
# Queer Spaces, Africanness, and *Bildung: The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba (The Wound)* in Conversation

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## Abstract

*The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) and *Inxeba (The Wound)* (2017) are post-apartheid texts that reveal the violence inflicted on queer Black bodies within a patriarchal and homophobic society, while also challenging heteronormative conceptions of Africanness and exploring potential spaces where Black queerness might exist. Each work also functions as a narrative of personal growth: *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is a Bildungsroman, while *Inxeba* focuses on the coming-of-age process into manhood through an initiation ritual. As stories of development and initiation, both texts explore whether queer Black bodies can find a place within post-apartheid South African communities—or whether they remain excluded. Although both works have been widely discussed in academic circles, no prior study has examined them together. We contend that these two post-apartheid works can be compared in terms of heteronormative disciplinary violence, as well as in relation to themes of queerness and Africanness. This comparison raises additional questions about potential spaces for Black queerness in the aftermath of apartheid.


## Introduction

*The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) and *Inxeba (The Wound)* (2017) are two post-apartheid works that centre queer Black identities and intimacies, and foreground heteropatriarchal disciplinary violence. Following Livermon in "*Inxeba*: Rethinking Dichotomies of Black Queer Visibilities" we employ the term queer "as an overarching term to think through a constellation of non-normative genders and sexualities" (Livermon 2023, p.213). Notably, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* are set in a country with extraordinarily high levels of male-on-male violence and anti-queer violence, despite this same country being governed by a constitution that is supposed to prohibit discrimination based on sexuality or sexual orientation. Gender-

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based violence and anti-queer violence are the consequences of histories of violence, and of patriarchal, heteronormative conceptions of masculinity. While *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* expose the violence meted out to queer Black bodies within a patriarchal and homophobic society, they also challenge heteronormative ideas of Africanness, and explore questions about spaces where Black queerness can exist. Both texts are also narratives of *Bildung* as *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is a *Bildungsroman* while *Inxeba* is a film specifically about “coming of age” into manhood through an initiation ritual. As narratives of development and initiation, these two texts meditate on the possibilities of queer Black bodies being integrated into communities in post-apartheid South Africa, or not. While each text has received substantial scholarly attention, no previous study has placed *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* into conversation. We argue that these two post-apartheid texts can be placed into productive comparative conversation around the theme of heteronormative disciplinary violence, but also around questions of queerness and Africanness, opening up further questions about possible spaces for Black queerness to exist after apartheid.

*The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) was written by K. Sello Duiker and provokes significant commentary on queerness and race in the post-apartheid era. The novel is predominantly set in the city of Cape Town, though by the end Tshepo, the protagonist, has moved to Johannesburg. The novel is one of the earliest post-apartheid literary works to centre Black male queerness, yet, according to Andy Carolin and Ronit Frenkel, much of the critical reception of the novel has “been problematic in its tendency to negate or ignore the significance of the same-sex intimacies in the text,” as “[m]ost scholarship on the novel has tended to sideline the literary and cultural significance of the text’s multiple sexual encounters” (Carolin and Frenkel 2013, p.38). Carolin and Frenkel are also critical of receptions of the novel that insist on reading gender in the novel through the binary taxonomies of heterosexual vs. homosexual. Instead, they claim that *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* explodes static renderings of sexual identity. Queer men in the novel draw on masculine and feminine performativity and aesthetics, some are serious and others are thrill-seeking. Tshepo and his white friend, West, have sex with each other, and both also have sex with other men and women.

The film *Inxeba* (2017) was directed by John Trengove and written by Malusi Bengu, Thando Mgqolozana, and Trengrove. Like *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, *Inxeba* also centres queer Black bodies and heteropatriarchal disciplinary violence. *Inxeba* attracted controversy due to its representation of queer masculinities in the traditional Xhosa rite of *ulwaluko*, and a legal battle even ensued in South Africa over the age restriction to be applied to the film. According to Wemar Strydom, the Film and Publication Board decided to “apply an X18 rating to Inxeba – effectively banning the film from being shown in commercial venues after it had already enjoyed a limited, though critically well-received, run in art cinema theatres across the country” (Strydom 2018, p.1). Protesters also sought to prevent the film from being screened in the Eastern Cape. Manona and Hurst point out that reactions to the film were significantly charged, such that some “leading actors received death threats” (Manona and Hurst 2018, p.2), and that “many who expressed unhappiness with the film were male members of various Xhosa communities countrywide” (Manona and Hurst 2018, p.2). Some critics of the film claimed that its interrogation of *ulwaluko* opens the cultural rite itself to the public whereas it is supposed to remain a private tradition, and

