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## **uGogo: Residing with the Spectral in South Africa**

Dusk spreads along the streets. Pedestrians hurry to the taxi lines, eager not to be caught in the descending dark. Yogi, a Zulu youth of 27 years, ambles along at a leisurely pace, steadily moving away from the city center. He is not overly concerned with the emptying sidewalks, approaching nightfall, or brisk winter chill. His abode is quite near, an apartment building called Point Place.

A gusty breeze sweeps through the streets. Yogi sways then steadies, letting the wind hold him. In this suspended moment Yogi notices he is standing alongside a cemetery. The gate swings ajar. Curious, Yogi enters. He foresees an opportunity for personal procurement. Yogi is correct. Small memorials to the deceased – flowers and votives – dot the ground. Yogi happens upon a particularly attractive candle; a red one, decorated with fanciful moons and stars. Pleased with his unexpected find Yogi picks up the candle and hides it beneath his shirt.<sup>1</sup> He slips outside the cemetery, walking slowly and deliberately not wanting to arouse undue suspicion. Without further incident Yogi enters Point Place. He sets the candle on his windowsill intending to light it later in the evening. Everything continues on as usual, seemingly normal. By midnight Yogi is a changed person. So is his girlfriend, Sisi.

The clock strikes twelve. Yogi bursts forth from his room. His eyes blazing red; his teeth elongated into sharpened points. Yogi bellows in pain, in unsuppressed rage. Thousands of invisible needles are piercing into his flesh. Sisi, his girlfriend, is not with him. She is in the bedroom flailing on the ground, possessed by something only she can see. The kids next door hear the commotion, push past Yogi and run into the room. They find Sisi clutching at her throat, gasping for breath, pleading for a woman named uGogo to stop strangling her. “I’m sorry

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<sup>1</sup> Two accounts from the Point Place youth claim that Yogi found the red candle while jogging along the Durban beachfront.

Gogo!” Sisi cries over and over again, “I’m sorry!” uGogo seems neither to hear nor care.

Menstrual blood stains Sisi’s skirt, trickles down her legs, leaving dark streaks on the floor.

The candle burns low, the melted wax congealing on the sill. In the flickering light it looks like thickened, coagulated blood. Somebody – a nonbeliever – picks up the candle and flings it through the open window into the night sky. Yogi’s eyes begin to focus. The redness fades away. His teeth reduce in size. The pain subsides. Yogi crouches down next to Sisi. He pulls out a 1R coin. He tells Sisi that as long as she holds onto this silver coin she will be safe from uGogo. The convulsions gradually cease. Sisi’s friends wipe away her tears. They wash the blood from her thighs. They carry her back to bed.

The next day the same thing happens. Sisi continues to have seizures. Her period flows uncontrollably. She only stops convulsing and bleeding when given something to hold onto, something shiny or reflective – a coin, a spoon, a broken piece of mirror. Yogi also encounters uGogo. Yet rather than falling to the floor Yogi undergoes another type of catharsis, one of hyper-verbosity. He corners unsuspecting youth in the hallways, stairwells, and rooftop of Point Place. He exposes their secrets, revealing their darkest fears to everyone. What Yogi knows is seemingly impossible. He accuses certain girls of being negligent mothers, leaving their babies at home, abandoning them to enjoy the pleasures of town. Others he denounces as fat freeloaders undeserving of sympathy or help. They clearly come from prosperous families. Still others he condemns as too thin, harbingers of hidden STDs. He points out the murderers, the thieves, and the rapists. They all are guilty. They all must leave Point Place. Yogi’s disclosures are devastating, private knowledge made painfully public. Nobody blames Yogi though. It is uGogo speaking. Not him.

Other kids start to see uGogo too. They meet her late at night, a floating misty figure

dressed in long flowing robes, her face and hair concealed by gossamer scarves. uGogo beckons to these youth, encouraging them to join her outside the windows. Some like Sisi fall to the ground convulsing, eyes rolled backwards, imploring for uGogo to leave them alone. Others feverishly search for red candles. When they come back with white ones, bruises and cuts appear on their faces and bodies. They say uGogo is hurting them, vengeful for blood, demanding her red candles. A foggy haze envelops the building. Everyone is smoking dagga and Mandrax incessantly,<sup>2</sup> all pushed to the edges of sanity – even the nonbelievers. Then it happens, what uGogo seems to want.

Yogi leaps onto the windowsill like a cat ready to jump.<sup>3</sup> A few of the older boys perceive Yogi's suicidal intentions. They rush towards him, but they are too late. Yogi slips outside. One boy manages to grab onto Yogi's arm. He tries to pull Yogi back inside. Yogi does not resist. Dangling three stories above the pavement, he has returned to his senses. A fall would mean broken bones, possibly death. The other boys join in and slowly raise Yogi upwards, straining not to fall out the window themselves. But then the Nigerians from the nightclub below interfere. They hear the ensuing chaos, lean out the first floor window, grab onto Yogi's legs and yank him down. Instead of catching Yogi they let him drop.

Yogi lands on the sidewalk on top of his head with a sickening thud. Pedestrians call an ambulance. The paramedics take Yogi to the hospital. An hour later Yogi limps his way back inside Point Place. uGogo, he announces, does not want him to receive medical treatment. Yogi climbs the stairs. The white gauze wrapped around his head starts to loosen. It trails behind him, skipping along the stairs, darting around the corner. The other kids whistle in disbelief. Yogi looks like a zombie, an unraveling mummy. He has been overcome by something not quite from

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<sup>2</sup> Mandrax is a potent barbiturate. To make their high cost-effective, the Point Place youth will crush the Mandrax tablet, sprinkling it on top of dagga, which they light and smoke through the stem of a broken glass bottle.

<sup>3</sup> One young man claims Yogi actually transformed into a cat, a black one.

this world.

