

**GOGO THE SANGOMA**  
**An initiation into biography writing**

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**Master of Philosophy**  
**Life Writing**

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## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## **DISCLAIMER**

Some names have been changed.  
Any further changes will be based on the decision of the ethics committee.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study in the field of life writing. It is a biography. It also tracks the relationship between Gogo, an elderly Christian Xhosa *sangoma* (sacred specialist / ‘traditional healer’), and her would-be biographer. Both are women, both are South African, but like many South Africans, their race, religion, age, level of education, and class has separated them. This thesis tells of how the project of the one to tell the story of the other brought the two women together, but also highlighted their differences.

As a black person, Gogo was disadvantaged during apartheid South Africa, working in domestic labour, one of the few careers available to her. As a woman in the milieu of African Traditional Religion, she was downtrodden by the patriarchal society in general - and her father and husband in particular. This situation was overlaid by the repression of both the Christian missionaries who, upon settling the land, dominated its peoples and their faith; and further, the Afrikaner Nationalist government’s theological justification of apartheid laws. It is through religion that Gogo was oppressed, but it is also through religion that she gained her power.

It was one of her employers, whom Gogo describes ‘like a sister’, who encouraged Gogo to follow her calling into traditional healing, which she had avoided most of her life. Gogo returned to the tradition that oppressed her, but this time as mouthpiece of the Ancestors.

The thesis draws on the ‘Tribal Politics’ theories of postmodern sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman. He proposes that within today’s ‘imagined tribal communities’, we appeal to ‘experts’ to approve our ‘self-constitution’ – we construct our own identities from available models of identity.

She has become an expert within her own community. Her ‘sacredness’ lends her status in an environment where New Age spirituality is a growing ‘imagined tribal community’ from within which indigenous cultures are being respected and resanctified by the descendants of colonialists, Christian Missionaries, and apartheid supporters.

To tell her story, the author conducted over twenty interviews with Gogo, over two years. She travelled to Gogo's hometown of Zastron in the Free State Province. This dissertation is Gogo's biography. It tells of her hometown, her family of origin, her working life, her relationships and her children.

As a psychology student, the author was interested in an indigenous tradition of physical, social, spiritual, and psychological healing. From a feminist psychological standpoint, she felt Gogo's story of overcoming oppression should be given a voice.

The author discusses theories of life writing, most specifically Paul J. Eakin's theory of relational biography. He states that one's life story is simultaneously the story of all the people in one's life. This is not dissimilar to the South African notion of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (we are people because of other people). Beyond this, though, as proposed in feminist psychology, and the theory of observer effect - the life story is also affected by the person listening to and recording it.

Despite the literature, the author learned that the process of recording a life is more difficult than she anticipated. She dealt with other players in her subject's life. She had to discern fact from fantasy. She had to trust and be trusted.

This dissertation tells of the relationship between the author and Gogo, the biographer and her subject. This is a discussion of attempting to build and maintain a relationship of equality. More than Gogo's narrative, it is the author's initiation into the process of life writing, with its assumptions, intentions, problems, theories, interpretations, setbacks and ultimate conclusion.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie voorlegging is 'n studie in die gebied van lewensbeskrywing. Dit is 'n biografie. Dit volg die verhouding tussen Gogo, 'n bejaarde Christen-Xhosa sangoma (heilige spesialis / 'tradisionele geneser'), en haar biograaf. Beide is vrouens, beide is Suid-Afrikaners, maar soos baie Suid-Afrikaners, het hul ras, godsdiens, ouderdom, vlak van opvoeding en klas hulle geskei. Hierdie tesis vertel hoe die projek van die een wat die storie van die ander vertel, die twee vroue saam gebring het, maar ook hul verskille beklemtoon het.

As 'n swart persoon was Gogo benadeel gedurende die Suid-Afrikaanse apartheid. Gedurende hierdie tydperk het sy as huishulp gewerk, een van die min beroepe wat aan haar beskikbaar was. As 'n vrou wat haarself in die miliur van Afrika Tradisionele Godsdiens bevind was sy oor die algemeen vertrap deur 'n patriargale samelewing en in besonder deur haar vader en haar man. Hierdie situasie is vererger deur die onderdrukking van Christen sendelinge wie, na vestiging in hierdie land, sy mense en hul geloof oorheers het, en verder deur die Afrikaner Nasionalistiese regering se teologiese verdedeging van apartheidswette. Gogo is deur godsdiens onderdruk, maar godsdiens is ook waar Gogo haar krag gevind het.

Een van Gogo se werkgewers, wie sy as 'n suster beskryf, het haar aangemoedig om haar roeping in tradisionele genesing, wat sy voorheen vermy het, te volg. Gogo keer toe terug na die tradisie wat haar onderdruk het, maar hierdie keer as mondstuk vir die Voorvaders.

Hierdie tesis is gebaseer op die 'Tribal Politics' teorieë van die postmoderne sosioloog, Zygmunt Bauman. Hy stel voor dat in vandag se 'imagined tribal communities, ons 'n beroep doen op 'kenners' om ons 'self-constitution' goed te keur - ons bou ons eie identiteite uit die beskikbare identiteit modelle.

Sy het 'n kenner geword in haar eie gemeenskap. Haar 'heiligheid' het haar status gegee in 'n omgewing waar 'New Age' spiritualiteit 'n groeiende 'imagined tribal community' skep,

waarvan die inheemse kulture gerespekteer en verheilig word deur die nasate van kolonialiste, Christen-sendelinge, en apartheid ondersteuners. Om haar storie te vertel, het die skrywer gedurende twee jaar meer as twintig onderhoude met Gogo gevoer. Sy het na Gogo se tuisdorp van Zastron in die Vrystaatse Provinsie gereis. Hierdie tesis is Gogo se biografie. Dit vertel van haar tuisdorp, haar gesin van oorsprong, haar werks lewe, haar verhoudings en haar kinders.

As 'n sielkunde student, was die skrywer geïnteresseerd in 'n inheemse tradisie van fisiese, sosiale, geestelike en sielkundige genesing. Vanuit 'n feministiese standpunt, het sy gevoel sy moet 'n stem gee aan Gogo se storie van onderdrukking en how sy dit oorwin het.

Die skrywer bespreek teorieë van lewensbeskrywing, en meer spesifiek Paul J. Eakin se teorie van 'relational biography'. Hy beweer dat jou eie lewensverhaal ook die verhaal van al die mense in jou lewe vertel. Dit is soortgelyk aan die Suid-Afrikaanse begrip van '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' (ons is mense as gevolg van ander mense). Verdermeer, soos voorgestel in feministiese sielkunde, en die teorie van die sogenaamde 'waarnemer effek' – word die lewensverhaal ook deur die persoon wat daarna luister en dit opneem beïnvloed.

Ten spyte van die letterkunde, het die skrywer geleer dat die proses waardeur 'n lewensverhaal opgeneem word moeiliker is as wat sy verwag het. Sy het ook met ander spelers in die hoofkarakter se te doen gehad. Sy moes onderskei tussen feite en fantasië. Sy moes vertrou en so ook vertrou word.

Hierdie tesis vertel van die verhouding tussen die skrywer en Gogo, die biograaf en haar onderwerp. Dit is 'n bespreking van 'n poging om 'n verhouding van gelykheid te bou en in stand to hou. Meer as Gogo se verhaal is dit die skrywer se inisiasie tot die proses van lewensbeskrywing, met sy aannames, intensies, probleme, teorieë, interpretasies, terugslae en die uiteindelijke gevolgtrekking.

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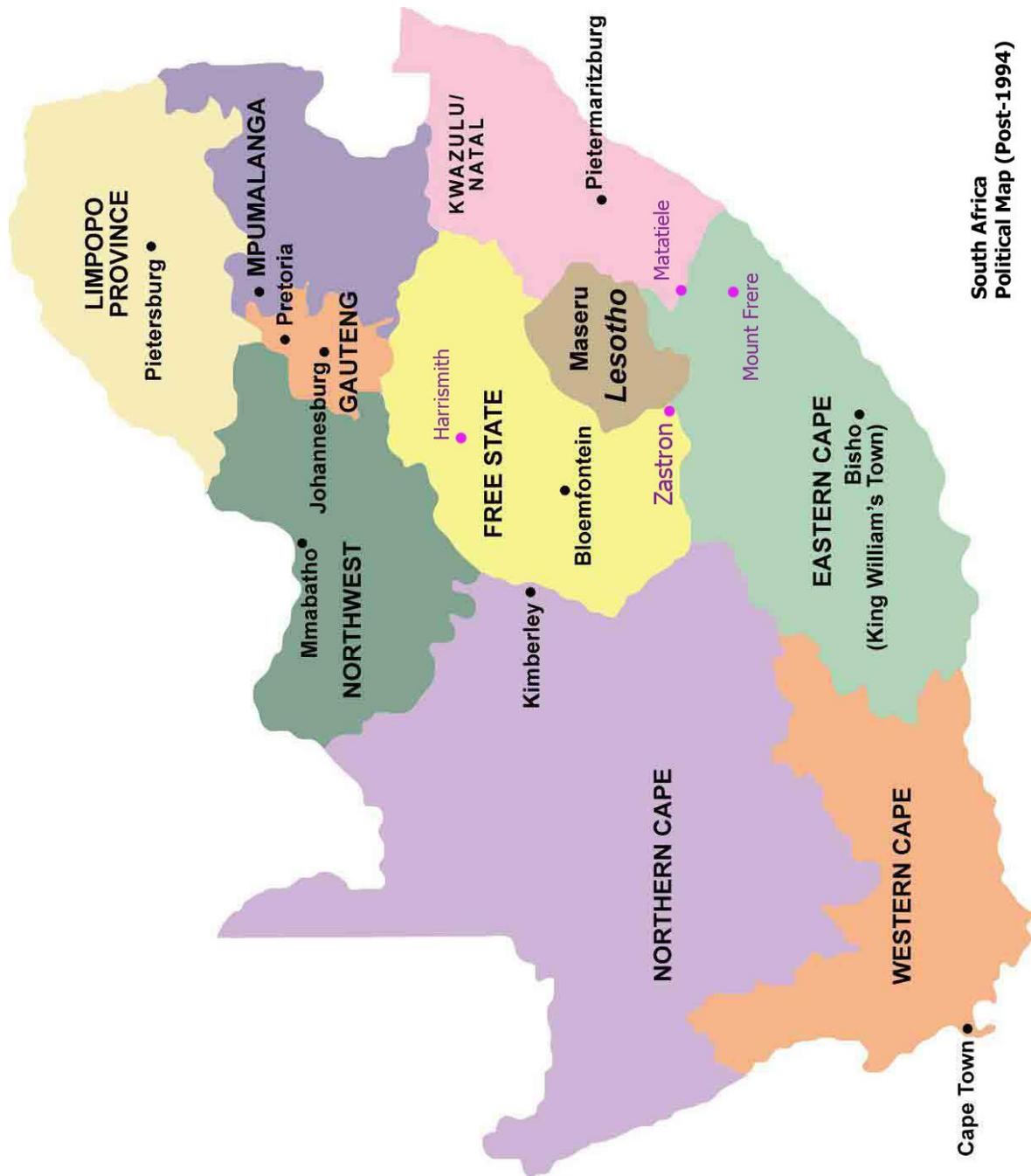
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‘Map of South Africa (Provinces),’ *Bookingsouthafrica.com*. Booking South Africa (BSA), n.d. Web, 13 November 2007, Map.

## TIMELINE OF SOUTH AFRICA <sup>1</sup>

- 1936** 7 April – The Representation of Natives Act no 16 of 1936 is passed, the first of a series of laws to diminish the voting rights of non-Whites in the Cape Province
- 1940** 29 January – The Herenigde Nasionale Party is formed
- 1948** 26 May – National Party wins General Elections in coalition with the Afrikaner Party (AP)
- 1949** 29 June – South Africa begins its apartheid programme
- 1951** 30 March – The Group Areas Act which was passed in 1950 becomes law  
14 May – The cabinet votes for the removal of the Coloured people from the voters roll
- 1954** 17 April – The Federation of South African Women is launched in Johannesburg  
South African Communist Party reconstitutes itself and goes underground.
- 1956** 9 August – Women march on the Union Buildings in Pretoria in protest to the pass laws
- 1959** 5 April – Pan-Africanist Congress led by Robert Sobukwe secedes from the African National Congress; adopts an anti-communist line
- 1960** 21 March – Sharpeville massacre, police shoot and kill an estimated 69 people who are part of a demonstration against pass laws; laws which require all black South Africans to carry a passbook to be able to travel about their own land
- 1961** 31 May – South Africa becomes a republic
- 1963** 26 November – The Rivonia Trial begins
- 1964** 11 March – Nelson Mandela's original five year sentence is commuted for life for high treason in the Rivonia Trial
- 1976** **16 June – Student riots break out in Soweto**

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). 'History of South Africa (including apartheid),' *Southafrica.to/history*, South Africa Travel Online, n.d. Web, 18 January 2007.  
'Timeline of South African History,' *Wikipedia.org*, Wikipedia, n.d. Web, 18 January 2007.

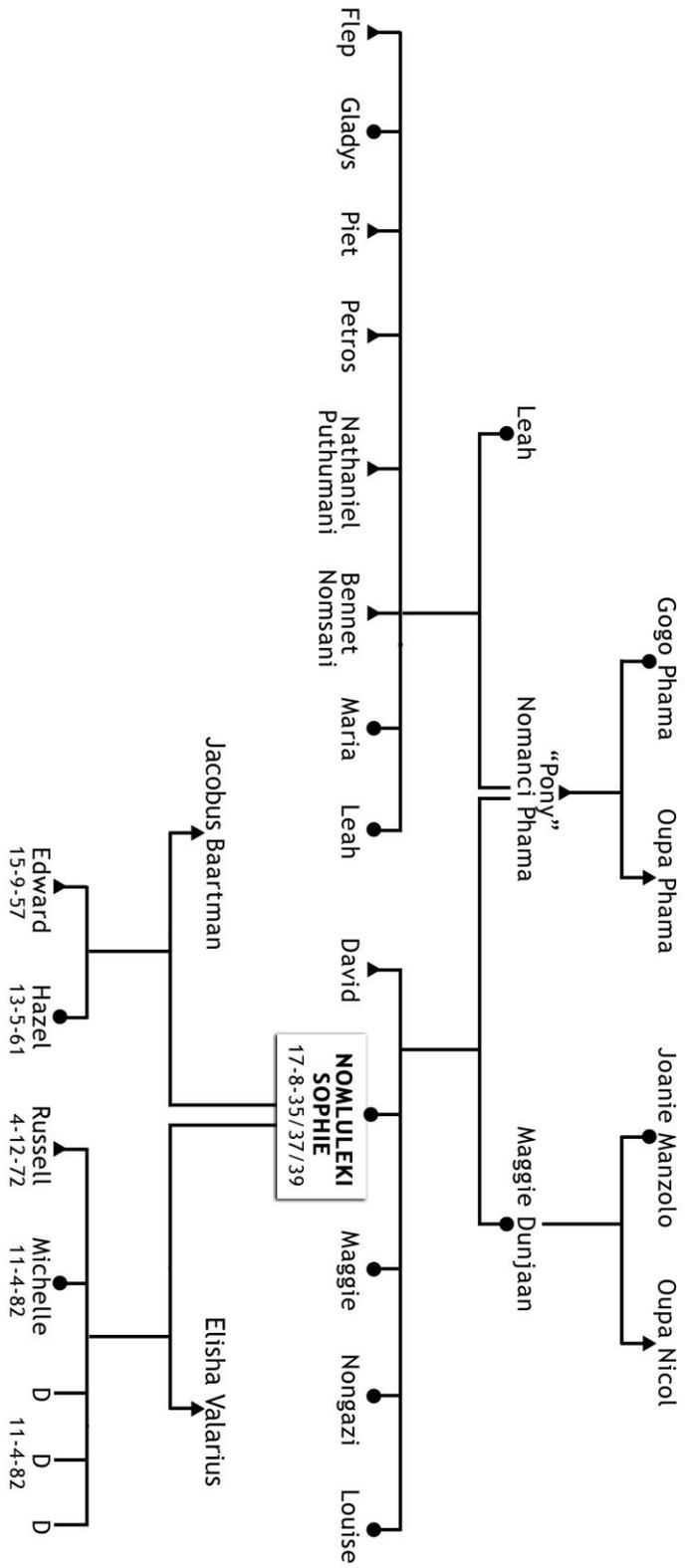
- 1984** Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu is awarded Nobel Peace Prize  
New constitution gives Asians and Coloureds but not Blacks limited participation in the central government  
P.W. Botha becomes State President
- 1984- 86** Prolonged and widespread resistance to the regime in black South African townships and violent government reactions  
Government declares partial state of emergency in major urban areas; renewed annually until 1990
- 1985** 31 January – Pieter Willem Botha, State President of South Africa offers a release proposal to jailed African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela
- 1986** Pass laws are repealed  
Government stops press, radio, and television from reporting clashes
- 1989** 5 July – PW Botha, State President of South Africa, and Nelson Mandela (in prison at the time) meet for the first time  
General election: F.W. de Klerk succeeds Botha as State President  
10 October – FW de Klerk, State President of South Africa announces that Nelson Mandela will be released
- 1990** 2 February – President FW de Klerk abolishes apartheid and announces date for Mandela’s release  
11 February – Nelson Mandela is released from the Victor Verster prison  
ANC and government begin negotiations  
7 June – President FW de Klerk lifts the state of emergency in South Africa after ten years in place  
1 August – African National Congress's armed wing, the Umkhonto we Sizwe, suspends its armed actions after 29 years
- 1991** 9 January – Black children are admitted to schools previously reserved for Whites only.
- 1992** 17 March – The government holds a referendum around changing the constitution, paving the way to end apartheid  
13 April – The legal system of apartheid is repealed  
17 June – Violence breaks between the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party in Boipatong leaving 46 dead  
4 June – 11 people are killed in clashes between the African National Congress and Inkatha Freedom Party members in Estcourt  
President FW de Klerk and Nelson Mandela are jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

- 1994** 15 March – South Africa's new national flag is unveiled  
21 March – The Inkatha Freedom Party rejects an initiative by President De Klerk to bring it into the election and starts planning a campaign of opposition to the Interim Constitution and April's election  
KwaZulu Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi meets State President FW de Klerk for talks about contingency planning for strife-torn KwaZulu-Natal  
The home of African National Congress regional premier candidate Jacob Zuma is torched by a mob in Nxamalala, near Inkandla, in northern KwaZulu-Natal  
**28 March – More than 30 people are killed and hundreds injured in battles in the Johannesburg area as tens of thousands of Zulus converge on the city centre to demonstrate their support for King Goodwill Zwelithini**  
Shell House massacre – security guards at Shell House, the African National Congress HQ in Jeppe Street, Johannesburg, open fire on demonstrators  
1 April – A state of emergency is declared in KwaZulu-Natal  
8 April – A meeting between the African National Congress president Nelson Mandela, King Goodwill Zwelithini, State President FW de Klerk and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, chief minister of KwaZulu takes place at a secret venue  
**26 – 29 April – the first democratic elections take place which the African National Congress wins**  
**10 May – Nelson Mandela is sworn in as the first democratically-elected President of South Africa and FW de Klerk and Thabo Mbeki become joint deputy presidents**
- 1996** 8 May – South Africa's new constitution is adopted by the Constitutional Assembly  
15 April – The Truth and Reconciliation Commission starts its first formal hearings with Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the helm
- 1999** 16 June – Thabo Mbeki becomes the second President of the New South Africa
- 2004** 14 April – The third democratic elections are held and won by the African National Congress
- 2007** June: Government workers, including teachers and nurses, strike for higher wages

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GOGO: TIMELINE

- 1935 17 August: Gogo is born to Nomanci (Poni) and Manzola in Matatiele, Eastern Cape.  
(As some later dates she gave me do not line up, I suspect her Identity Document may have been wrong, and she was born in 1939. This timeline, however, works according to the birthdate given in her ID book. All dates are approximated.)
- 1937 Phama Family moves to Zastron, Free State
- 1947 Mother dies  
Gogo becomes Christian
- 1948 Gogo is married to Jacobus, of her father's choosing
- ?1949 Gogo moves to Harrismith with Jacobus
- 1951 Gogo gives birth to her first child, Edward, on 15 September  
(The year she gave me is 1957. It does not fit with her story.)
- 1956 Jacobus leaves his family for another woman  
Gogo is pregnant with Hazel  
(The year she gave me for Hazel's birth, which again, does not correlate, is 1961.)
- 1958 Gogo moves to Bloemfontein and begins working for Mr Greenblatt
- 1960s Gogo moves with Greenblatts to Johannesburg  
Gogo meets and marries Elisha Valarius
- 1972 Russell is born (Elisha's son)
- 1982 Gogo gives birth to quadruplets (Elisha's children.)  
One quadruplet dies the following day  
Three weeks later two quadruplets die; Michelle is the only survivor
- ?1982-1990 The Greenblatts emigrate to USA  
Gogo starts working for Beth Taylor  
Gogo gets sick and has to return to Zastron; she stays there three years  
Gogo trains in Mount Frere  
Gogo 'trains' Adrian Taylor
- 1994 Elisha is killed in a riot

- ?1992-2004 Beth moves to Cape Town  
Gogo eventually joins Beth  
Gogo meets Kay Betterton  
Gogo joins the Shambala Foundation as a director
- 2005 Gogo's youngest brother, Putomani, dies
- 2006 I meet Gogo  
Gogo returns to the farm where she grew up



GOGO'S FAMILY

## **DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

*Gogo*

*Margot Saffer*

*Kay Betterton* – founding director of the Shambala Foundation, Gogo lives with her when in Cape Town

### **Gogo's family**

*Father* – *Nomanci 'Poni' Phama*

*Mother* – *Manzola (nee Dunjaan) Phama*

*'Step-mother'* – *Leah*

*Gladys* – half-sister

*Other Siblings*

### **Gogo's husbands**

*Jacobus Baartman*

*Elisha Valarius*

### **Gogo's Children**

*Edward*

*Hazel*

*Russell*

*Michelle*, and her son, *Pondo*

### **Gogo's employers**

*Greenblatts: Bernie* and *Sheryl*, and their children: *Michelle* and *Janice*

*Taylors: Beth*, her partner, *Morne*, and her son, *Adrian*

*Miss Marie Leroux* – owner of the farm in Zastron where Gogo grew up

### **Other**

*Ashleigh* – my friend who sets up meeting with Gogo

*Lucille* – owner of Lyndene guest house, where Gogo was staying when I first met her

*Baas Niklas* – owner of the farm next to *Miss Marie's* in Zastron

## **PART 1**

## **1. PROLOGUE: FIRST INTERVIEW**

‘Eish, eh, the main thing is that I’ve had such a lots of difficult life. This life is hard,’ said Gogo, or rather, Makhosi Athobile. ‘But I’m not dead.’

### **1.1 Meeting Gogo**

I met the woman I call Gogo for the first time in February 2006. I was doing a postgraduate degree in psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. The town of Stellenbosch is 45 minutes’ drive from Cape Town. As part of the degree, I took a course called ‘Psychology of Women’ in which we discussed theories of feminism and feminist psychology. As most of these theories originated in the United States, our professor constructed the course in such a way as to encourage us to question whether it was appropriate to apply them directly to a South African context. At the first class, we were told to interview a woman who was dissimilar to us in terms of age, race, class, ethnicity – all the categories of difference cited in our constitution.

Being Jewish in South Africa puts me in a special category; most people are different from me. I may be classified racially as white, but the culture in which I grew up is very different from most other white people, whether English or Afrikaans speaking. Most ‘English’ people I have met are either Christian or, more commonly, a-religious. Many would also call themselves ‘spiritual’ and have embarked on a more personal journey involving a concoction of practices classified under the New Age umbrella. Mine was a home of organised religion, and inherited tradition. In South Africa, it is difficult to differentiate clearly between cultures. For this reason, I was not sure whom to interview.

At about the time I was deliberating about this issue, my friend Ashleigh met a sangoma (sacred specialist<sup>2</sup>) known as Gogo. Ashleigh had been told about her on numerous occasions by Kay Betterton. Kay had been Ashleigh's yoga teacher and they had remained friends. Ashleigh was designing a website for Kay's non-government organisation (NGO), The Shambala Foundation. This NGO cared for orphans in Indlovu in the township of Monwabisi Park in Khayelitsha, about 20 minutes' drive from central Cape Town. Gogo was one of the other directors of the organisation. Kay had spoken very highly of Gogo and Ashleigh had felt honoured to meet her at a Shambala Foundation event. Ashleigh suggested I interview Gogo and arranged for me to call her.

Gogo seemed to fit the assignment brief neatly. She was very different from me in terms of age – I was 25 and she was about 70; she was Christian and African Traditional; she was Xhosa, of the Nguni tribes, the most prominent in the Western Cape. We spoke different languages. She had grown up on a farm outside a small town, Zastron, in the Free State, and I in the country's largest city, Johannesburg.

What we had in common was our gender – we were both women, but very different women – which was what the course was designed to highlight. The question the course was structured around was: Is it possible to apply the same theories on the psychology of women to two women who are different in all aspects of classification other than their gender?

## **1.2 Introducing Gogo**

The woman known to me as Gogo agreed to meet me in the afternoon of 16 February, 2006, in the leafy Cape Town suburb of Rondebosch, where she was staying. I curved round the crescent of a public park and turned into the long private street leading to a large property called Lyndene, not knowing what to expect. The main house, which was slightly run down, consisted of many suites, all overlooking a small central garden and swimming

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<sup>2</sup> David Chidester, *Patterns of Transcendence* (Belmont: Tomson Wadsworth, 2002).

Although the term 'sangoma' is a Zulu word, it is used frequently in this text and explained in section 2.2. Therefore it will not be italicised.

pool. In the garden stood a sycamore tree with branches that reached beyond the roof of the house. There was a long table in its shade. The owner, Lucille, rented the rooms out, mainly to visiting professors and exchange students who attended the nearby University of Cape Town.

The woman I had come to interview, however, was staying in the maid's quarters. I walked from my car towards the house, where Gogo stood at the bottom of the steps. She was a short woman, but large in girth, with a flat bottom and substantial breasts. She was barefoot. She looked like a rock earthed in its place, filling her space and standing her ground. She wore a shapeless sand-coloured dress printed with a gemsbok pattern. Her greying hair was braided close to her head and a leopard print headband rested on her hairline. As is the sign of a sangoma, she wore rings of small white beads around her ankles and red and white ones around her wrists.

At the bottom of the steps at Lyndene, in the heat of the February afternoon, the stranger smiled. I was not sure how to approach her. We were meeting *because* of the differences between us, and they felt vast. She hugged me, and the nervousness I had felt while driving to meet her was soothed by the softness of her body.

Gogo was shorter than I am – something that always makes me feel uncomfortable as I am used to people being taller than me. I introduced myself. She studied my face and I explored hers. Her skin was lighter than that of most Xhosa woman, the colour of sweet coffee with milk. Her smile was wide and closed-lipped. When she spoke, I noticed that her front teeth were missing, both upper and lower. Her bottom lip was much larger than the top, flabby like that of a pouting child. She had a moustache on her upper lip and a wide bump of a nose. Her eyes were black and small, but laugh-lines made them seem larger. Her grey eyebrows had a melancholic downward slant.

As it was a hot day, Gogo suggested we sit at the table in the garden to talk. She moved slowly with a carved wooden stick in her right hand, waddling as she leaned to one side

and then the other. She struggled slowly up the few stairs, leading me through the house into the garden, all the while looking down at her bare feet. It looked to me almost as if she were willing them to move with her tired gaze.

In the garden, I took out a bottle of water, a notebook and pen, and a digital recorder from my bag. I placed a recorder between us on the table, and turned it on. She was comfortable with this equipment, not even glancing at it twice. I was slightly surprised, but said nothing.

I had brought a consent form for her to sign. Each student in the Psychology of Women seminar had been given a document for her interviewee to sign, which outlined the reasons for the interview and ensured her privacy. She printed in block letters: SOPHIE BAARTMAN. ‘I never go to school,’ she said as she wrote what I thought was her name. ‘My boss children – they teach me. When I was working.’

Gogo explained that she had worked as a domestic worker, in the first instance, for a Jewish family in ‘*Vrystaat*’ near to where she grew up, and moved with them to Johannesburg. When I asked her where her hometown was, she answered, ‘It’s still in Zastron, but my house now is in Jo’burg.’ Was she not at home in Cape Town?

Gogo’s English was good, even if her syntax was convoluted. She still, however, mixed up pronouns calling males ‘she’ and females ‘he’. In the Nguni languages, there is no plural or gender distinction in the third person pronoun, all being referred to as ‘u’.

### **1.3 Gogo starts to tell her story**

‘I want you to tell me about your life, if you can, slowly,’ I requested.

I did not know what Ashleigh or Kay had told her about why I had come to see her, but as an interview subject, she astonished me by speaking freely and giving me an in-depth, fairly linear account of her life. She highlighted certain peak events, and these were mostly traumas.

‘The first thing, on my youngest age, my father give me a man. I got married to somebody which I did not know.’

‘How old were you then?’ I asked.

‘Thirteen.’

‘Did you already ... menstruate?’ The question of a Psychology of Women scholar.

‘No. I start to menstruate there, when that man want to sleep with me.’

My eyes widened; I could barely stammer out the next question. ‘How did you feel ... that first ... day?’

‘I run.’ She swiped her hand across her eyes. ‘I run away. I go to my uncle’s place for six months.’

‘Did your husband find you? Did anyone know where you were?’

‘They didn’t know where I am until my brother find me. And she quickly take me back home. And then at home they buy me clothes, they take me back to Jacobus.’

Gogo was married to Jacobus in a makeshift wedding. She also told me that soon after that, Jacobus, a policeman, was transferred to Harrismith, so the couple moved further north, away from Zastron, her home and her family.

‘He left me then. To take another, er, woman and then she say she didn’t love me.’ She paused, her bottom lip hung low.

‘How old were you when that... when he left you?’

‘Uh, I think I was 16,’ answered Gogo, tentatively, then corrected herself. ‘No, I was 16 when I have my first child, Edward. I was pregnant with the second, Hazel, when Jacobus left. I was 21.’