there were accusations that Trengrove, the white director, was performing "cultural appropriation" (Manona and Hurst 2018, p.8). We do not have the space here to delve into the implications of the claim that *Inxeba* made secret and sacred rites visible to outsiders, including women and white people, which could be presented as a valid critique of the film. However, it is clear that homophobia played a significant role in the outcry against the film. The Gauteng chairman of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa, Prince Manene Tabane, suggested that Xhosa men "are being embarrassed," and went on to express explicitly homophobic views, commenting that "the things that are being shown there is not what is happening in the mountain. It is disgusting and disrespectful of our cultural practices" (Tabane qtd. in Mabasa 2018).

*Inxeba* focuses on three characters, Kwanda (played by Niza Jay Ncoyini), Xolani (played by Nakhane), and Vija (played by Bongile Mantsai) who are engaged in the multi-stage Xhosa initiation process known as *ulwaluko*, where youths are circumcised and are initiated into manhood. *Inxeba* is set mainly in the rural Eastern Cape of South Africa, however, in the early parts of the film and the final scenes of the film there is a montage between rural and urban environments. The three primary characters, Xolani, Vija, and Kwanda all meet at a mountain in the Eastern Cape. Xolani and Vija are *amakhankatha* (caretakers) in charge of *amakhwetha* (initiates) such as Kwanda. The caretakers are charged with ushering the young boys into manhood. Notably, Xolani and Vija are engaged in a seemingly secret love affair that only takes place on the mountain where they meet regularly as caretakers and where the initiation ritual occurs. Kwanda is a youth who is sent to the mountain by his father Khwalo. Kwanda is coded as being queer in the film, and his father believes that he is "too soft" (Trengrove 2017). Kwanda is however eventually killed by Xolani in an act of heteropatriarchal disciplinary violence, when Kwanda threatens to reveal Xolani and Vija's love affair, thereby threatening to disrupt the heteropatriarchal discourse of the *ulwaluko* ritual.

The reception of *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* has tended towards some moral outrage at the "sodomy" depicted in the novel (Ezeliora 200, p.172), or has focused on Tshepo's queer experiences at "Steamy Windows" as a strategy of survival (Gagiano, 2004;

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Loukson 2020), or as a broader allegory of the post-apartheid era (Munro 2007), with some critics skirting around the question of same-sex desire (Tšehloane, 2010), or focusing on trauma and violence in the novel without much consideration of same-sex desire and intimacy (Shinners 2019; Sapsford 2020). We build on Carolin and Frenkel's observations that the novel "challenges the cultural invisibility of black practitioners of same-sex intimacies in South Africa" (Carolin and Frenkel 2013, p.36), though we take the ending of the novel into account when considering the kinds of spaces that are available to Tshepo in this narrative of *Bildung*. As outlined above, *Inxeba* was regarded as an extremely controversial film when it was released. Some scholarship has focused on this reception (Mbao 2020; Ncube 2020; Manona and Hurst, 2018), or on critiquing the film for "merely mimicking western/colonial gender embodiment discourse" (Moraka 2018), and for "[failing] in its (mis) representation of *ulwaluko* as less than a complex, nuanced and rich cultural practice" (Kiguwa and Siswana 2018). We build on the comments of Scott as he argues that the film "challenges dominant constructions of Xhosa masculinities by going to

the foundation of dominant Xhosa masculinities, namely the male initiation process" (Scott 2020, p.26), though we relate the narrative to conventions of *Bildung* as a coming-of-age narrative. In this article, we bring *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* into conversation to show how both texts rescript ideas of queerness in an African context, and how they can be read as narratives of postcolonial *Bildung*, rather than as ideal or traditional narratives of *Bildung*.

