

# **An Art-Based Autoethnographic Exploration of Ritual as Identity Formation**

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'The work of art- the object of interpretation –that is, that which is divided, spilt, antagonistic- in other words a heterogeneous site- is a totality only in the sense that it is the belonging together of differences' (Benjamin 1991:38).

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## INTRODUCTION

Art is not just didactic or a means to serve content or explore concepts and ideas, it is also an extension of self and reflection of self. What an artist chooses to express and how it is framed says something about the artist themselves. In this way art can be a reflection of values, socio-political ideals, and beliefs and thus reinforce or oppose the prevailing practices found in their society. Would the fact that artworks can serve as tools of reflection mean they can also be authorities from which identity can originate? The art makes the artist as much as the artist makes it. This mini-dissertation serves as a framework for my own art-making practice. Through this research paper my intention is to explore, a liminal reading of my own identity and its creation as told through an autoethnographic narrative that examines the structures perpetuated by rituals performed in a rite of passage. This examination is done with the use of the works of various theorists, chief among them is the anthropological theorist Van Gennep (1960) and his seminal work on rites of passages. Homi Bhabha's (1994) work on liminality provides the framework that will allow the analysis of transculturalism and how its incorporation into artmaking can allow the renegotiation of binary constructs and serve as a tool for identity formation. This is achieved by investigating how my identity was shaped by the intersection of my race, place of birth, the culture of my childhood as well as that of my parents and how self-identity can be shaped by the deconstruction, and reconstruction of the signifiers of these things through the art making process as a ritual. This is framed around the idea of different aspects of my identity having been out of sync with one another and unable to connect leading to a fractured self-identity. I will be examining how ritual as self-identity construction through art making can be used to counteract the effects of dislocation and alienation felt as a result of that fragmented self-identity. This will all be done using a qualitative research methodology that will rely heavily on my experiences and will be coupled with practical art making components that will form the practical research. Art installations that fit this description by Nicholas Hlobo and Yinka Shonibare are analysed alongside my own work.

## KEY TERMS

Ritual, Intercultural, Heterotopia, Hybridity, Liminality, Identity, Culture, Dislocation, Identity, Formation



## CHAPTER 1: SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

I want to keep the scope of this inquiry narrow and focused on notions of identity. This will not go into what has been researched on specific Xhosa or Sotho rituals, practices, societal challenges and reasons for certain rituals persisting under certain circumstances and others being altered.

The scope of this inquiry encompasses my identity formation (that of the researcher) within the framework and context of these positions: man, African, and family. I selected these attributes above all others because of the role they play in my self-definition and because of I feel they are interlinked and affect each another. Furthermore, from my perspective these classifications respectively embody for me a part of my identity. I was obligated to research how they are interrelated and intersect within me. This study explores how these three positions affect and continue to affect me. The study incorporates an amalgamation of autoethnography and artmaking to produce a visual representation of my identity formation within the three spheres identified above. The short story produced for this dissertation is confined to the expression of my personal experiences. In summary, subjectivity and reflexivity form the foundation of this study while being backed up and bolstered with a rigorous theoretical framework. Simultaneously, this inquiry offers a scope that spreads past the individual and the local, to experiences that mirror and echo the experiences of others and to interpretations and perspectives that could contribute to dialogues on identity and cultural dissimilarity. This part can take place within the realm of the art-based component of the inquiry by establishing a dialogical platform through the resulting exhibition.



## 1.1) ETHICAL CONCERNS OF RESEARCH

In this research private information such as beliefs, attitudes and personal opinions will be shared. However, as the sole subject of the analysis the traditional ethical concerns of informed consent and anonymity are rendered moot. I will not be conducting any interviews with human subjects, as this methodology will be completely reliant on autobiographical information of my experience which will be isolated. There is no potential physical, psychological or social damage inflicted upon the subject during the research or after circulation of the results as it will also remain within the academic sphere.

In the case that an issue does arise as both participant and observer I am in a position to make an informed decisions about my continued participation in the study as I am constantly aware of the potential risks and benefits of the research. There will be no engagement between myself and the ethnographic community within which the alienation had been experienced until the end of the study. By the end of the study the engagement with the community will come in the form of the art exhibition and dissertation which can serve as a platform for some sort of exchange or communication. Nothing from the exhibition will be documented or published because the point is not to record their experiences in any manner.

## CHAPTER 2: WHY AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The methodology of this inquiry is unique because it requires the interaction of the catalogue, dissertation and the exhibition to weave into one another in a way that allows them to function in different ways for different audiences. This is important because through this project different people are given different access to the work depending on their relation to myself. One of the access points of this work is the written dissertation which takes the form of an autoethnographic narrative that is first told and then later examined in following chapters. This is done so that the impact of the autoethnographic form is not hindered by immediate analysis because the emotive response the story has the potential to evoke is the primary priority. Only after the narrative has been provided will it be subject to examination later on in the text.

In this chapter I will provide a brief history and development of autoethnography, outline current issues, and discuss criticism of this methodology but also why it is still the appropriate choice for this research. The research method that I have chosen to use is qualitative in nature. This means that research includes the subjective experience and views of its participants as part of the data of the research. In addition, those personal views and experiences exist within a particular setting or are put into a context that allows one to examine broader ideas. That data can be articulated in various forms such as words and images from which themes are extrapolated allowing one to conduct their inquiry in a subjective manner (Creswell 2008:19). Because of this reliance on subjectivity, qualitative research requires modes of interpretative practices that form part of the data extrapolation. "...meaning that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:3)". Qualitative research started to thrive as it was inspired by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, (Bogdan & Knopp 2003; Jones 2008). The self and its representation being viewed as an effective and genuine method and expression of inquiry started in empirical academic circles (Bogdan & Knopp 2003). Being viewed as a "democratic method" made it easier for the qualitative method to gain acceptance (Bogdan & Knopp 2003:14) and find popularity amongst individuals and groups on the margins of society because of its ability to imbue them with expressive powers. This is one of the main reasons it is the most fitting theoretical methodological approach for this inquiry.

The other reason qualitative research is the best choice for my approach is because it is different from the objective forms of research; creativity is encouraged which is complimentary to the creative aspect of art making which forms the practical component of my research methodology.

Within the scope of qualitative research I will be using the method known as Autoethnography. Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which a researcher uses self-reflection and writing to examine their personal experience and connect this

autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings (Ellis et al. 2011:1). In other words it is the use of autobiographical stories as a way of exploring issues by identifying and scrutinizing the cultural, political and social significance of the events. This methodology and genre of writing reflects multiple levels of consciousness and reflects them through various forms (Scott-Hoy & Ellis 2008:4). There are other stricter definitions of autoethnography that will not be used, such as the studies of the culture of a group of which the researcher is a member as articulated by David Hayano (1979:99).

.This definition will not be used because the culture I am supposed to be a part of is not the main subject of this study (Ellis et al. 2011:3).

Autoethnography allows me to use my biography and personal life experiences as a way to orientate the research question and then reflect on my experience in the practice aspect of the research and use that as the main data point of the enquiry. This clarification is important because my personal narrative is not the main data point but rather the starting point upon which a theoretical framework will be developed, the data point is the reflection on the experience of the art making. Autoethnography is also a suitable choice because of its similarity to art making in that it uses its emotive aspects to connect with the reader or viewer in hopes of offering up alternative points of views and perspectives on subjects as opposed to trying to maintain cold objectivity (Ellis et al. 2011:2-3).

