Umkaphi: Ukukhanda ucwaningo besintu yobuciko olaphayo – reconceptualising ethics and reflexivity in narrative enquiry method for drama therapy research

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Bio

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Abstract

Drama therapy's central principles involve embodiment and projection. This article reflects on these principles as an undercurrent in the method chapter of my master's thesis. I proffer that, as a novice narrative inquirer,

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I transformed the trauma of my grandmother's hoarding of empty plastic bottles into an adjunct research process for a narrative enquiry method. Through the process, I draw parallels between this intuitively driven mode of conducting research, that is, reconfiguring the extra sensibilities attained from my maternal lineage: my mother, grandmother, aunts and other women elders who trained my researcher capabilities through Zulu cosmology. As such, I explain how the concept of *umkaphi* (guide) provides grounded ethical guidance, critical distance and interties with reflexivity. I argue that proximity to the subject matter, as well as participants, positions the researcher at an advantage for in-depth data collection and analysis. I explain how Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) research has affected drama therapy research and why a new reading of research is needed. The article is sectioned into titles forming waves of arrival: arriving to myself, arriving to drama therapy, arriving to the concepts of *umkaphi*, arriving to the concept of invisibilisation, and arriving to a method of transforming the experience of my grandmother's hoarding into an aspect of narrative research methodology—*ukuhlahlela okulahliwe*. The findings signal a procedural change in drama therapy through unique and intentional reconfigurations by Black drama therapists.

Keywords: Drama therapy, reflexivity, narrative enquiry, feminist methodologies, transformation

Introduction

Qualitative research appreciates the teller's wisdom and insight, and so narrative enquiry becomes an exchange of stories between the researcher and the respondent. In 2021, my research focused on interviewing Black drama therapists to gather their perspectives on their experiences in the field and gain insights on becoming a drama therapist in post-apartheid South Africa. According to several scholars, first-person narratives assist in the reconfiguration of one's identity in their perpetual evolution of becoming in a post-colonial world (Fanon, 1986; Gqola, 2001; Nielsen, 2011; Manganyi, 2013; Tamale, 2020).

Exploring diverse epistemic knowledges, according to Magoqwana, Magadla, and Masola (2024), means moving between native tongues and academic language to expand not only the linguistic repertoire of the researcher but also to encourage "revisiting our mother's epistemic

foundations" to deepen research. At the core of this article is conceptualising research from "lived wisdom", which is a scholarly approach that centres African women's lived experiences as legitimate entryways that appreciate African women's intellectual and conceptual labours (Magoqwana, Magadla, & Masola, 2024). Afro-feminists emphasise the inherited intellectual modes passed down orally across generations, which, when the printing press arrived in South Africa, were archived through indigenous languages and English texts (Magoqwana, Magadla, & Masola, 2024). However, meaning was lost through translation, and often male voices were centred. Before colonialism, women's knowledges were passed down through orality and archived through certain rites of passage, where artefacts like *ukhamba*,[1] *isidwaba*,[2] and *icansi*[3] were passed down across the generations.

On a personal note, many of these artefacts were non-existent in my family because of constant displacement during apartheid. Instead, I inherited hundreds of my grandmother's empty plastic bottles, which she diligently hoarded until her death. However, even without our traditional artefacts, the bodies of maternal figures in my family became the living vessels carrying hundreds of years of history. In *What is Slavery to Me*, African feminist Pumla Dineo-Gqola (2010) describes the liminal space of becoming the idealised self for Black women in post-apartheid South Africa as a site of affirmation that marks an end to silencing. Gqola (2010) explores the concepts of unremembering and reremembering in an attempt to redeem Black women's ontology through the plurality of their lived experiences. This article primarily focuses on reconceptualising the narrative enquiry method by firstly revisiting the voices and inherited trauma from my maternal lineage.

Umlando:[4] Arriving to myself and drama therapy

I am Black. I am queer. I am an isiZulu speaker. I am a woman, the third generation of last-born daughters on my mother's side; this means my mother was a last-born, and so was my grandmother. I am the granddaughter of Ndabazabantu Joseph Mthembu and Nomusa Juliet Mthembu, and the daughter of Innocentia Phumizile Mthembu and Benjamin Vusi Shabangu.

1 Clay pot
2 Loin cloth worn by married women
3 Straw mat for sleeping or sitting on
4 History/background

Some elders, when they hear I am a Shabangu, call me MaBhele, a celebration of the family trunk that connects Shabangus and unites several other Bantu lineages in the Southern African region. Some call Shabangus the original tricksters, but this is not an article about archetypes, and so I resist the temptation to indulge.