The next day the police arrest Yogi for housebreaking. They send him to prison. Although Yogi is gone, uGogo remains. Kids continue to see her. Sisi continues to fall ill. Finally on a Sunday some of the churchgoing youth tell their evangelical minister what is happening. The Twelve Apostles enter Point Place. They flick holy water in the darkened corridors, in the non-functioning elevator shaft, in Yogi's room. They call Sisi forward. The Apostles pray for her, marking a cross on her forehead. They encourage Sisi to attend church, to follow the teachings of the Bible. Sisi agrees. She goes to a few prayer meetings, recites a couple hymns, eats the sandwiches, drinks the juice, and gratefully accepts the donated clothes. A week later Sisi stops attending church. uGogo has left her along with everyone else, at least for the time being.

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All these sightings of uGogo – compiled from twenty-seven different accounts – occur several months before I enter Point Place. I go there as an anthropologist intending to investigate the social relationships of Durban's older street youth. My acquaintance with uGogo – with the immaterial, invisible, and otherworldly – thus occurs rather unexpectedly. I receive introductions from Ofentse, a 24-year-old Sotho female and well-established resident of the building. At the time we are discussing Ofentse's recent breakup with Khaya, also a resident of Point Place. Ofentse attributes the split to Khaya's repeated infidelity. Yet Khaya is not entirely responsible for his actions. Other forces, she tells me, are at work too.

Not so long ago Ofentse became extremely sick, rapidly losing weight, incapable of even drinking tea. Ofentse assumed it was the flu. The other girls from Point Place thought differently. They warned Ofentse to be mindful of her rivals, encouraging her to empty all her bags, to sort

through all her clothes, to wash all her linens. Sure enough they found a packet of *muti* – strange herbal substances – tucked in the folding of a shirt.<sup>4</sup> With this discovery Ofentse quickly recovered. Today Ofentse is not entirely convinced that somebody wishes her ill will, enough to use *muti* to force her breakup with Khaya. Still she is not taking any chances with their baby son, making sure all his clothes and bedding are *muti*-free. As Ofentse notes, regardless of her own personal beliefs, witchcraft is quite alive in South Africa, especially among the Zulus.

I ask Ofentse about other examples of witchcraft. She brings up uGogo. I am fascinated by the story, by its implications, Ofentse noticeably less so. She wants me to recognize that only the kids who smoke and drank saw uGogo; she wants me to recognize that uGogo is not really real.

“How could she be?”

“Yes,” I counter, “But I am not so concerned with the *how* rather by the *why*. Why does uGogo take on the bodily form of a grandmother? Why does she come at that particular moment in time? Why to Yogi? Why to Sisi? Why not before? And why not after?”

Ofentse begins to understand what I am looking for: the metaphysical possibility of uGogo, the underlying meaning of her presence. “Okay,” Ofentse concedes, “We’ll ask them. We’ll start with Sisi. Yogi is still in jail.”

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Ofentse and I are sitting at a small luncheonette with Sisi. Our interview with Sisi progresses quickly, for all her answers are limited to a few monosyllabic words, yes and no being the most common response. Sisi is shy in front of the recorder, in front of me. Ofentse assures me this is not like Sisi, not like her at all. Sisi has an assertive personality. She commands the

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<sup>4</sup> *Muti*, or more precisely *umuthi* (pl. *imithi*), means “tree” or “shrub” in isiZulu. When used in medicine it has noxious as well as curative substances, depending on the intent of the person’s application (Ngubane 1977:22).

respect of the other girls, quick to show her displeasure with a swift slap from the hand, a sudden poke of a knife. I never see this. With me Sisi is always polite and restrained. Occasionally I sense her underlying humor, a coyness that she displays around the Point Place boys:

*I am with the girls watching the busy exchange of clothes. Their flat has become a whirlwind of trading apparel – jeans for a pair of shoes, a halter-top for a skirt, a purse for a mended jersey. Sisi skips around the common area elated by her recent swap. Boys mill about as well, scoping out the scene, deciding whether or not to partake in the activity. Sisi bounces in front of them. She lifts up her skirt and flashes her ruffled underwear, teasing them about a tradeoff they'll never see. Ofentse shrieks in feigned dismay and tries to smack Sisi into proper, ladylike behavior. Sisi is too quick for Ofentse though, too quick for anyone. She hops away grinning delightedly, along with the laughing boys.*

Ofentse and Sisi have a close friendship, a mutual understanding. Sisi – for reasons unknown to Ofentse – has taken an interest in her relationship with Khaya, beating up other girls who may lead Khaya astray. Ofentse speculates that it may have something to do with their baby. Perhaps Sisi wants him to grow up with parents who are in a stable relationship? Ofentse reciprocates in kind.

Sisi has a younger sister, Tombi, who frequents Point Place. Sisi very much wants her sister to return home, not to fall susceptible to the vices that occur on the streets. Ofentse helps out, keeping a close eye on Tombi, consoling her when she is upset, encouraging her to return to school, to stop sniffing glue, to delay having boyfriends. Neither the tactics of Ofentse nor Sisi are particularly successful. Their interventions largely go unheeded. This does not deter them from trying though, assisting one another when they can. Even now Sisi is helping Ofentse. She has agreed to the interview.

Towards the end of our interview Sisi begins to open up. She expresses concern about a pending court case involving the murder of her brother. Sisi is scared of the defendant. He has threatened to kill her if she testifies against him. Over the course of this conversation Sisi mentions a recent nightmare, “I dreamt about Yogi. He wasn’t in jail anymore. He was here. He came to Point Place, he came to me, and his eyes were hanging out.”