As we argue, both *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* dislodge patriarchal and heteronormative paradigms of masculinity that claim to be rooted in notions of authentic Africanness. Regarding *Bildung* and disciplinary violence, we ask to what extent the environments depicted in the texts are able to incorporate queer Black bodies. As Joseph Slaughter notes in *Human Rights Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form and International Law*, whereas the traditional *Bildungsroman* emphasises the protagonist's eventual incorporation into society, post-colonial narratives of *Bildung* are often characterised by "disillusionment" and a lack of incorporation, exposing that promises of freedom, development, and self-determination are betrayed in the protagonists' contexts (Slaughter 2007, p.38). While *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* is a polyvocal text, in Tshepo's first-person narration he comes to realise that his desires for self-determinism are limited due to heteropatriarchal disciplinary violence which spills out of the carceral system, and due to the legacy of a racialised past. By the end, when he has moved to Johannesburg, Tshepo ends up, not incorporated into post-apartheid society, but rather marginalised within it. In *Inxeba*, Kwanda is eventually killed after he proclaims that he is now a man and that no one should tell him who to love. Thus the ideal narrative of *Bildung*, which "traces the 'progressive harmonization' of the individual and society" (Graham 2012, p.169) fails to materialise in each text. But it is also through this lack of integration of both Kwanda and Tshepo that the works problematise traditional and binary configurations of gender and sexuality, encouraging a more complex and less static rendering of sexual identities. Consequently, both *Inxeba* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* may be decoded as gesturing to alternative masculinities that are conceivable outside of patriarchal masculine norms of violence and domination legitimised by political and cultural institutions, violence that results in the rape of Tshepo, and the murder of Kwanda.

## Rescripting Queerness in an African Context and Exploring Queer Spaces

*The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* unfold in markedly different settings and contexts, and appeared 16 years apart, but both explore alternative masculinities that reject static categorisation, and challenge the idea of queerness as unAfrican. Indeed, the two texts may be placed into conversation around conceptualisations of fluid masculinities and around debates about queerness and Africanness. When Tshepo is working at the male brothel "Steamy Windows" in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, a white male character named West kisses Tshepo upon their first meeting. However, West suggests it is not sexual and it is merely a salutation that is "more meaningful, more personal than shaking hands" (Duiker 2001, p.244). West will also suggest that he prefers women, although he has sex with men at "Steamy Windows." Tshepo enjoys sex with men and reflects on sex he has enjoyed with women as well. Sexual identity is thus rendered fluid in the text. Further, Tshepo disputes various discursive views of race and culture in relation to queerness. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* disrupts cultural and socio-political discourses, such as ideas of authentic Africanness which privilege heteronormative masculinities. When Tshepo begins working at "Steamy Windows," he forms a relationship with another white male character named Sebastian and they often discuss their sexual histories and sexual orientation. In one of their early conversations, Tshepo disputes the legitimacy of authentic African masculinity as being rooted in a heteronormative patriarchal gender ideology. He tells Sebastian that, "people always say that black culture is rigid and doesn't want to accept things like homosexuals and lesbians. You know the argument - it's very unAfrican. It's a lot of crap" (Duiker 2001, p.250). Tshepo goes on to suggest that these ideas are in fact a consequence of Western influence, he offers that, "that kind of thinking comes from urbanised blacks, people who've watered down the real origin of our culture and mixed it with Anglo-Saxon notions of the Bible" (2001, p.250). Tshepo's analysis here has resonance for reading *Inxeba*, in that this

view from Tshepo is a counter-narrative to the discourse expressed outwardly by the community of men on the mountain in *Inxeba*.

Central to rewritings of the discourses that queerness is unAfrican is the idea that tradition is socially constructed. The idea of tradition as "invented" is not new; in fact, the idea of "invented tradition" was coined in 1983 in the book *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. There are also numerous studies detailing the ways in which queer identities were included in African societies prior to colonialism. In *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* Sylvia Tamale claims that "woman-to-woman marriages have been documented in more than thirty African societies" (Tamale 2020, p.101). Further, Marc Epprecht in *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* additionally contributes to a queer African history by stating "African men sometimes have sex with other men or boys, today as in the past" (Epprecht 2008, p.6). What is remarkable in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, however, is that in this novel, published less than a decade after the formal end of apartheid, a queer Black character points to the idea of so-called "tradition" as invented, in the context of situating queerness within African culture, as Tshepo states that the idea of African "traditional" culture as heteronormative has been "invented" through hybridisations between African indigenous beliefs and Christianity. This is all the more remarkable since, as Grant Andrews has noted, prior to the end of apartheid, queerness was not visibly a subject of South African literature: "Before the end of apartheid, queer lives were almost entirely unrepresented in public literary works in South Africa. Only after the fall of institutionalised apartheid could literature begin to look back at the role of queer people in the history of South Africa, and begin to acknowledge that queer people are a part of the fabric of South African society" (Andrews 2019, p.1).