My grandmother, Judith Pinky Shabangu, taught me the *isithakazelo*[5] of our people before she passed away; apparently, our people were praised for the skills of crossing mighty rushing rivers so effortlessly that, when we got to the other side of the bank, we looked even more beautiful and surreal, peaceful even—this is but a loose translation. Personally, this powerful praise song is hard to believe and even more difficult to recite, given the painful experiences of my family during apartheid.

Herein, I outline my arrival to drama therapy from a position of being born in a democratic dispensation, yet still experiencing the vicarious trauma of apartheid from my grandmother. Coming from a maternal line of healers who were riddled by poverty, I questioned how my family came to live in such deplorable conditions, especially because I knew my mother and grandmother intimately outside of their daily work as domestic workers and tea ladies.

I knew them as the women who spoke good English despite their limited education, women who taught me how to knit, bake, and garden; but mostly, I knew them as healers who knew how and when to brew *muthi*[6] according to the moon cycle. I knew them as tender women who explained the world to me without breaking my sense of wonder and curiosity. However, I also knew them as women who could not fulfil their own spiritual callings due to displacement because of apartheid, low economic disposition due to limited education, and limited access to other forms of work.

Moreover, the psychic wound of never seeming to arrive due to the legacy of the colonial injury had forced them to question the validity of the power in their spiritual craft, especially since they had not undergone initiation for their own callings. The grief of them never having the opportunity to fully realise their greatness weighed heavily on me by the time I registered for the course, and that grief was reawakened by both

5 Recitation of clan names or outline of lineage (singular of izithakazelo)

6 Medicine, specifically African Traditional Medicine (ATM). Muthi is typically used for bodily ailments that emanate from natural and supernatural causes

their passings. Contrarily, their passings also liberated me from the fear of pursuing my dreams. Understandably, career visibility for my mother and grandmother, much like the rest of the population that was born before or during apartheid, was recognised in servant labour, meaning one could not self-determine their career trajectories (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Mkize, 2005).

Umzabalazo:[7] The conception of invisibility

I argue that the psychic wound is a manifestation of invisibility, and in this section, I examine the conception of invisibility through Black feminists, philosophers, and psychologists, primarily Fanon, Gobodo-Madikizela, Gqola, Manganyi, Mkhize, and Stevens. This conception is further explored within the psychology, medical, and drama therapy fields.

Fanon (1986) argues that the colonial hangover informs the tacit ways that Black bodies navigate and negotiate space based on historic alienation during colonisation. Herein, the notion of adopting the popular language and culture directly correlates to access and being socially accepted, whereas failure to do so means isolation and alienation, that is, non-existence. Therefore, to be Black and fully embodied in the university, since universities are colonial entities, is based on racial alienation. As such, to be visible means, to an extent, employing self-betrayal to achieve racial and class membership, as well as belonging within social associations (Nielsen, 2011; Gqola, 2001; Hook, 2004; Freire, 2017; Tamale, 2020).

However, for Africans, the intersection of personhood and vocational identity is crucial, especially where societal roles shape meaning and purpose (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Makanya, 2014). Therefore, self-betrayal is impossible, or rather the last resort. Job titles reflect motivations and experiences, though individual experiences remain diverse despite collectivist values (Fabiano, 2010; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Stevens, 2016).

Black women feel the pressure to academically assimilate more than other student groups. Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) state that the main challenge faced by Black female students is the need for perceived high performance because they face increased scrutiny. These policies, though founded in legislative emancipation, create pressurised environments,

7 The struggle

because in post-apartheid South Africa, race relations still affect university experiences (Ngema et al., 2023).

Previously disadvantaged students reported significant challenges compared to their white peers. Gobodo-Madikizela (2015, p. 263) highlights the invisibility of Black medical students, illustrating this issue further:

> "To deny the painful reality of another person is to render the person invisible. The tragic part of this is not so much the denial of the Other, but rather the silencing of the protagonist's own conscience; that is to say, the dehumanisation of the self".

This reveals that the colonial act of invisibilising Black people through racial identifiers such as 'non-white' annihilated core cultural identities, resulted in Black people being seen as non-entities in previously white academic streams, and produced static atmospheres in the professional realm.

