

Steaming in the fringes; healing rituals in Johannesburg

Abstract

Hidden away from the public gaze, women and men, most of them migrants gather to participate in healing sessions using the steam-bathing hut they have erected next to a mining dumpsite in the south of Johannesburg. Steaming as a healing practice take elements from the African and Christian traditions. In post-apartheid South Africa, we have seen this practice reinvigorated by immigrants from neighbouring countries. For participants in the steam bathing, steaming responds to a multiplicity of material, physical and metaphysical challenges linked to life in the city they use it to address problems that are believed to have spiritual causes. In its current fashion, steam bathing is done collectively with both men and women steaming together the steam bath shacks are erected in the outskirts of the city. This work documents the urban and current form of this practice paying attention to what drives participants to use this healing system as well as how the body is prepared for cleansing, in this process the blending of African and Christian traditions are observed. This paper is based on an ethnographic work conducted by the authors who were witnesses and participants in steaming and its associated healing ritual at the Wemmer Pan Park in southern Johannesburg. It includes a series of interviews conducted with the prophet leading the steaming practice, and participants, members of various African Initiated churches.

Keywords: African independent churches, migration, healing, body, steaming

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Introduction

Steaming is part of the African traditional health practices, often used on an individual basis to treat natural ailments. In contemporary South Africa, migrants from neighbouring countries members of African Initiated Churches have refashioned steaming in several ways. Steaming huts are erected at the fringes of the city and men and women steam collectively and in its current form is used to treat conditions believed to have spiritual causes. Steaming for spiritual healing can be seen as a local response to the material, social and spiritual needs of African new urban dwellers. The healing needs of participants in the steaming encompass a range of issues such as infertility and various others health-related issues, difficulties in getting married, persistent unemployment and legal problems, among others. Those who practice it believe steaming brings spiritual protection and helps ensure material success. The healing practices that form part of the steaming are rooted in both African and Christian traditions. Steaming with the purpose to achieve spiritual healing involves invoking the intervention of the Holy Spirit to eliminate obstructions to success bringing to fruition the supplicant's desires and needs. Participants also hold explanations of its effectiveness based on physical mechanism. Steaming allows the body to be cleansed and rid of impurities. Through steaming, the body opens to absorb the medicine selected to treat the cause of the problems participant present to the prophets who lead the practice. This work documents the current form of this practice in the city paying attention to what drives participants as well as how the body is prepared for cleansing, in manners that make visible the blending of African and Christian traditions.

Isifutho (steaming): A proliferation of steaming huts in the city

Along with migratory movements and the spatial reconfiguration of the city, a multiplying of makeshift steaming huts have been erected in the fringes of the city of Johannesburg Steaming is performed in

areas such as Tembisa, Alexandra, Steel Dale, East Gate, Honeydew, Melville Koppies and Parkmore, all areas where foreigners reside. In these various locations, members of the Apostolic perform steaming rituals and Zionist churches both migrants from neighbouring countries (such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Botswana and Lesotho) and locals. Steaming huts are erected often in areas hidden from the public gaze, in what resembles a 'natural' environment, chosen to recreate a biblical landscape as well as for other practical reasons (e.g. the availability of firewood and stones). Steaming is an indigenous healing technology adapted to respond to the multi-layered challenges associated with life in the city. The building of the steaming hut draws on traditional knowledge and only materials found in the natural environment are used in its construction. Steaming includes the use of herbs used in traditional healing practices, medicinal products imported from India and China, and modern household cleaning products such as *Domestos* used to scrub the skin. In this amalgamation, all substances considered medicinal are called *iziwasho*, term that reflects the hybrid origin of this healing practice. Etymologically, *iziwasho* means 'to cleanse one's body' and according to Kiernan¹ *zewasho* is a corrupt form of the word 'washing', *iziwasho* is used "to wash out the inside...the repeated consumption of the mixture causes nausea and vomiting".¹

Steaming, within the Apostolic and Zionist traditions, involves producing the sacred through prayer and song. Participants call upon the intervention of the divine to change the supplicant's life circumstances and to solve the wide range of problems participants present to their prophets. The figure of the prophet plays the roles of both a priest and a healer, and is central to the steaming ritual. Through visions, prophets are able to identify the problems affecting the supplicants and prescribe the necessary treatments and the appropriate muthi or medicine. Through invoking the Holy Spirit, prophets seek to ensure the success of the steaming with the result that the altered physical, social and spiritual realm will be brought into order. In this paper, we present steaming as practiced by members of Zionist churches at the Wemmer-Pan Park, south of Johannesburg.

