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**TITLE OF MA STUDY: My language my culture: an exploration of the  
cultural significance of the isiXhosa language to people who identify as  
amaXhosa: a case study with six urban and six rural speakers**

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ 

Signed by candidate
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 Date: 14/04/2023

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Abstract

There are several factors that cause people to convert from their cultures to cultures that they view as being more economically and socially desirable. In South Africa, cultural conversion became evident with the arrival of missionaries: Africans started to adopt the culture and world view of missionaries (Ndlovu, 2002; Oduyoye, 2009). The adoption of western culture came at a high price for African languages, particularly in terms of developing the skills associated with learning and speaking one's first language (people started learning languages that were in line with their newly found culture). Bamgbose (2011:5) contends that one of the things that contributes to African languages being seen as languages without value is the fact that some African people display negative attitudes towards their mother-tongues by sending their children to schools where they would be taught in a foreign language.

Growing up in a middle-class family in Delft in Cape Town, where most people aspired to get a good education, land a well-paid job, and move to the suburbs, I was always aware that these aspirations were firmly linked to acquiring the highest level of English. In my daily life I, and my friends who were also young isiXhosa-speakers, could tell that the need to acquire English was paramount to achieving these aims. We saw no evidence of our own language, isiXhosa, being used in powerful institutions such as banks, hospitals, and universities. However, we did witness, at many cultural events, our language being used robustly and with pride. There appeared to be a separation between language that was valued as a way to gain economic wealth (English) and language that was important for spiritual development (isiXhosa). We thus were led to believe that our language is not sophisticated, that it holds no value in the economic world. Kramersch (2000:7) argues that the predominance of certain languages in institutions of power, and the neglect of others, can cause harm to the less powerful language and culture and slowly instil in its speakers a feeling of rejection and alienation from mainstream society: "The prohibition of its use is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture." In other words, equating success with one language and realizing that one cannot use one's language in certain contexts that are deemed economically important, can lead a speaker of a less economically powerful language to shift from his/her home language to another.

It is not the scope of this research study to say whether African languages hold value or not in the economic world, but what is of interest to me is the link between culture and language and whether that link is still positively maintained (given that many speakers of African languages have had to embrace more dominant languages) or whether even there, there is attrition in terms of loss of knowledge of key cultural terms.

## 1.2 Introduction

This study is prompted by a concern for what appears to be a lack of pride by isiXhosa-speaking people in their language and culture. While this is a real perception, it is important to recognize that a loss of cultural knowledge and language endangerment cannot always be linked to a lack of pride in one's heritage and language (see Mufwene 2003). Mufwene argues that it is a matter of practicalities: people have had to adapt to "changing socio-economic ecologies" and cites Ladefoged who asks "whether linguists are justified in condemning the fact that some people have found it more advantageous for them to shift from their ancestral language to another which they find more useful" (in Mufwene 2003:2). This is exactly the reason why I, as a Xhosa speaker, have put so much energy into learning English.

However, my own individual perception of a lack of pride both in our heritage and in our language (and the link between them) is one that is shared, or at least referred to indirectly, by a number of scholars of African languages (see De Klerk, 2000; Mous, 2003) and is therefore one that needs to be interrogated. From my own vantage point I am aware, for example, that there are amaXhosa who appear (and I say *appear* since outward appearances dominate) well aware of their origins and are apparently well-informed of their culture because I see them each year celebrating Heritage Day (24 September), wearing cultural clothes and in some cases, even posting pictures of cultural dishes on social media. But how much do these individuals really know about their heritage, and particularly the language that describes that heritage? How much of the lexicon of cultural events has been maintained? To what extent can people still talk about their culture in a language that reflects the depth, nuances, and spirituality of that culture?

### 1.3 Research questions

The following research questions serve to guide my data collection and analyses:

- How do Xhosa-speakers talk about Xhosa cultural practices?
- Do Western and Eastern Cape isiXhosa-speakers use the same lexicon when talking about cultural practices?
- To what extent is the vocabulary consistent across ages and place of residence and to what extent is there lexical variability when describing cultural events?
- Do isiXhosa dictionaries contain all the words that speakers use to talk about cultural events or are there lexicographical gaps?

### 1.4 Theoretical approach

In my analyses of the participants' responses to the images and from their open-ended interviews I am guided by Catherine Bell's seminal understanding of tradition and ritual:

Tradition, of course, is not created once and then left to its own momentum. Tradition exists because it is constantly produced and reproduced, pruned for a clear profile, **and softened to absorb revitalizing** elements. (Bell, 2009:123, my emphasis)

This means that if, for example, a certain demographic of isiXhosa speakers does not know the word for a particular item of clothing traditionally used by an initiate, I need to reflect on why this is so and what it says about the revitalizing (or not) of the tradition – could it be that animal skins are no longer worn (and thus the word used to name them is not known) because urban isiXhosa speakers are vegetarians or have certain beliefs about using animal products? It is important that before any kind of judgement is made in terms of vocabulary loss, I examine the reasons behind such attrition.

In addition to the theoretical approach detailed above, my methodology chapter (Chapter 3) embraces a theoretical approach as it assumes that culture is organized via language and that in order to understand the current state of a particular rite or ritual it is important to interrogate the way in which people use language to describe such rites and the extent to which they are aware of any cultural scripts involved in their production.

I also bear in mind Bell's reflections on power and ritual, which she refers to as "ritualization" and which, she argues:

can promote social solidarity. It can promote solidarity particularly in a fairly homogeneous group with general recognition of key symbols, where a sense of unity can be achieved through consent to the forms, and where most subgroups benefit in some way from the simultaneous integration and differentiation of the social order. (Ibid.,2009:216)

The recognition of key symbols, and the language used to describe them is critical for the continuation of isiXhosa cultural practices and the solidarity of this group. My research is aimed at understanding whether the unity and consent to the forms and symbols in terms of language used is consistent even if speakers of isiXhosa are young or old, urbanized or still located largely in rural areas. If the data reveals that there are real differences in terms of the lexis used to describe key symbols, or if these symbols are no longer understood by some members of the group, then is there a possibility that their social solidarity is under threat?

Secondly, with regard to language variation in the description of the rituals and rites, I make use of Kuipers' (1998:17) discussion on the link between place and language and to heed his call for linguists to "appreciate the way in which the actual speakers themselves ... make *use* of their language".

## 1.5 Data collection

In order to answer the above research questions, in this study I research two key cultural domains in the lives of contemporary Xhosa speakers:

- liminal rites: circumcision (do Xhosa-speakers understand the cultural terminology used in the circumcision rites?)
- death (funerals and burial customs). (can Xhosa-speakers refer to key lexical items used in traditional burial customs?)

## 1.6 Establishing a “culture lexicon”

Before conducting interviews, I collected the language that is core to negotiating each of these areas of cultural importance in the lives of Xhosa-speakers by using the following data collection tools:

- historical records (in newspapers and books)
- oral narratives with elderly speakers of isiXhosa
- academic articles and records

## 1.7 Participants

I then conducted research with three urban and two rural Xhosa-speakers, selected to cover demographic difference in terms of age, and amount of time lived in the Eastern Cape.

## 1.8 Methodological Data Collection Tools: Eliciting Responses

I presented each participant with the following data collection tools:

- pictures of Xhosa circumcision and bereavement rituals
- videos of Xhosa circumcision and bereavement rituals

## 1.9 Methodological Data Collection Tools: Questionnaires and Open-Ended Interviews

Participant responses to these events were prompted by carefully worded questionnaires for each event, eliciting participant knowledge of the event.

I encouraged participants to feel free to narrate their feelings and perceptions about the meaning of these cultural events to me in Xhosa but not to be constrained by any idea of "correct language use". This was done in the form of an open-ended interview.

The results of their answers to the questionnaires and their narrations in the interview section were then tabulated in terms of key cultural terms used and the ability to document the event in detail in Xhosa. The words that participants use to describe these cultural events were transcribed, organized and discussed in terms of core cultural vocabulary with the aim of discovering whether participants were able to make use of an established cultural lexicon in the Xhosa language or whether there are significant deviations and variations in the lexis.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present an overview of what other scholars have discovered in their quest to explain what culture is, how it is significant to people who identify with a particular culture and how it relates to their language (what its significance is to its people). I will link the findings of these scholars to my own study which explores the cultural significance of the isiXhosa language to people who identify as amaXhosa. Literature considered will aid in showing the cultural significance of language to its users. I am hoping that it will also provide insights and an appreciation of the extent and complexity of the issue of the connection between language and culture when drawing my own conclusions to this study, using examples from my own life-experience as a young man who was brought up within a specific culture and language (amaXhosa, isiXhosa).

### 2.2 Literature on Culture

Culture is a construct that has been the interest of several scholars (see Fox, 1999; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2012; Nunan and Choi, 2010). These scholars have endeavoured to define what culture is. Fox (1999:89) does not see culture as static and based on unmutating signs and representations but rather argues that:

culture is a complex system of references and symbols that are historically transmitted within a group, tribe, nation across trans-national boundaries, or geographical areas.

If I link Fox's definition of culture to language, it nicely complements Greenberg's (1963) traces of isiXhosa to Benue-Congo families and Bantu languages. Greenberg (1963) demonstrates the interconnectedness of all Bantu languages, and the fact that through historical and morphological and lexical investigation it can easily be established that isiXhosa is a Bantu language. This means that among Bantu languages there are shared significant grammatical and lexical similarities because these languages have a common ancestor. It can be assumed then that certain artifacts of

an original Bantu culture can still be found in the many different peoples that originated from that original people.

Another quotation again refers to the significance of shared beliefs and behaviours that characterise all cultures:

... the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next. (Matsumoto 1996: 16 cited by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2012:1)

As a person who embraces his culture, I agree with the above definition of culture. In my family, we practice culture in a way that my parents were taught by their parents who were also taught by their parents. Meaning the culture that we are currently practicing now has not been developed by my parents nor by their parents, instead it has been passed down from older generations. An enduring aspect of our culture is respect, *imbeko* (*ukuhlonipha* which can be translated into English as *to respect*). Respect is manifested both by a person's actions and by the way she or he speaks. The linguistic demonstration of respect is of paramount importance, meaning whenever you are talking with your elder you have to constantly mind your tongue. You cannot speak in the same manner as you normally would with your friends and peers. For example, in isiXhosa there is the word *unyoko* meaning *your mother* or *uyihlo* meaning *your father*. Now, you can use this word *unyoko* when you are talking with someone younger than you or your peer asking of his or her mother's whereabouts, i.e. *Uphi unyoko?* ('Where is your mother?') but you cannot use the same word when you are talking with your elder because that is considered culturally disrespectful, as the word *unyoko* has some pejorative connotations<sup>1</sup>, so you would have to say something like *Uphi umamakho?* ('Where is your mother?') depending on how old you are and how old the person you are talking to is. In isiXhosa, culturally the respect that you give someone who is your elder, for example someone of the same age as your father, is not the same as the respect that is due to someone who might be younger than your father. You can address someone whom you perceive to be as roughly the same age as your father as *tata* (dad/father) and someone who is younger as *bhuti* (brother).

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture

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<sup>1</sup> *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa Vol.2*, p. 898 gives this additional gloss for *unyoko* when used as an interjection "a serious insult that provokes intense anger and may lead to a fight."

consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action.” (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952: 181; cited by Adler 1997: 14 as referenced by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2012:1)

Kroeber and Kluckhohn’s references to “implicit” patterns and cultural systems as “conditional elements of future action” resonate with me since there are cases where you come across a person and spend some time with them and are not made aware of anything in that person’s behaviour that would suggest any particular cultural allegiance. This however does not mean that they do not have a culture but it can suggest that the person is forming culture from “derivatives of experience” and their own experience:

Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves. (Schwartz, 1992:324).

However, Schwartz’s definition of culture could be considered to be self-contradicting. I understand it as either saying that culture is transmitted from one generation to the next or culture is what people make it. I personally disagree with the latter, because one cannot just decide which culture is theirs. Issues of cultural determinism are presented in AC Jordan’s (1940) book *Ingqumbo yeminyanya* in which the protagonist, Zwelinzima chose the culture of the family in which he was raised in, but the culture of his forefathers caught up with him. The same situation pertains in the novel entitled *Kusa kusihlwa* by K.S. Bongela. In this book Lungile deserts his culture and moves away from the area in which he was born, starts life over in a new place and has children. However, the novel shows that because culture is inherited and transmitted from one generation to the next it is unlikely that one individual can completely eradicate a family’s cultural identity: Lungile dies in a car accident but his son, Mpumelelo survives. Mpumelelo learns about his parents’ strong cultural background and once he starts practising the culture himself his life takes a turn for the better. This can be seen in the context of African spirituality, a belief system that includes ancestors (in this case Mpumelelo’s father) who offer their descendants protection and prosperity (Ross, 2010:45). Mpumelelo would also have realized that in order for him to become an ancestor himself, he would have to lead an honourable life (Ibid.) This distinction between the responsibilities of the living and the dead can be seen as a part of culture, which:

[Culture] is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. (Hofstede 2011:3)

Hofstede's definition of culture limits it to the "programming of the mind" which is an equivocal and opaque statement because the mind can be channelled into different ways of perceiving life. In my opinion, culture is deeper than that, a person cannot just be programmed to practice a certain culture, unless the culture he is referring to is the culture of work and the "group of people" which in that case would be the colleagues. Even in that context it is still not clear in what sense is he referring to, are these individuals programmed to behave in a particular manner? Uphold certain values? Or think in a particular way? How is this culture even passed or transmitted to other generations? Do people not have free will to assess both the benefits and sometimes disadvantages of certain cultural practices? This definition has a lot of loopholes and can be confusing. The next definition I find more helpful:

culture can be defined as the system of shared objects, activities and beliefs of a given group of people. (Judd, 2002:10)

The above definition defines culture very well and would be suitable for almost all contexts in which the word culture would be referred to. I will apply this definition of culture to the culture of amaXhosa male circumcision which I believe is a perfect example to illustrate Judd's (2002) definition. I realize that in so doing I am guilty of straying outside the bounds of a literature review I may be encroaching on the terrain of data results. My rationale is that without the examples, the definition could, for many readers, lack immediate relevance.

1. "shared objects" - AmaXhosa believe that a special knife should be used to circumcise a boy, the specific term for this knife is *umdlanga* with some dialectical variation.
2. "activities" - amaXhosa generally believe that certain activities should be performed when there is male circumcision. These activities would be *umgubho/umtshotsho*, an all night dance that is attended by both girls and boys which takes place the day before the boy goes to the initiation school. This dance is believed to be the way in which boys and girls bid farewell to their peer as he is about to go into another level or stage of his life. It is also believed that this dance helps to keep company for the soon to be initiated and to help him to ease his thoughts about the following day. *Umngeno* is a ritual that is performed on the day that the boy goes to initiation school. This ritual can be understood as a way of notifying the community at large that the boy is now about to enter another stage of his life. This

ritual, unlike *umgubho/umtshotsho*, can be attended by anyone, it is perceived as a way for the community to bid farewell to the initiate. *Umphumo* is a small feast performed on the day the initiate comes back from the initiation school as a way of acknowledging his return. This feast, just like *umngeno*, can be attended by anyone. *Umfundiso* is an all night dance performed on the first night that the initiate returns home after spending time in the initiation school. This dance is attended by young men who will be teaching the new initiate about manhood (how to speak as man and how to use language to defend your manhood when there is a need) and also welcoming him into manhood. The dance is also attended by girls who are now at the age when they could date men and who mainly help with singing and keeping men company. *Umgidi* is a ceremony that is held the day after the return of the initiate. This ceremony can be attended by everyone, the community at large comes together to celebrate the safe return of the new initiate and to acknowledge his newly acquired status in the community. In all these cultural activities, ancestors are informed (by being spoken to in the kraal) of what is happening before the start of each activity and a particular way of speaking with ancestors (reciting all the clan names and praises of the family involved) is used. When men are teaching the new initiate about manhood they use purely isiXhosa and some isiXhosa riddles which the initiate would have been taught at the initiation school. During *umgidi* when elderly men and women are given a chance to offer words of wisdom or advice about life (a practice known as *ukuyalwa* which literally translates as ‘to be instructed’) to the new initiate in this new journey of being a man they use a particular language when speaking with the new initiate. During the practice of *ukuyalwa* one of the pieces of advice that a new initiate is given is that *indoda ayihambi ilala* meaning ‘a man does not sleep around’. Surprisingly enough, the same *isiyalo* (‘instruction’) *indoda ayihambi ilala* is also a song that is sung during such ceremonies. Such activities would differ depending on the dialect that a group speaks, but the bottom line is, activities are performed, special language within which culture is embedded is used and single words such as *umgidi* have a semantic field which encompasses a wide range of traditional expectations.

3. “beliefs” - back to my first point, it is a belief that a special knife should be used, it is a belief that a boy should stay in a special hunt built for him whilst healing, it is a belief that only males should visit the initiate. It is a belief that elderly people of the family should inform the ancestors of what is to happen by speaking with them at the kraal before starting with any ritual or ceremony. It is also a shared belief that ancestors would not look kindly upon a family that rejected such cultural practices. Research conducted by Mavundla et al.

(2016:5) confirms this view: analysing their research interviews the authors conclude that “Xhosa men regard traditional circumcision as a “sacred” or “holy” religious custom and that engaging in cultural circumcision is equal to a religious belief.”

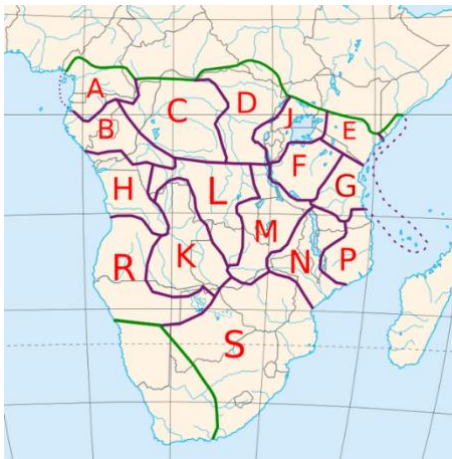
This understanding of custom is widely shared by amaXhosa and can be found underpinning other traditional ceremonies for liminal stages and well-being, with ancestor reverence being key (see Bogopa, 2010), and it is for this reason that I say that the above definition of culture would best fit a number of contexts in which the word culture could/would be used. Also important is Kramersch’s definition of culture as:

the membership in a **discourse** community that shares a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting. (Kramersch, 1993:10, my emphasis)

The above definition of culture might be considered somewhat vague and controversial. Vague in the sense that it does not specify the type of community (apart from the fact that we know a discourse community to be a group of people who have a way of **communicating** about shared beliefs and values), what is being perceived, believed in or evaluated. Controversial in the sense that one can be a member of community and share the same social space and history as other members of that community, but at the same time be practising a different culture and communicating in different ways about beliefs. For example, my father and his brother grew up together and everything for them (culturally) was done the same way that their parents had performed them. However, now that they are old and they have their own houses, their views on culture are somewhat different and the way they practice culture is considerably different even though they still live in the same community. My father, in his house embraces the cultural customs of amaXhosa only to a certain degree, choosing not to perform certain cultural customs of amaXhosa, for example the ritual of *umkhapho* or *umbuyiso* (a ritual performed in order to ensure the deceased is accompanied on his/her journey to the ancestors) and he also does not consult traditional healers as instead he embraces Christianity. On the contrary, his brother is more prone to such rituals which he believes must be performed to ensure that we as a family have a harmonious relationship with our ancestors.

However, if one looks at Greenberg’s (1963) work which allows for the tracing of African languages (particularly those known as Bantu languages) to a common ancestor, then we can see

how important the word “discourse” is to understanding the link between language and culture. Greenberg groups isiXhosa into the Benue-Congo sub-family within Bantu languages with the amaXhosa ethnic group forming part of the Nguni people of Southern Africa. This means that while there is a shared ancestor, the discourses around culture will necessarily also be traceable to a common ancestor but, because of changes over time and movements of people, these discourses will also be distinctly unique. So, isiXhosa discourses around initiation will be different from isiZulu and Siswati ways of speaking about initiation. To further complicate the issue, the isiXhosa language has several isiXhosa dialects that we know as Mpondo, Bomvana, Bhaca, Thembu, Mpondomise, Xesibe, Mfengu, Hlubi. According to Guthrie’s classification of Bantu languages (see Guthrie, 1967-1971) amaXhosa are located in S41: but as one can see the S grouping is large enough to allow for overlapping of both language and culture:



*Illustration 1: [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Guthrie\\_classification\\_of\\_Bantu\\_languages](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Guthrie_classification_of_Bantu_languages)*

However, as Dalby (1975) discovered, even though Guthrie provided us with sufficient evidence to suggest a common ancestor language (‘Proto Bantu’) – it is difficult to reconstruct the prehistory of the Bantu peoples as the linguistic evidence is not uncontroversial.

### 2.3 Literature on the Connection between Language and Culture

Jiang (2000:328) notes that language and culture are intertwined and that one would not make sense without the other. Language and culture complement each other, one does not speak about language and leave out culture as language reflects culture. Knowing ones’ language and culture means you know what their values are, what people of a particular culture consider honourable (as well as what is not honourable) and how they approach life as these are embedded in their culture. Kramsch

(2014:30) holds the same view as Jiang (2000) but because of the highly complex social worlds we now all live in, extends the definition to include reference to semiotics, and asks the question “How is cultural meaning encoded in the linguistic sign?” She discusses the impact of globalization and technology and concludes that:

the interpenetration of the verbal and the non-verbal has created additional links between text and context, linguistic and visual forms of meaning making. Particularly online communication, that looks both at and through language, blurs the distinction between text and context in a complex virtual culture that creates additional layers of reality. (Kramersch, Ibid.)

Returning to a more regular discussion of the link between language and culture it is useful to refer to Kramersch’s earlier work (1998) in which the author speaks of the types of communication that members of the same group choose that are sometimes beyond even just lexical content, “The way in which people use the spoken, written, or visual medium itself creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to, for example, through a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures and facial expressions.” (Kramersch and Widdowson, 1998:3)

Judging from the above quotes culture has many definitions and facets but for the purposes of this study culture will mean shared beliefs, customs, and the typical behaviour of members of the same group (amaXhosa).

#### 2.4 Male circumcision amongst amaXhosa: an example of the link between culture and language

In this part of the literature review I return to the topic of male circumcision as a widely shared custom in the amaXhosa community in order to sift through and establish key understandings of the custom and the language associated with it that might have undergone a shift or change. Ndangam (2008:211) notes that male circumcision is a cultural practice that is commonly practiced by amaXhosa who live in South Africa in the Eastern Cape. He asserts that male circumcision bridges the gap between adolescent and adulthood for amaXhosa who practice it. Ndangam (2008:212) associates the cultural practice of male circumcision with masculinity, “The cutting of the prepuce (done without anaesthetic), followed by the period of seclusion, is viewed as demonstrating bravery and instilling endurance and discipline in initiates.” I found this article relevant to my study as one of my aims was to investigate the extent to which amaXhosa have

detailed knowledge of their heritage and whether contemporary global debates on gender have had any impact on the cultural lexicon associated with initiation.

Male circumcision is a traditional ritual that has been practiced by amaXhosa for generations and has continued to survive and thrive from one generation to the next. This practice has its own cultural meanings which might not be fully comprehended by people who are not part of amaXhosa and who do not speak isiXhosa. For example, isiXhosa tradition dictates that for someone to be accepted as a man he must be able to withstand pain (that comes with circumcision), which is seen as a sign of bravery (Ndangam, 2008:212). Men who fail to endure the pain of traditional circumcision or men who chose to do medical circumcision are often perceived as unworthy of being called real men by other men in the community. They are also disrespected by other members of the community if it becomes known to them (community members) how these men have acquired their manhood (medical circumcision). These men are often stigmatised as *unofotyela* (see Sobopha, 2001) or *isiyoyo*<sup>2</sup>, both terms conveying the meaning of ‘lesser of a man’ or ‘weaklings’, the naming varies depending on the isiXhosa dialect a group speaks. Froneman and Kapp (2017:1) assert that even though the statistics of complications that come with the cultural practice of male circumcision were at an alarming rate in 2010, young amaXhosa boys still opt to undergo this practice. In my opinion, this clearly shows that amaXhosa not only condone, but have a total belief in, the practice of traditional circumcision in their communities, hence the young boys still opt for it irrespective of the potential risks of undergoing an operation outside of a hospital. During the season of male circumcision which often takes place in the middle of the year (June/July) or at year-end (November/December) you will often hear amaXhosa say, “*Lixesha lokuya esuthwini ngoku*” (‘It is now time to go to the initiation lodge’) or “*Lixesha lokuya entabeni*” (‘It is time to go to the mountain’). While these phrases suggest a literal movement towards these places they are also testimony to the unwavering belief that this practice is as unavoidable as the seasons of the year. In some cases, you will hear men (young and old) asking a boy who is at a perceived right age of being circumcised “*Sitya nini ngawe?*” (Literally: ‘When are we eating on account of you?’) or “*Usityisa nini?*” (Literally: ‘When are you feeding us?’) the figurative meaning of both questions being ‘When are you getting circumcised?’. This question stems from the fact that when a boy goes to initiation school there are a number of rituals or ceremonies (*umngeno*, *umphumo*, *umgidi*) performed where food, meat and alcohol is served for free. AmaXhosa boys fully understand the

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<sup>2</sup> The term *isiyoyo* does not appear in the *Greater Dictionary of Xhosa*, but is glossed in Doke et al’s *Zulu Dictionary* (1990:884) as a ‘newly born animal or person, newly hatched bird’.

hidden meaning in such questions: they do not need an explanation and they normally answer them with delight.