The supervisee-supervisor relationship develops the capacity of future therapists; therefore, a good relationship is required. However, in the United Kingdom, a study found that interracial supervisee-supervisor relationships between white supervisors and non-white psychology students often resulted in conflict concerning client care, student performance, and readiness for work due to the discipline's Eurocentric roots (Eklund et al., 2014). Similarly, with white female drama therapists comprising over 80% of the professional population (Mayson, 2020), the South African foundations of drama therapy mirror the foundations of the South African psychology field, with accounts of being silenced during supervision meetings (Qhobela, 2015; Manganyi, 2013).

South Africa's first Black qualified psychologist, Chabani Manganyi, found himself a political refugee in the United States after experiencing exclusion from the South African psychological professional bodies. According to Stevens (2016), Manganyi demonstrates professional resilience and signifies the naming of the obstacles manifesting from being historically viewed as a non-entity despite his academic accolades and qualifications.

It is in narrating and re-narrating his training experiences during apartheid that Manganyi reaches a reflexive disposition, highlighting the fight to be professionally recognised. Similarly, the Black women that I interviewed navigated the same obstacles and, through a narrative approach, found a means to voice their frustrations, joys, confusions, and achievements.

Ubuciko olaphayo:[8] Drama therapy's arrival in South Africa

Henrich, Heine, and Norenzyan (2010) posit that Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) research is linguistically and conceptually skewed towards satisfying a minority of the world's population perceptions, that is, the Global North. Furthermore, WEIRD research often carries assumptions of universality, but in so doing, creates alienating disciplines. As such, the medical and behavioural sciences are unfairly attributed with traits of objectivity. However, American psychologists make up approximately 5% of psychologists in the world, and research from the United States dominates psychology across the globe (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzyan, 2010). Therefore, the medical field and psychology are inherently biased and limited in serving non-white, or rather non-WEIRD, populations. Consequently, drama therapy's arrival in South Africa, a decade after political liberation, is not unmarred by the colonial hangover and WEIRD research.

Drama therapy emerged in the second half of the 20th century across America, Europe, and the United Kingdom, underwent various developments (including short courses), and was officially formalised in the United Kingdom through the Health Professionals Council (Langley, 2006). The modality is characterised by the foundations of psychology and theatre, with elements borrowed from shamanistic performances calling for healing through dramatic action, symbolism, role-taking, mirroring, projection, and embodied play for psychological growth and catharsis (Pendzick, 1988; Feniger-Schaal & Orkibi, 2020).

The development of drama therapy in the West contrasts with the South African timeline, whereby during the 20th century, the country saw the exchange of colonialism with apartheid (Gallo, 2020). Drama therapy, therefore, arrived in South Africa as a Western export to the only department that offers the course at the University of Witwatersrand. Attempts to position the discipline within activist streams placed the pedagogy alongside applied drama and theatre, with both disciplines focusing on social transformation and healing (Nebe, 2016). However, limitations to reach the broader South African population through trained drama therapists that are racially and linguistically representative of the population are revealed

8 Healing arts

through a baseline review of the student enrolment statistics, which indicate a stagnation of enrolment numbers, particularly for Black students, year after year (Shabangu, 2024).

Between 2014 and 2021, Black female students consistently comprised a minority in drama therapy enrolment, and despite women making up 81% of total students, Black women only comprised 30% of the female cohort (Mayson, 2020). These percentages point to bridging the gaps in WEIRD research by examining the retention rates of Black women students in the journey of becoming drama therapists. Moreover, research on retention in South Africa is complicated by the history of work migration and indentured labour, whereby for a significant period, research on career development was limited due to the restricted opportunities for work beyond blue-collar employment and the limitations imposed by Bantu Education during the apartheid era in South Africa (Gallo, 2020; Phadi & Ceruti, 2013; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

According to Henrich, Heine, and Norenzyan (2010, p. 112), building concepts that are rich in diversity bridges the gaps identified in WEIRD research and creates a new window to understand certain behavioural trends within specific populations:

> "Researchers can view phenomena from a novel perspective, not constrained by their own intuitions, when they study those from other cultures, and can potentially discover phenomena that they otherwise would not see. However, we disagree with an extreme version of this argument, which proposes that researchers should entirely avoid studying people from their own culture. Researchers' intuitions about the ways people in their own cultures think can be a useful source of understanding in building theories and in honing research instruments".

Access and assimilation go hand in hand with political liberation; however, access to the discipline does not necessarily translate to assimilation because assimilation into academic cultures is still centred in WEIRD cultures (Swartz, 2009; White & Ali-Khan, 2013).

