abstract

Literary works often mirror the complexities of real life and the diverse lived experiences of communities in a fictitious way. Even though it is fiction, authors analyse lives lived by real people in communities and then develop fiction stories. Homosexuality and intersex are the realities lived by people in communities, a reality that most researchers shy away from. This article explores how Sibiya portrays these themes in a novel entitled *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020). The focus is more on the portrayal of intersex, which is a rarely spoken reality of minority people. Furthermore, the article examines how the novel integrates cultural traditions with queer identities, challenging conventional narratives and fostering a deeper understanding of inclusivity. The analysis is grounded in queer theory which advocates for the deconstruction of binary notions of gender and sexuality while emphasizing the fluidity of identity. The article first presents the context of intersex and homosexuality within the broader societal and cultural framework, followed by a discussion of the methodology of the article. It then delves into how *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020) portrays the intersection of queer identities and isiZulu culture, shedding light on the diversity within the LGBTQI+ community and the transformative potential of literature in addressing these themes. This is essential for educating people about the existence of diversity amongst the LGBTQI+ community.

Keywords: *Culture; Homosexuality; Hermaphrodite; Inkululeko Engakhululekile; Intersex; Queer Theory*

Introduction

While there are countries that only favor heterosexual relationships there are countries that also permit homosexual relationships. Amongst those countries, South Africa is one of them. According to Rudwick (2010: 112), South Africa became the first country in Africa to include a sexual identity clause in the Bill of Rights in 1996, which led to legalizing same-sex marriages. This means that, in South Africa, all people have the same rights and should all be treated equally, regardless of their sexual preferences. Nevertheless, this is not the case; Chamane (2017: 05) argues that even though sexuality struggles vary from one individual to the other, based on varied circumstances and experiences,

homosexual people suffer the most. Despite the liberal constitution, South African gay men and lesbian women are still faced with discrimination and victimization because of their sexual orientation (Wells and Polders, 2006: 21). This suggests the possibility of having homosexual people accepted and recognized in writing, but practically still marginalized and discriminated for their sexuality in other communities.

According to Rudwick (*Op cit.*), there have been many instances where homosexual people suffered hostile violence of homophobic attacks. Wells and Polders (*Op cit.*) classify unjust treatment of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex (LGBTQI) community as heterosexist and homophobia. In other words, because people grew up in societies that were not aware of homosexuality they tend to have a fear of homosexual people and discriminate against them. Wells and Polders (*Op cit.*) argue that homophobia manifests in the avoidance of the LGBTQI community, through joking negatively about gay and lesbian people, verbal and physical harassment, and violence through gay-bashing, rapes, destruction of private property, and murder.

Epprecht, quoted by Ntuli (2009: 06) states that homosexuality in Africa is labelled as “the white man’s disease”. This is the view that some South Africans also hold. In other words, homosexuality is seen as a disease that came with white people, seeing that it is seen as a “disease”, means that there should be a cure for it. That is where the violence and homophobic attacks happen, in an attempt to find a “cure”. Olaoluwa (2018: 20) reveals that viewing same-sex sexualities and gender variance as ‘un-African’ is influenced by the adoption of Christianity and Islam, which are two Abrahamic religions that dominantly influence the values and beliefs of Africans and, as Mutua in Olaoluwa (*Op cit.*) state, the two religions have homophobia in their doctrine teaching. In other words, ‘un-African’ religions influence some Africans to believe that gender variances and homosexuality are un-African, one should then wonder how gender variances were viewed before the arrival of Christianity and Islam.

In the apartheid era, the LGBTQI community was mostly disadvantaged. According to Rudwick (*Op cit.*: 116), homosexual activities were illegal, which essentially meant that the black LGBTQI community faced twofold discrimination: based on their skin colour, and also, based on their sexual identification. At a time when the LGBTQI community should be enjoying their human rights and celebrating freedom, like anyone else, they are still discriminated against for their sexual orientation. There may be many contributing factors to this, one being misinformed and a lack of educational measures on the LGBTQI community. van Vollenhoven and Els (2013: 266) state,

Despite these post-apartheid constitutional provisions, human rights violations against LGBT people recurrently surface in the South African media. Continual social intolerance against LGBT people hints towards a gap in the South African education system to educate ill-informed members of society against homophobia and unfair prejudice against sexual orientation.

In other words, having freedom of expression; equality; and all the clauses that speak of accommodating everyone; without having proper systems that will educate and train people on how to accept and understand diversity is pointless because those who should be protected are still marginalized. This then becomes the author’s responsibility to educate through literary works about harmonious existence in societies and acceptance of homosexuality and much as heterosexuality.