Traditional circumcision is really a burning issue in amaXhosa communities. Mfecane (2016) in his paper discusses masculine hierarchies in South Africa, paying special attention to the concept of *indoda* ‘a man’ amongst amaXhosa. He looks at what it means to be an *indoda* in communities of amaXhosa and what hierarchal position a traditional circumcised man upholds in this society. Mfecane (2016:204) acknowledges that it is of paramount importance that all amaXhosa boys undergo the traditional circumcision in order to be accepted as *amadoda* (‘men’) in communities of amaXhosa and claims that the practice of traditional circumcision is what distinguishes men from boys. Moreover, Mfecane (2016:207) argues that apart from undergoing the physical endurance required by traditional circumcision in order to be accepted or recognised as a man in communities of amaXhosa, there is also a special language spoken by traditionally circumcised men that one should know. He references Mgqolozana (2009) in his explanation:

To ensure that those who have not undergone *ulwaluko* do not pass as *amadoda*, amaXhosa devised a special language of communication among *amadoda* which is imparted to traditionally circumcised Xhosa initiates during the separation period. (Mgqolozana, 2009 as referenced in Mfecane, 2016:207)

Mfecane (2016:207 referencing Connell, 1995:79) goes on to explain that without having undergone the traditional ritual (and learnt the language associated with it) :

boys and men who were circumcised in hospital are excluded from the “circle of legitimacy” referred to as *esidodeni* in isiXhosa. Initiates are required to memorise this language since it serves as admission criteria into ritual spaces.

I found this special language spoken by amaXhosa traditional circumcised men relevant to my study. It significantly shows how language and culture are really intertwined. Given the diversity of South African communities in this day and age and how people are multilingual, one might mistake another fellow African man (Zulu or Sotho) as umXhosa on the basis of how that particular person is amazingly fluent in isiXhosa. It is by way of this special language learnt at initiation school that amaXhosa men are able to distinguish other African men (amaXhosa who are medically circumcised or from different ethnic group) who are speaking isiXhosa from traditional circumcised amaXhosa men. This language is shared amongst amaXhosa men who are traditionally circumcised, even if you are from a different village or town, you ought to know this special language of communication among amaXhosa men. The link between this language and culture is that, the

“special language” is spoken in cultural spaces. For example, one might speak it when introducing himself in an area where he is not known, in cases where one is unsure where to sit when entering a house full of men, when one wants to ascertain that the person he is speaking to is really a man (meaning that he is traditionally circumcised) or even in cases where one is defending his manhood (Mfecane, 2016). The bottom line is that the language learnt during traditional initiation should be in line with the culture of amaXhosa and be deemed a mark of cultural conformity.

Froneman and Kapp (2017) researched the perception of male circumcision in contemporary Xhosa society and discovered that some amaXhosa who populated the communities of Knysna in the Western Cape, after being exposed to alternative methods (clinical circumcision) of male circumcision are now choosing to have the circumcision performed at hospitals. However, elderly people are still adamant they want to keep the traditional way of male circumcision. This insistence on the operation being performed within an age-old cultural framework is significant since boys who are not circumcised or those who had failed circumcisions are often subjected to inhumane treatment in their communities. For example, Froneman and Kapp (2017:1) state:

If they are not circumcised, they are given leftover food at celebrations, are not allowed to socialise in taverns with other men, are not allowed to use the family name to introduce themselves and are sometimes forcefully taken away from their girlfriends. Uninitiated men have less autonomy and must often obey others.

Elderly people link the reports by The South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) of traditional circumcision with the sign from ancestors that the people who had complications were not worthy of being called men (see Froneman and Kapp, 2017). Froneman and Kapp (2017:1) further explain that this cultural practice of male circumcision is still important to some amaXhosa as the new initiates are taught a new language and riddles by elders at the initiation school and they would have to use that language to prove their manhood with other new initiates or men. It would appear that the isiXhosa initiation ritual has become a way of speaking about manhood that is heavily associated with a ritual – so circumcision performed at a hospital no longer stands for circumcision as amaXhosa understand it – it contains none of the new language or knowledge that young men are expected to obtain while at the initiation lodge. Kramsch refers to the fact that words can contain an “intensity of ... emotion” and I would argue that the word “initiation” for the amaXhosa is deeply charged with emotion. She speaks of:

the degree of the cognition and the intensity of the emotion triggered by the words. Not in a deterministic way, and not in the dictionary meanings of words, but in the enunciative choices of speakers and writers and in the affective, social, and political meanings they assign to these words. (Kramsch, 2014:37).

## 2.5 Bereavement rituals showing the link between culture and language amongst amaXhosa

To move away from initiation *per se*, it is important to look at how language and culture are intertwined in other cultural practices of amaXhosa. Van Heerden's thesis (2002) explores two cultural bereavement rituals that are performed by amaXhosa to keep ties with the deceased. Van Heerden notes the following about the amaXhosa practices of *umkhapho* and *umbuyiso* "The *umkhapho* ritual is intended to help facilitate the movement beyond so that the ancestor can return later" (Van Heerden, 2002:14) and "The *umbuyiso* ritual literally means to bring the spirit of the ancestor back home" (Van Heerden, 2002:15) .

These rituals are performed to ensure that the relationship between the dead and the living is a harmonious one, since if not performed misfortune, it is believed, will befall the family. These rituals speak to my study as they show the interconnectedness of language and culture. During these rituals certain phrases are uttered and songs sung, the words form an important part of the culture, the language **is**, in fact, the culture. As Seema (2016:20) observes, writing about women's funeral songs amongst the Basotho, the song allows "the death to be communally shared". Some of the phrases that would be uttered by people performing these bereavement rituals would be: *Makudede ubumnyama kuvele ukukhanya* (Literally: 'Surpass darkness, rise light', figuratively: 'May the darkness make a way for brightness or may the light prevail and darkness be abolished.'). The Somagwaza song, which was traditionally sung at initiation ceremonies, may also be sung during these bereavement rituals, and researchers (e.g. Lobley, 2012) have discovered that its melody and music often have an emotional effect:

The fact that the song was so widely recognisable to male and female youths and elders led to a wide variety of responses. Some men struggled to speak through nostalgic tears of joy (Lobley, 2012:188)

The fact that this song can now be heard at ritual spaces other than initiation ceremonies is testimony to the fact that culture changes, or is different for different people. One informant noted that "Somagwaza was more commonly used by amagqirha for healing ceremonies " (Lobley, 2012:190)

while others were adamant that it was only used by males at initiation ceremonies. The researcher had to conclude that “many people believed that the ceremonial context of the song mattered much more” than the accuracy of the words (Lobley, 2012:191).

Solomon (1986:44) reminds us of the deep interconnectness between what she terms the “ritual word” and the “belief” and gives the example of the isiXhosa word “Camagu”:

This word, to the Xhosa is all-embracing and is recognized as a religious act and word, solemnly spoken and echoed by all present. Camagu means - let it be so - let our prayers be heard by our ancestors and let the ancestors carry on our petitions to God with whom they live. In every ceremony when an animal is slaughtered and it roars before it is dead everybody shouts Camagu - meaning that they all witness the fact that the sacrifice has been accepted by the ancestors .

Kramersch (2000:7) asserts that culture and language are intertwined and that they complement each other. This is evident in the culture of amaXhosa, when a person dies the elders (men) of the family have to speak to the deceased (corpse) before that person can be laid to rest. For example, if a person dies in a car accident, members of the family have to go to the scene where the person last took her or his breath. When they get there the elders (men) must speak to the deceased and tell him or her that they are there to fetch his/her soul and take it home with them where he or she will be laid to rest along his or her forefathers. When speaking with the soul of the deceased a special language which is common to all amaXhosa is used, they start by calling the clans of family which the deceased was the part of. Similarly, when amaXhosa are transporting the corpse from one place to another, members of the family must speak to the deceased (corpse) and tell him or her that they will now be transporting the body from one point to another - they do not just move the body as they see fit. If proper customs (speaking with the dead) are not followed there is a belief that the transport used to transport the corpse will not reach the destination safely or something bad might befall the family of the deceased.

## 2.6 The power of spoken words

In my opinion there is a general belief from people belonging to different cultural groups that whatever you speak or say comes into existence - manifestation. This belief can be seen in cultural customs of amaXhosa, and indeed in their parenting advice and rules. When we grew up we were frequently reprimanded if we spoke ill of each other. It did not matter even if you were the one who

had been wronged: you were not allowed to utter words that showed cruelty. I remember when I was in high school, we (boys) were cleaning the windows on a Friday afternoon. One of my classmates took the stepladder I was using whilst I was taking a dry cloth to dry the windows, angrily, I said to him *Ingase sikuwise* (Literally: ‘I wish it [the step ladder] could make you fall’, i.e. ‘I wish you could fall’) and my teacher who was within ear shot heard me and reprimanded me harshly and instructed me to take back what I said to my fellow classmate. There and then I retracted my statement because I remembered that my mother would always say, “*Umbi umlomo wakho,*” (Literally: ‘Your mouth is bad’, figuratively: ‘You speak in a way not befitting your culture’) whenever she reprimanded me after hearing me speaking ill of others. I think this belief stems from our belief as human beings that there is a superior being who is our Creator and who used language/words to create the universe. People from different cultures have different names to refer to this superior being. In order to substantiate my observation, I will make reference to the isiXhosa Bible, the book of Genesis (1) states “*Wathi uThixo, Umhlaba mawuphume uhlaza, imifuno evelisa imbewu, imithi yeziqhamo, eyenza iziqhamo ngohlobo lwayo, embewu ikuyo, emhlabeni. Kwaba njalo. Umhlaba waphuma uhlaza, nemifuno evelisa imbewu ngohlobo lwayo, nemithi eyenza iziqhamo, embewu ikuyo, ngohlobo lwayo. Wabona uThixo ukuba kulungile.*”<sup>3</sup> (“Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.”)

From the above extract it can be said that the belief in the power of God to create or speak things into existence relies heavily on an understanding that language literally has the power to bring things into existence.

## 2.7 The importance of respect

In the culture of amaXhosa the words *mama* ‘mother’ and *tata* ‘father’ do not only apply to one’s biological parents but can be extended to everyone who is old enough to be a mother or father. It is this concept of the human family beyond the Western nuclear one in which we find *ubuntu* ‘humanity’.<sup>4</sup> Finlayson (2002) looks at amaXhosa marriage rituals as uniting two families not just

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.wordproject.org/bibles/xho\\_2/01/1.htm](https://www.wordproject.org/bibles/xho_2/01/1.htm)

<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank one of my external examiners, Mlamli Diko, for this important insight.

two people. She pays special attention to the role of the woman in her newly found family and the role played by respect. It is important to note that in the culture of amaXhosa respect (*intlonipho/ukuhlonipha*) is expected at every stage of life. For example, when you are a child you are expected to respect your siblings who are older than you and not call them by their first names- your big brother you will address as *Bhuti* and your big sister you will address as *Sisi*. The same notion goes for the siblings of your parents, you are expected to address sisters of your father as *dadobawo* and sisters of your mother as *makazi*, the younger brothers of your father as *tat'omncinci*, the older brothers of your father as *tat'omkhulu* or *tat'omdala*<sup>5</sup> and address your mother's brothers as *malume* irrespective of their ages. That is also the case with newly wedded women who traditionally had to use the women's language of respect, *isihlonipho sabafazi* at their in-laws' homes. Finlayson (2002:283) postulates that wives of amaXhosa were not at liberty to use language as they pleased but had to constantly omit words that contained any syllable that formed part of the names of her husband's relatives as a way of showing respect to his family. Moreover, Herbert (1990:471) as referenced by Finlayson (2002:283) state *isihlonipho* is more common in cases where the syllables or names of the husbands' relatives that should be avoided by the young daughter in-law are unique which is normally the case in isiXhosa.

## 2.8 Culture, conceptual maps and the link to age

Nanda (2021:48-49) through a reflective enquiry explores the link between culture and language using a system of representation. He asserts that for people to have a common understanding about the meanings of particular concepts they have to share the same culture, "conceptual maps" and language. People of different cultures have different codes or association of objects with concepts that are in line with their culture and this makes it easier for those of the same culture to comprehend when communicating with one another. People learn about, or come to understand, these concepts through language, and this happens subconsciously. Moreover, Nanda (2021:49) explains that humans' cultural groups could be "identified easily by interacting with other members of same groups" and that their beliefs and values "are reflected through their tool of representation, language." This (see also Kramsch, 1998) means that wherever a person goes, he or she carries his or her culture in his or her language. And this can be true in the sense that when you come across umXhosa, as umXhosa, you begin to speak and act (gesture) as umXhosa. For example, if you are

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<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank my external examiner Dr Simthembele Xekewana for pointing out that these days the correct way of addressing an older brother of your father is *bawokazi*

with your friends at school who do not share the same culture with you, and it happens that you bump into a person who shares your culture, and this person happens to be older than you, immediately your mind tells you to address the person as per your cultural values and customs. This trigger from culture to language might confuse the friends who do not share the same culture, as they witness a distinct change in behaviour whose meaning they do not have access to unless they are curious and ask.

Nanda (2021:50) acknowledges that even when they appear to be from the same ethnic group, people who belong to the same culture “might have different ways to interpret certain things and concepts.” Nanda (2021) argues that this difference can be attributed to the age gap: he states that there could be two different words referring to one item, with one word being preferred by old people and another one being used by the youth. I concur with this view and will use four words to show the way members of the same culture but with different ages might assign different semantic properties to lexical items. For example, among amaXhosa youth, when we wish to express our wish or desire for something that we do not have, sometimes say *andisayibaweli* (Literally: ‘Do I no longer desire it’, figuratively: ‘I really desire it’) a word which has been grammatically compressed and constricted (via the deletion of vowels) to *sbwl* in social media and in other platforms of communication, whereas older people still use the word *ndirhalela* ‘I long for’ to express their wish or desire. It must be noted that the two words (*-bawela* and *-rhalela*) can be used interchangeably even by younger people: *-rhalela* is largely used by amaXhosa in the North Eastern side of the Eastern Cape province<sup>6</sup>.

Secondly, some youngsters, when referring to a person who robs people of their belongings, call that that person *iphara* or *ipharaphara* whilst old people refer to the same person as *utsotsi*. Thirdly, old people in my acquaintance refer to a chicken as *ityiphu* (which could mean both a chicken that runs around in the yard and a cooked chicken) but we youngsters at home only use the word *inkukhu* when referring to a chicken. Lastly, some older people still refer to a train as *uloliwe* but most middle-aged and younger people say *itreyini*.

## 2.9 Conclusion

The literature I have consulted for my study has given me the background with which to approach my research question as clearly “culture” is not a simple concept and, particularly when viewed

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<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Mlamli Diko for this information on *-bawela* and *-rhalela*

with through the primary lens of language, needs to be constantly revisited and re-examined. In my research I will seek to discover how amaXhosa speak about their cultural practices and the extent to which core vocabulary items and phrases (including songs) linked to cultural practices are retained. This literature review has clearly shown me that I need to explore the possible link between a loss of cultural knowledge and language endangerment which cannot always be linked to a lack of pride in one's heritage and language but rather in socio-economic realities facing the younger generation (see Mufwene 2003). In an article on the importance of maintaining the first language of Koreans now living in America, the author discovered that parents wanted children to know their Korean language because the heritage language "is the essence of ethnic identity and heritage" (Brown, 2011:33). This observation is extremely important for my study as I need to find out whether a loss of key vocabulary items in the speech of young isiXhosa-speakers might be indicating a concomitant reduction of cultural knowledge and therefore a loss of the umXhosa identity.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the methodological tools that I used to gather qualitative data aimed at establishing whether contemporary isiXhosa-speakers can speak about two key traditional rites still performed by amaXhosa, using appropriate vocabulary and displaying knowledge of ritual-specific terms. This chapter therefore focusses on the a) the data I decided to collect (vocabulary and discourses relating to two key isiXhosa cultural events – circumcision and bereavement rituals) b) my sources for this data – academic and historical texts and oral descriptions of the rituals from elderly informants who were asked by me to offer their own accounts of these ceremonial practices as they understood them through lived experience c) participants I chose to elicit knowledge of the lexicon of the cultural data being key words, words, phrases, prayers and songs commonly uttered at these ceremonies (which will also be represented in table format) and d) how I went about getting the participants to speak about these rituals which would then allow me to test and analyse the data offered by them in the analysis chapter (Chapter 4). My methodology is thus part theory in that I assume that the cultural life of amaXhosa is organized and interpreted through rites and rituals and that these rites and rituals have specific cultural scripts which are subject to variation and change.

### 3.2 Data collection - selection of two specific cultural events for this study

In order to establish a culture-rich context for harvesting data for this research, I purposefully selected two cultural events that are common amongst amaXhosa: Circumcision and Bereavement rituals. When these rites are performed there are normally phrases, words, songs, incantations and prayers to the ancestors which are carefully uttered especially for such rites and it is assumed that most isiXhosa speakers would be conversant with these performative discourses. Although I want to test my hypothesis that the cultural lexicons of contemporary isiXhosa speakers might not be as extensive as expected: in other words that some key cultural terminology is being lost. The ‘what’ of my research methodology is thus focused on the lexicon and discourses of these rituals and the ‘who’ is on a representative sample of isiXhosa speakers over the age of 20 (both male and female) who would be expected to know these lexicons and discourses.

First, I provide brief descriptions of these rituals, including reference as to whom they are performed, and for what purpose they are performed. I then look at written and oral records in

which the rituals are described and follow this with a tabulation of the core isiXhosa vocabulary and discourses that I extracted from these sources in order to be able to check these against participants' knowledge and the repertoires they use to describe these events.

### **3.2.1 Brief description: isiXhosa male circumcision**

Generally, all peoples, no matter what culture or creed, go through different stages in life. We reach some stages because of our experience, some because of our age. What is important is that as we gradually move from one stage to the next, one gets responsibilities and titles that come with that particular stage. These stages are referred to in academic literature as 'liminal' stages (see Mavundla et al., 2009). This is also the case with male circumcision amongst amaXhosa: it is a customary rite of passage from childhood (being perceived as a boy) to manhood (being perceived as a man) undertaken, generally, by boys aged 18 years and above. Mfecane (2016:204, citing Ngwane 2004) explains the process involved in male circumcision as follows:

*Ulwaluko* entails, among other things, circumcision followed by separation from society for a period of three to six weeks. During the separation period, the initiate — known as *umkhwetha* — lives in the secluded temporary *ibhoma* lodge together with a designated guardian called *ikhankatha*. This is where he receives instruction about being a man from the *ikhankatha* and other initiated male youth [Abafana].

Mfecane (referring to Ntombana's 2011 study) elaborates on the above and provides a reasonable explanation for the purpose or rationalisation of male circumcision by stating that,

After the completion of the *ulwaluko* ritual, a Xhosa initiate is reintegrated into the community and officially regarded as a man, an *indoda*. This allows him to marry, build a homestead and actively participate in community discussions and rituals. (Mfecane, 2016:204)

It can be assumed, from the above brief explanations of circumcision rites among the amaXhosa, that this ritual has a specific lexicon associated with its location (e.g. *ibhoma* – the circumcision lodge), practices (e.g. *ukungcamisa* – a ritual requiring the eating of a specific piece of meat) and particular discourses and songs which amaXhosa are expected to know and understand (e.g. the Somagwaza song – see Dowling, Deyi and Gobodwana, 2018).

### **3.2.2 Brief description: isiXhosa bereavement rituals**

The bond between family members of amaXhosa is very deep and generally lasts forever and it is believed that this strong family connection is not even terminated when someone dies although the

death requires certain rituals to be performed in order to bring stability to the family and honour to the deceased. Therefore, amongst amaXhosa when someone dies there are certain rituals that need to be performed before the person can be laid to rest and at which family members say their last goodbyes to the person whose body they are burying. As Solomon puts it:

Various rites are performed at the actual burial. These rites are intended to send off the departed peacefully, to sever his links with the living and to ensure that normal life continues among the survivors. (Solomon, 1986:24)

AmaXhosa perform rituals such as *umkhapho* (a ritual to ensure the deceased is accompanied on his/her journey to the land of the ancestors) and *umbuyiso* (a ritual to bring the spirit of the deceased back home) for their deceased. These rituals entail, amongst other things, brewing traditional beer slaughtering of animals (goat or sheep depending on the family preference) and inviting community members to attend this ceremony as it is a custom of amaXhosa to do a proper send off of their loved one as they believe that when one dies go into another space or world of the ancestors, so by performing this ritual they are accompanying the deceased into that world. AmaXhosa perform these rituals in order for them keep their bond with the ancestors strong and for them to be able to communicate with their deceased. AmaXhosa generally believe that ancestors watch over the living protecting them from the evil that they do not see and also bring them good fortune in life. Solomon (1986:33) notes that after the funeral:

Relatives and close friends who could not attend the funeral call at the house and are taken to the grave to "lay their stones" - "UKUBEKA ILITYE:' As a rule, during the first week after the funeral mourners are not allowed to leave the house but duty calls and .the threat of losing one's job could negate these social expectations.

Solomon also mentions the bereavement rituals of *ukusezwa amanzi* (Ibid.) which she describes as an "expression of acceptance" of the death and Again, it is clear from this brief description of amaXhosa bereavement rituals that there are particular words, phrases and discourses that are key to performing the rites appropriately.

### **3.2.3 Written and oral records of the two cultural events**

Before eliciting responses from participants, I embarked on a detailed examination of both historical and contemporary texts referring to circumcision and bereavement rituals amongst amaXhosa. As

I went through these records, I made a note of the isiXhosa lexicon surrounding these events – the special language that is used by participants in the ritual, words to describe the various stages of the ritual including incantations, songs, special names for objects and people assigned specific tasks. The data from these sources allowed me to tabulate the lexicon that could be expected of any contemporary isiXhosa speaker who partakes in such rituals. It is important to note that there is dearth of literature when it comes to the historical records of amaXhosa particularly one that speaks about bereavement rituals. Van Heerden (2002:3) observes the following about the *umkhapho* and *umbuyiso* rituals which are key to the amaXhosa bereavement process:

There are few formal texts about the *umkhapho* and *umbuyiso* rituals. Despite the poverty of written literature, however, there is a rich, living oral tradition about them. The rituals are widely practiced in a variety of different contexts and in the interviews I got the impression that they are dynamic and living rituals.

Because of this dearth of literature on these rituals, much of what will be presented here comes from Tiyo Soga's *Intlalo yamaXhosa* (1983) originally published in 1936 and here reproduced in the old orthography, as well as from orally recorded videos of a very knowledgeable informant – this informant is steeped in the cultural practices of amaXhosa since throughout his life he has participated in countless bereavement and male circumcision rituals.

### ***3.2.3.1 Detailed accounts of the Bereavement Ritual***

Tiyo Soga's *Intlalo yamaXhosa* (1983) provides evidence of a people with a rigorous system of cultural rites and practices. Soga (1983:130) states that;

*Ukuba ngumnini-mzi kombiwa ecaleni kwexanti lasekunene afakwe nedosha, inxowa yake yokutshaya, nokuko nezenjana, nomkonto kwa nezinye ke intwana-ntwana zakhe. Qonda ke yinkolo yasema-Xoseni yovuko le lwabafileyo neyentlalo kwelizayo ipakade. Apo wofika agawule abiyele inkomo zakhe utango etshaya icuba lake.*

When it is the head of the household that has passed on, his grave will be dug on the left-hand side in front of the kraal where he will be buried with his lighter, his bag of tobacco, a woven grass mat, his axe and spear and a few other personal belongings. Understand that it is the belief of amaXhosa that the dead will resurrect in the next life and live forever. There when he arrives he will cut down trees and fence off his cattle whilst smoking his tobacco. (Own translation.)

In the above extract it is clear that amaXhosa used to have a strong belief about the after life and used to perform send-offs that were in line with their beliefs. Claims made by Soga correlate with those made by Solomon (1986) in her thesis where she states the following about amaXhosa:

a man is buried with his stick and assegais but these are broken *angabi dlongodlongo*<sup>7</sup> because it is believed that the journey he is now taking is a peaceful one and the breaking of these weapons symbolizes peace. He is now an ambassador of peace to his ancestors. The belongings he is buried with are only the very intimate items like sticks, assegai, blanket, pipe and tobacco, his pipe lighter (*idosha*) or item to make fire with; and his personal bag made out of the skin of a goat (*ingxowa yebhokhwe*)." (Solomon 1986:39-40)

Soga (1983) makes reference to words uttered by the bereaved to their loved one:

*Xa kubekwa ilitye engcwabeni phaya kumana kutetwa kusithiwa, "Hamba kakuhle. Uze ube usikhonzele phambili apho. Siyeza siya kulandela. Uz'usikhumbule nalapo uya kona."*

During the process of putting a stone on a grave, people utter, "Go well. Prepare the way for us<sup>8</sup>. We are also coming, we'll follow you. Do remember us wherever you are going." (Own translation)

The above extract reinforces how language has always been vital when performing rites of amaXhosa as there has always been a belief of the efficacy (and indeed in the power of the words to effect some kind of invisible transformation) of what is being said when performing a ritual.