I would be remiss if I did not touch on how Autoethnography is not without its weaknesses, as a self-reflexive and qualitative methodology it is bound to come across technical complications. The complications with autoethnography start with the vagueness and nebulosity of the definition, rooted in the fact that the method keeps developing and thus changing slightly. It began with ethnography, which was developed from anthropology as a means of research in which a dominant individual would examine, investigate and represent in academic crowds the beliefs, principles, values and cultures of a subordinate and marginal other, (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Jones 2008). Ethnography at its most basic and accessible explanation would be a qualitative research method of collecting empirical data on societies and cultures (Bogdan & Knopp 2003).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) edify some of the concerns that keep on troubling the method, clarifying that quantitative research “is a commodity that circulates and is exchanged in this political economy” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:377). Autoethnographic works are frequently submitted to Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) for credentials and criteria that contradict their very meaning and reason for existence (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2000:377) state that, “IRBs have become methodological review boards, institutionalizing only one brand or version of science”. This weakness does not apply to this inquiry because the autoethnographic component is a part of a larger body of work; it serves to orientate the theoretical framework and also serves as a point of origin for the methodological practice. Therefore, instead of being the core of the inquiry it is more like the foundation upon which it is built.

An added significance of autoethnography is to interrogate conventional practices and authenticate and validate the existence of different and numerous methods of inquiry, relaxing the inflexibilities of control of the traditional and conventional academic system that not only chooses who, why and what will be researched but also how it should be researched. Autoethnography accepts that “to study the particular is to study the general” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:378); while “[t]he researcher assumes that readers will be able...to generalize subjectively from the case in question to their own personal experiences” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:378). In this way, autoethnography substantiates and identifies the legitimacy of subjective experiences by generating a safe-space inside academia and the academic research field. As a by-product the reader is exposed to personal teachings from the personal accounts, restraining the authority of conventionally defined accomplishment, achievement and academic success.

I feel I must articulate the relationship between this textual artefact and the accompanying artworks that are presented in the exhibition. Even though Laurel Richardson (2000) focuses on text, I have come to understand that her concept “writing; a method of inquiry” (2000) can be extended to visuals and artistic visual production. I have used the artistic medium of painting and sculpture to help facilitate a study on the changes in my ideals, life and self-perception. I can best analyse and understand my thoughts when drawing from writing a narrative story that functions in relation to my artworks because of the insight that it gives to some of the works conceptual origins. Only recently have I discovered writing to be a significant expression for self-reflexivity and therapy through the writing of this textual artefact itself.

## 2.1) VISUALITY

Exactly how we interpret and comprehend the visual world around us, and what political ideals are entrenched in the ways we view and articulate visual material from commercials to visual arts to figures, spaces, imaginations, and fantasies to the depiction of those very same things. To recognize visuality as being a lot more than visual exemplification and depictions is to recognize the value of critical studies of visual culture. Epistemologies as well as political frameworks that direct the idea and articulate the visual exemplification of a subject is what visuality is about. Visuality is not only concerned with comprehension but also how the act of seeing is not simply a corporeal and physical act but rather a historically, socially and aesthetically entrenched practice of information and knowledge production (Sturken & Cartwright 2001). Visuality is about recognizing how we “actively interact with images from all arenas to remake the world in the shape of our fantasies and desires and to narrate the stories which we carry within us” (Rogoff 2000:30). This is relevant because a huge part of this inquiry is art based (sculptural) and thus features a visual component. In this case it less about what the art is trying to say and more about what it is trying to do.

## CHAPTER 3: THEORIZING OF THE SELF

In theorizing autobiographical performances or narratives the notion of the self is complicated. It could be said that the motivation of any kind of autobiographical writing or expression is a form of self-determination (Rugg 1997). The self can also be seen as disjointed, interpersonal, relation and located (Smith 1998; Eakin 1999), consequently it becomes essential to study identity and its representation as it's connected to the particular, but usually indefinite contexts of one's own history, culture, and sociality. There are scholars that have taken a dualistic interpretation of understanding self and as a result are spilt between the culturally conventional, modern view of individualistic, authorial, self-expressive self; and the alternatively fluid postmodern positioned and various existences of identity. The double consciousness that directs some people who write autobiographies is defined as "the awareness of the autobiographical self as decentred, multiple, fragmented, and divided against itself in the act of observing and being; and the simultaneous insistence on the presence of an integrated authorial self, located in a body, a place, and a time" (Rugg 1997:2).

On the other hand arguments against the existence of "I before the text" are made by Sidonie Smith (1998:108) who references Judith Butler, particularly the work on performativity, by stating, "...there is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating". Smith (1998:110) claimed that this "autobiographical subject," would be "amnesiac, incoherent, heterogeneous, and interactive". At the core of my final thoughts is the conceptual understanding of self, relative to people who are not myself and one's environment in an autobiographical act of writing or visualizing one's life. For this purpose identity needs to be understood as subject positioning in order to grasp the concept of a relational self (Dunlop 1999; Eakin 1999). These situations are multifarious and the classifications for the subject are based on dissimilarities, otherness and common resemblances. "Because of this constant placement and displacement of 'who' we are, we can think of identities as multiple and as 'contextual, contested, and contingent' " (Smith and Watson 2002:33, quoting Scott, 1993).

## CHAPTER 4: Auto-Biographical Orientation

My name is Teboho Lebakeng and I am the son of a Xhosa woman and a Sotho man. I was born in Springfield Massachusetts in the United States of America even though both my parents are South African. This happened because during the fight against Apartheid my mother went into exile in 1976 at age 19 and my father went into exile in 1975 at age 17. This put them on the path to meet in Tanzania and spend their lives outside of their home country until they could finally return when Apartheid ended.

My name is Teboho Lebakeng and I grew up believing that I was named after my father only to find out that is not the whole truth. My father's legal first name is Josiah and he was named after his grandfather who was also named Josiah. But in the Southern Sotho

culture, when you refer to someone who is named after an elder in the family you can't call them by that very name because that would be considered disrespectful. Only the elder gets called by that name while the other person adopts a second or a nickname. So no one ever called my father by his first legal name Josiah, instead he was given the nickname Oupa, which means grandfather in Afrikaans.

When my father had to go into exile he wanted to reject these names and adopt one that better suited what he considered his growing black consciousness. As a result of this he chose to refer to himself as Teboho as an act of rebellion and that would serve as his struggle name. He wanted a name he could identify with and a name to project this new self through. All his official legal identification documents still say Josiah and were never changed. So I was not named after my father, I was named after the man he had chosen to be but unlike him, this is a name I struggle to identify with.

It's a name that belongs to a language that I do not speak and because of my upbringing in mostly white middle class communities it's a name I rarely hear pronounced correctly to the point that I myself mispronounce it when I introduce myself just so I can hear consistency between what I call myself and what others call me. Perhaps what complicated matters further was that in the Southern Sotho culture tradition dictates that I take on the cultural practices of my father's people. However, my father grew up in Soweto as a child and he had little exposure to his own Southern Sotho culture unlike my mother who grew up steeped in Xhosa traditions and teachings. She was also the person who raised me in my formative years which resulted in isiXhosa being my second language after English which is my first because it is what I learned from being born and living in America as an American citizen. I have often not known which culture I belong to because my relationship to Sotho is more of a traditional technicality than anything else and yet I am told I am Southern Sotho by family. The problems this cultural mix up would cause only became apparent later in life.