¹Ibid., p. 31.

Methodology

This paper is based on ethnographic work carried out by the authors, who were both observers and participants in the ritual of bath steaming and its associated healing ritual at the Wemmer Pan Park. We engaged in fieldwork intermittently, over a period of three years, from 2013 to 2016. During that time, and on several occasions, the three authors visited the site, sometimes together, sometimes separately. At the start of our fieldwork, we relied heavily on participant observation and on conducting informal interviews with participants at the steaming site. A good rapport with key fieldwork participants was built up gradually during the space of these three years, particularly with Prophet Tshabalala who initiated this particular steaming site. We held conversations and formal interviews with Prophet Tshabalala on at least ten occasions on days when there was no steaming so he could have time to talk to us. Most often, we met outside the steaming site at a nearby MacDonald's restaurant other times we met at the steaming site.

The interviews with Prophet Tshabalala included the following topics: his life as prophet; the origins of steaming and of the site; meanings associated with and the logic of the practices of steaming; the body and the conditions that steaming can treat; the methods of diagnosis; causes of health problems; and the mechanism through which steaming operates and heals a person. These interviews proved to be central in generating a deeper understanding of the practice and were instrumental in building the trust that allowed us to conduct research at the steaming site. One obstacle we had to overcome was the fact that participants in the steaming bath varied all the time. Only a few remained constant, Prophet Tshabalala being one. Yet, our numerous visits allowed us to get to know a larger number of participants. Usually, those who knew us would inform those who did not of the reasons for our presence there. Every time we visited the site, Prophet Tshabalala introduced us and asked for permission from the participants for us to stay.

As time passed, we decided to engage in full participation in the steaming. Two researchers took part in the steaming ritual on several occasions. This created a space of trust between the researchers and the participants, which was manifested, for example, in Prophet Tshabalala's level of engagement with our questions. Indeed, when we carried out further interviews after our participation in the steaming bath, Prophet Thabalala changed the way he responded to our questions. He went into more detail, referred to our own participation to illustrate his points, and expressed that he could better answer our questions now that "we knew what is steaming about". Taking part in the steaming bath also involved having our problems diagnosed, being told prophecies and being prescribed treatments.

We also conducted interviews with participants in the steaming bath on different days and in different places. In this way, we sought to protect respondents' privacy when talking about their life stories or health conditions. One aspect that helped us to engage with participants' individual healing stories, was by making reference to prophecies given to them by the prophets when we were present at the site, prophecies provide details of what the person is going through. One researcher, proficient in IsiZulu, acted as interpreter whenever necessary, and both interviews and translations were recorded and transcribed.

Background to steaming

Steam bathing, used to treat certain maladies and to promote and

maintain good health, is a part of many indigenous healing systems around the world, for example in China and India,² as well as in Latin America, particularly amongst Native American and various Mesoamerican cultures. Middle class urban groups in Latin American cities have appropriated the practice of steaming for spiritual purposes, in pursuit of cleansing and embracing the spirituality of indigenous groups.ⁱⁱ These groups have adopted the tradition from early Mexican populations and they use a makeshift hut commonly known as Temascal.ⁱⁱⁱ In some African countries, such as Uganda, steam bathing is often used in conjunction with herbs and oils for the treatment of malaria,³ and as a way of improving hygiene (Courtright, 2000). In southern African steaming has been cited by various authors as one of the healing rituals conducted by traditional healers.^{4,5}

Ngubane's⁶ seminal work on Zulu traditional religion and, later, Truter's⁷ study, provides detailed descriptions of how a traditional healers conduct steam bathing and how its purpose is understood in the Nguni traditional health system and cosmology. Ngubane⁶ explains how a traditional healer prepares herbs for steaming and how they are made into an infusion with boiling water, with the intention of removing *umnyama* (or isidina) (bad luck) and feverishness: the patient is covered in a blanket and then kneels, absorbing the heat, until completely soaked by the steam, thus allowing the medicine to enter the body.