Andrews (2019: 01) argues that the LGBTQI community was not represented in literature in South Africa before the end of apartheid, then, post-apartheid several celebrated authors explored queer themes, however, it was explored from the white perspective. This suggests that black queer individuals were still invisible in literature even post-apartheid.

In the isiZulu literary works, Bengithi Lizokuna, a novel by N.G Sibiya (2008), was the first novel to be published exploring the theme of homosexuality. Sibiya has paved the path for the homosexuality theme in IsiZulu literature, limited literary works have been published exploring this

theme. Xaba (2016) in her MA dissertation presented some literary works that explore the theme of homosexuality, in those, it is a novel titled *Bayeza Abanqobi* (2012), and the short stories *Umhlaba Ushingile*, *Oqotsheni*, *Impohlo*, *Ngeke*, and *Amalungelo*. Dumisani Sibiyi (2020) becomes one of the very few authors to successfully write and publish the homosexuality and intersex themes in his novel *Inkululeko Engakhululekile*, on whom this article is based. This article aims to discuss the success of the author in portraying the theme of intersex and homosexuality in the IsiZulu novel *Inkululeko Engakhululekile*.

This article employs the queer theory. While Matebeni, Monro, and Vasu (2018) explain that the word ‘queer’ can be used as a noun to refer to people who are non-heterosexual and non-gender binary, or as a verb to challenge or disrupt heterosexuality or gender binaries, in this article, queer is applied as a theoretical framework. It goes beyond simply identifying non-normative sexualities and gender identities by challenging the rules and ideas that support traditional views of gender and heterosexuality.

Pennel (2022: 574) highlights that queer theory is a post-structural concept that originated in the 20th century primarily, in the discipline of gender studies and queer studies. This is a field of study that challenges and critiques the traditional understanding of gender and sexuality. According to Ranjan (2019: 90), It consists of concepts often labeled as postmodern or poststructuralist, initially focused on gender and, more recently, on sexuality. In short, queer theorists suggests destabilizing hegemonic cultural ideas and normalcy (Ranjan, *Op cit.*). In other words, this theory questions the idea of fixed binary categories of gender and sexual orientation. It argues against the view of heterosexuality as a norm and homosexuality as the “other”.

One of the basic features of the queer theory, according to Ranjan (*Op cit.*) is that all statements about reality are socially constructed. In other words, it views identities and sexual desires as complex and fluid phenomena that are socially constructed rather than being inherent or natural. Queer theory is not a cohesive or systematic framework, but rather a compilation of intellectual efforts to understand the connections between sex, gender, and sexual desire (Spargo, 2000: 9). In a nutshell, this theory is interested in engagements that investigate the relationships between sex-related phenomena. Moreover, Nakayama (2017: 1) argues:

The queer theory begins with the notion that identities are not destiny; our identities do not determine who we are, who we become, or how we view the world. Instead, identities are constituted and constructed to meet particular goals. In this sense, queer theorists have paid much attention to what is considered normative, as well as to how and why people sometimes resist normativity.

Queer theory has been carefully selected for its relevance to this article as it is often used to analyze LGBTQI+ people and issues (Pennell. 2022: 574). Nakayama, (*Op cit.*) argues as follows:

...if someone has a new baby, people often ask: “Is it a boy or a girl?” This assumes, of course, that there are only two possibilities. If the baby is a boy, he may find himself surrounded by blue clothes, blankets, and other gendered items. As he grows older, he will face normative expectations that he should want to play with certain toys, for example, toy trucks, and should engage in certain kinds of activities, for example, sports. He should not want to play with dolls or engage in sewing. These gendered constructions are historically and culturally constituted; they are not necessarily the same in all historical eras or in all cultures around the world. In other words, these gendered ideas are not “natural,” or grounded in biology. Queer theory insists on the constructed aspect of identities, and by so doing it opens the possibility of constructing identities in other ways and for other goals.

It can be inferred from the above reference that society typically recognizes two normative sexes at birth, that is male or female, this excludes intersex. These sexes are therefore associated with specific

societal expectations regarding gender roles and behaviour. As a result, discomfort and confusion arise when these expectations must be altered to accommodate the diversity and complexity of sex and sensuality. Queer theory seeks to alleviate this confusion by questioning and deconstructing socially constructed ideas of identity and sexuality to promote inclusivity.

The summary of the novel discussed by Zwane (2024: 462), reveals that amongst several themes explored in the novel *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020), homosexuality and hermaphroditism become the notable themes. It is worth noting that the term hermaphroditism (explained later in the article) is viewed as insensitive and therefore less used by scholars in recent years. The narrative revolves around the Ndlovu family, who welcome a child born with both male and female sexual organs. This then leads to the parents deciding to surgically remove the male organ since they already have three sons. As the child grows, she discovers her attraction to other girls, while the eldest son realizes his attraction to other men.