Ofentse and I prod Sisi to speak more about the dream, what it possibly could mean. We bring up uGogo. Sisi does not seem to remember her. Sisi becomes noticeably quieter, saying she will go home if Yogi is released from prison. Ofentse changes the topic of discussion. We talk about the Durban nightlife, the clubbing scene, and the Mariah Carey poster hanging on the wall behind us. I later ask Ofentse what happened. She replies that Sisi stopped blinking. uGogo may come back.

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Two months after my interview with Sisi, Yogi is released from prison. I am stunned to see him. I have known Yogi for many years but by a different name. It is Mr. Building! The young man who first took me to Point Place promising me safe passage from a local children’s shelter. Yogi rushes toward me in delighted recognition, shakes my hand in enthusiastic greeting. “I no longer know you!” He laughingly calls out. And indeed Yogi looks different too, paler and heavier than I remember, a telltale sign of a prolonged prison sentence. We briefly catch up agreeing to talk later. For now Yogi is much too preoccupied. With a wink and wave he dashes off, intent on re-securing a room inside of Point Place.

Several weeks pass before Ofentse and I have the chance to formally interview Yogi. Yogi treats it as a special occasion. He is overjoyed by the “party” we arranged for him. Buoyed by the attention Yogi performs to his utmost capabilities. He wipes down the chairs with a



dramatic sweep of the hand; arranges the table so it does not tilt; pours the liter of Coke with exaggerated care. When our plates of food arrive Yogi talks and eats at the same time, his spoon a utensil of animated punctuation. Grains of rice soar into the air and land back onto the table, chairs, and floor below effectively nullifying all previous attention to order and tidiness.

Yogi, I notice, has lost weight since his release from prison. His skin is much darker. He has been sitting outside in the sun, sniffing glue, forgetting to eat, forgetting to bathe. All this I expect. Yet Yogi has a smell even I cannot fathom. It transcends the usual perils of body odor and unwashed clothes. Something is rotten, pungently so. Ofentse and I discreetly sit back in our chairs, leaning away from the table, away from Yogi. Ofentse thinks Yogi may have an untreated STD. Along these lines Yogi tells us about a painful sore, an *imvilapho*. Usually this sore can be seen. It is an external lesion. In Yogi's case the *imvilapho* remains hidden. He feels its presence though, a throbbing ache in his groin.

I ask Yogi if he has sought help either from the clinic or from more traditional means.<sup>5</sup> Yogi responds that he and Sisi recently returned from the hospital. They had their blood taken. It came out black, thick as oil. They were poisoned, he claims, most likely by the Nigerians. I take a chance and inquire about uGogo. Yogi expresses surprise at my line of questioning. He pauses, enough so that I think he may not answer.

But then Yogi replies, "I was relaxing in my room. I was smoking a cigarette. The cigarette went out! *Voo!* I didn't know what was happening. After that I was getting hot. Somebody was pulling me. I was crying. I was being forced out of the room. Then I went to the hospital; after that prison."

Ofentse asks Yogi for further clarification, "You threw yourself out of the window?"

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<sup>5</sup> In times of illness or misfortune, the youth of Point Place may consult with an *inyanga* or an *isangoma*.

Yogi shifts in his seat and then corrects Ofentse, “Somebody called me, called me down. I never saw her face. She was wearing an *iduku* [a kerchief covering the head]. uGogo was calling me. I’m coming. Somebody is pulling me. That’s Yogi falling down the window!” As Yogi tells us, he did not jump out the window on his accord. He wanted to meet uGogo, to see her up close. Also technically speaking, the Nigerians pulled him down.

Ofentse proceeds with the interview, determined to solve the mystery of Yogi’s red eyes. “How did they change color?” Yogi remains silent. He withdraws from the conversation. He does not hear Ofentse anymore. I am incapable of adding anything. I am scared. Perhaps we pushed Yogi too far? Perhaps uGogo has returned? Ofentse too is startled by the silence but then in a smooth transition asks Yogi, “Hey what type of job would you like to find?”

Yogi snaps out of it no longer silent, “It doesn’t matter, any job. Only money I need.” The interview continues. None of us mention uGogo again. Afterwards Ofentse teases me saying I looked absolutely white, rather ghostly myself when Yogi stopped talking. Since when did I become afraid of uGogo?

“No,” I hedge, “I’m not frightened of uGogo. I was worried that Yogi might jump. You see we were sitting on the second floor of an open terrace.”

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In his monograph, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolisms* (1976), anthropologist Axel-Ivar Berglund notes that in isiZulu a conceptual distinction exists between timely and untimely departures. According to Berglund (1976:79), Zulu speakers describe a timely death as: *goduka* (to return home), *dlula* (to pass), *hamba* (to travel), *shona* (to set, as in the sun) and *qhubeka* (to proceed). An untimely death as: *fa* (to come to an end), *buba* (to perish), and *gqibuka* (to snap

off).<sup>6</sup> A timely death imparts a notion of continuity. An untimely death expresses the opposite, the breaking off of life. The continuity associated with timely deaths – as opposed to untimely deaths – applies to the afterlife as well. For upon proper burial and decomposition, the deceased enters into another realm of existence: that of the *amadlozi*, the ancestors/shades.<sup>7</sup>

The *amadlozi* are a deep continuation, a profound extension of human life; hence their other commonly invoked name, the *abaphansi*, those who are down below (Ngubane 1977:50-51; Sibisi 1975:48). To go a bit deeper, Zulu thought-cosmology – again to draw upon the work of Berglund (1976:82-83) – distinguishes the body from the living spirit. Yet unlike Christian doctrines that posit a clear external/internal dichotomy, the body and living spirit are not wholly separate. The living spirit has an observable presence. Like the body it can be seen: as a person's shadow, as an image in a mirror, or as a reflection cast off of water. All three reveal the living spirit, the *isithunzi* (Berglund 1976:87).<sup>8</sup> The disassociation of the living spirit from the body occurs with death. The body – the corpse – remains on earth. The living spirit, the *isithunzi* departs for another place. The shadow (*isithunzi*), in other words, becomes one of the shades (*amadlozi*).