The uttering of the above phrase starting: *Hamba kakuhle. Uze ube usikhonzele phambili apho.* (Go well. Prepare the way for us) is still pertinent in the culture of amaXhosa when burying their loved ones. Not as part of the data collection, but by way of establishing norms and practices, I observed this in three funerals (different families) that I had attended in my village in Eastern Cape, Engcobo in December 2021. However, what I found different between what I observed and the claims made by the above scholars (Solomon 1986 and Soga 1983) is that, upon arrival from the mortuary, the corpse was taken to *uronta* (rondavel) then the oldest man of the family talked to the corpse before it was later laid to rest in the grave yard. He informed the deceased about what was happening at that particular moment, why he was laid there. The old man uttered:

*Makhosonke Ngqulana* (pseudonym used) *ngoku sikungenisa emzini wakho. Namhlanje yimini yokuba sikuthathe sikuse kwikhaya lakho lokugqibela. Sikulungiselele indlu yakho apho siza kubeka khona ngoku. Kodwa ukuba unento ongakholwanga yiyo uze ungasihluphi uze uziveze okanye utsho xa kukho into ongayithandanga. Singaboni ngawe sewuzele*

<sup>77</sup> Solomon leaves *angabi dlongodlongo* untranslated. Roughly translated it means "so that he should not be fierce". In other words, these things are buried with the deceased in order to show preparation for his journey to the next world but not for actual combat.

<sup>8</sup> *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa Vol.2* (2003:91) glosses the word *khonzela* as 'serve for a person or purpose or for or on behalf of another'

*likratshi nengqumbo. Ungezi kakubi, uze, uze kakuhle kuthi. Siza kuphuma nawe apha siyokubeka kwikhaya lakho lokugqibela apho siza kushiya khona. Enkosi.*<sup>9</sup>

Makhonsonke Ngqulana, we are now entering your home. Today is the day where we will take you to your final resting place. We have prepared your house and we will leave you in it for now. But, if there is something you're not happy about, please do not give us a hard time and just show us. We do not want to see signs that you are angry. Do not reveal yourself in a bad way to us, reveal yourself in a good way. From this place on we will take you to your final resting place where we will then leave you. Thank you. (Own translation).

Secondly, Soga (1983:130) claims that when it is the head of the household that has passed on, his grave will be dug on the left-hand side in front of the kraal where he will be buried with his lighter, his bag of tobacco, a woven grass mat, his axe and spear and a few other personal belongings. However, in my experience at a funeral that I attended in December 2021 where the head of the household was to be buried there was a demarcated grave site inside the family yard. There was no special place to bury the head of the household as he was also buried where other family members are buried. Thirdly, the number of items that he was buried with were reduced and were not the same as those mentioned by Soga (1983). The head of the household's assegai, stick, tobacco and pipe were not included. The items that were included were only his *ingubo* (blanket) and *ukhukho* (a grass mat). I had a good chance of observing all these things because we young men of the village are always at the forefront of rituals that are performed there, helping to ensure their smooth running.

During the interviews one of my eminent informants, a 68 year old man who lives in a village called kwaVetyu in Engcobo under the Chris Hani district in the Eastern Cape, articulated the following:

*Kwintlalo yakwaXhosa kudala kwakuthi xa kuswelekiwe emzini umzi lo wawuye utyatyekwe mnyama wonke. Oku kwakusenzelwa ukubonakalisa ukuba umzi lo, gxebe, ikhaya eli liphantsi kwelifu elimnyama. Kwakuye kubekho indzolo ekhayeni apha, kungangxolwa, kuthethelwe phantsi kungaphithizelwa kuba kaloku kuhlanelwe okanye kuthozanyelwe esi sithwakumbe sokufa. Kusuku lokuqala ikhaya lalikhupha umntu oza kuya kwizihlobo nasekuhlaleni abike umphanga wekhaya. Logama kusahanjwe kubikwa umphanga kusenziwa namalungiselelo, umzimba lo ubugcinwa emva*

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<sup>9</sup> The family and the elders involved were close relatives of mine and were informed of my research project and agreed that I could use their words as long as no names were mentioned. They were eager to have these practices recorded for posterity. In addition, I gave them copies of the ethics information sheet and also informed them that they could at any stage choose to withdraw their involvement and consent. After transcribing the utterances I also made them available in isiXhosa and English and gave them to the family members for checking and their final approval. The elders agreed to these transcripts being used in the thesis.

*kwecango usongelwe ngengubo nokhukho olo umfi belele kulo ngoku ebegula. Kusuku lwesibini, ubude kwelesithathu bekuye kufihlwe.*

In the olden days, according to the culture of amaXhosa, a home in which there has been a death would be painted entirely in black. This was done to show that the home is under a dark cloud. There would be quietness in the home as people spoke in lowered voices and people would avoid moving about unnecessarily in respect of the death that has occurred. On the first day after the death, the family would send a person to go tell the news to the friends of the family and the community. In the meantime, the body of the dead would be kept behind the door wrapped in a blanket and a grass mat in which the dead was sleeping on when he or she was sick. The burial would take place on the second or third day after the day of death. (Own translation)

The above description correlates with that of Solomon (1986) where she provides a detailed narrative of the historic bereavement processes of amaXhosa:

As soon as death is announced by the umongi<sup>10</sup> the women make a loud isikhalo (screaming), holding their heads such that it is heard by the people in the village. Those who hear this screaming soon assume that so-and-so 's patients must have passed away, and they come immediately. The dead person is then wrapped in a blanket and also in the mat he lies on (ukhuko) and placed behind the door in the hut. This place is more respectable and quiet. Somebody in the family is then sent to break the news - umphanga. This messenger breaks off a branch from the bread fruit tree called umphanga and carries it in his hand instead of the usual stick. When people see this branch they know that someone has died, and without any waste of time they follow the messenger to the house where death has occurred. Since burial takes place within 24 hours there is usually a great sense of urgency involved when there is death. A branch of this tree is also erected at the house where death has occurred so that visitors who may pass this home should not stay long with the hope of overnighting at this place as they may not be catered for. (Solomon 1986:37-38)

Performing burial rituals has drastically changed in the contemporary world when compared with what the above scholars have recorded about the practices related to this custom. I think this change could be due to small cultural changes over time, but also because of the country's modern legal requirements relating to dealing with a deceased (corpses have to be taken to mortuaries or hospitals for autopsies). Also, important to consider is the change in geographic settlement of amaXhosa. People cannot bury their loved one in their garden or yard and in some cases they do not even have a kraal if they are permanently settled in the townships. There is also the change in people's lifestyles and ways of communication: some people now mix English with isiXhosa when

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<sup>10</sup> Caregiver

speaking and some people communicate about rituals via social media. However what is still the same is that most of amaXhosa still bury (rather than cremate) their loved ones and put specific items such as a grass mat and a blanket in the grave with the deceased. The utterance of “goodbye” phrases is still the same as described by Soga (1983).

In December 2021 at Engcobo in the Eastern Cape the head of the household of one of our neighbours was sick and died at his home. The process that was followed in announcing *umphanga*<sup>11</sup> to the village was as follows: the brother of the deceased, announced, during another ritual ceremony (which happened to be the *umngeno* ritual of the circumcision process), that his brother had died and gave instructions as to when the young men would be expected to dig a grave and bury him at their home. The brother of the deceased chose to announce the death of his brother during this event as there were many people attending *umngeno*, and I was told that is how people often make announcements of upcoming rituals that they will be having at their houses if they want their announcement to reach many people in the village (as this will be the talk of the village until the funeral passes). According to Solomon (1986:37-38) traditionally “when death is announced by *umongi* (caregiver) the women make a loud *isikhalo* (screaming), holding their heads such that it is heard by the people in the village. Those who hear this screaming soon assume that so-and-so’s patients must have passed away, and they come immediately.” Then somebody from the family is sent to break the news to the village and this messenger carries a branch of *umphanga*. The deceased gets buried within 24 hours. Solomon did not specify the gender of the messenger. My experience differs to what is explained by Solomon. Firstly, the death in December 2021 was announced by a man - I did not hear any screams. Secondly, the death was announced at a village gathering (which was *umngeno* in this case). Thirdly, the messenger who announced the death did it verbally, he was not carrying the *umphanga* stick as described by Solomon. Fourthly, the body of the deceased was taken to the mortuary to be kept there until the day before the burial. Lastly, there was no branch of *umphanga* erected. However, the word *umphanga* is still used even if the *umphanga* stick is no longer carried. People generally use the word *umphanga* when referring to death that has occurred or has been recently announced. For example, when a person is asking about death that was announced at a gathering they generally say, “*ibingumphanga kabani lo bekuthethwa ngawo kulaa ntlanganiso* (it is so and so’s passing that was announced at that meeting).

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<sup>11</sup> According to *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*, Vol.2. (2003:987) *umphanga* is “announcement, news of the death of someone; a notice about the death of someone circulated to relatives and people in general; the practice and the name came from a tree, the pread tree, *Encephalartos Lehm*, whose branch was thrown on the roof of the hut of the bereaved in order to give general notice that death had occurred in that home.”

### 3.2.3.2 Detailed accounts of the Circumcision ritual

From Soga's account of circumcision (1983:94) amongst amaXhosa it is clear that this ritual is currently performed differently from how it used to be conducted. Soga states that the ritual of male circumcision only took place when there was a son of a king that was due for the ritual, if not, then the son of the right hand man of the king, and if not him then the son of a well-known wealthy man in the village. All other ordinary boys were to be hosted by the main initiate. Soga (1983:94) goes on to say:

*Abantwana abazelweyo lonyaka baziwe ngalo nkosi yaluka lo nyaka. Se kumana kusitiwa, "Umntwana wazalwa nyakana kwaluka u-bani no-bani.*

Children who were born in a certain year become known by the event that took place in that year. People will say things like, "the child who was born in the year that so-and-so was initiated. (Own translation)

The above extract simply shows that male circumcision amongst amaXhosa was so significant that it had the power to influence how people talk about age, using the ritual even as a way of identifying the age and age mates of a particular person. This custom of identifying a young man by referring to the circumcision ritual can be seen in the book, "*Ityala lamawele*" (The Lawsuit of the Twins) by Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi (1914) where the twins (Wele and Babini) of Vuyisile went to the initiation school with the son (Zothana) of the chief.

An informant of mine, a 62 year old man living in the Khayelitsha township of the Western Cape, had this to say about how circumcision was practised in his day:

*Kudala yayingekho le nto yenziwa zezi ntwana uvele uvuke namhlanje sewusithi ufuna ukwaluka. Amakhwenkwe azokoluka ayesebenza mpela azibonakalise ukuba akulungele ukuba ngamadoda. Kwiminyaka emithathu okanye emibini phambi kokuba amakhwenkwe oluke ayethathwa asiwe kwaNkosi apho aza kuthi ahlale khona nonyana walapho asebenze, abone, afunde ngezinto zakhona ukuba zenziwa njani. Le nto yayinceda kuba ilali yayiba namadoda aqiqileyo ngokwasengqondweni, akwaziyo ukuthetha nabantu, akwaziyo ukusombulula iingxaki neengxabano, ayaziyo into eyiyo nengeyiyo kuba kaloku ahleli pha kwaNkosi afunda nezinto zesizwe samaXhosa. Indoda kaloku iba yindoda yesizwe sayo ayipheleli kukuba yindoda kwayo kuphela. Kwakuthi ke xa sele kufike ixesha lokuya esuthwini, la makhwenkwe okhelwe ithonto lawo apho aza kuhlala khona ewonke. Phaya entabeni kunendlela achotshiswa ngayo amakhwenkwe azakwaluswa. Ingcibi yayiqala yaluse iNkosana, ize ithi inkwenkwe eyaluswe emva kweNkosana ibe liphakathi leNkosana. Ukutsho oko, ibe ngumgcini nomcebisi wayo.*

In the olden days, things were not done the way that today's youth do them. One wouldn't just wake up today and decide that he wants to go to the mountain. Boys who wanted to be initiated had to work hard to show that they are ready to become men. In the two or three years before a boy would go to the mountain, they would be taken to the home of the chief where they would work side by side with the chief's sons and learn how things are done. This helped because the village would then have men who are mentally strong, know how to communicate with people, know how to resolve conflict and know how to separate right from wrong because during their stay at the Chief's compound, they are taught about the amaXhosa nation's way of life. In the amaXhosa culture, a man did not become only a man for his household, he became a man for the entire amaXhosa nation.

When the time came for the boys to go to the initiation school, a hut would be built for them and they would all live together. In the mountain, there is a certain way in which the boys who are to be initiated are seated. The expert circumcision surgeon would first initiate the son of the chief, and whichever boy was initiated thereafter would be the chief's son's middleman. This means that this boy would be the chief's son's advisor. (Own translation)

### **3.2.4 Own and expert knowledge stimulated by visual representations of the rituals**

In this section I purposefully made a note of all the tools, performances and discourses that selected pictures of the circumcision and bereavement rituals stimulated in my mind and compared and contrasted my responses with those of expert informants<sup>12</sup>. I thereafter tabulated the cultural lexicon associated with each image. These were the same images that I used with participants to encourage discussion and description. I felt it fitting that visual representations of the rituals should be used with my participants since, not only are they becoming more and more reliant on images in social media to help them identify as belonging to a particular ethnic group, but also, as Barker (2004: 157) argues, images tend to merge, or blur, what is cultural and what is aesthetic :

Postmodern culture is often argued to be a more visual culture than previously encountered and is connected to a general aestheticization of everyday life. It is also distinguished by a blurring of modern historical,

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<sup>12</sup> These excerpts include a) a traditional activist who is frequently featured in talk shows of uMhlobo wenene FM that include discussions on the culture and history of amaXhosa b) an old man who lives in Delft and normally hosts amaXhosa rituals there c) a woman who is a traditional activist at Engcobo in a village called Beyele d) a number of other people who are knowledgeable of the rituals and customs of the amaXhosa.

aesthetic and cultural boundaries, including those between culture and art, high and low culture, commerce and art, culture and commerce.

Barker's earlier argument (2004:132) that all nations need, in a sense, to construct national identities for themselves and thus create 'shared meanings of nationhood' is pertinent here. My motivation for using pictures to stimulate discussion was to find out whether my participants and myself (cross-referencing with authors of academic and historic texts) shared the same meanings when it came to describing ritual events presented to us, using a shared cultural lexicon. In this exercise it was not my intention to come up with a set of fixed terms against which I would score my participants as right or wrong, but on the contrary to keep in mind that, as Barker (2004:7) contends:

The 'objects' of language are not fixed or universal things but meaningful descriptions that through social convention come to be 'what counts as truth' (that is, the temporary stabilization of meaning)

The following images that I will now present are pictures of different stages of the circumcision ritual in a contemporary setting.

Image #01: Boys getting ready to go to initiation.

Photograph of boys getting ready to go to initiation. Photo sourced from a friend's [Luvo Gcingca] Facebook account. Permission to use the picture for this research was sought and granted.



Image #01 is a photograph showing the first step taken by boys (who are of age to be circumcised) in their journey to manhood. These boys are boys of the same age (*ontanga* – agemates), not necessarily by birth, but by doing things. In the culture of amaXhosa there are instances where age does not matter and the stages of life are used to determine a person's age group. One or all of these boys will go to the initiation school. The photograph (Image #01) was taken amid the event that pre-initiates partake in to let society know that they will be going away for some time and will come back as men. This pre-initiation party is known as *Umguyo*. They are wearing animal skins (*iimfele kunye namasay'bhokhwe*) on their knees, shoulders and heads and torn clothing so that they can stand out from other boys. Their attire shows that they are ready to be circumcised. The boys travel in large groups singing traditional songs that encourage bravery. These songs announce that the boys are going to initiation school and affirm the belief that the boys are taking the right path. Here is an example of one of the traditional songs called *Nam ndiyafuna ukuba yindoda* 'I also want to be a man':

*Nam ndiyafuna ukuba yindoda  
Ndifuna ukuba yindoda, ndombethe amafele egusha.  
Ngoba kusasa ndifuna ukuba yindoda.  
Nam ndiyafuna ukuba yindoda  
Ndifuna ukuba yindoda ethatha izigqibo, ufung'angajiki  
Ngoba kusasa ndifuna ukwandisa umzi katata.  
Nam ndiyafuna ukuba yindoda  
Ndifuna ukuba yindoda kuba utata ondizalayo yindoda  
Ndifuna ukuba yindoda ngokuba kumnandi ebudodeni.*

I also want to be a man  
I want to be a man, I am wearing sheep skin  
Because tomorrow morning I want to be a man.  
I also want to be a man,  
I want to be a man that can make decisions, a man of his word.  
Because tomorrow I want to develop my father's home (family)  
I want to be a man because my father who gave birth to me is also a man.  
I also want to be a man, because manhood is nice. (Own translation)

During this event, the boys go to different homes of family relatives, singing and dancing, and expecting to receive gifts such as money, alcohol and/or livestock. The way these boys are standing in Image #01 suggests that they are waiting to be attended to at the house of whoever they have visited. Mhlahlo (2009:104) explains this event as *ukukhonya* (bellowing) he further describes the event as follows:

It often involves a boy that will go to the 'bush-school' behaving wildly. It could be one or two boys, or a group of those who will go through this ritual at the same time. They are generally accompanied by other boys (friends) who will not be

undergoing the ritual at this time. This collective group of boys runs around in a village (township), shouting and carrying fighting sticks (*iintonga*). For example, their shouting may go as follows, “*Ndiyaya emadodeni!*” (“I am going into manhood!”).

In my observation this event (*ukukhonya*) the next day was followed by another event which most contemporary amaXhosa know as *umngeno*. Although Mhlahlo (2009:105) is more specific, referring to it as the second step of *umngeno* (the ritual of slaughtering an animal) where the initiate is fed a roasted *isiphika* (a strip of meat cut from the right foreleg of a sheep or goat) and later fed cooked *umkhono* (the right foreleg of the animal used). The initiate is also given something like a necklace called *ubulunga* made out of the family cow’s tail. All of this is done *ebuhlanti* (at the kraal) before the boy is taken to *ingcibi* (the expert traditional surgeon). Some scholars refer to stages of the initial ritual such as the sacrifice *umdanga* (see for example Mkhwanazi 2019:16) but in my experience the word *umdanga* is not used widely by participants in the ritual. The word does not even appear in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*. This would suggest that Mkhwanazi’s participants in Nyanga in 2002 might have had their own lexical items for the ritual. Even my participants from Cape Town (Delft and Khayelitsha) who have been exposed to the ritual of male circumcision in the Western Cape, Cape Town, made no mention of the word *umdanga* when they were explaining the ritual of male circumcision to me. Mkhwanazi (Ibid:16) also refers to *osisa*, which is glossed under a cross-reference to *ojisa* in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.2*, 2003:928) as a verb meaning “allow circumcision initiates to have access to water after abstaining from it during the first eight days of circumcision; a goat or sheep is slaughtered on the eighth day for them”.

When everything that needs to be done in the kraal has been accomplished, the initiate is taken by men to the initiation school where he will be circumcised by *ingcibi* (the expert traditional surgeon). Ncaca (2014:48) states that “Immediately after being circumcised, the initiate is required to proclaim his newly acquired status and utter the following phrase “*Ndiyindoda*” (I am a man!) without flinching or a change in voice.” Mkhwanazi (2019:16) shares the same understanding with Ncaca 2014 by confirming his claim by mentioning that “when the foreskin was severed the traditional surgeon exclaimed ‘*Yithi uyindoda!*’ (Say you are a man!) to which the initiate responded ‘*Ndiyindoda!*’ (I am a man!).” Mhlahlo (2009:106) also shares the same argument with Ncaca (2014) and Mkhwanazi (2019) as he says, “Once a boy goes through this operation, his status changes immediately; he becomes a man.” In my experience as a man who went through the amaXhosa initiation process in December 2013, I share the same sentiments: immediately after I

was circumcised by *ingcibi* (the expert traditional surgeon) he commanded me saying, “*Yithi ndiyindoda!*” (Say I am a man) and I repeated after him “*Ndiyindoda!*” (I am a man!). I also noticed during my observation in December 2021 at Engcobo that this is still pertinent, each boy is commanded by the traditional surgeon to proclaim his newly acquired status by saying “*Ndiyindoda!*” (I am a man!) immediately after his foreskin is severed. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that there is some deviation from Mhlalo’s specifications. In my observation, when everyone (old people and young men) spoke about the coming out of the initiates they would say something along the lines of: *Kuphuma amakhwenkwe* or *kukhutshwa amakhwenkwe* ‘The boys are coming out’ or ‘The boys are being taken out’. This means that the initiates are still referred to as boys, not men, on their last day of being at the initiation school irrespective of what they were told to proclaim at the beginning of their initiation. Another interesting thing to note is, Mkhwanazi (2019:16) state that “after the circumcision, elders addressed the newly circumcised boys, now known as *amakrwala* in ways of manhood and respectful manner (*kuhlonipha*).” Again, in my experience newly circumcised boys are referred to as *abakhwetha* (initiates) not *amakrwala* (graduate initiate), they are referred to *amakrwala* (graduate initiate) only once they come out of the initiation school.

Finlayson (1998:104) asserts that initiates are taught a new language at the initiation school, a language which they use during their stay there:

*Isikhwetha*, the language of the initiates, is taught to them by an *ikhankatha*, who is the guardian and instructor of these boys throughout their seclusion for the initiation rites.

Speaking from my own experience as a man who went to the isiXhosa initiation school I can verify that I was taught *isikhwetha* and it was mandatory to use it during the time I was there. I also noticed in December 2021 that when we young men of the village visited an initiation school, the initiates were still being taught and using *isikhwetha* to communicate. *Isikhwetha* has not changed from the time I was taught (December 2013), the lexicon has remained constant, for example a fighting stick is still called *ikrali*, water *amagcaza*, a dog *ikhanka* or *ibhengethe*.

Image #02: Boy getting ready to go to initiation school.

Photograph of a boy getting ready to go to initiation school. Image downloaded from:

[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/\\_py27BE9pN1/TAaVCH9YDII/AAAAAAAAALI/vHgGwGc\\_L2A/s1600/Emakhaya+3.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_py27BE9pN1/TAaVCH9YDII/AAAAAAAAALI/vHgGwGc_L2A/s1600/Emakhaya+3.jpg)



Image #02 is a photograph showing the same stage of the initiation ritual as the one in Image #01. The boy's attire is different in this image because of geographical reasons. People in some parts of the Eastern Cape tend to dress up more for this ceremony because the necessary attire for this event is easily available in the market as boys are most likely to perform this ritual there and the community encourages the performance of this ritual. The boy has *isabhabha* (metal horn) hanging around his neck and is carrying *ibhunguza* (a fighting stick) and *izembe* (an axe). In some cases the boy might even have *umrhaji* (a thin blanket) hanging around his shoulders. These are valued items in the culture of amaXhosa when performing this custom and also, friendly fights are likely to break out during such ceremonies sometimes fights that started as friendly turn to be quite serious and violent therefore one must be able to defend himself when that happens.

Mhlahlo (2009:93) states:

After the circumcision operation is over, an initiate is left with a circumcision wound to deal with. This wound goes together with excruciating pain. This is not just an ordinary pain, but a symbolic pain that gives birth to a man. It is a pain that separates boys from men. Those who endure it successfully are welcomed with joy and honour by the community.

I happened to witness a scene similar to the one described by Mhlahlo when we young men (*abafana*) together with the older men (*amaxhego*) at our village (Engcobo kuBeyele) were bringing home three initiates (*amakrwala*) from the initiation school. Women of different houses started ululating (*ukuyiyizela*) when they saw us walking with initiates covered in striped blankets (*iiragi*). All these ululating women were uttering the same phrases:

*Haaaaaaba! Haaaaba! Haaaba Ndiyahabazela!  
Yhiiiiini! Yhiiiiini! Yhiiiiini! Ndiyahabazela!!  
Haaaaaaba! Haaaaba! Haaaba! Abuya amadodana!*

Ululating! Ululating! I am Ululating!  
Ululating! Ululating! I am Ululating!

Ululating! Ululating! The men have returned!

Images 3 and 4 below are images of women's involvement in initiation ceremony.

Image #03: Grandmother rejoicing at the safe return of her grandson.