In 2015 there was a family gathering meant to celebrate my cousin's return from the initiation school he had attended. The event was meant to welcome him back into society after his initiation into manhood. This is part of a rite of passage known as Ulwaluko which is a ritual circumcision that is considered sacred and family orientated which accounted for my invite. I had never been to such an event apart from a ritual done for me when I was a young boy (which involved having my forehead pressed against a goat while someone prayed over me followed shortly by the slaughtering of said goat). At the time I did not know what it was or why it was happening. In fact, I still do not know why it was done and the experience left me confused to say the least, consequently though at this family gathering for my cousin I did not know what to expect.

I entered my aunt's house to find some of the older women of my immediate family sitting in the living room while the others could be heard talking and moving around in the kitchen. They were all doing so in their ironed out dresses made of different coloured shweshwe fabrics. I was instructed to go around the room and greet every one of them with hugs and handshakes but there was also the occasional double cheek kiss from

those I had not seen in a long time. I was told that my cousin, (the one who had been circumcised) was sitting in one of the guest bedrooms and that I should go see how he was doing.

I was not sure what to expect when I saw him. All I ever knew about the initiation schools were the stories that I read in the newspapers whenever it was reported that someone was hospitalized or died from dehydration or a circumcision gone horribly wrong.

When I entered the room I found him sitting in a corner on a mat with no clothing on except the big blanket wrapped around his shoulders. He looked thinner than I remembered him being (which I was told was probably a result of the strict diet he was on during the whole initiation process) and his eyes were closed as if he were asleep. At his feet were half-finished bottles of alcohol and a few glasses. I sat next him and waited for him to notice that I was there but he looked tired so I sat with him in silence, trying not to disturb him. I watched him nap and was glad that he was not one of the unlucky few who never made it back home. I wondered what it must have felt like for him to finally be back in a house, as opposed to being in the hut he had to live in for a whole month. It must have been uncomfortable and difficult to do but the point was that it would prepare him for the trials and tribulations that being a man would bring in his future.

After a few minutes of sitting in silence he opened his eyes and slowly turned to me. A look of surprise spread across his face as he saw mine. He told me that he did not know that I was the one in the room with him. (He thought I was someone else; one of our mutual cousins to be specific). Our conversation was brief; he asked how I was doing at school and how I was finding New York and I asked if he was doing okay because he looked exhausted and that was it. I left him to rest and went out of the room.

When I got out of the room I was confronted by an all-female living room, and an aunt who pointed outside and told me to go to the backyard, as that is where all the men of the family were congregating. I got there to see two different groups sitting on chairs in a circle around the bottles of alcohol that were placed on the ground. It became very clear at that moment that the gender divide that I was witnessing was not accidental. The women were inside and had easy access to the kitchen while the men who were outside had easy access to the kraal, which had two goats inside tied up at the legs and awaiting slaughter.

Now I feel it is important for me to clarify that the kraal was not a kraal in the sense that it served the purpose of keeping livestock within its boundaries. It was far too small to do that (standing at a height no higher than my knees) and because it was made up of a few branches from the backyard it lacked the structural integrity to hold back any animal if it tried to break through which was why the goats were tied up. Therefore, it was more of a symbolic kraal than an actual functioning one. The relevance of this realization will be discussed and contextualised later in the section "Creating Counter Spaces".

I joined one of the circles and took a shot of vodka. Apparently I had arrived just in time to help with the slaughtering of the goats. Once knives and an axe were handed out to those who did not have any with them, we all went to the kraal.

It only took a few seconds for one of my oldest uncles to scream about something we were doing wrong. I tried to take a short cut and jump over the kraal but apparently we were not allowed to do that. Everyone had to use the little gap that was designated as the entrance even though it would have been quicker to just step over the branches. This symbolic kraal had to be interacted with as if it had all the physical characteristics of a real functioning kraal.

The task at hand as well as the space it had to be carried out in was clearly gendered. The slaughtering of the goats and sheep was a task reserved only for the men and the boys. Not a single woman was allowed to set foot in that space while it was happening. Once the goats were killed, they were meticulously cut into smaller pieces and placed in dishes that were sent to the kitchen to be cooked by the women who were waiting for them. Only a few choice pieces were left behind and those were going to be cooked over the open fire and carefully fed to my cousin the initiate once he came outside.

Again my uncle shouted at me when I tried to pass the meat to one of the cooks over the knee-high branches that make up the kraal and I was told to go all the way around the branches and use the entrance.

My cousin (the initiate) came outside and into the kraal with his big blanket still on and was sat in front of a fire that was started so that his meat could be cooked over it. He kept the blanket on in the middle of the kraal even though it was blistering hot that day and even though everyone else got to sit in the shade and watch him get fed the pieces of meat that were kept aside for him.

When that was done I was told it was time to go to the bushes. We would accompany him to the bushes where a meeting would take place. We gathered sticks from the backyard, formed a group that surrounded him and lifted our sticks in the air while we walked with him up the road, chanting, singing and shuffling our feet. The neighbours from the community came out of their houses when we walked past and stood at their doors, clapping and singing along as we went passed. The road we were on continued past the houses and turned right into a gravel path that leads to the bushes away from the residential area. It was then that I was told I had to stay behind. My oldest cousin went on to explain that because my father was not Xhosa and I did not go through the same initiation process that they all did, I could not join them or listen to whatever conversation they were about to engage in. They were about to impart words of wisdom onto him and tell him the things that they believed he should know when becoming a man. This was a conversation that you could only be a part of if you had the right cultural status, which was the status of being a man. I was far too old physically to have stayed behind at the house with the young boys but culturally I had not matured and transitioned into manhood



either so I was not allowed to join the men. So there I was sitting alone on the side of the road in-between the house where the young boys and the women were and the bushes where the men had gathered. In that moment I belonged to neither side. At first I was saddened by the thought that I was forbidden from participating in the important acts that were happening within my own family. For thirty minutes I sat in the heat and waited for them to finish whatever it was they were doing. As the heat started to bother me I contemplated standing up and going to the local shop to buy a cold drink. That is when it hit me. If I wanted to go I could simply go. I was not allowed to participate with this specific part of the ritual but that also meant I was not needed by either side. My lack of the necessary status meant that I could not join them but it also meant that I was not bound by being required to do anything anywhere at that moment. There was a freedom that I had at that moment that no one else did, so I stood up, went to the store and bought myself a cold drink. I went back to road and waited there while sipping on my drink. When they came back down the gravel road everyone picked up their sticks and surrounded my cousin (the initiate) once again. We started singing a song about a woman named Palesa, our sticks were raised above our heads as we walked with him down the road. A mock stick fight broke out as well as a few dances. As we walked with him back home chanting and singing at the top of our lungs. My mouth was moist and I was feeling refreshed, having discovered the power of being in-between.

Once we got back to the house, I was asked to go fetch the homebrewed beer, also known as umqombothi. This is a drink that plays an important cultural, social and spiritual role in the Xhosa culture. In this case it was to officially celebrate the homecoming of a young man after completing his initiation and ritual circumcision. Now he can officially call himself a man.

One of my uncles was getting drunk of whiskey and talking about how much the ritual has changed since he was a young boy going through it. A debate had broken out about whether the ritual test was hard enough for the boys of today seeing as they were only required to spend a single month doing it. When my uncle was a young initiate they stayed up in the mountains for almost five months. It was supposed to be both a lesson and also a true test of stamina and will. If the rules change too much and they make it easier then where is the lesson? Now the initiates did not even go up an actual mountain, they were simply near it at the bushes.

My other uncle is quick to interject, by stating that traditions have always slightly changed and adapted with time. The argument was that rituals adapt and change with the times but also simply change for practicalities sake, like young boys cannot take half a year off from school for the ritual. Not only that but rituals have always been done a little differently from family to family and it may also depend on the community you are from as long as there is a strong support system but there are also some aspects of the tradition that do not change.