The *amadlozi* while from the place below reappear on earth as omens, in visions, and in dreams. They are white, casting white shadows and so viewed most clearly in the dark during the

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<sup>6</sup> To help the English reader distinguish the original stem of the Zulu word, I drop the infinitive prefix (*uku*) for each of these verbs.

<sup>7</sup> I translate *idlozi* (pl. *amadlozi*) as ancestor and shade, using the two terms interchangeably. Berglund (1976:29) would fault this as he exclusively translates *idlozi* as shade: “One reason for not using the word ancestor is that the English idiom suggests ascendants who are dead (according to Western concepts) and, as a result, there is a distance between them and the living... This is not descriptive of Zulu concepts which [...] assume a very close and intimate relationship and association within the lineage between the departed and the survivors.” I appreciate Berglund's analytical insights yet also am mindful of my respondents' general use of *idlozi*, which they translate as ancestor.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Ashforth (2005: 223-224), writing in the contemporary context of Soweto, describes the *isithunzi* as a “sort of life force” as well as “the inner, hidden, invisible domain of personhood” comparable to breath (*umphefumulo*). He distinguishes the *isithunzi* from *umoya*, which he claims corresponds more closely to Christian understandings of the soul. Ashforth nonetheless cautions against any rigid differentiation of these concepts, for they often are used interchangeably in both ritual and linguistic practices.

night (Berglund 1976:89-90; Ngubane 1977:50-51). The *amadlozi* protect their descendants from malicious intent and thus treated with deferential respect. If neglected the *amadlozi* are capable of inflicting illness, yet death is not their ultimate objective (Berglund 1976:28,269). Rather the relationship between the *amadlozi* and the living is one of mutual interdependence. The *amadlozi* are interested in the perpetuation of the lineage, its deep continuity. A timely death highlights this desirable progression. The passing of elders may be mourned but is not considered tragic, for they have children who will perform the necessary work to honor them as *amadlozi* (Berglund 1976:79-81). An untimely death is another matter, altogether.

Untimely deaths are associated with the young, with those who have not reached their full potential (Berglund 1976:79). Such deaths are tragic occurrences, for they threaten the continuity of the entire lineage: from the ancestors to the unborn descendants. First an untimely death denies the possibility of honoring the *amadlozi*, as their descendants are responsible for these ritual undertakings. Second it precludes the possibility of extending generations further down the line; it essentially cuts off the (unborn) children of the children. An untimely death therefore is regarded with extreme suspicion and anxiety, for it may signal the demise of an entire lineage. Such deaths, as noted in *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolisms*, are not readily accepted as a natural progression of life events but rather suggest a different type of order, a perversion of everything that is good, moral, and upright in society, a perversion that follows its own murderous, non-productive logic – that of witchcraft.

The ultimate objective of witchcraft is to kill and annihilate a person completely, utterly, and totally (Berglund 1976:81,266,385). The actual physical death of a person is the first murder. The second murder involves the taking of the life spirit, preventing the shadow from becoming a shade. The stealing of the life spirit – the *isithunzi* – typically occurs at burial sites. The deceased

not yet fully decomposed is dug up and treated with noxious substances. The corpse violated, the *isithunzi* appropriated. Such desecration differentiates witches from common murderers (Ngubane 1977:31). Both destroy life but only witches know how to transform it, how to mold and shape the *isithunzi* for their own nefarious purposes. Witches are the incarnation, the personification of evilness itself. They are the annihilators of the life spirit and as such are the annihilators of the *amadlozi*.

The youth of Point Place are familiar with murder. They are familiar with untimely departures. Young people die quite frequently inside the building. They become ill and weak wasting away from a sickness that nobody will name outright (HIV/AIDS). Outside within blocks of Point Place they die as well. They are stabbed, shot, beaten to death, run over by speeding cars. Yet what uGogo does is something different, not consistent with these recognizable everyday forms of death and murder. uGogo demands red candles; she causes seizures; she strangles kids; she entices them outside their windows. uGogo wants something in particular, something that is reflective, that can be projected onto a shiny coin, a broken piece of mirror, or a spoon. uGogo, I believe, is after the *isithunzi* – the very life spirit of the Point Place youth.

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*METRObeat: When Days are Dark, Friends are Few*  
By Nomsa Nyawo (2005:22)

Life is not easy if you are homeless, especially if you are a teenager. Living on the streets without shelter, clothes or food is a grim experience. METRObeat visited an abandoned block of flats on Point Road – called Point Place – to speak to the street children who take shelter in this derelict shell. The building is a nightmare, smelling of accumulated filth. It is pitch dark, even in daylight, with defaced walls and broken windows. There is no electricity or water supply.

METRObeat spoke to Wiseman, who guided us around the building. Point Place consists of just twelve units, but accommodates more than 120 street kids. As forbidding as the structure is, it is the closest thing to home for these ‘lost’ children. Rats and

cockroaches swarm in every corner, competing with the children for existence. Some of the kids even sleep in a toilet and bathroom. Many have lost their parents to violence or AIDS, and find themselves without a support network in a harsh world.

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Point Place is an urban dwelling set in the heart of Durban's metropolis, directly in between the beachfront and central business district. Its location makes the building an ideal place of residence. It is close to everything that comprises a bustling cityscape: stores, markets, nightclubs, transportation hubs, clinics, hospitals, municipal agencies, recreational and educational facilities as well as countless other amenities visible to any passing pedestrian: street lights, water fountains, and sanitation services. To not have running water then, to not have electricity, to not have a working infrastructure is seen as something that is distinctly non-urban, an anomaly within the city comparable to living in the countryside. Like many of those living in the rural areas the Point Place youth fetch water from outside taps, light candles instead of lamps, and dispose of their nighttime excrement in plastic containers.