Image downloaded from:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=xhosa+burial&rlz=1C1RUCY\\_enZA900ZA900&sxsr=A0aemvIYutSYUmHuulA9uLwLxnzPxPebpQ:1635793686810&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi47oGt7vfzAhUe7rsiHZaECp8Q\\_AUoAXoECAEQAw#imgrc=sdnjtoxVFMrl8M](https://www.google.com/search?q=xhosa+burial&rlz=1C1RUCY_enZA900ZA900&sxsr=A0aemvIYutSYUmHuulA9uLwLxnzPxPebpQ:1635793686810&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi47oGt7vfzAhUe7rsiHZaECp8Q_AUoAXoECAEQAw#imgrc=sdnjtoxVFMrl8M)

Image #04: *Izibazana* (mother of the initiate) and her sisters dancing, rejoicing the safe return of *ikrwala* (graduate initiate). Photo is a screenshot of a video that was taken by Ncedo Mtsi at Engcobo in a village called Mnyolo in the Eastern Cape. Permission to take the picture was obtained from the host of *umgidi* (ceremonial party) and by those being photographed to use the picture for the research.



The women sing and dance to songs through which they express this happiness. Here is an example of the kind of songs that they sing:

*Akalali umntu ozele inkwenkwe* (repeat until the end).  
 A person who has given birth to a boy does not sleep.  
*Umntu ozele inkwenkwe uyabheshuza*<sup>13</sup> (repeat until the end)  
 A person who has given birth to a boy dances.

Whilst other women are singing others at the background of the song are ululating (*bayayiyizela*) and blowing a whistle.

Haaaayayayaaa! Haaaayayayaaa!  
 Yhiini! Yhiini! Haaaayayayaaa!

Ululating! Ululating!  
 Ululating! Ululating!

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<sup>13</sup> Dancing in a way that one's dress will rise to reveal one's undergarments.

Image #05: Young men accompanying *ikrwala* (graduate initiate) to his home and playing stick fighting (*ukudlala iintonga*). Downloaded from: [https://i.ytimg.com/vi/M8\\_0XtUJfVY/maxresdefault.jpg](https://i.ytimg.com/vi/M8_0XtUJfVY/maxresdefault.jpg)



In this image we see the group of young men bringing the initiate home. It is of significance that the new initiate is brought back home by young men because he is now one of them, he is new to manhood and they are welcoming him. On the way home, the new initiate is kept right in the middle of the young men, encouraged and reminded of what is expected of him – how he should carry himself as a man. The men have hats on and jackets over their shoulder as a sign of respect to the culture of amaXhosa, this is a general practice that is naturally expected from men in this position. Some men decide to rather hang their jackets over their shoulders or wrap them around their arms. The cultural effect of this is the same as when they wear their jackets. Whether they decide to keep their jackets on or hang them over their shoulders is immaterial culturally - all methods are equally acceptable. The circumcision ritual is a liminal rite of passage during which the boy becomes a man. He is carrying a stick (*umnquma*<sup>14</sup>) which signifies peace, authority and patience.

Mhlahlo (2009:115) refers to the stick as *umnqayi*, a term that is also used by other isiXhosa speakers depending on the dialect used in a particular area.

The reason why these young men in the photograph are lifting their sticks up could be because they are singing and they are using these sticks to simulate a stick fighting (*ukudlala iintonga*), an activity that is also part of the culture of amaXhosa. Mhlahlo (2009:115) states that the singing and stick fighting (*ukudlala iintonga*) continues until men reach their destination, which is the home of the graduate. The stick fight (*ukudlala iintonga*) is often involved in amaXhosa rituals and is a way

<sup>14</sup> *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.2. K-P* (2003:731) gives one gloss for *umnquma* as “wild olive” – “it is the most popular tree for making sticks”

that young amaXhosa men entertain themselves and members of the gathering. Mhlahlo (2009:115) further contends that when these young men arrive at the home of the graduate initiate they are offered a bottle of brandy “It is called the ‘bottle for washing the boy’ (*ibhotile yokuhlamba inkwenkwe*).” In my village this bottle of brandy is accompanied by six beers or even a case of beers and five litres (*ibhekile*) of *umqombothi* (traditional beer) all of which is referred to as *utywala beentonga* (alcohol for sticks). This alcohol is served to young men by the host (be it the parents of the graduate initiate or whoever is doing the ceremony for the graduate initiate) as a way of saying thank you for bringing the graduate initiate home safe and for entertaining people who were watching them as they were walking the graduate initiate home.

Image #06: *Amakrwala* (graduate initiants) from initiation school entering *ebuhlanti* (into the kraal). Admonitions are to be made by the old man next to them. Image downloaded from <https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/GhmxAG02fjFhEgaCvyek3p0YDk84RgADWSwexTHfALTy3bHMxRCq8CapkqNEiiDO5fZLc4KDrzTxakCMOIP7uK-MKw0liqeuY0KAA1ZF-Y7gU=s1200>



The participants would be expected to mention that this image depicts the day when the new initiate is brought back home by the young men after burning the hut where he was living. Mhlahlo (2009:115) writes that elderly men are given a bottle of brandy by the family of the initiate as a way of thanking them for burning the initiation hut: “This brandy is called the ‘bottle for burning the initiation hut (*umtshiso bhuma*)”.

Image #07: Young men singing, accompanying a boy to the initiation school to be circumcised. The photo is a screenshot of a video, sourced from a friend's (Njabulo Ncwasu) Facebook account. Permission to use the picture for this research was obtained from him.



The above picture shows young men rejoicing as they are accompanying a boy who is to be circumcised in Eastern Cape, Dutywa at a village called Doti. The men are singing popular songs that are normally sung in this ritual, songs such as *Thula mntwana womntwana wam* (Hush child of my child) or the Somagwaza song (see Dowling, Deyi and Gobodwana, 2018). These songs focus on manhood and encourage and reassure the boy that he is making the right decision.

*Thula mntwana womntwana wam ubudoda bunzima*  
*Thula mntwana womntwana wam ubudoda bunzima*  
*Abuyelwa sibhedlele*  
*Thula mntwana womntwana wam ubudoda bunzima*  
*Abuthengwa ngemali*  
*Thula mntwana womntwana wam ubudoda bunzima*

Hush, child of my child manhood is difficult  
 Hush, child of my child manhood is difficult  
 You do not have to go to the hospital for it  
 Hush, child of my child manhood is difficult  
 It is not bought with money  
 Hush, child of my child manhood is difficult (Own translation).

Another song that amaXhosa closely associate with the ritual of circumcision is Somagwaza:

*Somagwaza!*  
*ndakugwaza ngalo mkhonto*  
*Awheehhhh! Iyhoo ho hoooo!*  
*Awheehhh!*  
*Somagwaza*  
*Somagwaza!*  
*ndakugwaza ngalo mkhonto*

Somagwaza!

I will pierce you with this spear

Awheeehhhh! Iyhoo ho hoooo!

Awheehhh!

Somagwaza

Somagwaza!

I will pierce you with this spear.

(Dowling, Deyi and Gobodwana, 2018 translation)

These young men are rejoicing because the boy will soon be one of them and he will be taught everything that he needs to know as a man by them. It is also important that the men are wearing jackets (*iibhayti*) to show respect to the culture. Mkhwanazi (2019:16) explains the clothes in the following way "Each boy was given new 'western'-style clothes – usually a jacket, trousers and a hat – that he had to wear until he became a 'man'. He only became a man after he found employment or a year after having undergone initiation." In my experience, the status of manhood is acquired immediately once you are circumcised and your traditional surgeon commands you to proclaim your newly acquired status as a man by saying *ndiyindoda* (I am a man). So, from the day of your circumcision you are a man but there are different stages of manhood that specifically relate to the initiation ritual, namely:

- *umkhwetha* (initiate), the seclusion period where the boy is at the initiation school.
- *ikrwala* (new initiate), the stage where the new initiate graduate is given western style clothes to wear.
- *umfana* (young man), the stage where the young man can be *ikhankatha* (a traditional nurse).
- *ixhego* (old man), a stage where a man can give words of wisdom to a new initiate and can participate in various things that take place in the village, for example, the election of *amakhankatha*.

## Image #08

A kraal: a place that is used by amaXhosa for most traditional rituals. The photograph was taken in Eastern Cape, Engcobo in a village named Beyele. Photograph taken by Ncedo Mtsi. Permission obtained from Zwelibanzi Mtsi.



A kraal (*ubuhlanti /uthango*) is a significant part of the home in the culture of amaXhosa as important ritual ceremonies are often conducted in this place which is considered sacred (see *The Greater Dictionary of IsiXhosa*, 2006:750). This is where livestock for the initiation rite is slaughtered, where the ancestors of the concerned family are addressed and where the men usually sit during cultural events. In my experience *ubuhlanti /uthango* is also the place where the boy departs from when he is going to the initiation school leaving his home. When he is brought back home again from the initiation school he is first taken to *ubuhlanti /uthango* to be given words of wisdom (*ukuyalwa*) by old men.

I will now present images which relate to the bereavement ceremony in a contemporary setting.

### Images #09 and 10

Family and friends burying their loved one. Downloaded from:

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymaverick.co.za%2Farticle%2F2020-04-28-funerals-suspended-in-parts-of-province-as-covid-19-infections-rise%2F&psig=AOvVaw2SyrIHg2JhYYgj1EHghqgC&ust=1642513860634000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAsQjRxqFwoTCMCz-Y\\_3uPUCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD](https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dailymaverick.co.za%2Farticle%2F2020-04-28-funerals-suspended-in-parts-of-province-as-covid-19-infections-rise%2F&psig=AOvVaw2SyrIHg2JhYYgj1EHghqgC&ust=1642513860634000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAsQjRxqFwoTCMCz-Y_3uPUCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD)



Image #10: Widows mourning death of their husband. Image downloaded from: [https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/6mpz1qYR8OzJrCAok-YnbwSynV\\_nBND9FNxzIHpkgtpAag00cadKeadvnIJ4nK1C3Ow6\\_gnWCq-tq4gGmAkIA](https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/6mpz1qYR8OzJrCAok-YnbwSynV_nBND9FNxzIHpkgtpAag00cadKeadvnIJ4nK1C3Ow6_gnWCq-tq4gGmAkIA)



Images #09 and 10 depict events at Eastern Cape funeral during which the family member is buried at home.

Most people at this grave site are wearing black clothes, a colour that is associated with mourning. People leading the funeral make use of songs that are also found in *Incwadi yamaculo esiXhosa*<sup>15</sup> (book of isiXhosa hymns). Songs to comfort the family are sung. Here is an example of a song that is sung called *Ngelo xa lokushiywa* (Literally: At [the time] of being left) (see *Incwadi yombhedesho*, 1926:340).

*Ngelo xa lokushiywa ngabo sibathandayo sokhala kuwe Nkosi  
Nyana kaThixo sive.  
Lakusishiya ithemba kugqithe nezihlobo sokhala kuwe Nkosi  
Nyana kaThixo sive  
Sakuva kubuhlungu, imfesane isika, sokhala kuwe nkosi  
Nyana kaThixo sive*

At a time when our loved ones leave us (pass on), we will cry out to you Lord  
Son of God hear us  
When we lose hope and friends pass, we will cry out to you Lord  
Son of God hear us  
When we're hurting, and compassion cuts, we will cry out to you Lord.  
Son of God hear us. (own translation)

These songs are known by the community and religious congregations and have become part of our discourse when conducting funerals. They are a way in which amaXhosa blend aspects of the Christian faith with their traditional customs and practices. Most of these songs we know by heart – when we sing these songs we do not use hymn books, they are sung spontaneously by participants of the ritual.

Prayers to comfort the family are also said. Here is one prayer that was said at a funeral that I attended in the Eastern Cape, Engcobo, as an example:

*Thixo, naba abantwana bakho xa behlelwe lilifu lobumnyama sicela wena Nkosi ungene  
kwiintliziyo zabo ubomeleze ubabophe ngebhanti yakho yokholo.*

Lord, here are your children befallen with a dark cloud, we ask your Lord to come into their hearts and strengthen them with your belt of faith. (Own translation)

Every now and then family members of the deceased are consoled by friends present at the funeral who utter phrases such as *Akuhlanga lungehlanga* (Literally: It does not happen without happening. Figuratively: Condolences). There is generally no dancing at funerals. Family members will be

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<sup>15</sup> Author accredited to “Ngamabandla aseRabe” (Presbyterian Churches), 2003: Alice: Lovedale Press.

given a chance to *ukubeka ilitye* (Literally: to put a stone; figuratively: throw soil into the grave) as they are burying their loved one. This might seem like it is the last stage of the bereavement as the family and friends are bidding their farewell to the dead. On the contrary, it is not the last stage of the entire ritual, there are still other rituals associated with bereavement known as *intlamba peki* (the washing of the spades), *ukukhululwa kwekhaya*, (setting the home free) and *ukuchithwa kwempahla* (distribution of clothes of the dead) and *izila* (mourning) or *ukubuyiswa* (bringing back) all of which are performed after a number of weeks or a month after the funeral, depending on the family.

### 3.2.5 Tabulation of cultural lexicon from above sources for checking purposes

The table below is populated with key vocabulary, terms, phrases, songs and prayers that are associated with the two rituals as gleaned from the written and oral records and from the lexicon that emanated from visual stimulation by way of photographs of the customs being performed.

**Table 1: Terms used in circumcision and bereavement rites**

IsiXhosa terms used in circumcision rites	IsiXhosa songs sung in circumcision rites	IsiXhosa terms used in bereavement rites	IsiXhosa songs sung in bereavement rites <sup>16</sup>
<i>Ikhankatha</i> (“guardian or mentor of the boys at an initiation school”. <i>The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa, Vol.2.K-P, :45</i> )	<i>Somagwaza</i>	<i>Ukubeka ilitye</i> (Laying the stone)	<i>Sobonana emathuneni</i> (We will see each other in the cemetery)
<i>Umdlanga</i> Special knife/spear used to circumcise the boy	<i>Ubudoda bunzima</i>	<i>Izila</i> (the process of mourning)	
<i>Ukukho</i> (grass mat)		<i>Ukuwambula</i> (to take off the mourning clothes)	
<i>Ingcawe</i> (a special blanket used for traditional purposes)		<i>Ukukhulula izila</i> (see above)	
<i>Umosiso/umojiso</i> (“Custom of allowing circumcision initiates to have access to water after abstaining from it during the first eight days of circumcision; a goat or sheep is slaughtered on the eighth day for them”. <i>The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.2, K-P:928</i> )		<i>Umkhapho</i> (a ritual ceremony to ensure that the deceased is not alone in his or her journey to the spirit realm)	
<i>Ithonto</i> (special hut built for the initiants)		<i>Umbuyiso</i> (ritual ceremony to ensure the deceased returns in spirit to the homestead)	
<i>Ingcibi</i> (expert circumcision surgeon)		<i>Umhlolo</i> (widower)	
<i>Ubuhlanti</i> (kraal)		<i>Umhlolokazi</i> (widow)	
<i>Ukungcama</i> (a ritual performed before the boy goes to the initiation lodge)		<i>Iminyanya</i> (ancestors)	

<sup>16</sup> Here I only include traditional Xhosa songs, not Christian songs and hymns.

<i>Isilimela</i> (“Pleiades: a cluster of stars clearly visible in June, which marks the new year according to the amaXhosa calendar and also the time for circumcision ceremonies to take place”. <i>The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.2, K-P:928</i> )		<i>Amahlamvu</i> (leaves used to sprinkle traditional medicine)	
<i>Ukusokwa</i> (a celebration to welcome the initiate home – at this celebration the young man is given gifts)		<i>Amahlwempu</i> (poor people)	
<i>Amabutho</i> (in this context: groups of boys going to initiation)		<i>Isidumbu</i> (corpse)	
<i>Umgidi</i> (“the big day marking the going out of the boys from isuthu or initiation school ... where there is usually plentiful supply of meat and beer”. <i>The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.1:586</i> )		<i>Ookhokho</i> (ancestors)	
<i>Esuthwini</i> (“the custom of circumcision with all its rites, seclusion and instruction”. <i>The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.3:236</i> )		<i>Emadlakeni</i> (in the graveyards)	
<i>Ifutha</i> (a white paste that is smeared on initiates)		<i>Ukuhlamba imihlakulo</i> (to wash the spades – spades used to make graves must be washed before being used again)	
<i>Usosuthu</i> (“the father of one of the boys to be circumcised in a given year who takes the lead in connection with the activities concerning the rite”. <i>The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.3:223</i> )		<i>Ukubhubha/ukusweleka/ukutshaba</i> (to die/pass away)	
<i>Ingqongqo</i> (“A dried bull’s hide used as a drum when boys go to the initiation school, when abakhwetha dance and when they return from initiation school; today a piece of corrugated iron is commonly used.” <i>The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.2, K-P:568</i> )		<i>Ukusezwa amanzi</i> (Drinking of water)	
<i>Izibazana</i> (the mother of the initiate)		<i>Ubulunga</i> (A necklace made out of a cow tail – see Kropf and Godfrey, 1915:257)	
<i>Umnqayi</i> (A peace stick given to the initiate as part of amaXhosa initiation rites)		<i>Umongi</i> (Caregiver)	
<i>Umkhwetha</i> (the initiate)		<i>Umphanga</i> (News about death)	
<i>Inqalatha</i> (A boy that is assisting the initiate whilst he is at the seclusion hunt)		<i>Akuhlanga lungehlanga</i> (Literally: It does not happen without happening. Figuratively: Condolences)	
<i>Ukuziba</i> (Going to initiation school without the consent or knowledge of parents)		<i>Ikhaya lakho lokugqibela</i> (your last home)	
<i>Ikrwala</i> (the graduate initiate)		<i>Uze usibulisele apho uya khona</i> (send our greetings where you are going)	
<b>Ndiyindoda! (I am a man)</b>		<i>Ilfu elimnyama</i> (dark cloud)	
<b>Ukukhonya (bellowing)</b>			
<b>Umtshiso bhuma (burning of hut)</b>			
<i>Utywala beenntonga</i>			
<b>Ukukhupha amakhwenkwe (taking out boys)</b>			
<i>Ibhotile yokuhlamba inkwenkwe (brandy for washing boys)</i>			
<i>Imifele (animal skin)</i>			
<i>amasay’bhokhwe</i>			

### 3.3 Eliciting data from participants: methodological tools

#### 3.3.1 Selection of Participants

Etikan (2016:3) defines sampling as a technique of selecting a subset of the population in order to make statistical inferences from them and estimate characteristics of the whole population. Therefore, for the purposes of this study the researcher selected participants as follows: six first language isiXhosa-speakers in urban areas (three males and three female) and six in rural (three males and three female). All the selected participants have been exposed to these two rituals considered in the study. I will tabulate brief details of the participants below. Also following Etikan's definition (2006:2) of purposive sampling, I purposefully selected participants between the ages of 18 to 35, 36 to 45 and 46 to 65 in order to find out what these age groups know in terms of the words, phrases and discourses associated with the rituals, and to compare and contrast their culture-specific lexicon with a) the literature and b) with each age group. I also included the variable of the participants level of education to ascertain whether their level of education impacted their use of the lexicon that defines these two rituals in any way.

In the words of Etikan (2016:2), "The purposive sampling technique is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses". I found purposive sampling method suitable for this study as it allows the researcher to find or select people who can, and are willing to, provide information of interest as they have personal experience or knowledge of the research topic and who represent people in different age groups. According to Tongco (2007:150) the purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling typically used in qualitative research to identify, and select in order to gain access to rich information.

For the purposes of this research, participants that were selected in order to achieve the objective of this research are participants who had lived in both rural and urban areas. It was important for me that I had participants who had witnessed these rituals being performed in the rural areas of Eastern Cape as this is considered the home of amaXhosa. The participants selected are specifically those who have experienced substantial exposure to these two rituals, that is male circumcision and bereavement. I also carefully included participants that still maintain and use standard isiXhosa when speaking as well as those who purposefully juxtapose isiXhosa and English when conversing in order to compare and contrast their knowledge of the lexicon of the rituals. The current residential areas of my participants are Delft and Khayelitsha in the Western Cape, Cape Town and Engcobo in the Eastern Cape. The fact that some of my participants no longer live in the Eastern Cape was

useful as I needed to ascertain whether living away from the cultural nub of amaXhosa ritual in any way impacted on the participants' cultural-lexicon.

**Table 2: Participants' details**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Years lived in Eastern Cape</b>	<b>Years lived in Cape Town</b>
Male	62	18	39
Male	37	13	24
Male	68	51	Not applicable
Male	37	32	5
Male	20	0	20
Male	23	19	4
Female	42	33	9
Female	36	8	25
Female	27	22	4
Female	24	22	2
Female	61	34	3
Female	64	16	48

### 3.3.2 Questionnaires and interviews

For this research I used a qualitative research approach for collecting data. Rajasekar, Philominathan, Chinnathambi (2013:9) contend that the qualitative research approach is an approach that seeks to investigate data and test or ascertain hypotheses by asking a why and how question (by finding answers to the why and how question). They further state that it is a non-numerical, exploratory approach that aims at getting the meaning by applying reasoning and using words not numbers (Ibid., 2013:10).

For the purposes of this study, which is to find out how isiXhosa-speakers describe two key cultural events, being bereavement rites and initiation (what vocabulary they use, what intertextual references, songs and ritual prayers they know) data can be easily explained in words not in graphs or numbers, hence a qualitative research approach is more suitable. It is for this reason that this research adopted a qualitative approach of collecting data as it aims to look at the link between language and culture. Another important theoretical approach that I adopted for my study was the ethnographic approach, to focus on the “qualitative exploration of cultural values, meanings and life-worlds with the purpose of giving (mediated) ‘voice’ to people who are traditionally under-represented within Western academic writing” (Barker, 2004:64).

Finally, it was important for me to use both structured and semi-structured interview questions. The structured interview questions were asked in order to ascertain the demographic details of the respondents, while the semi-structured interview were used in conjunction with the images in order to stimulate open-ended, relaxed discussion on the specified cultural-events. Both sets of questions on the specific rituals (circumcision and bereavement) also contained references to the lexicons associated with these rites.

### **3.3.3 Pictures to stimulate free discussion**

In addition to the interviews, I presented each participant with the following data collection tools:

- images of the two isiXhosa cultural events (bereavement and initiation rites). These were images of the ritual being performed in a contemporary setting. These images are image #09 and 10. I could not get old, historic images for the two rituals. All images were in colour.
- videos of the two isiXhosa cultural events (bereavement and initiation rites). These were videos of ritual being performed in a contemporary setting. I played the videos for participants, however, because I could not embed a video in this study I decided to take a screenshot of some parts of the videos that I used and put them as pictures here, for instance, images number 4 and 7 and. These videos vary in length ranging from 30 seconds to 22 minutes long. Some videos were taken by me as a researcher, some I got from my friends and some online. All ethical considerations for using these videos as part of this study were followed as explained above and under each image.

#### *3.3.3.1 Pictures of initiation and bereavement rituals being performed*

As discussed in 3.2.3. select images (photographs/screenshots) of the cultural events being investigated in this study were shown to the participants of this study in order to stimulate open-ended free discussion and description. It was anticipated that on seeing these photographs participants might reflect on their understanding of the initiation ritual and use language specific to the custom when describing the images. I sourced the images and videos that I used in the study from WhatsApp statuses being posted by some of my friends (2 males aged 27 and 29, both isiXhosa speaking and both residing in the Western Cape) and also from online images. I asked

friends for permission to use their post or statuses (videos and pictures) for my study and they consented by sharing the pictures and videos with me. The reason why I chose to use these pictures and videos is because I saw them making the rounds in social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook being posted by people who are wearing isiXhosa clothes, for example *isikhakha* (traditional skirt) or *imibhaco* (isiXhosa skirts), *iingcawe* (white blanket with a black stripe) some even reciting their clan names, identifying as amaXhosa giving the appearance that these people were well aware of the culture of amaXhosa. I wanted to discover whether people are as linguistically fluent in their culture as they are in representing it in terms of attire.

### 3.3.3.2 *Questionnaires and interview questions*

After participants were presented with images and videos they were required to answer, in isiXhosa

- simple questionnaires about the cultural events depicted (see appendix C).
- interview questions prompting them to talk about these cultural events (see appendix D)

This data collected from the elicitation tools (pictures and interviews) will be analysed in the data analysis section of this thesis. By sifting through participants' responses with regard to the isiXhosa lexicon and key ritual performative discourses, I was able to establish the extent to which isiXhosa-speakers were able to talk about the rituals using the lexicon traditionally associated with each rite, and to assess whether certain key lexical items traditionally used to describe the rituals are still current, and also to ascertain whether new words and phrases are being used.

## 3.4 Ethical considerations

Prior to starting with all interviews and questionnaires, I obtained ethical clearance from the School of Languages and Literatures Ethics Committee (see appendix E). My research participants received reasonable and sufficient knowledge about me and about the study, and this was clearly outlined in the information letter. (see appendix A) The letter was written in a language that is understandable to the participants. The letter informed my participants about my research intentions. The participants were informed verbally that there would not be any financial compensation that would be offered for their participation in the study. In addition, participants

were informed about the aims of the study, that they could withdraw at any stage of the research process, that they could use pseudonyms when answering the questionnaires and that their anonymity was guaranteed, thus the participants names are not included in the study. All recorded information that could be compromising the participants of the study I stored them in a password protected laptop and I used codes instead of names for referencing purposes. Before starting interviews, all participants were given consent forms (see appendix B) to sign for giving me permission to use the data that I obtained from interviewing them.