Feldman⁸ emphasises the multi-layered purposes of steaming in the Xhosa tradition and describes how steaming with herbs strengthens and fortifies a person. Feldman highlights its ability to "clean (umgqwaliso) the isinyama (bad luck) associated with their weaponry. Another form of isinyama is associated with a calendrical killing spree: if a person kills at a certain time of year and is not cleansed (ukususa isinyama), the Xhosa believe he will kill again in the next year during the same season".^{iv}

Other authors have described the healing properties of steam bathing in combination with herbs and other substances and how it is used for minor ailments such as flues and coughs.^{9,10} For example, people boil eucalyptus leaves and cover themselves under a blanket and breathe in the eucalyptus-infused steam, or apply eucalyptus oil or vicks directly to the body.^v Jewkes et al,¹¹ in their South African research, and Mureyi et al.¹² in their study in Zimbabwe, found that steam baths among women were common. The women studied used traditional as well as biomedical health practices, attending pregnancy check-ups in hospitals but also using traditional steam bathing methods at home in order to widen the cervix in preparation for birth and also as a way of contracting the muscles in the postpartum period.

Shoko¹³ describes steam bathing as a healing ritual used in apostolic churches:

"A prophet [uses] steam and urge[s] the patient to inhale in order to release the offending objects". According to Shoko, and as we observed in our own research, participants sit inside an enclosed makeshift hut for 30minutes or more, exiting and re-entering a number of times, and perspiring copiously because of the intense heat within the hut. The heat helps to eliminate toxic elements and to absorb substances that are believed to shield and protect the person. As healing takes place, opportunities for success are expected to open up for the supplicants.

ⁱⁱAdd website with information

ⁱⁱⁱAdd reference

^{iv}Ibid., p.25.

^vCommercial name of the product

Fatokun¹⁴ describes how among African Initiated Churches water is used in ritual bathing for various purposes such as naming, success and deliverance, as well as healing rituals.

Similarly, steaming with the purpose of cleansing and spiritual healing is used amongst Zionists church members in a Christianised fashion. This is confirmed in our own key respondent's account, Prophet Tshabalala, the founder of the steaming hut, when he describes how upon he was searching for a church that would practice steaming, This is how the steaming site began:

I went to those mountains looking for churches that [hold] steam baths. Then I found the other guy. They were a church but [there were only a]... few [church members]. They [the church members] were not steam bathing. We started steam bathing together. I organized my church mates to steam bath [on] the other side of the freeway near City Deep.... It became our way of worshipping.

Upon his arrival from Zimbabwe, Prophet Thababala was looking for churches that hold steam baths he did not find any. It was he who introduced members of his church to steaming and as he put it became a 'way of worshipping'.

The city, the devil and the body

For migrants, Johannesburg has historically represented both danger and opportunity. As Chidester¹⁵ says, the city is "a space of transition, a liminal space, like the river representing both danger and opportunities". Kihato¹⁶ in her life stories of contemporary women migrants in Johannesburg portrays the city as a liminal space, as a place of transition. Signally the deadly dangerousness of the city, migrant labourers labelled syphilis in the past, and contemporarily, HIV/AIDS, as 'diseases of the city'.^{17,18}

Yet the city continues to be pivotal for the survival of both urban migrants and their rural homesteads. However, as long as success is uncertain and the threat of violence is never far away, witchcraft and insecurity are, for many, the most common urban experiences.¹⁹⁻²¹

The rise of witchcraft in South Africa in the nineties has been termed the economies of the occult.²² The rise of the occult is associated with the country's problematic modernity characterised by the encounter of cultural traditions with multiple temporalities in the context of millennial capitalism that is not sustained by productive labour^{vi} the contradictory effects of millennial capitalism and the culture of neoliberalism^{vii}. Scrutinising the place of the magical in the modern, McEwan²³ discusses the political potential of stories about ghosts and other spirits to challenge rational thought. In view of this, the author poses the need for the consideration of an 'enchanted modernity'.