*Inxeba* also presents discursive disturbance as it challenges notions that authentic African masculinity is heterosexual. The context of the film, that of a traditional Xhosa initiation rite into manhood, is rooted in patriarchal heteronormativity which utilises the constructed idea of an authentic African culture as a legitimising factor of this worldview. Kwanda's father, other elders, and even other initiates uphold views of non-heteronormative sexualities as unAfrican. Further, the rural landscape where the *ulwaluko* ritual occurs is often seen as "authentically African" due in part to the absence of apparent European influence. Kwanda, who is coded as queer in *Inxeba,* poses a disruption to ideas of "traditional" African masculinity, and this disruption is framed as a consequence of Kwanda's proximity to whiteness and the city. Vija tells Kwanda: "You're here to fuck up our ways... I see your tricks, you act like you don't care but you won't be satisfied until you've disrupted our ways" (Trengrove 2017). Of course, the statement is highly ironic given Vija's own sexuality, but the "disruption" referenced here is Kwanda's visible queerness. The reference to "our ways" suggests that Kwanda's performative queerness has been brought about by proximity to whiteness and the city, and that this is a threat to "traditional" rural ways. The elders in the film also support the notion of queerness as a Western intrusion and unAfrican. Towards the end of the film, before Xolani kills Kwanda, as they walk towards the highway, one of the elders of the mountain offers parting words of

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wisdom that reinforce heteropatriarchy and frame queerness and Western influence as dangerous and destructive to life: "Open your ears. Open your eyes. Reject the foreign ways of the city" (Trengrove 2017). In a similar vein, in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, Tshepo's father rejects him and levels slurs against him, asking: "What is this business that I hear that you go to faggot nightclubs? I didn't bring you up to be a stabane. Are you a faggot?" (Duiker 2001, p.190). Similarly, Kwanda's father insists that Kwanda needs to be reformed and have his "softness" removed. Heteropatriarchy is an institution that is passed on from generation to generation, and both Kwanda's and Tshepo's fathers seek to transform their sons into men who conform to hegemonic masculinity.

However, *Inxeba* also showcases Kwanda's ability to complete the traditional ritual of *ulwaluko*, which is supposed to lead him into manhood, despite his evident queerness. The film depicts a queer body completing this traditional rite of passage into manhood and shows other queer bodies, namely Xolani and Vija, as having completed this rite as well. In this way, the film showcases queer identity as not excluded by and contradictory to African customs but existing within Africanness. Contrary to what Tshepo suggests in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, the men from *Inxeba* who represent "tradition" are not "urbanised blacks" (Duiker 2001, p.250) but rather the men who are elders and caretakers on the mountain. Yet the character Vija in *Inxeba*, who engages in same-sex intimacy, is also not typically "urbanised" or Westernised. For instance, when Xolani requests passage from a white farmer to see a waterfall, Vija does not even speak to the white farmer, implying that his contact with white people is limited, perhaps by choice. In this way, the film echoes Tshepo's idea that "It's stupid to suggest that homosexuality and lesbianism are foreign to black culture. Long ago, long before whites, people were aware of the blurs. They must have been" (Duiker 2001, p.250). At the end of *Inxeba*, when Kwanda tells Xolani, "I'm a man now. I'm not taking anyone's shit. Not my dad's, not anybody's" (Trengrove 2017), he is using his experience on the mountain to critique heteropatriarchy. As Kwanda and Xolani walk on the mountain after the completion of the ritual, Kwanda states, "This is South Africa...we're not led by Mugabe...Like Africa doesn't know gay love. I'm sure Shaka and his warriors all wanted each other... how can love destroy a nation?" (Trengrove 2017). This echoes Tshepo's statements about queer desire existing in precolonial African societies.

For Kwanda, queerness and African manhood are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the African ritual his father made him participate in becomes integral to his self-determining capacity to love who he chooses. Livermon suggests:

> In reworking and revising tradition, black queers offer a critique of the ways that tradition has been selectively appropriated to reinforce heteropatriarchy... black queer engagement with forms of tradition reveals tradition to be a set of practices that are fluid and constantly in process. (Livermon 2015, p.17)

In this way Kwanda's coming-of-age mirrors Tshepo's from *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*.