When comparing *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* with another IsiZulu novel discussing the theme of homosexuality, *Bengithi Lizokuna*, *Inkululeki Engakhululekile* chose to explore the theme differently by showing that there are people who may be born with two sexual organs. In contrast, others are born with one sexual organ, but they all may have similar struggles with sexual orientation. Whereas, in *Bengithi Lizokuna* (2006), the author narrates a story of a young male who undergoes surgery to change his sexual organs when he realizes that he has feelings for males. *Bengithi Lizokuna* presents the story from the transgender point of view, while *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* presents it from a hermaphroditism and gayness point of view. This paper discusses both Hermaphroditism and homosexuality as they are both presented in the novel. Moreover, hermaphroditism is discussed because it is rarely spoken about and hardly presented in literature.

Narration of Hermaphroditism

At the beginning of the novel, the author presents us with a pregnant mother about to go into labour. In this era, pregnancy and labour are no longer mysteries. With improved technology, parents do not have to wait until the baby is born to know the sex of the baby. Doctors can give an estimated due date and predict the sex of the baby. However, this was not the case for the Ndlovu family. Sibiya (2020: 4) states:

Okumphatha kabana nokho kulesi sisu sakhe wukuthi odokotela abehlukene bebesho izinto ezingafani mayelana nokuthi uthwele noma uzothola mntwana muni. Odokotela ababili bathe uzothola umtwana womfana kwathi abanye ababili bathi uzothola intombazane. Owesihlanu udokotela yena uthe akacacelwa ukuthi umfana noma yintombazane yini.

What bothers her with her pregnancy is that different doctors predict the sex of her unborn child differently. Two doctors predicted that she would give birth to a boy, while the other two doctors predicted a baby girl. The fifth doctor said it is unclear as to whether the unborn baby is a boy or a girl.

The unclearness of the baby's sex could suggest a possibility of sex variances beyond the societal norm which challenges the binary view of male and female, or it can highlight the limitations of prenatal technologies and the complexities of determining sex before birth. One can also argue that the author is trying to build suspense for the reader about the sex of the baby. He does this by presenting different doctors predicting different sexes of the baby. This is unusual because in most cases, different doctors predict the same sex of the baby, and that predicted sex then becomes a reality when the mother gives birth. Therefore, for the characters of the Ndlovu family, the sex of their baby is a mystery, just like in the olden days when there were no advanced technologies to predict.

The author continues with his creative writing of presenting suspense when the protagonist, Mrs Ndlovu is having contractions and is rushed to hospital where she is expected to deliver her child. After being admitted and having gone through her examination, Mrs Ndlovu finally gave birth. In Sibiya's (2020: 12) words, "*Umhlengikazi ophethe ibhukwana anikine ikhanda bese ethi: "Matron, angazi ukuthi ngibhale ukuthi umfana noma yintombazane le ngane."* (The nurse carrying a book to record babies born shakes her head and says, "Matron, I don't know whether to write that this baby is a boy or a girl.")). Strangely, the sex of the baby is still unknown even after the baby is born. This is because; normally the sex of the baby is the first thing that the doctors present to the mother when the baby is born. Society has been made to believe that a baby can be either a boy or a girl (male/female). For the doctors to not know whether the baby is a boy or girl could mean either that the genitals are underdeveloped, or the baby has two genitals, which is one scenario that is never talked about or expected in society and therefore pressurizes parents to ensure that the baby conforms to the societal expectations. As presented in the novel:

Waze wabuza kamuva ukuthi ngabe uthole mtwana muni. Umhlengikazi waphakamisa amahlombe okomuntu osuke engazi. Wayesevele eqonda enganeni wayikhumula. Wathuka woma uMaSibisi uma ebona umtanakhe enobulili besilisa nobesifazane.

(She later asked the gender of her child. The nurse raised her shoulders as a person signalling that they did not know. She then went to her child and undressed the child. She was so shocked when she learned that her child has both male and female genitals.)

(Sibiya, 2020: 13)

Being born with two genitals is a rare condition called hermaphrodite. Collins Dictionary (2005) defines a hermaphrodite as an animal, person, or plant with both male and female reproductive organs. It is worth noting that the usage of the term hermaphrodite might sound insensitive, therefore, the term intersex is used as it appears to be more polite. The term '*cubumbili*' is used to refer to intersex individuals in isiZulu. As a corrective measure, some people opt for surgeries to remove or reposition sexual organs to follow the well-known, either female or male genitals. Cohen (2021) states:

Intersex surgeries are non-lifesaving procedures that change natural variations in genital appearance or reproductive anatomy. Intersex surgeries include reducing or repositioning a clitoris (which can result in the loss of sexual sensation), creating or altering a vagina, moving a urethra that already works, and removing organs that would make sex hormones (such as gonadectomy, which can result in sterilization).