Ashforth²⁴ in turn, invites us to take seriously, "people's relations with forces, agencies, and entities understood as capable of causing harm, including those forces which appear simply as figments of others' imaginations". He does not see the state of spiritual insecurity as disconnected from societal forces. On the contrary, he writes, "spiritual insecurity is related to, but not reducible to, the fears, dangers, and doubts that arise from poverty, disease, hunger, and violence"^{viii}. The experience of newcomers to the city can be described as one of spiritual insecurity.²⁵ This is a state of indeterminacy also referred to by Ashforth²⁴ as 'a crisis of authority' regarding the

ontological status and origins of everyday events—of both the ordinary and the extraordinary—and the multiple possibilities that can explain the causes of these events and what needs to be done to address them. As Ashforth puts it: "...the very indeterminacy of the appropriate categories for thinking of these matters contributes to the sense of insecurity"^{ix}.

As we argue here, the proliferation of supernatural threats, competition for scarce resources, unemployment and violence are all factors driving the heightened need for healing that newcomers experience in the city. Healing, through steaming, is aimed at shielding a person from bad spirits and witchcraft, and enhancing personal powers. For the purpose of this work is important to draw attention on the connection between the spiritual realm and the body in African tradition as subscribed by Zionist churches. More specifically we would like to reflect on how this connection links to a particular conception of the body that is experienced as 'open' and vulnerable, the preferred target when harm is intended.

Seeking protection at the steaming site in Wemmer Pan Park

As we began to visit the steaming bath at the Wemmer Pan Park, we met Nkomo, a Zimbabwean businessman and member of a Pentecostal Church and occasional participant in the steaming bath. As he told us, he found himself in persistent financial problems and family difficulties. As a last resort, he decided to try the steaming bath. This was unknown in his church that opposes to members engaging in healing practices outside the margins of the church. When we met at the steaming site, he described the hardship of the city. He said:

When people are home, there are not [a] lot [of] problems: at home, everything runs normal. [In] South Africa life is [a] fast life; people have to cover rentals and to support others back home. Food and transport are also issues to be covered... So people have that eagerness and envy to gather a lot of money, so if someone stays for one month without cash, they think that there is evil spirit.

For many the city experience is thus one of heightened risk. Participants in the steaming, mostly migrants, said they felt more exposed to risk, violence and witchcraft, and that they needed protection. Nkomo describes this experience as follows:

.... This country is full of crime and so forth. People go there [the steaming site] to have prayers and to be protected. Sometimes you are shopping around and a stray bullet hits you. They get protection from such situations. For example, if I am going to Pick'n Pay and [I] am protected and there are people coming to rob the place you will feel [you are] not wanting to go there. If it's a taxi, you will feel [like] not boarding it and let it go then at ten or so you hear that it has been involved in an accident, thus [that is] why people look for protection.

Nkomo went on to explain how healing was carried out at home before and how now, in the city, healing is carried out using manufactured products:

At home, we were using isihlala somtswiriri, or water from the river [and] these [new medicinal products, which comprise a] lot of things yellow, red and bottles, [which] are Indian, stuff.... Long back, we used to phone home to get isiwatsho. It was around 1996 to '8 but people were starting to look for ashes, umlotha ... [it is a] not very [common] tree... We did not have access to rural areas here

^{vi}Ibid.

^{vii}Ibid.,p.279

^{viii} Ibid.101

^{ix}Ibid.47

[in Johannesburg]... We believe that things coming from home are [of better] quality and could be trusted. Even now, there are some people [who], when they have a problem, take a taxi and look for people to help [at home]. Because here in town there are fake things like Chinese stuff so, we used to phone people [at] home. You know, at home, there is a certain kitchen made of grass [with a grass roof] where we cook. The smoke makes the grass dark...it is called *isinyayi*. We put it in water and drink it and it is good for stomach problems.