Both texts also reflect on aspects of class in discursive constructions of sexuality. In "Homosexuality & the Postcolonial Idea: Notes from Kabelo Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*," Ives S. Loukson suggests that "Steamy Windows" is merely "a strategy for survival" as Tshepo is "representative of poor black South Africans in the narrative" who see "homosexuality as a wonderful opportunity to make money" and it is this "that compels him to homosexuality" (Loukson 2020, p.110). This idea that a character can be "compelled to homosexuality" misses the text's dislocation between sex acts and sexual identity, and frames queerness as a deviation from a Black character's identity. Duiker positions sexual intimacy as a means to achieve community as well as part of Tshepo's coming-of-age and not as an identity marker. West says that working at "Steamy Windows" may have saved him from "self-destruction" (Duiker 2001, p.297). Tshepo arrives at "Steamy Windows" soon after he is raped and robbed by his housemate, Chris, leaving him homeless. In effect, "Steamy Windows" provides Tshepo (under the pseudonym of Angelo) with a restorative male community, allowing him to make a living, gain confidence, and consider himself as self-determining, though he eventually learns the racialised limitations of this community.

West, Tshepo, and Sebastian in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, and Xolani and Vija in *Inxeba* find meaning in same-sex encounters, even though they may not exclusively have sex with other men.

*Inxeba* has a heteropatriarchal setting where heterosexual masculinity that is stoic and strong is achieved through *ulwaluko*, and this identity is sanctioned and legitimised by framing it as authentically African. According to Manona and Hurst, *ulwaluko* is a highly significant cultural rite for the Xhosa people: "For the Xhosa nation, *ulwaluko* – long seen as a tradition that has stood the test of time – is regarded as a sacred and necessary step toward proper or real 'manhood'; and ulwaluko is so widely acknowledged by the Xhosa nation that many view it as the only culturally recognised path" (Manona and Hurst 2018, p.2) to manhood. While *ulwaluko* includes the act of circumcision, it includes other rites and masculine education as well. A traditional surgeon referred to as *ingcibi* performs the circumcision. *Inxeba* uses a close-up and unsteady shot to emphasise the toughness and roughness of the *ingcibi* as the surgeon orders each young man to "spread" (Trengrove, 2017) their legs. There are no supportive words exchanged. The initiates are expected to endure this moment without showing pain. After the circumcision in the film, they are instructed to shout "*ndiyindoda*" ("I am a man") (Trengrove 2017). The expectation for *amakhwetha* to endure the pain of the circumcision is highlighted in the scene that follows the circumcision. Xolani and Kwanda are in their hut, it is the first time the pair are seen together and Xolani is dressing Kwanda's wound. As Kwanda continually grimaces and moans at the uncovering of the wound, Xolani says to him "I'll leave it like this. Do you want to do it yourself?" (Trengrove 2017). Xolani is stern, initially not showing Kwanda any compassion. After Xolani emerges from his shared hut with Kwanda, seemingly the day after the circumcision, he encounters other caregivers. Xolani walks through the group of men having a conversation while the camera follows him in a front-facing tracking shot. One of the caregivers can be heard saying "I've got five dicks to look at...I'll need a warm vagina soon" (Trengrove 2017). This statement uses the rhetoric of heteropatriarchal masculinity, the suggestion that men need sex from women. Further, the reference to "a warm vagina" and not an entire woman speaks to the heteropatriarchal discourse of female objectification. Following this scene, Xolani and Vija, who are secret same-sex lovers, exchange teasing heteronormative banter. Vija shouts to Xolani, "how's your sister?", insinuating sexual interest in Xolani's sister, to which Xolani replies "Still married, Vija, just like you" (Trengrove 2017). Thus, in the early part of the film, a particular heterosexual and stoic hegemonic masculinity is created by the gatekeepers and guides on the mountain who are meant to lead the young men into heteronormative "traditional" masculinity. However, this is quickly disrupted when Xolani and Vija, gatekeepers and guides to the institution of heteropatriarchal masculinity on the mountain, are shown having sex.