In order to establish the ethics of each stage of this research I now present the steps and the ethics clearances conducted for each stage. It is important to note that prior to these stages I attended, as a community and family member a number of initiation and bereavement ceremonies helping in the practicalities of the ritual performance, e.g. slaughtering and digging of graves and building and burning of the initiation hut. Prior to attending subsequent rituals, I made myself known as a potential researcher and asked permission from families concerned to observe and take notes of what was being said and how rites were performed for Masters research in African Languages at the University of Cape Town. The families were given full details of my research project and the ethics clearance thereof and agreed to my presence at the rituals and to my data collection as long as it remained anonymous. Family members were enthusiastic about the project as they felt that some of the language of these rituals and rites would die with them, and I would be ensuring that crucial elements of amaXhosa culture would be recorded for posterity.

I assured family members that no village names and no people's names were going to be used and that no data that I collected would be made publicly available. The participants were made aware of the fact that the data would be stored in a safe, password protected computer that only I and my supervisor would have access to. Participants knew who to contact (my supervisor) should they have any questions or concerns and also I made it known that they could contact me at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the manner in which my research was being conducted.

### 3.4.1 Stages of informed consent

Stage	Ethics
Identified elders who would have knowledge of the customs for interviews	Made contact with knowledgeable elders who had wide experience of amaXhosa cultural practices. Explained research project with them and gained their consent to interview them about the circumcision and bereavement rituals and to record them during the interview sessions.
Feedback to elders	Transcripts of the interviews were made available to the experts for checking. Elders gave consent to me using these extracts in the thesis.
Identified families carrying out rituals of interest (Circumcision and Bereavement). The information about the families who would be having these rituals was ascertained by attending community meetings which take place at the headman's house every Wednesday at 10am. During these meetings intentions to have rituals are made known to the community (of which I am a part) – and I was thus able to immediately know which family to approach.	Discussed research project with family members
Approached family families asking for permission to observe their circumcision or burial proceedings.	Met face-to-face with families who had shown interest in the project. At the meeting full details of the manner in which I would observe the rituals were disclosed (note taking, recording, agreed upon photographing – I would be guided by family members as to what to which aspects of the ritual they would agree to have photographed. Anyone photographed would be informed beforehand and consent would have to be obtained prior to a photograph being taken). Provided all family members concerned with a letter detailing the research project and the ethics involved. Family members were free to decline to take part in the project and no pressure was put on them.
Feedback to families	I showed family members: i) transcripts of the recordings ii) photographs iii) short video clips Family members were given time to read the transcripts, view the video clips and photographs and make any changes in areas where they found errors or that they did not want used
Ethical consideration by myself	When selecting transcripts and visual materials I also took into account any sensitive or confidential information and made sure this was not used.
Approach potential participants to describe events depicted in visual materials	Approached friends and community members that I knew within a certain demographic and described the project to them – some via phone, with some I set up face-to-face meetings in areas where they felt comfortable
Identifying participants	Those participants who showed interest and were willing to take part were then given the letter of consent which I also explained in face-to-face meetings. Participants that they would be recorded but that what they said would be not be identified as their words but would be kept anonymous. They were informed that at any stage they could withdraw from the project and that their confidentiality was assured.
Conducted the research	I showed participants the visuals that I wanted them to describe at their homes, at times that were most suitable for themselves. I recorded their answers.
Transcribed the participants feedback	Participants were allowed to see the transcripts and make any amendments that they wished.

## CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I closely scrutinize the data that I collected from both Eastern and Western Cape participants involved in the study. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I pay attention to the use of lexical items involved in the two traditional rites performed by amaXhosa, namely the circumcision and bereavement rituals. First, I discuss the words that the participants used to describe the images and/or videos presented to them with the aim of establishing whether contemporary isiXhosa-speakers still speak about these two key traditional rites using commonly accepted vocabulary (as established by my research with experts and using all available descriptive literature) and displaying knowledge of ritual-specific terms. For ease of reference, I present participants' responses to images according to area and age cohort and compare and contrast responses according to these criteria immediately after each image. Secondly, at the end of the section on responses to images I also provide a summary of the significance of age on participants' responses.

Thirdly, I provide a discussion of participants' feedback to interviews which involved simple questions asking for definitions of key words and phrases related to the rituals. This discussion is presented under area in which the research was conducted, i.e. Eastern or Western Cape.

Fourthly, I summarize the definitions provided by participants, in terms of simple glosses. Definitions that appear to be confused or incorrect are starred and underlined.

Lastly, I present words that occurred in the definitions that do not occur in any isiXhosa dictionary or that were not known to me.

In my conclusion I look at the issue of words losing currency in contemporary isiXhosa, lexical variability in the descriptions of circumcision and bereavement rituals and highlight the issue of new words (not found in any dictionary as well as those new to me) widely used by participants to describe aspects of these rituals. Finally, I discuss semantic broadening and narrowing with relation to words used to describe the circumcision and bereavement rituals and rites.

This chapter will help me in answering my key research question which is concerned with the cultural significance of the Xhosa language for people who identify as amaXhosa. Answering this question should help me arrive at a better conclusion as to what kind of vocabulary contemporary

isiXhosa speakers use to describe circumcision and burial rites of amaXhosa. It will also help me to highlight cultural words that appear to be becoming obsolete and to discover whether any new vocabulary is being employed by speakers when describing these customs.

## 4.2 Images - lexicon used in discussing circumcision rites

I start with the responses elicited from participants as a result of showing them the selected Images (as detailed in Chapter 3). I discuss the age cohort responses first of Eastern Cape men and then directly after that follow with responses from Western Cape men. This is done in order to aid immediate comparison between speakers of the two different regions – the Eastern Cape historically expected to produce more “pure” speakers of isiXhosa. I provide a summary of the words participants (per age cohort) used to describe these images.

After the section on responses to images, I go on to discuss participants’ definitions of cultural words (as established by my research) in the same way (age cohort: Eastern Cape vs Western Cape responses). Words that have changed their meaning, have gained meanings or so not appear in any isiXhosa dictionary will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

I follow the same procedures with Western Cape residents.

### 1<sup>st</sup> age cohort: 18-35 years old



#### **Image #01: Eastern Cape Residents**

Image #01 was presented to three Eastern Cape participants who fell into this age cohort (18-35 years old). The participants interpreted the image as either these boys are preparing to *ukukhonya* ‘bellow’ or to go to *umgubho* ‘pre-initiation party’ – an event which commonly takes place in the evening and continues overnight on the night before the boy or boys go to the initiation school. One participant used the word *umguyo* to describe what he saw in the image. *Umguyo* has the same meaning as *umgubho*. In *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol. 1, A-J* (2006:653) *umgubho* is entered with the abbreviations Mpse (isiMpondomise) and Th (isiThembu). The word *umguyo*, in the same dictionary, is glossed as ‘men’s wardance and festivities preceding initiation into manhood, circumcision’ and is entered with the abbreviations Mbo (isiMbo) and Mpse (Ibid.:670). The participant who used the word *umguyo* lives in a different town in the Eastern Cape (Centane) than other two participants who live in Engcobo which is also

in the Eastern Cape. All three participants said the boys in Image #01 are wearing *amasay'bhokhwe* 'animal skin'. The word *amasay'bhokhwe* does not appear in any isiXhosa dictionary but was established as the equivalent of *iimfele* in Chapter 3.

### Image #01: Western Cape Residents

Western Cape participants between the ages of 18 and 35 said the boys in this image are wearing



*imithika* 'animal skin'. *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol. 3: Q-Z* (1989:298) glosses *umthika* as 'skin garment cut into hanging strips or thongs and worn around the waist, usually by diviners'. Other glosses in the same dictionary gloss are 'tail-coat' and 'academic gown'.

It was observed by these participants that normally it is boys who are from Eastern Cape who dress up like this and roam around the streets singing in groups for a few days or a week before they go to the Eastern Cape to be circumcised. According to participants the boys in Cape Town are not so keen on doing this, but in some instances some do join the boys from the Eastern Cape when they are doing this activity. One participant mentioned that he never went through this stage whilst he was preparing to be circumcised as his friend considered such a practice as *into yofarm boy* (something only done by boys who are from farms), so he would not dare to join his peers who were doing it as he was going to be a laughing stock amongst his friends who were born and raised in Cape Town.

Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort (18-35 years old) provided far more linguistic detail than their Western Cape counterparts. By using the word *imithika* to describe the animal skins it would appear that the Western Cape participants have an idea of the words used for "traditional clothing" but are not always aware of the subtle distinctions and semantics of these words. Hence *imithika* which is usually used for the skins worn by traditional healers is used by them to refer to the skins used by the initiants. Also significant is that the Western Cape residents distanced themselves from this cultural practice, describing it as *into yofarm boy* – in this way the participant is signalling some criticism, or approbrium in connection with the clothes worn thus absolving himself from any ignorance on his part with regard to the lexicon of the cultural attire.

### Image #02: Eastern Cape Residents



Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort (18-35 years old) said Image #02 is similar to Image #01, stating that it is clear that these boys are to attend *umgubho* or are coming from *umgubho*. According to participants the attire worn by the boy in Image #02 makes him stand out as a true *usaluka* ‘initiate-to-be’. All the weapons that he is carrying are those that are generally expected to be carried by *usaluka*. He is well armoured for *umgubho* because he is carrying *izembe* ‘an axe’ in his right hand to attack boys who are not from his village if a fight were to break out as often happens. In his left hand he carries *ingqanda* ‘a spear’ which he will use to shield himself when attacked or to throw at the enemy if he runs away. He also has *umrhaji* ‘a blanket’ in his left hand which can be used both for cushioning blows and to keep himself warm when it is cold. Around his legs he is wearing *amasay’bhokwe* which make him exciting to watch when he is dancing. He also has *isabhabha* ‘a metal horn’ around his waist which he uses to create a lovely sound that will go with the rhythm of the songs that are normally sung in such events or will go with the dance that he will be dancing. Participants concluded that this is how *usaluka* is generally expected to dress.

### Image #02: Western Cape Residents



In image two participants identified that the boy in the picture is carrying an axe (*izembe*) and a stick (*intonga*). They referred to the *iintsimbi* as ‘beads’. They said image one and image two look the same however, they highlighted that it is very rare to see a boy wearing items of clothing similar to the one in image two around Cape Town even if the boy is from the Eastern Cape or Cape Town, it is rare to spot one dressed like this. Normally, boys from the Eastern Cape who are in Cape Town and boys born in Cape Town just tear their clothes and wear animal skin just like in image one, if they do have it.

Discussion: Eastern cape participants provided a thorough description of the image in this age cohort. They named each and every item carried or worn by the boys in the picture, and they knew why these boys are dressed like this and even had a name that is used to refer to the boy who is dressed like this. What is also significant is the fact that Eastern Cape participants have names for the items used by *oosaluka* (plural) “those about to become initiates” and the fact that there is an

expectation for them to be dressed like this signals that Eastern Cape participants are fully aware of this practice. Western Cape participants lack traditional vocabulary in terms of naming the items carried or worn by the boys in the picture, and to name the event that these boys are to attend or coming from. However, by mentioning that boys who live in Cape Town just tear their clothes and wear animal skins just like in image one (if or when they have it) means that the Western Cape participants have an idea of what should be done by boys who will be going to the initiation school.

### Image #03: Eastern Cape Residents



Image #03 stimulated the participants from the Eastern Cape to say that it looks like the young men in the image are coming from the initiation school where they fetched the initiate. They are on their way to the home of the initiate and are singing and engaging in *kudlalwa iintonga* ‘playful stick fights’ every now and then.

### Image #03: Western Cape Residents



Image #03 stimulated the participants of Western Cape to say the young men are coming from *ebakhwetheni* ‘initiation school’ (literally: ‘from the initiants’). They are on their way to the home of the initiate where there will be *umgidi*. They are playing stick fight to entertain themselves as they are travelling a considerable distance from

*ebakhwetheni* to the home of the initiate.

Discussion: Both Eastern Cape and Western Cape participants in this age cohort (18-35 years old) gave the same description of Image #03.

#### Image #04: Eastern Cape Residents



Image #04 (which is a screenshot of a video that was played for participants in the 18-35 age cohort). Looking at the image the participants could point out *izibazana* ‘the mother of the initiate’ as the one leading the dance. They also identified the men in the background and said that they were sitting *ebuhlanti* ‘at the kraal’ as men often do during traditional rituals. The women are playing stick fights and the participants identified the dance moves as *ukubheshuza* – a word not glossed in isiXhosa dictionaries although it does appear as *beshuza* in Doke et al.’s *Zulu-English Dictionary* (2006:34) as ‘toss up the hind-quarters as a buck’ and in this context used to translate ‘dance’. They also picked up the lyrics of the song which were *akalali umntu ozele inkwenkwe uyabheshuza* ‘a person who has birthed a boy does not sleep, she dances’ on the video, as well as in Vee Sholo’s song entitled *Akalali*, available on You Tube [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOvUU\\_QTFc4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOvUU_QTFc4). In Vee Sholo’s lyrics the word *uyabheshuza* is replaced by the word *uyabhenquza*<sup>17</sup>. According to *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.1*, (2006:155) *ukubhenquza* has two meanings, one being “gesticulate, thrash the arms, stamp in anger; rage, storm” the other “walk with an exaggerated backward and forward or up-and-down movement of the buttocks”.

#### Image #04: Western Cape Residents



In Image #04 which is a screenshot of a video that was played for participants, the Western Cape participants in this age cohort (18-35) could point out the mother of initiate as the one leading the dance, although they did not use the word *izibizana*. They also identified the men in the background and said that they were sitting *ebuhlanti* as men often do during traditional rituals. The participants identified the dancing and

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.deezer.com/en/track/1595978001> - see lyrics in which the word *uyabhenquza* features

stick fighting as a normal part of such traditional ceremonies. They identified the beads and the drum using English words *iibeads* and *idrum*.

Discussion: Eastern Cape participants referred to the mother of the initiate as *izibazana* and had the vocabulary to name the type of dance that is performed by the women on the video while the Western Cape participants in this age group (18-35) were not able to provide the word *izibazana* to describe the mother of the initiate. Western Cape participants generally did not have specific cultural words in their vocabulary to identify something particular on the video except pointing out *ubuhlanti*. This suggests that although the Western Cape participants in this age cohort are familiar with what happens in such ceremonies, they lack the traditional vocabulary and thus cannot point out and name significant things such as the name used to refer to the mother of the initiate or dance moves performed by these women. On the other hand, the Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort have the vocabulary to describe such things. It could be argued that the isiXhosa cultural lexicon of bilinguals (as my Western Cape isiXhosa-speaking participants were) is undergoing attrition. This loss of vocabulary can be ascribed to the participants not having heard the isiXhosa words enough in the Western Cape (which is predominantly Afrikaans-speaking<sup>18</sup> with English being the language of commerce) and also parents not passing on these words to their children. As Gharibi and Boers (2017:65) observe with regard to knowledge of the vocabulary of the “heritage language” (the mother-tongue) amongst bilinguals “attitude toward the family language and their language practices play a crucial role in the heritage language proficiency of their children”.

### Image #05: Eastern Cape Residents



Participants in this age cohort (18-35) described Image #05 by depicting a scene in which *kukhutshwa amakhwenkwe* ‘boys are brought back home’ from initiation school. The initiates are surrounded by young men singing the *Somagwaza* song.

<sup>18</sup> Just under half of the population of the Western Cape speak Afrikaans as their first language and almost a quarter speak IsiXhosa (see: [https://www.statssa.gov.za/census/census\\_2011/census\\_products/Census\\_2011\\_Census\\_in\\_brief.pdf](https://www.statssa.gov.za/census/census_2011/census_products/Census_2011_Census_in_brief.pdf))

Young men are playing stick fights to entertain themselves and any spectators who might have gathered to watch them.

### Image #05: Western Cape Residents



Western Cape participants in this age group (18-35) said the initiant in this image is being brought back home by young men. Young men are playing stick fight and they might be singing the *Somagwaza* song until they reach home of the initiant.

Discussion: The understanding and description of the picture by both groups of the participants in this age cohort (18-35) is the same.

### Image #06: Eastern Cape Residents



Image #06 prompted participants in this age cohort (18-35) to describe the process whereby *amakrwala* ‘initiants’ are entering the kraal *ubuhlanti* and will sit on the grass mat *ukhukho* and await words of wisdom *ukuyalwa* given to them by old men whilst they are looking down (as they are not allowed to look the old men in

the eyes). *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.3 Q-Z* (1989:618) includes in its gloss of *ukuyala* the following ‘at a ceremony held for this purpose: instruct, charge, exhort, advise (a person undergoing a transition ceremony) in regard to the code of behaviour expected from him in his new status, eg a youth entering manhood, a bride at her new home’.

### Image #06: Western Cape Residents

For Image #06 Western Cape participants in the 18-35 years old cohort said the initiants are entering



the kraal (*ubuhlanti*) and will sit on the grass mat (*ukhukho*) and await to be given words of wisdom (*ukuyalwa*) by old men whilst they are looking down as they are not allowed to look their elders directly in the eyes.

Discussion: The understanding and lexicon used to give description of the picture by both groups

of the participants in this age cohort is the same.

### Image #07: Eastern Cape Residents



Image #07 was considered by participants (in the 18-35 years old cohort) as similar to Image #05 in the sense that it could be that these young men singing and playing stick fight are coming from initiation school to fetch the initiate *kuphuma amakhwenkwe*. However, the participants also pointed out that it could be that the men are on

their way and are taking the boys to the initiation school *kungena amakhwenkwe*.

### Image #07: Western Cape Residents

Western Cape participants (aged 18-35) described Image #07 (a screenshot of a video that was



played for the participants) as depicting young men who are rejoicing, singing, dancing and playing stick fight as they are accompanying a boy who is going to initiation school *baya esuthwini*.

Discussion: When comparing Eastern Cape and Western Cape participants there is no difference between in the lexicon used in giving descriptions,

apart from the fact that the Eastern Cape participants felt that the image could depict the young men

going to or coming from the initiation school. The Western Cape participants only identified the young man as going to the initiation school.

### **Image #08: Eastern Cape Residents**



Participants in the 18-35 years old cohort described Image #08 as a sacred place for amaXhosa, saying it is a place where most isiXhosa rituals have to be performed. One participant said he knows how important the kraal is in isiXhosa culture as he spent over eight hours naked sitting on the grass mat inside the kraal whilst waiting for certain rituals and customs such as *ukungcama* ‘a ritual performed before a boy goes to initiation lodge’ and *ukuchetywa inkqayi* ‘cutting of hair’ to be performed on a boy on the day he is circumcised.

### **Image #08: Western Cape Residents**

Participants in the 18-35 years old cohort described Image #08 as place where livestock is kept.



Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in the 18-35 years old cohort appear to understand very well the significance of the kraal not just as a place for keeping livestock but also in terms of its ritual significance. It is significant that the Western cape participants in the 18-35 years old cohort did not include any references to the kraal as a sacred place used for traditional rituals.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> age cohort: 36-45 years old

### Image #01: Eastern Cape Residents



Image #01 was presented to the two participants who fell into this age cohort (36-45). One participant interpreted the image as boys who are to attend *umtshotsho*, ‘a pre-initiation party which takes place in the night before the initiation of the boy’. According to the participant these boys are wearing *iimfele* ‘animal skins’ which were also interpreted by the other participant as *amasay’bhokhwe*. Participants noted that boys are most likely to be attending *umgubho* in the evening of the same day. A participant noted that the boy with the yellow t-shirt is carrying *ibhunguza* ‘a fighting stick’ which he will use to fight, defend himself or just wave in the air whilst he is dancing. In the Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.1, A-J (2006:199) *ibhunguza* is glossed as ‘a short stick with a big knob; a knobkerrie, knobstick’ while Kropf (1915:50) glosses it as ‘a cudgel with a large head’. A ‘cudgel’ is usually considered a stick that is used as a fighting weapon and in the definition of ‘knobkerrie’ in *A Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* (Silva et al., 1996:382) most of the examples of the word include reference to it as a fighting stick.

### Image #01: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old age cohort described Image #01 as boys wearing *amatshaka-tshaka* ‘animal skins’ preparing for *ukwaluka* ‘initiation school’ (literally: to be circumcised). The words *amatshaka-tshaka* does not appear in any isiXhosa dictionary. However, it was described by Western Cape participants as something that looks like a mop, and it is normally worn by traditional dancers when dancing. From this description, for me, I understood this as *amasay’bhokhwe*.



Discussion: Again, it is clear that Western Cape residents had a reduced cultural lexicon when describing this image and were not able to go into the detail that their Eastern Cape counterparts did when referring to the attire or the particular type of stick the boys in the image were carrying.

### Image #02: Eastern Cape Residents

In image #02 participants in the 36-45 years old cohort said judging by the attire *amasay'bhokhwe* 'animal skins' and *amaso* 'beads' that are worn by the boy in the picture, he is preparing to attend *umgubho* the 'pre initiation party'. The items that he is carrying, *izembe* 'an axe', *ingqanda* 'a spear', *isabhabha* 'a metal horn', and *umrhaji* 'a blanket' are not usually just randomly combined and carried by boys, only when they are going to, or when they will be attending, *umgubho* that will be taking place in his village or in neighbouring villages.



### Image #02: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort found Image #02 similar to Image #01, the only difference being the items that the boy is carrying: *izembe* and *intonga* 'a stick'. They described him as having a white sheet and as wearing *amatshaka-tshaka*. They added that all these items are used by boys to dance *xa besoluka* 'when they go to be initiated'.



Discussion: The Western Cape participants did not mention specific items such as, *isabhabha*, *umrhaji*, *ingqanda*, and *amaso* that were mentioned by the Eastern Cape participants. What is also significant is that they did not say which event these boys will be hosting or attending before going to the initiation school which is the information that was given by the Eastern Cape participants. Western Cape participants also used the word *amatshaka-tshaka* to refer to *amasay'bhokhwe* - the word will be discussed later in this chapter.

### Image #03: Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #03 as young men bringing home *ikrwala* ‘an initiate’ from the initiation school. The woman who has her walking stick up could be the grandmother of *ikrwala* ‘the initiate’: she is joyful and *uyahabaza* ‘ululating’ for her grandson’s safe return hence her walking stick is up and she is walking very close to the group of young men. She would not even dare to come close if the boy were still going to the initiation school as that is prohibited.



### Image #03: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described image #03 as young men bringing home *ikrwala* but did not go into any further detail.



Discussion: Both the Eastern Cape and Western Cape participants referred to the initiate as *ikrwala*. The Eastern Cape participants gave more detail about the background of the picture, for example, they said the grandmother *uyahabaza* something that is normally done by the women when the initiate is brought back home from the initiation school.

### Image #04: Eastern Cape Residents



After watching the video which Image #04 was taken from, participants in the 36-45 years old cohort identified that the women are wearing *imibhaco* or *isikhakha* ‘traditional dress’, *oophephela* ‘traditional head scarf’, *iintsiyane* ‘arms and ankle beads’, *iintsimbi* ‘beads’ and have *imbola* ‘ochre’ on their faces. They identified the woman in the orange traditional dress as *izibazana* ‘mother of the initiate’. The other women

who are singing and dancing alongside *izibazana* were identified as *oomama bomngqungqo* ‘women of the traditional beat’. Participants also highlighted that during such traditional events, men always sit next to *ubuhlanti* and women sit next to *iziko* ‘the fire place’.

#### **Image #04: Western Cape Residents**

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort linked Image #04 (which was a video played for them)



with Image #03 saying in Image #04 *ikrwala* ‘the initiant’ is already home, the woman dancing are wearing *imibhaco* ‘traditional dresses’, *iintsimbi* and are carrying sticks as they are rejoicing for the safe return of *ikrwala*. Participants identified the woman in the orange traditional dress as *izibazana* ‘mother of the initiant’.

Men sitting at *ebuhlanti* ‘at the kraal’ were, according to participants, ‘giving the initiant words of wisdom’ - *bayala ikrwala*.

Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort (36-45) had the lexicon to name each of the traditional clothes worn by the women on the picture. By mentioning each item of clothing, for example, *oophephela*, *iintsiyane* shows that these clothes are used often and the participants are somewhat familiar with them. Using the phrase *omama bomngqungqo* to describe the women who were dancing on the video shows that the Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort have a specific, culturally precise lexicon that they use to describe this ritual. Western Cape participants in this age cohort also used the traditional lexicon to name and describe image #04 as compared to previous images but did not offer the more precise names for the items of clothing. This suggests that while both Eastern and Western Cape participants still use most of the things that they saw on the video, the Eastern Cape participants’ linguistic repertoire afforded them a wider lexicon with reference to items of traditional clothing.

### Image #05: Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #05 as the time after *ithonto* or *ibhuma*



‘the special seclusion hut built for initiants’ has been burnt. Young men are taking *ikrwala* to his home. On their way to the home of *ikrwala* they are singing (*kuyombelwa*) and playing stick fights (*kuyaqulwa abanye bathi kudlalwa iintonga*) as a way of

entertaining themselves. When they arrive at the home of *ikrwala* they will take him to *ebuhlanti* and sit him on *ukhukho* with his *umnquma okanye umnqayi* ‘stick’ next to him and cover him in *iragi* ‘a striped blanket’ where he will be informed of what is next in his journey *ayalwe* ‘and be instructed’ (i.e. given words of wisdom). *Iragi* is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.3, Q-Z* (1989:109) as ‘a rug (travelling).’ The isiXhosa gloss is given as “*uhlobo lwengubo olwenziwe ngoboya, lwaza lwanemisebe, ethandwa kakhulu ngabantu abaseluhambeni*”. This is the blanket that participants referred to and said is normally used for initiants.

