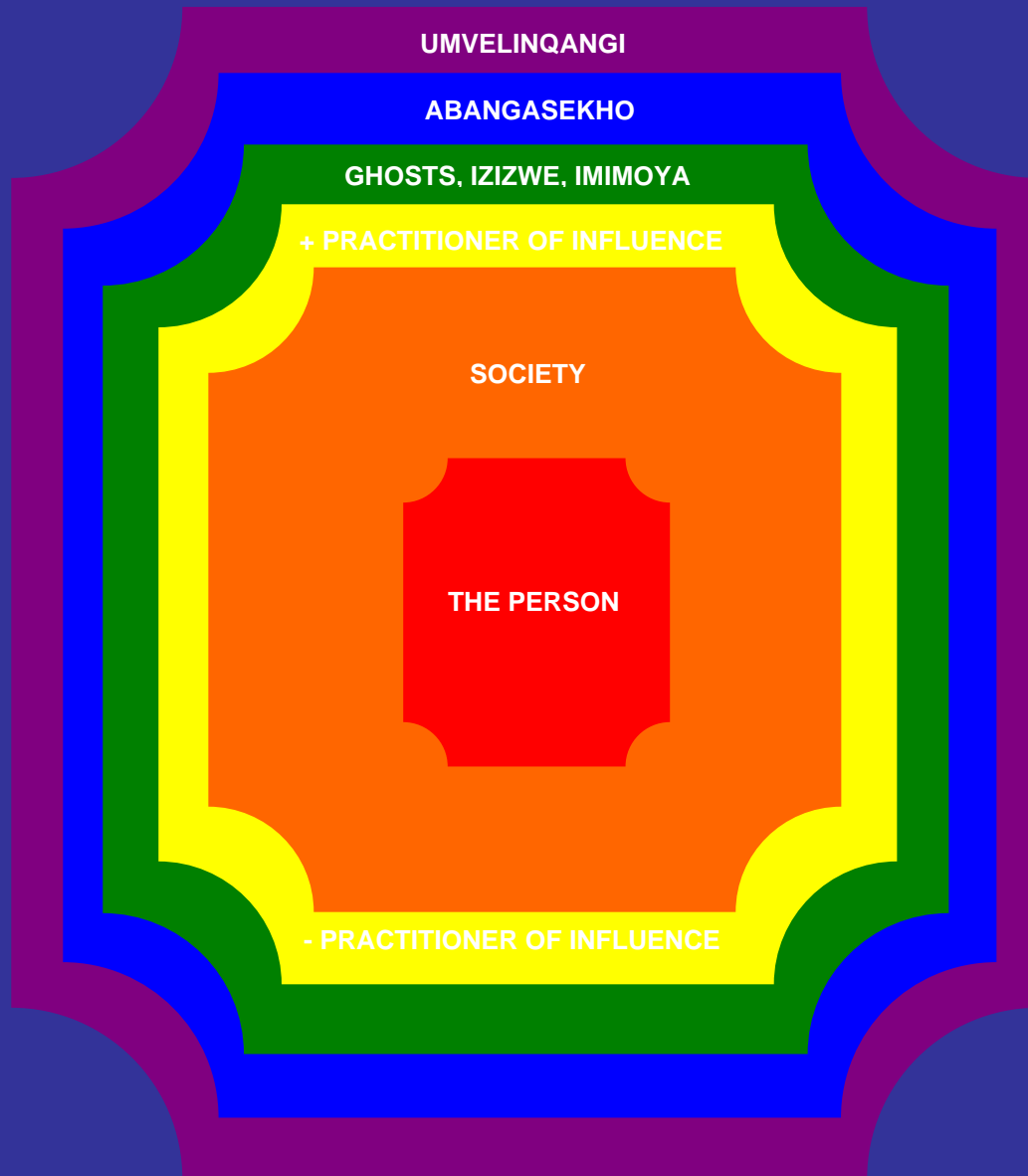


AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR CULTURE-SENSITIVE HEALTHCARE : THE CASE OF ABANGUNI



RAVINDRA NAIDOO

SHADRACK SEHOTO

LOUISE DE VILLIERS

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*This work is dedicated to Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela for
freeing us from the shackles of apartheid and giving us
the gift of freedom to shape a South African destiny that
we can proudly embrace as our very own*

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NOTES TO THE READER

This book is characterised by the usage of unique concepts and *IsiZulu* terminology. We believe it is important to clarify two unique concepts which are central to the understanding of this book viz. States of Debilitation and Practitioners of Influence.