The youth of Point Place frequently remark upon this juxtaposition between the urban and rural. They commonly invoke dichotomies of what is done "here" in the city and what is done "there" on the homestead. Yet while living in a seemingly modern urban environment, the Point Place youth continually come up against the very distinctions that they describe as the other, the rural, or the traditional. uGogo herself embodies such contradictions. She is an elderly grandmother living in a building occupied primarily by youth. She is a figure from the past yet inhabits the present. She demands obedience and conformity from those who desire self-autonomy and defy authority. She brings darkness and destruction to where there is light and life. She is, in short, a force of irreconcilable oppositions; inchoate and indistinct yet simultaneously real and terrifyingly clear – even to those who cannot see her, even to those who do not believe

in her.

“I never saw uGogo,” Jabulani, a Zulu male of 24 years, tries to explain, “I only heard her once, like somebody was walking in the passageway. I heard some noise, but I couldn’t see that lady. I don’t know where this ghost came from. I heard her, but I couldn’t see her.”

“He’s wrong,” his friend Shorty, a Zulu youth of 19 years scoffs, “Jabulani’s wrong. You know sometimes you can see a ghost on the farms but not here in town. There is no way to see one in town. Maybe in one year 10,000 people will die in town. But I’ve never seen such a thing like a ghost.”

“True, you can’t see them,” Jabulani concedes.

“Because there’s electricity,” Shorty puts forth.

“Okay, you can’t see them in town. But you can see them in Point Place. Why?” We wait expectantly for Jabulani’s answer, “Because there’s no electricity!”<sup>9</sup> To our laughter Jabulani adds, “There is darkness and in darkness you can *see*.”

To see inside of Point Place, to see uGogo is to see darkness as Jabulani proposes. Although darkness of a certain kind: that of absences and voids, hollowness and nothingness, emptiness and oblivion. Here then darkness not merely refers to unlit corridors. It also refers to states of despondency, to the emotional disconnections and dejections of life losses.

Again Jabulani elaborates, “Many people have died inside Point Place. Since we’ve been there nothing has been working. The elevator, it’s stuck. Sometimes if you’re stuck your heart will stop. You’re scared of things. So you can die just like that. *Snap!* Especially if your family doesn’t know where you are, where you went – so now they can’t come and take you.”

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Geschiere (1997:2), conducting anthropological research in Cameroon, also remarks upon this apparent disconnect between expectations of modernity and practices of witchcraft in Cameroon. The oft-repeated statement, “Where there is electric light, witchcraft will disappear,” belies the actual experiences of his research assistant who frequently encounters occult forces while residing in town.

Ofentse joins in, explaining that family members must come to collect the spirit of the deceased.

“Otherwise,” as Jabulani concludes, “You’ll be an uGogo from here onwards.”

To die far away from home – as so many do – without receiving a proper burial, without being collected by a family member is a common anxiety among the Point Place youth. uGogo, as Jabulani infers, relates to these trepidations, to the very real possibility of becoming an unsettled, un-fetched spirit.

In a similar conversation two young Zulu women, Liyanda 22 years old and Busi 18 years old, contemplate the internal degradations of Point Place. Through uGogo they address what usually is left unsaid: the mysterious afflictions and illnesses of their friends, the ignominious departures of the unclaimed dead:

“I remember that day,” Liyanda recounts, “When Yogi walked into the girls’ room. He went straight to Sisi, and he touched her. She was still sick. She had uGogo. He touched her and they went outside. Sisi was crying. She came back inside the room. She covered herself with a blanket. Yogi turned into an animal. He had pointed teeth. We were crying. The boys came up from downstairs. They asked us, why are we crying? We told them what happened. They said no. There’s no such thing.”

“Do you remember that girl who died in the morning?” Busi interjects, “She was sick when she came.”

Liyanda presses on, “And one of the boys said he saw a fireball. It was going down the stairs...”

Busi’s comment, “Do you remember that girl who died in the morning? She was sick when she came,” seems unrelated at first. Liyanda recounts uGogo’s appearance directly, the up-



close chaos of her existence. Busi touches upon something else, another trauma she witnessed inside Point Place. I learn about the circumstances of this particular death from Ofentse:

“She came to Point Place. She came when the HIV was, what do you call it?”

“AIDS?” I prod.

“Yeah, it was AIDS. Like a week before she died, she couldn’t stand up. She couldn’t go to the toilet. She couldn’t do anything.”

“Why did she come to Point Place?”

“Someone dumped her there.”

“Who looked after her?”

“We did, we tried, but she was violent. She was weak, but she was violent. And she died there in the girls’ room with her eyes open.”

“The girls saw this?” I am incredulous.

“Yeah, and we were scared to sleep in that room for about a week.”

“Who took the woman out?”

“The police. Oh, it was heartbreaking. They put her in a plastic bag. It was like an animal died.”

This illness then – far from being unrelated to uGogo – is intimately connected to the same suffering and distress, to the same sense of panic and fright, to the same feeling of being stuck and broken, dumped and bagged, unclaimed and un-fetched from the unlit corridors of Point Place.

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Ofentse and I are sitting at our usual luncheonette, this time with Sisi’s younger sister, Tombi, beside us. Tombi and Sisi are close as sisters, regard each other as protective companions

yet not at all similar in temperament or appearance. Whereas Sisi is reserved and contained, short and compact, Tombi is loud and gregarious, tall and gangly. Tombi happily chats away about everything and anything and quite often nothing, her outspokenness a noticeable contrast to that of Sisi. The interview setting, the formalities of obtaining participatory consent, a recording device, do not detract from any of Tombi's candor. She continues to reveal all, speaking with total abandon. We learn inadvertently from Tombi why uGogo visits Sisi, the thing that Sisi did at home. Neither Ofentse nor I are prepared for Tombi's disclosure. Tombi herself seems surprised at her own indiscretion, widening her eyes and covering her mouth as if she would like to take back what has been said. Tombi's explanation of uGogo confirms what many youth at Point Place already have speculated: uGogo appears most vividly to the guilty, to those who have committed terrible offenses.