I was confused by the sudden change in timing, the extreme difference between 16 and 21, but asked. ‘Were you happy with him before he left you?’ I wanted to know if love had developed in the arranged marriage, and if she was upset that he left.

She answered, ‘He didn’t bother me because she was just coming when she wanted something and eat and go.’

I had known this woman for barely half an hour and already she had told me this shocking personal story. From an academic point of view, this story was also interesting in what it revealed about the position of women in Gogo's culture when she was growing up.

I did not know how often Gogo had told the narrative of being a child bride, and to whom, but it was clearly a pivotal point in her life-story, and it still held a charge for her.

As Gogo spoke, I could not help but be reminded of the work Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela did at the Centre for Narrative Trauma and Forgiveness. At the Centre psychologists help victims of trauma tell their stories and in so doing, reconstitute their personal narratives. She believes it is *necessary* to talk about one's trauma.<sup>3</sup> Her theory of trauma is that it overwhelms the senses because one has no reference point in terms of one's own existing narrative, and consequently one's sense of self is lost through the experience of trauma.

I was feeling hot, and refilled our glasses with water. As I sat back and sipped, I wondered what else Gogo still needed to tell.

#### **1.4 Four babies at once**

Gogo then told me about her second husband whom she met when Hazel was 13 years old.

'I meet another man, Elisha. So I get married to him and I have a son. My first born to that man is Russell.'

She told me that Russell was born on the side of the road on the way to the hospital.

'Then I have four other children ... to that man. But they die.'

I sympathised, wondering what more could have happened to this poor woman.

Gogo told me that in 1981, she fell pregnant with – 'what you call it? Four at once,' she asked. I pushed my head forward, raised my eyebrows and stared at her. I did not think:

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<sup>3</sup> Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *Woordfees*, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, 26 March 2006, Lecture.

‘How often is it that someone gives birth to quadruplets?’ but strangely, rather: ‘How often does one meet a woman who has given birth to quadruplets?’

‘Were they little-little?’ I asked, not really expecting Gogo to respond, ‘No, not so little.’

She explained that they were born with a rash. ‘You know I don’t know what was wrong with me inside me because they was so sick.’ On the fifth day after their birth, the first one died. Three weeks later, another two died, one an hour after the other.

‘Only one alive - her name is Michelle,’ she said sighing, and added that Michelle now had a son of her own, Pondo.

‘So I’ve got two boys, two girls.’ I noted that in my journal. The shadows of the sycamore leaves dappled the white pages.

‘Then Michelley and Russell’s daddy ...’ Gogo started to tell me another story about Elisha, and I hoped it would be more light-hearted than the last two.

### **1.5 Elisha and that big *toyi-toyi* at Jo’burg**

‘When it was that big *toyi-toyi* at Jo’burg ... You know that before Madiba come out?’

‘Mmm hmm ...’ I was not sure. ‘Which year?’

‘I think Mandela come out,’ she paused, uncertain.

‘In 1990,’ I said.

‘1994. Madiba come out,’ she corrected me.

‘That’s when he became president, ja,’ I corrected her. I assumed her slip was the mistake of an elderly woman.

‘Ohhh, okay. Before that,’ she said

‘Oh, the one in town? Shell House?’ I remembered, as a young girl, watching the news broadcast of hundreds of men carrying sticks, *toyi-toying* outside the building in the Johannesburg CBD. All I knew then about what was happening was that it had something to do with the upcoming elections and Mandela.

‘No, before Shell House. There was that big thing with the Zulus.’ Oh, yes, I remembered that the predominantly Zulu party, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), was protesting.

‘They were chopping people,’ Gogo continued. ‘Cutting their *tollies* out.’

‘What’s *tollies*?’ I frowned.

‘The part that make them a man.’ At the time, I certainly did not know the Zulus were doing *that*.

‘Ja,’ she said, simply confirming. ‘So they were going to work, in the Park Station there ... the Jo’burg train station, and Elisha go. I tell him not to.’

I was not sure I wanted to hear what she was about to say next, but she wanted to say it, despite her voice getting softer. ‘So the Zulus kill. Kill lots of people. And the police didn’t allow any man to go pick up the bodies. We, the women, the wives, did go ourselves. The head is there, the arm there – they chop them! Like when ... you slaughter the cow.’

Then Gogo went silent. I was silent too; I had no idea what to say.

She spoke first, ‘I didn’t cry. My tears just end up inside because if I’m crying, who’s going to pick up my husband, his body? I was sick for three months after that.’

Although she was hiding her eyes from me, she was not crying then. I did not feel like crying for her either; my body was too cold with the shock of the three stories, one after the other.

I felt connected to this woman because she had trusted me, a stranger, enough to tell of her tragedies. I did not feel that it was because I was special, but rather perceived her as a trusting soul in general, and I liked that. I am still not sure why, but I did. I wanted to hear more about her traumatic experiences. I also was aware of the catharsis experienced when telling someone your story. I naïvely felt willing to be that someone – if she was willing to tell me, and it seemed she was.

I realised I had found a biographical research subject. She would tell me her life story, and I would write it.

## 1.6 Gogo is invited to the Shambala Foundation

Gogo told me that after the traumatic events involving her husbands, Jacobus, and later Elisha, she decided that she did not want to get involved with another man again. She said, ‘I just being myself. I start to pray very hard that God must give me happiness – somewhere. Like if I’m involving with people. This why I end up to the project.’

The Shambala Foundation, of which she was one of the directors, was based in Cape Town. Gogo told me that years previously, Kay Betterton consulted with Gogo in her capacity as a sangoma. It was not common for white South Africans to consult with sangomas, but I was not surprised when Gogo told me this as many Capetonians, on a quest for self-knowledge, have sought the wisdom apparent in various other cultures. Gogo clicked her fingers and said, ‘We just connected like that.’ It was not clear whether together they decided to set up a non-government organisation or whether Kay had already conceived it, or started it, and subsequently asked Gogo to come on board. The Shambala Foundation ‘looks after orphans’ and ‘people what got nobody what look after them. And you know the AIDS people, they always don’t say. If they’ve got AIDS, they’re always scared to talk about that.’

The Shambala Foundation, Gogo explained, ran a crèche for young children in Indlovu, in Khayelitsha ‘and we teach the other young girls to dance so they must keep them away from the street. That they can also enjoy like, eh normal children. You know, children with parents, all those things.’

I asked Gogo why she thought Kay asked her for her help, and she answered wistfully, ‘When they were going to ask for the land, the government says they have to have eight directors: four white, four blacks. So, ja, I’m one of the main directors. But very funny, I always said it’s very funny ‘cause I can’t write, I can’t do that, I just ... I can just talk too much.’ She folded her fingers over her thumb, put her hand in front of her mouth, and made a talk-talk gesture. ‘Sometimes I can’t switch off myself,’ she laughed.

‘Good,’ I said, laughing along with her. I thought that a talkative person would be a good person to interview.

Gogo told me why she wanted to be a part of the Shambala Foundation: ‘Because I said that if you – if that person is old, it’s my mum, my granny, it’s my sister. If it’s a man – it’s my grandpa, my father, my brother, my son. My children. If that person is hungry, I will be hungry. If that person is got food, I will have food.’ It sounded to me that Gogo had a good soul.

When we ended the first interview I told her I could listen all afternoon. She smiled, her black eyes widening, and simply said, ‘Ja, I can see.’

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Choosing Gogo as my research subject

The assignment, its questions, and the course ended, but Gogo remained the subject of my fascination, and the subject of my initiation into biography writing.

Why did I choose to write Gogo's biography? What drew me to her?

She was a sangoma. Reports of her charisma had preceded her and excited me, as did the power she clearly wielded in her community. I was impressed by her life story of victory over difficult circumstances, both familial and political; and not least of all the magic, her access to the spiritual realm.

More than Gogo's journey of triumph over her circumstances, I found when I first began this project, that I wanted to come to *know* Gogo. What does that mean? As I have indicated, Gogo is a woman who possesses a rare charisma. It is difficult to define her magnetism, and harder still to understand from whence it comes. I wanted to know what was so hypnotic, what entranced me.

Anthropologist I.M. Lewis speaks of charisma linked to 'mythical power'.<sup>4</sup> Gogo is a sangoma. What was it that made me think a sangoma would be a compelling subject for a biography? Sangomas are surrounded by an aura of mystery and power. Why? Why did Gogo command respect and power? Sangomas appear to receive information from a realm inaccessible to others. As a sangoma, Gogo's role in her society is to see the unseen. *That* was why I wanted to know her, why I chose her as my subject. I wanted to know how she came to know what others do not know.

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<sup>4</sup> I.M. Lewis, *Religion in Context: Cults and Charisma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

What was her secret? Could I get to understand the mystery of this ‘other’ type of healer, quite foreign to our Western medical and psychological tradition? Viewing her as the Other and foreign, in all the different ways mentioned above, I wondered, could I get to know her and understand her, perhaps access her key to the spiritual realm? Could I gain all this by listening to her tell her life story – her thoughts and her feelings – and capturing it as a biography that would help unravel the mystery?

## 2.2 What is a sangoma?

The term sangoma is a Zulu word (the Xhosa term being *igqira*) that is difficult to translate, an idea that is not easily understood in Western-traditional belief systems. ‘Witch-doctor’ is a derogatory term used among white South Africans. Witches are associated with evil; they are mediums of black magic. In the myths of the West, they wear black and pointed hats. In Africa they wear bones and skins of things long dead. Witches talk with the dead, and the dead are the opposite of the living, just as light is the opposite of dark, and black is the opposite of white in popular discourses of othering or polarising. There is some truth in the term, however. They are doctors in the sense that they treat physical ailments, and part of the diagnosis, and often the cure, comes from communing with the spirit world, most often in a trance state.

Sangomas are also called ‘traditional healers’. The term ‘healer’ is broader than ‘doctor’ and closer to their capabilities. They claim to heal not only physical ailments, but psychological, spiritual and social ones as well. Many sangomas, however, dislike the term ‘traditional’. They fear it may be interpreted as the same as ‘primitive’, and imply practices that do not measure up to the standards, statistics and science we have today in the West. Noxula Mdende, a sangoma herself and an academic, believes that the term ‘traditional’ is racist, implying that sangomas are ‘stuck in time’.<sup>5</sup>

The closest translation of the term is ‘shaman’. There is a trend of late to use this term globally to describe indigenous healers and also to refer to the healers of Southern Africa.

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<sup>5</sup> Noxula Mdende, *An Introduction to African Religion* (Cape Town: Icamagu Institute, 2006b).

Again the nomenclature is not straightforward. Mircea Eliade traces the etymology of the word ‘shaman’ to the Siberian Tungus ethnography.<sup>6</sup> Voigt (in Lewis) observes that the term then spread around the world. Today it is applied to individuals in varying cultures.<sup>7</sup>

Eliade gives a tripartite definition of shaman<sup>4</sup>. Firstly, shamans use altered states of consciousness in training, healing and divination. Secondly, they work on behalf of, or within, a community. The third characterisation of a shaman, according to Eliade, involves ‘travel’ to other realms. Sangomas do *not*, nor do they claim to, ‘travel’ to other realms as part of their healing or diagnostic work.

The sangoma is unique, and I therefore maintain use of the term sangoma.

He or she is regarded as an expert in different techniques for gaining spiritual knowledge and power over illness, misfortune or evil. Sangomas may ‘throw the bones’ which is a technique of divination where a collection of things is thrown: shells, bones, dice, dominoes, and coins. Depending on how they fall, the sangoma makes a reading for the client. They could also use the technique of oneiromancy – interpreting messages for their clients or the community from their dreams.<sup>8</sup>

### **2.3 The Sangoma in African Traditional Religion**

Traditional African religions conceive of a High God at the top of a hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> Beneath the High God are the ancestors. These are family members who have passed away and are considered the ‘living dead’. They are not considered spirits of the dead who are stuck between worlds, rather they mediate between the High God and the living and they are

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<sup>6</sup> Vilmos Voigt, in Lewis 1996, 105.

<sup>7</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (London: Arkana, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Vera M. Buhrmann, *Living in Two Worlds* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Mndende (2006b).

communicated with via ritual. Ancestor religion provides and identifies a spiritual dimension of the world that, for believers, effectively dissolves death.<sup>10</sup> Most misfortunes in Zulu or Xhosa society are believed to result from some displeasure or unrest among the ancestral spirits (*amathfongo*).

The living inhabit homesteads and chiefdoms. A homestead is a collection of homes of extended family members clustered around a central space. The head of the wealthiest homestead within a clan is the chief. The chiefdom is the larger political order that encompasses homesteads. The powerful roles – heads of homesteads or chiefdoms – are held only by men. The society is very patriarchal, with women playing not only marginal roles, but subordinate ones.

*Amasangoma* (plural of *sangoma*) belong neither to the domain of the homestead nor the clan. They hold a marginal position claiming access to spiritual power and they heal, protect, and strengthen either the homestead or the religion. These roles can be held by both women and men. A *sangoma* is therefore a person that occupies a rare position of power, a position that women, too, can hold within the African Traditional Religious system. Where the ancestors inhabit the space between the High God and the living, the *sangoma* works between the living and the living dead, and also between the leaders of the living.

## 2.4 Religion and Politics

David Chidester,<sup>11</sup> scholar of comparative religious studies, links religion and politics: ‘Religion has been entangled with economic, social and political relations of power that have privileged some, but have excluded many from a fully human empowerment.’

Gogo had been impacted by religion in a variety of different ways while she was growing up. It was the Christian missionaries who, upon settling in the land, dominated the

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<sup>10</sup> David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa* (London: Routledge, 1992) 1.

<sup>11</sup> Chidester (1992) *xi*.

indigenous people by attempting to replace their God with that of the colonialists. It was the Nationalist government that appropriated the Biblical myth of the Chosen People in their rise to political power and justification of the apartheid laws that denied Gogo, as a black person, freedom in the land of her ancestors. It was in the hierarchical, patriarchal milieu of African Traditional religion that the men in Gogo's life felt justified to abuse her and deny her her own choices

#### **2.4.1 *Christian missionaries***

Christian missions in South Africa have long been associated with colonial and commercial interests and are thus seen as agents in its conquest. Article XIII of the Dutch East India Company Charter, published in 1652, recorded the desire to create a settlement in which 'the name of Christ may be extended, and the interests of the company promoted'.<sup>12</sup>

The artefacts of the Europeans – like square houses, or their clothing – were considered ritual relics of the Christian worldview by the local chiefs. The chiefs therefore, sensed that a problem of dual loyalty might arise among their subjects: trying to follow both the chiefs' teachings as well as the missionaries' doctrine of sin and salvation. They were untrusting of this alien political power on the one hand. On the other, it was welcomed for the material benefits it was thought to provide, such as armoury. The different nationalities of European explorers and colonists who arrived on the shores of Africa each declared Southern Africa a site with an indigenous population that had 'no religion'. The Xhosa, as a people, were even designated by the term *Kafir*, which originated from the Arabic for 'unbeliever'. This designation is today still considered the most derogatory in terms of white-on-black racism. The indigenous people were termed 'unbelievers' because their practices were not considered religion, but rather, a system based on false beliefs or superstitions. Yet the Africans did not consider themselves unbelievers. There is a theological argument between Robert Moffat, a Scottish Congregationalist missionary to

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<sup>12</sup> David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1996) 35.

Africa (from 1816 to 1870), and a Tswana sangoma. The Tswana man offered a compromise by saying: ‘My God lies in the South, yours in the North.’ Moffat was amused by the indigenous man’s attempt to constrain his universal god, and commented: ‘He looked rather stupid when I informed him that my God ruled over all the earth’.<sup>13</sup>

#### **2.4.2 Christianity and Apartheid**

The Nationalist Party ruled South Africa from 1948 to 1994. The party was, for Afrikaner nationalists, more than an ordinary political organisation; it was a national movement grounded in a sense of divine calling.<sup>14</sup> It legitimised its racist social engineering by reinterpreting Afrikaner history as ‘sacred history’: the *volk* - the nation - were considered the Chosen People; the Great Trek was the exodus from the bondage of British rule at the Cape. The Chosen People struggled for years in the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. There, they ruled over the heathen nations in the interests of Christian civilisation. This myth formed the foundation of a theological rationale for the apartheid policies, which separated the tribes of South Africa from each other and all indigenous people from white people who were entrenched by law as superior.

#### **2.4.3 New Age spirituality and ‘Postmodern tribes’**

The New Age movement did not play a role in suppressing Gogo, but rather aided her emergence from that suppression. I discuss it here as a background ‘religion’ that informed her story and fostered my interest in her. Most writers agree that New Age spirituality is a difficult phenomenon to describe or constrain. It is described as a syncretism of Western esoteric traditions, Eastern philosophies, and popular psychology.<sup>15</sup> Often the beliefs and practices diverge, but what the attempted fusion conveys about the phenomenon is the belief that ‘All is One’. The entire universe – all that exists – is one

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<sup>13</sup> Chidester (1996) 38.

<sup>14</sup> Chidester (1996) 88.

<sup>15</sup> Michael York, ‘New Age Commodification and Appropriation of Spirituality’ *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16:3 (2001) 361-372.

cosmic whole.<sup>16</sup> The underlying nature of all things is conceptualised as the ‘God Force’, and ‘God is Love’.

Further, all human beings contain the ‘God spark’,<sup>17</sup> and are considered holy in themselves. They are part of the connection of the universal oneness. They are also thought to possess certain God-like qualities and the belief is that individuals are responsible for shaping their own realities and destinies.<sup>18</sup> As is exhibited by the popularity of the book *The Secret*, and the film of the same name, much power is bestowed on the notion of positive thinking to create a positive outcome in one's life. The same techniques are promoted in cognitive behavioural psychology.

The New Age movement can be viewed as a postmodern phenomenon in that there is no central authority of the movement.<sup>19</sup> As individuals themselves are supposedly imbued with the ‘God-spark’, everyone has authority. Its components are conflicting and different facets of these are invoked to suit certain circumstances. The alliance of the groups, beliefs, and techniques that consider themselves, or are considered New Age, is also shifting with new beliefs coming and going. New Age spirituality is essentially a hybrid, albeit a constantly shifting one, of beliefs and practices that are particular to each practitioner. Everyone within the movement pulls together a selection of what suits his or her needs, yearnings, context, exposure, education, and psychology. People try on various aspects for size and reject or accept them – which is very unlike traditional mainstream religions where the laws are not to be questioned or chosen by the practitioner, because they are believed to be given by God. This is exemplified in Judaism's dictum of ‘We will do, then we will listen’. Surprisingly, although some South Africans have taken on the

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<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Porter, ‘Introduction to the New Age Movement’ *Popgoesreligion.com*, Jennifer Porter, n.d. Web, 18 November 2009.

<sup>17</sup> York 362.

<sup>18</sup> York (2001).

<sup>19</sup> York (2001).

beliefs and practices of overseas ‘shamanic’ traditions – *ayhuasca* ceremonies from the Amazon, and sweat lodges from Native American rituals – local indigenous beliefs have not been as popularly adopted. They do, however, enjoy a new respect. Recall how Gogo originally met Kay, white South Africans consult sangomas more than before – yet their practices have not been readily assimilated into white society. I cannot be sure why this is so, but one reason could be the secrecy of the practice of sangomas. As I was to encounter in my research, they will not readily share their techniques or materials.

## 2.5 Bauman and the new ‘merchants of certainty’

The New Age movement is a development that exemplifies Bauman’s postmodern ideas about the reformation of established social structures. In his book, *Intimations of Postmodernity*,<sup>20</sup> Polish sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman states that in our current postmodern society, we inhabit a complex system with no simple existing structures (such as religion, or national-affiliation) to tell us our place or give us our function within society. We are therefore left to seek our own identities from an array of available models of identity. ‘The identity of the agent is neither given nor authoritatively confirmed ... The construction of identity consists of successive trials and errors. It lacks a benchmark’.<sup>21</sup> He calls this process of self-assembly, self-constitution. Bauman suggests this process is never complete, nor does it have a stable direction: one’s ‘life-project’ is ‘the process of self-constitution’, similar to Jung’s notion of individuation.

Bauman talks of various politics that are at play underlying the continuous process of self-constitution. One of these is his notion of ‘Tribal Politics’. We belong to new types of communities, which may be real or, according to Bauman – ‘imagined’ – like soccer fans, academics, or new age practitioners, and they exist in a virtual reality. There are times and rituals, like the 2010 World Cup, during which the communities meet and become tangible. We also belong to *various* imagined communities and take from them in order to

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<sup>20</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Bauman 193.

construct our identities; i.e., we can be new age practitioners, *and* soccer fans, *and* academics, *and* writers, or daughters. The New Age movement is one such postmodern community, and since it has no fixed set of beliefs and rituals, each agent chooses his personal plate from the smorgasbord of spiritual practices. Bauman's theory states that, because in our contemporary complex structures we do not have set roles, we look to figureheads to make us feel our chosen roles are accepted. For example, being a famous figure who holds power, Madonna's adoption of Kabbalah spurred thousands of other people, who deemed her a worthy authority, to dabble in accessible versions of the Jewish mystical tradition. There may be no central authorities in New Age spirituality, but as with any commodity, those with the better brands garner a wider following as long as the brand is considered to be trustworthy. Madonna has maintained her public presence over time, and thus proven herself.

Madonna is what Bauman would term a 'merchant of certainty'. These are experts, politicians – those in positions of authority to judge us. As we perceive them to have authority within our chosen imagined community, we give them power to approve of or reject our own self-constitution. These merchants of certainty play on our desires and fears in our forever-unstable process of self-constitution. Within postmodern politics, we gain power in turn by being given or claiming the capacity to approve of somebody else's self-assembly.

## **2.6 My fascination with Gogo**

It was this kind of power that I thought Gogo had. What attracted me most strongly to Gogo was her spiritual power. I felt that I could learn something from this woman indirectly. It was not that I wanted to learn any of her techniques of clairvoyance or dream interpretation or medicines, but rather that I wanted to learn how she wielded what I saw as her spiritual power.

I am aware now that, although having been raised in a traditional, orthodox Jewish home (my brother is a rabbi), I too propound and practise many elements of the New Age movement. I, too, believe that all things are connected – a belief that I soon found Gogo shared. I also believe in a dimension that cannot be perceived with our bodily senses nor can be evidenced by scientific methodology. It could be considered ‘spiritual’, but the definition is a discussion in itself. I do, however, believe that this dimension is not beyond our perception, and that a greater wisdom about the true nature of existence dwells there, and is accessible to us with the right tools. Throughout my life I have given import to dreams to portray messages (from a spiritual realm or from the collective unconscious) that cannot as easily be heard in waking life. I identified with Gogo in that this was one of her techniques of communicating with her ancestors, of foreseeing future events, and finding cures for her clients. She had many other techniques, and I was interested in coming to know about them.

I was seeking, and Gogo was the expert. As is respected in New Age spirituality, here was a modern-day medicine woman, an indigenous sorceress who worked with magic, the witch of the fairy tales we grew up on.

Gogo grew up as a woman in the African Traditional patriarchal religious discourse, an indigenous person in a Christian-colonised land, and as a black person during apartheid. I have mentioned above that the African Traditional hierarchy, Christian missions in South Africa, and the role of religion in the construction of apartheid had each played a role in her suppression. I initially chose to write about Gogo because she was a woman. She was a woman who had been raised in a patriarchal society, and also subject to the political forces of the time. She was a marginalised individual – a black, elderly woman – whose voice was not heard (so I believed at the time), especially by those closest to her. Gogo’s life’s journey had brought her back to the tradition that oppressed her, but this time as Mouthpiece of the Ancestors. She practises as a sangoma, and trains other initiates. Following Bauman’s theory, she has become Expert within her own community. It is through religion that Gogo was oppressed, but also through religion that she gained her

power. She has become a ‘merchant of certainty’. The arc she has travelled is set against the context of political transition in South Africa. Gogo’s life story, as she had shared it in the interview conducted for the Psychology of Women course, was an example of triumph over circumstances. Her story was one of hope, one of victory, a journey from denigration to virtual deification.

### 3. THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

In order to attempt to understand Gogo's mystery – how she had and held the information I thought she did – I used the tools of two complementary disciplines: Life Writing and Psychology.

I would portray Gogo in the form of a biography and use the tools I had learnt in my study of psychology, mostly feminist psychology, in order to gather the necessary data.

#### 3.1 Life Writing

This thesis is in the field of Life Writing, the subject of a post-graduate degree being offered for the first time in South Africa at the University of Stellenbosch. Life Writing is writing the stories of lives, and encompasses both biography and autobiography.

The theorist, James Olney<sup>22</sup> has noted that critics of the genre of autobiography emerged en masse in the latter half of the twentieth century and not before. The timing puzzles him and he seeks an explanation.

Olney begins to answer this question by deconstructing the term *autobiography*. This word, which was first used only in the early nineteenth century, is constructed of three Greek elements: *autos*, *bios*, and *graphe*.

Olney asks: *What do we mean by the self?* (autos); *what do we mean by life?* (bios); and *what significance do we impute to the act of writing?* (graphe).

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<sup>22</sup> James Olney, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

### 3.2 Self-Consciousness – An interest in the self

Olney suggests that these critics are in fact seekers of *autos*. They are concerned with the self and consciousness, or knowledge of it, and how it manifests in autobiography: ‘It is a fascination with the self and its profound, its endless mysteries and, accompanying that fascination, an anxiety about the self, an anxiety about the dimness and vulnerability of that entity that no one has ever seen or touched or tasted’.<sup>23</sup> Olney, however, does not contextualise his finding. He mentions nothing about the decades of the development of psychoanalysis preceding 1956 – the date he gives as the beginning of the appeal of autobiography to students of literature in recent times.<sup>24</sup> I cannot make assumptions about causality and say for certain that the emergence of psychoanalysis – a purported science of the self – gave rise to a renewed interest in autobiography, and moreover, an interest in the *autos* aspects above the *bios*. Perhaps the two emerged simultaneously based on a third variable: a search for the self is at its strongest in the Western world at a time when our philosophy of postmodernism has undermined our sense of a consistent self and left us without ‘the ability to say *I*’ as our identities have been so fragmented.

I propose that the same concern about the self can be deduced not only from autobiography consumption and critique but also from the century’s enjoyment of biography.

Readers of biographies are also seeking ‘provisional answers to the existential questions’ that are posed by life.<sup>25</sup> In a postmodern world where our gods are dead, we breathe life into new ones and give them the moral power to tell us what is right and what is not, and what’s passé and what’s hot. Our gods became chiefs, elders, royalty. Revolutions killed them and put us in their place. So we read each others’ memoirs, watch each other on TV,

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<sup>23</sup> Olney (1980) 23.

<sup>24</sup> Olney (1980) 23.

<sup>25</sup> Paul John Eakin, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 36.

and follow our friends on Facebook. All we really want is an acknowledgment of our own selves, a pat on the back, a right to be. We need to know that we made the right choice in an age which has blurred the line between RIGHT and *NOT* RIGHT – like a neon light outside a Chinese takeaway where the *NOT* can be illuminated at the flick of a button. Are we willing to take the responsibility that comes with the freedom of being the one who flicks? No. So we have created the frenzy of celebrity. It is no coincidence that the majority of celebrities are actors or singers – people who give us narratives or ‘psalms’: allegories of some kind. We are looking for parables to help us decide the structure of our own lives and our own selves. Paul J. Eakin talks of ‘models of identity’.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.2.1 *Self-myths – possible sources*

Where might these helpful parables, or myths come from? Certain roles may have an atavistic source. Do we all possess a role, as Olney suggests, ‘already performed by the ancestors and to be performed again by descendants’?<sup>27</sup> In African Traditional cosmology, one’s ancestors guide one’s destiny, often attempting to fulfil through others what they could not in their lifetimes. Psychoanalyst C.G. Jung<sup>28</sup> conjectures that there are a limited number of archetypal roles that we play out generation after generation.

A person may choose his personal myth from a formal religious model. Most religions prescribe the necessity of devoting one’s life to following The Way or God’s way. His way, too, was passed to believers through stories, or via The Book. Anthropologist Mircea Eliade claims that ‘religious man’ strives to align his self with the ideal revealed to him by myths.<sup>29</sup> In his book, *The Sacred and The Profane*, he says, ‘For many cultures ... once ...

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<sup>26</sup> Eakin (1992) 72.

<sup>27</sup> James Olney, *Memory and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 30.

<sup>28</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *The Undiscovered Self: With Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams* (London: Routledge, 1958).

<sup>29</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Hancourt, 1997) 187.

revealed, the myth becomes apodictic truth; it establishes a truth that is absolute. “It is so because it is said that it is so”.<sup>30</sup> This is as opposed to ‘profane’ ways of being – for which there are no perfect models.

### 3.2.2 *The role of context*

A biography is not just a text about a subject, but about a subject in a context, or in many contexts throughout his or her life. The *bios* – or the life being lived – cannot be separated from the context in which it unfolds; it interacts with it *in order to* unfold. Biography itself can be considered a cultural phenomenon and there are rules that determine its success at a given moment in cultural history.<sup>31</sup>

Biography theorists Spengermann and Lundquist agree that the production of autobiography is a cultural act which brings together the personal, unassimilated experiences of the writer and the shared values of his culture.<sup>32</sup> They state that the actual production of the autobiography fits into fairly specific roles that civilisation prescribes for its citizens to adopt when portraying themselves in writing. Eakin believes, ‘By definition, all biographies presuppose a model of identity, and many seek to inculcate one’.<sup>33</sup> Here we could perhaps suggest genres within the genre: the conversion narrative like Elridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, or the success story like Richard Branson’s bestseller, *Losing My Virginity*. These narrative structures also then provide the plot of choice for Western lives. Culture prescribes fairly specific roles for people to adopt when portraying or *being* themselves at *any* time.

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<sup>30</sup> Eliade (1997) 95.

<sup>31</sup> Bruss, in Olney (1998) 73.

<sup>32</sup> In Eakin (1992) 73.

<sup>33</sup> Eakin (1992) 77.

Weintraub agrees that all cultures compress the essential values and convictions in human models that exercise an intensely persuasive and attractive power on the process of self-formation, because they are taken to be of more universal validity than any merely idiosyncratic version of the self.<sup>34</sup> This has echoes of Bauman's notion of self-constitution, where the individual seeks affirmation from 'merchants of certainty' within their chosen imagined community.