Such as the consumption of umqombothi. Umqombothi is a homemade sorghum beer and it plays an important role in most prominent cultural occasions. I picked it up from the

kitchen. In appearance the beer is opaque and light tan in colour. It had a thick, creamy, gritty consistency from the maize as well as a sour aroma. I brought it to the circle and placed it in the middle. It had very low alcohol content because it was made to be consumed out of respect for tradition, not with the intention of becoming intoxicated.

It was beer in a silver bucket that we were all supposed to drink from communally one at a time because we could not use glasses or cups, it had to be straight from the bucket. Being a bit of a germophobe and not too keen on the idea of sharing a single bucket of beer with twenty men I have never met I thought I could take the opportunity to be the first one to take a drink. There was one bucket for us and one for the elders (the elders were the men who were a generation or more, older than myself i.e. uncles and grandparents).

There are traditions to be observed both in the brewing of the beer and the serving and drinking of it. The beer is traditionally brewed by women and is made from maize, maize malt, sorghum malt, yeast and water and has a distinctive sour flavour. One of the by-products of making the beer, isidudu, is porridge, while the grains that are left over from the process are used to feed chickens. Tradition states that the woman scattering the grain for chickens gives thanks to the ancestors while doing so. Sorghum beer is fermented for several days in a huge drum covered with a thick blanket and on the day of the traditional ceremony the beer has been brewed and is poured into the calabash also called ibhekile in Xhosa. These rules are not written down in some rulebook, they are passed on through practice and orally.

So before anyone could drink I was told to pour a small amount on the ground to share with the ancestors. And then someone ceremoniously opens the drinking by taking a small sip, which signifies that it is safe and everyone can start drinking.

The Xhosa culture believes that the ancestors will not recognize a ritual that one is performing if umqombothi is not part of it. In some cases it is a way of communing with the dead as they also used to make umqombothi, it is a way of connecting with them by practicing an act that they once participated in it.

After I poured some on the ground I was told that the bucket of beer would be passed around in descending order based on age meaning that the oldest person would be the first to drink and they would be followed by the next oldest person and so forth. As I moved to the front of the line because I believed I was the oldest person there I was told that my place was actually at the back of the line because in this context age wasn't counted by how many years since your birth but rather how many years have passed since you entered manhood.

I learnt that although I had also been circumcised by going to the hospital for surgery it is not considered the same thing because it does not have the same cultural significance. You bare the mark which is the removal of foreskin but nothing else. What makes this rite significant is that it serves as a school for the initiates so the purpose is to pass knowledge

that is believed that a man needs to know before entering manhood. They are taught about their history, their new place in society and how to contribute to that society.

Someone who has not gone through this rite of passage is referred to as Inkwenkwe which means boy and is a term used to describe that person regardless of their age. It is the title that I hold. Therefore, there is a difference between your biological age and your societal age. Moreover, that when it comes to the consumption of umqombothi you are always the last person to have a drink because of your societal age.

I had had the hospital circumcision at the behest of my parents before I knew the relevance and the cultural significance of what I was giving up by doing so and now find myself locked out of something that could have helped give me an identity to anchor myself to. The title comes with rights and privileges that cannot be obtained any other way.

Even if it was possible to be circumcised twice, I have not and shall never go through this rite of passage through my mother's side of the family because I cannot claim to be Xhosa but because I was raised by her when I was younger and do not speak Sotho the knowledge that would be passed down to me if I sought to go through initiation on my father's side as a Sotho man would be inaccessible to me.

This inability to locate myself in this specific cultural space left me with a feeling of dislocation; a dislocation which stems from a fragmented self-identity. As a solution I thought I might decide to investigate my own cultural, racial and historical background in order to use those findings as a guide to help me decide which group I owe my fidelity to but that is a superficial solution that doesn't address how I feel whenever I am at these family gatherings and confronted with these societal structures. So instead I want to examine how ritual as self-identity construction through art making can be used to counteract the effects of dislocation felt as a result of a fragmented self-identity. The artworks produced will form an exhibition that can function as a counter-space to my traditional family gatherings and will create a platform for my family and I to engage each other.

## CHAPTER 5: RELEVANT TEXTS FOR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this inquiry is based on Arnold Van Gennep's (1960) triadic model of the Rite of Passage as described in his book *The Rites of Passage* and it is to be combined with various theories on hybridity including Homi K Bhabha's (1994) theories as explored in *The Location of Culture*. This dissertation relies on the interpretation of an identity crisis as a form of personal liminality that can be used to create a synchronistic identity through hybridization that does not negate the liminality but rather maintains it

and allows for its projection through art-based methodologies onto a space that can manifest into a heterotopic space as a result.

In *The Rites of Passage*, Arnold Van Gennep (1960) states that rites can be broken up into three phases' separation, liminal and incorporation. These rites are further classified by their liminality. The rites of separation are preliminal rites, the ones that take place during the transition are liminal and the ones that take place during the incorporation are postliminal rites. In the separation phase a person relinquishes their current status and prepares to replace it with another. This status is usually one that is recognized as belonging to the group and fitting somewhere in the hierarchal structure. This relinquishing of status is accompanied by a symbolic ritual that signifies the detachment from your former self, in the case of the initiation ritual that I was invited to that cutting away is the act of circumcision. After one has lost that old status, they now enter the liminal phase. In this phase a person is no longer in their old status but they have not entered the new one either. They are in an ambiguous state that does not have a place within the societal structure. This idea of an ambiguous state shares commonalities with the identity crisis that I describe in that the crisis is brought upon by a sense of not finding a place to fit in and a constant feeling of being in-between. Once they are through the threshold they enter the incorporation phase. This phase is about re-entering society with the new status once the rite has been completed. It often involves outward symbols that are manifestations of this status and in the case of my study that symbol can be the artwork that is created (Van Gennep 1960:20-22). The difference being that it is not a symbol concerned with reinforcing the societal structure but instead it is concerned with rejecting it or challenging it.

In the book *Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts*, edited by I. William Zartman (2000) the overall premise is the examination of traditional conflict management practices that are used in Africa to deal with the various effects of violent conflicts as well as the conflicts themselves. One of the sections is written by Laurie E. King-Irani and titled Rituals of Forgiveness and Processes of Empowerment in Lebanon. In Rituals of Forgiveness she discusses the power of ritual as well as empowerment through ritual. These ideas are explored through the backdrop of the Lebanese civil war and how the after effects of that war has left many people feeling displaced in their own home as life around them has changed so much. In the power of ritual she speaks of transformative social and personal powers that can be used to heal victimized individuals or societies and how these can occasionally be accessed through rituals (King-Irani 2000:130). The process here consists of a transitional rite of passage that would allow one to transition into something that would allow them to handle the aspects of their daily lives that are consistently changing (King-Irani 2000:134). The idea of transitioning or transforming into a state that grants you properties and characteristics that allow you to deal with a specific problem on various levels is what I am borrowing from the writing of Laurie E. King-Irani. In my case though the state of being that is transitioned to is a liminal one that allows the participant to become liminoid

In *The Ritual Process Structure and Anti-Structure* by Victor Turner (1966) he writes about two different models of organization, Structure and Communitas. Which are opposing forms of social identity and social interaction (Turner 1966:106, 94-97). In communitas individuals are without a social identity and therefore interact with each other as equals on the same plane. Because there are not any social identities for individuals to conform to their also are not any rules that dictate the relations and interactions of said individuals. Structure on the other hand is all about status and how that status defines you in relation to others in your society (Turner 1966:112-113). It is about being able to fit into a set category and place in the hierarchy that separates you from other individuals. This is the model in which Arnold Van Gennep's (1960) theoretical framework operates (Van Gennep 1960:20-22). I know that my artwork will not change the structure in any way; it poses no threat to the institutions that reinforce them. The change has to happen to me if I am to acquire this whole sense of self. But what this does offer is the ability to simultaneously use my ritual as a way to critique the social structure and express my resentment of the inequalities perhaps by rejecting perpetual boyhood status that I have been given (Turner 1966:94-97, 113-120). The expression of how I feel will not be a one-way communication but rather opened up to be dialogue where the thoughts and opinions of my family will be welcomed.