\* \* \*

In isiZulu the power of anger – again to refer to Berglund's monograph, *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolisms* (1976:255) – sits in the soft palate of the mouth. This part of the mouth is called *ililaka*. Anger, wrath, and passion all are known as *ulaka*; the plural form *amalaka*, which also refers to the inner throat and tonsils again forming part of *ililaka*. Anger, in other words, resides in the throat. Thus to choke a person, to stifle, smother, and suffocate all breath signals much more than an act of bodily violence. Symbolically it suggests the crushing of passion, the suppression of procreative life in its most elemental form. Such strangulated, twisted destruction evokes significations of a certain kind. To clarify these significations I turn to the physical placements of anger, to the legitimate and illegitimate holdings of the throat.

As noted by Berglund (1976:255), a categorical distinction exists between legitimate and illegitimate anger, both of which rest in the throat although of different parts. Legitimate anger

occupies the interior of the throat (*umphimbo*), the site of eloquent speech and song; illegitimate anger occupies the upper throat and nasal passage (*unkanka*), the site of obstinate talk. The first promotes order and discipline, adherence to a good and moral life. The *amadlozi*, for example, are capable of inflicting illness and misfortune. Their wrath while at times implacable is justified, a retributive measure meant to enforce proper respect. Illegitimate anger is something quite different. It sets forth disorder and destruction, attacks of incinerating, incommensurate proportion. The wrath of witches typifies the wrath of illegitimate anger (Berglund 1976:255-256), for it is counterproductive and unjustifiable, utterly dreadful and completely deplorable.

Thus to return to uGogo's anger, why does she choose strangulation? Why not a more conventional means of assault? Like a stabbing or a shooting both of which are familiar to the Point Place youth? Why the extra hands on exertion of a full throttle attack? uGogo it seems wants more than mere death. She targets the throat, the emotive site of passion and procreative life. Her anger I propose is an illegitimate anger, a murder twice over – first on the body and then on the actual life vitality of the Point Place youth. Her intent? Absolute annihilation.

\* \* \*

*“ePoint Place indawo yokufa! Kungcono nibuyela emakini kunokuthi nife nje nge’ntutwani!”*  
[Point Place is a place of death! It's better if you return home than die like ants!]

Yogi screams his despair to everyone and to no one in particular: to the bustling city traffic, to the thronging pedestrians, to the paramedics who arrived forty minutes too late. A young boy just died on the streets. He bled out first from his nose then his mouth. It became a torrent of blood clots and vomit, soaking his clothes, spilling onto the sidewalk, leaving an indelible puddle. The boy died from untreated tuberculosis. The week before another boy from Point Place passed away. He was eating a fried donut, licking the grease from the waxy paper, crossing the road when a truck ran the traffic light and knocked him down flat. His intestines

spilled out onto the pavement, his arms and legs contorted into strange positions. He too died in front of everyone.

Shortly after Yogi's outburst, shortly after the deaths of his two young companions, uGogo returns to Point Place. Ofentse senses it a few hours beforehand. She feels an electric shock when touching Yogi. Her hair stands on end. Concerned, Ofentse corners Sisi, gazes into her eyes. They are clear. Even so Ofentse warns her friends about the possible coming. To protect her son she burns *impepho* (a dried plant of everlasting flowers).<sup>10</sup> That same evening Yogi tears up his bed, overturns the cupboards, smashes the dishes, and breaks down the door. uGogo was gone for nearly a year but then reappears again during the early winter months of my field stay to renew another cold season of death and destruction – to Yogi, to Sisi, and to many others living inside Point Place.

\* \* \*

“You know that Yogi? How he is when he has that thing of his? He said something is choking him. He woke up, and he fought with the tables.” Liyanda shakes her head as she speaks, contemplating the disturbances in her bedroom the night before.

*Shoo!* Chester, a Zulu youth of 19 years slides off his chair, settling closer to Liyanda sitting on the floor. “What did you do?”

“I held my boyfriend tight. Ha! I held him tight. Yogi had his thing. He was hitting the tables, just here he flipped the table.”

Chester nods knowingly. He heard Liyanda's boyfriend speaking about it earlier on.

“We reminded Yogi of it in the morning. He laughed at us.”

“Hmm,” Chester muses, “Why do all these boys see uGogo? I haven't seen uGogo.

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<sup>10</sup> The smoke of *impepho* is meant to cleanse the air and to appease the *amadlozi*.

There's no uGogo that's coming to Chester!"

Yogi and Sisi figure as the catalysts of uGogo. Yet their stories are the not the only ones. Other narratives intersect, the significations of uGogo extending to all those who reside within Point Place. As such I look to the recurring patterns of uGogo, to the 1R coin and strangulation, to the mediating symbols of life and death. To this I add the red candle. Brought in and ignited by Yogi its flame flickers on many, even on the disbelieving. For irrespective of the hand that lit it, the red candle calls forth certain associations, particular conflagrations. Thus even Chester who is skeptical of uGogo, of her existential reach prefers white candles to red, lighting them for their pearly reflections, for their illuminating shadows, for their mitigating protections.