### **3.2.3 *Conflict with the cult of individuality***

The irony here, though, is that the culture that we inhabit, which in part constitutes ourselves, holds at its core a belief in 'individual identity'.<sup>35</sup> This is the modernist model of identity that was thought of as: 'An integrated, continuing personality which transcends the limitations and irregularities of time and space and unites all of one's contradictory experiences into an identifiable whole'.<sup>36</sup>

Western society is conceptually structured of individuals – autonomous and independent of others. This is both oxymoronic and impossible. This idea essentially means that the ultimate individual can never be that: by being individual, she or he becomes exemplary of the society, its perfect member. The problem is that no matter how disconnected we may desire to be; we are always reliant on another. Eakin cites the example of McCandless, made famous by the filmic adaptation of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. He was an individual who sought isolation, but who survived only 113 days alone.

### **3.2.4 *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu - We are people because of other people***

To South Africans, these concepts of a self that does not exist in isolation but in relation to others come as no great revelation as there is the traditional credo in this country of *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. We are people because of other people: our selves are

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<sup>34</sup> In Eakin (1992) 73.

<sup>35</sup> Eakin (1992) 73.

<sup>36</sup> Spengemann and Lundquist in Eakin (1992) 73.

reflected in others; we are who we are because of those around us, and whom we have encountered.<sup>37</sup> Smith agrees: ‘The individualistic version of selfhood that has characterised our Western tradition since the Renaissance ... seems an increasingly poor fit to our requirements for survival in unavoidable interdependency’.<sup>38</sup>

I believe that we need to let go of the notion of one coherent self that is autonomous and unchanging. It may be replaced with Freud’s notion of id, ego and superego, the conscious and unconscious, Descartes’ body and mind, or Jung’s shadow self or archetypes, or the postmodern shifting identity, or the self that unfolds moment to moment. The dialogue whether the notion of a single coherent self is problematic has become tedious; it is a given. Eakin concludes his discussion on relational selves: ‘The lesson these identity narratives are teaching, again and again, is that the self is dynamic, changing, and plural’.<sup>39</sup>

### **3.2.5 *Biographies of men vs. biographies of women***

Wagner-Martin attests that the ‘so-called revolution’ into a ‘new’ biography would have happened earlier if women’s biographies of women as early as the nineteenth century were acknowledged. She has the same to say of the study of women’s psychology: that women’s biography writers *and* readers knew already what seemed like a breakthrough of psychoanalytic thought with the likes of Jean Baker, Carol Gilligan and others. Women lead ‘contextualised lives’.<sup>40</sup> They depend, in a fundamental way, on their environment, and their environment invariably has its effect on them.

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<sup>37</sup> Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> In Eakin (1992) 77.

<sup>39</sup> Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999) 98.

<sup>40</sup> Linda Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women’s Lives: The New Biography* (New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1994) 4.

Wagner-Martin distinguishes this statement about women's lives from men's lives by saying a biography of a man is the story of his participation in the events of his life and times, whereas a woman's story is how the events of her time affect her life. 'Men's lives are usually focused outward, and the important 'facts' of their existences are external and public'.<sup>41</sup>

In the previous centuries biographies were written about important people in history or society. People want to read about 'exceptional' lives. In the past, this meant a famous figure whose actions affected the world around them. Wagner-Martin believes that for the ordinary woman to lead her ordinary life, she has had to overcome great obstacles. For famous men, these obstacles have led them to greatness, whereas for women their greatness has merely allowed them to survive.

Women readers became interested in the intersection of women's lives with their context.<sup>42</sup> This is not about describing the historical events and the subject's actions but rather about women's interior lives and its conflict with their external contexts. It was this realisation of the effect of other people, one's circumstances and one's environment on one's life, that is fundamental to the feminist psychology movement – giving rise to the famous aphorism: 'The personal is political'. Readers became interested in how the personal was so closely dictated by the political milieu. We are a result of all we encounter, and beyond that, we live within a series of systems – religious, political, economic, metropolitan – that inform our opportunities, our actions and our reactions.

### **3.3 Relational model of identity: The self in relation to other people**

All the above ideas point to a relational model of identity. Like feminist psychologists before her, Mary Mason questioned the individuality model of identity saying that this

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<sup>41</sup> Wagner-Martin 5.

<sup>42</sup> Wagner-Martin (1994).

model of a separate and unique selfhood did not fit the contours of women's lives. She proposed another model – identity through relation to the chosen other.<sup>43</sup>

Eakin continues this notion. He, however, drops the prescribing 'chosen'. He also says the 'model of separate and unique selfhood' does not fit the lives of men either and intends to 'liberate' their narratives as well.<sup>44</sup> Eakin strengthens his argument in a psychodynamic theory, stating that it is possible for the human individual not to become a self at all if the process of individuation is interfered with.<sup>45</sup> To illustrate this claim, Eakin cites the terrible story of a little girl, Genie, who, for most of her childhood was tied to a potty in a darkened room, isolated, with no one to relate to. As a result, she never worked out who she was and who somebody else was.<sup>46</sup>

Jessica Benjamin raises the 'central paradox': 'At the very moment of realising our own independence, we are dependent on another to recognise it'.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Eakin argues, 'Because the assertion of autonomy is dependent on this dynamic of recognition, identity is *necessarily* relational'.<sup>48</sup> Some propose, therefore, that selfhood emerges at the moment that language is acquired. It is related to the child's discovery of the first person – who says 'I' – as a rupture from the third person in which he has thought of himself up to that point.<sup>49</sup> It literally is so that a person is a person because of other people.

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<sup>43</sup> In Eakin (1999) 47.

<sup>44</sup> Eakin (1999) 49.

<sup>45</sup> Eakin (1999) 46.

<sup>46</sup> Rymer in Eakin (1999) 46.

<sup>47</sup> In Eakin (1999) 52.

<sup>48</sup> Eakin (1999) 52.

<sup>49</sup> Eakin (1999) 95.

Eakin discusses a few different autobiographies where the focus is contradictorily on someone else's story. He outlines a woman's story, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, by Carolyn Kay Steedman, which is also the story of her mother. Steedman's 'autobiography' asserts that crucial events in her mother's life and personality shaped her own intrinsically. She binds her life to that of her mother's and says that this is universally the case: 'Children are episodes in someone else's narrative'.<sup>50</sup> Eakin discusses another parent-child relationship; that of Philip Roth narrating the final years of his father's life in *Patrimonial*. 'I told myself, "Remember everything accurately so that when he is gone I can re-create the father who created me"'.<sup>51</sup>

### 3.3.1 *Gogo in relation to me*

My own project entered into these questions seeking theoretical and practical resolution. 'How do we sort out the legitimacy of life writing, how can we specify its responsibilities, if we cannot say for sure where the "I" begins and ends?' asks Eakin.<sup>52</sup>

My text would be Gogo's story as told to me by herself. In many ways I was editing her oral autobiography. It was also a story of the relationship between us. Her story changed once when it was told to me and will yet again as I tell it to others. I was changed by my relation to her. I was to appear in the story – but only the parts of me that my interaction with Gogo brought out. It would be *her* story. It would be Gogo, but only as she appeared to me; only what she was willing to say, what I heard, and how I interpreted. We only see two things in another person – what we want to see, and what they want to show us. I could only know what was revealed at the interface between us.

Miranda Seymour asks: If the biographer is aware of his or her own phenomenology, which undoubtedly has an effect on his or her interpretation and portrayal on the subject,

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<sup>50</sup> In Eakin (1999) 176.

<sup>51</sup> In Eakin (1999) 184.

<sup>52</sup> Eakin (1999) 181.

‘Would it not be an act of honesty to appear in the book?’<sup>53</sup> He or she will be present in the book either openly or covertly. It seems that the central paradox here is the inability for an author to write a biography without writing about herself and the impossibility of writing an autobiography without writing about others. A biography is an autobiography and an autobiography a biography.

I, as author, belonged to the ‘class that controls the production and consumption’<sup>54</sup> of these kinds of texts. Gogo was aware of that. She had mentioned her disappointment in her lack of schooling, thinking that if she had been better educated, she would have a more influential position in the new South Africa. I, as a young white woman, a third of her age, was interviewing her for my fourth degree. Even though the result may have been a relational autobiography/biography, it was I who wrote her voice. It would be my signature on the title page. This could only be a narrative of one moment in time captured by me, in the English language, of the interface that existed when two women, their lives, and cultures met. I would love to read the story as Gogo would have written it. But despite my youth and her wisdom, history has conspired to make me the one holding the pen.

### **3.4 The writer’s responsibility and the search for truth**

I, therefore, had a responsibility to my subject. Smith and Watson<sup>55</sup> make the distinction between what readers expect from biographies and what they expect from autobiographies. Biographies were, and to some extent still are, seen to be sources of verifiable facts about the subject and his/her context. Readers *expect* autobiographies to be fictitious to a certain extent. The life-liver/writer is forgiven for taking liberties in making her achievements greater, her sorrows more poignant, her anecdotes funnier.

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<sup>53</sup> In Peter France and William St Clair, eds., *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 264.

<sup>54</sup> Eakin (1999) 174.

<sup>55</sup> Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson, eds., *Getting a Life: Everyday uses of Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

The biographer collects the facts as he or she finds, orders, and sees them. It is then based on the collated facts whether or not he or she accepts the subject's Life-Myth as a necessary conclusion. Walter discusses Leon Edel's idea of a Life-Myth: 'The story a subject tells him/herself as a means of coping with the psychological tasks which confront us all'.<sup>56</sup> It is a way of making meaning from otherwise seemingly unconnected, futile occurrences in one's life. Many times the biographer's elucidation of the subject is at odds with the subject's own self-definition. If a biographer uncovers the myth, he or she tells the life as he or she sees it, not as the subject themselves are living it.

This is the biographer's daily distress. The list of potential damages is long. One could ruin the reputation of one's subject. One could hurt a family member or another character in the story by telling the subject's experience of an event. This could affect an entire community. However, if the biographer hides what she knows, her integrity is damaged. Also, the readers, her very bread and butter, are deceived. What is left are Truth and Story.

Are Truth and Story synonymous? There is importance in writing that which one has come to believe to be the truth, rather than obscuring facts in lieu of a good story. One must base a biography on the verifiable facts but sculpt it with the tools of a novel. As Jonny Steinberg, author of *The Number*, and *Three-Letter Plague* says,<sup>57</sup> one does not have the luxuries of fiction where you can get into the subject's head. In life writing, one is limited by what the biographical subject allows. What the biographer chooses to include in the final text depends a lot on his/her presuppositions and intentions.

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<sup>56</sup> James Walter, 'The solace of doubt? Biographical methodology after the short Twentieth Century,' in Peter France and William St Clair Ed., *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 324.

<sup>57</sup> Jonny Steinberg, Personal Interview, 10 April, 2007.

### 3.4.1 *The biographer's task*

Is the biographer then a glorified journalist? Is he or she an artist? An interpreter? A tactician? An historian? A psychoanalyst? Critics have argued that the 'real art of the form is that of selection'.<sup>58</sup> Edel extends this to include the justification of the selection: 'A biographer is an artist from the moment he chooses between different sets of facts and explains and justifies what he has chosen'.<sup>59</sup>

'The aim of biography is the truthful transmission of personality', says Woolf in '*The New Biography*', quoting Sir Sidney Lee.<sup>60</sup> Woolf immediately recognises the difficulty of this aim, or at least she rejects the impressionistic type of biography that would result. She qualifies the statement by opposing truth and personality.<sup>61</sup> She compares truth to solid granite and personality to an intangible rainbow. 'There is a virtue in truth; it has an almost mystic power'.<sup>62</sup> Biographers, then, according to Woolf should convey those truths which transmit personality.

Like Woolf, Edel outlines the dilemma of: 'Imposing order, bringing logic and shape to the record of "something that is as mercurial and as flowing, as compact of temperament and emotion, as the human spirit itself"'.<sup>63</sup> Walter challenges with the idea that a biographer must succeed in conveying an individual set apart from their chaotic backgrounds, yet create the illusion that they are in the midst of life.<sup>64</sup> Kinkead-Weekes<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Wagner-Martin 9.

<sup>59</sup> In Walter 322.

<sup>60</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays: Volume Two* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966) 229.

<sup>61</sup> Woolf (1966) 229.

<sup>62</sup> Woolf (1966) 229.

<sup>63</sup> Leon Edel, *Literary Biography* (Bloomsbury: Indiana University Press, 1973) 1.

<sup>64</sup> Walter 323.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph to exile, 1912-1922*. (Cambridge:

raises the uncomfortable point that we live our lives day to day and not in themes. Seymour's<sup>66</sup> suggestion, then, is for biographers shamelessly to insert a connecting narrative thread. As Milan Kundera says of *living* a life in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, life is a novel and you are the author.<sup>67</sup> This is a form of meaning-making: to connect events with a thread so they become a well-woven story *as it is lived*. This is even more vital when it is written.

### ***3.4.2 Can a person be 'fixed' in time and space?***

According to D.H. Lawrence, the question boils down to the following: is possible to 'fix' people through the analysis of their lives or are humans not in a state of constant flux and transformation?<sup>68</sup> Even if the narrative is structured chronologically from birth to death, the biographer is still interpreting the life 'in hindsight' – based on all the 'facts' attained at the end of a subject's life. If the narrative is based on interviews with a living subject, this constant reinterpretation is all the more relevant. In retrospect we make sense of what might have had no coherence at the time. We link facts that seemed to have no connection. This awareness forces the biographer to admit that what they have produced, given the facts, is merely one story of many possible stories. With a subject who is still alive the problem becomes even more complex: the narrative can and almost certainly will differ depending on when the story is told and on the circumstances affecting the subject at different points in time. The narrative must find a premature closure, or closure must be redesigned at every turn of the subject's current life. His or her past is constantly being given expression and interpretation.

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Cambridge University Press, 1996.)

<sup>66</sup> In France and St Clair 265.

<sup>67</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).

<sup>68</sup> Kinkead-Weeks, 238.

Another aspect is that the interpretation will change with the reader. In a self-reflexive biography, the reader is given the chance to become co-interpreter. She is given the facts that have been analysed by the biographer. She has the right to disagree with that interpretation. Just as the subject's life is dependent on her context, so too is the interpretation of that life dependent on the time in which it is read. The Jena Romantics felt the same of the novel. It is never complete: with every reader and every time it is read, it changes.

However valid the postmodern stance might be, a biography *can*, in some cases, 'fix' a subject. It cannot fix the essence or all possible facets of a subject, but it can fix an idea. One version becomes the only version and the biography *becomes* the subject. In Woolf's praise of Stachey's biography of Queen Victoria, she writes that his 'Queen Victoria will *be* Queen Victoria, just as Boswell's Johnson is now Dr. Johnson'.<sup>69</sup> This whole-meal consumption of portrayed lives exists in mainstream Western culture with the uncritical viewing of biopics<sup>70</sup> that have become popular of late (*Walk the Line*, *Queen Elizabeth*).

### 3.4.3 *Questions of ethics*

If biography has such potential power, then what is the biographer's stance to be, ethically? Emmanuel Levinas proposes that at the basis of all philosophy, before one even attempts to seek a truth, is ethics.<sup>71</sup> When one is confronted with another person, one must view them as holy. First and foremost, we have an ethical responsibility to another human being. Our very selves are denoted by our obligation to, and our respect for The Other. (It seems that empathy, however, of a biographer for their subject is not a given requirement. For example, van Onselen<sup>72</sup> judged the subject, Joe Silver, of *The Fox and the Flies*

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<sup>69</sup> Woolf (1966) 224.

<sup>70</sup> Biographical films.

<sup>71</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *God, Death, and Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Charles van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies: The World of Joseph Silver, Racketeer and Psychopath* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007).

morally reprehensible. What sustained his researching and writing was curiosity and a hunt across time and space where the prize was to ensnare the fox. He conjectured that Silver was in fact the notorious Jack the Ripper.)

Secondly, there is also the responsibility to oneself as biographer to conduct one's work with integrity. Does this integrity lie in our knowing we have behaved as honestly and as ethically as possible?

There is a third responsibility to the readers who expect they are reading 'a truth'. Wagner-Martin suggests that in the end it is up to the readers, however, themselves to judge whether a biography fulfils his or her need to understand, and then to enjoy a subject.<sup>73</sup>

Ultimately, though, the biographer does have to wear all the caps. To be ethical, he or she must be as empathic and tactful as a therapist. To be taken seriously by a reading public, she must be a self-reflexive historian with integrity. To be enjoyed, she must be a novelist and the 'selector' that Wagner-Martin and Edel expound. The major difference from the novel is the obligation we have ethically to The Other. The biographer must be self-reflexive in the attempt to portray 'from life' and interrogate every move of the imagination for its 'fairness'.

As Gogo's self was constantly shifting, and I encountered Gogo only in relation to me, and as she presumably has a myth by which she lives her life, I did not harbour the naïve assumption that I would fully succeed in gleaning the Truth about who she is when I set out to write her biography. I intended to base the biography on the facts that I would find out when interviewing her.

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<sup>73</sup> Wagner-Martin, 153.

Like Woolf, I embraced the challenge that from the verifiable facts of her life as she lived it, I would be able to paint the rainbow of her personality.

#### 4. FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGY

In the past, women were defined relative to men. They were barred from positions of public power because they were considered ‘other’ – and because it was believed they did not and could not think like men.<sup>74</sup> According to psychotherapist and feminist, Jane Flax, ‘It is the very essence of being the ‘other’ and ‘lesser’ that makes for the ‘traditional’ feminine traits like ‘timidity, passivity, irresponsibility’.<sup>75</sup>

The first wave of feminism said that women could and would do whatever men could.<sup>76</sup> This move, however, was met with criticism, - like Irigaray’s stating, ‘Women merely equal to men would be like them, therefore not women’.<sup>77</sup>

The second wave of feminism, which spanned the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, called for emancipation from comparison to men, and celebration of the innate virtues of women. These women argued that equality is not sameness. Women *are* different from men, but still should be deemed as *equal*.<sup>78</sup>

Feminist theory, from the 1990s then widened to include other marginalised groups. It sought to create an awareness of how the public sphere is not divorced from the private,

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<sup>74</sup> M. Crawford and J. Maracek, ‘Psychology Reconstructs the Female’, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 13, (1989): 147-165.

<sup>75</sup> Jane Flax, ‘Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory’, in Nicholson, Ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 39-58.

<sup>76</sup> Rachel Hare-Mustin. ‘Discourse in the Mirrored Room: A Postmodern Analysis of Therapy’, in M.M Gergen and S.N. Davis Ed., *Toward a New Psychology of Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>77</sup> In Flax 173.

<sup>78</sup> Arianna Stassinopoulos, *The Female Woman* (New York: Random House, 1974).

and how daily lives – and indeed internal lives – may be affected by membership to one or more of these ‘minorities’.

Feminist theory and therapy today seeks to re-empower marginalised groups. It calls for its proponents to be aware of how members of these groups have been treated, and to employ a more considered approach. The central principles of feminist theory and therapies are a commitment to equality and egalitarian relationships, political understanding of distress, and an emphasis on social transformation.<sup>79</sup>

From a feminist framework, the awareness of power within the research process is key. The theory is aware of traditional models where the therapist or researcher is considered the ‘expert’ in the relationship. Before interviewing Gogo, I had to think about these issues: how is power evident between the interviewee and myself? What can I do to empower her and what does she do to empower herself in this constructed setting? This theory asks one to question and be aware of how power plays a role in all interactions.

The researcher plays the role of *bricoleur*<sup>80</sup>, listening for the *meaning* that the interviewee makes, but is also aware of herself as interpreter. Beyond this, she is aware of the reader as interpreter. As raised above, regarding relational dynamics in the biography-writing process – I must be self-reflexive. What do I bring into the research that informs the outcome? How do my emotions and biases impact the co-creation of meaning? I must constantly look at the way in which the research is being conducted.<sup>81</sup> Also, once

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<sup>79</sup> David Capuzzi and Douglas Gross, in Allen E. Ivey, Michael D’Andrea, Mary Bradford Ivey and Lynn Simek-Morgan, *Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy: A Multicultural Perspective* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002).

<sup>80</sup> Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln, *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998).

<sup>81</sup> C. Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).

complete, I must be able to stand back and review how the research was done and how it could have been done differently.

I chose my methodology based on the principles of feminist psychological theory. For example, I chose to use open-ended interviews to obtain data because I wanted to allow Gogo to express what was important for her. If she belonged to the groups that the dominant discourse has silenced, I wanted to allow her voice to be heard. I considered Gogo to be the expert in her own life.

Further, as had been taught in the Psychology of Women seminar, I intended to remain as open-minded as I could. I was not looking for anything specific to be proved, or to promote theories that Gogo's stories might fit.

I was, however, aware of gender issues in her story. I listened for how her life was affected by the fact that she inhabited various marginalised groups. As stated above, Gogo grew up as a woman – the daughter of one of her father's wives – in a traditional Xhosa homestead. She lived as a black person during apartheid, which by design also ensured her relative poverty. How did being 'marginalised' throughout her life affect how she felt about herself, and how others behaved towards her?

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Design**

My research was grounded in Qualitative Methodology. It was the natural development of a person and events surrounding her that I wanted to capture. This form of research is concerned with idiosyncratic characteristics of the participant. Qualitative methodology is a quest for understanding, and in-depth inquiry.<sup>82</sup>

I chose to interview only Gogo at first. I wanted her story, as she had experienced it, and continued to experience it. I also wanted to record how I encountered her. I did not want to be biased into adopting a certain view of Gogo.

I considered talking to others at a later stage, however, I wanted first to hear her story, and then corroborate or enlarge on it later.

(Gogo's sister Gladys was present during two interviews in Zastron. She, however, spoke no English, and I not enough Xhosa or Afrikaans. Gogo did consult with her when I wanted to draw up a family tree.)

I read and learnt more about the historical and societal contexts in which Gogo's story took place.

### **5.2 Instruments**

The instruments used were open-ended interviews, unstructured participant observation, participatory observation, and journaling.

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<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth Henning, Wilhelm van Rensburg and Brigitte Smit, *Finding Your Way in Qualitative Research* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2004).

I conducted the major part of the interviews with Gogo between 2007 and 2008. They were on average between one and two hours long and most were held at Kay Betterton's house in Kenilworth, Cape Town.

I also travelled ten hours from Cape Town to her hometown of Zastron, Free State in December 2006. I spent four days there.

This was in addition to the interviews I already had held with her as part of the Psychology of Women seminar, as well as a morning of participatory observation. At her invitation, I attended a Shambala Foundation event where Gogo conducted the opening ceremony.

### **5.3 Interviews**

I began the entire process of open-ended interviews with the request: *I want you to tell me about your life*. I wanted to know what was important for Gogo, and what she deemed important to tell me.

As the interviews went on, I developed a sense of what had been pivotal events and people in Gogo's life. I began to want more details about these events – what had happened, who had been involved, and how she had felt – in order to construct a narrative.

After the third interview in 2007, I made a list of about 600 things<sup>83</sup> I wanted to know about another person's life in order to attempt to understand her. The list was very broad and included items from food preferences, to level of education, to ideas and beliefs. These things were in my mind as I conducted the interviews.

I began to guide the interviews and ask questions about aspects that I found interesting, or suspected that a reader might, or that I thought portrayed certain characteristics.

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<sup>83</sup> See Appendix 1.

	<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Length</u>
1.	16 FEBRUARY 2006	Lyndene, Rondebosch, Cape Town (Lucille's home)	1 hour
2.	4 DECEMBER 2006	Gogo's House, Matlakeng, Zastron	5 hours
3.	5 DECEMBER 2006	Car, Farm, Zastron	3 hours
4.	20 FEBRUARY 2007	Kay Betterton's House, Kenilworth, Cape Town	2 hours
5.	26 FEBRUARY 2007	Kay Betterton's House, Kenilworth, Cape Town	1 hour 50 minutes
6.	6 MARCH 2007	Kay Betterton's House, Kenilworth, Cape Town	1 hour 50 minutes
7.	21 MARCH 2007	Kay Betterton's House, Kenilworth, Cape Town	1 hour 20 minutes
8.	15 JUNE 2007	Kay Betterton's House, Kenilworth, Cape Town	1 hour 24 minutes
9.	19 JUNE 2007	Kay Betterton's House, Kenilworth, Cape Town	1 hour 36 minutes
10.	20 JANUARY 2008	Public Park, Car, Rondebosch Cape Town	1 hour 14 minutes
11.	6 MAY 2008	Car, Chippies, Rondebosch, Cape Town	1 hour 30 minutes

**Table 1 Interviews; February 2006 – May 2008**

I had hoped that we would have one interview a week, and complete them within a certain timeframe. I could not set this up at the start, however, and the interview process was extended over almost two years. At the end of each interview, we would negotiate a time for the next one. Sometimes this could not be agreed upon, and I would call Gogo between interviews. During these calls, out of politeness and concern, I would ask how she was, but they were primarily to make a time to meet. The calls were not recorded.

The interviews were conducted in English.

(In two interviews, Gogo spoke about recording events and dreams in a diary. I never saw the diary, despite expressing my desire to do so. She also claimed she had destroyed some of the diaries when she was sick so that no one would read them if she died.)

#### **5.4 Procedures**

We met in a setting of Gogo's choice (see table above). Only the two of us were present during the interviews.

On occasion there were interruptions. Gogo kept her cell phone on during interviews and would take calls. Mine was turned off. Kay returned home during two of the interviews, but left soon after. If we met in a public place, we were interrupted by people wanting to talk with Gogo.

I took notes during the interviews, making observations about the context, her gestures and facial expressions, my responses to what she said, and particular phrases that stood out for me. I also made notes in my journal before and after the interviews of my own emotional and physical state, my expectations, and my responses.

## **5.5 Data management**

All interviews and discussions we had in the car were also recorded. I used an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder WS-320M. A friend filmed Gogo at the Shambala Foundation event mentioned above, and I photographed her at another, as well as in Zastron.

The data capturing was a labour-intensive process. All interviews were transcribed – taking on average eight hours to type one hour of taping. Over 20 hours of recordings were typed, and I have files of over 500 pages of transcripts. I have a complete record of the recordings, transcriptions, and photographs stored digitally. Hard copies of the transcriptions were shared with my supervisors. I used the hard copies and the recordings, as well as my notes to do my data analysis.

## **5.6 Data analysis**

I used the data gathered to write this biography-type thesis. I chose certain stories of all those Gogo told me in the two years to highlight in my narrative. Her accounts were jumbled and many times incoherent. I had to spend a lot of time replaying interviews to understand what she had meant. I reread the transcriptions dozens of times, and referred back to them each time I added to my dissertation.

The narrative presented in this thesis is rooted in Gogo's accounts – which I interrogated with a view to my main interest in her: her prowess and powers as a sangoma.

I tried to reconstruct the information in a more coherent timeline, and narrative, to enable the reader to make more sense of it.

## **5.7 Ethical rules of conduct**

### ***5.7.1 Informed consent***

Gogo was given a consent form. It outlined that, based on her interviews, I intended to write her biography. This dissertation would be towards a degree in Life Writing at the University of Stellenbosch.

The form contained the following information:

#### ***5.7.1.1 Confidentiality***

The interview would be recorded but only I, and, if necessary, a transcriber would listen to the recordings. The transcriber would be held to a confidentiality agreement. My supervisors would have access to the transcriptions. They, along with their contact details, were listed on the form.

The participant has the right to choose a pseudonym.

#### ***5.7.1.2 Right of withdrawal***

She is allowed a copy of the transcripts and also to review the paper prior to publication. If she disagrees with any portrayal of herself within the paper, she has the right to ask me to allow her to withdraw. If there are any questions she is uncomfortable with, she is not obliged to answer them. At any point in the research, if she no longer wants to participate, she has the right to withdraw.

#### ***5.7.1.3 Providing help***

If, beyond the interview, owing to discussions in the interview, the participant needs psychological assistance, I have the duty to aid her in getting help.

This form also acted as a contract between Gogo and myself. We both signed it and she was given a copy.

It also outlined that I would ask her for ten interviews, after which I could call her to arrange any further ones to clarify uncertainties. (Having conducted two interviews, I estimated that ten would be sufficient.)

Gogo was not to be compensated monetarily for the time she spent talking to me. This was recommended by my psychology supervisor and was standard practice in her qualitative research. The reasoning was that any form of payment affected the interplay of power between researcher and subject. It also was thought to affect what the subject told the researcher. She could hold back, or feel obliged to embellish, based on what the information was interpreted to be worth in monetary terms.

## 6. WHAT IS IN A NAME?

### 6.1 Gogo

The textual sign of the real person is her proper name... It is the name that is ‘certifiable’, ‘verifiable’, ‘the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person.

Philippe Lejeune<sup>84</sup>

I still do not know my subject’s name; for the last three years, I have called her *Gogo*. During the interviews, I tried to determine her ‘proper name’ – to use Lejeune’s term.

Gogo means Grandmother in the Nguni languages. One does not actually have to be a grandmother in order to be accorded this title. Zulu and Xhosa people refer to each other by their status related to their age, relative to oneself. One generation above me would be *Mama*; and women of the same generation refer to one another as *Sisi*, Sister.

Familial terms are also used in the course of training sangomas (*thwasas*). A sangoma training a *thwasa* is that neophyte’s ‘mother’. The sangoma that trained him or her, is referred to as the new trainee’s ‘grandmother’, irrespective of gender.

I, however, initially thought I was calling her Gogo because of her status as a sangoma. I thought one was referred to as such because one’s learning accorded one certain wisdom usually associated with the elders.

However, this is not the custom in the Bhaca tradition in which Gogo was trained. As in all other South African traditions, initiated sangomas are given a name by the ancestors. It is this name by which they come to be known.

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<sup>84</sup> In Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) 11.

The name given to Gogo was Makhosi Athobile. *Makhosi* is a sign of respect. It is the title sangomas receive, like the western *Doctor*. When I asked Gogo what Athobile meant and why she was given this name, she said it meant her ancestors are very quiet, and she answered the second question facetiously: ‘Because they have to call me somebody.’