Ukuhlahlela okulahliwe:[9] The metaphorical exploration of the narrative enquiry

According to Moore et al. (2020), historical trauma often leads to unresolved grief, and the awareness of systematic oppression needs to be brought to the surface as part of the therapeutic work. Hearing the same stories of the losses experienced by my grandmother and mother sounded more like cries for justice, much like a formal grievance process. I, in turn, internalised all the narratives, hoarded them, and formed an unhealthy relationship with my identity. However, Mkhize (2000, p. 4) explains this phenomenon as a natural process in one's transformation:

> "During the process of development or 'ideological becoming', an individual enters dialogue with a number of social and cultural voices or perspectives. These voices, which may be composed of utterances by parents and grandparents, including collective group understandings as reflected in cultural and religious prescriptions, are preserved in the psyche, where they can engage in an inner dialogue with each other".

In preparation for the narrative enquiry, I went back home to my maternal grandmother's garage, where she kept her hoard of empty plastic bottles. These garage sessions turned into quasi-experimental moments. I walked through hundreds of empty plastic bottles that she had been collecting with hopes that one day she would accumulate enough to sell and make a sizeable amount of wealth.

I played around with these empty plastic bottles daily in the silence and in the grief. I took off the caps and exchanged them with the other mouths of bottles. I carefully read the ingredients on the labels and then turned the labels around to the blank side while I thought of a new label. These sessions became playful and sobering meditations.

The pain of playing with these empty plastic bottles surfaced in most of my sessions as I considered the condition of Black lives in my community: empty, fragile, and non-redeemable. I needed to move from this emotional disposition by externalising and projecting my uncomfortable feelings into the bottles I performed with before the interviews with the drama therapists. I knew that I needed to approach my participants without apathy and not

9 Analysing that which is discarded

assume their conditions were similar to those in my environment. I relabelled the bottles by writing down the values of my research on the blank side of the label. Sometimes I would get stuck, but I would put my ear to the bottle as if I could hear it, listen to the echo, and then write a new label for the bottle, such as *isidima*,[10] *uthando*,[11] *inguquko*,[12] *impumelelo*,[13] *umvuso*,[14] *inhlawulo,*[15] and various others that informed the chapter titles of my research but also prepared me for deep listening during my participants' interviews.

Umkaphi:[16] Relational ethics and reflexivity

Often, concerns about validity and credibility arise due to the proximity of the researcher to the field, the selected participants, and the research topic. However, Haverkamp and Young (2007) state that a proactive researcher who invests in the relationship with their participants produces in-depth findings. The insider-outsider researcher approach is, therefore, the prime position to interrogate the interacting forces between systems and people for redressing institutions that determine visibility and progressiveness (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Fook & Gardner, 2007). Previous drama therapy research points to the importance of the insider-outsider researcher. For example, Qhobela's (2015) master's thesis is a self-reflection on the performance of race in drama therapy sessions, pointing to a need to be hyper-visible because of a lack of attention paid to drama therapy trainees during her time. Precarity surrounds Black lives and places them at the periphery of power systems; therefore, a "new bodily ontology" implores us to rethink social belonging, injurability, and bodily presence (Butler, 2009).

It is significant to factor in belonging when conducting research, especially in historically marginalised populations (Gaotlhobogwe et al., 2018; Walkington, 2017). I shifted the nature of research from one that is purely clinical and objective to a method that emphasises democratic data collection

10 Dignity
11 Love
12 Transformation/change
13 Success
14 Resurrection
15 Reparations
16 Guide/guider

and a rethinking of research ethics. Herein, I resorted to my Zulu culture's notion of *umkaphi*[17]—the person who guides another to their destination.

Typically, *umkaphi* knows the way better than the person being guided, because the *umkaphi* has the experience of being on that path before. Typically, *umkaphi* takes on the role of the listener of grievances and maintains an objective stance in social altercations while still acting as an advocate for the person they are guiding. *Umkaphi* takes on different meanings in different contexts: spiritually, *abakaphi*[18] are guides who point the living in the right direction and path. In this instance, they are considered benevolent and wise, unlike other spiritual guides who may have malicious intent. Every rite of passage calls for *abakaphi*. At an initiation, *umemulo*[19] guides young Zulu maidens. At a wedding, *abakaphi* are regarded as part of the bride's party, ensuring that the bride is well represented and taken care of before and during the wedding presented by the groom's family. As such, *abakaphi* direct the research process and serve as ethical reminders for the manner of relating to others in different situations. Furthermore, *abakaphi* hold the boundaries for interactions and act as vessels for accountability. In addition to my research supervisor and my spiritual guides, other *abakaphi* I encountered were the qualified drama therapists who had started their journeys years before me, the ones who charted the path before I knew of its existence, and from their destinations and different vantage points, responded to my call for interviews with keen investment in the research article's formation and completion.