This planned rejection would be facilitated by not giving into any single pre-existing model of societal expectations and creating something that combines objects and symbols that come from different cultures. The postcolonial writer Homi K Bhabha (1994) takes a deconstructionist approach to culture and the social sciences in that he is anti-dichotomous in his views. He rejects the binary views of writers such as Edward Said (1978) as advanced in *Orientalism*. Bhabha (1994) instead is concerned with hybridity as he describes in his book *The Location of Culture*. He asserts that one can form a mixed identity through mimicking someone's culture. The idea is that an oppressed people can mimic the culture and language of those who colonize them as a form of political resistance because the act gives the person being mimicked a destabilizing feeling (Bhabha 1994:56, 85-92). I use mimicry in my own work in that I mimic the dancing and practices that are found in my mother's culture, things that I am not supposed to have access to because in the Sotho tradition I am meant to take after my father. But this mimicry is not only meant to help facilitate the crossing over into cultural liminality and into a transcultural space but it is also aimed at destabilizing the patriarchal and hegemonic structures that force the binary imposition of being man or boy and all that the statuses include.

Bhabha (1994) also talks about artists making works that are metaphors for the liminal space itself, he makes reference to Renee Green and her work *Sites of Genealogy* and

uses it to illustrate his idea of the liminal (Bhabha, 1994:3-4). I want to clarify that my work is not intended to serve as a metaphor; it is instead a remnant left over from the art making process. I am the hybrid, not the work but the work is symbolic of me and I become that way through the process of making the art. The experience of interacting with the materials is what changes me by giving me a new relationship to them that is not based on alienation.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the irony that is that the inner circles which I envy because I am being excluded from, may in fact be the very confines that the people within them wish to escape from. This was sparked by my reading of *The Metropolis and Mental Life* by Georg Simmel (1997). In this book he focuses on social urban life but it was originally published in 1903, so cities were a little different back then but reading it today I have still found it very relevant not only to my life but to this thesis. One of the important points made is about how people in urban settings can feel a lack of restrictions and the kind of prejudices that they would associate with smaller or more religious communities. And that this is exasperated when said urbanite finds themselves experiencing rural life. (Simmel 1997:181)

At this point I feel it is important to discuss that the ideation that my definition of identity will be based on is an amalgamation of various models. Marilynn B. Brewer (1991) In *The Social Self: On Being the Same and Different at the Same Time* refers to personal identity as the individuated self. What this means is that it is the things that make us different from other people in a certain context such as a social one that gives a sense of the individuated self (Brewer 1991:475-478). In *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, Erik H Erikson (1968) puts forward two different ideas of identity, the first being the ego and the other being the personal identity. My work is concerned with the latter which he goes on to describe as “the perception of the selfsameness and continuity of one’s existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity (Erikson 1968:50).”

In *Questions of Identity Critique of Anthropology*, Roger Rouse (1995) has similar views of what constitutes identity. Mainly he defines it as sameness and continuity of oneself across time and space from one context to the other. By oneself he means the properties and qualities that make you who you are as an individual but also that you share with others that mark you as part of a collective. This is a prevalent idea in the social sciences but where Roger Rouse becomes more relevant to my dissertation is the view that people can have difficulty in claiming ownership of an identity and having that identity socially acknowledged by other people. And how a failure to get that acknowledgement often means that a person finds themselves living with an identity that is defined by other people, at least in a specified social context. And because of this view he writes that personhood is an attempt to achieve those properties and that continuity is something one must actively achieve as opposed to expect to be given (Rouse 1995:357). This continuity or synchronicity is what my study aims for.

The book *South African Keyword The Uses & Abuses of Political Concepts* by Emile Boonzaier and John Sharp (1988) provides an understanding of the role that legislation played in the South African context of how communities laid claim to certain ethnic identities. In the section of the book that deals with this they quote the Promotion of Black Self-Government Act which states ‘the Black peoples of the Union of South Africa do not constitute a homogenous people, but form separate national units on the basis of language and culture...’ Because of this policy groups were identified and all black South Africans had to fit into one of these categories which is antithetical to the boundary blurring nature of this project (Boonzaier & Sharp 1988:106). The influence that these legislations have on the way South African communities self-identify is shown in practical terms by my own self-identification as Southern Sotho as opposed to Xhosa (refer to Autoethnographic Orientation). I acknowledge that this is based on no more than what I have been told should be considered important when one wants to know their own ethnic categorisation. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the role that colonialism, segregation, and apartheid played in the forming and reinforcing of these ideas. An excellent case would be how the notion that the child of parents with two different ethnic identities assumes the ethnicity of the father as opposed to the mother is identical to a rule from the Population Registration Act cited in *South African Keywords The Uses & Abuses of Political Concepts* that states “...where a person is the child of one black and one coloured parent, his or her classification will follow that of the father.” (Boonzaier & Sharp 1988:102) This is important because it shows the power that external factors can have on the way that people form their culture and gives credence to the idea of the evolutionary nature of culture and self-identification. If we do not simply generate our cultures and traditions from within but do so in collaboration with our circumstances then that leaves the possibility for the external factors generated by the creation and execution of my exhibition to indeed have a practical and not just theoretical impact on my self-identification. Even though this book is important for understanding what shaped ethnic self-identification in the South African context, I am careful not to delve too much into the history of such because the intent of this project is to locate it in a present discussion even while being mindful of the historical influences.

In the book *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, the author Pierre Bourdieu (1977) explains his thoughts on the habitus. In this book the problem revolves around agency and structure. He states that habitus is something that is shaped by your position within social structures. But at the same time it is that habitus that works to generate action. Which means that when you exercise your agency you reflect the structures that have shaped you in whatever you do (Bourdieu 1979:78-79). This position works for my inquiry because I can mine from my experience of creating the work. Therefore, when making my art as part of the practical component of this research and exercising my agency through the work created it will offer the opportunity for observation, contemplation and reflection.

In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor (1992) writes about an identity that is not solely generated by the self in isolation but is instead partly internalized and also

negotiated with others through methods such as dialogue. Those others do not have to be from the same societal structure one is rejecting they can be from outside it (Taylor 1992:47). This dissertation and the art that accompanies it can serve as the initiators of that dialogical relation.