Gogo’s identification document gives her name as Nomluleki Sophie Baartman. I thought that must be her name.

Baartman was her first husband’s surname. She did not take her second husband’s name, because, she said, that in the eyes of God, one is always married to one’s first husband. She told me her maiden name was Phama.

When she agreed to talk to me, she signed the consent forms with the name Sophie Baartman. In the interviews she often spoke of herself as Sophie. Many black South Africans have an English name, by which they introduce themselves to *mlungus* (a term for white people). It is understood that white people will not be able to pronounce nor remember their birth name and should not even have to try.

Nomluleki was her married name. When a woman marries, she not only adopts her husband’s surname, but her new mother-in-law gives her a new name. Nomluleki means, ‘Everybody will come to me and I will give them the right way to go.’ She believed her mother-in-law knew she would end up advising people. Although she was only married to her first husband for six years, his family members still consult her for advice nearly 50 years later.

‘It is a very big thing,’ said Gogo of being given a name – the seed of so much meaning. She believed there is portent in the name that is known by the giver.

Gogo told me that the names her parents gave her were also important for the meanings they held. Her mother called her Uzani: ‘Like someone was digging very hard to have

me.’ This name she did not understand as she struggled to believe that anyone would want to fight for her.

Gogo’s father’s name for her was Nosphithiphithi, which she told me meant: ‘Everybody will pull me where they want.’ She blamed this name for the way this phenomenon manifested in her life, and elaborated, ‘The nother one pull me that side, the nother one want to pull me that side; they don’t know how to share me.’<sup>85</sup>

As a young girl, Gogo spent some time living with her father’s sister, and this aunt called her Notwetwe. This name has no meaning: ‘It is just a thing,’ she said. At home, in Zastron, she is known mostly by this name amongst her siblings and acquaintances.

When she thought of herself, what name did she use? – I wondered. When I asked her, she took a long while to answer, eventually settling on: ‘Makhosi Athobile.’

In this biography, I have settled on calling her Gogo. Firstly, it is the name I know her by. It is the name I called her – and the name she expected me to use. Secondly, in writing about her, I hoped to give voice to one of many untold stories of people marginalised by colonialism, culture, and class. Gogo is a generic name – this is the story of someone’s grandmother.

What is most commonly left behind when a life has ended? A tombstone bearing the name, and dates of birth and death of the body buried beneath.

I still do not know Gogo’s name.

I have titled the first five chapters with one of the above names that the other characters in that chapter would have called her.

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<sup>85</sup> Nosphithiphithi means ‘the confused one’ (Charnock, personal records, 2010).

## **PART 2**

## **1. ZASTRON: NOTWETWE'S STORY**

When Gogo signed our contract, she told me that she would be travelling with her daughter Michelle and grandson Pondo to her hometown of Zastron in the next few weeks to spend Christmas with her family. She agreed that it would be a good idea for me to accompany her. She offered to take me around the farm where she grew up. I became excited about this and so did she. She told me she had recently dreamed of the farm belonging to Miss Marie Leroux where her family once worked. We arranged to meet in Zastron on Monday, 4 December 2006.

### **1.1 Zastron, Free State**

Gogo was a little girl when she first came to Zastron from the east. She was born in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains, in Matatiele – a town on the border of Natal and Transkei. Her father, Nomanci 'Poni' Phama brought his two wives and his children across the mountains into the town of Zastron, leaving his parents behind. Perhaps her grandfather had already died? Poni could not have known as he took his daughter, Gogo, whom he called Nosphithiphithi into the future, that his father would be accompanying the girl in spirit.

Zastron lies at a node joining what was once the Orange Free State with Transkei, the 'Bantu Homeland' of the Xhosa to the south, and Lesotho to the east, giving it a strategic position. Even today there is a military base in the town of Zastron, tucked away just outside the town, on the far side of the location. The Orange River rises in the Drakensberg Mountains in Lesotho, and makes a natural border between what are now the Free State and Eastern Cape Provinces. The river, known to the Nama people as the Gariiep, flows west into the Atlantic, separating South Africa from Namibia. Anyone crossing into the Republic from Mhaleshoek in Lesotho or Sterkspruit in Transkei has to bridge this river, once known as The Great River. The black population of Zastron is thus mostly of Sotho or Xhosa descent.

A short distance past the Gariiep Dam, the first sign of Zastron appeared to me as a set of silos rising above the earth behind a herd of grazing cows. After driving from the west through the tawny yellow-gold barrenness of the desert, the sight of the grass refreshed me and the cows seemed welcoming. The town itself felt homely and liveable, unlike most of those on my way from Cape Town. Along the main road, there were Christmas lights and lots of trees. Having grown up in Johannesburg, which boasts of being the world's largest man-made forest, I noticed, with delight, the willows of Zastron. One was the largest willow tree I had ever seen. It made me wonder what that tree had seen. An old man wearing a chequered blanket walked by. He lifted his walking stick to greet me and I waved back.

Then I saw the mountains that flank Zastron to the right. There was a single road that led some way up and then footpaths tracked on and upwards to where I could no longer see them clearly, yet they drew my eyes up and up to the very top. The gold of the desert darkened to sienna rock-formations on top of the mountain. As I looked up, a strange thing stared down at me – The Eye of Zastron. There was a hole in the middle of the topmost rock, perhaps eight or nine metres in diameter.

Because of my elevation, I could see the layout of the location below me to the left. It was enormous compared to the town. I wondered about employment: where did all these people work? Gogo had told me she had 15 brothers and sisters. How many were still alive? How many lived in that township of Zastron? Where did they work? Their father had worked on a farm nearby and the family grew up there. I hoped it would be possible to visit the farm once run by Miss Marie – the one that Gogo had recently dreamed about.

As the hours rolled by the following morning, I become more and more anxious that I had not yet heard from Gogo. The arrangement was that she was supposed to contact me on her arrival in Zastron from Cape Town. Deciding to use the time to learn more about the

town, I consulted the information centre. This was the type of town where the information centre was also a stationery store and incidentally a bicycle-repair shop.

I learnt that Zastron was originally laid out in 1876 on Jan Hendrik de Winnaar's farm, Verliesfontein. It was named for Johanna Sibella Zastrow, the Polish wife of J.H. Brand, then President of the Orange Free State Republic. It became a municipality in 1881. Basotho, Voortrekkers, and San were continually contesting the no-man's land surrounding the town. Today Zastron is a commercial centre for cattle, sheep, dairy, maize and wheat farming.

At the municipality I had no luck locating a map of the town and its surrounds. A helpful woman in the district office at the military base made me a copy of an unwieldy, A1 map of the farms and plots surrounding Zastron. Unfortunately the map of the township was not housed there. A separate office in town dealt with the affairs of the township.

The office was a small room. Like a bank, the desk was behind glass and other offices were hidden around the corner. Strangely the clerk managed to look both tired and curious. The office had one copy of a map and that was outdated. Some of the newer streets and houses were not included. I nevertheless thanked him for the map and promised to return it later that day. I walked down the hill to the bicycle shop to photocopy it.

As I approached the huge church in the centre of Zastron, the time on its clock read ten minutes past twelve – and I had still not heard from Gogo. I did not know whether she had arrived yet. Quite by chance, I saw her standing with her daughter Michelle, and another young woman in Matheys Street.

She was very happy to see me and gave me a big hug. She told me she was concerned 'we miss each other'. I confessed that I, too, had been scared that I had travelled all the way to Zastron and we would not see one another. She seemed not to want to have a conversation. True, she was very tired. Was there another reason? Did it have something to do with

talking in English to an *umlungu* while surrounded by her people in her town? We arranged to meet the following day, Tuesday, 5 December 2006, around the corner from the church, under the trees by the minibus taxis.

## 1.2 Gogo's house

At 10am I picked Gogo up and drove her into the nameless dirt roads of Matlakeng. The front door of Gogo's house was close to the road. Gogo's house was built of large concrete bricks. It was painted beige and had a pitched tin roof and a tin door. She apologised for the tin door by telling me that her son Russell, who would be visiting for Christmas, had said: 'Don't buy a proper door; I've got a door for you.' I followed Gogo inside, carrying some of her parcels. 'This is my little camp,' she said, welcoming me. She hung the padlock from the door, with the keys still in it, into the top buttonhole of her pale blue shirt. The rooms were very small. The front door opened directly into the lounge where there was a small two-seater couch – not much larger than a loveseat – a television on a small table, matching armchairs, a Persian rug covering the 'shelf-paper' floor. There were wires hanging everywhere, each snaking from different rooms to attach themselves to an adaptor hastily strung above the couch. Next to the wire-weave was a clock that had stopped. There was a gap in the ceiling that let in a stripe of summer sunlight, but in winter must weep with rain. 'I'm still trying to want to put ceiling on, and dadadada,' she said, short-circuiting any further details. I wondered if she had seen me looking at the hole in the roof.

To the left were the bedrooms; the second door leading to hers. On it was a colour computer printout with a border of Egyptian hieroglyphs stuck on with lots of clear duct tape, asking in capital letters: PLEASE REMOVE YOUR SHOES. ENKHOSI. (Thank You.) N.S.B. Gogo's bedroom was crammed with things in the little space between the bed with its floral cover and the white bureau: a wooden ladder, drums, fabric suitcases sitting on top of the skin of a small buck, paraffin for cooking, and a basket of ostrich eggs and bones. She touched the scapula and leg bones and explained, 'I have to have these bones – the bones of the goats when they training me. If somebody, she been sick for a

long time, to train, and she didn't find anybody to train her, I get this. And I burn it, and make like this.' Gogo ground a fist into the flat of her other hand. 'And they must lick it here.' She licked the back of both hands. 'To bring the ancestors down. That's why I keep them.'

She showed me an enlarged photograph of her grandson, Pondo, a calendar printed with a photo of Russell's children in Johannesburg sitting on a white Santa Claus's lap, and a candid one of herself, looking very queenly in her full sangoma regalia. She was dressed in a white outfit with a lion-printed cloth around her neck, and a leopard skin headband. I found it strange that stuck on the other wall was an illustrated map of the US. Next to it hung a small assortment of animal skin necklaces, and a certificate validating her affiliation as a sangoma to Bantu Muti Herbs of SA.

There were two beds in the second bedroom, with mismatched linen, dark curtains, and a dressing table. 'This is Michelley and Pondo's room. They come about six o'clock to sleep.' There was a patch on the one wall of a different colour, where someone must have painted around a cupboard, not caring to move it. Gogo noticed my looking at it, and quickly said, 'We must paint it now.' Was she proud or ashamed to show me around her home? Or neither: did it matter to her who I was and what I saw?

'This one is my kitchen. But the fridge broke.' My eyes were directed towards the fridge. On top were two plants, in good condition, considering Gogo had not been home for some months. Next to them was a ... snow-dome. I stepped into the kitchen and reached for the snow-dome. Instinctively, I shook it. The bauble became white and slowly, slowly, the snow settled over a miniature city of Chicago. 'I got that from Chicago. I went to Chicago,' Gogo said. I tried to understand. 'To go ask money. Me and Kay. For the Project.'

'Did you get any?'

'Some, yes, for the project. At Mbeki's office, they give me, there in Chicago.' She indicated the direction of Chicago with her head.

‘So they asked me to talk to the ladies which they busy making bead things.’ She traced a brooch over her heart. I noticed she wore her usual beads on her arms but also strips of animal skins.

‘They order the flag. We got the money like that.’ They had ordered a batch of bead brooches of the South African flag.

I was bewildered. I wanted to know the story of how this woman from this township had ended up flying somewhere as far away as Chicago. I wanted to ask her about it again, but never got the chance.

We walked around the back of Gogo’s house. There was space there that she said she wanted to use to make renovations to her house, build another room for when her daughter, Michelley, and grandson, Pondo, move in. There was an outhouse tucked into the corner of the garden, alongside the neighbour’s fence. There was a hole in the fence. She complained that the neighbourhood kids made it so they could come and steal her apricots. There was loud reggae music playing. A group of children who had been watching Gogo and me from the other side of the fence, waved to us. ‘*Molweni*, hello,’ we answered.

Back in her living room, I rolled out a large piece of paper on the floor and began drawing up a family tree.

‘Here, I’ll start with you. I’ll just call you Gogo for now. What year were you born?’

‘They always says it was the fight of Hitler. Don’t ask the year. Uh, because my father, they were always telling you they know when you were born when it was something big, then they will tell you what was cooking then.’

‘Do you have an ID book?’

I opened her green book and read 17 August 1935. She had told me she was 74. This made her 71. My first inclination was to believe her ID book but then I thought of my maternal grandmother, Alice, and her sister. According to their South African ID books, issued when they arrived from Lithuania, Alice was born two years before her twin sister.

Gogo told me that she had four children, two from each husband. Edward and Hazel from Jacobus, and Russell and Michelle from Elisha. ‘And I’ve got 11 grandchildren.’ Edward and his family live in Grahamstown; Hazel and her daughters are in Du Noon, near Cape Town. Russell and his wife and children live in Johannesburg. Michelle and her son Pondo had travelled back to Zastron with Gogo. Pondo was to stay with Gogo’s half-sister, Gladys, while Michelle finished her schooling in Bloemfontein.

A wind picked up and rattled the front door. I held down the sheet on which I drew the family tree.

Gogo explained that only five of the ten children her mother had borne had survived. Her brother, David, was the oldest. She was born second, followed by another three girls: Maggie, Nongazi, and Louise. Maggie was also her mother’s English name, her other being Manzola, but Gogo only gave me the *umlungu* names of her siblings, except for Nongazi’s, which she could not remember.

We both looked up when the wind whistled in the small hole in the roof. Gogo continued talking about her genealogy. Gogo’s mother, Manzola Dunjaan had married Poni (Nomanci) Phama, Gogo’s father. He took another wife, Leah, whom Gogo refers to as her stepmother. She had eight children: Phillip, Gladys, Piet, Petrus, Nathaniel, Bernard, Maria, and Leah. The two families lived almost as one in a homestead with *rondawels* nearby one another. The girls slept with their mothers, the boys all together in their own *rondawel*, and Nomanci with either of his wives. There was a communal cooking and cleaning area, and everyone would take meals together. ‘When you come home you can say: “Tu! Lots of people visiting here.” In the meantime, it’s just one man’s family.’

Gogo spoke nostalgically of that time, of growing up in a large family, and of the farm on which they lived. ‘We go there tomorrow,’ she said, excitedly.

### 1.3 The farm

The following day, Gogo and her half-sister, Gladys, climbed into my car. Gladys looked very different from Gogo. She was a tall woman with dark brown skin. Gogo was wearing a red t-shirt and a skirt printed in white, pink, and red, and white sneakers with no laces. It was the first time I had noticed her wearing shoes of any kind.

I drove them to what had once been Miss Marie's farm. It was not even 18 kilometres away from their houses, and yet they had never once visited the place where they grew up.

'When was the last time you were here?' I asked Gogo.

'Before I even have a child. I didn't know the woman can have a child – it's so long. I want so much to come and walk. I even dream about that. Yesterday I was sitting thinking: Will I go?'

Gladys, however, was reticent and I was not sure how to engage her. From the passenger seat, Gogo explained that Gladys did not speak English and began translating for her sister. Like Gogo, Gladys spoke isiXhosa, Sotho ('that language is like our language') and Afrikaans. I lacked proficiency in Afrikaans although it had been a compulsory subject at school. Also, I came from a part of Johannesburg where Afrikaans was not heard much. Curiously, my paternal grandmother, born in Paarl, was Afrikaans-speaking. By the time I was born, however, she had suffered the consequences of a concussion and did not say very much.

We travelled south-east along the main road that eventually crosses the Orange River, and turned off to the left onto an uneven dirt road. The car bumped and jumped as we wound further into the farmlands. Gogo was getting more and more excited; talking animatedly with Gladys, then turning to me and saying, 'I'll show you where the man in my dream came from. I'll show you where the *rondawels* were!' I got caught up in the sisters' enthusiasm. 'It's round the next bend!' All we reached was a gate, chained shut with a large lock.

Gladys had seen a sign on the gate of the last farm we passed: perhaps they would help? We drove back. There was a name and a cell phone number. As I dialled, Gogo jumped out of the car, taking a plastic bag with her. While the cell phone was ringing, I looked for her. She was bent over on the other side of the road, digging earnestly. Gladys got out to help her. I spoke in broken Afrikaans with a man at the other end of the line who spoke to me in broken English. He said someone on his farm would have the keys. We could call them, he said, and they would let us in with pleasure.

While we waited, I went over to Gogo, who was digging in the soil on the side of the road. ‘Baas Niklaas, the man you speak to – he’s Miss Marie’s nephew. This is his farm,’ she said and carried on digging with what looked like a paint scraper. It must have been in her plastic bag. Had she brought it along for this very reason? Eventually, she pulled a weird-looking root out of the ground. It was as large as a turnip and similar in colour, but instead of being smoothly round, it had thinner roots sprouting from all over it. How on earth had she known that was growing there, I wondered.

‘I been looking for this. They don’t have in Cape Town. I need this. When the woman wants to have baby after the doctor give her the pill not to, she takes this. It clean her. Maybe this one can help me dig more.’ She gestured towards a young man in blue overalls coming towards us, holding a key.

We got back in the car, passed through the gate that had been opened for us, and curved onto what was once Miss Marie’s farm. The land to the right of the road swept upwards to high hills, covered in overgrown grass in shades of yellow and green and sparsely dotted with bushes. To the left were the ruins of the main farmhouse, surrounded by trees that then descended into a small river. Gogo pointed out a flat piece of land under a large tree, which she said was the kraal where the cows were kept. Beyond the kraal, there was land where Gogo’s father could plant ‘what he wanted’. She was so, so excited and thought out loud: ‘It’s like a story come true to my head. Because here I am.’ Her lips were set in a wide grin.

Gogo stood by the fence, looking around, and told me again about the dreams she had about coming to the farm, of how she needed to fetch something from the river. In it, men on horses tried to stop her from going to the river, telling her, ‘No one – not even your brothers – will come get you.’

I asked if she wanted to walk higher up the hill towards the river. She looked shocked and laughed. ‘I won’t! The owner of the ground will talk to you and then you’ll know.’

Whom did she deem the owner of the ground?

‘Snakes. When you take herbs when you sangoma, you always put sacrifice.’ Gogo explained that when she dug for herbs, she first sprinkled some snuff on the ground as an offering to the snakes, she said. ‘So they must forgive us for taking from the ground.’ *This* was why she was wearing shoes today.

I climbed up to join Gladys, who was walking towards the site they remembered as once being their home. Gladys stopped abruptly, bent over, and again started stabbing at the ground, taking the soil away in order to reveal the root. I could then see what she was using – a self-fashioned tool that looked almost like a tooth. It had a handle and a long point that stabbed into the ground. I continued up the hill, and between cacti and dandelions found regularly-placed stones in the ground that must have been the base of walls.

We were startled by the bellowing of a bull coming along the road beneath the hill. Gogo was afraid that the bull would charge – more afraid than she was of the snakes, because the approaching animal caused her to jump off the road into the grass. Two men were leading a pale brown cow and a speckled bull past a windmill and small round reservoir. The bull’s bellow was a strange, high-pitched sound that echoed and filled the valley.

When the animals had passed. Gogo and I noticed that Gladys was gone.

‘*Uyaphi wena?*’ Where are you? Gogo shouted for her sister.

We heard Gladys shout from the direction of the trees, on the other side of the road but her voice was more distant than expected. She had climbed down the riverbank.

‘Yo, yo, yo, yo! That one!’ Gogo covered her eyes with her hand, then reluctantly turned around to follow her sister.

Gogo asked me for a Rand to throw into the river. She threw it in along with something else she found on the ground, quickly muttering a prayer. Then, balancing on her cane, she teetered across the stream where rocks had been placed to form a bridge. We met up with Gladys and followed her as she pushed through overgrown bushes towards the remnants of Miss Marie’s house. Gogo and Gladys walked around the ruined building.

‘That was the kitchen, and that was the back door, and that was ... And there was a big veranda here.’ Gogo began imitating Miss Marie – or so I guessed – in high-pitched Afrikaans. Gladys laughed loud and open-mouthed.

‘Did you all work here?’ I asked.

‘Yes, it’s where we learn to work – here,’ replied Gogo. ‘Miss Marie teach us.’

As we drove away, we passed a peacock on Niklaas’s farm. It seemed so out of place amongst the chickens in the yellow of the Zastron hills. I looked from the regal bird to Gogo in the passenger seat.

She was smiling. ‘Margot, you don’t know what you do for me today. I feel I can die now.’

## 2. GOGO'S MOTHER'S DEATH: UZANI'S STORY

It was 20 February, 2007. I had not seen Gogo since taking her and Gladys to the farm in Zastron almost three months earlier. Visiting her home and meeting some of her family had made me excited about what might transpire in our subsequent meetings. The next meeting was scheduled to take place back in Cape Town at Kay Betterton's home in Kenilworth, where Gogo was staying.

Gogo met me in the driveway. She was wearing a white cloth with a large print of a red and black lion. Her step was heavy, and her eyes downcast as we walked together towards the townhouse. We entered the kitchen through the back door. The kitchen opened onto a small lounge where the interview took place.

I sat on a couch against the wall, next to a television set. Gogo sat opposite in an armchair; there was a coffee table between us on which I placed the recorder. Like Gogo's house, it was small but for a different reason: Kay's home was a uniquely South African compromise for those who could afford it – a compact townhouse built in a gated complex for security reasons.

Gogo wore a maroon *doek*, a cloth, covering her hair, and the dark colour looked like it weighed her face down. She was less talkative than when I had last seen her in Zastron. What could be the matter today? I wondered. 'I'm tired,' Gogo said before I had a chance to ask. 'I go to bed and then get tired because I can't sleep. I don't know what make me to not sleep.' She had woken up in the middle of the night and made herself a cup of tea. She had sat in the dark, alone, sipping, and thinking.

I thought she was going to tell me about a dream.

'I can sit like this, alone, no nothing, no TV, no radio, just me. No reading. Asking questions, which nobody can answer them. Only my brain can answer these questions.'

I wondered which answers in her life she attributed to her ‘brain’, which to her ‘grandfather,’ and which to ‘God’; and if she knew.

## **2.1 Her family is broken**

Gogo *did* know what was keeping her awake. Her voice was shaky, unsure as she told me, ‘My family is broken, Margot. It’s killing me inside. I don’t know how to fix that. All of us now, we’ve got no Mum, no Dad. We have to look after each other if we don’t want our father’s name to die forever.’ She rubbed her eyes and was quiet for a moment. ‘But it is only Gladys and me that think like that.’

I did not know why this was affecting Gogo now. Although this was the first time she could agree to an interview, she had been back from Zastron a few weeks already.

‘Our brothers and sisters, they hate us’, Gogo said. ‘Or they hate Gladys – let me put it that way – because they think when I am there, in Zastron, Gladys is eating my money; that I’m giving Gladys lots of money and I am not giving them anything. I try so hard to come up with an answer for why they think like that. I always say to Gladys I wish I die before you. Otherwise who will bury me? She is the only one.’ Gogo’s face lightened somewhat, even though her joke was macabre.

She continued, offering herself a possible explanation, ‘I don’t know, but I always say to myself, maybe that it was my Mummy’s wish which wishing that it must happen like that, because the day she was dying, she call me, Gladys and Maggie.’

I had known Gogo for almost a year when she mentioned her mother for the first time. However it was not so much her mother, as her grave, to which Gogo eventually introduced me. When we were in Zastron in December, on the farm where she grew up, Gogo stood on the dust path alongside my car and scanned the yellow hills around us. I watched her as she looked at the grassy mountains, the paths, the rocks, and the ruined houses. She stretched her arm out parallel to the ground and extended her finger to the

east. ‘My Mummy’s grave is there,’ she said, drawing out the last vowel to indicate how far into the valley her mother had been buried.

Only during the interview back in Cape Town did I begin to understand how fitting it was that I was first introduced to her mother in this way: it was in the moment of her death that she lives forever with Gogo.

## **2.2 Two things you can trust: Stones and kikuyu grass**

I was in for a story. I could gather that from the certain intensity and pace of Gogo’s speech that I always noticed when she got started. The tiredness from a moment ago seemed to subside a bit as she narrated the drama of her mother’s last days.

Gogo told me that her mother had been sick for what she remembered as a long time. She did not know what was wrong with her, or what had caused her prolonged illness. Her mother had spent most of the time at the hospital in Zastron, and Gogo hardly saw her that year. When she began to get a little better, she returned home to the farm.

At home, Gogo’s mother sometimes took herbs that her children cooked for her. They had learnt the medicinal properties of the herbs from her. Now that Gogo is a sangoma, she believes that her mother died because she did not want to train as a sangoma. Gogo suspects that her illness was *thwasa*<sup>86</sup> (an illness related to being called as an initiate sangoma) as she always knew where to dig for the right herbs, and all the things she told her daughter in the moments before she died actually came to pass.

Soon after her mother returned from the hospital, she and Gogo went out to the bluegum forest on the side of the hill to collect firewood. They were on their way back, carrying the wood on their heads when Gogo’s mother screamed and fell down. As Gogo told me this, she shouted as her mother would have shouted 60 years earlier; the low, sad sound echoed in the lounge. Her mother had been bitten by a small brown bird with yellow flecks. I

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<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 5: Gogo Trains as a Sangoma, pg. 83.

asked her if she knew what it was called, but she only knew the Xhosa name: *nongwingwi*. She could not explain it to me better as she had not seen a bird like that in Cape Town or Johannesburg. Her mother was again bedridden after this incident.

Gogo had been surprised when one morning, her mother woke early and walked to the patch of land where she was responsible for the planting. She saw to all the cattle, sheep, and horses. Afterwards, she went to speak with Miss Marie, her boss. Later that afternoon, when she had regarded it all, she returned to her *rondawel*. 'I'm so tired now,' Gogo told me she said as she called the three girls into her hut.

'Do you remember the date?' I asked Gogo.

She recalled the day – '7 September' – but not the year. She did, however, remember that it was only three weeks after she had turned 12.

Gogo said that when the girls came to their mother's *rondawel*, they were each given instructions. Her mother told Maggie to look after their baby sister. Gladys's mother had also recently given birth to a baby, and Gladys was told to help her. Gogo's task was to look after her family, her sisters and brothers, and her father. 'And it's like that still,' she realised.

Gogo's voice softened as she said that her mother turned to her and told her, 'Trust no one. Two things you can trust: stones and kikuyu grass. Kikuyu, it grows, it does nothing else; it grows and grows. A stone you can leave somewhere, and come back, the next day and the next day it will still be there, and it will still be a stone. A person may tell you they will do something, but they don't.'

I knew what Gogo was telling me affected our relationship. She did not pronounce it pointedly, in such a way that I might think was directed at me, but I wonder now whether she intended, subtly, to convey a message. Was she saying that she did not trust me, or that I should not trust her?

Her mother continued, ‘Trust the white people. They will give you bread because of your hands. If you work, you earn money so you can eat.’

Was she saying that she trusted me, or that she did not? Was that the message at all? I was not sure. I was tired from mentally trying to place everything Gogo told me into a timeline. I could never simply listen to what she said, but instead was always trying to work out what she *meant*. I chose, during this interview, just to listen to the story, make notes of any poignant details in my journal, and review the interview later, placing it into the contexts I had constructed.

“‘Do not take anything that does not belong to you. And when you see something nice that someone has, do not wish it were yours. Rather say: ‘That thing of yours is so nice. Bless God that he gave it to you’”,’ she continued, sharing her mother’s advice. “‘Respect each other, and the old people, and the young people until your dying time. And respect the earth, the ground on which you walk. Look after your family, your brothers and sisters and your father,” she tell us. But they bigger than us! I ask her: “How can we look after them?””

‘Do as I tell you, my child,’ was her mother’s answer.

‘What could I do? I listen to her. I’m still listening to her!’ Gogo was not indignant, she was merely questioning. She was resolved to continue fulfilling her mother’s words as she had always done despite her siblings’ ingratitude.

Gogo talked about her mother more frequently in subsequent interviews, mostly describing dreams in which she had appeared. Whenever Gogo spoke of her mother, she called her ‘my Mummy’, and it seemed to me at those times that the Gogo with whom I was interacting was not a woman of 70, but rather, a frightened and confused 12-year-old.

I sat opposite Gogo and sympathised with her recollections of her mother's death; and she continued comfortably, albeit with sadness, despite the graveness of the discussion. The way she spoke gave me hope – perhaps she did trust me.

### **2.3 Her Mummy's funeral was perfect!**

The funeral took place the day after her death. 'My Mummy's funeral was perfect!' she exclaimed, again sounding like a child. Gogo remembered it being afternoon and a beautiful spring day. I imagined the large Free State skies as still and blue. Farm workers and owners and other white people from Zastron and Sterkspruit attended the funeral. 'Lots and lots,' she said, shaking her head incredulously; she is still unsure why there were so many people there. She told me she had never seen that many white people together. Gogo and her sisters had to wear dresses that day.

'What did you usually wear?' I asked.

'You know, the cloths around us here.' She straightened up in her armchair and circled her hands around her waist.

At the funeral, Gogo looked after her siblings, already assuming the responsibility she had been given the previous day. The family sat in front of all the other mourners, watching the simple wooden coffin being lowered into the earth. Gogo told me she spent the burial trying to stop her younger siblings' crying.

'I couldn't cry because I was making my sister to stop crying,' remembered Gogo. She told me that for one month after her mother's death, she did not speak. 'I couldn't do nothing - the doctors said it was because I didn't cry.' After that month she cried. 'Lots, lots, lots I cry.'

Her description reminded me of our very first interview where she had told me about the murder of her second husband, Elisha. In the short time that I knew Gogo, she suffered from many physical ailments that she claimed allopathic doctors were unable to diagnose or treat. She ascribed some of them to the incomplete funeral rites of her relatives who had died during the year, and others to her ancestors' disapproval of her being in Cape Town when they wanted her in Zastron, seeing clients.

In the course of our interviews, Gogo described other traumas she had suffered in her life, and I noted a pattern. Her initial reaction was action: do what needs to be done. (She needed to identify Elisha's body; or she needed to comfort her siblings.) After taking care of the practicalities, it seemed that her unexpressed grief then became somatised and manifested later as illness.