Additionally, I engaged in the practice of reflective journaling during the research process to mediate fluctuations, as both the researcher and participants are in constant flux (Popoveniuc, 2014). By adopting a reflexive approach throughout the research process, I was able to evaluate the findings with the clarity afforded by critical distance. I kept a critical reflection journal throughout the research process to evaluate my own assumptions. For example, some participants articulated their selfhood within the lens of Black womanhood instead of Afro-feminism. I had to examine my own labelling of others, and I realised that the resistance to being identified and codified as Black and feminist was due to the structural difficulties faced during

17 Guide/guider
18 Plural for guide, i.e., guides
19 Rite of passage for young unmarried women

their years at university. Even when respondents did not express difficulty due to their race, the resistance to this identification could be attributed to the need to evade historical negative connotations of being visible solely in those ways.

Conversely, class identity for the interviewees seemed to also contribute to the self-definition of 'Black woman', wherein the identity of being called a woman was not argued, but being Black was; again, this is because of the historical negative connotations associated with the compound identity of being Black and a woman.

Drawing out the points of a discernible reality proved interesting yet challenging because the research process elicited responses that went beyond clinical responses towards nuanced dialogues that add criticality. As a result, the intimacy of narrative enquiry opened a channel to practice true reflexivity and apply ethical hygiene.

Inzuzo yendaba: Findings

The findings gleaned from the five semi-structured interviews that I conducted indicate three factors that directly influence drama therapy students in pursuing the career further: a positive master's experience, a positive internship experience, and positive drama therapy supervisory support. These three factors all have a singular link, which is relationship building—either laterally with drama therapy classmates, hierarchically with supervisors and lecturers, or externally with internship sites that could potentially lead to long-term work opportunities. Four of the five participants identified as drama therapists, and all five perceived the career to be economically viable. The drama therapists who connected well with their supervisors fared better, but this was not always the case; instead, the drama therapists interviewed sought extra support by finding another supervisor with whom they could culturally connect and be mentored fairly. This was found in the form of an elder Black woman in a similar profession:

> "I felt it expanded my relationships beyond just the work relationship part because I could go to her about the concerns that I had, I didn't necessarily take my therapeutic work to her but she was wise enough to know how to assist me and support me by virtue of their expertise in the field and my way of working as well is very community based so she was able to plug in quite a lot and shape quite a lot. She had worked overseas but she's also worked here locally, and she had

> that wisdom of what the possibilities of overseas are and she formulated a lot of working systems in that environment. She was a groundworker like she's a ground worker and a pioneer." The Preceptor (Shabangu, 2024, p. 60).

The five participants came from a middle-class background. Three of the five participants were mothers. Motherhood was particularly integral for building inner resilience for three of the participants, and all the participants described positive parenting during their childhoods that built their inner reserves for *resilience*. One participant shared about their mother's influence:

> "My mother was very particular about the words. She is very metaphorical. She came with the rules and strictness in the house, but that created structure for us. It became the space of safety." The Dancer (Shabangu, 2024, p. 66).

Feminist ontologies expose the intersections of oppression women experience by deliberately naming phenomena that are particularly directed at denigrating women and their intellectual labours (Magoqwana, Magadla, & Masola, 2024). Moreover, Afro-feminism deconstructs these oppressions and links the oppressions to structural powers, unearthing the layers of suppressed meaning:

> "If we are to achieve effective intersectional analyses… then looking inside texts and narratives for ideological traces means implementing a mode of analysis which reads contradictions within texts as refractions of structural, material, and ideological contradictions. It means being attuned to the cracks, absences and discontinuities in stories instead of conducting 'smoothed over' analysis which reproduces univocally" (Tamale, 2020, p. 71).