In the novel *Inkululeko Engakhululeki* (2020), the author presents intersex through the presentation of a baby born with both genitals. "The doctors declare a state of emergency when they fail to immediately determine whether the infant is a girl or a boy" (Amato, 2016: 71). So was it in the novel in question, that the medical team is presented confused and requiring assistance from the superiors. The confusion is a result of the fact that the baby is not conforming to the binary norms as expected in society. From a queer theoretical perspective, the infant's indeterminate sex disrupts the normative gaze that demands clarity and certainty in gender identity. This is narrated as follows:

Saya ngokwanda isixuku sabahlengikazi ababengunge uMaSibisi nomntanakhe. UMaSibisi usalokhu ulele. Umhlengikazi ophethe ibhukwana anikine ikhanda bese ethi: "Matron, angazi ukuthi ngimbhale ukuthi umfana noma yintombazane le ngane." Baphathana ngamehlo bonke abahlengikazi. Akekho owaphuma nempendulo.

(The crowd surrounding MaSibisi and her newborn baby continued to increase. MaSibisi is still fast asleep. The nurse carrying a small book shook her head then said, “Matron, I don’t know whether to write this baby is a boy or a girl.” All the nurses looked at each other. Noone responded.

(Sibiya, 2020: 12-13)

In the above lines, the writer presents nurses all confused as to what to write as the sex of the baby. This is because the baby had both female and male genitals. It is at this stage that a state of emergency is declared and higher management is consulted for a solution. Which then resulted in the correction surgery being the only available option to be given to the parents. After a consultation on the phone with the superiors, the matron gave the parents a date for the correction surgery and informed them that they would have to perform surgery for the child to conform to either being a girl or a boy (Sibiya, 2020: 18). The reaction of the medical staff, seeking external validation and “correction” through surgical intervention, highlights the discomfort and even panic that society feels when confronted with an identity that resists neat categorization. This mirrors queer theory’s idea that gender and identity are not fixed, and that trying to force them into rigid categories creates unnecessary pressure and harm.

Compton (2018) states that surgeries to correct the gender to conform to the either male or female “have been performed on intersex babies and children since at least the 1950s, often in secrecy,” without ever telling the children. Sterling (2000: 45) highlights that Coercive measures are often implemented without adequately consulting parents and never with the patient's consent, the patient being an infant in this case. The same thing happened in the novel, the Ndlovu parents chose to remove the male genital, making their baby a girl, but they planned to never tell anyone about the procedure.

When intersex is involved, the parent-child relationship is characterized by secrecy (Amato, 2016: 219). In other words, parents who ordered the ‘correction’ surgery to be performed on their children keep the information of the surgery a secret from their children. Not only to the children but to the extended family also. So were the Ndlovu characters, the parents swore never to tell their “daughter” about the surgery. Even before the surgery was performed Sibiya states, “*izingcingo ezingenayo kusokhaya noma kunkosikazi zivela ezihlotsheni, zaziphendulwa ngezwi elilodwa, kuthiwe nje: “sithole intombazane.”*” (All the phone calls from relatives coming to either the wife or the husband to enquire about the sex of the baby received the same answer, that: “we got a baby girl”) (Sibiya, 2020: 19). This proves that the parents were willing to keep the truth about the sex of the baby a secret and ensure that no one knows about the surgery as well. The secrecy surrounding the child’s intersex condition and the corrective surgery reveals the pressure in society to maintain rigid, binary sex and gender norms. Since queer challenges the conformity to predetermined categories of male and female, the secrecy can therefore be viewed as a form of control that is meant to ensure that the newborn conforms to these socially constructed norms.

Even after the baby was ‘forced’ to conform through correctional surgeries, she grew to reject these imposed norms. In doing so, she embodied the principles challenging the binary understanding of gender. She rejects the imposed norms by realizing and revealing that she is gay. Even after her parents realize that she claims to be gay (having romantic feelings for other girls), they choose to confess only to their son Mthokozisi instead of the one who had her sexual organs “corrected”, Nosipho. The fear of having their daughter hating them for choosing sex that was suitable for their desire to have a girl child was the deciding factor that led to the truth being hidden from her (the daughter). The guilt the parents had was an influence in them (the Ndlovu parents) accepting their child for the sexuality she had ‘chosen’ for herself. It is the guilt that made Ndlovu say:

Sasiyokhetha kanjani ukuthi abe ngumfana ngoba abafana besesinabo be bathathu? Angiqondi ukuthi ufuna ukuthina, nkosikazi. Thina kusho ukuthi senza iphutha ngokukhethela kanjena. Mina

esengikubona manje wukuthi kwakumele simyeke enobulili obubili bese kuthi esekhulile, azikhethele yena lobo afuna ukubusebenzisa,

(How were we going to choose for her to be a boy meanwhile we had already had three boys? My wife, I do not understand what you are trying to say. Our mistake was to choose for her. I now think that we should have let her grow with both genitals until she is old enough to choose for herself the one she wants to use.)