\* \* \*

The witch, by most South African accounts, is typically older, female, and without children. She wants to cause suffering, enjoys it immensely, wrecking havoc on everything considered good, decent, and upright in society. The witch usually works at night, undercover by the light of red candles. Yet while alienated from everyday society the witch does not necessarily act alone. Often she employs others – e.g. “familiar” – to carry out her evil intentions. In the rural areas a horde of familiars – baboons, owls, dogs, cats, and snakes – fall under the witch’s dominion. In the urban areas a special familiar, the *tikoloshe* predominates. *Tikoloshe* are hypersexual beings renowned for their excessive body hair, short stature, and massive penis. The witch not only dispatches *tikoloshe* to perform wicked deeds; she also utilizes them for her own sexual purposes. Such depraved, immoral passion sets the witch apart yet again. Her sexuality is not productive or naturally generative; it is manipulative and abnormal; it is like her sterile womb entirely perverse (Niehaus 2002).

To control her familiars the witch utilizes *muti*. Not inconsequentially for the Point Place

youth, the rural areas – with their strange, traditional ways – feature as the preeminent site of *muti*-making. As Jabulani explains, “You see here in town you will find *muti*. But you’re not going to find strong *muti*. You’ll just find weak. Because why? Here in town they buy it. In the farms they make it for themselves.” Still the allure of quick money and instant gratification, always at the expense of others, provides plenty of fodder for occult activity – even in the city.<sup>11</sup> To illustrate these material gains Jabulani calls for an impromptu dummy display.

“You see if I’m a witch,” Jabulani look around and zeroes in on Shorty sitting on the bed, “I’ll want to use him.” Jabulani deftly raises Shorty’s shirt and presses his fingers against Shorty’s stomach. “I’ll cut him here and here. I’ll put *muti* all over his body so he’ll listen to me.”

Laughing nervously Shorty leans back.

Undeterred, Jabulani pushes Shorty forward. “He’ll be my uGogo now.” Jabulani emphasizes his say-so with a small jab to Shorty’s arm. “He’ll go into town. If I send him to kill somebody he’ll go. I even can send him to steal money from a bank.”

As Jabulani speaks another friend – who has been quiet up until then – enters the fray, “Zulu witch, *tikoloshe*!” he spontaneously exclaims.

Laughter erupts from us all, for Shorty much to our amusement and to his chagrin has been transformed into a sexually manipulated, profit-seeking *tikoloshe*. To clarify this hirsute association I ask if uGogo is related to a *tikoloshe*, if they somehow are the same.

“Yes,” Jabulani responds, “I think uGogo is like a *tikoloshe* because you can’t see her but she can see you. Yes, and like a *tikoloshe*, you can’t see it but it can see you.” For Jabulani, the simultaneous invisibility and presence of uGogo conjures up features comparable to a *tikoloshe*.

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<sup>11</sup> In recent years, anthropologists have duly noted the dramatic surge – or perceived surge – of occult economies in Southern Africa (Ashforth 2000; Auslander 1993; Burke 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Comaroff and Comaroff 2003; Gulbrandsen 2003; Jensen and Burr 2004).

Although Jabulani readily accepts uGogo as being similar to a *tikoloshe*, other respondents reject this line of questioning. For example Vusi, a Zulu male of 17 years prefers to compare uGogo to a ghost, “Eh, that thing, uGogo, she was like a miracle or something, like a ghost getting you, controlling you, shaking you.”

Meanwhile Bonggi, a Zulu female of 19 years and self-professed Christian describes uGogo as something closer to an ancestor, “See I don’t believe in ghosts. I really don’t, but I was scared even though I don’t believe in ghosts.”

“So you think uGogo was a ghost?” I ask, hoping for clarification.

“Yeah, sort of,” Bonggi replies, “Like the *amadlozi*.”

Andile, a Xhosa male of 23 years, represents another case in point. His understanding of uGogo changes numerous times even within the same interview. “uGogo,” Andile begins, “I can say she’s a zombie, something of the night. She died inside.” Sometime later Andile adds, “uGogo was not a *tikoloshe*. She was a ghost.” And then again upon further reflection, “You see a thing of the night, like a zombie, it can’t come to a place that has electricity. uGogo was somebody’s thing. That’s why she was able to come to Point Place, she was sent by another person. There are people who want to destroy you. They use *muti*. A person just cries, cries, cries.”

Andile’s narrative, difficult to follow, adds to the mystical aura of uGogo. She is an elusive figure, impossible to grasp or fully comprehend. Andile’s statement, “uGogo was somebody’s thing,” reflects this ambiguity, the uncertainties of her presence: Is uGogo a thing of the night? A familiar sent by a witch? Or is she a personal thing? Something specifically related to Sisi and Yogi? Andile’s free-floating associations make it difficult to tell. Still while apprehensive of uGogo, Andile also cautions, “You mustn’t take the things that are not the truth

because it happens that it's there. It's the things from their homes." In other words we should not believe in uGogo too much, for she relates to matters beyond our experiential perceptions.

Andile, I subsequently learn, will not encounter uGogo for two other reasons as well. One, he has the protection of his *amadlozi*, "Yeah, *amadlozi*, they're here next to me." And two, Andile holds onto something that many of the other Point Place youth have relinquished a long time ago. "The way that uGogo came, I can say it's combined with a certain type of witchcraft. Not really strong though. There's another thing too. You must have hope. The thing that causes uGogo not to come to me... I trust in God."

Andile's spiritual syncretism is typical of the Point Place youth. Regardless of their personal backgrounds or upbringings – from the rural areas or from the townships, as Christians or as charismatic faith-followers, as Zulus, Xhosas, or Sotho – they refuse to subscribe to any single doctrine, any cohesively rigid dogma. Rather their selection of beliefs derives from a conglomeration of many competing, contending, dialectically coexisting cosmologies. uGogo is the fractured composite of such cosmologies. She relates to the collective experiences of the Point Place youth, to the untimely deaths and joint suffering. She also relates to the setting of Point Place, to its internal degradations and disconnections. Yet the very possibility of uGogo, the metaphysics of her being has a much wider field of association. To disinter uGogo, to exhume the origins of her existence I thus go to the site of genesis and final departures. I trail after the memories of the wayward ultimately following them homeward.