Prophet Tsabalala explained to us what is required to ensure that steaming can help a participant to overcome problems caused by witchcraft. He said that steaming is successful if the participant acknowledges the existence of witchcraft and, at the same time, believes in God. The subtleness with which Prophet Tsabalala lays out these orders requires that we scrutinise the difference between acknowledging and believing. In other words, the coexistence of two traditions framing the participants' experiences in the steaming implies and requires a dual subjective orientation. One order requires maintaining loyalty to a Christian god and, simultaneously, the other requires an awareness of the spiritual threats to which the person is exposed. In the 'acknowledgement' is an awareness of the risks, vulnerability and spiritual threats that people are exposed to.

Ashforth's²⁴ approach is pertinent here as it allows the establishment of a distinction in the relationships that participants maintain with invisible entities (either through believing or acknowledging) and sheds lights on how these relationships frame the experiences of participants in the steaming. Where witchcraft is acknowledged, its associated illness or misfortune can be treated through steaming. We asked Nkomo to identify what problem made him go to the steaming bath, something that his church would not approve of. He mentioned witchcraft that he could identify by a number of associated problems in his life, also by an unusual and unpleasant feeling in his body. This is what he told us:

I don't know how to call it... ah... but we call it *isichitho* [something that causes divisions in families]. There were things that were, like, walking on my body.

Walking?

Yes, like small ants. I was just feeling them, like...then I see nothing, you see. I faced a financial problem as well. I started facing destruction on my property because I used to have my own things, you see. Like every human being, if you work you achieve some things, but things were falling off...you understand.

As described by Nkomo signals of spiritual problems manifest in bodily experiences as well in interpersonal relations and financial problems. Spiritual healing is required to address the various levels simultaneously affected. How spiritual insecurity becomes ultimately an embodied experience because the body is experienced as an open body is vulnerable to harm and witchcraft and body as will be explained in the next section.

The African body

The body in the African tradition, according to Niehaus,²⁶ is made up of blood, spirit, and *isithunzi* (shadow/aura). Niehaus describes the African notion of the body as unbounded, "permeable and partible", and argues that this conception is part of the modern personhood of contemporary South African communities (ibid). He argues that understandings and experiences of the body as open have

been maintained among urban communities alongside processes of migration and initiation into wage labour in the city. The body is perceived and experienced as porous and unbounded, susceptible to attacks but also able to increase its power and be shielded through specific substances and techniques. In the experience of the participants in the steaming, the body is vulnerable to manipulation through witchcraft, which can be carried in substances and passed on through physical contact or consumed in food. The body is vulnerable to pollution, too, through contact with polluted objects, spaces or individuals who are polluted. Examples of pollution include having sexual intercourse with widows, pregnant women, those who have had abortions, or those who carry evil spells. A person can also be polluted by witchcraft, or by the harm, they may have caused to another person, who keeps thinking of him or her in pain. This produces a state of *umnyama* or darkness.²⁷ Prophet Tshabalala explained to us how misfortune or *umnyama* enters the body:

[Umnyama] enters the body in many ways. First, through witchcraft and second, through *isijezi* [punishment] by ancestors because of some evil deeds that one would have committed. It also comes through grudges that other people are holding against you. Whenever I think of you, I become angry; that act can bring evil spirits or, for instance, breaking one's heart and having a person always crying about you. It brings you *umnyama* [misfortune] and makes you vulnerable to evil spirits.

Risk, danger, pollution and misfortune become amplified in the urban environment. Nkomo told us about how bad things entered his body and, as a result, his body -or what his body projected to others- changed: he become unpleasant to others for no apparent reason:

If you drink this... [A substance that was put in a drink without his knowledge] people start hating you. You hear someone just from nowhere hate you, [and of] this and that happening... Or they give you something that you eat unknowingly...like in a meal... That thing we believe stays inside... Then people, when they look at you they see a different person, even if you treat them nicely and do everything okay, people start disliking you.