Young men will be served food, *umqombothi* ‘traditional beer’, beers and brandy known as *utywala beentonga* ‘alcohol for sticks’. The young men will also be served alcohol for keeping the initiant company and teaching him about what is expected of him now he has reached manhood.

### Image #05: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #05 as a group of men coming from



*ebakhwetheni*, bringing home *ikrwala* for his *umgidi*. On their way to the home of *ikrwala* participants noted *badlala iintonga* and are singing.

Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort provided far more linguistic detail in describing the

image #05 as compared to Western Cape participants. They used synonyms in order to give a better description of the picture and tried to give details of each stage to me which suggested that these participants understood this traditional rite and the words that describe it. The Western Cape participants gave descriptions of Image #05 to me in a way that showed shows that they although

they have an understanding of what is happening in the picture they were unable to name some of the items using a traditional cultural lexicon, e.g. *utywala beentonga* was not a phrase they used.

### Image# 06 Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #06 as an old custom done by amaXhosa



when *ikrwala* is brought back home from *esuthwini*. He has to start at *ebuhlanti* and sit there on *ukhukho*, covered with *iragi*, carrying his *umnquma*. Old men will inform *ikrwala* of what is happening and what is going to happen from there on as they did when he was going to *esuthwini*. When the boy was going to *esuthwini*

he departed from *ebuhlanti* covered in *ingcawe* ‘a white blanket with a red or black line on one of its long ends’ carrying *intonga*. Now that he is brought back home, the same procedure is followed: before going to the house he has to start *ebuhlanti*.

### Image 06 Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described image #06 as *amakrwala* ‘initiants’ covered



with *iragi* waiting to be seated on *ukhukho* and *bayalwe* by the men standing in front of them.

Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort gave a well detailed description of the picture using a traditional lexicon when unpacking what might be happening in the picture. Participants even showed the link

between the entering the kraal when the boy departs for the initiation school and distinguished between the boy as *usaluka* and when he returns back from *esuthwini* as *ikrwala*. In this way participants show that they are fully aware of what is happening and what word ought to be used and when. In showing this link between these two stages it is significant to note that participants said when the initiates comes back he is covered in *iragi* but when he was departing as *usaluka* he was covered in *ingcawe* and these are two different blankets used in different stages. Western Cape

participants referred to the same items as the Eastern Cape participants when giving description of the picture but their descriptions were very limited in terms of detail when compared to the ones given by the Eastern Cape participants.

### Image 07 Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort found Image #07 similar to Image #05 *yimini yokuphuma*



*kwamakhwenkwe* ‘it is the day of the coming out of initiates’. Young men are playing stick fight and singing *amagwijo* which is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* (2006:685) as “*u-gwijo* b/n 5/6 signature tune; introductory song sung before a radio broadcast, a meeting, a choral rendering, a boys fight, etc.”

They are described as rejoicing as they are bringing the initiate back home after burning *ithonto* or *ibhuma*. Most of them are looking forward to drinking *utywala beentonga*.

### Image #07 Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described image #07 as a group of young man singing



*amagwijo* and rejoicing, possibly because they are taking a boy to *ebakhwetheni* or bringing *ikrwala* home.

Discussion: Eastern Cape and Western Cape participants’ description of image #07 in this age cohort is the same.



### **Image 08 Eastern Cape Residents**

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #08 as an important place for every household. They believe that it is a dwelling place for the ancestors of each family hence every traditional ritual that is done always involves *ubuhlanti* somehow. All boys who are amaXhosa must leave for the initiation school from *ubuhlanti*. Again when they are brought back home their arrival station is *ubuhlanti* before entering or being taken to any house.

### **Image #08 Western Cape Residents**

Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #08 as place where livestock is kept.



Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort describe Image #08 as a sacred place occupied by ancestors and used as a departing and arrival station of a boy during the circumcision period. Western Cape participants only described Image #08 as a place to keep livestock.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> age cohort: 46-65 years old

#### Image 01: Eastern Cape Residents

Image #01 was presented to two participants who fell into this age cohort. Participants described the picture as signifying *ixesha lokuya esuthwini* ‘the time of going to the initiation school’. They said boys wear *iimfele* or *amasay’bhokhwe* which is traditional attire when they are *oosaluka* or *oontangandini* ‘age mates’. These animal skin makes them stand out from other boys who were referred to as *oonosala* ‘those who will not be going to the initiation school – literally: the stay-behinders’. The boy with the yellow t-shirt is carrying *ibhunguza* ‘a fighting stick’ which he will be using both for waving whilst *etshotsha* ‘dancing’ or defending himself when fights break out during *umgubho* being the pre-initiation all-night dance, or *umtshotsho* which is sometimes used as a synonym for *umtshotsho* although it is not strictly the same thing, being a ‘Saturday night gathering of boys and girls in traditional Xhosa communities’ (*The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa, Vol.3, 1989:410*).



#### Image 01: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort referred to the animal skin worn by the boys in Image #01 as *imithika*, saying boys of amaXhosa normally wear these and torn clothes which make them stand out from boys who are not going *e-bush* ‘to the bush’ in that particular season.



Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort gave far more linguistic detail as compared to their counterparts. They mentioned by name all the items worn by the boys in the picture and the name of the dance that he is to attend. This shows that they know and understand very well the stage that these boys are at. Western cape participants gave a vague description of Image #01 which suggests that they have a limited understanding of this stage of the initiation process, particularly with regard to specific cultural lexical items.

### Image 02: Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort initially described the boy in Image #02 as *usaluka*, but



then judging by the boy's appearance they said the boy was *unosala* 'a boy who is left behind by his peers who went to the initiation school – literally: one remaining' because he looks young enough to be still a boy.

The boy is carrying *izembe*, *intonga yokuhlanganisa* 'a stick used to shield', *ibhayi* 'a blanket' and *isabhabha* 'metal horn'. The word *ibhayi* is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.1, A-J* (2006:142-143) in six ways. Firstly, as 'cotton sheeting, *ibhayi* sheeting, used for making the traditional skirts for young girls, baby's carrying blanket, children's clothing and the large wrap-around blanket worn by older girls and women.' Secondly as 'baby blanket made of any material.' Thirdly, as 'girl's or women's blanket made of this material.' Fourthly, as 'any cotton blanket.' Fifth, as 'white, red or brown cotton blanket.' Sixth, as 'dark grey cotton blanket used for protecting the knuckles in stick fighting.' Participants used this word as the sixth definition of the dictionary.

He is wearing *amaso namasay'bhokhwe* 'beads and animal skins'. Together, all these items signify that this boy will surely be hosting or attending *umgubho* in the evening and will be going *entabeni* 'initiation school – literally: to the mountain'.

### Image 02: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described the boy in Image #02 as a boy who is ready to



go *ehlathini* 'to initiation school – literally: to the forest' or *e-bush*. They referred to the animal skin that he is wearing on his legs as *amatshaka-tshaka*, the stick as *intonga*, an axe as *izembe* and also mentioned the blanket and white sheet.

Discussion: Western Cape participants did not mention specific items such as, *isabhabha*, *umrhaji*, *ingqanda*, and *amaso* that were mentioned by the Eastern Cape participants. Also significant is that they did not have specific traditional lexicon to refer to the boys in the picture nor say which event these boys will be hosting or attending before going to the initiation, all of which is information that was offered by the Eastern Cape

participants. Western Cape participants also used the word *amatshaka-tshaka* which I assume to mean *amasay'bhokhwe* but will be discussed later in the chapter.

### Image 03: Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort said the woman who is walking along the group of young men in Image #03 is 'preparing the court'



men in Image #03 is 'preparing the court' *utshayeleva inkundla* and *uyahabazela* 'she is ululating', rejoicing as the young men are bringing her grandson *entabeni* which in this context is literally 'from the mountain', figuratively 'from the initiation school'.

### Image 03: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #03 as young men coming from *ehlathini*



and the old woman on their left hand side possibly being the grandmother of *ikrwala* since she is clearly welcoming the young men with joy.

Discussion: Both Eastern Cape and Western Cape participants in this age cohort gave similar description of Image #03. Eastern Cape participants used traditional lexicon to give a little more detail with regard to the background of the picture, describing what might be the action of the grandmother in the picture.

### Image 04: Eastern Cape Residents

Image #04 was taken from a video played for the participants. The participants in the 46-65 years



old cohort identified the dancing woman at the court as *oomama bomngqungqo*, wearing *imibhaco*, *iintsimbi*, *amaso*, *oophephela*. They identified the dance they are doing as

*ukubheshuza*<sup>19</sup> and the woman in the orange traditional dress as *izibazana* ‘the mother of the initiate’.

#### Image 04: Western Cape Residents



Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #04 which was a video played for them as *umgidi* of *ikrwala* and identified the four women as wearing *oophephela*, *imibhaco*, *iintsimbi*, *amanqasha* ‘ankle beads’ and *ubutseke* ‘arm beads’. The women are also described as *bayayiyizela* ‘ululating’ whilst dancing and

playing stick fights.

Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort had a sufficient lexicon to name one by one traditional clothes worn by the women in the picture. By mentioning each item of clothing, for example, *oophephela*, *imibhaco*, *iintsimbi* shows that they are not only familiar with seeing these clothes being worn, but also with hearing the specific words used to describe them. Using the phrase *omama bomngqungqo* in referring to the women who were dancing in the video shows that Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort have a proper lexicon that they use to describe this ritual. Western Cape participants in this age cohort used words such as *amatshaka-tshaka* - words that are new to me and which were also not used by Eastern Cape participants. This suggests that Western Cape participants have their own words to describe these items of clothing which are different to the ones used by their Eastern Cape counterparts.

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<sup>19</sup> See previous reference to *ukubhenquza* in footnote 17 and the definition of *ukubhenquza* in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.1*, (2006:155) which is given as “walk with an exaggerated backward and forward or up-and-down movement of the buttocks”.

### Image 05: Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #05 as the time when young men and



old men are coming *ehlathini* 'from the forest'. They passed through the river where they washed *umkhwetha* whose status changes after the washing from *umkhwetha* to *ikrwala* 'a newly initiated young man'. He is now taken to his home where 'he will be

instructed' *uza kuyalwa* and there will be *umgidi* done for him. On their way to the home of *ikrwala*, *kuyaqulwa ngabafana* 'young men are playing stick fight'. Upon their arrival at the home of the initiant men will then be served *utywala beentonga*.

### Image 05: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #05 as young men coming from



*ebakhwetheni* or *ehlathini* bringing *ikrwala* home where *umgidi* will be done for him. On their way to the home of *ikrwala* they are singing and *kudlalwa iintonga*.

Discussion: Both groups of participants in this age cohort gave

similar descriptions of Image #05.

### Image 06: Eastern Cape Residents



Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #06 as *amakrwala* that are inside *ebuhlanti* covered with *iiragi* carrying *umnquma* or *umnqayi*. They were described as being about to be seated on *ukhukho* after which

they will be informed of what is happening at this stage of their journey and be given words of wisdom *bayalwe*. The man who is preparing *ikhukho* for them is their *ikhankatha* ‘traditional nurse’ who was taking care of them at *entabeni*.

### Image 06: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort describe Image #06 as a period when the initiates are



brought back home from *ebakhwetheni*. They referred to the striped blankets that initiates are covered with as *iiragi*, the grass mat as *ukhukho* and said *baza kuyalwa ke ngoku* “they will be instructed now” by the elderly men standing in front of them.

Discussion: Eastern Cape participants in this age cohort used traditional lexicon to describe Image #06 and named each item that they saw as important in this stage of this ritual. It is significant that they also took note of the man behind *amakrwala* and referred to him as *ikhankatha*, and explained his relationship and role in connection with *amakrwala* - something which was not done by their Western Cape counterparts. Apart from this difference, Western Cape participants used the same lexicon used by Eastern Cape participants to describe some items in the picture.

### Image 07: Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort said Image #07 is similar to Image #05 just that in Image



#07 they are at the home of *ikrwala* because on their right hand side there is *ubuhlanti* which is the evidence that they have arrived.

### Image 07: Western Cape Residents

Western Cape participants in the 46-65 years old cohort found Image #07 similar to Image #05 and



said *kudlalwa intonga*, but in Image #07 the participants felt that the place was closer to, or at the home of the initiate where the *umgidi* will take place.

Discussion: Both Eastern and Western Cape participants used the same lexicon to describe this image.

### Image 08: Eastern Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #08 as *ubuhlanti* and elaborated that this



is place where livestock is kept and also as a place where amaXhosa find it easy to connect and speak with their ancestors.

### Image 08: Western Cape Residents

Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #08 as *ubuhlanti* a place where livestock is kept in rural areas.



Discussion: In giving descriptions of Image #08 there has been consistency in both groups - Eastern Cape and Western Cape participants. Irrespective of the age cohort, Eastern Cape participants maintained their description of *ubuhlanti* as both a place of keeping livestock and a dwelling place of ancestors. Western Cape participants on the other hand,

maintained that the kraal is the place of keeping livestock and did not refer to its ritual significance.

### 4.3 Images: lexicon used in discussing bereavement rites

#### 1<sup>st</sup> age cohort: 18-35 years old

##### **Image #09: Eastern Cape Residents**



Participants in the age cohort 18-35 described Image #09 as *isifihlo* ‘a funeral’ that is taking place inside the tent.

##### **Image #09: Western Cape Residents**



Participants in the age cohort 18-35 described image #09 as *isingwabo* ‘a funeral service’ taking place at the home of the deceased.

Discussion: There was no difference in the way Eastern and Western Cape residents in the age cohort 18-35 spoke about the funeral in the image, except for the fact that Eastern Cape participants refer to the funeral as *isifihlo* and Western Cape participants refer to it as *isingwabo* and also specified that it was at the home of the deceased.

### Image #10: Eastern Cape Residents



Participants in the age cohort 18-35 described Image #10 as *abahlolokazi* ‘widows’ : the women are wearing black clothes as a sign that they are under *ilifu elimnyama* ‘a dark cloud’.

### Image #10: Western Cape Residents



Participants in the age cohort 18-35 described women in image #10 as *abahlolokazi* who are mourning the death of their loved one.

Discussion: The only difference in the way Eastern and Western Cape residents (aged 18-35) described Image #10 was that Eastern Cape residents referred to the black clothes that are worn to symbolize the “dark cloud” of mourning.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> age cohort: 36-45 years old

### **Image #09: Eastern Cape Residents**



Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #09 as *isifihlo* taking place inside the tent.

### **Image #09: Western Cape Residents**



Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #09 as *isingwabo* taking place at the home of the deceased.

Discussion: Both sets of participants in the in the 36-45 years old cohort had the same response to the image and did not differ in their description of the event or the lexicon they used apart from the fact that the Western Cape residents preferred *isingwabo* to *isifihlo*

### Image #10: Eastern Cape Residents



Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort described Image #10 as widows using the word *abahlolokazi* and said that they are wearing *impahla yezila* ‘clothes for mourning’. They added that all these women are mourning for their loved one who is most likely to be the husband and that it was not out of the question that these women were in *isithembu* ‘a polygamous marriage’.

### Image #10: Western Cape Residents



Participants in the 36-45 years old cohort referred to the women in Image #10 as *abahlolokazi*.

Discussion: The difference in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape responses in the 36-45 years old cohort is that Eastern Cape participants referred specifically to the kind of clothes and also to the possibility of a polygamous marriage while the Western Cape participants did not make any reference to these aspects of the bereavement ritual.

### 3rd age cohort: 46-65 years old

#### **Image #09: Eastern Cape Residents**



Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #09 as *isifihlo* taking place taking place inside a tent. The pastor is conducting a last service for *umfi* ‘the deceased’ before going to *emdalakeni* ‘the graveyard’ to lay him or her *kwikhaya lakhe lokugqibela* ‘in his/her last home’.

#### **Image #09: Western Cape Residents**



Participants in the 46-65 years old cohort described Image #09 as a funeral taking place.

Discussion: Eastern Cape residents in the 46-65 years old cohort gave a more detailed description of what was actually going on in Image #09 which could suggest that they had a more thorough knowledge of the exact procedures involved in conducting an isiXhosa funeral than their Western Cape counterparts.

### Image #10: Eastern Cape Residents



Eastern Cape participants in the 46-65 years old cohort referred to the clothing worn by the women in Image #10 as *impahla yezila* and used the word *abahlolokazi* to refer to the women. Participants also mentioned that in the olden days clothes that were worn by mourning women were different from the ones in the picture. In the past, they said, mourners would wear clothes of quality, clothes that would not quickly tear or be damaged and that these clothes were known as *iimpalane* ‘traditional mourning dress’. They described the clothing as similar to *imibhaco* but noted that that were specifically worn by women for mourning purposes only.

### Image #10: Western Cape Residents



Western Cape participants in the 46-65 years old cohort referred to the women in Image #10 as *abahlolokazi abazilileyo* ‘widows who are mourning’.

Discussion: Again, the Eastern Cape residents gave a far more detailed description of the Image, referring to cultural terms used in the past such as *iimpalane*. The word *iimpalane* will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

#### 4.4 Analysis of responses to images according to age

Participants in the age group of 18 - 35 years provided detailed descriptions of Images #01 to #08. For Images #01 and #02 they described the clothes worn by the boys in detail and even identified the name of the stage the boys are at using appropriate vocabulary. However, for certain images, whilst giving descriptions these participants left out some important detail. Some of the omitted detail that was connected to the attire worn or valuable items of the rite visible in the background, for example, in the video played for them Image #04 and Image #06. This could be because they lack the appropriate vocabulary for these items.

Participants in the 36 – 45 age group gave advanced descriptions from Image #01 to Image #08 as compared to the first group (18 – 35) of participants. For all images participants identified the stage of the ritual and used appropriate vocabulary in identifying items used which are visible in the pictures and in the video played for them. In describing Image #01 and #02 participants used two different words to refer to the event that these boys are dressed up for. These words were *umtshotsho* ‘Saturday night gathering of boys and girls<sup>20</sup>’ and *umgubho* ‘pre-initiation party’. Participants gave sufficient descriptions of Image #04 (which was a video played for them) and Image #06 as these two images are rich with items that are normally used by amaXhosa in such rites.

Participants in the 46 – 65 age group used a sufficient number of isiXhosa terms in describing various items, stages, and people for Image #01 - #10 presented to them. These participants described everything that I expected them to describe in the images (including the video) and used appropriate vocabulary and even vocabulary that I was not aware of. For example, *iimpalane oophephela* and *iintsiyane*.

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<sup>20</sup> As referred to earlier *umtshotsho* does not specifically refer to a pre-initiation party, but to any Saturday night gathering of young people. *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa Vol.3* (1989:410) has an extensive gloss on *umtshotsho* which includes reference to the kind of dance (*ukuteya*) and to the fact that “the merriment ends early in the morning when the girls disperse and return to their respective homes while the boys remain for a short time to engage in stick-fighting”.

#### 4.5 Definitions of cultural words – participants’ input

In the discussion below I use transcriptions of the actual responses of participants (see Appendix G) to each question asked in the interviews about the circumcision and bereavement rites of amaXhosa.

##### 4.5.1 Eastern Cape residents’ definitions of cultural words

###### General discussion

###### Circumcision language and lexicon

The meaning of the word *ukwaluka* (initiation) is defined in many ways by Eastern Cape participants, but there is generally a core mutual understanding of what *ukwaluka* is amongst the participants who spent most of their lives in this area, irrespective of their age difference. In the 45- 65 years age cohort *ukwaluka* is defined as *Ukwaluka yi-class yokuwelela ebuntwini obupheleleyo bokuba yindoda. Loo class ke igqitha ethontweni ngesiko lokwaluka.* (Circumcision is a class – a stage of learning - that a boy passes through to when he is entering into the level of becoming a man. This stage is signified by going to the initiation school for the initial ritual.) This definition is very similar to the definition of *ukwaluka* given by the participants who are in the profile of ages 18- 35, with the only difference being the choice of words used. The word *isiko* (a ritual) was used by all three age groups of participants appropriately in a common way which helped them to better explain the meaning of the word *ukwaluka* (to be initiated).

The understanding of the word *ikhankatha* (a traditional nurse) and the way in which it is used or defined by participants who spent most of their life in the Eastern Cape is the same. An abbreviation of the word *ikhankatha* to *khanki*, is used by participants who are between the ages of 36- 45. This abbreviation is not farfetched from the original word. All three age groups adequately defined the *ikhankatha* in terms of his position and role.

The word *ithonto* or *isuthu* (special hut built for the initiants) has quite a number of synonyms attached to it. Participants appeared to be happy to use any word that came to mind when referring to the initiation school, including: *ithonto*, *esuthwini*, *entabeni*, *ebhomeni*, *ehlathini*. *Entabeni* and *ehlathini* can be described as metonyms since the definition of a metonym is that it is when “a term that primarily refers to objects of a certain kind is used to refer instead to things that belong to objects of this kind” (Löbner, 2002:49). So *intaba* and *ihlathi* normally just refer to ‘mountain’ and ‘forest’ but in the context of Xhosa male initiation they refer to the ‘initiation school’.

It is also important to note that these terms are often used in the locative: for example, in answering the first question most participants said boys are taken to *entabeni*, *esuthwini*, *ethontweni*, or *ebhomeni* for *ukwaluka*. Nevertheless, all age groups of participants understand and gave appropriate definition of the word *ithonto*.

Participants in profile 18- 35 and participants in the the 36- 45 years age cohort have an idea of what *ingqongqo* is and what is used for. However, from their definitions or description there is uncertainty of what *ingqongqo* really is. Participants in the 3<sup>rd</sup> age cohort, 46- 65, are fully aware of what *ingqongqo* is, what is made of and what it is generally used for.

In all three age cohorts, participants understand use the word *ukuyalwa* as a way of giving words of wisdom to the person who is entering another stage of life. Participants put emphasis on *ukuyalwa* being an act done by those who are already at the stage that the new person is entering and who are not new to this stage themselves.

The definition and application of the word *ifutha* is common to all three profiles of participants, they have a similar understanding of its meaning in terms of what it is and what it is used for. They went to the extent of providing a synonym for the word *ifutha* which is *ingceke*. The synonym which is also mutually understood by participants suggests that *ifutha* or *ingceke* is not something that is rare to find, and most people have been exposed to it on multiple occasions.

Participants in all three age cohorts define and understand *umojiso* as a mere custom not a ritual that is performed for an initiate. From the definitions of *umojiso* given by participants, *umojiso* is seen or perceived as a reward or small party done exclusively for the initiate. There is no significant meaning for this custom except for the fact that when it is performed the initiate is allowed to eat some of the things which he was forbidden to initially. In other words, it simply refers to the smoked meat that *umkhwetha* is allowed to eat after a period of abstaining from certain foods. It is interesting to note that there is an observation of 7 days for *umojiso* but none of the participants made that observation.

There is uncertainty in the meaning of the word *ukungcama* in all three participant age cohorts. However, what the participants are certain of is that *ukungcama* is a ritual performed for the boy on the day that he will be circumcised.

Participants in the 18- 35 age cohort gave a detailed description of what happens on the day of *umngeno*. Two important words come up from this detailed description, one being *umguyo* - the overnight party held by the boys as way of saying farewell to the one who is due for circumcision.

And the other word being *umngcamo* - which was described above by participants as a ritual of slaughtering a goat in the name of the boy who is to be circumcised. The use of these two words in describing *umngeno* suggests that they are key in describing *umngeno*. Participants in the second profile 36- 45 in their description of *umngeno*, also mention *umngcamo* and referring to the dance party speak of *umtshotsho* which bears the same meaning with the one that was used by participants of the first profile *umguyo*. Participants in the second profile use the word *usaluka* to refer to the boy who is due for circumcision. In the third profile of participants of 46- 65 the use of the word *umngcamo* really confirms that all the three groups of participants understand and agree that the important thing that happens on the day of *umngeno* is *umngcamo*.

All three profiles use the word *umphumo* to refer to the coming out ceremony of the initiate. In the first age cohort, the participants mentioned items which they found to be significant when the *umphumo* ceremony is done, those items are, *iragi* (a striped blanket), *iqhiya* (head scarf) *imbola* (ochre) - all items which are used by the initiate. In the second profile participants added another item *ikhukho* (grass mat, also *ukhukho*) which was left out by the participant in the first profile. Participants of the third profile give a detailed explanation of what happens on the day of *umphumo* and also give insight of how items like *ingqongqo* is used and actually used the commonly accepted name, *ikhethsemiya*, for the head scarf used by the initiate.

In all three groups of participants there is a general knowledge of the *Somagwaza* song: when it is sung, how it is sung and where it is sung. The knowledge of the language that is used at initiation school is also common amongst all the profiles of participants they provided a few examples of words to prove their understanding of this language.