#### **2.4 Gogo goes to church**

Gogo continued describing the funeral. The white people began singing. 'I never forget that song,' she said. Gogo smiled broadly with her lips together and her eyes shone as she began humming the tune she had first heard 60 years previously; it had moved her so. She knew it was a hymn because they sang of 'John'. She told me that it caused her to vow to go to church the following Sunday.

Like the chiefs of old who resisted the European Christian missions, Gogo's father did not want his children to attend church because his family were traditionalists and he did not want the colonial outlook to influence them.

Against his wishes, every Sunday following her mother's funeral, leaving her siblings at home, Gogo would steal away to church. If her father caught her returning, he would beat her. He whipped her with a long thin stick on her back. 'Every Sunday,' she said. 'I didn't even care.' She remembers those beatings as horrible, but they never deterred her. They were the sacrifice she was willing to make for her strengthening faith in Christianity and Jesus as Saviour.

In a later interview Gogo repeated to me what her mother requested on her deathbed, using almost the same words as she had on this occasion. I was used to stories changing and facts forgotten – why was she consistent with relaying *this* information? I slowly came to understand that her mother's dying words became the first creed by which she lives. Christianity became her second.

### **3. KIDNAPPING: NOMLULEKI'S STORY**

The following week, on February 26, I again interviewed Gogo at Kay's townhouse. As it was a very hot day, Gogo locked the gate behind me, but left the kitchen door open. I unpacked my bag, taking out my bottle of water, notebook, and dictaphone. Gogo walked across the room to open two windows, but left the thin white lace curtains closed. She wore nothing on her head, and her greying plaits were exposed. She sat down in the armchair and again I sat opposite her. She was in a better mood than the previous week; she was lighter and spoke more easily. In the previous interview, she had told me about her mother and church in great detail and, as I turned on the recorder on the table between us, I hoped she would again feel comfortable to share more stories of pivotal moments in her life.

Gogo said that it was soon after her mother's death that she was married to Jacobus. It was the first thing she had told me in our initial interview, and I was pleased she brought it up again – although I knew it would be hard for her to talk about it and hard for me to hear. She had mentioned the marriage briefly then, but now spoke in more detail.

In a subsequent interview, Gogo told me this story a third time and although the body was the same each time, details changed. This is what she told me on the hot day at the end of February:

#### **3.1 Gogo is kidnapped**

Jacobus was Gogo's cousin; she called his father '*Malumi*', Uncle. He taught at the school where her younger sisters learnt, which was close to the farm where the Phamas worked, and so he came to stay with them. He was like a brother living amongst them for two years.

At the time, Gogo had a boyfriend, Nkululeku, who was principal of the school in town. Although Gogo was very young, he asked her father for her hand in marriage. She would

complete her standard five education, and then live with Nkululeku's family while they prepared her to become a wife. To secure this deal, Poni Phama was paid eight cows.

One Sunday, barely a year after her mother's death, when Gogo had finished washing the dishes from the evening meal, she turned to carry the basin of clean dishes to the house. She was startled to find a man behind her. He told her not to worry, he had a letter for her stepmother. Would she run and give it to her? She ran in the direction of her stepmother's *rondawel*. In some versions of the story there was no letter – but, instead, the man had left cigarettes behind after having visited.

Gogo heard the voice of a second man. In the dark she could just make out that he was standing by a bicycle. He grabbed her, put her on the bike and rode off.

Gogo began to scream, 'Where are you taking me?'

There was someone stationed at each gate to the farm, opening and closing them behind the cyclist. He rode through quickly while his abductee kicked and screamed. Past the last gate, along the path, the abductors encountered Mr Phama returning home on his horse. He heard the girl howling but did not know who it was.

He shouted down to the men, 'Hey! You guys! When you take a girl, you must sing, men.' He started to sing.

The men passed with the daughter, and the father continued home, singing.

I was shocked that her father had done this. She described him as being so nonchalant as his daughter was being kidnapped. Not being able to fathom the story from any reference points in my upbringing, I realised that I had to try and understand it from the upbringing that Gogo had experienced within the African Traditional culture. I wondered, however, whether Gogo, as a 13-year-old girl could have understood it, from within any system of belief.

Gogo was taken to another farm. She was hidden in a hut with the sleeping lambs, she told me, and was covered with a blanket as they moved her to the house where she slept with

all the girls. She knew what was happening: she had been taken to be married – but to whom, she wondered. Her boyfriend, Nkululeku's, family had already paid for her; they would not take her in this way. She had been promised to him, and so she believed that everything would be sorted out soon.

She was guarded vigilantly. She was not allowed to go outside during the day, while the men worked. At 2:45 every morning, the girls took her to the river to wash herself, after which she had to return indoors. She knew she would escape. Her decision assuaged any fears she had and numbed her to what was happening.

### **3.2 Gogo escapes**

After three weeks at Jacobus's family's home, Gogo managed to sneak past her guard. She ran to Sterkspruit across the Orange River. Although she felt sure to be safe in another town, the people there assumed it would be the first place her father would come looking for her. So she crossed back over the river and went to stay with another uncle in Zastron town. Neither her family, nor Jacobus knew where she had disappeared to.

She went to see her boyfriend, Nkululeku, who asked if she had slept with Jacobus. She was hurt, and answered, 'I thought I was to marry you. I didn't sleep with anybody. How can I sleep with a man when I am a little girl?' Her one-time fiancé did not believe her.

Gogo interrupted her tragic tale to tell me how she only saw him again many, many years later. He was married and his children grown. They met at a party in Zastron and he introduced her to his wife. She knew who Gogo was as he had shared the story with her, and she went to call her children.

'Why?' Gogo asked.

'I want to show them who was supposed to be their mother,' Nkululeku's wife answered.

A breeze blew through the small space of Kay's house, for which I was grateful. Gogo was quiet as she seemed to enjoy the coolness on her skin. She used the moment to take a break from recounting the horror of what had happened to her and to gather her thoughts. When again she opened her mouth to speak, her story became even more difficult for me to hear.

### **3.3 Gogo marries Jacobus**

When she was still a child, hiding from Jacobus's family at her uncle's house in Zastron, she was happy to see her brother in the street one day. She did not expect that he would shout at her for walking with other girls. She was to be married and was therefore no longer considered a girl, he said, and took her back to Jacobus. Gogo had told me that a Xhosa girl is initiated as a woman when she begins to menstruate. Part of the rite includes learning about sex. So, uninitiated as a Xhosa woman as she was yet to menstruate – therefore still ignorant of sexual relations between a man and a woman – she was married to Jacobus.

When her new husband came to lie with her, Gogo did not understand what he was trying to do to her. She ran screaming to her parents-in-law's house to tell them what their son was doing to her.

Soon after they were married, the couple moved to Harrismith – another town in the Free State Province. From the time she was kidnapped, Gogo had never returned home to the farm – until we went together that previous December.

When I had asked Gogo about the marriage to Jacobus at our first meeting, she replied that it had been 'fine'. It was not until this interview a year later, on 26 February 2007, that she told me that he beat her. She did not announce this new piece of information with any change in her demeanour, but once she had stated it, she looked to me and quietly awaited my response. I remained empathetic, but asked for details, thinking that she created the opportunity to talk about what had happened. She told me that Jacobus hit her often, and

in front of their son. She says of the beatings, in a simple way: ‘It was my life when I was married.’ She said that her front teeth were missing because of him. She brought her fingers to her gums to show me the physical effect of what had happened all those years ago.

One day when Jacobus came home, it was different. He did not just come home to eat her food, and use her body, or abuse it. He told her he was leaving because he did not love her. She was pregnant with their second child, a girl, when she watched him walk out the door.

Through those years, Gogo said she often called on Jesus and God. She believed it was Their will that she survived. ‘He helped me, even helping me now. Even now, Margot,’ she said, elaborating that she prayed to Jesus for everything. ‘What about your ancestors?’ I asked. ‘The main power person is God, Margot. You can’t do nothing without Him.’

#### **3.4 Her father and the kingdom of heaven**

Although Gogo’s mood had lifted somewhat as she spoke of her reliance on Jesus and God, she was again despondent as she told me that many years later, her father, Poni, and stepmother, Leah, were also baptised as Christians. I was not sure why this would upset her. Gogo hung her head and fiddled with her fingers for a while before she explained. She believed because of their true faith, when they died, they were forgiven and accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven. Her mother, however, having never accepted Jesus into her life, would live out eternity in a place apart. If her father was willing to let that happen, she said, she feared it meant her father never really loved her mother.

Gogo did not believe he loved her either. Once he had converted to Christianity, her father did not support her becoming a sangoma – not financially, nor emotionally. His beliefs had altered completely from the African Traditional Religion within which he raised his children. He would not give Gogo the prescribed ceremony to welcome her ‘as a new person’ into his house when she became a sangoma. He also did not fulfil the ritual of placing money between them so he could meet and communicate with her in her new

capacity. As a result, Gogo said, she could not visit him and his wife, as each time she did, she became ill.

‘I always say even my Daddy didn’t want me. How do I expect the nother people to love me?’

She did not look at me for a while after she said this. In the two years Gogo spoke to me about her ‘hard life’, I never saw her cry.

I could see the deep well of sadness in her face but her eyes remained dry as she told me, ‘I must accept what I am that I'm not a person, I'm a dog. I must just pray that God accept me and give me a little place where I can be happy when I'm dead.’

#### 4. GOGO THE DOMESTIC WORKER: SOPHIE'S STORY

I called Gogo a few days after the last interview to make a time to meet again. She had wanted to spend some days with her daughter, Hazel, and her grandchildren in Dunoon - a township near Cape Town. She told me she would call me right back as soon as she knew her plans for certain. I did not hear from her for days. I did not want to be too invasive and risk pushing her away, so I waited to call her back. When I did, she seemed to have forgotten that she said she would call me. It was two weeks until our next interview, which took place on 6 March 2007 at Kay Betterton's home.

After the poignancy of the last interview, where she had appeared extremely vulnerable, I felt disrespectful launching straight into questions, and began by asking how she was. Perhaps she was uncomfortable with the emotions that the interviews were bringing to the surface. She shrunk into her chair and her elbows rested on the arms of the chair, and looked down at the red light on the dictaphone.

'Uh, I was watching that old days movies,' she said, and pointed at the television. 'I think I sleep four o'clock. And then, I dream again that I was with Miss Marie. Remember on the farm where we were, in Zastron? And she call me. And then I go. She says to me it's the time that I must get out in the whole in all this life. *In al de lewe*.' Her voice softened and slowed to a deliberate measured pace, but I had lost her train of thought. Was Miss Marie appearing to her with guidance, playing the role of an ancestor?

I felt I could not interrupt her for details, and so let her carry on:

'At six, when I start to pray, my ancestors they want to come. They tell me to say something, I didn't want to listen, instead I quickly said, amen. I go have a shower, looooong cold shower. Whish! in my hair. Because I didn't want to hear what they want to tell me.'

'Why?' I asked. It seemed like the appropriate question, but I did not know what she was talking about. Was she still talking about the dream? Was this six o'clock in the morning, after the dream at four? Where was she when this took place?

Gogo coughed, startled by my interrupting her reverie. ‘Ja, like always when something is happening to me, when I don’t know which road to take, sometimes it’s better for me to go in the sea. At home I will take the bucket of water and then I’ll go *gooi* [throw<sup>87</sup>] water on me, shhh, cold water. Or else I will go sit down there where there is nobody. I will just sit for long, before even I was sangoma, it was on my head to go sit and think. The shower was very good for me. It cleans me.’

I realised that she took a shower in reality and not in her dream.

#### 4.1 Gogo contradicts the contract

‘Soon as I finished, I thinking that I must go home. I said God, I think it’s time for me to retire, whatever I am doing in Cape Town, and go home. I have to be with my children. I switched the water off.’ Gogo made a swishing sound of water falling and then stopping. ‘My grandpa says first of all, when we bringing people for you that you have to praying them, you always tell them to go somewhere else. Which is wrong.’

Gogo had told me that although her ancestors were sending her messages that they wanted her to help people, they would not let her consult with clients in Kay’s house. As she had nowhere else in Cape Town to use as rooms, she had to send prospective clients and *thwasas* (trainees) to other sangomas.

It seemed that her grandfather, one of her guiding ancestors, had more messages for her.

‘You’re not finished here,’ he had told her. ‘And then *you* come. And then she says, “What about her?”’

‘Me?’ I asked, only knowing she was talking about me because she pointed her short fingers at me.

‘Yes, you! I tell my grandfather, it’s okay, you will write. I said I didn’t sign any contract. Did I sign contract with you?’ She laughed nervously.

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<sup>87</sup> M.S.

‘Yes,’ I stated strongly.

‘Don’t tell me that!’ She laughed again. ‘Because that’s what my grandpa told me. She said, “What about Margot?” Then I said no, I didn’t sign any papers with them.’ It was my turn to laugh nervously.

‘She will find somebody,’ Gogo continued. ‘I think also she’s finished what she want to me. She was at my home, she saw we are grown up, she saw me...and then the water. I must come out. I go dry myself.’

What did she mean by this? I felt angry; even that I had been used. I had driven her and her sister, Gladys, to the farm they had not seen in decades and now she was no longer interested in working with me. It was a strange thought, considering how careful I had been not to make her feel as though *I* was using *her*. I had hoped rather that we would both gain from our relationship. When I had asked her if I could write her life story, she had been excited. She had said it could be something her grandchildren could have. At the time, I still thought it would be the kind of narrative that they would enjoy and in its reading discover aspects of their Gogo.

I frowned, I was uncertain as to what to say. Surely she remembered that conversation?

I asked her, ‘Gogo, what do you think I am doing, coming to interview you week after week?’

She looked at me long and hard, then broke into a laugh. ‘I, myself, I don’t know. I ask my grandfather. I ask my mum, my father. All I know is it will become for you clear why *you* are coming to *me*.’

It was my turn to shrink into the couch. I was disturbed by what she had said. Was she planning to end the interviews? I certainly did not understand why she had said it would become clear to me why I was interviewing her, but perhaps her ancestors would hold her to her contract until it *did* become clear to me? I was clutching onto straws – hoping that she would not terminate our interviews. My heart was no longer in the interview. I asked

her what she did when Jacobus left her in Harrismith. She sat back and began to answer, as though she had simply forgotten the previous topic. I, however, listened listlessly.

#### **4.2 Mr Greenblatt**

After her husband left her, she knew she needed to get a job to take care of their two children, Edward and Hazel. Professions available then to women were minimal and, during apartheid, the two main professional options open to black women were nursing and teaching.<sup>88</sup> Many who could not afford the training fees to become nurses or teachers became domestic workers instead, and left their homes and own families in order to provide for them by being paid to take care of the families of the whites. Not having had even a primary education, as she had told me when signing the consent form, Gogo's options were even more limited.

Gogo told me of how one day, while still largely unemployed, but doing 'piece-jobs' (odd-jobs), she was hanging around the train station. She was waiting for the guards to look away so she could steal coal to take home to cook and keep her children warm. She was spotted – but not by the guards. Victor, the man who spotted her, drove her back to his boss, Mr Greenblatt. His boss gave her a job and money to buy paraffin. He told her he did so because he recognised his own suffering in her.

During Gogo's working years, domestic labour was still unorganised: there were no strict hours or salaries, and no training. A good command of English could secure a black woman a better job. Gogo revealed that she was the only one of her siblings who could speak English, as well as Xhosa, Sotho, and Afrikaans. In order to try and find herself a better job, she bought herself two books: *See!* and *Kyk!* and taught herself English with the Afrikaans picture book alongside.

Gogo worked for Mr Greenblatt in Harrismith, and later in Bloemfontein. He was a travelling salesman who sold electronic equipment. He brought girlfriends to

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<sup>88</sup> Frances Ames, *Mothering in an Apartheid Society* (Cape Town: Self-Published, 2001).

Bloemfontein, and Gogo told Mr Greenblatt he must marry someone like himself, not a ‘fancy’ woman – so they could start together to build something. She disapproved of each of them, until he brought Sheryl, a dancer whom she describes as: ‘This poor little thing’. They married and had a daughter, whom Gogo claimed to have named Michelle – many years before her own second daughter, Michelle, was born. The Greenblatts had a second daughter, Janice. They lived together in Bloemfontein, with Gogo in the maid’s quarters. Mrs Greenblatt worked as a dancing teacher, so the day-to-day nursery-care fell to Gogo. During our interviews, she spoke very affectionately of Michelle Greenblatt, as though she were her own child.

Gogo and her children moved with the family to Johannesburg. She built a house in the township of Alexandra and lived between that abode and the Greenblatt’s home in the nearby suburb of Glenhazel. Gogo told me she worked for the family for 30 years, at least until they emigrated to Irvine, California. When they left, she went on to work for another woman, Beth Taylor.

At the end of this interview, Gogo revealed that Mr and Mrs Greenblatt were to visit Cape Town soon. She had not seen them since they had left and was visibly nervous. The Greenblatts had left behind a domestic worker and would return to find a respected sangoma and director of the Shambala Foundation. She told me that she wondered how they would address one another. She had called Sheryl Madam, and Mr Greenblatt affectionately called the young woman he had found in Harrismith, *Tsotsi* (a term used to describe delinquents). What decorum would exist between these people now, 20 years later, 14 years into a democratic South Africa?

Kay came home as we were closing the interview. It was unusual to have someone else in the space, although it was her house. She told Gogo that she had that morning received an e-mail from Mr Greenblatt arranging a time to visit. Kay said she would take Gogo to meet them at their hotel. I told Kay that I also wanted to meet them, after Gogo had seen them, and asked at which hotel they would be staying. She looked at me askew, then

looked at Gogo, who had no reaction to my request. She looked back at me and unwillingly gave me the hotel name and the dates of their trip. I thought nothing of Kay's delayed response until I called the hotel the following week and was told that the Greenblatts had already checked out. Was it a coincidence or had Kay deliberately not wanted me to meet with them?

I knew that Mr Greenblatt had played a crucial role in Gogo's life, as she talked of him with more emotion probably than anyone else she had spoken about – including her own children – except perhaps about his first-born daughter, Michelle.

I had decided when I started interviewing Gogo that I would only speak with third parties when I felt I had gathered enough data from talking to Gogo herself. I was ready, though, to make an exception, as it seemed fortuitous that her employers would be visiting while I was interviewing her to write her biography.

What did I want to know from them? I wanted to know what kind of emotion, if any, they showed when talking about their former domestic worker? If she spoke so fondly of Mr Greenblatt, how did he speak about her? I had wondered why Mr Greenblatt called Gogo *Tsotsi* – and why she did not mind this nickname. Was it a joke, or did he know more about her nature?

After the interview, it was difficult to find a time that Gogo agreed to meet me. Again it was two weeks until we next met. I began to worry that Gogo was avoiding me, and that she would begin to ignore the contract she said she had supposedly forgotten.

## 5. GOGO TRAINS AS A SANGOMA: MAKHOSI ATHOBILE'S STORY

Our next interview was on 21 March 2007, Human Rights Day, at Kay's house. It was mid-morning but the curtains were drawn, leaving the whole room dark and dreary. I had hoped Gogo would talk about her meeting with the Greenblatts. She merely told me that it had been good to see them, and smiled to herself. I was worried that the times between meetings may start to get further and further apart, so I wanted to waste no time in trying to get as much information as I could about Gogo's life.

When the Greenblatts emigrated, Gogo began working for a woman named Beth Taylor. I had hoped she would talk about the Greenblatts. Instead she spoke about her next employer, introducing her to me by saying, 'He like my sister that woman.' Like Mr Greenblatt, Beth played a catalysing role in Gogo's life. It was because of her that Gogo moved to Cape Town. It was also because of her that Gogo eventually trained as a sangoma.

I looked at her across the table in Kay's sunless lounge, and could make out the small mole on the bridge of her nose. When I first met Gogo in February 2006, she said she used to have a circle of them on her head, and they formed a cross on her back. During that interview, she also pulled some of her hair aside to show me a patch of white hair at the back of her head, with which she was born. Her mother told her it had something to do with the ring of skin excrescences, which grew like a crown on her head. There was only one of them left, but she said they had also grown around her wrists and her knees. I had never before seen anything like it, - it looked like an indigenous *fynbos* flower growing from skin or tissue. She understood from her mother that these features were special signs indicating *inthwaso*.

### 5.1 *Inthwaso* (the call to divination)

The word *thwasa* is used to describe someone who has begun his training, a trainee. *Inthwaso* means ‘the call to divination’. Often it is indicated by a period of undiagnosable illness or so-called madness. This is accompanied by dreams in which family members who have died contact the prospective initiate. Often the dreams can be quite literal – about ceremonies and being bedecked in skins and beads. In most circumstances, the sangoma with whom the dreamer should train, or the place where that sangoma lives, is shown to them in their dreams. It is up to the *thwasa* to seek her teacher. These summoning signs can manifest as undiagnosable physical symptoms, which intensify if the calling is ignored – this is known as *thwasa* illness. The aggravation of symptoms can also indicate that the time to enter into training has come.

Almost all sangomas, when called to train would have experienced an illness of some kind, for example, unexplained paralysis or epilepsy. Often allopathic doctors cannot offer cures. *Thwasa* illness is diagnosed when accompanied by mental disturbances, vivid dreams, depression, and oftentimes neglected hygiene.<sup>89</sup>

Studies of shamans worldwide indicate a similar initiatory illness to the Southern African *thwasa*<sup>90</sup>. Anthropologists have differentiated these illnesses from usual cases of neuroses or psychoses. From within Western understanding, the experiences of an initiate are interpreted as needing to be resolved as a part of their professional development. The initiation is seen as a death and rebirth. Anthropologist, Michael Winkelman, views it

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<sup>89</sup> W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Rituals and Medicines: Indigenous Healing in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Donker, 1989).

Vera Buhrmann, *Living in Two Worlds* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1984).

David Cumes, *Africa in My Bones: A Surgeon's Odyssey into the Spirit World of African Healing* (Cape Town: Spearhead, 2004).

Nokuzola Mndende, *African Spiritual Journey: Rites of passage among the Xhosa speaking of South Africa* (Cape Town: Icamagu Institue. 2006a).

<sup>90</sup> Michael Winkelman, ‘Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Shamans.’, in Mariko Namba Walter and Eva Jane Neumann Fridman, ed., *Shamanism: An Encyclopaedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture* (California: ABC-Clio, 2004).

through the lens of Western psychology: ‘Disintegration of one’s own psychological structures and the inability of the psyche to maintain its integrity is experienced symbolically as death. The rebirth cycle reflects... the psychological reorganisation guided by drives toward holism and integration’.<sup>91</sup>

Also, as understood in Rogerian person-centred psychology, having the experience of an illness imbues the healer with the empathy necessary to treat others.<sup>92</sup> I. M. Lewis quotes Shirokogoroff’s description of the phenomenon of the initiatory illness as something that has to be worked through and overcome successfully. ‘The Shaman may begin his life career with a psychosis but cannot carry on his functions if he cannot master himself’.<sup>93</sup>

Even after initiation, practising shamans are often judged as tinged with psychopathology. Winkelman, however, has found that shamanic altered states of consciousness differ from schizophrenia in that shamans enter altered states of consciousness deliberately; they do not lose their social interaction and communication skills; and they are able to discriminate between shamanic experiences and everyday life.<sup>94</sup> The beginning exercises of training involve learning to increase the vividness of mental imagery. The shaman then learns to control this imagery.

The jury is still divided about the ‘*thwasa* illness’. From the perspective of DSM-IV-defined psychopathology, individuals suffering from the illness present with symptoms akin to psychiatric illnesses. Gogo’s belief that she communicates with her dead

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<sup>91</sup> Michael Winkelman, ‘Neuropsychology of Shamanism’, in Mariko Namba Walter and Eva Jane Neumann Fridman, ed., *Shamanism: An Encyclopaedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture* (California: ABC-Clio, 2004) 194.

<sup>92</sup> Carl Rogers, *Client-centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory* (London: Constable, 1951).

<sup>93</sup> In Lewis 113.

<sup>94</sup> Winkelman ‘Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Shamans,’ 271.

grandfather could from this perspective be considered a delusion. ‘Delusions are steadfast beliefs held by the individual despite contradictory objective evidence’.<sup>95</sup>

Seen through the perspective of African Traditional Religion, however, the supposedly undiagnosable symptoms of ‘*thwasa* illness’ are indicators of the individual having been chosen by his ancestors to train in healing work for the benefit of his community.<sup>96</sup> One does not choose to become a sangoma, one is called into the practice. Many psychiatric wards in South Africa are believed to shelter and treat *thwasas*. They experience symptoms of mental illness because they are being called to train and have not understood the summons, or cannot afford it, or, like Gogo, have chosen not to train. According to all the sangomas I spoke with, and their families, training is a long, arduous and expensive process.

## **5.2 Gogo grappled with her gift**

As described above, Gogo was born with the markings that in her culture distinguished her early as having been ‘called’. Gogo says that she did not want to be a sangoma as she saw them as dirty people, literally, who did not wash, ‘They always have snakes. Things hanging. Herbs all over their head. Ew!’ Gogo surprised me by going so far as to say she ‘hated’ them, screwing up her face in disgust. The shadows of her face were frightening in the strange lighting of the lounge. Did she still think of sangomas as dirty and reprehensible, despite herself now belonging to the fraternity?

Gogo’s earliest experience that shaped her view of sangomas was of her aunt, her father’s sister. Gogo told me that all the professional paraphernalia she now possesses once belonged to this aunt. All I have seen of her aunt’s are the beads she was wearing around her wrists and ankles, and her carved walking stick. She described her aunt as a very ‘strong’ sangoma. ‘I wish I can be like her,’ Gogo has said. From the story she proceeded to tell, I suspected she meant in ability, not in morality...

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<sup>95</sup> David Sue, Derald Wing Sue and Stanley Sue, *Understanding Abnormal Behaviour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000) 10.

<sup>96</sup> Mndende (2006a).

Gogo was ten when her aunt was newly married and she went to live with her to help her, and, I assumed, possibly also to learn from her. Her aunt trained *thwasas* and so there were many people around the house and there was a lot for Gogo to help with. After living with her aunt for six months, she discovered that her aunt was having an affair with one of her *thwasas*. The way she described the scenario to me in the dull light of Kay's lounge, was strange. It seems that Gogo was more annoyed about the fact that she and the other *thwasas* had to go out and gather herbs while this man stayed behind, than that she disapproved of what happened when her aunt and her lover remained alone at home. She was also disturbed by the fact that her aunt broke the code. As in Western cultures, for a teacher to sleep with a pupil was taboo. I did not sense as much disapproval of the fact that Gogo's aunt was cheating on her new husband.

The ten year-old Gogo challenged her aunt's behaviour and sought her husband out at his workplace. She told her uncle, 'I want to go home. You must take me home now. I can't take this anymore. Why these people have to work for that guy? Why they have to dig herbs for him? And him he stays with my Auntie there and they close the door every time.' Gogo quietly revealed to me that she now believed she was wrong to have done this, and continued telling the story, to explain the consequences of her action.

Gogo and her uncle went back to the house and caught her aunt with the new man she had fallen in love with. The husband beat him. Her aunt ran outside and drank some *koperdip*. Gogo said it was what farmers give to sheep in small doses to cleanse them of worms and to keep them docile. It is likely the vernacular for Cooper's Dip, which is a mixture of arsenic and sulphur added to sheep's dip and fodder to improve the quality of their wool and digestion – and is toxic in high doses.

Gogo's aunt came back to Gogo in the house, took off her beads and gave them to her. Gogo saw yellow bubbles forming at the side of her aunt's mouth before she finally died.

### 5.3 Dreams and visions

As she grew older, Gogo told me she received other ‘gifts’, as they are referred to by sangomas. She had powerful dreams and visions, and her father’s dead father became her guiding ancestor. She did not know her grandfather before his death, but her father confirmed the identity of the man communicating to Gogo from the ancestor realm. Still, she did not heed the callings that took different forms over many, many long years.

She had dreams from a very early age, Gogo told me, dreams that frightened her, about snakes and bones. She did not distinguish between dreams and visions, and told me she also had these dreams while at church. At a stage, when the priest would get up to make his sermon, Gogo would see the scene transformed. She saw snakes in the church, and the priest and his congregants were all skeletons. She illustrated this image to me from her chair opposite by holding her arms out in front of her and opening and closing her jaw. ‘I saw people going to die.’ This happened every time she went to church, and eventually, with great sadness, she stopped going.

As the sun moved from the east, the room darkened even more. Gogo told me she would never forget a particular vision (she called it a dream) that she had had at church when still very young. She described having seen a large river flowing through the church. Everyone got caught in the rush of its waters. Suddenly she was wearing an expansive round gown sewn of many fabrics and many colours. Drowning people grabbed onto the edges of the cloth and she pulled them out. She described the scene in such vivid detail, using her hands and her facial expressions, that it was easy for me to imagine what she might have seen in the church as a young woman.

After this dream, her grandfather told her that if she did not want to be a sangoma, there was a ritual to perform. She would have to light candles and pray for the people. She was told to get 12 candles of different colours, each colour holding a different meaning. When I asked about the meaning of the colours, she cocked her head, raised her eyebrow and gave me an impish grin, implying that I was never going to get an answer to that. At the

time of the interview, I smiled back at Gogo's cute grin and respected her implied wishes not to be probed any further. Later, however, I was irritated that this was the deepest I was able to get into the secrets of her sangoma training. From time to time during the research process, I was also frustrated with myself for choosing to be so respectful, and not to push Gogo for more answers.

I asked why candles were so important.

She sounded shocked at my question, and asked, 'How do you pray?'

I told her I was Jewish and that we did not pray with candles.

She knew the laws of Judaism, she said. She had worked 30 years as a domestic worker for a Jewish family in Johannesburg.

'The Greenblatts?' I asked, hoping she would say more about their recent meeting in Cape Town.

'Ja,' was all she answered.

I felt like my line of questioning had reached another dead end.

#### **5.4 Beth urges Gogo to train**

Realising I was not going to hear more about the Greenblatts, I instead turned the focus of the interview back to the role Beth had played in her life and asked, 'How long did you work for Beth?'