(Sibiya, 2020: 127)

Choosing not to perform corrective surgery on intersex babies means that a child will grow up with both male and female genitalia. This can lead to issues such as problems with identity formation, self-esteem, and bullying. If Mr. and Mrs. Ndlovu in the Novel had not agreed to the surgery, Nosipho might have struggled with understanding whether she was a boy or a girl. However, rather than trying to force her into a binary sex, embracing her natural diversity would have allowed her to navigate her identity in a way that reflects fluidity, and challenging the societal need for conformity. Additionally, if other children became aware of her having both genitalia, they might have bullied and mocked her. This marginalization is because of societal pressures, perhaps embracing her diversity could have led to empowerment rather than shame. The dilemma in the novel reflects the broader challenge of accepting non-binary identities and the consequences of attempting to force individuals into predefined boxes, which queer theory critiques as limiting and harmful.

Narration of Homosexuality

The term homosexuality refers to a romantic engagement between people of the same sex, this can be a male-to-male or female-to-female relationship. Medrado and Valentova (2023: 1) define it as the sexual preference of the same sex. This can occur through attraction, behavior, desire, and fantasy, social identification with sexual orientation, or physiological arousal (Valentova, *Op cit.*). This is one of the topics that are deemed to be sensitive. Lyonga (2023: 571) outlines reasons that might be contributing to homosexuality being seen as a sensitive topic, some of those reasons are that there are countries that still criminalize homosexuality, again that it is a private behaviour that is still condemned in other countries. It therefore becomes a challenge for researchers to dive deep into the issues of homosexuality. Homosexuality, as stated before (in the introduction), has been rarely explored, especially in African languages. The novel in question explores this theme, hence it is discussed in this article. The focus will be on gay people, which is the sexual relationship between a male and a male person.

The novel presents a character named Mthokozisi, who, at the beginning is a first-born son of Ndlovu and maSibisi. This character is depicted as an individual who is deeply passionate about soccer. This is evident in the line as follows:

Wazithela mhluzi eswayini! Esageza izitsha kanjalo, kungene uMthokozisi ebuya ukuyodlala ibhola nokuyiwona mdlalo awukhonzele.

(You poured yourself broth into the salt! While washing dishes, Mthokozisi enters coming from playing soccer, which is the sport he likes.)

(Sibiya, 2020: 25)

The writer stipulates in these lines that Mthokozisi is fond of soccer. As stipulated in the novel, Mthokozisi was playing soccer with his brother while the house was not tidied up, and the dishes were not washed. Mthokozisi's passion was short lived as it is stipulated in the novel that he endured an injury while playing soccer at school. This is evident in the following lines:

Ngakusasa uMthokozisi esikoleni wehlelwa yinto engemnandi, walinyazwa ngomunye umfana omdadlana kunaye ngesikhathi bedlala ibhola. Kwakuthe kudlalwa ibhola kanti uMthokozisi uzogqashuka nalo ngelikhulu ijubane. Ebona lo mfana ukuthi angeke esamfika uMthokozisi wavele wamkeqa. Wawa wagingqika uMthokozisi, amadolo lawa ahuzuka kabuhlungu.

(The next day at school, a terrible incident happened to Mthokozisi, he was hurt by another boy who was older than him while playing soccer. While they were playing, Mthokozisi ran off speedily with the ball. As the other boy realized that he would not be able to catch up with him, he then knocked him off. Mthokozisi fell, his knees abraded badly.)

(Sibiya, 2020: 42)

Being injured while playing soccer is common. Most boys who play soccer have once, if not often, experienced injuries while playing. As common as it is, it was not acceptable for Mthokozisi, it was a breaking point that made him realize that playing soccer was not what he wanted to do. He still enjoyed playing sports, just not soccer. Sibiya (2020: 44) reveals that Mthokozisi grew to enjoy playing netball with girls and he developed a passion for cooking. This proves that Mthokozisi did not desert sport in totality, he just preferred playing netball over soccer. In a conversation between Mthokozisi and MaSibisi when MaSibisi tells Mthokozisi to play soccer with boys, his response is “*abafana bayalimazana ebholeni lezinyawo.*” Translated as boys injure others in soccer, (Sibiya, *Op cit.*).