*Umrhaji* and *ubulunga* is well known by the participants of all three groups, they understand what these are used for and who is most likely to use them. The word *ukuziba* and *ukusokwa* is used or described by all participants to refer to the same circumstances.

### **Bereavement language and lexicon**

The understanding of *ukubeka ilitye* by both the first group of participants (18- 35) and second group of participants (36- 45) is the same. Both groups understands *ukubeka ilitye* in its literal sense which is putting a stone on the grave of the deceased. The third group of participants also understands the act of *ukubeka ilitye* in a similar way as the two other groups but also goes a step further and explains the figurative meaning behind the act of *ukubeka ilitye* as “*ukwenza*

*undancama*” which means “to make giving up” literally, but figuratively can be translated as “to bring closure”.

The word *izila* for bereavement processes is open to ambiguous interpretations. All three groups of participants understand *izila* differently and they have given their responses to the question accordingly. Some understand *izila* as the particular clothing that is worn by the widow whilst others understand it as the ritual of slaughtering a cow to commemorate the deceased. In the context of bereavement both responses of participants are acceptable, however another participant showed in-depth knowledge of traditional clothing in isiXhosa and provided the exact name (*iimpalana*) used to refer to the clothing worn by a widow during the mourning period. The level of understanding on the question of who gets to mourn is the same in all three groups of participants.

The word *ukuwambula* is not well understood by the first group of participants. *Ukuwambula* is better explained by the participants of the second group and by those of the third group. The reason for this could be that the word *ukuwambula* is slowly phasing out in the isiXhosa bereavement rite vocabulary.

In all three groups of participants the process of *umbuyiso* and *umkhapho* is well understood. Participants mentioned that it just differs on how it is carried out from one family to another. Important to note is that participants of the second group (36- 45) and those of the third group (46- 65) have in-depth knowledge about these two rituals, that is who are they actually performed for and how should they be performed.

In answering the question of whether there are any specific songs sung in the two rituals *umbuyiso* or *umkhapho*, the participants gave response that shows there is uncertainty regarding whether or not there should be singing when these rituals are performed. This uncertainty might be because initially songs were not sung in such rituals but all that was lost in translation and influenced by the introduction of Christianity amongst the amaXhosa people hence participants in group one and two mentioned that church songs are sung. Participants in the third group maintain that there are no songs sung during these rituals because they are older, have been most probably exposed to how these rituals were performed in the olden days by their parents.

Across all three age groups participants understand *umhlolokazi* the same way.

Participants understand *amahlamvu* the same way, as per the context of the study, they understand what they are and what they are used for. The exception was one participant who understood *amahlamvu* as a church service that normally take place during the good Friday.

There is common understanding of *amadlaka* in all three age groups of participants.

The understanding of *ukuhlamba imihlakulo* and *umphanga* is the same in all three age groups. The first group 18 – 35 provides a synonym of *ukuhlamba imihlakulo* and refers to it as “*intlamba-peki*” also acceptable in isiXhosa. The third group age (46 – 65) provides in-depth explanation of *ukuhlamba imihlakulo*. The understanding of *umphanga* is the same in all three age groups of participants. However, their understanding is not the same as the definition of *umphanga* by Soga (1983:131). He explains it as a branch of a tree that was carried by the messenger whilst going to relatives to break the news about death. There has been semantic broadening of this word which can now be used to mean news about death.

There is a common understanding of *umongi* in all three age groups. Third group of participants provides in depth explanation of *umongi* and also acknowledges the fact that it is not in every case whereby a patient fully recovers – sometimes a patient dies, unfortunately, but whether the patient dies or recovers does not change the status of *umongi*. *Umongi* remains as *umongi* regardless of the outcome.

All three groups of participants understand *ukusezwa amanzi* the same way, they even provide synonyms for this custom, referring to it as *umxusho*, or *umtsico*. Again, the third age cohort (46 – 65) provides in depth explanation of *ukusezwa amanzi* and the reason behind the practice of this custom.

#### **4.5.2 Western Cape residents’ definitions of cultural words**

##### **General discussion**

##### **Circumcision language and lexicon usage**

There is a common understanding of the meaning of *ukwaluka* amongst participants who spent most of their life in the Western Cape, Cape Town. These participants vividly understand *ukwaluka* as a ritual. Their understanding of *ukwaluka* is however, somewhat limited as compared to the understanding of participants who spent most of their life in the Eastern Cape, Engcobo and Centane. This can be ascertained by their cultural lexicon as discussed below.

The meaning of *ikhankatha* (traditional nurse) is defined as a care giver of *umkhwetha* (the initiate), which is correct. However, I consider this definition of *ikhankatha* very limited on the basis that it is given by people who are amaXhosa. The definition of *ikhankatha* given by participants of all three age groups, is not a sufficient definition I would expect from a person who is umXhosa. I would have expected participants to say exactly what are the roles of *ikhankatha* at the initiation

school, for example, *ikhankatha* must take care of the initiate in terms of his health and also teach him *isidoda* which is the language that is used at the initiation school and the riddles that *amakrwala* normally use when speaking to each other.

The word *isuthu* or *ithonto*, (special hut built for the initiants) has many synonyms attached to it. Participants of the Western Cape find it tricky to clearly say what exactly it is. All three groups of participants, have the idea of what *ithonto* or *isuthu* is, however they lack the cultural vocabulary of explaining in detail what *ithonto* or *isuthu* is.

Participants in the first two age cohorts (18 – 35 and 36 – 45) had no idea what *ingqongqo* is. One participant in the third age cohort (46 – 65) was able to give a good description of *ingqongqo*, and what is used for, and described it accordingly.

Participants in all three age cohorts had a general understanding of what *ukuyalwa* means. The understanding matched that of participants who had spent most of their life in the Eastern Cape.

In the first two age cohorts (18 – 35 and 36 – 45) participants did not know what *ifutha* was, claiming not have this word in their vocabulary. Participants in the third age cohort did have a general understanding of *ifutha*, but not in the context of its cultural use.

One participant in the first age cohort (18 – 35) did not know what *umojiso* was, confusing it with *ukoja* ‘to braai meat’. Other participants in all three groups partially understand what *umojiso* is. However, they lacked the cultural vocabulary to explain the word in detail.

In all three age cohorts, no-one knew, or even had an idea of, what *umngcamo* might be.

Participants in all three age cohorts did not have sufficient cultural vocabulary to express their understanding of what takes place on the day of *umngeno* although they did have some idea of the day’s significance.

Participants in all three age cohorts understood equally well what transpires on the day of *umphumo*. Interesting to note is that, participants in the first age cohort (18 – 35) and third age cohort (46 – 65) used two words to refer to the initiate in a correct manner: calling the initiate as *umkhwetha* whilst he is still at the initiation school, but once he is home they referred to him as *ikrwala*. It takes a fair amount of cultural knowledge to use the appropriate isiXhosa word to refer to the initiate on the same day. This shows that participants had a clear understanding of how to differentiate between *umkhwetha* and *ikrwala*. Participants in the second age cohort used the term *ubhuti omtsha* to refer to *ikrwala*, this term is also widely used contemporary amaXhosa.

In all three age cohorts participants had a common understanding of the song Somagwaza, in terms of where it is normally sung, and when. Only one female in the first group (18 – 35) said she did not know it. Other participants knew the song but did not know its original lyrics - they knew the modified or popular version of it sung by Stompi Mavi.

Out of all the participants only two females, one in the first age cohort (18 – 35) another one in the one (36 – 45) said they did not know the language that is used by initiates at the initiation school. Other participants provided a few of the words that they are familiar with in the language used by initiates at the initiation school.

Only one male participant in the third age group (46 – 65) understood what *umrhaji* is and what it is used for. All other participants said they did not know what *umrhaji* is. This word was understood better by participants who had spent most of their life in the Eastern Cape.

Participants in the first age cohort (18 – 35) did not know what *ukuziba* means in the context of circumcision. Participants in the other age cohorts did have an understanding of what the word *ukuziba* means.

One male participant in the second age cohort (36 – 45) had an idea of what *ubulunga* is, but lacked the cultural vocabulary to explain it depth. All other participants did not know what *ubulunga* is.

### **Bereavement language and lexicon**

The understanding of *ukubeka ilitye* by both Western and Eastern Cape participants in the 18-35 and 36- 45 years old cohorts is the same. Both groups understands *ukubeka ilitye* in its literal sense which is putting a stone on the grave of the deceased. The third group of participants (46-65 years old) also understands the act of *ukubeka ilitye* in a similar way as the two other groups but also goes a step further and explains the figurative meaning behind the act of *ukubeka ilitye* as “*ukwenza undancama*” which means “to make giving up” literally, but figuratively can be translated as “to bring closure”.

The word *izila* for bereavement processes is open to ambiguous interpretations. All three groups of participants understand *izila* differently and they have given their responses to the question accordingly. Some understand *izila* as the particular clothing that is worn by the widow whilst others understand it as the ritual of slaughtering a cow to commemorate the deceased. In the context of bereavement both responses of participants are acceptable, however another participant showed in-depth knowledge of traditional clothing in isiXhosa and provided the exact name (*iimpalane*)

used to refer to the clothing worn by a widow during the mourning period. The level of understanding on the question of who gets to mourn is the same in all three groups of participants.

The word *ukuwambula* is not well understood by the first group of participants. *Ukuwambula* is better explained by the participants of the second group and by those of the third group. The reason for this could be that the word *ukuwambula* is slowly phasing out in the isiXhosa bereavement rite vocabulary.

In all three groups of participants the process of *umbuyiso* and *umkhapho* is well understood. Participants mentioned that it just differs on how it is carried out from one family to another. Important to note is that participants of the second group (36- 45) and those of the third group (46- 65) have in-depth knowledge about these two rituals, that is who are they actually performed for and how should they be performed.

In answering the question of whether there are any specific songs sung in the two rituals *umbuyiso* or *umkhapho*, the participants gave response that shows there is uncertainty regarding whether or not there should be singing when these rituals are performed. This uncertainty might be because initially songs were not sung in such rituals but all that was lost in translation and influenced by the introduction of Christianity amongst the amaXhosa people hence participants in group one and two mentioned that church songs are sung. Participants in the third group maintain that there are no songs sung during these rituals because they are older, have been most probably exposed to how these rituals were performed in the olden days by their parents.

Across all three age groups participants understand *umhlokokazi* the same way.

Participants understand *amahlamvu* the same way, as per the context of the study, they understand what they are and what they are used for. The exception was one participant who understood *amahlamvu* as a church service that normally take place during the good Friday.

There is common understanding of *amadlaka* in all three age groups of participants.

The understanding of *ukuhlamba imihlakulo* and *umphanga* is the same in all three age groups. The first group 18 – 35 provides a synonym of *ukuhlamba imihlakulo* and refers to it as “*intlamba-peki*” also acceptable in isiXhosa. The third group age (46 – 65) provides in-depth explanation of *ukuhlamba imihlakulo*.

There is a common understanding of *umongi* in all three age groups. Third group of participants provides in depth explanation of *umongi* and also acknowledges the fact that it is not in every case

whereby a patient fully recovers – sometimes a patient dies, unfortunately, but whether the patient dies or recovers does not change the status of *umongi*. *Umongi* remains as *umongi* regardless of the outcome.

All three groups of participants understand *ukusezwa amanzi* the same way, they even provide synonyms for this custom, referring to it as *umxusho*, or *umtsico*. Again, the third age cohort (46 – 65) provides in depth explanation of *ukusezwa amanzi* and the reason behind the practice of this custom.

#### 4.6 Summary of definitions of words

In this section I bring together Eastern Cape and Western Cape participants' definitions of the most important cultural words associated with the initiation and bereavement rituals. Many participants gave the same definitions so this is a summary of all the given definitions. The isiXhosa definitions are followed by a translation in English in parentheses. Code-switching and translanguaging definitions are transcribed exactly as they were used by participants.

Note: Definitions that are factually and culturally incorrect are starred and in italics.

##### 1. **ukwaluka**

- i) *umntwana oyinkwenkwe uwelela kwinqanaba elingentla ebomini* (a boy child goes to a higher stage in life)
- ii) *yingqeqesho yakwaXhosa ehamba nesiko lokutshintsha isimo nesimilo somntwana, ukususela ebukhwenkweni ukuya ebudodeni* (it is Xhosa training relating to the change from boyhood to manhood)
- iii) *yi-class yokuwelela ebuntwini obupheleleyo bokuba yindoda* (it is the class to cross over into the full humanity of being a man)

##### 2. **ikhankatha**

- i) *ngumntu ongubhuti uzohlala nalo mntwana olukileyo apho ebhomeni* (it is a male person who will stay with the initiated child in the initiation hut)
- ii) *ngumfana ohoyene nempilo yabakhwetha* (it is a young man who looks after the health of the initiants)

iii) *ngubhuti* who guides *umkhwetha*, *amfundise nezinye izinto*, *umzekelo ulwimi lasesuthwini* (it is a young man who guides the initiate and teaches him things, for example the language of the initiation school)

iv) *yindodana enyulwa lusapho ukuba ibajongele unyana wabo esuthini* (it is a young man elected by the family to look after their son at initiation school)

### 3. **isuthu/ithonto**

i) *libhuma/libhoma* (it is the circumcision lodge)

ii) *yindlu eyakhelwa abakwethwa* (it is the house built for the initiants)

iii) *yindlu yokugcina abakwethwa eyakhiwa emasimini okanye ehlathini kude kunemizi* (it is a house to keep the initiants which is built in the fields or forest far away from the village)

### 4. **ingqongqo**

i) *yinto ebethwayo ngomphumo wamakhwenkwe* (it is something that is beaten when the boys come out)

ii) *yidrum ebethwa ngoomama xa kungena amakhwenkwe* (it is a drum beaten by the women when the boys are going in)

iii) *lifele lenkomo elidala elibethwayo xa kungena okanye kuphuma amakhwenkwe* (it is the old skin of a cow that is beaten when the boys are going in or coming out)

### 5. **ukuyalwa**

i) *kukulumkiswa nokucetyiswa ngezinto ezinokwenzeka ebomini nangendlela yokuziphatha* (it is to be warned and advised about things that can happen in life and about how to behave oneself)

ii) *kukuxhotyiswa ngamava ngabantu abanawo* (it is to be given the tools of experience from those who have it [experience])

iii) *ziziluleko okanye iingcebiso eziphoswa ngamadoda anamava phezu kwentloko yekrwala* (it is the advice and words of wisdom that grown men speak over the new initiants)

### 6. **ifutha**

i) *yingceke – yilaa nto imhlophe iqatywa ngumkhwetha* (it is that white thing that is smeared [on the body] by the initiate)

ii) *yinto ebumbolarha esetyenziselwa ukuqaba umkhwetha khona ukuze angabonakali lula ukuba ngubani* (it is that ochre-ish thing that is used to smear over the initiate so that he is not easily identified)

#### 7. **umojiso**

i) *kukuxhelwa kwegusha ze umkhwetha atyiswe isiphika* (it is the slaughtering of a sheep and then the initiate is fed from the upper leg)

ii) *umojiso kukuxhelwa xa kuvuyiswana nenkwenkwe ebezilile ukutya okuthile ukufika kwayo esuthwini* (*umojiso* is slaughtering to celebrate the initiate's breaking his fast of certain foods when he arrives at the initiation school)

iii) *kukukhululwa kwenzila yomkhwetha* (it is when the initiate is released from fasting)

#### 8. **ukungcama**

i) *\*kukuchetywa kwenkwenkwe inkqayi* (it is when the boy's head is shaved bald)

ii) *kukutyiswa kwenkwenkwe inyama yebhokhwe ngomhla wokungeniswa kwayo esuthwini* (it is when the boy is fed goat's meat on the day of his entering the initiation school)

#### 9. **usuku lomngeno**

i) *ngosuku lomngeno kufika abafana \*(amakhwenkwe omtshotsho la betshotsha ubusuku bonke) ekhayeni lwenkwenkwe behamba nootata babo baye ebuhlanti bafike benze zonke iimfanelo zenkwenkwe ezifana nokucheba nokungcama ze emva koko ithathwe inkwenkwe isiwe esuthwini* (on the day of umngeno young men (the boys who had been dancing the whole night) arrive at the home of the boy and go with their fathers to the kraal and do everything necessary for the boy like having the hair cut and being fed goat's meat and then the boy is taken to the initiation school)

ii) *ngosuku lomngeno kungeniswa inkwenkwe ebudodeni ngokuthi yenzelwe isiko lobudoda* (the day of umngeno is when the boy is entered into manhood by having a manhood ritual performed for him)

#### 10. **usuku lomphumo**

i) *ngemini yomphumo kugoduswa umkhwetha* (on the day of *umphumo* the initiate is taken home)

ii) *le mini kulandwa ngayo inkwenkwe esuthwini, idluliswe emlanjeni ihlanjwe itsho iphume ingumntu omtsha ogqibeleleyo* (on this day the boy is fetched from the initiation school and taken to the river for a bath where he will emerge as a completely new person)

#### 11. **umrhaji**

i) *yingutyana imdakana ibufana nexakatho ufike ixakathwe ngamakhwenkwe ahamba ngousuku ehamba imiguyo* (it is a small, slightly dirty blanket that you would usually find draped around boys' shoulders when they attend events at night)

ii) *yingubo endala emdakana ekholise ukombathwa ngamakhwenkwe xa esolusa okanye xa esiya emitshotshweni kubanda* (it is an old, dirty blanket that is usually used by boys to cover themselves with when they are going to parties when it is cold)

#### 12. **ukuziba**

i) *kukuzisa esuthwini ngaphandle yemvume yabazali* (it is when one goes to the initiation school without parental consent)

ii) *kukwenza into ungakhange uxelele bantu* (it is to do something without telling people)

#### 13. **ubulunga**

i) *yi-necklace yesiNtu eyenziwe nguboya bomsila wenkomo, enxitywe entanyeni* (it is a traditional African necklace made from the hairs of a cow's tail, worn on the neck )

ii) *yintambo eyenziwa ngomsila wenkomo ekhethekileyo ekuxhwithwa uyo ngabantu besiduko esinye xa besukube besenza isiko elidinga ubulunga* (it is a rope made from a selected cow's tail that everyone from the same family [clan] plucks hair from for all ceremonies that require this rope)

#### 14. **ukusokwa**

i) *zizinto ikrwala eliziphiwayo ngomhla womgidi walo xa libuya ebhomeni seiyindoda* (it is the gifts that the initiant is given on the day of his party when he returns from the initiation hut as a man)

#### 15. **ukubeka ilitye**

i) *kukugalela umhlaba engcwabeni ukuba ubungekho esingcwabeni.* (it is to throw soil on the grave if you were not at the burial)

ii) *ukuba awukwazanga ukuya kuyongcwaba ngomhla wongcwabo xa unethuba lokugoduka usiwe emadlakeni ngumntu akubonise ingcwaba. Uza kufika uthethe phezu kwedlaka elo uchole ilitye ubeke phezu kwalo usenza umfuziselo wokugalela umhlaba* (If you were not able to go to the burial on the day, when you have a chance to go home you are taken to the graveyard by someone and s/he shows you the grave. You will speak above the grave and pick up a stone and put it on it as if you are throwing in soil)

iii) *ngundancama wokuvalalisa owenziwa lusapho lomfi* (it is the final closure [accepting the death] done by the family of the deceased)

iv) *yindlela esetyenziswa ngabantu abaphilayo xa bebulisa, besenza undlela-ntle kulowo uhambileyo* (it is the way the living say goodbye to the one who has passed on)

v) *ilitye libekwa ngabantu abakhoyo esifihlweni kanti nabo bebengakhange bafike ukuza kuzongcwaba bayalibeka ilitye xa bethe bafika noba kunini* (a stone is laid by those who are at the funeral but also by those who were not there – they lay a stone whenever they have the opportunity)

## 16. izila

i) *yimpahla eye inxitywe xa kusweleke umntu* (it is the clothes worn on the death of a person)

ii) *yinkomo exhelelwa indoda yakusweleka* (it is a cow slaughtered for a man who has died)

iii) *kukunika intlonipho kulowo uswelekileyo* (it is to give respect to the deceased)

iv) *yimpahla emnyama eye inxitywe ngumntu ongumama emva kokuba eswelekelwe yindoda yakhe* (it is the black clothes worn by a woman when her husband has passed away)

## 17. ukuzila

i) \* abantu abavame ukuzila ngoomama – *bazila babonakale ke bona ukuba bazilile kuba banxiba esaa sinxibo simnyama sonke* (the people who mourn the most are women – their mourning is visible because they wear completely black clothing)

ii) *umntu ozilayo ngumntu obhujelwe ngumfazi okanye yindoda yakhe, akathetheli phezulu, akahambi ebutha, akahambi matheko nazindywala nabantwana akababethi akabangxolisi* (a person who mourns is someone who has lost his wife or husband, s/he does not visit people, does not attend ceremonies, does not go to shebeens nor shout at children)

## 18. ukuwambula

- i) *kukukhululwa kwempahla yezila emva kwexesha elithile* (it is the taking off mourning clothes after a certain period of time )
- ii) \*kukutyhilwa kwelitye lomfi (it is the unveiling of the deceased person's stone)

## 19. usuku lombuyiso

- i) *umbuyiso wenziwa xa sekudala umntu eswelekile, kuxhelwe inkomo, kusilwe notywala kuthiwe uyabuyiswa* (umbuyiso [return]is performed when a person has been dead for a while, a cow is slaughtered and beer is brewed)
- ii) \*sisithethe sokubuyisa – kukuxhelwa kwenkomo nebhokwe zixhelelwa umntu ongutata, intloko yekhaya ebithe yasweleka (it is a custom of returning [the deceased] – it is the slaughtering of a cow and a goat that are slaughtered for a man, the head of the household who had died)

## 20. usuku lomkhapho

- i) *yimini kungcwatywa ngayo. Kuye kuxhelwe inkomo ezokutyiwa ngabantu abaze emngcwabeni. Akusilwa tywala* ( it is the day of the burial. A cow is slaughtered for the people who have come for the funeral. No beer is brewed.)
- ii) *kuxhelwe inkomo, inyama yomkhapho ityiwa iphele kwangaloo mini. Umntu okhatshwayo ngumntu ongutata oswelekileyo* (a cow is slaughtered, the meat of the umkhapho [accompanying] must be finished on that day. A person who is being accompanied is a deceased man)

## 21. umhlolokazi

- i) *ngumntu ongumama oswelekelwe ngumyeni wakhe* (it is a woman whose husband has died) ii) \*ngumfazi ongenandoda okanye ongenamyeni (it is a woman who does not have a man or husband)

## 22. amahlamvu

- i) *luhlobo oluthile lomthi oluye lusetyenziselwe xa kusenziwa isilawu sekhaya* (it is a kind of wood used for a death at the home)
- ii) *yinqubo yokukhonza eyenziwa ecaweni ngeCawa ephambi kokuba yiCawa yePasika* (it is a service that is normally conducted at church prior to Easter Sunday)
- iii) *ngamagqabi omthi osetyenziswa lusapho for izinto zalo zamasiko* (they are leaves used by a family for its rituals)

### 23. amadlaka

i) *ngumhlaba wokungcwaba abantu abatshabileyo* (it is land specifically allocated for the burial of the dead) ii) *ngamangcwaba* (they are graves)

### 24. ukuhlamba imihlakulo

i) *yintlamba-peki* (it is the washing of the spades); *ngumsebenzi wotywala owenziwa emva kweveki umntu eswelekile* (it is a ritual of brewing alcohol a week after the person has died)

### 25. umphanga

i) *kukufika kweendaba ezimbi ezixela umntu oswelekileyo* (it is the arrival of news about death) ii) *ziindaba ezingaqhelekana, ziindaba zokufa* (it is unusual news, it is news of death)

### 26. umongi

i) *ngumntu okhathalela umntu ogulayo ongakwazi kuzenzela nto* (it is someone who looks after a sick person who cannot do anything for him/herself)

### 27. ukusezwa amanzi

i) *ngumxusho lowo owenzelwa uxolisa nokonwabisa usapho emva komngcwabo* (it is a dance that is performed to bring peace and entertainment to the family after a funeral)

ii) *lisiko lokuxolisa i-family nokuyinika ithemba lokuba ukufa kudlule kuyo mayonwabe ixole ngalo mntu sele imngcwabile ukuba akazuphinda abuye* (it is a ritual to bring peace to the family and to give them hope that death has passed on and that they should be at peace about the person who they have buried and [the fact that] s/he will not return)

iii) *sisithethe sokunyevulela nokubetha ukufa khona ukuze kungaphindi kulindwendwendwele olo sapho kwakamsinya. Kwamanye amakhaya kude kuxukuxwe ngobisi kuthufwe phantsi. Ngale ndlela kugxothwa ukufa oko* (being made to drink water is a custom of chasing away death so that it does not visit the family of the deceased again. In some families they even wash their mouth with milk and spit on the ground. In this manner they are chasing death away)

## 4.7 Songs

There are different songs that are sung in each ritual. However, what I found common in lyrics of these songs is that, singers of these songs carefully select words when singing. Different songs appeal differently to the person that the ritual is performed for. For example, participants mentioned

that when a boy is taken to initiation school, one of the songs that is sung has the lyrics that encourage bravery and ensures the boy that he is following the right path. The lyrics of the song are as follows:

*Thula mntwana womntwana wam, ubudoda bunzima (X2)*  
*Thula mntwana womntwana wam, abuyelwa sibhedlele.*  
 Hush child of my child, manhood is difficult  
 Hush child of my child, you do not have to go to the hospital for it.