A prophet is able to identify the wrongdoings in a supplicant's life and see how evil entered the body and manifests itself, whether through illness, unemployment, misfortune, because of wrongdoing or because of bewitchment (*umnyama*). As prophet, Tsabalala explains, "evil spirits usually cause a person to be disliked by others and [to] be vulnerable to accidents, unemployable-ness and other bad things". A prophet can also identify how evil works.

Evil has many manifestations: there is [the] evil of witchcraft and [the] evil caused by a person. Evil is being disliked by other people. Also the evil brings complications to a person's life. As a prophet, I first look at his [a supplicant's] problem and will see what, where and how the evil is in a person's life (Prophet Tshabalala)

Once the problem and its cause have been identified, the afflicted person participates in the steaming bath and follows the indicated bodily practices. Nkomo described the course of action recommended for his problem:

I was prescribed [by the prophet] to take a steam bathing to induce vomiting as well as doing [wrapping around] this white string on my waist... to tie it, you know... I think... and to buy this thing... coarse salt... that I must bath with... I have to bath with that coarse salt. Then, after I have finished those things... I see it like [it was] taking more time [to work], [do] you understand? I got exhausted.

The body is actively involved in the healing practice of the steaming ritual through fasting, observing sexual abstinence, vomiting, praying, wrestling with the spirit, speaking in tongues, singing and steaming to expel bad from the body. In some practices, incisions are cut into the body to facilitate the absorption of healing substances or iswashi. This, too, indicates understandings of the body as ‘open’. In the next section, we will explore how the traditional conceptions of the body are reinterpreted in the context of Christianity.

The steaming body in African initiated churches

The genealogies of bodily practices are rooted in both Christian and African traditions. Here we would like to highlight the embodied conceptions and experiences of healing which blends various conceptions of the body and the spirit. This, too, is described by Kiernan²⁸ who explains that the Zulu term *umoya* means win, air or breath and that it “began to be used for spirit with the advent of Christianity”.^x *Umoya* (spirit) is now identified with the Christian Holy Spirit and is considered a benevolent influence “life-giving and health-bearing”.^{xi} The cooling elements of breath and air, intrinsic to it, are crucial in the mastering of healing powers to counteract the “‘hot’ or dangerous states, such as those produced by sorcery or passion”.^{xii}

One very visible element that connects African Independent Churches with the Christian tradition is the clothes they wear: long white, blue or green garments, with a hood and a string tied around the waist, inspired by the Apostles. In the steaming, the body does not entirely align with the Christian conception of the body. This amalgamation of traditions has been well documented, and is often explained in the literature as reflecting the syncretised origins of African Independent Churches.^{xiii}

The Christian tradition in the African Independent Churches as performed by the Zionist and Apostolic churches in South Africa includes practices such as fasting; praying; speaking in tongues; laying of hands on a supplicant’s head; and the blessing of water and its use for praying, cleansing and healing. These are all practices inspired by the Bible. Within Christianity, religious bodily practices aimed at expiating the sins of the body include some forms of self-punishment. All of these are individual practices that attempt to negate the body, to punish and dominate it, and they reflect an individual’s relationship with God. Commonly, when the religious body is at work in the steaming healing ritual, supplicants engage, too, in ritualised practices that prepare the body for this religious experience such as fasting and observing sexual abstinence. The presence of the Holy Spirit is invoked and it is believed that the medicines used can only act if God, through the Holy Spirit, is present. For this reason, the beginning of the healing ritual is always framed with prayers and songs that call on God’s intervention.

Tshuma, a participant in the steaming bath, said to us “Here, we come for fasting. The Bible tells us that if you need to be strong you need prayer. Here it is quiet. We can pray without disturbance.” He explained that further prescriptions on the body had to be observed:

ⁱIbid. p28

ⁱⁱibid

^{xii}ibid

^{xiii}There is a need to problematise the notion of syncretism in order to scrutinise power relations that may be operating in the past and in the present. The term is problematic as it suggests a harmonious encounter, an easy mixture of various traditions, a patchwork.