'There was the time in Jo'burg,' she answered, thinking out loud, and counted on her fingers. 'And then I go to her in Cape Town.' She held out the fingers of both hands, looked down at them, but still did not answer my question.

Instead Gogo told me a little about her relationship with Beth.

Beth worked from home as a massage therapist. 'When she's doing massage I was always helping her,' Gogo told me. It seemed that Gogo had worked in a capacity other than as a domestic worker – but what exactly did Gogo mean? How did she help Beth?

As the politics of the day prescribed: Gogo was the servant, and Beth the Madam; however, in this case, the Madam recognised Gogo's talents. Beth called Gogo in as a consultant to read clients 'energies', their 'auras'. As this was during apartheid, the white clients were told that Gogo was just bringing them tea.

It surprised me to hear Gogo talking about energies and auras, the jargon of the New Age. Later in the interview, she spoke about being 'clairvoyant'. I thought she might have heard the word from Beth. When I asked her where she learnt that word, she took offence and said, 'Margot, it's been long time I'm on this earth.'

Gogo said that she and Beth would pray and meditate together. Gogo described one day when they woke early to pray:

I go in trance. I don't even know what happened to me, there. I couldn't, they couldn't wake me ...until ...the gardener come. Beth's partner and, and Beth, they didn't know what to do with me. I was like a sleeping but ... I didn't know myself. I saw this big, big guy coming with yellow clothing like a priest. I couldn't see his head. I couldn't see his feet because they covered. He come ... He told me you are going very far. You have to help people with your hands, with your energy, with everything. I'm coming to bless you now. But I was making like this when I want to say *enkosi, enkosi*, [thank you<sup>97</sup>] no, no, no: I don't want to look at you. I don't know, but I want to know where you coming from? You coming from the light? Or are you coming from the dark?

Working within a spiritual healing tradition herself, Beth kept asking Gogo why she ran from her gift. Perhaps she perceived Gogo's psychic abilities, perhaps she was envious and could not understand that someone would squander a gift of the kind she thought Gogo had been given. Gogo, however, continued to resist. She had managed to placate her ancestors with the rituals that her grandfather had told her to do for decades. It was after witnessing Gogo in this trance state that Beth encouraged Gogo to train as a sangoma.

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<sup>97</sup> M.S.

I wondered whether the phenomenon of New Age spirituality gave Gogo and Beth a language with which they could share similar aspects they had both experienced, and continued to experience, in their vastly different upbringings and environments. I know that the language of New Age philosophy helped me to understand and accept certain things that Gogo told me without feeling the need to question them further, as perhaps another researcher may have done. This was positive because Gogo felt understood, but also, I did not ask for as much clarification as I otherwise might have, and made the assumption that we were talking about similar phenomena.

### **5.5 Dream prophecy**

Gogo told me that she had various teachers over the many years it took her to qualify as a sangoma. I tried, but could not establish exactly *how many* years. She had two different teachers in Johannesburg, but after some time of study with each of them, she returned to work for Beth. She learnt much from her second teacher, and shared the last experience that she had with him which was about a dream about a future occurrence.

‘It was Saturday night that day, I won’t forget it.’ She remembered that her ancestors appeared in a dream and told her that in the morning, a young man from Natal would come to her. She said, ‘My ancestors they tell me that someone kill his parents, now they kill his young brother, and buried his head in the *kraal* - where they put the cows?’ Gogo said no one knew where the body was, but that she was instructed to tell the young man to dig in the forest nearby his house, next to a big rock. Gogo told me that in her dream, she asked her ancestors who it was that had killed the young man’s brother. Her grandfather answered her: ‘The father of that young man coming, he has seven wife. So now they fighting, because they say that man love that one more than that one, and that one mustn’t have a boys, because if she’s got the boys, *then...*’ Gogo’s voice trailed off but she pinched the sides of her mouth together, raised a finger, and gave me a look that said she need not finish her sentence, I should just understand. ‘Then I told my teacher the dream,’ she said.

Gogo told me that the next morning, she and her teacher waited for the young man to arrive as predicted in her dream. ‘He come exactly like I said, eight o’clock, with two men.’ She told me that she became so nervous to consult with her first clients, telling me, ‘I start to shake like this.’ She shook her left arm violently. ‘I don’t know why – I knew everything.’

Gogo recounted that the three men were angry with her teacher for not seeing them himself and instead proffering a training sangoma. She said she nevertheless called on her ancestors. ‘I tell the men, you not from here. You did go to three sangomas in Soweto, but still you wasn’t satisfied. Now, I must tell you why you here.’ According to Gogo, she gave them all the information her ancestors had given her in her dream the previous night: ‘I say first of all, you must dig inside the house, when you cook with that round thing in the middle of the house? You make fire there? I said, then you dig there. I said you will find two heads, in *your* house. You go out, you go to the kraal, you will find the head of your brother there, and the body on the forest.’

Gogo said that she did not want to tell the man who had murdered his parents and brother because: ‘I don’t want to break his family. But it’s not a person like outside, is the person inside the family.’ She knocked on the coffee table between us when she said ‘inside’. Her inclusion of details in her tale about her first client made me think that it was an event she was still proud of.

I did not hear any accounts from Gogo’s clients in the time that I interviewed her. I took for granted the powers that she might have from the effect she had on the lives of the women with whom she had worked, from her own stories, and from her indisputable charisma.

It was clear that Gogo still received much guidance and knowledge in her dreams, and that she still regarded them as instructive and prophetic. During our interviews, she indicated that she spent much time attempting to unlock the metaphors of their messages. ‘Sometimes I think, why am I not *still* like that, what happen to me?’ Gogo sounded as though she was questioning her current abilities as a sangoma. ‘Because he was going to

Natal, and he did find everything I told them. After everything, they come back there where I was training to tell my teacher that they found the heads, and that his *thwasa* was right.’

Gogo was living with her teacher and his other students. After she made this prediction, he suggested that she leave, for her own protection: the other students were jealous and had become antagonistic towards her. Not yet fully qualified as a sangoma, she returned to work for Beth.

Finally, however, she became physically ill. Her legs ‘stopped working’. She lifted the red, black, and white cloth she was wearing and showed me a clean scar at the bottom of her calf, and told me that she had pulled a muscle. Gogo could not work anymore and left Johannesburg to stay on the farm where her father and stepmother then worked in Zastron. She told me she was there for three years. Elisha was still alive at the time. He worked in Orkney on the railway and visited her and their young son, Russell, in Zastron, one weekend a month.

Her grandfather apparently appeared to her in Zastron and asked, ‘How long you going to stay here in that chair? You must stand up and go to Mount Frere.’ He told her that her sangoma is there and that he will go with her, ‘When you are in Mount Frere, in town, I’ll tell you what to do.’ She told him she could not walk, and asked how it was possible she could become a sangoma. Her grandfather replied, ‘In the morning, seven o’clock you must go. You will see; you will stand up.’

Gogo claimed it happened as he said it would. She said that she just stood up. ‘My leg make k-k-k-g-g-joo!’ Gogo made a cartoon-like noise that sounded like a joint uncomfortably clicking into place. The sound seemed out of place in the small room in suburbia where we sat and chatted. She no longer resisted her calling, she told me, and went to Mount Frere in the then Transkei, now Eastern Cape, to train with a sangoma of the Bhaca tribe.

## 5.6 The Bhaca tribe

‘You know, the ones who cut their face here?’ Gogo asked, and brought her nail to her forehead above her eyebrows and drew short vertical lines. I had asked people I met who had those scars and the bearers explained they were made for preventative or curative reasons. ‘They’re Bhaca,’ she elaborated.

The Bhaca are a small Nguni sect who speak Xhosa and live in the area around Mount Frere in the Eastern Cape, close to the Kwa-Zulu Natal border. When I learnt this, I realised there was so much I did not know about my fellow citizens. When the new constitution was adopted, it was published in 11 official languages. I thought those languages represented the tribes that continued to exist in South Africa. The history is much more complex than that. For modern anthropologists, the term Xhosa designates a linguistic, rather than an ethnic, category. The Bhaca are one of the tribes that speak Xhosa.

Information on the Bhaca is very scarce. The only literature I found was written in 1962 by anthropologist David Hammond-Tooke. I also wondered what indigenous people had written about their own heritages. Hammond-Tooke also complained about the ‘meagre literature’. His research discusses the difficulties in reconstructing what happens in an illiterate society, because details are lost. In the last few decades those who knew the customs have died and the accounts of those who remain do not always coincide – particularly in the chronology of events.<sup>98</sup> I, too, encountered similar difficulties in my struggle to understand and find records of the details of the sangoma training.

The socio-political structure of the Bhaca tribe was similar to other tribes who practised African Traditional Religion. Hammond-Tooke says of it: ‘The important principle of primogeniture, respect for seniors [and] the well-being and prosperity of the living depend

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<sup>98</sup> W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Bhaca Society: A People of the Transkeian Uplands, South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1962) 11.

on the continued goodwill of the dead, the seniors who have passed on'.<sup>99</sup> When a child is born into the tribe, the ancestors are praised with the enunciation, '*Ithfongo likabwo lisebntile.*' 'The shade of my father has worked'.<sup>100</sup> Shade is another term to refer to a dead forebear.

The Bhaca proved to be an interesting tribe for Hammond-Tooke's study because they provide a bridge, both culturally and historically, between North and South (Cape) Nguni. The present-day culture, however, is closer to Cape Nguni, and there is intermarriage with the surrounding Mpondo, Hlubi, and Xesibe tribes. The anthropologist found that the story of the Bhaca 'falls naturally into three great episodes or phases, viz. the origin in northern Natal, the flight and period of wandering with no settled tribal home, and the eventual colonisation of their present territory in the Mount Frere district'.<sup>101</sup> Like Gogo, most members of the Bhaca tribe today are Christians but are still distinct in terms of language and culture from other Eastern Cape tribes. These tribes consider the Bhaca to be great witches and sorcerers. Hammond-Tooke discovered that the sangomas of the tribe are still considered a powerful force and the 'theories of magic are still vigorous'.<sup>102</sup>

During this interview Gogo made a prediction about my family. It had become so dark in the lounge, I struggled to see the page on which I was making notes. Neither of us thought to turn on the lights. She started to say something about my younger brother, and then stopped herself. She said, 'I don't even know if you have the young brother.' I did, I listened. She said he would have a son. Within a year, his wife was pregnant, and she gave birth to a strong boy. There was more to what Gogo said to me that day, but I choose to play the role of client, and not reveal it. This choice angers the researcher and academic in me. This aspect of me was also frustrated that Gogo had revealed so few facts about the process of training as a sangoma, and how she made her predictions.

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<sup>99</sup> Hammond-Tooke (1992) 262.

<sup>100</sup> Hammond-Tooke (1992) 260.

<sup>101</sup> Hammond-Tooke (1992) 2.

<sup>102</sup> Hammond-Tooke (1992) 262.

## 6. BETH'S SON – ADRIAN

Unfortunately, my concern about the lengthening gaps between interviews proved to be valid. Our next interview was three weeks later, on 14 June 2007. Before I had even stepped into Kay's kitchen, Gogo told me that she would soon be leaving for Zastron. I asked how long she would be away, and she did not know. My fears were calmed when she said she did not expect to be away longer than a month. Funders would be visiting from Chicago at the end of July and Kay needed Gogo to meet with them back in Cape Town.

The weather was typical of Cape Town winter on that day: a light rain and a strong wind. Grateful to be indoors, I took off my raincoat, and sat down. I turned on the recorder, aware of my rising desperation to capture as much information that could eventually become part of the story of Gogo I would end up writing.

Gogo began where we had left off during the previous interview and told me what happened when she returned from Mount Frere to Johannesburg. I wanted to know more about her training, rather. How was it that the resistant *thwasa* and domestic worker became a sangoma? She evaded all my probing, and I grew frustrated. *This* was what I had wanted to know.

Many months after this interview, I spoke with another sangoma, and told her about my project and my frustration. She laughed at my intention. 'First of all,' she said. 'No sangoma will tell you everything you want to know. Especially the ones who are being true to their guides. She must talk with her guides and can only tell you what they agree to. It is sacred.'

## 6.1 Gogo returns to Beth

After she had qualified as a sangoma, Gogo told me she returned to Johannesburg, and resumed working for Beth. I wondered if Beth had kept a position open for her throughout her different training processes. Why would she do this? What was the pay-off for her? I was further confused by Gogo's need, if now qualified, to continue doing domestic work, but she explained that it was part of her agreement with her ancestors. Training to become a sangoma is a very expensive process. Often this obstacle prevents *thwasas* from training at all. Some of the time, families will contribute to the tuition fees. Gogo could not rely on her father to support her training, so she said to me that her ancestors told her she would always be bound to 'the white people'. She would have to work for them in order to be able to afford to become a sangoma.

When she returned to work for the Taylor family, Adrian, one of Beth's sons, had been hospitalised. Gogo shook her head, and said, 'They says he was mad. I won't ever say that name right. Maybe you can put two and two together?'

'Schizophrenic?' I offered.

'Ja. So I tell his mum I want to go see him. When we come there, to the hospital, Adrian is there, you know, like somebody, like a zombie. I stand on the gate there, I open the gate for the car. I call, Adrian! She just *gooi* everything, and he run to come to me. I run to her.'

Gogo told me that when she asked him what was wrong, he told her he had voices in his head, and was seeing 'scary people'.

'I said, "Where are your clothes? Take them, because I am taking you home!"'

Gogo said he was thrilled, because he had prayed for Sophie (as he called Gogo) to come fetch him.

Gogo became animated as she told me about the rescue operation. She began to talk louder and faster. She told me that she was met with resistance from Beth's partner, Morne, who was 'boiling'. He angrily threatened Gogo, 'If Adrian starts his nonsense – it's your problem.' She told him not to worry; she would fix him; he just needed to give her some

money. He grew angrier. She insisted. She told me she took his money, went to Shoprite, bought *mielie* meal and *ntombo miela* from which she made *umqobothi* beer, which is used in rituals and ceremonies. She was going to train Adrian.

I was fascinated with the way Gogo described her diagnosis of Adrian from within her worldview. I found the story all the more poignant because, in the previous interview, Gogo had told me that it was his mother Beth who had encouraged her own training.

## 6.2 The old days' ways

'The big mistake of white people, when the child has got – the sangoma – the healing thing, they don't understand what is it.' Gogo reckoned that people were too quick to diagnose pathology: 'They forget quickly. Long ago, there was no doctors, even to the Jewish. They have prophet; they have people, which he can work on them. The old day's ways.' Gogo tapped the table, drumming out the pertinence of her statement. 'I can train, teach Adrian things and we can go sit outside, so she can even learn to listen the wind and listen the grass, and know, learn all these things. She can go sit on the sea and just sit, and listen what the water says.' Gogo claims, 'Adrian is now at university. He's perfect, that one!' He is without medication.

I asked her if she thought that everybody whom psychologists diagnose with schizophrenia is actually a *thwasa*.

'I don't know. It depends. They don't all have to train like me,' she said. She continued by saying that psychologists should teach them that if they hear voices, not to be afraid, but to respond: 'Okay, here I am, I am listening. You tell me what you want from me, and then you tell me which side you coming.'

What did she mean: which side?

'Don't allow the dark angels to come to you,' Gogo explained. 'They not good. Only allow what comes from the white side.'

I asked Gogo if she, too, had to block certain messages she received. She surprised me by telling me that when anyone starts to train in spirit-work, she needs to learn what guidance to follow.

‘How does one know the difference?’ I asked.

‘The way they going to tell you, they will always not saying good things,’ she answered. ‘Like if they is speaking like swearing, you will know from that they are not right.’ She continued, ‘They will promise you money always, lots of richness, nice things. You will have everything you want. You know straight from there that they no good!’

Gogo wanted to teach the parents of white children who ‘heard voices and saw visions’ not to dismiss them as ‘mad’ but rather to encourage the children to pay attention to them. She questioned: *Why should it not be that ‘spirits or ancestors’ or ‘angels or guides’ are talking to them?* She reiterated that the first thing the parents should teach their children is to ask whether the voices are coming from the side of good or of evil, and learn not to allow the evil spirits to talk to them. Gogo claimed she taught Adrian how to focus his attention on the ‘voices’ he heard.

I was transfixed by Gogo’s approach to what would unquestioningly be deemed as psychopathology in the system of psychology that I had studied. I was amazed that it had supposedly helped Adrian. A part of me could not fully accept that Adrian was well – my formal education ran too deep.

I was also surprised by Beth’s complete trust of Gogo to handle her son’s health. On Gogo’s insistence, and against her partner’s wishes, Beth took Adrian out of the care of the traditional Western psychiatric system. Beth trusted Gogo’s expertise more than she did that of the white doctors in treating her son’s ailments. At this point, I wondered what a conversation between me and Beth would sound like.

Gogo had returned from Mount Frere a qualified sangoma. She had presumably learnt many healing techniques while there. She had, moreover, been accepted into an elite, and

powerful, coterie – as viewed from within the African Traditional Religious cosmology, as well as the New Age movement to which Beth undoubtedly subscribed.

Gogo not only belonged to the imagined community of sangomas, but for Beth, she was also part of the imagined community of mental health care specialists. Gogo was now regarded as such a ‘merchant of certainty’ – to repeat Zygmunt Bauman’s phrase. This was shown by the fact that a white woman in apartheid South Africa was willing to place her own son’s health in her employee’s hands.

## **7. GOGO GOES UNDERGROUND WITH THE ANC**

Just a few days later, on 19 June 2007, we had our next interview. I was glad that it was so soon after the last interview, and thought that maybe the pattern was changing. She had spoken so freely the previous week and was responsive to my questions. At the time, I could not have guessed it was to be the last interview for the year.

The morning had been sunny, and we both remarked on how grateful we were that the rain had abated for a few days. In winter in Cape Town, it can rain for two weeks without pause. When the sun does come out, it becomes still and hot; and dark moods are removed with the raincoats. Gogo, however, had not released hers; she was as gloomy as the cloud that covered Table Mountain.

### **7.1 Youth Day**

Since our previous interview, South Africa had commemorated Youth Day, a public holiday honouring the June 16 student uprising of 1976. When we met again at Kay's house I asked Gogo what she had done to mark the occasion. As usual, I sat on the low couch, opposite Gogo. She told me that she had been at the Shambala Foundation in Indlovu. They had held a ceremony where the children sang and made her proud; 'Their voices, they so nice; they trained themselves. God, they were so good.'

Despite the praise in her voice, she sunk deeper into the armchair, and I realised her despondency had something to do with the event. Her right arm rested on the arm of her chair and she slumped her head into it, loudly releasing a sigh. She was quiet for a moment; and then revealed what seemed to have been on her mind for days.

'It's the day that the children, they must remember what they done, on the June 16. How do they going to remember, Margot?'

I looked at her. Her eyes were pleading, but I had no answers.

‘They don’t tell them the right way,’ she explained. ‘They just saw them on the TV how many children die when the police shoot them and then what they doing to stop the children from being there.’

I thought of the famous picture of Hector Pieterse, his sister holding his limp body, her tortured face.

‘The teacher now, they’re not at school. When they going to teach the children about when they died?’

By mid-June 2009, municipal workers in South Africa had been on strike for over three weeks, and no negotiations had been agreed to as yet. In one of the biggest strikes of the post-apartheid era, nearly one million public service workers, involving 17 unions, and spear-headed by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), had begun striking on June 1. They demanded an across-the-board increase of 12 percent, plus increases in health and housing benefits. Many strikers were quoted as speaking bitterly about the contrast between their demand for a 12 percent increase and the 57 percent that has been recommended for President Thabo Mbeki and his cabinet.<sup>103</sup> In many cases over the past few weeks, the protests had turned violent.

The strike included teachers at all public schools. As with most strikes, the strikers incited one another and prevented any teachers who wanted to work from entering campuses. Children had been denied classes for nearly a month.

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<sup>103</sup> Chris McGreal, ‘South Africa Hit by Strike as Left Challenges ANC Leadership,’ *Guardian*. Guardian, 13 June 2007, Web. 18 June 2009.

Barbara Slaughter, ‘General Strike Hits South Africa,’ *World Socialist Website*, International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), 15 June 2007, Web, 18 June 2009.

Workers Vanguard, ‘Public Services Strike Shakes South Africa; Workers Fight Neo-Apartheid Misery,’ *Workers Vanguard No. 894*, International Communist League, 8 June 2007, Web 18 June 2009.

‘The teachers *toyi-toyi*. For the money.’ This was what was upsetting Gogo. ‘The children died because they want the better learning, the better teaching. They didn’t want only Afrikaans. They want to learn what every children in this country learn, which they didn’t have. But now who’s going to give them?’ Her voice was angry, but calm. ‘What they teaching children, now, Margot? Is this what the children *toyi-toyi* for on June 16th? No. Children *toyi-toyi* for better life.’

I thought about what I had read in the papers over the weekend. In 1953 the Apartheid Government ratified The Bantu Education Act. The author of the legislation, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd (then Minister of Native Affairs, later Prime Minister), stated: ‘Natives must be taught from an early age that equality with Europeans is not for them.’ R644 a year was spent on a white child's education but only R42 on that of a black child. There was also a lack of qualified teachers. Because of the government's homelands policy, no new high schools were built in Soweto between 1962 and 1971. The increase in secondary school attendance, when new schools were built, had a significant effect on youth culture. Secondary school students formed their own, politicised identities. When it was decreed that Afrikaans was to become a language of instruction at school, the situation was already volatile.

We sat quietly opposite one another for some time. She looked down, every now and then wiping a hand across her soft face. I was stiff, sitting with clenched muscles at the edge of my seat. I did not know how to console Gogo, or if she wanted consolation or assurance at all. I sensed her emotion arose from a deeper belief, one which she articulated later in the interview, that: ‘The world is not right.’ Through her long life, she had experienced tragedy and disappointment, but these disappointments were not confined to her personal experience. It seemed many times in our interviews that she was saying that she experienced the world as out of kilter with her ideals.

I felt uncomfortable, stuck between wanting to be a friend and commiserate with her and to be a therapist wanting to understand the depth and origin of her passion. My body

relaxed, however, as I returned to being researcher. ‘Where were you on June 16, 1976?’ I asked; never expecting the answer that followed.

## **7.2 A secret meeting**

Gogo told me that one evening, during the first week of June 1976, she was walking from work to church when she passed a few young men sitting on the pavement in Alexandra. They called out to her and she went along with them. They took her to a secret African National Congress meeting.

I was surprised and asked, ‘Why did they ask you to come along?’

‘They just chose me,’ she answered. ‘But in the meantime I am ANC, but secretly, from long ago, from Bloemfontein.’

My surprise turned to shock. I had known Gogo for over a year now and not once had any involvement in the ANC or politics even been hinted at. She continued talking, and I hoped I could mask my shock and that a clue would arise from what she said.

‘Before they catch Madiba, we were doing these things secretly. We went to Lesotho at night-time to meetings, trying to decide what to do next, and da da da da and what what.’ Gogo often ended her stories or opinions in this manner, expecting me to fill in the dada-what-what.

Gogo explained that while in Bloemfontein, following her then-boyfriend, she joined the banned ANC movement. During the apartheid years, police would randomly raid people’s houses. It was the time of passbooks and if non-whites were caught spending a night outside the area of jurisdiction stamped in their passbook, it was grounds for arrest.

One night, police searched Gogo’s room and found she that had embroidered the ANC symbols and colours – green, yellow and black – onto her bed-linen. (I thought this was a strange thing for someone in an underground political movement to have done.)

Gogo said that she was arrested and tortured.

She described how seven policemen – four white and three black – interrogated her in a room at Park Road Police Station. She told me of how they circled around her body, as they held her on the floor with her arms behind her knees with a ‘*hanepooi*’ stick. The men questioned her about hidden ANC membership cards. She said nothing, she knew nothing. Gogo bent over from her position on the armchair and held her hands behind her knees. Her body squeezed into a ball. ‘That wasn’t the only time they take me,’ she said.

I was simultaneously horrified and confused. I felt awful when I even tried to imagine the cruelty that she described as having endured. In spite of my empathy, I felt something else arising that I could not immediately identify. I later realised that some part of me doubted the veracity of what she was telling me. Had this really happened? Why did I start to think that maybe her story was just that – a story? A story of grandiose phantasies?

Gogo continued with her tale. It was dramatic, but her voice betrayed no emotion, rising in inflection only when I interrupted now and then, asking for a detail here and there. Each time she elaborated at my request, she met my eye, and I detected a glint in hers and a slight smile on her lips. She was excited. Was she enjoying the comfort of sharing a horrific experience, or was she enjoying entertaining my amazement?

She told me she was afraid she would be sent to Robben Island, so she asked another prisoner to write to her family. Eventually, however, Mr Greenblatt came to the station and bailed his domestic worker out by convincing the police of her innocence. I do not know if Mr Greenblatt believed he was speaking the truth. Did he really believe that she was not actually an ANC member, or did he know his employee was involved in the underground revolutionary movement? She told me that her family had known nothing and that she later also kept her ANC membership a secret even from her second husband, Elisha.

Midday was approaching and the room began to darken as the sunlight moved away from the small east-facing window. I directed Gogo back to my inquiry of what she was doing on June 16, 1976.

The meeting she had gone to with the men the week before was attended by boys and girls. As she entered, Gogo held up her fist, they responded: ‘Amandla!’ Power! She remembered a tall man with a beard and long hair leading the meeting. I asked if she remembered who he was. She brushed my question aside and told me that he was killed in a ‘big *toyi-toyi*’ and that he was involved in training the Umkhonto we Sizwe. Later in the interview she remembered him as being Sobukwe.

When I arrived home later that day, still feeling uncomfortable about doubting Gogo’s story, I did some research and discovered that during 1976, Robert Sobukwe was under house arrest in Kimberley. He died a year later after an illness. It could not have been him at the meeting. Did Gogo merely mix up the name of the man who led the meeting, or had she not attended a meeting at all?

During the interview, Gogo told me more about the meeting. They discussed their intention to fight for a better education; as Gogo said, ‘to be teach proper, not half.’ Gogo told them she could not be involved, as she had a full time job. They told her she was perfectly stationed to work as a spy to listen to and report back what the *umlungus* said. ‘But good for me, I was working for the Jewish people, who were not involved in these things.’ Did she feel lucky because they treated her well, or because she did not have to consider betraying loyalties?

### **7.3 16 June 1976**

What had been planned in the meetings was soon put into action. ‘It was a Thursday, because after I cleaned, I was going to be off.’ (June 16, 1976 was actually a Wednesday.) Gogo remembered it was around 9am; she was finishing off the morning housework while listening to the radio. She told me, ‘All of a sudden, the radio says: It is the end of Soweto.

The police killing the children. The children *toyi-toying*. It's just smoke of guns. I didn't switch off the vacuum cleaner. I just throw it there. I run to my room. I take the money, I put the money in here.' She showed me where by dipping her hand into her ample bosom. 'And I run.' She went to Park Station.

'It's just police,' she described the scene to me. 'I can't catch the train. It's just bottles, stones, children running, people running. Police is shooting. I never saw things like that; see how many people die like that. And the children, they all over.'

According to Gogo, the event had been so well organised that children from schools all over the city knew what would be happening. I tried to understand what had happened, what Gogo had seen. From what she told me it seemed as though school children and university students stopped people travelling to work by insisting the train drivers reroute all trains to Soweto.

There had been *impimpis*, informers, she explained; so the police were already in Soweto. 'Everywhere – the police, the army – they were to stand next to the bus rank. So when everything happened, the army just said okay, here, our work now, we must fight. They fight what? Children?'

Gogo said that parents came to the station, crying for their children. 'The nother young guy told me: "Go back. Now it's still us. You big people's time is coming. You better go back now." And I did, I did go back.' She shared how helpless she felt as she turned around and walked all the way back to the quiet suburb of Glenhazel, where she sat down and cried, grieving for what she had seen.

'You saw children dying?' I asked.

'Millions, Margot. Yo! And dead. Ooooo. The people now, they don't understand. They use the public holiday to drink. But if it wasn't for June 16 ... June 16 it was the key to open for Congress people, ANC. It was the door to open that Mandela must come out at the jail.'

#### 7.4 The world is not right

Uncharacteristically, Gogo rounded off her discussion by reiterating her disgust with the teachers who were *toyi-toying* outside schools, and had not taught children that year about the 1976 protests. It was getting chilly, perhaps the rainclouds were rolling back in. Gogo pulled a shawl over her shoulders; I had not thought to bring my jacket from the car. She expressed her disappointment with the present government that it could let this happen. Gogo professed she had been disillusioned by the ANC choice of parliamentarians and what she described as the lack of acknowledgement for others who made sacrifices for the Freedom Charter. She then stated that if her father had only allowed her to attend school, she would now 'be somewhere'.

I understood that she believed if she were in a governmental position she would consider the wellbeing of the citizens, which she did not believe was happening in most of the offices of power in South Africa. The miserable mood she was in when I had arrived was intensified at this point of our interview, as she seemed to be saying: *The world is not right, and I have not been given a chance to make it better.*

An open window let in the chill of the winter wind. Gogo got up to close it. I took advantage of the moment's silence to sit back and try and make sense of the 1976 story and my conflicting reactions to it. She had told me a tale of torture, of political intrigue, of striving for a better world. She was genuinely upset by how she perceived aspects of current-day South Africa. Why did I feel bewildered? Why had she seemed so excited as she was telling me all this? Why had she not mentioned any of it sooner?

My confusion grew stronger, but I remembered Alessandro Portelli's notion of Uchronic Dreaming.<sup>104</sup> Oral sources of history tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted

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<sup>104</sup>. Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different,' *The Oral History Reader*, Perks and Thompson, Eds (New York: Routledge, 1998).

to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did. In *The Number*<sup>105</sup>, Jonny Steinberg described his subject's false belief that he too had been involved in student protests in the Cape during June 1976. The uprising against the apartheid government was so pivotal in their lives that many people actually believed they were playing a role in it, or in retrospect believed that they had. Was this also the case with Gogo?

Was the situation different: that instead of adding herself to the story of the struggle, she added the grand political narrative of South Africa to her story? Did she feel that her own story was not enough, that she also needed to play the political heroine in her Life-Myth? Was this myth constructed merely for me – and any potential audience she thought I might have? Was it a myth she had always told others? Was it a myth she told herself? Was it a myth at all? Everything felt unstable. I truly did not know.

