

The Wound [15] 2017 | South Africa | 88 min

UK release date **27th April 2018**

Director **John Trengrove**

Screenplay **John Trengrove, Thando Mgqolozana, Malusi Bengu**

Cinematographer **Paul Ozgur**

Cast **Actor Nakhane Touré (Xolani); Bongile Mantsai (Vija); Niza Jay Ncoyini (Kwanda); Thobani Mseleni (Babalo); Gabriel Mini (Khwala); Zwelakhe Mtsaka (Elder 1)**

Tradition and modernity clash head-on in Oscar-nominated South African drama, *The Wound*. Competing attitudes toward masculinity and sexuality are also exposed. (The film's depiction of a gay romance provoked fury in the Xhosa community and a censorship backlash in South Africa.)

Nakhane Touré stars as Xolani, a factory worker with little status or pride in his work. He feels a sense of importance about his work as a "guide" to the young men in an ancient initiation ceremony for young Xhosa men that takes place deep in the countryside. The men are kept in remote camps and are ritually circumcised.

The rite supposedly protects them from evil and marks the passage into adulthood. Xolani is entrusted with a "rich boy," Kwanda (Niza Jay Ncoyini), whose father wants him to be toughened up and to get over his sybaritic city ways. Xolani is gay. If this was known, he would be ostracised. His only confidante is fellow guide Vija (Bongile Mantsai), who is also his lover.

The relationship between the three central characters is fraught. Xolani is attracted to Kwanda; suspects he might be gay too, and is very wary about letting Vija get too close to him. Kwanda is rebellious and defiant. He refuses to follow the elders' orders. He is also perceptive enough to realise both that his guide has designs on him and that Xolani's relationship with the other guide goes beyond mere friendship. "Don't worry. Your secret is safe with me," he taunts the guide.

Its fraught sexual politics apart, *The Wound* is fascinating in its insights into Xhosa culture. There is an obvious poignance here in the knowledge that the characters will soon have to return from the wilds to their everyday lives back in the city until the next year's ceremony.

Xolani is painfully aware that there is nothing for him away from the mountain other than a life of anonymous drudgery. Director John Trengove handles complex subject matter in a sensitive and insightful way. There is a surprising twist too at the end of this unsettling rites of passage story.

Geoffrey McNab, *The Independent*, 25 April 2018

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