The art and dissertation that will facilitate the dialogical relation will be presented as an exhibition. The exhibition can function as a counter-space to my traditional family gatherings and will create a platform for my family and I to engage each other. This will be based on the concept of heterotopic spaces. The concept of a heterotopia will be taken from an essay by Michel Foucault (1986) that was translated and published in *Diacritics* 16, no 1. In it Foucault (1986) describes heterotopic spaces not as inactive places but rather as counter-spaces with active properties that allow it to also function as a medium in and of itself (Foucault 1986:24-25). Having my artworks in the exhibition space will transform it into a space that can compensate for or expose the shortcomings of the cultural space described in my autoethnographic narrative. The notion of heterotopia and how it applies to this inquiry will be expanded on in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6: CREATING A COUNTERSPACE

In this chapter I will expand on the concept of heterotopia and how it will be applied in this inquiry. As part of my attempt to challenge and deconstruct identity forming rituals and the hierarchal models they sustain. I suggest a methodology that is not restricted to the art making aspect of this project but also extends to the curatorial aspects. This is important because of the role that space plays in rituals and how that experience will be juxtaposed with the creation of a counter-space. By engaging with spatiality in this manner I can create a place that helps with the construction of a liminal interpretation of my identity. In order for this to happen spatiality will be reflected upon within the framework of space as part of the curatorial function of the exhibition but also the conceptual implications for using said curatorial function as a tool for the creation of a counter-space.

The earliest mention of the notion of heterotopia appeared in medicine, where it was defined as something abnormal or peculiar to the body “A phenomenon occurring in an unusual place or spatial displacement of normal tissue” (Sohn 2008:41). The concept was then transferred by Foucault from the medical field to the humanities field.

The radio station France Culture was what Foucault’s initial text was devised for, it was a series on literature and utopia (Boyer 2008:53). Once that passed and the spring of 1967 arrived there was a request for him to deliver it at the Circle of Architects. Unfortunately the text wasn’t printed with his permission and it was only translated in 1984 when there was an art exhibition in Germany called the Internationale Bau-Austellung Berlin (Dehaene & De Caeter 2008:13). The idea of heterotopia has its critics as some scholars



have claimed it is not a consistent or a very finely honed idea. There are those who criticize it and those who defend it but there is wide agreement that one of its main defining characteristic is that of a fluid concept (Bal 2009) of a make-believe geography (Frank 2009), malleable and up for various readings and interpretations.

He defines Heterotopias by juxtaposing them against the fantasy spaces of utopias but as spaces that basically occur but outside the regular ordering. Heterotopias are “real places, places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society, which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality.” (Foucault 1986:24).

The most common illustration of heterotopias are cemeteries, gardens, brothels, colonies, and ships. These are considered the more positive examples because of how their otherness is perceived to be a freeing and a refusal to be confined by the commanding and ruling order of discourse. However, those are not the only illustrations of heterotopia there are also deviant heterotopias which carry with them negative connotations. Space such as a prison or psychiatric hospitals. Restricted spaces where a society can place people or things that they do not want to be a part of their ordering. There is a big difference between a prisons and a ship and because of this it might be hard for one to reach to a solid definition of a concept with such vastly different examples. Regardless, this inquiry recognizes that these illustrations are acting not as essential spaces that explain a theory as an insulated idea, but rather as spaces that are viewed relative to the social space that they are challenging and reflecting. Heterotopia as a collection of relations that transpire in the generation of (other) spaces (Foucault, 1986).

Foucault’s (1986) notion of heterotopia forms the foundation upon which the idea of this counter-space is built. Kevin Hetherington (1997:53), he posits that utopian values and beliefs presenting themselves in society is the basis for the generation of heterotopia. In this case the utopian ideal would be the man who finds power and a reconcilable self-identity through liminality.

To conceptually manifest such a space for my exhibition, studies that focus on various different spaces of organization are referenced and their theories applied. Hetherington (1997:20) claims that spatial relations should always be seen as “multiple and contested” and this even includes those that are considered hegemonic structures of ordering. Thus within liminal or fringe spaces, counter-positions could hypothetically be revealed.

This exhibition intends to display a body of artworks created by me that express the figure of the African man who forges his agency through the deliberate encroachment of restrictive patriarchal boundaries. Within the context of the exhibition, my identity takes

up temporary residence in the fluidity of the liminal, heterotopic space revealed amidst ideologically inscribed binary constructs.

I re-enact certain actions from the ritual in the making of the practical body of work, such as the brewing of umqombothi and dancing in a feet shuffling style on the fabrics I use as materials -The performative re-enactment of these moments –, embodied and rooted in my Xhosa and Sotho cultural and social background – but now framed by the exhibition space creates a situation in which the spatial organisation and exhibition environment becomes the lens through which the performances are viewed as art. In so doing the heterotopic space is built around what could be aptly referred to as an institutional frame. This institutional frame operates with academic concepts and ideas which ideally serve as the entry point for engaging with the counter space as a platform for discourse (Kwon 1997:89).

The space in which this takes place, features crisp clean walls with controlled lighting, which are things that have a dual function the first being as utilitarian tools and the second being as a coded devices to reinforce ideology in the space (Kwon 1997:89). In this case a curatorial one. This idea is also explored by Brian O'Doherty (1976:4) in the essay, *Inside the White Cube* in which he studies the gallery as a space that is conceptually loaded. Its very existence and the form in which that existence takes place is an ideological statement of its own. The staged white space symbolizes the presence of art and the art reinforces the sacred nature of the space itself. A similar spatial transformation also takes place during my cousin's ritual in which the presence of only men and the act of slaughtering an animal elevates the makeshift kraal that was erected in the backyard up to the status of an altar. The reason behind this is that when the branches were used to create a circular enclosure the space they encompassed was altered in name only. It was too low to actually function as a kraal of any kind as any animals that were put in there would simply be able to escape by jumping over the knee high wall of branches. So in fact it was more of a symbolic kraal, even though we were required to approach it with all the rules we would usually associate with the ritualized space of a truly functional kraal. But the moment the first goat was slaughtered is when the space truly transformed because its status as a kraal was secondary to its status as an altar and it could fulfil the role in a practical manner so it stopped being symbolic and became the real version of what it represented.

Because objects within its white walls are considered art through their very presence in the sacred space, this elevation of some chosen objects rather than everything in the space allows a hierarchal values system to try and manifest (O'Doherty 1976:4). Although that system would be negated by the very objects that it is trying to elevate and the exclusion of the outside world from this space isolates the work from everything else. (This is similar to the kraal, in which I was allowed to enter because I was not a woman. It became a sacred space and exclusionary because of the branches around it that demarcated the area it occupied, even when nothing was happening inside and no one was in it, just like before my cousin entered the space it still had to be treated as a sacred

space. The physical structure imparted status on in its content. However, when the men in my family went around the corner and into the bushes, the area they occupied became an exclusionary sacred space because of their presence. They are the ones that imparted the status on the space, so it was the opposite of the effect that the white cube has.) My heterotopic space is aimed at being a combination of the two. The white cube confers the status of art onto the objects and the objects confer the status of ritualized sacred space onto the white cube.

Heterotopias and social ordering operate with the marginal as a counter-hegemonic space at their core. So Henri Lefebvre (1991:33) explains that space is multifaceted and complicated by its representation, which captures its various conceptual intersections. Space and its inferences integrate the power dynamics that art articulates. The establishment of space is theorized as a “conceptual triad” by Lefebvre (1991:33). The first of which is “spatial practice” which involves the formation of space through the social relations that arise from production and reproduction within a capitalist system; the second being “representations of space” which denotes the relations of production and the order imposed by such relations associated with the produced space and finally the “representational space” expresses conflict with the prevailing social order – the hidden facets of social life and art. It is the “representational space” that forms my intended exhibition space and produces the possibility for revealing the discrepancies manifest in my identity but within a liminal space that allows them to exist without conflict or at least a conflict that doesn’t lead to negation of one over the other and thus achieving hybridity and a visual manifestation of a synchronistic form.