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<sup>105</sup> Jonny Steinberg, *The Number* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2004).

## 8. SHAKA ZULU'S SANGOMA

It was starting to darken; the wet weather was probably blowing in from the west. Having left my jacket in the car, I was getting very cold, and found it difficult to focus on the interview. I was concerned that I might have to end it shortly. Gogo had told me the previous week that she would be going back to Zastron soon. While we were still face to face I wanted to make a time for us to meet again before she went. I asked her if she knew yet when she would be leaving. She answered, 'If- if- the- the funeral is this week, I'm going this week.'

'Who – whose funeral?' I wondered; she had not mentioned a funeral, or a death.

'My cousin's dad, my sister's son's mother-in-law also. And my sister is there. I have to be there for my sister's son, ja.'

I shivered, but then remembered I had legwarmers in my bag, and pulled them on. They warmed me up tremendously. I was glad to be comfortable, because I wanted to stay and hear what else Gogo would choose to reveal.

She looked at my feet and a confused look crossed her face. She said, 'Kay give me six pair socks, but I'm not wearing them, and my feet is ice cold. I don't know why I'm not wearing them. God knows.' We both laughed.

'That I can make,' said Gogo, pointing at my pink woollen legwarmers. 'I'm sewing, I have to finish Kay's things, handbags, and it is no time for me to do that. Because when I am leaving you now, I'm not going to come back quick, I don't think. I must be proper sangoma, not *umlungu* sangoma. Not sitting here making toys and bags. Why do I wearing beads for Margot? And then last night I just go boom, like a fire.'

'What do you mean?' I asked her.

### 8.1 My ancestors and my children, they making me so mad

'I don't know what is wrong with me. My ancestors and my children, they making me so mad.' She continued in a fast whisper, sharpening each consonant, 'Margot, my children

make me mad! I am telling you. And they old. Edward, he's 45 years old, my son, my firstborn. He is a man with daughters.

'The only child she doesn't bother me, it's Russell, the one in Jo'burg. She never say Mummy please do this. Can you help me here? Never ever. She build the house himself. And then, I mean, she never ask anything to me. Instead of which, she will phone me and ask, "Don't you eat Chicken Licken anymore, Mom?" When I said: "I do", he say: "Oh shame, Mama, I put money on your account. So go take the money and buy for yourself a Chicken Licken."' "

She returned to her tirade against Edward: 'I phone Edward on Sunday to just ask how are you, because she was quiet. "Um, no Mama, oh, oh, oh, oh, thank God you phone, I haven't got the money to phone you, and then when I send SMS you don't phone back". I said: "I'm not phoning somebody when she SMS me: Phone me." "With what? How can you ask me phone you when you know I'm not working?"'

'Where is Edward?' I asked, trying to distract her from continuing with this story and calm her down, but she was too angry.

'At Grahamstown. Then he says, "Can you borrow me R400 please?" I know they need money desperate. I mean, he – he had job when he was working with me when we – I was doing Shaka Zulu there, that movie.'

'What were you doing?' I quizzed.

'On the movie? Shaka Zulu's movie. You know that movie?' she raised her eyebrows, widened her eyes, and looked at me.

'The series – or what?'

'That movie, it was very nice movie. Um, it was very long ago.'

## **8.2 Gogo was Shaka Zulu's sangoma**

I realised she was referring to William Faure's ten part television series that depicted the glory and end of the life of the Zulu king Shaka, and his people's interaction with the invading British. It was an extremely popular programme, and remains so on DVD. It aired on South African TV during the 1980s, on Sundays. I remember sitting on the carpet

in front of the television watching the show with my younger brother and hardly ever getting to see the end of the episode before our mother called us for lunch. We would try and keep the television on while everyone was gathering and lunch was being served.

‘What were you doing there, on the movie?’ I asked again.

‘I was sangoma. I was Shaka Zulu’s sangoma, but I wasn’t sangoma at that time. I was sangoma at the movie.’

I was stunned. What she had just claimed literally pushed me back. I sat back in the couch, staring at Gogo, hardly able to prevent my jaw from dropping. First she was a member of the underground ANC movement, and now she acted in one of the most popular television series ever to come out of South Africa! And she would be going away next week.

When I regained my voice, I tried to place this occurrence in the already sketchy timeline I had of Gogo’s life – more for myself than anything else. Everything was shaken, everything around me seemed to be coming apart, and I needed to hold onto some sense of order, so I asked, ‘Is that when you were living with Beth?’

‘I was living – I started with Mr Greenblatt,’ she answered.

‘So when was that, what year? Do you remember?’

‘My God, it’s long. Very long. I think, um, I don’t know.’ Over the years, this was the most common answer I received from Gogo.

### **8.3 How Gogo came to play the role**

‘How did they find *you*?’ How did her story take this turn?

‘Eh. I was going to OK at lunchtime,’ she began to explain.

‘Where, which OK?’ I remembered the supermarket chain from my childhood.

‘At, um, you know what they call that Louis Botha Avenue?’ I nodded. I had passed by that branch every day on my way to school.

‘Ja, there, in Highlands North – that OK. We were staying at Glenhazel. So, when you come up there, I forgot what they call that park. There was a big school this side, and the park this side.’

I did not remember the park.

‘So when I saw these cars, they standing there, the movie people and then I end up be there. I just, I was just curious to go watch. So, there were three ladies there. They were wearing like I'm wearing, but the sangoma material, to be – they must act to be sangoma. That time they were doing *Thandi*, that movie. They couldn't understand what these people tell them, or how must they do, da, da, da, da, da. I just grab the card box – I say: ‘Hey! Hey! Shoo! Let me show you what these people want.’ I didn't know you have to stand there, talk again, and they said, quickly, ‘Cut, cut, cut!’ And this big French guy, he come. The meantime it's the boss of whatever.’

Gogo was present in the story, telling it with sound effects and large gestures. I could not help but laugh.

‘He come, he says, “Hi”. I said, “Hello. Oh sorry.”’ She put on an innocent face, and joined in my laughter. ‘She said, “No, no! Come!” They change everything. I must sit there, I must be sangoma now, ta, ta, ta, ta, ta. It happen like that. Then the Frenchman, he ask me, “Where are you staying?”’

Was William Faure French? I wondered.

‘How did you know what to do? You knew what to do because you'd seen your Auntie?’ I asked.

‘I knew what to do, because my Auntie was sangoma, you see. And when I'm home, I like to go to this ceremony of sangomas. I like to sing the song, sing for the sangoma. So, I knew everything, what it was happening there.’

Even if she considered them dirty? I thought to myself.

Gogo said that she was hired to play the role of Shaka Zulu's sangoma. She said she took Edward, who was then about 18, with her if he had a school holiday, also to work on the film. They filmed in Natal, which was at least four hours drive from Johannesburg. She

said that she would go there for two or three days at a time and then they brought her back to work at the Greenblatts.

‘All the way there and back? For how long?’

‘Maybe 18 months? Ja. They said they will do that – there and back again – because I was working, and then, if it’s the Jewish thing, I will never move. Like *Pesach*, Passover, da, da, da, da, da, all those things. I have to be in, because I was cooking. I will smell fish like juuu.’

I did not know what the smell of fish had to do with the story, but I did know the potent odour of minced fish being cooked for *Pesach* or *Shabbat*.

‘So you can teach me to make *gefilte* fish?’ I joked.

Gogo burst out laughing: ‘My God! *Gefilte* fish! *Wena!* Whoooooo. You know, I always sitting here and looking when Kay cooking. Do you think I can cook? I don’t think so. Anymore.’

I had wondered if Gogo cooked for herself while staying at Kay’s house.

‘But when I’m at home, I do sometimes,’ she continued. ‘I will say, everybody after church, “You coming to eat at my house.” And my son in Jo’burg, she says: “I like when my mummy come to visit, because I’m going to eat salad.”’

We both laughed at the culinary influence of Gogo’s close association with white South Africans.

Then Gogo abruptly said, ‘So, and we walk there, and the Zulus, they were singing, boom, boom, boom.’ It was rare for Gogo to return to the story she had been telling, she would usually go off on a tangent. It took me by surprise.

‘Can you remember the name of the Frenchman?’ I felt I needed to validate as much as I could of her claim.

‘I don’t know. But you know that Frenchman I saw? He’s a little bit older now. Remember when you come to me at Lyndene, at Lucille’s place?’ Gogo was talking about our first interview, over a year previously. ‘It was him came there.’

He certainly had not come during our interview, but perhaps she meant in the time she was staying at Lyndene.

‘Ah, I don’t know what that guy’s name. They were always naming them different, you know. Even my name, they wasn’t even call me Sophie there.’

‘What did they call you?’ Perhaps this could be a clue.

‘Thembikile.’

‘What does that name mean?’

‘It’s mean to trust. They trust you.’

#### **8.4 Myth or Truth, and is there a difference?**

As she spoke, I forgot my ethics; I was anxious to leave as quickly as possible to tell someone – anyone – what she had just told me. Guiltily, I remembered that at the beginning of the research process I had assured Gogo I would tell only my professors what was said in the interviews. I left the interview on 19 March 2007 tingling – I *wanted* to believe what she had told me.

I sat in my car outside the gates to the townhouse complex, trying to calm down. My confusion over Gogo’s telling of her tale gave way to a much deeper, darker, more sinister problem: Doubt. Why did I feel this way? Why had it been so difficult to get Gogo to answer any of my questions in previous interviews and why had she divulged so much in this one? I wrote in my journal: ‘How deep have I dived into Gogo’s life? Today I am not sure if I have found a deeper layer of truth that she hasn’t yet revealed to me. Or a layer of psychopathology that other people have been convinced of but I cannot allow myself to believe.’

On my way home, I stopped by the DVD store and was viscerally thrilled that they had a copy of the *Shaka Zulu* series. I rented the first two disks. When I got home, I plugged the first into my laptop; as I heard it spin, I connected to the internet. My confusion had turned into excitement, but that excitement changed into incredulity. The incredulity was close to anxiety; I was close to anger. What was true of all that she had previously told me? Were

all her stories cleverly concocted, and repeated over years? Did she make things up on the spot?

I asked the question in the worst forum I could have: Facebook. I changed my Facebook status update to: *Margot Saffer is about to watch the Shaka Zulu series – for good reason – her sangoma claims she was the sangoma in the series. Is she delusional?*

By that stage, only a few hours after the interview, I really doubted the stories that Gogo had just told me. How is it that in one interview, after over a year of knowing her, she revealed two huge pieces of information that, to me, altered her life story? Perhaps that was the problem – that, as my study went on, I began seeing her as a story, changed by the plot.

Within moments, I received comments from Facebook friends:

*That was one of the scariest images from my childhood.*

*The witch with the white hair? I still have nightmares about her!*

I could not remember the character, despite recalling the series and of course, the proud portrayal of Shaka Zulu himself. I turned on the DVD. I did not know what I felt when the sangoma appeared. I expected to know immediately whether it was Gogo or not. I was confused: I could not be sure. She looked nothing like Gogo, but, admittedly, she was caked in make-up. Her irises were white; Gogo had said that they put contact lenses into her eyes. I looked at her body; it looked nothing like Gogo's: it was skinny and almost frail-looking. It was a long time ago, I told myself. But her breasts were droopy and scraggly. Perhaps it was before Gogo gave birth to quadruplets? I listened to her voice. I darkened the room and closed my eyes. Was this Gogo's voice? I played the recording of our interview; I listened to the woman on the screen. I could not tell.

I saw no features that were Gogo's, even a Gogo from 20 or 30 years back. I still did not want to believe it was not her. Watching the episodes again and thinking about my friends' comments made me realise that this image was the first impression most of us white

children in apartheid South Africa had ever had of a sangoma. For many people, images like this one are still the only idea they hold of their countrymen's culture. I grew excited again about the possibility of the actress being Gogo.

I was interested in the implications of this starring role for the final story: imagine if I could reveal the individual behind a sangoma, and imagine if she was the first image that many of my readers would have had of a sangoma! Imagine if the actress had become a real sangoma? In our postmodern age of simulacra, the representation was becoming the real.

The Shaka Zulu series was the ultimate 'merchant of certainty'. It had created the most pervasive idea of what constituted a sangoma for white South Africans – and also for foreigners, as I later discovered – due to its slick production and immense popularity.

I logged back onto Facebook. Oddly, I noticed that Kay Betterton was on Facebook too. She was a friend of a friend. I decided to take advantage of the network and sent her a message asking if Gogo did indeed play the sangoma in the *Shaka Zulu* series.

## 9. KAY AND THE FACEBOOK FIASCO

The next morning, I had two messages waiting from Kay on Facebook.

The first read: *Yes, it was the movie by Bill Faure.*

I felt the air punched out of me as I read the second. Due to my ignorance about Facebook privacy settings, Kay had managed to view my profile, and therefore my status update – the one in which I questioned whether Gogo was delusional for claiming she played the sangoma in the *Shaka Zulu* series. Kay berated me severely for disrespecting Gogo, because I questioned the truth of her story; as well as calling her ‘my’ sangoma.

*In what way is she your sangoma?* Kay had written.

I had meant nothing by this other than indicating to friends whom I was talking about, having already described her in my ‘about me’ section. ‘The sangoma I am writing about’ would not have fit into the space allocated for updates. Facebook biographies insist that our lives are constrained into a prescribed structure.

I changed my status update to: *Margot Saffer is ashamed.* I was.

Up until the previous day’s interview I had tried as best I could to understand Gogo as objectively as I possibly could. I had believed everything that she had told me, including her communication with her dead grandfather. The word ‘delusional’ was not mine. My supervisor and other colleagues in the psychology department had often questioned me about what they termed Gogo’s delusions. I expressly had not wanted to impose psychopathological diagnoses on Gogo. According to her belief structure, she was not delusional, she was communicating with her grandfather in order to help heal her clients’ ailments. At this point, however, I needed to try to make sense of what I had been told the previous day, and retreated to the systems that I knew to recreate cosmos from the chaos within which I was lost. I found myself thinking in black and white and for a moment, I disregarded all she had told me and labelled it the musings of a woman suffering from

delusions. I found it hard at that moment to accept that there might be nuances in the veracity of her claims.

### **9.1 I speak to Kay and to Gogo**

I phoned Kay. She was livid. I tried to clarify that I did not use the term ‘delusional’ facetiously, but rather, scientifically – from within psychiatric theory. This was true, but it took nothing away from how rude it sounded to ask such a question about someone in a public forum. She accused me of not respecting Gogo. I defended myself by trying to prove how untrue that was by reading to her from my notebook. Just a few days earlier, I had, at the prompting of another supervisor, recorded reasons why I was drawn to writing about Gogo, despite her being such a difficult subject. I wrote about how, above all, I saw her as a teacher. She was a woman, wise with her experiences, who wanted to share with others the knowledge she had accumulated.

Kay did not think I respected Gogo enough. I realised that Kay was not angry because I had been rude about Gogo – which I had – but rather because I had doubted Gogo.

‘She is sacred,’ Kay loudly declared. Kay perceived her as something other than human, and thus not subject to the same judgments and expectations as everyone else.

When I thought about it again, I found it a strange statement for a devoutly Christian person to have made. What makes Gogo more sacred than any other human being? Later, a religious studies expert suggested that my publicly calling Gogo into doubt possibly destabilised Kay’s own belief structure. Kay *needed* Gogo to be ‘sacred’ – just as I had needed her to be a teacher. We were both challenged in what we needed to believe through the unfortunate Facebook incident. This took nothing away from the fact that what I had done was wrong.

Eventually, Kay calmed down. ‘You’re thinking too much,’ she said.

She was right. I had not considered what Gogo might have felt like if she were to have read what I had written. When I put the phone down to Kay, I dialled Gogo. I was saddened to

discover that Kay had already told her what I had posted on Facebook, or ‘the m-net’ as Gogo called it. Gogo was quiet on the other end. This unnerved me more than anything she could have said. I had known her for a year, and had never encountered her to be silent. My heart was beating fast and I was spluttering out words, trying to explain myself. My voice was high and my words came fast. I still did not know how Kay explained what I had done, nor if her reaction was engendered by Kay, or if it was her own. Gogo’s disappointment in me had a much greater impact than Kay’s anger. I, too, was disappointed in myself. Slowly, she began to talk more. As opposed to my aggravated intonations, hers were calm and metered. She did not want to know any details and asked no questions of me.

She said, ‘White people have disappointed me my whole life. And now you too.’

I had been clumped together with all white South Africans, including the policemen who arrested and tortured her. I did not consider that fair. Everyone makes mistakes; could I not be forgiven? I asked if I could come see her before she left for Zastron. True to what I had come to expect: she did not say yes, but she did not say no.

I put the phone down, and sat on the floor. I meditated for a long time on the mistake I had made. I had been rude and disrespectful. I had acted rashly. I had hurt someone deeply. Uncharacteristically for me, I turned to prayer. Inspired by conversations I had had with Gogo, I cried and prayed for forgiveness. I even opened my dusty *siddur*, prayerbook. There is a prayer said silently three times a day: ‘My God, guard my tongue from evil ...’ After that, I began reciting it daily as I awoke. It brought me an awareness of what I chose to say and write and acted as a reminder of the harm thoughtless words can cause, and my ethical responsibility in the role of biographer.

When I spoke to Gogo the following day, she said I could come see her the next morning. I felt a ray of hope; this matter would be resolved. On Friday morning, I drove to Kay’s place in Kenilworth where Gogo was still staying until she was to leave for Zastron on Saturday. I rang the intercom. There was no answer. I rang again. Nothing. I waited a little while. I phoned Gogo’s cell phone. She spoke to me dismissively and said she was busy; she would call me. She did not apologise for not being there. I realised I had not actually apologised to her either.

I went home and could do nothing as I waited for her to call me. I did not hear from her. The next morning I phoned her, reasoning that even when our relationship was not strained, she still had not called when she said she would. She answered her cell phone.

‘I said I would call you,’ she barked abruptly, and hung up.

She did not see me before she left for Zastron.

## **9.2 Six hard months pass, and no interview**

I decided not to bother Gogo while she was in Zastron, and so anxiously waited out the three weeks she had intended to be away. I called her in the last week in July, a few days after the date she was due to return. She was not back. I felt gutted. She said she did not know when she was coming back. She was sick. ‘It is my time. I’m dying, Margot,’ she told me over the phone. She was not angry that I had called her, and I became concerned for her health.

Over the months, our relationship healed with the calls I made every week or two asking about her health. She seemed grateful for my concern. I was grateful for what seemed like her forgiveness.

Something had altered though. I think she now knew that I was reliant on her, that I was beholden to her. I came to acknowledge that much of the anxiety I would feel before a call to her was similar to how I had felt months before each time I went to interview her. Feminist psychology literature warns the researcher not to hold too much power. I had been so meticulous in trying to keep the stakes balanced between Gogo and me that the exact opposite had happened. Gogo held the power, and, I realised, Facebook fiasco notwithstanding, she had done so for quite some time. I needed something from her. My thesis depended on her. Without her cooperation, years of work would come to nought.

I grew edgy; I grew depressed. I went back to the interviews and to my contract with Gogo. I started to realise that to write her biography, I may have to utilise only the data I had

already gathered. However, so many things were unclear – how would I piece a woman together from the disparate things I had been told?

I kept calling Gogo every two weeks. Each time she told me she would be back in ten days. After two weeks, I would call her again. This went on for five months – from July to December 2007.

By the time December came around, I had finished the work that required me to be at the university and decided if she were not coming back to Cape Town, I would go back to the Maluti Mountains, to Zastron, to see her. Gogo was to spend Christmas with Russell and his family in Johannesburg, but agreed that I could visit her in Zastron before she left. I asked a friend to go along. I began to look forward to the trip as we got ready to leave. I called her a few days before to confirm my date of arrival. She answered her cell phone and told me she was no longer in Zastron; she was already in Johannesburg. It was then that the pedestal I had held her on crumbled.

I may have behaved badly, but I realised that I had not been respected from the beginning of our process together.

I no longer cared: I had to finish my thesis without her.

### **9.3 Fact or fantasy?**

At the forefront of my mind, though, was the concern about the *Shaka Zulu* series. Did Gogo act as the sangoma, and would I ever find out the truth? I had watched the sangoma, listened to her voice, watched for the credits. Gogo had said they had given her contact lenses, and called her by a different name. Why would Gogo lie? Why pretend to have been such a frightening character?

From the credits, I narrowed down who the actors could have been, and Googled each of them. I looked at movie databases online. They all pointed to a Nomsa Xaba as playing the sangoma – who was called Sitayi, not Thembikile, as Gogo had said – but there were no

pictures of Nomsa Xaba on the World Wide Web. Eventually, I tracked down Nomsa's agent who confirmed that she had indeed played the role of Sitayi.

Still, I could not believe that Gogo might have lied. Perhaps she meant another representation of Shaka Zulu, and it was Kay who had gotten it wrong, or mythologised Gogo's story. In the same interview, Gogo had told me that Edward was now 45. If I worked backwards to when he was 18 or 19 as Gogo said he was when he worked with her on the film; that would take us to the early 1980s when the Faure series was filmed. If, however, I tried to work forwards – Gogo was born in the late 1930s, she said she fell pregnant with Edward when she was 16. It would make him now at least 50. That means he was 18 in the mid-1970s not in the mid-1980s.

In 1979, another film was made in South Africa about Shaka's reign starring Burt Lancaster, Bob Hoskins and James Faulkner called *Zulu Dawn*. Now Gogo would be co-starring with some of the greatest actors of the time! I found the VHS in a university archive, and watched it in a musty research room with bulky earphones. It starred another actor whom Gogo had once mentioned – Ken Gampu. Finally I would uncover the truth, and resolve the situation – I hoped. The film was long, so I started with the credits to see who was listed as playing the sangoma. There was no sangoma in the credits. I watched the slow-paced film very carefully. Could the director's name be French? Douglas Hickox – no. I repeated scenes in which I thought I might have missed something. Even so, there was no sangoma in the entire film. I did not want to believe it.

Why would Gogo lie? What else would she lie about? What else had she lied about? I had been so worried about her recalling all of the tapes because I had broken confidentiality according to our contract. I feared then that I could not trust one moment of the 20 hours of interviews I had recorded over the two years I had spent with this woman. I did not know what – if any of it – was true.

#### **9.4 January 2008**

It was a few weeks into the New Year when, during one phone-call, she said she was coming back to Cape Town. I did not get excited. This time I did not believe her. She

called to ask if I would fetch her from the station; she would take a train from Johannesburg. I was not going to show up and wait for the ghost I felt she had become; I told her to call me along the way to tell me what time the train would arrive in Cape Town. When she phoned on 12 January 2008, almost seven months since I had seen her last, I exhaled with relief. She was at the station!

Gogo looked very different than she had when I had last seen her in June of the previous year. Her hair had been strung with hundreds of white beads, and it hung long to her shoulders. It gave her different gestures, and as she swung her beaded hair, I realised it was the first time I thought of her as a sexual being.

I almost did not recognise her in the crowd of travellers who were returning to Cape Town after the Christmas break. She stood next to a suitcase and a large woven plastic bag. These chequered bags are made cheaply in China and are bought cheaply in South African street markets. They are *de rigueur* for South Africans whose luggage has accumulated while away. I approached her to help carry the bags to my car.

I wondered if she was reminded, as I was, of all the stories involving train stations that she had told me over the years. As I walked towards Gogo, I thought of her stealing coal at Bloemfontein station, of the children at Park Station in Johannesburg on 16 June, 1976, and of her second husband Elisha's murder in the early 1990s. She smiled and embraced me warmly. I sensed, however, rather than being grateful that I had come to fetch her, as Kay was away, that she expected it of me.

I took Gogo back to Kay's place in Kenilworth. We walked up the driveway towards the townhouse, and Gogo said to me, 'You know, Margot, when you're married you will know it is a very hard thing living in another woman's house.' Gogo told me that Kay did not want me to interview Gogo in her house anymore; she did not want Gogo to talk to me at all. Kay would be returning in a few days' time from Australia where she was visiting her children. Gogo nevertheless agreed to see me the following week. We arranged that I would come fetch her when Kay would be out and we would conduct the interview elsewhere.

We went to a public park in Rondebosch, which was opposite Lyndene where I had first met Gogo. She said she had been wanting to see Lucille, the woman who ran Lyndene, but that Kay did not want her to. It was not clear why, but she began criticising Kay and taking me into her confidence regarding issues she had had over the years about her relationship with Kay and living in her house. It felt uncomfortable, but at the same time, I sensed I was being absolved of any anger she may have had towards me.

I apologised again for any hurt I may have caused her. She told me it was not the first time that Kay had reacted in this way. Someone else had come to interview Gogo many years before. Gogo did not give the full story, but after many interviews, Kay sent him away, and Gogo does not know what happened to those tapes. Later in the interview she told me of how, many years back, Kay herself had recorded tapes of her talking about her life. I wondered what Kay had intended to do with those recordings and how this might have influenced Kay's reactions to me.

Gogo said that Kay would not even let her talk about Beth. 'I work for Beth so many years, but I can't mention Beth's name to them, then they get cross.'

She expanded a little on wanting to see Lucille: 'I want to come to Lucille, to come and say thank you very much, Lucille. Um, you keep me in your place, da, da, da, da, da, da. Lucille did help me a lot, but I can't mention Lucille's name on them. Why is that? It's not only you. It's lots of people.'

I had beaten myself up about my behaviour for six months, dissecting whether or not I had treated her correctly during our interviews, and now it seemed that even the women who had played the most important roles in Gogo's life were getting the same treatment from Kay Betterton. I felt comforted by Gogo telling me this. I wondered why she was confiding in me – it seemed strange, but at the time I did not question whether Gogo was perhaps manipulating me against Kay.

Gogo said how she worked well with Kay on the whole, but there had been a problem when funders from Chicago had come. I was not sure what had happened but Gogo described it as a ‘big mess up’.

In the next breath she said, ‘Sometimes I think myself she think I will leave her. She tries to hold you. Maybe I can pack in the night and go.’

## **9.5 Rebuilding**

I do not know what changes Gogo made about living in Zastron or in Cape Town, with Kay or not, since our last interview on 6 May, 2008. I spoke with her on the phone a few times after that, and she was sometimes in Cape Town, sometimes in Zastron, and once in Johannesburg.

I called Gogo on her birthday, 17 August 2009, to wish her many happy returns of the day. The last time I actually saw her, however, was together with Kay at a prayer service held in Indlovu in Monwabsi Park in January 2009. During the December break, the buildings that formed part of the Shambala Foundation project had been burnt to the ground. Arson was suspected. The community was gathering to join church leaders in praying for funding and a speedy rebuilding of the crèche, clinic, and community hall.

It was sweltering hot, and those who had the forethought to bring umbrellas shared them. We stood on a patch of earth that had once been the crèche – which was now being run out of a shipping container. The choir sang passionately, with the community members and children joining in. The church leaders and Kay prayed that they would receive the money to rebuild the project, and Kay added that anyone who opposed the Foundation would not succeed. Why would anyone in the community oppose having a clinic and a community hall? I wondered.

I did not know what was going on behind the scenes of the Shambala Foundation, and the details of Kay’s and Gogo’s involvement. It was clear that Shambala needed Gogo in order to obtain the funding it did. She was a charismatic African character. She was a healer from a

Xhosa community. She wore the beads, the cloths, and the skins. She had been a fighter in the struggle for freedom and she had acted as television's most famous sangoma. Had she not?

## 10. CONCLUSION

### 10.1 MERCHANTS OF CERTAINTY

#### 10.1.1 Kay's 'credible expert'

In the introduction, I outlined Zygmunt Bauman's theory of self-constitution. He states that, in our current postmodern society, we inhabit a complex system with no simple existing structures to tell us our place, give us our function within society. We are therefore left to seek our own identities from an array of available models of identity. He calls this process of self-assembly, self-constitution.

Within postmodern politics, people gain power from claiming the capacity to approve of somebody else's self-assembly. These are experts, politicians – those in positions of authority to judge us. As we perceive them to have authority within our chosen imagined community, we give them power to approve of or reject our own self-constitution. These 'merchants of certainty' play on our desires and fears in our forever-unstable process of self-constitution.

By qualifying and practising as a sangoma – the only role of authority available to women within her community of origin – Gogo has become a 'merchant of certainty'. Kay considers her as such. Kay has chosen to associate closely with Gogo, who, Kay claims, is not merely human, but 'a sacred being'. In order for Kay to feel assured that her own 'process of self-constitution' is validated, she *needs* Gogo to be a 'credible expert'. I am not sure of the reasons why Kay defends Gogo's myths – perhaps it is for her own sanity, or for the continuation of Shambala. Whatever the reason, it seemed she has made sure that no one is allowed to depose Gogo from this sacred position.

### 10.1.2 Gogo as my ‘merchant of certainty’

I should be in no position to judge Kay. When I first met Gogo, I too was entranced by her charisma – what Lewis calls ‘mythical power’.<sup>106</sup> It was primarily based on this that I chose her as a biographical subject worthy of my efforts and time – it was this mystery that I wanted to try to understand.

### 10.1.3 Gogo travelled a journey from denigration to relative deification

When I first interviewed Gogo on the afternoon of 16 February, 2006, the following is the story I heard:

At the age of 12, Gogo lost her mother. A year later, she was married off to a man who was not of her choosing. She became a teenage mother, and was abused by her husband until he left her. It was left to her to support their two children, despite being an uneducated black woman, . She moved to where the work was, even though this meant living in a city far from her family.

Gogo grew up as a woman in the African Traditional patriarchal religious discourse, an indigenous person in a Christian-colonised land, and as a black person during apartheid.

With Beth’s encouragement, Gogo returned to the tradition that had oppressed her, but this time as Mouthpiece of the Ancestors, as a *sangoma*. She now takes her position in one of the most powerful roles in her community of origin.

In 1994, the Afrikaner myth came to an end and Gogo, as a black person, voted for the first time as an equal and free citizen of South Africa.

Three months before he died, Gogo’s first husband, Jacobus, travelled to Cape Town to apologise for how he had abused her almost 50 years earlier.

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<sup>106</sup> Lewis (1996).