“We also stress that no sex [is allowed] before coming here and no person on periods [menstruating] should lay hands on others.

The Christian ideal of the submission of the body to the spiritual realm and, ultimately, to an almighty God does not enable an explanation of the unbounded and open African body,²⁹ which sustains the work done through steaming and it has associated bodily techniques. In order to examine these bodily techniques we look now at their roots within African healing traditions. These healing traditions include the use of emetics to induce vomiting; the making of incisions in the body to introduce the ashes of herbs; and the scraping of the skin with a particular mixture such as *iziwashi* and *jeyes* fluid^{xiv} to facilitate cleansing before steaming. Steaming allows the body to be cleansed so it can absorb substances that will produce not only a physical but also a spiritual effect. When we asked Tshuma, a participant in the steaming bath, why people cut their bodies with a razor, he replied: “We use Iziwatsho, Zimbela soil, cotton cords, and [a] razor... People are scratched in their body so that when they steam, these things will penetrate well inside their bodies”. He explained how the open body is manipulated:

We use a mix of coarse salt, jeyes fluid [a chemical disinfectant], soil, and methylated spirits to stretch the body and then anoint the body. People are stretched so that *iziwashi* [can] enter the person. We then steam the person for the mixture to be absorbed inside the body (ibid.).

Prophet Tshabalala explained the compatibility of the steaming bath with various other religious traditions:

If you check, people come from different religions. Some come believing in traditional religion. Here in South Africa, isintu [humanity] is there but [only in a] few [people]. As I understand, one will know *inyanga* [traditional healer] through reference, somebody will refer you. Here, because of difficulties caused by migration, and other [of] life’s difficulties like unemployment, people have been to different churches looking for help. They will tell that they have been to Christ embassy, SDA [Seventh Day Adventist Church]. I do not criticise other churches. I like them and they are right. They have different faiths to know deeply about their lives.

For Tshabalala, the importance of being inclusive resides in the realization that people may transit through different churches and healers in search for help for similar problems. It is there, in Thabalala’s view, it is there where isintu allows them to connect, in the possibility of being humans together. Independently of the belief or church people come from what the Zionist doctrine and the steaming associated with it proposes is a deep understanding of the spiritual or metaphysical causes of the problems which are expressed in the physical realm. Prophet Tshabalala compares his role to that of a doctor; he explains how he diagnoses the problem:

It is as if a doctor looks at you, knows what you are suffering from, and tells [you] what to take as medication. They will not tell [you] the symptoms that they are seeing. Thus, people need to be prayed for and have prophecy and understand, through prophets, their problems, how the problems began and what are the solutions to them. The issue of migration, marriages and general problems, which befall everyone, are the main issues that we address. There is also the issue of sins.

Unlike in the Catholic tradition where supplicants are expected to confess their sins, in the Zionist tradition sins do not need to be

^{xiv}Modern household cleaning product

confessed. Prophets can ‘see’ the cause of the supplicant’s problems. Steaming is not used to expiate sin but to extract the bad from the body to terminate the bad luck that originates in witchcraft, often motivated by jealousy and manifested in a range of areas in a person’s life.

Conclusions

Steaming as a healing practice integrates the economic, physical and spiritual needs of newly arrived migrants in the city. Steaming is used to confront material, physical and spiritual adversity associated with urban life. The origins of steaming can be traced back to African traditional healing practices. In today’s Christian Zionist tradition, steaming is practiced with the purpose of healing conditions that are understood as being rooted in the supernatural world, especially in witchcraft. In this paper, we have explored the encounter of two orders underlying the practice of steaming and have been concerned with how different traditions are ultimately resolved in the body and through the body. We found that bodily practices framed within the Christian tradition are performed to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit, yet the persistence of the African notion of an open body is central to healing through steaming, as can be seen through the belief that the success of steaming rests on the acknowledgment of witchcraft. As we found in post apartheid South Africa, the practice of steaming has become reinvigorated with the increase in immigration to responds to a multiplicity of material, physical and metaphysical challenges that are linked to life in the city.

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Conflicts of interest

Authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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