## CHAPTER 7: COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS OF ARTWORKS

The artists, Yinka Shonibare and Nicholas Hlobo, have been selected for this dissertation because the concept of hybridization that forms an integral part of this study is manifested in different ways in their artworks. Yinka Shonibare and Nicholas Hlobo have different backgrounds and they live and practice their art in different parts of the world yet both these artists’ works deal with identity more specifically a facet of African identity. They use imagery and symbols that signify and reference African culture that are then put into contact with other symbols. The effect is not the same in the two pieces though, in the work of Nicholas Hlobo there is a sense of conflict and in the piece by Yinka Shonibare there is harmonious hybridization. Both have cultural transference that takes place although in different ways. I would like to mention that one of the major differences between myself and these artists is that they are working from the inside of their structures and groups and I am working from the outside but that should not be a problem because the processes used are the same as my own.

## 7.1) Nicholas Hlobo

Nicholas Hlobo (2006) is a contemporary visual artist, whose work is autobiographical and focuses on Xhosa traditions with an emphasis on masculinity, rituals the potential for transformation in relation to his identity as a gay man. The materials he uses are objects from his cultural environment as a Xhosa man. It is because of this use of his cultural heritage as a Xhosa male artist that I chose to analyse his work.

The Nicholas Hlobo piece I have chosen is titled Umthubi. Umthubi is the Xhosa word for kraal and a kraal is a large structure made of tree branches with the day-to-day function of containing livestock most commonly cows. It must be noted though that the kraal depicted here is a Zulu kraal because of its shape even though the title of the work is in Xhosa (Hlobo 2006). This is important because Nicholas Hlobo intentionally titles his works in Xhosa as a way to anchor them and give them a very specific cultural context to start from (Gevisser et al. 2009:21-22). Therefore, the fact that the kraal is a Zulu one is actually a subtle hint at the cultural exchange that takes place due to our interaction with other cultures.

Because cows are considered as some of the most valuable livestock, this creates a strong association between the size of ones kraal and their wealth so in some ways it also serves as a status symbol. Even though a kraal has the day-to-day functionality of holding livestock, during ceremonies it is transformed into a ritual space which is used as an altar. This space has rules of its own one of which is no females allowed inside the kraals. This is the very rule that Nicholas Hlobo hints to in order to challenge gender conventions that are still prevalent in South African societies. He does this with the pink satin ribbon which is put in the same space as the kraal to introduce a feminine presence to a space meant to reinforce the masculine aspects of African identity and serves as a masculine cultural symbol (Hlobo 2006). More importantly though is the way in which this pink ribbon occupies the space. It does so in a way that makes the kraal physically inaccessible to a person, thus this masculine space is negated by a feminine presence. It loses both its everyday function but also its ritualistic function and allows one to challenge the purpose of the kraal.

Nicholas Hlobo artwork description: Exotic and indigenous wood, steel, wire, ribbon, rubber inner tube 200 x 400 x 730cm (variable)



Umthubi 2006, digital photograph, Michael Stevenson, Accessed 03 June 2018 <<http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/hlobo/umthubi.htm>>

## 7.2) Yinka Shonibare

Yinka Shonibare is a British-Nigerian artist who lives in the United Kingdom. His work examines the construction of identity and ideas such as colonialism, race and class. Shonibare uses a variety of mediums from sculpture, painting to video art (Shonibare 2018). His art is relevant to the topic of this research because he touches on collective national identity and the meaning of such words as culture. Shonibare's work draws imagery from Africa and Europe in order to examine their relationship. I selected his work because of how he uses transcultural images to question the boundaries between those cultures. The materials he uses are also similar to the ones I use. Shonibare makes sculpture installations from fiberglass, leather, and metal but most importantly Dutch wax cloth. The sculptures are mannequins put into poses and installed into scenes that give them a context that lends a deeper meaning to the work. In this installation titled Victorian Couple the figures are headless which makes it difficult to read the racial identity of the figures depicted so one of the most prominent visual clues for this is identification are the clothes that adorn the mannequin. This is intentional by Shonibare, as it forces the viewer to engage with what becomes the point of contact for the two cultures being referenced. This contact is manifested in the clothing which is British in style and cut but is made from Dutch wax fabrics. The Dutch print fabrics have been adopted as part of numerous African

cultural identities even though they are European in origin. They are an artificial construct exported to the continent by textile merchants from Manchester, England and from, Vlisco, a company in the Netherlands. The patterns and style were originally handmade by Indonesians and called batiks. The Dutch Wax fabrics are a result of the attempts by Dutch textile merchants to mass-produce the textiles and sell them back to the Indonesian people. However, this did not work because the mass production process created textiles that were slightly different from the handmade ones mostly due to colour and pattern distortion which resulted in products that did not appeal to the tastes of the Indonesian people. But the textile merchants managed to find a market in West Africa as the populous was fond of the fabrics to the point that they appropriated it as part of their visual cultural identity. It is this cross-cultural history that makes them an appropriate material for Shonibare (2018) to question notions of identity creation (Gibbons 2007:69). On top of that the clothes worn by the mannequins aren't cut in just any British style, they are specifically Victorian which is the same time period associated with the height of British imperialism (Gibbons 2007:70). This brings to the forefront and questions the complex relationship of those who have taken on the characteristics of their oppressors. The mannequins represent postcolonial hybrids that are difficult to identify or characterize and that is the point.



Victorian Couple, digital photograph, Mirth and Motivation, accessed 03 June 2018, <<https://mirthandmotivation.com/2009/08/30/yinka-shonibare-mbe-where-art-meets-post-colonial-african-artifice/>>

## Analysis of My Own Work

As part of my intention to negate and deconstruct the cultural model of the initiation into manhood's, rite of passage's hegemonic effects, I offer a reconsideration of the very signs that have been used in this rite of passage. In order to reconcile disparate parts of my identity, I attempt to bring them together within the artwork being made. I do this through an art making process that uses materials that are made from items that play a role in South African ritualistic practice. A process which combines sculpture, printmaking and installation. I combine fabrics often associated with the identities of various South African cultures with various items that I have a connections to and make them occupy the same space. By blending shapes, symbols and signifiers together they undergo formal and symbolic transformation. The artwork becomes a new contact zone that facilitates the exchange, and produces transcultural forms.

A main component of this process is the use of the fabric print known as ishwehwe. One of the reasons for using ishwehwe is that it is a material of German origin that has been adopted by Xhosa and other cultures in South Africa. It first became accessible because it was brought to the country through trade but now is seen as a part of these cultures visual identity. This makes it an appropriate material to explore notions of cultural identity formation in the context of my research and thus serves as the foundation for my work. The second major component in my work is the use of umqombothi. Umqombothi is a homemade beer made from maize, yeast, water, maize malt and sorghum malt. It is consumed during weddings, funerals and other rituals. I use it by combining it with the ishwehwe fabric. I do this by pouring the umqombothi onto the fabric to make it wet and then begin to shape it by dancing on it in the traditional Xhosa dance known as ukuXhensa which involves the stomping of the feet. After the fabric has taken a wrinkled shape created by my dancing I leave it to dry. Because the umqombothi has starch in it, the fabric becomes stiff and keeps the shapes that have been created. After that the fabric has stiffened I use it to cover different objects such as a mokorotlo. A mokorotlo is an intricately woven hat made from straw used as part of traditional Sotho clothing and is the national symbol for the Basotho people. Even when it is wrapped with the fabric its distinctive shape is still visible, so the resulting work has the silhouette of the hat but the ripples and undulations on the surface created by the stomping are also still visible. I do not arbitrarily use the Lesotho nation's symbol. My connection to Lesotho traces back to my great grandfather who was from Botswana but migrated to Matlakeng in the Free State which has a large Southern Sotho population. When he was there he adopted elements of the culture, in an attempt to assimilate which is reflected in small ways like the way my name is spelt and the surname I carry. Lebakeng is a last name from Lesotho.