Afro-feminist theorists informed the development and condensation of the following themes: *strong Black woman (SBW), angry Black woman (ABW), Andizi, Black masquerade*, *gatekeeping*, *academic racial politics,* and *community between Black drama therapists* (Gqola, 2001; Kiguwa, 2019; Ngema et al., 2023; Motimele, 2019; Tamale, 2020; Tamale & Oloka-Onyango, 1997; Shabangu, 2024; Watson & Hunter, 2016). These themes point to centres of power for the interviewees and centres where deliberate invisibilising takes place if the terms and conditions of assimilation are not met (Shabangu, 2024). For example, SBW and ABW were configured differently by the women; three of the women's narratives subscribed to this label, whereas

the latter seemed to be an aggressive descriptor forcibly put onto the two women who did not subscribe to being strong Black women—a descriptor feared by all women for fear that they would not be perceived as agreeable and would face social isolation, which came true for one participant.

Therefore, conditions of the drama therapy qualifying process are not far removed from Manganyi's own account in apartheid South Africa—however, the participants seemed to have more agency. Whilst the findings are textured and vary from participant to participant, the majority expressed an overall positive master's placement year and internship year, except for one participant who generally had an overall negative experience. The prevailing themes of *racial politics*, *Black masquerade*, *strong Black woman*, and *angry Black woman* signal a negative visibility that delayed or deferred pursuing a drama therapy career for one participant:

> "I did my hours, but I've not finished my hours actually because I just stopped. I felt that I wasn't happy doing what I was doing so I stopped. This was what I felt even doing my master's I felt I wasn't being supported I wasn't being heard, and I wasn't being seen as an individual. I don't know how else to explain it. I know that we were supposed to be studying but I saw all the people being supported and I wasn't. I knew I was not being supported by anybody, but it was just me on my own, that's it! You take the individual into account; not just take the collective. You know I didn't want to seem like an angry Black woman who always complained so I tried to limit my complaints. But even when I did present it, it wasn't like anybody listened, you understand? So, no I had a horrible experience." The Writer (Shabangu, 2024, p. 58).

To an extent, a favourable economic upbringing positioned all the participants at an advantage because economic-class membership buffers social associations; however, class identity offers little protection against being first read as Black (Phadi & Ceruti, 2013). All the participants reported encounters of being treated as some form of stereotype, causing them either to shrink, silence themselves or, conversely, overcompensate as students and in their professional roles, proving that these micro-traumas were experienced by all the women, even though the majority expressed a positive experience. However, once they fully attained their qualifications, they found that they enjoyed new powers of self-determination in the field; they could rest and return at will—choosing what visibility looks like for them:

> "I refuse to go to some of the things, but because I feel like if I'm to survive now I'm good in the field and to continue being as passionate, I would need to make sure that those that I'm streaming along and walking with are people that I know are not induced by power dynamics, that are not interested in reminding me who started drama therapy in South Africa; that for me is problematic. The commitment is on the work ethic. It's not in the politics and I'm not interested in debating, and so I prefer the groundwork." The Preceptor (Shabangu, 2024, p. 64).

The narratives demonstrate that professional visibility for Black women drama therapists is measurable, though often undermined, and their trustworthiness is frequently invalidated. Whilst these interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis, the collective narratives carry common nodes that connect the participants, creating a paradox of being both visible and invisible even to each other. These findings arguably point to the transposition of apartheid trauma in drama therapy and explain the experience of micro-aggressions. Collecting these narratives from drama therapists reminded me of wading through the hundreds of empty plastic bottles and relabelling them as my assumptions dissipated about each interviewee during our sessions. One participant who had quit her training felt encouraged to go back and finish her clinical placement hours after the interview. The process was affirming and cathartic for the participants, in that initially I started with three participants, but two of them then referred two other drama therapists to me. These drama therapists, who were not queer, not me, in a way acted as *abakaphi* for me and were affirming the process of becoming a drama therapist to me with the singular message: you may get fractured along the way, but you will arrive whole.

Conclusion

The article suggests that 'lived wisdom' is an integral part of narrative enquiry, especially in South Africa. I created a non-biased narrative enquiry mode by externalising my psychic tensions onto my grandmother's hoard of empty plastic bottles that symbolised my generational trauma and transformed the bottles into repository vessels for my research. The concept of *umkaphi* (guide) plays a crucial role in this research and emphasises the importance of relational ethics in narrative enquiry. Positionality is marked by membership, and the significance of the insider-outsider researcher proves

that proximity allows for honest communication, data capturing, and finding nuance in the participant narratives. The onto-epistemologies of the women interviewed illustrate the myriad complexities that each drama therapist engages with to be certified and empowered.

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