Playing with girls and enjoying cooking is viewed by many people as unacceptable for a boy child. This is because of the gender roles that exist in communities, mostly black traditionally cultured communities. In such communities, cooking is seen as a girl’s task. It then becomes disturbing when a boy child grows to enjoy cooking and playing with girls. This was also the case for Mthokozisi. It is the binary gender roles that dictate to people the roles of a male child and those of a female child. In a world that is in line with queer principles, a world that is non-gender binary, it would have been understood that any person, regardless of their sex, can perform any duties and play any sport to their fullest abilities.

Mthokozisi was not only discriminated against by learners for wanting to play netball but by the principal too. This is evident when Sibiya (2020: 44) highlights that the school’s principal was sceptical of allowing Mthokozisi, who is a boy, to play netball with girls, however, he was defeated when other teachers reminded him that the constitution emphasizes equality between both genders. Even at home, the marginalization continued as his mother was also uncomfortable with his choice of sport and chores. Sibiya (*Op cit.*) went on to explain as follows:

Nakuba lalibuye limkhathaze uMaSibisi ikhono elidlondlobalayo likaMthokozisi ezimbizeni, wayetheneka Amandla uma indodana yakhe imtshela ukuthi iningi labapheki abahlonishwayo emhlabeni bangabantu besilisa.

(Even though MaSibisi was bothered by the Mthokozisi’s growing passion for cooking, she was defeated when her son told her that most well-respected chefs around the globe are males.)

The above quote emphasizes that cooking is viewed as a girl’s duty, therefore, when a boy enjoys cooking people around that boy get bothered. This may even lead to other issues like bullying. This was evident even in Mthokozisi’s case. Mthokozisi was closer to girls than boys, she had two female friends namely Thembeke and Sonto. Again, he preferred using the girls’ bathroom as opposed to using the boys’ bathroom. This was not easily accepted by his peers, it led to him being bullied. Sibiya (*Op cit.* 54) narrates as follows:

Ngelinye ilanga iqulu labafana lamthelekela lambhudukeza, sengathi lizomshaya. Uthe esakhungathekile ukuthi kwabe kwenzekani ibhulukwe labe seliphansi emaqakaleni. Abafana

bamkhumula nesikhinjana sangaphansi. Bamyeka esezishayela ngezinqe zakhe. Kwaze kwakhona oshoyo kulaba bafana ethi: “kanti unalo njengathi. Pho wenqenani ukuchama lapho sichama khona nathi njengabafana?” Akekho owamphendulayo lowo mfana.

One day, a group of boys came onto Mthokozisi, grabbing him aggressively as if preparing to beat him. While he was still confused as to what was happening, his trouser was already on his ankles. The boys even undressed him of his underwear. They let him go when he was completely naked on the bottom part. One boy even said, “But he also has it just like us. So, why is he sceptical of peeing in the same bathroom with us boys?” No one answered him.

(Sibiya, 2020: 54)

The incident serves as an example of the taboo and misconceptions surrounding homosexuality. Some people believe that homosexual people either have two private parts or their sexual organs are not well built like those of heterosexuals. The author highlighted this through the question that was asked by one of the boys which alluded to that the boy was bewildered by the realization that Mthokozisi also has a penis just like all the boys. This demonstrates that people often conflate hermaphroditism with homosexuality. This confusing can lead to the discrimination and bullying of homosexual individuals, as evidenced by what happened to Mthokozisi. In the novel, Mthokozisi faces bullying and discrimination despite not having disclosed his sexuality through the process of coming out, indicating that he has not understood his own sexuality, yet people have concluded that he is different.

As much as Mthokozisi faced bullying for choices such as having close friendships with Thembeke and Sonto, playing netball and not soccer, and using the girls' bathroom as opposed to that of boys, he can be viewed as an agent of change as opposed to being a victim. All these choices serve as a direct challenge to the traditional gender norms imposed by society. One may argue that his actions disrupt the idea of fixed gender identities and expose the fluidity of gender expression. Rather than passively accepting the masculine roles society tried to impose on him, he became defiant through his actions and questioned the gender fixation norms. As much as he might not have understood that he was fighting the societal norms, he did.