Xolani and Vija's secret sexual intimacy, juxtaposed with the heteropatriarchal culture of the mountain, simultaneously reinforces the heterosexual pressures of the mountain as a space for the making of men, while disrupting the notion that queerness is unAfrican. Xolani and Vija are sexually intimate three times in the film. Twice this intimacy is performed in private spaces, seemingly away from the heterosexual gaze, at first, in an abandoned building, the only built structure in the rural forest landscape. In the second incident, Vija and Xolani are cast as shadows on the screen, metaphorically speaking to their hiding and lovemaking in the figurative shadows. These two intimate moments represent what Livermon refers to as "(non) visibility" (Livermon 2023). They occur in secret; however, they still occur. After Xolani and Vija have been intimate twice, the two have a conversation about Kwanda. Xolani and Vija are walking in an open veld reminiscing about Vija's sister when Vija asks Xolani about whether Kwanda is "a faggot" (Trengrove, 2017). Vija is clearly a split subject who feels it necessary to identify Kwanda as being queer, which distances Vija from his own queerness. The possible damage to himself of his own denial is emphasised as on the mountain as Vija is often inebriated, either drinking alcohol or smoking marijuana. Vija is often extremely rough and dominating in his sexual encounters with Xolani, but towards the end of the film. However, after he defends Xolani against young initiates who challenge his authority on the suspicion of Xolani being queer, Vija leads Xolani to the water and initiates sexual tenderness. The presumably healing symbolism of the waterfall is brought onto the screen as both Vija and Xolani bathe each other. This striking visual is a further disruption of discourse that queerness is unAfrican and occuring

in an urban environment, as the waterfall serves as a visual backdrop here for same-sex intimacies.

In "Usable Traditions: creating sexual autonomy in post-apartheid South Africa," Livermon claims:

> If tradition is represented as that which is authentically and unproblematically African, then same-sex sexuality is its direct opposite — its constitutive outside. Under this formulation, black queers cannot exist as part of African cultural practices represented by tradition. They can only be some manifestation of cultural loss and ultimately alienation from African subjectivity. (Livermon 2012, p.6)

Vija makes this point to Xolani when Xolani suggests that they escalate their romantic relationship. Vija repeatedly tells Xolani "we can't" (Trengrove 2017). These refusals of a publicly queer relationship allude to the heteropatriarchal discursive pressures on the mountain and perhaps beyond it. As Vija suggests "we can't," and not, "I won't," Vija reinforces the suggestion that public same-sex desire is not viable, despite his own personal desires. This theme of Vija representing traditional African masculinity, while performing acts of queer intimacy, is a significant tension in the film. Vija represents a paragon of "traditional" African masculinity, supposedly uncontaminated by "whiteness" or life in the cities. He is marked as masculine and daring, as when he steals a goat from the white farmer who bars the *amakhwetha* from accessing the waterfall, and he upholds the rules of the mountain. Yet, in secret, Vija explores his own queer sexuality.

The African initiation process, while allowing Kwanda to reconcile his queerness and masculinity, does not "harmoniously incorporate" (Graham 2012, p.169) him into the dominant heteropatriarchal community. This becomes clear towards the end of the film, after Kwanda stumbles upon Vija and Xolani naked together in a moment of post-coital vulnerability. In this moment the queerness of Vija is clear to Kwanda, who scornfully says to Vija, "does your wife know the rubbish you get up to on the mountain?" (Trengrove 2017). Soon after, as Xolani ostensibly leads Kwanda to an alternative route home, Xolani says to Kwanda: "You cannot speak of what you saw here on the mountain" (Trengrove 2017). Kwanda is dismissive, and Xolani protects his secret self through violence. By killing

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Kwanda at the film's denouement, Xolani protects his and Vija's invisible queer relationship in order to sustain the ideology that *ulwaluko* is an overtly heteronormative space. Critiquing a society that cannot incorporate Xolani, his murder of Kwanda also highlights that visibility in certain spaces can be dangerous for queer Black bodies.

Rather than conforming to idealist narratives of *Bildung* that foreground the "image of man in the process of becoming" (Graham 2012, p.169), both *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* can be read as "postcolonial (sub)versions" of *Bildung* that "reflect critically on the process of incorporation" (2001, p.169). As Graham argues, "while the individual's harmonization with society resolves the coming-of-age process in the idealist *Bildungsroman*" (168), this does not occur in most postcolonial narratives of *Bildung*, potentially offering a critique of the contexts that fail to incorporate the protagonists. While Tshepo attains some level of freedom in queer clubs and through his work at "Steamy Windows," he must still navigate the racial and class tensions of the cityscape, and he has nonetheless experienced heteronormative disciplinary violence within the city. This violence