\* \* \*

"Cockroaches! Look cockroaches!" A burnished insect, its legs protruding upwards, mucks in the gravy of my mutton. Appetite gone I push my plate away. "Cockroaches!" Tombi gleefully declares, this time swiveling in her chair so all the surrounding patrons can hear.



“Shhh!” Ofentse hisses. Tombi flashes her a lopsided grin revealing two crooked front teeth and matching dimples. Neither Ofentse nor I can resist Tombi’s charm, a liveliness that flickers most unexpectedly, even in muck. We laugh and contemplate our old haunt, the luncheonette – now three years later – gone horribly wrong. Still meat is meat and in due course Tombi rescues our fare, scraping the contents of our plates into a takeaway container. Spoonful by spoonful Tombi sloshes up the gravy, dribbling it on our leftovers. She hums a familiar chant. Unexpectedly a memory of Sisi: *A tradeoff you’ll never see!* The tune dwindles. Tombi’s movements slow then stop altogether. She is quiet, uncharacteristically so.

“Are you stressed?” Ofentse gently asks. Tombi looks at us unable to respond. “You miss your mother?” Tombi nods yes. Her mother passed away six months previously. “And Sisi?” Tombi’s hand quivers. The spoon, dripping with gravy, dangles in midair and then drops. It lands with a splattering thud on the floor. Tombi bursts into tears. The serving ladies glance our way questioningly.

\* \* \*

“How did it happen,” I later ask Ofentse, “How did Sisi die?”

“It wasn’t easy, not easy at all. Remember I called you?”

“I know but I was back in the U.S. then.”

“Yeah you were far. But me, I was close to everything – Sisi and Tombi, their mother. I saw it all.”

“How so?”

“I went to Sisi’s home the day before she died.”

“Can you tell me about the visit?”

“It’s hard.”

“Oh.”

“No, it’s not what you think. I made promises. Promises I couldn’t keep.”

“To Tombi?”

“No, to her grandmother.”

I am confused. There’s an uGogo, a grandmother in the home? How can that be? And then it dawns on me. The thing that Sisi did at home – not at the home of her mother but at the home of her father, a father that Sisi and Tombi do not share. Sisi, in a fit of rage, set the house ablaze. She left her uGogo asleep there, to asphyxiate from smoke inhalation, to burn unaware.

“Imagine,” Ofentse echoes my thoughts, “Imagine.”

“And the promise?”

“I will tell you.”

\* \* \*

Ofentse gazes at me steadily. She takes a deep breath. “I didn’t see Sisi, not at first.”

“You didn’t see her?”

“No, not *see*, like recognize, I didn’t recognize her. She looked so old, so very old.”

“Is this when you went to her home?”

“No, this was at the hospital. I took Sisi there – at the mother’s request.”

“How did the mother know you?”

“She called me. Sisi or Tombi must have given her my number. She asked me to visit them.”

“And you did?”

“Yeah. You know I didn’t expect it but their home is nice. Four rooms, I’d say. Still I could tell something was wrong, something besides Sisi’s illness.”

“Like what?”

“It was so quiet there. Usually if somebody is sick, really sick neighbors will help out. You know with the cooking and housework, stuff like that.”

“How did the mother and grandmother receive you?”

“They were happy to see me, asked me how I knew Sisi and Tombi. When I told them they didn’t look at me funny, you know the way people sometimes do when they hear kids are staying alone in town.”

“Because they think it’s wrong?”

“Yeah especially if you’re a girl. But they understood. The situation. We can’t stay at home. The grandmother wanted to know more about town, about Point Place. How we get food, if there’s work, if anyone helps us, that sort of thing. That’s when Tombi left the room.”

“Why?”

“She knew what was coming next. She went outside to cry.”

“Because of Sisi, of her illness?”

“Because of what they couldn’t do for her – the burial. They couldn’t afford it.”

“But you said the house was nice, well kept?”

“Yeah but they never applied for Sisi’s ID. And so later when she got sick they couldn’t include her in their coverage, their funeral policy. The father’s family wanted no part of it, refused to help with the costs.”

“So how was she buried? Without a service?”

“That’s when I made my promise. I told them I could take Sisi to the hospital.”

“The hospital doesn’t give out coffins does it?”

“No.”

“They incinerate?”

“Yeah and if the body is unclaimed...”

“A mass grave?”

“The bodies, the ashes they’re all mixed up.”

“Did Sisi hear any of this?”

“No, she was in the far corner of the room, sleeping.”

\* \* \*

I scour my field notes looking for a special entry, a phone call in the middle of the night from Ofentse telling me of Sisi’s untimely passing. I find it – a testimony, a skeletal memory that I flesh out years later at our luncheonette.

*Sisi stirs. Ofentse stands up to attend to her ailing friend. Sunken eyes gaze at the ceiling unseeingly then focus, flash with recognition. Sisi smiles, her lips cracking with the effort. She wants to show Ofentse something. The blanket, Ofentse helps Sisi fold it down; revealing protruding collarbones, emaciated arms, and jutting ribs. Lower still she folds the blanket. Sisi moves her fingers to the hem of her dressing gown. She twists it to the side, exposing her thighs, her private parts. Rooted near her groin a lump rests. It shines brightly, tightly. It covers the entirety of her pudenda.*

*“What is it?” Sisi wonders.*

*Ofentse does not have a ready answer. Later she asks me.*

*I do not know either. But I think back to Yogi’s imvilapho, to his hidden sore now made painfully public, openly visible for all to see. uGogo’s tradeoff: uncompromising and unstoppable.*

*“Touch it,” Sisi asks of Ofentse, “Touch it.”*

*“But it might burst.”*

*“Let it.”*

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