Despite being bullied for his preferences during his school years, Mthokozisi only began to understand his true sexuality after his sister was reprimanded for being homosexual. By this time, Mthokozisi was done with his higher education, he was already working, married, and became a father. This suggests that, from the time of his bullying incidents, it took him some time to understand his own. This highlights that people in communities have set norms that they expect people to live by. It is these norms that they use to classify people. While these norms may sometimes be accurate, they can also be misleading. For instance, considering Mthokozisi's incident, people can predict or assume one's sexual orientation based on the activities they engage in. As much as this may be misleading and untrue, there are instances where their predictions are true. It was assumed that Mthokozisi might be homosexual because of the choice of sport and chores he engaged in, and only after he was married and had a child did he try to understand the feelings he had towards other men. It is worth noting that, assuming people's sexual orientation based on their choices and preferences can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, contributing to discrimination and marginalization with the LGBTQI+ community. Sibiya (2020: 137) narrates, “*lento waqala ukuyizwa esanda kushada. Manje uyizwa le mizwa ilokhu iya ngokukhula idlondlobala.*” (He started feeling this soon after he got married. Now, he realizes that these feelings are growing tremendously.). This suggests that Mthokozisi realized that he was homosexual soon after getting married but suppressed his feelings and conformed to societal norms. To substantiate this, the writer explains that Mthokozisi was bothered by his inability to come out and accept his identity, suppressing the love he has for men, he realized that he was not leading a truthful life. Looking at Mthokozi's situation, it can be deduced that some homosexual people struggle with their own identity for some time before coming out.

Coming out refers to the process in which a homosexual individual reveals to other people, family members, friends, or community members their sexuality. Seidman quoted by Ghosh (2019: 2), explains that young homosexual individuals often consider coming out, which involves revealing their sexual identity to others as crucial for asserting their sexual identities. This suggests that before coming out, individuals hide their true identity and conform to societal norms and expectations of a particular gender. Sahoo, Venkatesan, and Chakravarty (2023: 1013) state, “The term ‘Coming Out’ (CO) has been used as a metaphor used to describe LGBTQ+ people’s self-disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity”.

One may argue that the process of coming out can only happen after an individual has accepted one’s sexual identity. Mattison and McWhirter, quoted by Ghosh (*Op cit.*) argue that coming out is a crucial milestone leading parents to eventually accept their gay or lesbian child. They further outline that; parents generally prefer their children to share their sexual orientation with them directly instead of finding out on their own or being informed by a third party. Fearing the reaction of people when coming out is amongst the reasons why people stay longer in the closet. It is for this same reason that it took Mthokozisi sometime before coming out to his wife and family. Sibiya (2020: 137) narrates that the biggest issue that was hindering Mthokozisi from coming out was the fact that he was married and had a child, he wondered what would happen to his wife when he came out. Indeed, his fear came true as he lost his wife after coming out. Sibiya (2020: 208) highlights that Sonto, who is Mthokozisi’s wife was first hospitalized after Mthokozisi revealed to her that he is gay and that they would need to get a divorce, after that, Sonto was continuously in and out of hospital for consecutive four weeks. Sibiya (2020: 208) further narrates:

Kwakuthi nalapho ehlangene noChris ndawana thile kube nechashazi likanembeza elimkhumbuzayo ukuthi uSonto usesibhedlela ngenxa yokuphumela kwakhe obala ngendaba yobunkonkoni.

(Even when meeting with Chris in a particular place, he would have a slight guilt conscious that reminds him that Sonto is hospitalized because of him coming out about being gay.)

The continuous situation in the novel of Sonto being hospitalized is the novel ended with Sonto dying from a heart attack and stroke. No one would like to lose their loved one when they come out as homosexual. Tuite, Rubenstein, and Salloum (2021) highlight that the participants in studies revealed their concerns about the social outcomes of coming out including social alienation while others were concerned about their safety and bullying. This fear is the one that sometimes keeps other people from coming out and end up living double lives such as dating gay people while also playing happy husband at home. Rudwick (2011) reveals that Zulu gay men in her study stressed that their coming out was difficult as they felt like something was wrong with them. Mthokozisi led a double life before coming out to his wife. This is seen narrated in the novel as follows:

Zanda izinsuku zokubonana phakathi kwalaba bobabili. Zanda izinsuku lapho uMthokozisi ayesebenza khona ngeMgqibelo. Eqinisweni uMthokozisi wayengasebenzi kodwa wayesuke eyohlangana noChris ezindaweni ezahlukeni. Kwanda ukuthi bangabonani nje kuphela kodwa bagcine bebambene ngezandla lapho bendawonye. Kwanda ukuncomana, ukumoyizelelana, ukuqabulana, singabala sithini. Ngolunye usuku bahlangana endaweni yokungcebeleka nokuphuza utshwala eyayigcwala abantu abayizinkonkoni kuphela.

(Days of seeing each other between the two increased. Days where Mthokozisi was working Saturday increased. In all honesty, Mthokozisi was not working but he was meeting with Chris in different places. They continued to not only see each other but hold hands when they were together. They continued to compliment each other, smile at each other, kiss and so much more. One day they met in a pub that is always full of gay people.)