The last step has to do with the use of the left over sap from the umqombothi preparation (something that would usually be thrown away). I apply it onto the surface of the fabric to harden it but also to do allow me to have various textures on the work. The transcultural aspect of this process has to do with the origins of the materials as well as their treatment rather than just what the material actually is. . Because I do not engage with these materials and symbols outside of the occasional ritual circumstance the engagement is hollow and lacks meaning for me. So I use the materials, in a way they were not intended to be used as a way to claim my own personal relationship with them and create a relationship that I did not have before. By using them in my work and in an artistic context I am imbuing them with meaning that I can connect to.

The image above is an example of a shweshwe fabric.

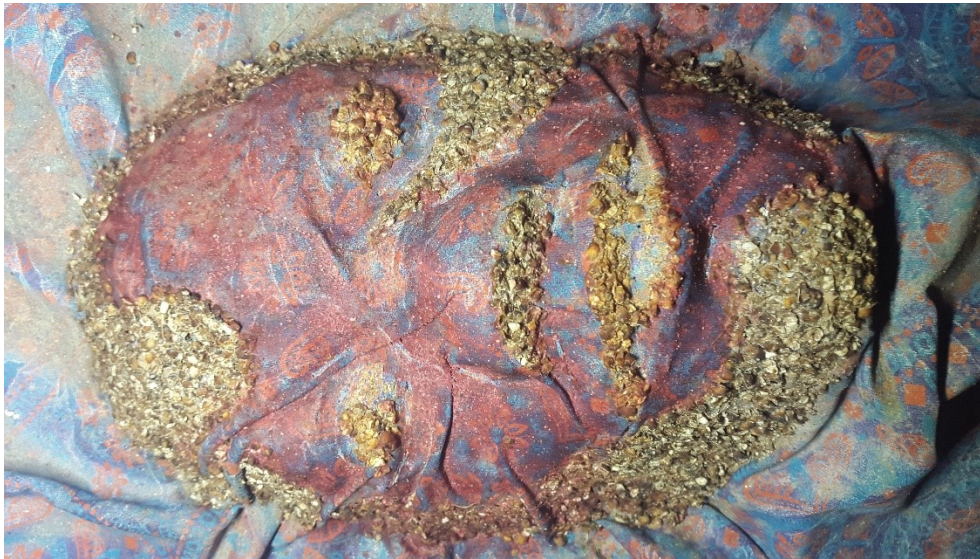


Image above is a shweshwe fabric that has been sculpted to take the shape of a face and is mixed with umqombothi and the left over grains.

Image Below is a Lesotho hat also cover in the left over grains from umqombhoti. Mixed with kool aid.





This is an example of a shweshwe fabric after it has been stomped on in traditional dance to form creases and then had the leftover grains from umqombothi applied onto the surface.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND CLOSING THOUGHTS

I will conclude this thesis by first summarizing the inquiry step by step and then I will finish it off with a few personal thoughts.

The direction of the study is influenced by the position I found myself in which was the feeling of being dislocated and confused due to the various cultural influences in my life. I have always felt that my families prioritizing of traditions and experiences stemming mainly from a traditional Xhosa and Sotho sphere does not accommodate the interpretation of the lived experiences of those like myself that are situated outside the boundaries of those cultures. In my opinion, this resulted in and exacerbated exclusion within our own familial structures.

I could have taken the decision to disengage with my family altogether in this quest for self but instead my hope is that my art may create a platform of sorts in which my family and I could meet. I do hold open the possibility that this processes may perhaps also lead to a better understanding – empathy even, with my family members' fears, apprehensions and uncertainties about me? Perhaps I could find out if with them being on the other side, that these ritual and identity issues are as much a crisis for them as they are for me.

The irony is that the inner circles that I envy because I am being excluded from them, may be the very confines that they wish to escape from. After all they are not just Xhosa

or Sotho; they are also modern South Africans. The quest for belonging and some sense of authenticity is not only mine: all have been misplaced. And perhaps the spaces created here can act as a place for us to meet, somewhere in-between.

This begun by my stating my objectives in order to give the direction of this research. In the first chapter I gave a brief history of autoethnography and why it is the perfect qualitative method of research for this particular inquiry. Next I articulated why visuality mattered in this study as it reinforces the role that my artmaking practice plays, with artworks that are less about saying something (i.e. being interpreted) and more about doing something (i.e. having transformational properties). This was followed by the theorizing of the self, the goal of which was to find a position from which the theoretical framework could be deployed, by articulating what I consider a sense of self to be. When discussing the fragmented self-identity this helped by providing an example of what a continuous sense of self could be. After that I employed my autobiographical orientation, which served to tell the story from which the artworks I create and the theoretical framework that surrounds them would be inspired. From the materials I use to the methodology itself, this story served as the root of it all and gave a sense of what motivated me to pursue this inquiry in the first place. Then I wrote about the relevant texts for my theoretical framework which were about the concepts of liminality, rites of passages as well as identity formation.

I illustrated how a fractured self-identity is similar to a liminal phase, by referring my readings of *The Location of Culture* by Homi K Bhabha (1994) as well as *Questions of Identity* by Roger Rouse (1995). The ambiguity I feel does not come from having a status stripped away due to initiating a rite of passage but rather from not fitting in. So the new self-identity I create through the hybridization of the disparate parts of my fragmented identity will be physically represented by the artefacts created in the artmaking process. To illustrate how this might work I referenced two other artists. Yinka Shinobare and Nicholas Hlobo's installation artworks were the ones used to align my experience of identity creation with the theory from Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage*. I outlined how the interpretation of identity crisis as a form of liminality could be used to undermine the societal structures that one is excluded from and established how Yinka SHinobare's installation work *Victorian Couple* and Nicholas Hlobo's *Umthubi* installation artwork exhibited the transcultural properties that I myself aim to achieve or at least explore through this practice. There is the possibility that the hybrid identity would have no value culturally or socially but would have personal value instead. So the transformation would be one that I see in myself but would be physically reflected by the artwork I create. This artwork being presented in an exhibition space and viewed through a heterotopic framework helps me generate a space in which familial dialogue can take place.

What comes next is meant to be a 'flexible' conclusion located, liminally, against the broader local African male transcultural and identity politics. The word 'conclusion' is used intentionally regardless of the uncertainties and possible paradoxes I put forward.

The concluding opinions defined in this section continue to be uncertain, disconcerted and open-ended – rather a practice of un-ravelling the narrative scripting of contemporary South African maleness. Coming to final thoughts in relation to the objectives investigated in the framework of this thesis contests the ideals of liminality interlaced throughout my investigation. Even though this section offers final concluding observations in reaction to the goals and intentions of my investigation. We see proof that trans-cultural African male identity can be a constant progression of development and constant re-negotiation of self, which encourages the kind of flexible and malleable gaps and spaces manifested as a result of the prevailing binary oppositions attempting to contain young men. My intent to establish a liminal South African male identity is a continuous mission to account for my subsequent contemporary relocation, re-organization and repossession in life. Like understanding, identities are built in various dialogues through language, visuals and linguistics. Using the texts by Stuart Hall and M. M. Bakhtin, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2002) I posit that identity is continuously an unfinished act established within representations and with the dialogues that are around an individual; one will come to recognize what identities they are obligated to embrace and inhabit as well as who they are relative to those identities (Smith & Watson 2002), and in my case hopefully reject them outright.

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