reaches a crescendo when Tshepo's flatmate Chris and his cronies gang rape Tshepo. According to Graham, Chris and his gang members are not perpetrating a "homosexual rape," but rather it is "rape perpetrated by heterosexual men as a means of showing gang solidarity and hierarchy, as a disciplinary act against a man who is regarded as weak or feminine" (2001, p.179). It is clear that Chris is using heteronormative disciplinary violence against Tshepo when, prior to the rape, after physically abusing Tshepo and orchestrating the loss of his job, he says: "He doesn't think he's better anymore, not since he lost his job. That smile on his face. It's gone. I took it away...I fixed him good. And he keeps the house clean, like I want" (Duiker 2001, p.210). Later, when Chris decides to rape Tshepo in order to "fix him," he says "You like this don't you, huh? You like it, don't you" (2001, p.212). In this way, Chris alludes to Tshepo's potential queerness and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* thereby depicts "corrective rape." Although the term "corrective rape" in South Africa usually refers to a type of rape used by agents of heteronormative patriarchy to discipline Black lesbians, we use it here to refer to disciplinary rape directed at a queer Black man. As in *Inxeba*, where Kwanda is killed to hide the secret same-sex intimacy that occurs on the mountain, the heteropatriarchal disciplinary violence experienced by Tshepo is rooted in a society marked by toxic hypermasculinities that imbue violence into actors in order to reinforce heteronormativity.

After the rape, Tshepo finds refuge and a space for personal growth during same-sex intimacies at "Steamy Windows," where he is able to express his queerness, under the pseudonym "Angelo". Indeed, the chapters narrated by Tshepo before his time at "Steamy Windows" are entitled "Tshepo," but as he transforms at "Steamy Windows," the chapters narrated by him begin to be entitled "Angelo." During this transformation he sheds his awkwardness and gains a sense of confidence. When he again meets his friend Mmabatho towards the end of his employment at "Steamy Windows" she notices his maturation and coming-of-age, observing to herself "his new adult tone" and that "people grow up quietly" (2001, p.449). However, if the apparent brotherhood and same-sex experiences at "Steamy Windows" facilitate Tshepo/Angelo's coming of age, they also ultimately leave him disillusioned. According to Sebastian, "Steamy Windows" is modelled on the Brotherhood of Pre-Raphaelite society (2001, p.256), and is supposed to transcend race and class. But this is not achieved. While the masculinities at "Steamy Windows" are bonded by their deviation from heteronormative masculinities and sexual practices, the text displays ways in which these masculinities are still racialised and racially divided. Tshepo initially notes potential racist and misogynist implications in Sebastian's speech about transcendent societies. When Tshepo challenges Sebastian's reference to "so-called primitive people" (2001, p.249) as an allusion to Black people viewed through the Western lens, Sebastian confirms that he means "whoever the West thinks is primitive" (2001, p.249). Tshepo brushes such moments aside initially. However, well into Tshepo's job at "Steamy Windows," the white manager named Shaun suggests to Tshepo that he was nervous a customer would "go kaffir," and although Tshepo is "shocked," he thinks to himself, "the bubble had to burst sometime" (2001, p.285). This moment is the beginning of the end for Tshepo, as the idealism that "Steamy Windows" initially presented is unravelling. Shaun attempts to offer a poor ahistorical context for the term, but it is obvious that by using this racial slur, Shaun invokes racial stereotypes of Black people as that violent, thieving, and unruly. Following this interaction with Shaun, Tshepo is discriminated against by a white gay man in a bar called New Yorkers, which makes him reflect that "I feel depressed and disillusioned, naive forever fooling myself that gay people are different. They are white people before they are gay" (2001, p.343). Tshepo eventually leaves "Steamy Windows" after becoming "disillusioned" by these experiences of racism, which interrupts the coming-of-age that he had achieved through queer intimacy.

Slaughter claims that in postcolonial narratives of *Bildung*, "the promises of developmentalism and self-determinism are revealed to be empty, or at least exaggerated; *Bildung* thus becomes the process of recognizing the limits of personal development" (Slaughter 2007, p.38). This is true for Tshepo-Angelo. After the incidents of racism that Tshepo-Angelo experiences, his identity is split in the text and his narrative sections are no longer titled "Angelo" but rather "Angelo-Tshepo". The first narratorial split of his identity in a chapter title occurs in the same chapter in which Tshepo mentions his deceased

mother. This is significant as it is the first time that Tshepo has spoken of her since Chris raped him, when he stated that he felt like his "mother died again" (Duiker 2001, p.214). There is a sense of loss in both chapters, the loss of his mother, but also the loss of part of himself. His disillusionment with gay culture in Cape Town culminates in a trip to a Cape Town township where he witnesses the injustices that remain a legacy of apartheid, and where the Black inhabitants reflect the lack of "developmentalism" and "self-determinism" he had thought Cape Town could offer.