ABANGUNI

The book is dedicated to the cultural reality of a specific cultural group viz. *AbaNguni*. This term, *AbaNguni* is inclusive of four major cultural groups in Southern Africa viz. *amaSwazi*, *amaZulu*, *amaXhosa* and *amaNdebele*.

STATES OF DEBILITATION

AbaNguni are debilitated from time to time by a range of physical, social, psychological and economic “symptoms” which mimic western diagnoses of physical and psychiatric disorders. These “symptoms” occur in various combinations and do not respond to everyday traditional and western remedies. *AbaNguni* regard these presentations as being caused by supernatural entities. To distinguish these presentations from illness, we have used the term ‘states of debilitation’ to describe such presentations.

PRACTITIONERS OF INFLUENCE

Abangasekho or ancestors are believed to exert a protective influence over individuals and communities against all exigencies. *Izangoma* (Diviners) and *Abathandazi* (Faith healers) are earthly representatives who act in accordance with *abangasekho* directives to exert a protective influence over their clients. Other categories of practitioners who exert supernatural influences over people are *Izinyanga* (Traditional practitioners specialising in the use of *imithi*) and *Abathakathi* (Traditional practitioners who exert negative influences over people). Collectively, these practitioners are referred to as ‘practitioners of influence’.

The term 'influence' is used to distinguish their role function from that of a solely curative agent.

ISIZULU TERMINOLOGY

This book is replete with *IsiZulu* terminology. To assist the reader, a Glossary of *IsiZulu* Terms used is included.

BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE MAIN SOURCE

I like to begin by briefly explaining how it came about that I became a practitioner of influence. Since I was very young, at the age of seven to be specific, my health was very frail and I had several illnesses. I had recurrent headaches, chest problems, wet ears to mention a few of my ailments. I was also involved in a number of mysterious accidents. My guardian took me to hospitals, to *izinyanga*¹, and to *abathandazi*² and still there was no cure for my debilitating state.

These incidences crippled my life aspirations and I finally left school. As time went on, my life became miserable; I kept on dreaming of *izangoma*³ and *imithi*⁴. I also dreamt of myself in *izangoma* attire. My family members overlooked the dreams and the other occurrences of illnesses because they were staunch Christians. These problems carried on until my marriage.

In the year 1970 the problems were at their zenith. I could pass out for the whole day. Hallucinations also became part of my daily problems. When I was going around town, I could see mountains and thereafter could not find my way. Kind people would take me to where I was going. Sometimes I would lose all my money, or sometimes I would find myself in front of a vehicle on the street without knowing what had happened.

1 **Izinyanga** [plu.], Inyanga [sing.] {noun}– Practitioners of influence or professional Healers specialising in managing complicated African traditional presentations through the use of imithi.

2 **Abathandazi** [plu.], umthandazi [sing.] {noun}– Faith Healers, those who heal debilitating states through prayer and holy water.

3 **Izangoma** [plu.], isangoma [sing.] {noun} – Practitioners of influence or healers specialising in people’s general problems and ailments. This practitioner is trained by an accredited school run by professional izangoma.

4 **Imithi** [plu.], umuthi [sing.] {noun} – Medicine.

One day, *idlozi*¹ spoke out and warned me. It mentioned that it wanted to work through me. On some days, in daylight, I would have a vision of an *inhlwathi*² chasing me until I entered into a dam. Inside the dam, I would see an elderly person adorning me with *umyeko*³ and giving me *iwisa*⁴ and *ishoba*⁵. It also happened a number of times that in a dream or vision, men would come to take me to a place which they would say is a training school of *izangoma*.