(Sibiya, 2020: 169)

The above quote highlights that Mthokozisi had to lie to meet with Chris. Lying as saying he is working on all Saturdays suggests that at home he was supposed to leave and dress as though he was going to work, meanwhile, he was not. This is the double life that Mthokozisi found himself having to leave. He had to lie to his wife while also making Chris, his gay partner, happy.

Holding hands and attending public drinking places that are only full of gay people is not a reality in rural areas. It is only a reality in big cities where individuals can live their lives according to their preferences and wishes. This suggests that homosexuality is widely accepted in the cities as opposed to rural areas. Reasons for this might be that in rural areas older citizens are not well informed about homosexuality. Again, this is a generation of people who are traditional and only accept concepts that were not part of their upbringing. Ntuli and Ngcobo (2022: 478) explain that the findings of their study highlighted that in rural areas homosexuality is viewed as just “a thing” or a stage, unnatural and a sinful act. They further reveal that this perception then deterred homosexual youth from being themselves forcing them to falsely lead different identities in different contexts. Which was also the case with Mthokozisi.

Bringing Culture to Homosexuality

Homosexuality has rarely been accepted in South African cultures, specifically in the Nguni cultures. Rudwick (2011) reveals that many Zulu people endorse the myth that homosexuality is un-African. This may be because certain rituals and ceremonies are linked to gender as normatively accepted in societies, which are male or female. One of them being *ilobolo*. The author selectively brought the two notions together, culture and homosexuality, by introducing *ilobolo* for the homosexual community. The inclusion of this concept of same-sex couples in the novel is an important queer moment as it challenges the rigid cultural and gendered assumptions embedded in this traditional practice. Since *ilobolo* is viewed as a heteronormative, with a clear distinction that a groom is expected to pay *ilobolo* for the bride, by introducing *ilobolo* for same-sex couples Sibiya exposes the adaptability of the practice and opens it to non-normative relationships. Perhaps it is about time that people accept that societal structures such as marriage and associated rituals are not inherently fixed but socially constructed and performative.

Ilobolo is, according to Rice (2014: 387), “the transfer of wealth in the form of cows or their cash value equivalent from the groom or his family to the bride’s family”. According to Gelfand, quoted by Zungu (2020: 70), the submission of *ilobolo* is a token that the husband acknowledges the benefits he is receiving, again; it is compensation for the bride’s father for losing his daughter who will go with the husband to join his kinship. In other words, *ilobolo* is a symbolic gesture from the groom and his family to the bride’s family to thank them for raising their bride-to-be. This happens in the form of giving cows or, with the changing of times, money equivalent to the price of a number of cows, that have been agreed on in the *amalobolo* negotiations.

Contradictory, in the homosexual community where there is no groom, but bride and bride or groom and groom, understanding who should pay *ilobolo* is not as black and white as it is in heterosexual relationships. However, it still happens. In the Novel, Sibiya (2020: 210) presents a character Okuhle submitting *ilobolo* to the Ndlovu family in respect of Nosipho. Again, Sibiya (2020: 212) narrates the *ilobolo* negotiation process from Chris to the Ndlovu’s in respect of Mthokozisi. The *ilobolo* negotiation process involving Okuhle and Chris disrupts the expectation that only heterosexual unions can engage in cultural rituals. By so doing, the author is pushing boundaries of what is acceptable within cultural frameworks revealing the evolving and adaptability of culture to include queer identities without culture losing its significance.

The author understood that as much as homosexuality has been accepted in South Africa, it is still taboo to other people. It is for this reason that the author portrayed neighbours of the Ndlovu family questioning the whole *ilobolo* process and the engagement of homosexual people, they questioned it in

the form of being foreign to them since they are used to a male and a female getting married. As much as this highlights the societal discomfort with queerness, perhaps it is the call in the right path to start the conversation that will allow culture to be adaptable leading to queer being fully understood.

Conclusion

This article has examined the portrayal of homosexuality and intersex in Sibiya's novel entitled *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020). It has highlighted the portrayal of intersex as it is presented in the novel, and as it is rarely written about. Moreover, the article sheds some light on how the novel brings two notions, the culture of homosexuality, which are always viewed as contradicting each other. The article advocates for the acceptance of non-binary sex and gender identities as it is a reality for other community members.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest associated with this research. This study did not involve any human or animal participants, as it was strictly conducted through document analysis. Therefore, no ethical approval was required.

Regarding informed consent, since the study did not involve human subjects, obtaining informed consent was not applicable. All sources used in the study are publicly available and duly cited following academic integrity and ethical research practices.

Data supporting the findings of this study are available in the referenced literature. No additional datasets were generated or analyzed during the study.

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