"Steamy Windows" and the queer clubs of Cape Town in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* are represented as everything the elder in *Inxeba* warns the initiates to be concerned about. But while Tshepo has some freedom to explore his sexual identity in certain spaces in Cape Town, a freedom that Xolani and Vija do not have, this freedom has its restrictions. In the early parts of the novel, Tshepo suggests that he moved to Cape Town to "run away from the whole race thing" (2001, p.34) and he goes on to state that people in Cape Town care more about class than race, "they want to say ah you're cool and not ah you're black or white" (2001, p.35). Tshepo will eventually be dissuaded of this idea, however, as *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* navigates an unfulfilled post-apartheid ideal. The novel initially positions "Steamy Windows" as a potential post-racial utopia where black and white men sleep together, challenging the apartheid stance against homosexuality and interracial relationships. But even within this space, the novel reveals to the reader that the traumatic South African past of racialisation endures.

However, the text does offer a glimmer of hope in its denouement as Tshepo moves to Johannesburg. After many chapters entitled "Angelo-Tshepo," the final chapter is entitled "Tshepo" again. Indeed, Tshepo remarks, "In Jo'burg everyone knows me as Tshepo. I left Angelo behind in Cape Town, still roaming its streets and exploring its underworld" (2001, p.452). In Johannesburg, he now works in a children's home, looking after children from abusive environments. By participating in giving these children a safe space, Tshepo can be read as performing some kind of healing of his own past. He has retained his love for men, and same-sex intimacy is still pivotal to the narrative as he goes on to say, "Once a week I go for a night out in town…I always meet special men…intimacy of some sort is part of our ritual. They offer me blueprints for survival, for building a new civilisation, a new way of life" (2001, p.455). This glimpse of a new and alternative life is about queerness, but also, even from his male friends such as bankers who work in a capitalist economy, he begins to see that "capitalism is not the only way" (2001, p.455). His creativity becomes linked to his queerness as he buys an easel and speaks to it: "I tell it about the men I like, the ones I fantasise about" (2001: 455). In Johannesburg, however, he lives in a fugitive community of "illegal and legal immigrants" (454), and as such, he is not incorporated into mainstream society, but it is here that he feels that he "live[s] in Africa" (2001: 454) and that he has "space [and] time to think" (2001, p.455). Thus, "*The Quiet Violence of Dreams* may be read as a 'dissensual' version of the *Bildungsroman* in that it does not entirely abandon an ideal of harmonious integration" (Graham 2012, p.180). Whereas Tshepo's coming-of-age was shaped by his experiences in the "underworld" of "Steamy Windows" in Cape Town, the freedom offered by this space was limited. By the end of the novel Tshepo survives by living a marginalised life, in a marginalised community. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Kwanda, who is killed at the end of *Inxeba*.

## Conclusion

It is concerning that, while set at least 15 years apart, both *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* reflect upon ongoing violent realities for queer Black South Africans. "Corrective rape" and murder are some of the violent realities that queer Black people face in the post-apartheid era, in both urban spaces to the rural areas. At the same time, however, by referring to pre-colonial same-sex intimacies, both texts disrupt narratives that serve to exclude queer bodies in contemporary African contexts. The impressive feat of both *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Inxeba* is the recasting of queer identity as potentially African, and as providing spaces for community. For queer Black readers and viewers both texts would seem to usher in a sense of community, in the very process of reading or viewing. Ncube comments thus on the potential significance of *Inxeba*:

> … for viewers who identify as gay, watching the film offers a space of recognition and belonging.

> For these viewers, the process of viewing the film becomes an empowering experience in which kinship and community are forged and coalesced. The screen represents a space of contact and dialogue where ideas of what it means to be black and queer are performatively discussed and rethought. (2020, p.68)

Vija and Xolani's lovemaking at the waterfall in *Inxeba* is the only representation of gentle

intimacy during the happenings on the mountain. This softness is mirrored in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* in Tshepo's intimate encounters with West, Sebastian and with other men at the end of the novel. Despite the heteronormative disciplinary violence visited upon

Tshepo and Kwanda, and despite the fact that these two characters cannot be incorporated into a dominant homophobic and racist post-apartheid culture, both texts open up questions about spaces for queer Black bodies, asking what these spaces might look like. These questions then lead to further questions: whether queer invisibility would have to be a norm, and whether there are possibilities within South Africa, in Tshepo's words, "for building a new civilisation, a new way of life" (Duiker 2001).

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