In 1979 I went to my first training school for *izangoma* in Maputo (Southern Africa). It was after I had dreamt of an elderly person saying that “I am your great-grandfather, I want to work through you.” That person then gave me directions to the school. He also gave me advice as to how I must behave at the school, what he liked me to do and not to do. The following day I went to the school walking like an insane person. Upon entering the yard of the school, I passed out. When I woke up, I was told that *idlozi* had spoken through me. It gave all the instructions about my training to the *isangoma* in charge. I had drunk *uthswala*⁶ that was already prepared since I was being expected. I trained at Maputo for five months. My *idlozi* led me out of the school because of some problems that were prevailing. I went to another school in Beckville where I trained for another six months. I also had to leave this school, as I was very ill during my training.

1 **Idlozi** [Sing.], Amadlozi [plu.] {noun} - A deceased family relative who looks after well being of an individual or family. cf Chapter 4.

2 **Inhlwathi** [sing.], izinhlwathi [plu.] {noun} – A snake called python.

3 **Umyeko** [sing.], imiyeko [plu.] {noun} – Izangoma’s beaded (decorated) hair extensions or wig.

4 **Iwisa** [sing.], amawisa [plu.] - A short round-headed carefully crafted stick; a short knobkerrie.

5 **Ishoba** [sing.], amashoba [plu.] {noun} – A beast’s or a wilder beast’s tail joined with short crafted stick which qualified izangoma carry.

6 **Utshwala** [both sing. & plu.] {noun} – African traditional alcoholic beverage. Also called a zulu term for

After leaving Beckville I headed to *Umlazi (South Africa)* where I finally completed my training as an *isangoma* in 1981. In 1985 I was recognised as a trainer of *izangoma*. In other words, I had my own training school. I started working throughout the province of KwaZulu-Natal. My main focus was treating illnesses which included *ukubethela*¹, to end *amanzi amnyama*², to get rid of *isilwane*³, *igobongo*⁴, *idliso*⁵ and so on.

In 1993 *Idlozi* came to me with the instruction that I must be both *isangoma* and *isayoni*⁶. In other words, more than working as *isangoma*⁷, I also have to lead a religious congregation. Added to the instructions, an ordinary person came to me saying that she was told to attend church in my place although there had never been church meetings at home. I then started church services and healing people through religious prayers and holy water. Today the church has more than thirty regular members and the number is increasing.

alcoholic beverages.

1 **Ukubethela** [from verb, bethela] {noun} – A process used to protect a home against attacks by abathakathi (i.e. the usage of evil medicine).

2 “**Amanzi amnyama**” [phrase] – This is a situation where abangasekho are in complete misery and have no good communication amongst themselves and their human families. This situation could be deliberately brought about by someone with the aim of creating instability among the living, the dead or both.

3 **Isilwane** [sing.], izilwane [plu] {noun} – 1) A beast 2) One of several variations of man-made utokoloshe 3) A state of debilitation, cf Chapter 13.

4 **Igobongo** [sing.], **amagobongo** [plu.] {noun} – A special type of medicine for Amandiki naMandawe.

5 **Idliso** [from verb, dlisa] – a state of debilitation acquired through eating or drinking something; more like being poisoned, cf Chapter 13.

6 **Isayoni** [sing.], izayoni [plu.] {noun} – A member of the Zionist Christians, a faith healer or his/herfollower.

7 **Isangoma** [sing.], izangoma [plu.] {noun} – Practitioner of influence or healer specialising in people’s general problems and ailments. This practitioner is trained by an accredited school run by professional izangoma.

I work throughout Southern Africa. My clients include all the main population groups of South Africa. Through my work, my home has become like a welfare centre. Destitute people come to me for shelter, food and so on. I accommodate some and give free treatment for whatever problems they have. Most of them leave my home having achieved means to live independently through obtaining employment or setting up independent businesses.

Mrs Eunice Nomusa Sihoto