It is through religion that Gogo was oppressed, but it is also through religion that she found her power.

As stated, Bauman proposes that within today's 'imagined tribal communities', we appeal to 'experts' to approve of our 'self-constitution'. Within her own community, and by being an 'authentic shaman' where the spiritual freedom of 'New Age' is growing, Gogo has become Expert. Gogo now works with a white woman as a director of a non-governmental organisation. Kay, who might have once been her 'Madam', now reveres her. Gogo is now the 'credible expert' that Kay needs in order to judge and approve of her own 'self-constitution'. Gogo has become a 'merchant of certainty' in the 'imagined communities' of New Age and African Traditional Religion, she has been conferred with the authority to judge others' self-constitution, and is therefore now Powerful. She has travelled a journey from denigration to relative deification.

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*This* was the story I initially wanted to write.

I thought that I had entered into this project wanting to relay Gogo's story as she wanted to tell it. Now I am aware that I did so because it was a story that I, too, wanted to tell. I *thought* my expectations were minimal, but when I heard a narrative in the very first interview with Gogo, it was that narrative I wanted to capture in the interviews that followed. I wanted to tell the story according to the construction above – a tale of heroism and liberation.

It is not just the story *I* wanted, but also the story that I suspected readers wanted. It is the *Fairlady* article, the prime-time Oprah tale, the feel-good film from Africa about 'One Woman's Triumph Over Circumstance.'

The ideas propounded in feminist psychology were the background theory that pervaded my research. An aspect of the emancipation of a woman is acknowledging her as fully human. Women continue to be objectified, idealised, or essentialised – seen, for example, only as mothers and nurturers; or objectified as sex symbols; or placed high on a pedestal.

Perhaps, I too am guilty of disempowering Gogo in this way. I objectified her as a *symbol*.

I objectified her as a symbol of a woman who was oppressed by her circumstances as she moved through her early life, but who then came into her power. This is the heroic story that feminism endeavoured to tell, and I wanted her story to be an example of this. I saw her tale as a story of survival, of success, of hope. Gogo herself, for me, stood above all as a symbol of survival. This is the symbol that, to my mind, Kay protects, too.

It was when this story went too far that the symbol began to crumble. In that one interview, on 19 June 2007, Gogo told me that she had been an activist member of the ANC, and also that she had acted as Shaka Zulu's sangoma. That was when I began to doubt her, and, when I acknowledged that she was not respecting me, that she finally became *human*. In opposition to Kay's 'sacred being', Gogo the 'expert' – my *symbol* – became just human – like everyone else. She, too, misbehaves, and messes up. She is what she is – a mix of contradictions, like us all. She was not the construct I wanted her to be – not the idealised, fascinating version that I thought I would mesmerise readers with.

She fell from the pedestal onto which I had placed her.

## 10.2 LESSONS IN LIFE WRITING

Where I thought the project would lead us when I started it, and where we are now are two different places. I had considered Gogo a ‘merchant of certainty’. I had thought that she would be an authority from whom I could learn more about the secrets of the phenomenon of the sangoma. I had thought that I might learn how she accessed a spiritual realm, and how she knew about what remained mysterious to ‘ordinary’ people.

I began to feel, however, that Gogo had manipulated me, did not take responsibility, told untruths, and was unreliable. Was I gullible because she was telling me more of what I wanted to hear? I wonder, in hindsight, what she was trying to gain from me and our relationship.

In June 2007, more than six months into the thick of it, it felt as if the project unravelled, and so did I. I had tried not to be too powerful, and ended up disempowered. I tried to know; I wanted to know her charisma, but I ended up being caught up in her myth. I became disillusioned not only with the biography I was writing, but with life writing as a whole.

At a point in the process, I began to feel like Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*. I continued to fall until I was lost down the rabbit hole and in Gogo’s wonderland. I felt I had been a fool to stick with a subject who was as difficult to follow as the White Rabbit, who made as much sense as the Mad Hatter, and appeared and disappeared as erratically as the Cheshire Cat.

I made the mistake of not delimiting my subject and my study became as convoluted as her language and as far-reaching as her tangents.

### **10.2.1 Chronology: keeping track of a time line**

The material I have presented here is a construction. Gogo did not give me a clear chronological account of her life. She told me bits and pieces of each story during different interviews. I spent much time attempting to check with her what I had been told, and asking her to expand. Some stories were consistent, others altered, and others I heard only once. The interviews took place on the dates I have given, but the content of each one was a jumble.

I made the choice to try and apply some sense of order to the muddle of recordings I had, so that the reader might be able to follow a narrative. If there are parts where the reader is confused, unsure in what order events happened, where they fit on the timeline, or how old Gogo was at a certain time – it is because I had no idea. Gogo could recall no dates, and when she did, they often conflicted with other times she gave me.

### **10.2.2 Relational biography**

I have written and rewritten versions of Gogo's life, trying to make sense of it. I changed course and tried at least to make sense of the research-subject relationship. This final narrative rather follows the excitement and subsequent disillusionment of this biographer-fool's errand.

I realised that I had begun the project like The Fool, the first trump in the tarot deck. He is depicted with a knapsack over his shoulder, a dog at his ankles, and about to step off a cliff, supposedly 'in search of experience'. I was a fool in that, despite all I had learned from my background reading of the impossibility of capturing a life in a book of words, I still flung my dictaphone and journal into my knapsack, slung it over my shoulder and stepped off the cliff, ignoring the dog of the literature that nipped a warning at my ankles. I was a fool in that I attempted to write a biography – to find the narrative sequences of a life – from a collection of chaos and a jumble of memories and fantasies that changed as new ones were made.

I was naïve in my expectations: the process would be smooth; I would interview her ten times or so, and she would willingly tell me stories and answer the questions I asked. Once

again, despite all my reading of the literature on biography – and particularly on relational and contextualised biography at the beginning of this project – I did not fully grasp that it would involve two people in the midst of their own lives trying to come together and create a text. Events in both of our lives, as well as in the broader context, like external political events in South Africa, affected when and where and how often we met, and what was discussed in the interviews.

I believe it would have benefited my methodological design had I succeeded in setting dates for each interview at the beginning of the process, but as stated above, it was nigh impossible. In retrospect, perhaps I should have stopped working with Gogo when our arrangements became more erratic, the interviews became more and more impossible to guide, and I struggled increasingly to follow what she was saying.

Our cultural differences were so vast – Gogo and I met *because* we were different. I do not know how much misunderstanding in our relating was caused by this. Often I acted towards her as I *thought* she might have wanted. I kept projecting and trying to second-guess her. So many assumptions were made, definitely on my side, and, I would imagine, on hers, on both sides, that again, it was hard to see the true personality, never mind grasp the granite of the facts, as Virginia Woolf suggested.

During the research process, many people asked me if I could not rather find another sangoma to write about. I answered by saying it was not because she was a sangoma alone that made Gogo so intriguing – it was the life she had survived, and the intense stories she told about it.

That said, I do have to admit that there were many times in the process that I wished I had chosen another subject entirely. Perhaps I should have chosen a subject who spoke better and clearer English; one who was more compliant; had a better sense of structure over her time; and who took more responsibility for her choice to be involved in this project.

### 10.2.3 The imbalances of power

Her erratic behaviour so disturbed the process of interviewing that I thought maybe Gogo's decision-making had been hampered. Throughout her whole life, her ancestors – most specifically, her paternal grandfather – had guided her actions via visions, voices, and dreams. She did not have to make her own decisions. When she felt she was in a real quandary, then she would by-pass her ancestors, and even Jesus, and ask God directly for guidance. She believed she always received it. I got the sense that she often acted against her own free will in order to placate the desires of her ancestors. Consequently, she fought for her 'freedom' in manipulative ways. I found that she never said 'No' outright, or 'I don't want to' – to me or to others. I was manipulated and blocked, but never openly, just subtly. I am still not sure of how conscious she was of this. I was lured in and pushed away, pulled in and pushed back again and again and again. I ended up listening to what *she needed* to say, not what I had wanted to know.

Further, because the decisions were not hers to begin with, she did not need to face their consequences, or she would ask her ancestors for a way out of them. She was not empathetic to the effects she had caused for others around her.

From the feminist standpoint, as researcher, I was to do all I could to prevent Gogo not feeling or being disempowered by our interactions. I spent much of the time with Gogo, and thinking about her and what we were doing, concerned about the play of power in our relationship.

I was careful, almost neurotically so, not to hold too much power. This intention was ironic, because I ended up with none. I was constantly afraid of losing her. I slowly learnt how changeable she was. I was afraid of asking the wrong thing, pushing her, and fearing that she would recede and disappear altogether, taking my source of data with her.

#### 10.2.4 Triangulation and the need for corroboration

Perhaps it would have been better had I begun to develop connections with Beth, Gogo's children, and even Kay from the start – with Gogo's knowledge, in order to broaden my fund of facts according to which I could perhaps have pieced together a more coherent picture of her life.

When I started the research process, I had decided to interview only Gogo at first, and other characters in her story at a later stage, when I felt I had recorded what Gogo wanted to tell me. After the incident where I doubted her involvement in the *Shaka Zulu* series, more than ever, it became necessary to speak to a third party, other than Kay. At the time, however, I was so racked with guilt over the way in which I had compromised my investigation through Facebook that I chose not to proceed along that route.

My initial concern at the time was to regain Gogo's trust and heal our relationship. I knew it would have ruined our connection beyond repair had I tried to track down Mr Greenblatt or Beth. Gogo, and probably Kay, would have interpreted my doing that as further proof of my doubting her. I did not want to go behind her back.

If the biographer is to wear many caps, I was no longer able to be that sort of detective. I did want to know the truth about the *Shaka Zulu* series, but I was not ready to sidestep Gogo, and treat her as just a subject. We had a relationship – we had spent many hours together over many years – I had to treat her more as a person than just as a subject. Perhaps that harmed the biography, but it healed the relationship – even though it may possibly have never completely recovered, as I could no longer trust her as I once had.

#### 10.2.5 Facing ethical questions

I could have left out my feelings of doubt about Gogo being an ANC member, and as acting as Shaka Zulu's sangoma. I *could* have told the story as she told it. The arc she travelled from oppression to opportunity would then have become even more powerful than I could have imagined. It could have been a great story for a reader – entertaining, and full of hope. Have I done readers a disservice by taking away their hope, and relaying my

confusion, doubt, and ultimate distrust of all they have just read? What is my responsibility to my readers?

I did not want to write this story as I have done. I felt it was immoral to interview someone for two years, take her story, and represent her as though she might have told untruths or fed me some of her phantasies. I wanted to protect this woman I had spent so much time with. There is a concept in Judaism of *Lashon Ha’Ra*. The direct translation is: Evil Tongue. It forbids one to talk badly about another person – and it goes without saying that it is one of the hardest laws to keep. In this dissertation, I openly judge someone who shared her memories and innermost thoughts with me. What gives me peace, however, is that I am presenting the facts as I understood them: this is what happened, and how I felt. It is up to a reader to identify with my confusion, or to assess my reactions as ridiculous.

To hold my integrity as a biographer, I felt this was my only option.

To whom, then, did I owe the greatest ethical responsibility – to myself as biographer, to readers, or to Gogo?

I thought I had met a woman who had overcome the seemingly impossible circumstances of her life, and I wanted to share *that* story with readers. By my wanting to tell that story, I too, was not listening to *her*, but rather to her myth. I was traumatised in the months we had not seen each other, from June 2007 to January 2008 – not only because a relationship was crumbling, but because as she receded, she took the mythological tale with her.

### **10.2.6 Why these myths?**

It seemed to me that I saw Gogo happy only once – on the farm in Zastron. Every time we met, it seemed she had a new problem to deal with, whether it was her children, or her siblings, or her dreams. She always seemed to be on her way home, or on her way to settle. She yearned to return to Zastron for good – but always had to come back to Cape Town, which was far away from the people she loved.

I wondered what would have been a true liberation for this woman, who seemed still to be caught in the machinations of her external world. She had been exploited in one way or another, and to one extent or another, throughout her life. My wanting to tell a particular tale about her could also be seen as wanting to commodify her experiences.

Gogo told me stories of playing a great role in the liberation of South Africa, and in white South African's representations of sangomas, yet she was only sometimes, I felt, really proud of herself. What rings loudly in my ears, and beats with pity in my heart are her words:

‘So every time when I'm speaking, I always say even my daddy didn't want me. How do I expect the nother people to love me?’

‘I must accept what I am that I'm not a person, I'm a dog. I must just pray that God accept me and give me a little place where I can be happy when I'm dead.’

Why, then, had Gogo chosen to tell me these particular tales?  
She chose a life-myth wherein she felt valued.

### **10.2.7 Gogo initiated me into Life Writing**

Despite the difficulties I encountered writing this biography, I still value Gogo. I no longer consider her a ‘merchant of certainty’, an authority to appraise my self-constitution, as her stories raised too much doubt for me. I do, however, still respect her wisdom. She is no longer a symbol of triumph for me, but a real person. Despite whether or not I believed all that she told me, her life journey has indeed been a progression from oppression to opportunity. She had little prospects or free will growing up as a black woman in the

society and politics in which she did. Today, she *is* a sangoma, and she *is* a director of the Shambala Foundation. And this young white woman *did* write her biography.

I saw that Gogo, however, still carries the hurt of those initial tens of years of abuse and being a second-class citizen. The way she had been treated is deeply ingrained in her as the way she deserved to be treated. She does not consider her accomplishments as achievement enough. She still feels like the 12-year-old girl who has just lost her mother. She has therefore boosted her image of achievement with stories of the underground ANC struggle and of being famous actress. Her tale may be one of success, but it is also one of deep sadness. This may not have been the picture I initially wanted to paint, but it is about an encounter with a real person affected by her story.

When stripped of the imposed story, who is the real person that is revealed? When she fell off the pedestal onto which I had placed her, I finally acknowledged that she was human. After my initial trauma and the depression that followed, I realised I had gained an invaluable insight into biography writing. By portraying a more authentic picture of Gogo, perhaps I had succeeded after all – I *had* written the truer biography.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### 1. Family of origin

Tell me all your names?

Where did you get them?

What does Gladys call you?

What did your mother call you?

What does Kay call you?

Did you become Gogo when you were initiated or when you had your first grandchild?

What do other people know you as?

The psychologists from parliament – what do they call you?

What stories do you remember people sharing about your birth?

What do other people say about your family? Now and then?

What do you do as a family?

What did you do on the farm?

Were you ever all together?

Do you notice that you have the same mannerisms as your parents?

What do you remember most clearly about your parents?

How did your sister die when you were young?

How did you feel?

Is she buried on the farm?

Was it before or after your mother died?

Were you the first to get married?

Why did your father want you to marry?

How old were you?

How long after your mother died did this happen?

Do you think if your mother were alive she would have stopped it?

Why did your father choose Jacobus?

How long did you run away for?

What was your father like?

What was your mother like?

What work did your father and mother do on the farm?

What kind of work did you do for Miss Marie?

What is the name people in Zastron know you by?

What are your other names?

What do they mean?

When I say I am writing about you – what name should I call you by?

If there is a book: *The Story of* - ?

How old were you when your Aunt killed herself?

Did you think it was your fault?

For how long did you feel guilty?

Did you tell anyone?  
Have you communicated with her in your dreams?  
What happened to her when she died?  
Who was the ancestor who gave her messages?  
Was she your mother or your father's sister?  
Did she know you were going to be sangoma?

Did you know your grandparents?  
Tell me about them?  
What did you learn about them from other people?  
What did you learn about them from your parents?

Were there other families living and working on the farm?  
Were you close with them?

Was your mother sick before she died?  
For how long?  
What was wrong with her?  
Who helped her? Sangoma? Doctor? Priest?  
Did you father look after her?

When did your father die?  
How?

Did your father own cattle?  
When did he sell?  
Did he farm his own crops on the land?

You were born in Matatiele. When did you come to Zastron?  
What do you know about where your family lived before?  
What work did they do?  
What tribes did all of your ancestors belong to?  
How did you come to have the surname Baartman?  
Where did Jacobus's family come from?  
What tribes were they from?

## **2. Home**

When did you get your house?  
How did you feel?  
Did you ever live there?

## **3. Motherhood**

Did you live at the Greenblatts with your children?  
Did your children live with you always?  
Who took care of them?  
How did Elisha treat them?  
Did Jacobus give you any money for his children?  
Did Hazel and Edward ever ask about Jacobus?  
What did you tell them?  
How did Russell and Michelle feel when Elisha died?  
What did you tell them about his death?

How did he treat the children?

If you could give your children or grandchildren advice like your mother gave you what would you tell them?

Did any of your children ever live there at your house in Zastron?  
Do your children ever all come together – like over Christmas?  
Why not?  
Do you think they would all like to live near to each other?  
Do you think they will ever live in Zastron?

Did you ever all live together – with all your children and Elisha?  
What does Edward do?  
What does Russell do?  
What does Hazel do?  
Do they have Xhosa names? What are they?

How many children do each of them have?  
How old are they?  
Who was the first to get married?  
How did you feel when you were going to become a grandmother?  
What do you do that makes you feel like a grandmother? How are you a grandmother?  
What is the role of a grandmother?

Tell me again about when you were pregnant with Russell and went to the hospital.

Did your children go to school?  
Did they enjoy it?  
Were they good students?  
Did you know the teachers?

What other interests/sports/hobbies did they have?  
Was there anything they were really good at?

How did you find out you were first pregnant?  
Were you excited?  
Were you afraid?  
How did Jacobus react?  
Can you tell me a little bit about being pregnant?  
How did you feel?  
How did you feel about your body?  
How did you feel about becoming a mother?  
When did you start to feel different?  
Did you think you would do a good job as a mother?  
What did you think about?  
How was your relationship with Jacobus when Edward was born?  
Was each of your pregnancies the same?  
Were you surprised to have quadruplets?  
Did you know you were expecting quads before you gave birth?  
Were each of your births the same?  
Tell me about them.  
How did you feel after the birth? About yourself? About the baby?  
Who chose the names?  
Why did you give your children those names?  
Do you call them by their English names?  
Did you use herbs during pregnancy or birth? Which?  
Were all your children healthy?  
Were they ever very sick?  
What did you do when they got sick?

What is a mother's role?  
What does it mean to be a mother?  
When did you start to think of yourself as a mother?  
When did you start to think of yourself as a woman?  
Was it nice to be a mother?  
Was it awful?  
What was not/nice about it?  
Did you think about your mother?  
Did anyone help you?  
Is there such a thing as a bad mother?  
Did becoming a mother change your relationships? Jacobus? Your parents? Siblings? Jacobus's parents? Neighbours? Community?  
Did you know about having a child? Pregnancy? Raising?  
Who had you watched/learnt this from?  
Did you know how a woman gets pregnant?  
When did you learn this? From whom?  
What was the difference between your last birth and your first?  
In what ways were your relationships with Edward and Michelle different from the other?  
  
How did Michelle feel when she fell pregnant with Pondo?

Did she tell you?  
How did you react?

#### **4. Work**

Are you receiving an income?  
How do you earn money?  
How have you earned money in the past?

Were there people, besides Beth and the Greenblatts, that you worked for?  
How did you feel about Mr Greenblatt calling you Tsotsi?  
Why do you think he did?

Do you think Michelle Greenblatt would be happy to talk to me about you?  
Did she have a brother or a sister?  
Older or younger?

When did you get your first job after you left Zastron?  
Were you still married?  
Where did you work most as a sangoma?  
Did you work as a domestic worker at the same time?  
Were you called 'domestic worker'?  
How did the children of the families you worked for treat you?  
Could you make a living as a sangoma?  
Where do people like Dizu know you from?  
Or the King of Swaziland?

When did you become a sangoma?

In Bloemfontein did you live and work for Bernie Greenblatt?  
You said you met him in Harrismith – how?  
Did your children live with you?  
You said you taught yourself English to get a better job.  
What job did you get?  
What role does community play in your life?  
When you worked on *Shaka Zulu* – how did you feel about not having any time off?  
What is your role in the Shambala Foundation?  
What is your role at Endlovini?  
What was an average day at work like?

What are the most common clients you see?  
Who? – demographic.  
And what problems? Queries? Ailments?  
Are you able to help most of them?  
Are you surprised when you can/not?  
Are you surprised by people who don't believe in what you do?  
Does everyone accept that you talk to your grandfather?  
When you say you talk to him, do you hear his voice?  
Do you talk back?

Is it only in dreams?  
Are all your dreams from ‘the good side’?  
How do you know?  
How do you divine?  
Have you ever used bones?  
Do you sing?  
Do the clients do anything active?  
What do you believe about bones?  
Did your Aunt use bones?  
How did she divine?  
Why did you not want to train?  
How did you train – what was the process?  
How long for?  
Could you afford it and also to look after your children?  
Who supported you in the process?  
How do you train a *thwasa*?  
If a Jewish or Christian person has ‘a big dream’ and thinks they should become a *thwasa* – or a sangoma tells them they must, what do you think they should do?

Why did you study *twasa* in a Zulu/Baxa way?  
How did your Aunt train?  
Who else in your family were sangomas?  
If you weren’t a sangoma what job would you like to have?  
Did you want to act more after *Shaka Zulu*?  
What did it feel like seeing yourself on television?  
Did your neighbours and friends know?  
Was this after Elisha died?  
Do you remember which street in Glenhazel the Greenblatts lived?  
Where did Beth Taylor live?  
Was she married?  
Was she married to the father of her children?  
How did you come to work for her?  
How did you feel when the Greenblatts emigrated?

What subjects did you learn at school?  
Which did you enjoy?  
How many years did you go to school for?

How much money do you charge/earn?

#### **4.1 Work (Religion)**

Is Kay a Christian?

Who does she pray to?

Is Beth a Christian?

You talk about energy and auras – did you learn that from Beth or just new words for something else you knew before?

Can you read everyone's energy/aura?

What do you see? Feel? Know?

Do you think everyone could?

#### **5. Adult relationships**

Was Elisha alive when you became a sangoma?

How did he feel about it?

What work did he do?

Were you in love with Elisha?

What do you understand by the term 'love'?

Does it matter to love someone?

Who are the people in your life that you love?

Did Jacobus ever see the children?

Did he care about them?

Did you ever see Jacobus again?

Who do you see in Cape Town?

Do you like living at Kay's place?

Would you and Kay be friends if you didn't work together?

Have you got any special friends?

Were your husbands Xhosa?

Were they Christian?

What was your relationship with Elisha like?

Was he caring?

Was he aggressive?

Who are your friends?

Who were your friends in Bloemfontein, Harrismith, Alexandra?

## **6 Community**

What do you see as your role in your community?

Do you think that people in a community play certain roles?

Do you think that you get the same respect that your grandparents would have?

What communities do you feel you belong to?

### **6.1 Community (Government)**

Did you have any support from social services?

Did you know or make friends with other people in the ANC?

How did you join?

Did you know it would be dangerous to decorate your room like you did?

Were you expecting to be arrested?

How many times were you arrested?

What happened?

Did you tell anyone?

Did Mr Greenblatt know you were in the ANC?

Why did you choose to become a member?

What did you have to do to become a member?

Are you still a member?

If not, why not?

Where did you vote in 1994?

How did it feel? What did you do that day?

Who were you with?

What were the names of the leaders you interacted with?

How much did you know about what was going on?

What was your role?

## **7. Body**

### **7.1 Health and Illness**

Were you sick as a child?

When you got sick did you see a doctor?

#### **7.1.1 Affect**

Do you listen to music?

Do you sing to yourself?

What do you like to listen to? To sing?

Do you notice paintings?

Do you like pictures?

## **7.2 Woman's body**

What did you look like when you were young – before you had children?

What was your body-shape like? – how to ask this?

Did you think you were a pretty girl?

How did you manage your periods? Tampons etc?

Was it a hassle?

## **7.3 Health**

Do you sleep well?

Have you ever taken medication? What?

Any family history of illness? Psychiatric illness?

What do you know about psychiatric illnesses?

How do you cope when things go wrong?

Did you ever worry about your health?

Did you ever worry about your mental health?

Did you think it was perfectly normal when you hallucinated in the church?

Do you know the word hallucinate?

How do you understand it?

Do you think more than you feel?

Did Beth ever work on you?

What did she work on? What did she do?

When you are sad or angry do you get sick or sore in your body?

Do you think this last sickness was caused by that?

## **7.4 Food**

I want to talk to you about the role of food in your life.

At what times in the day do you have your meals?

Are they regular?

How often during the day do you eat?

What would a typical breakfast, lunch, supper, snack be?

What do you drink?

How do you do your grocery shopping?

Will you go to one store over another?

How do you decide?

How do you prepare your food?

Where do you eat?

Is there a ritual?

What do you do before/after you eat?

What did you eat at your sangoma initiation ceremony?

What did you eat at your/your children's wedding?

Is food an important part of these occasions?

What is a special meal for you? – What would you like to eat?

What's your favourite meal?

When would you have this?

Have you ever dieted? Why? When? In what way?

What were you told about food by your mother?

What do you consider healthy food?  
Where did you learn that?  
Do different foods make you feel different? How?  
Where do you like to eat food out?  
What will you order?

### **7.5 Sex**

When was the first time you had sex?  
Did you enjoy having sex?  
Did you only sleep with your husbands?  
When was the last time you had sex?  
With whom?  
When did your periods stop?  
Do you want to still have sex?

Did you use contraception?  
Did/do you have a strong libido?  
Did Jacobus? Did Elisha?  
Were you suited sexually?  
Did they cheat on you?  
Did you consider it cheating?  
Was their cheating important?  
How did you feel about it?  
Did you ever or ever want to cheat on them?  
Why did you/not?  
At what times was your libido stronger/weaker?  
Are men forgiven more easily for affairs than women?

What words do you use for sex?  
Who do you/did you talk to about sex?  
Did you share your experiences?  
Where did you learn about it?  
Did you teach your children about sex?  
Safe sex?  
What did you tell them?  
Whose role is it to tell children about sex?  
What do you think can be done to stop the spread of HIV?

Did you have orgasms?  
Did you have an orgasm the last time you had sex?  
Was it important for you to have an orgasm?

## **8. Emotional life**

What are the biggest problems in the country now?

What are your biggest problems?

Do you understand the term 'grounded'?

Do you think you are?

What makes you feel angry?

What makes you feel sad?

What scares you?

What makes you happy?

What makes you nervous?

Are you often nervous?

What emotion do you feel most often?

Are you aware of your emotions?

What do you do on a typical day?

Are/were you energetic?

Do you/ did you get tired easily?

What helps you stay awake?

What does snuff do?

Do you still take snuff?

How do you celebrate?

Do you remember any events that made you very happy or very scared or very sad when you were growing up?

What has been your biggest problems in your life?

What have been your happiest moments?

## **9. Violence**

Is there still violence in your life?

What impact has violence had on your life?

Was there/is there alcoholism?

Other drugs?

Did you ever drink? Other drugs?

Do you like to drink?

What do you think about drugs?

What kind of impact do drugs have on people's lives?

What impact has alcohol and drugs had on yours?

Besides for Elisha's death, what other role has violence played in your life?

And your children's?

Are you/has there ever been a time that you were afraid of crime or violence in the country?

Why do you think there is so much crime now?

## **10. Politics**

How do you see that apartheid had an effect on your life now?  
How do you feel about talking to a white woman about this?  
How were you compensated for Elisha's death?  
Would you like to have a hearing about it?  
What did you think about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

What did you tell Elisha's family about his death?  
Were you friends with other women whose husbands were killed?  
Did you talk to anyone about it?  
How did you reason it?  
Did you think you were being punished?  
How did you feel about Zulus?  
How do you feel about Zulus?  
Did you always feel this way?  
How did your parents feel about people from other tribes?  
What did they tell you about other people?  
When did you first hear about Jewish people?  
What did you think when you first met one?

## **11. Religion and Spiritual Beliefs**

Tell me about the church you ran in Alexandra.  
How do you celebrate Christmas, Easter?  
What other festivals do you celebrate?  
How did your father feel when you decided to start going to church?  
Did any of your siblings go with you?  
You are isiXhosa and you trained as a sangoma how?  
Why?  
Do many people do that?

How do you understand the difference between good and evil? Light and dark?  
Do you think people are intrinsically good or bad or neither?  
What happens after you/someone dies?  
Is it the same for everyone?  
Where did you learn that?  
Did someone tell you?  
Your ancestors?  
Or it is what you believe/know yourself?  
Are you afraid to die?  
Are ancestors reincarnated?  
How do you understand reincarnation?  
How many times have you been reincarnated?  
How many times do you think you will still?  
Do you know anyone in this life that you knew in a past life?  
Can you tell me about the kinds of lives you've led before?  
Are you resolving issues from those lives in this one?  
Did we ever meet in a past life?

What was our relationship?  
Will your grandfather ever be reincarnated?  
Do you have an altar?  
What do you put on your altar?

How did the world begin?  
Where did people come from?  
And dinosaurs?  
Is there life on other planets?  
Does it matter?

## APPENDIX 2: PHOTOGRAPHS



Zastron at the time that Gogo lived there



Zastron with the Maluti Mountains of Lesotho in the distance



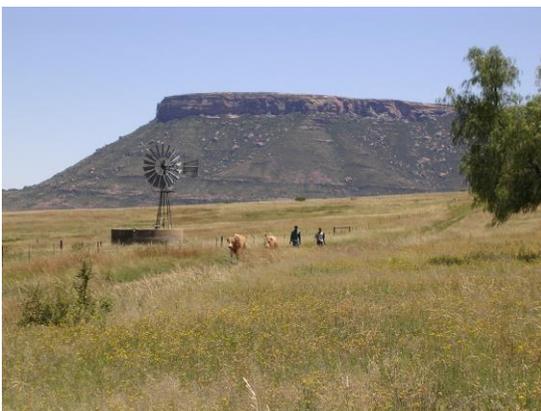
Zastron, 2006 – with the Maluti Mountains in the background



Approaching Zastron December 2006



Gogo and Gladys waking to where their mothers' houses were



The farm, Zastron



Ruins of Miss Marie Leroux's house



Gogo's father and step-mother, Poni and Leah Phama, and their youngest son, Putomani



Bones and shells in Gogo's bedroom in Zastron



Gogo the Sangoma



Gogo pointing to her mother's grave.