This song is sung whilst the boy is taken to the initiation school not to the hospital even though medical circumcision is also an option now. The lyrics of this songs motivate the boy to follow in the same footsteps of the young men who are singing for him and not consider taking the medical circumcision option.

Songs are also now sung during the bereavement ritual. These songs are Christian songs with consoling lyrics to comfort the deceased family:

*Ngelo xa lokushiywa ngabo sibathandayo*  
*Sokhala kuwe Nkosi*  
*Nyana kaThixo sive.*  
*Lakusishiya ithemba kugqithe nezihlobo*  
*Sokhala kuwe Nkosi*  
*Nyana kaThixo sive.*  
 At that time of being left by those we love  
 We will cry out to you Lord  
 Son of God hear us.  
 When hope and relatives leave us  
 We will cry out to you Lord  
 Son of God hear us.

#### 4.8 Data analysis

In this concluding section I discuss words and phrases traditionally relating to circumcision and bereavement rituals which are losing currency; the issue of lexical variability (e.g. the fact that there are no fewer than five words to refer to the seclusion lodge); new words (i.e. words not in the dictionary) used by participants as well as words used by participants that are in the dictionary but were not known by me (as a representative of a young, male umXhosa who has been steeped in the culture from an early age). I also discuss the issue of semantic broadening and narrowing of terms.

#### 4.8.1 Words and phrases losing currency

In this section I discuss words and phrases that some participants had no knowledge of in order to draw attention to the fact that some words in the isiXhosa cultural lexicon could be under threat – i.e. in the future these words might be understood by fewer and fewer people until eventually they may lose all currency.

**Umrhaji** - is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol. 3, Q-Z*, (1989:114) as ‘an old, worn-out, threadbare blanket’. Participants who recognized the word understood it in the same way as defined by the dictionary. Participants of the Eastern Cape see *umrhaji* as a blanket that still has some sort of value. They understand it as an old small blanket that is used by anyone to cover themselves whilst they are still up (not to take it to bed with them). My understanding of *umrhaji* is the same as the dictionary definition as expanded by participants. Out of twelve participants in this study, five participants (all in the Western Cape, in all age groups) did not know what *umrhaji* is.

**Ukuwambula** – I heard this word frequently used in relation to the custom that is done after the period of mourning in my village. However, this word does not feature in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*. Participants used this word in differed ways, some used it in relation to my understanding of it, some have used it with a totally different (see participants’ responses) meaning. Some participants in both groups (Eastern Cape and Western Cape) described *ukuwambula* as the tombstone unveiling. One participant of the Western Cape described *ukuwambula* as discovery of hidden things. One out of six participants of the Eastern Cape (age 18 – 35) did not know what *ukuwambula* is. Two out of six Western Cape participants (age 18 – 35) did not know what *ukuwambula* means.

**Ukungcama** – is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol. 2, K-P*, (2003:518) as ‘a ritual where a novice is made to eat *intsonyama* in some cases and the right foreleg of the ritual animal in others, to mark the initiation into a new stage of life, eg at the *imbeleko* ceremony, *ulwaluko* ceremony, *intonjane* ceremony, *ukudlisa amasi* ceremony, and initiation into the society of diviners at the ceremony of *ukugoduswa*.’ Participants in the Eastern Cape who have used this word in the same light as the above definition even though they did not use exactly the same description. However, all six participants of the Western Cape (all age groups) did not understand this word at all, some of them even said it was their first time hearing it (see participants’ responses).

**Ingqongqo** - is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol. 2, K-P*, (2003:568) as ‘a dried bull’s hide used as a drum when boys go to the initiation school, when *abakhwetha* dance and when they return from the initiation school; today a piece of corrugated iron is commonly used.’ Participants of the Eastern Cape who explained what *ingqongqo* is, explained it in the same way as *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*, however, they did not mention that *ingqongqo* is also beaten when they boys go to the initiation school, only saying that it was beaten on their return. Out of twelve participants in this study only seven knew or had an idea at all of what *ingqongqo* is. Six of them are participants of the Eastern Cape (in all age groups) and one Western Cape participant (46-65) understood very well what *ingqongqo* is. I am not suggesting that the word is dying out, but that the research shows that its precise meaning is becoming blurred is undergoing semantic narrowing. For example nowadays even a sheet of zinc (for a roof) or old tank can be used as *ingqongqo* and referred to as such by isiXhosa-speakers.

#### 4.8.2 Lexical variability

In this section I discuss common words used by all participants in their descriptions and highlight the synonyms or words in the same semantic fields that could confuse speakers not fully conversant with the isiXhosa cultural lexicon relating to circumcision and bereavement rites and rituals.

##### 1. The INITIANT

The initiant is variously referred to in different stages as:

**Usaluka** - no dictionary has the word *usaluka* – speakers have nominalized the verb root *ukwaluka* with the noun class 1a prefix *u-*. Ntshingana (2019:17) glosses *usaluka* as “initiation-school mate” and gives the reason “because *saluka kunye* (we were both initiated at the same time)” (Ibid.)

The word *usaluka* can be heard in the song Ndibon’ *usaluka* bye bye” [see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0adS26GBIM>]

**Umkhwetha** – is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol. 2, K-P*, (2003:129) as ‘a boy undergoing the rite of circumcision who during that period lives apart from the community; one who undergoes the process of initiation into divinership under a fully-fledged diviner’. In Kropf (1915:209) the gloss for *umkhwetha* is ‘a lad who is undergoing the rite of circumcision with other lads; he is considered unclean and lives for the time apart from the community’.

**Ikrwala** is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.2, K-P*, (2003:164) as a ‘young man who has just emerged from the initiation school; this phase lasts for a month or a little longer; traditionally the krwala’s attire consists of a white blanket with a black stripe (see *utoliwe*); this blanket is dyed a brick-red with ochre; his head is covered with a black headcloth and his body and face are smeared brick red with ochre; wherever he goes he carries a long stick (*umnqayi*) and he must comport himself with dignity; the modern educated youth goes through a similar process except that instead of *utoliwe* he wears khaki trousers and a shirt which become stained with the ochre from his body’ [the isiXhosa gloss is given as “*umbokrweni, indodana esafikayo ebudodeni, esandul’ ukwaluka; ibanga lobukrwala lithabatha isithuba esimalunga nenyanga nangaphezulu; ngokwesiXhosa ikrwala lambatha utoliwe ufakwe emanzini embola ukuba abe bomvu, entloko lijikele iqhiya emnyama; emzimbeni nasebusweni liqaba imbola; lihamba lisoloko liphethe umnqayi; kufuneka lihambe ngentelekelelo; abasesikolweni banxiba ikaki, ibhulukhwe nehempe endaweni katoliwe; ezinye izinto ziyafana*).

Kropf (1915:376] glosses *ikrwala* [spelling in dictionary: *irwala*] as ‘fruit which is nearly ripe, figuratively: one who has newly arrived home after circumcision’ and McLaren (1936:146) has ‘unripe fruit; a youth entering on manhood’.

**Ubhuti omtsha** – This phrase does not appear in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* as a single lexical unit. Participants used it to refer to the initiate, as he is regarded as a new person. *Ubhuti* means brother, younger siblings of the initiate are required to refer to the initiate as *bhuti* when he comes back from the initiation school as respect is of utmost importance in the isiXhosa culture. When older people refer to him however, it could be *bhuti omtsha* ‘new brother’ or *bhut’olikrwala* ‘brother who is an initiate’. These names show some sort of respect to the initiate. Again, the phrase *bhut’olikrwala* does not occur in *The Great Dictionary of isiXhosa* but these are words that are commonly used by amaXhosa without any misunderstandings.

## 2. PARTIES and FESTIVITIES

Initiation parties are variously referred to as:

**Umgubho** - in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.1, A-J*: (2006:653) *umgubho* is glossed as an ‘all night dance which is traditional at the beginning of the initiation rites into manhood.’

Participants used this word synonymously with *umguyo* which is glossed in the same dictionary as ‘men’s war dance and festivities preceding initiation into manhood, circumcision’ (Ibid.:670) .

The use and understanding of these words by participants of the Eastern Cape is the same with definition given by *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*. Western Cape participants in all age groups did not use the word *umgubho* to refer to any ceremony that relates to male traditional circumcision.

**Umtshotsho** – is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.3, Q-Z* (1989:410) in three ways. Firstly, as a ‘chant in a low, guttural voice, a kind of coarse, rough bass as boys traditionally do at their night parties (*imitshotsho*).’ Secondly, ‘to perform the dance and utter the sounds described under *umtshotsho*; have a youths’ night party.’ Thirdly, ‘talk nonsense, tripe; a term of contempt that annoys and is likely to start a fight.’

Although the first word, *umgubho*, is the most applicable to the initiation ceremony, the second one, *umtshotsho* is the most applicable to this study, as it is the same as the one that is given by Eastern Cape participants. Western Cape participants did not use this word to refer to any ceremony or party at any point in this study. The isiXhosa gloss is given as ‘*okwamakhwenkwe: ukuxhentsa evuma ngelizwi elirhwexayo esombelelwa ziintombi zawo; ukuba neendibano zomtshotsho; kgl umtshotsho*’ (Ibid.)

### 3. INITIATION SCHOOL

Initiation school is variously referred to as:

**Isuthu** - this word is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.3, Q-Z* (1989:236) in four ways. Firstly, as ‘boys’ circumcision lodge, traditionally constructed of saplings, laths and grass’ with synonyms: *ithonto*, *ibhuma* and *ibhoma*.

Secondly, it is glossed as ‘site of the circumcision lodge, traditionally at some distance from, and out of sight of, habitations’ (Ibid.)

Thirdly, as loc *esuthwini*: ‘the custom of circumcision with all its rites, seclusion and instruction.’ (Ibid.)

Fourthly, as a ‘group of initiates who have undergone circumcision and are living together in the lodge.’

The manner in which most participants have used the word *esuthwini* is the same as the definition from *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*.

Participants also used:

**Ithonto [locative: Ethontweni]** – is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.3, Q-Z* (1989:313) as ‘the seclusion lodge in which circumcised youths live during the period of the initiation rites of manhood’ and ‘the place where the circumcision initiates live during the period of their seclusion, ie the lodge and the surrounding yard, often enclosed by a fence of branches’.

**Ibhoma [locative: Ebhomeni]** - is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.1, A-J* (2006:177) in two ways. Firstly, as ‘orchard’ and

Secondly, as ‘circumcision lodge’.

The second definition of *ebhomeni* is the one that this study refers to, and participants who have used this word in the study have used it as per *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* definition.

**Intaba [locative: Entabeni]** - is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.2, K-P*

(2003:744) as a mountain, the locative suffix *E-* and locative suffix *-eni* makes it a preposition.

Participants who have used this word used it to refer to the initiation school. The reason speakers of isiXhosa might choose this word is because initiation schools traditionally (some still are) were built as far as possible from homes, in open fields and in mountain where women were most likely not to come any closer. The isiXhosa gloss is given as ‘*indawo ephakamileyo, ethi ibe neendawo ezinyukayo kakhulu, nezinemiqhokro yamawa kwanomphakamo ongaphezu kowenduli*’ (Ibid.)

**Ihlathi [Locative: Ehlathini]** - *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.1, A-J* (2006:753) glosses *ihlathi* in three different ways. Firstly, as ‘forest, wood’.

Secondly, as ‘a hiding place, refuge, stronghold (in time of war women and children sought refuge in forests)’.

Thirdly, as ‘God or person who is one’s protector or refuge or behind whom one hides’ (Ibid.)

The first and second definition of *ehlathini* suit the context of this study well. Participants who have used *ehlathini* as a synonym of *esuthwini* have used this word with the understanding of both how the forest appears, where it is located and what it should look like in terms of an initiation school. The isiXhosa gloss of this words provides a much clearer picture for the reader “*indawo enemithi emikhulu nemincinci eshinyeneyo: nayiphi na indawo onokuzimela kuyo ukhuseleke:*” (a forest that is full of short and long trees: any other place that you can hide in and be safe). Initiates must not be in a place where they can be easily seen by anyone.

**Umkhwetha/Abakhwetha [Locative: Ebakhwetheni]** – Participants used this word in its locative form to refer to the initiation school, but this use of the word is not referred to in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*, where it is only used in its uninflected form to refer to ‘a boy undergoing the rite of circumcision’ (2003:129).

#### 4. CONSOLATION RITUAL AFTER BEREAVEMENT

**Ukusezwa amanzi** (literally: being made to drink water; figuratively: to be consoled) is variously referred to as:

**Umtsico** – This word does not appear in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*. It translates to ‘spitting’. Participants of Eastern Cape who have used it said it is a custom that is done to frown or spit on death as death is something that is never welcomed in any family. An Eastern Cape participant in the 46-65 age group described it as what members of the family after death would do: they would wash their mouth with milk and spit on the ground.

**Umxusho** – the verb from which this noun is derived, *ukuxusha* is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.3, Q-Z* (1989:611) in four ways. Firstly, as ‘trample on, e.g. cattle or horses on wheat or sorghum when used for threshing, or trample flat or bare, eg animals or people walking over the same place time and again’.

Secondly, as ‘to go into, discuss, thrash out (a matter) thoroughly’.

Thirdly, as ‘ruminate, digest, contemplate’.

Fourthly, as ‘discipline (a person) by admonition when necessary; train him for his role in life.’

The first definition of this word I believe it is what the participants were referring to, figuratively trampling on death.

#### 4.8.3 New words and words not known to me

In their descriptions of the images and in their interviews the participants sometimes used words that did not appear in any dictionary or, if I did find them in a dictionary, were completely new to me. I deemed it important to include these latter words (in the dictionary but not previously known to me) in this section as I believe I am a typical representative of culturally aware young amaXhosa and therefore the fact that I do not know and have never heard the word would suggest that possibly

many other young people also would also not know it. I am not using the term *neologism* to refer to these words because a neologism is defined as a ‘lexical innovation’ (O’Grady et al., 1996:722) and I cannot be sure that these words are innovations or are words that have been around for some time but have just never been codified by lexicographers for reasons relating to dialect or politics or both. The dialect chosen to be the standard for isiXhosa could have played a role because words contained in “non-standard” dialect might have been deliberately omitted by the lexicographers of the day (see Mathiesen, 2000).

**Amanqasha** – this word does not occur in any dictionary of isiXhosa but there is a word *inqashela* (Class 5/6) which would appear to be related as it is glossed as ‘anklet, ornament worn around the ankles by boys, made of leather, beads, brass bells, empty pupal cases, etc.’ (see *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.2 K-P*, 2003:710). There were a few Western Cape participants who used this word to refer to the beads worn by women in Image #04.

**Amatshaka-tshaka** – *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* does not have this word although there is an entry for **intshaka** which is cross-referenced to = *intshatshoba* which is glossed as ‘tassel, male inflorescence of a maize plant’ (see *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol3 Q-Z*, 1989:382).

**Amasay’bhokhwe** – There is no entry for this word in *The Great Dictionary of isiXhosa*. However, this word is a word that I used to (and still do) hear people in Engcobo (and in other towns, e.g. Dutywa, Tsomo, Centane and Gcuwa) using when referring to the animal skin that boys wear around their knees or just below their knees when dancing. This word should be included in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* as it is an old word that was not recorded but still used, it has not lost its meaning and is understood by people.

**Ikhetshemiya** – This word does not occur in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*. Participants have commonly used it to refer to the black head scarves with white stripes worn by initiants. *Ikhetshemiya* is also worn by the bride, or woman when mourning<sup>21</sup>. It is a head scarf that marks a new stage of life that one enters, a stage that requires a lot of obedience and endurance. This word should be included in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* as this word is not a new word and it is understood by amaXhosa.

**Iimpalane** – is a word that was not known to me before conducting this research study. It is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.2, K-P* (2003:378) in two ways.

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<sup>21</sup> See references to this use of the word on the internet, e.g. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/dress-of-makoti-or-newly-married-xhosa-woman-unknown/FAF7yce0VP7wRA?hl=en>

Firstly, as an ‘oxhide skirt that has not been smeared with fat and dipped in yellow ochre, worn by a widow when mourning for her dead husband’

Secondly, as ‘new garment made from ox hide, with or without fat and clay, which a widow receives as a garment of honour after the death of her husband, when the old garment has to be cast away.’

The use of this word by participants of the Eastern Cape in the third age cohort (46 – 65) is in the same context as these two definition given by *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*.

**Iintsiyane** – This word does not occur in any dictionary of isiXhosa. I had also never heard of it before conducting this research. Eastern Cape participants between the ages of 46 – 65 used the word for beads worn by women. The fact that this word was only used by elderly participants would suggest that it is not a new word that has been recently coined.

**Imithika** – this word is glossed as ‘thongs worn around the waist by diviners’ (see *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa*, 1989:298) but participants who used this word meant it to refer to animal skins worn by initiants. I was not aware of this word at all – it had never featured in any of my conversations nor had I heard my parents mention it.

**Intlamba-peki** – although this word (referring to the ‘washing of the spades’ ritual) does not appear in any dictionary of isiXhosa but it is clear how this neologism came about. The first part of the word *intlamba* has been derived from the verb *ukuhlamba* ‘to wash’ and nominalized using the Class 9 prefix *in-* with the consonant sound change effected by the nasalization of /hl/ to the voiceless ejective alveolar-lateral affricate: /ntl/. The second part of this compound noun is taken from the borrowed word for ‘spade/pick’ being *ipeki* (see *Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa, Vol.2, K-P*, 2003:963).

**Isabhabha** – this word, referring to a ‘metal horn’ does not occur in any dictionary, nor can its etymology be linked to any existing words as the verb *ukubhabha* means ‘to fly’ which appears not to have any link to a horn. This word does occur on Facebook posts on Xhosa culture<sup>22</sup> so it clearly has currency with contemporary speakers of isiXhosa.

**Oophephela** - There is no dictionary entry for this word and I had also never heard of it before. Participants of Eastern Cape used it when referring to the traditional head scarf worn by the women in one of the pictures that I presented to them to elicit responses. However, I discovered that it is

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<sup>22</sup> See for example: <https://m.facebook.com/XhosaCulture.co.za/photos/wwwxhosaculturecoza-umgubho-wamakhwenkwe-amadala-oophopho-kwilali-yaseqebe-engco/1176499245753000/>

not a foreign word nor a neologism as it is known by other people as well (not participants of the study) in the Eastern Cape, Engcobo.

#### 4.8.4 Semantic broadening

Semantic broadening is what happens when a word takes on new meanings over time. It is “the process in which the meaning of a word becomes more general or more inclusive than its historically earlier form” (O’Grady et al., 1996:344).

The data collected in this research project reveals that semantic broadening is evident in words used to describe phenomenon and objects in the ritual life of amaXhosa.

**Imithika** – As has already been discussed, *imithika* used to (and might still with some speakers) refer to strips of leather worn around the waist by diviners. However participants used it to refer to boys before going to the initiation school to make them stand out from other boys. This is a case of a word taking on added meanings.

**Ehlathini/Ebakhwetheni/Entabeni** – all of these words are locative forms of the common nouns *ihlathi* ‘forest’, *abakhwetha* ‘initiants’, *intaba* ‘mountain’ but in their locative forms they have come to take on an added meaning being ‘at the circumcision school’. As previously discussed they are also used metonymously in that the initiation school does take place where initiants, forests and mountains are found.

**Ukuziba** - is glossed in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.3, Q-Z:657* as ‘to slip, sneak, steal away from company; seclude oneself to do something in private, eg to concentrate on something, perform some task, escape embarrassment.’ Participants of the Eastern Cape who used this word used it correctly in the context of a boy who went to the initiation school without consulting anyone. In this way the word has broadened its meaning to include reference to a behaviour in the context of a specific ritual that does not have to be specifically referred to for people to understand what is being meant.

#### 4.8.5 Semantic narrowing

Semantic narrowing “is the process in which the meaning of a word becomes less general or less inclusive than its historically earlier meaning” (O’Grady et al., 1996:344). One word in particular can be identified as clearly having undergone semantic narrowing:

**Isikhakha** - in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa Vol.2, K-P: 28* *isikhakha* is glossed as ‘traditional ox-hide skirt of amaXhosa women, now seldom worn’. In Kropf (1915:177) it is glossed as ‘a short skirt made of skin; a petticoat’. Participants used it to refer to the traditional dress worn by the women in the pictures presented to them. However, the *isikhakha* worn by the women in the picture is made of hard cloth not ox-hide as stated by *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa*.

**Ikhankatha** – Western Cape participants only had a very narrow understanding of this word which they said was used to refer to the umkhwetha’s caregiver. As I argue previously the role of the ikhanatha is much more nuanced and includes his instructive responsibility.

#### 4.9 Table of terms used by participants

Below is a table of words I expected the participants of this study to use. On this table I mark with a tick all the words that ALL participants used at least once and remembered. I leave those that did not feature in any of the narratives.

**Table 3 Terms participants used in discussing circumcision and bereavement rites (if a term was used it is marked with a tick)**

IsiXhosa terms used in circumcision rites	IsiXhosa songs sung in circumcision rites	IsiXhosa terms used in bereavement rites	IsiXhosa songs sung in bereavement rites <sup>23</sup>
<i>Ikhankatha</i> ✓	<i>Somagwaza</i> ✓	<i>Ukubeka ilitye</i> ✓	<i>Sobonana emathuneni</i>
<i>Umdlanga</i> ✓	<i>Ubudoda bunzima</i>	<i>Izila</i> ✓	
<i>Ukukho</i> ✓		<i>Ukuwambula</i> ✓	
<i>Ingcawe</i> ✓		<i>Ukukhulula izila</i> ✓	
<i>Umosiso/umojiso</i> ✓		<i>Umkhapho</i> ✓	
<i>Ithonto</i> ✓		<i>Umbuyiso</i> ✓	
<i>Ingcibi</i>		<i>Umhlolo</i>	
<i>Ubuhlanti</i> ✓		<i>Umhlokokazi</i> ✓	
<i>Ukungcama</i> ✓		<i>Iminyanya</i>	
<i>Isilimela</i>		<i>Amahlamvu</i> ✓	
<i>Ukusokwa</i> ✓		<i>Amahlwempu</i>	
<i>Amabutho</i>		<i>Isidumbu</i>	
<i>Umgidi</i> ✓		<i>Ookhokho</i>	
<i>Esuthwini</i> ✓		<i>Emadlakeni</i> ✓	
<i>Ifutha</i> ✓		<i>Ukhlamba imihlakulo</i> ✓	
<i>Usosuthu</i> ✓		<i>Ukubhubha/ukusweleka/ukutshaba</i>	
<i>Ingqongqo</i> ✓		<i>Ukusezwa amanzi</i> ✓	
<i>Izibazana</i> ✓		<i>Ubulunga</i> ✓	
<i>Umnqayi</i> ✓		<i>Umongi</i> ✓	
<i>Umkhwetha</i> ✓		<i>Umphanga</i> ✓	

<sup>23</sup> Here I only include traditional Xhosa songs, not Christian songs and hymns.

<i>Inqalatha</i>		<i>Akuhlanga lungehlanga</i>	
<i>Ukuziba</i> ✓		<i>Ikhaya lakho lokugqibela</i>	
<i>Ikrwala</i> ✓		<i>Uze usibulisele apho uya khona</i>	
<b><i>Ndiyindoda!</i></b>		<i>Ilfu elimnyama</i>	
<i>Ukukhonya</i> ✓			
<i>Umtshiso bhuma</i>			
<i>Utywala beenntonga</i>			
<i>Ukukhupha amakhwenkwe</i>			
<i>Ibhotile yokuhlamba inkwenkwe</i>			
<i>Iimfele</i> ✓			
<i>amasay'bhokhwe</i> ✓			

#### 4.10 Conclusion

The data collected during this research has brought to light the following key issues:

- There is a clear distinction between Eastern and Western Cape participants' ability to discuss the rites and rituals associated with boys' circumcision and bereavement rituals with a culturally specific lexicon. Eastern Cape participants provide far more detail and are able to name specific items of clothing and objects used in the rituals while Western Cape participants often give very quick, superficial descriptions.
- A number of words used by participants to describe these two rites of passage do not occur in any dictionary. This would suggest that further lexicographical work needs to be done in order to ensure that dictionaries (including online translation tools) are updated accordingly.
- A number of words used by elderly Eastern Cape residents were not known to me. Some of these words were also not known by the first group of participants (18 – 35). Some participants in the second group (36 – 45) had an idea of what these words meant, but could not provide as much semantic detail as the third group of participants (46 – 65) did. Elderly participants had in-depth knowledge about these two rituals including the appropriate vocabulary with which to explain these rituals. This would suggest that other young amaXhosa might also not know these words suggesting either that they are losing currency and in the future the isiXhosa cultural lexicon might undergo vocabulary attrition.
- There is great variability in the way in which participants refer to the locale of the circumcision rite (specifically the seclusion lodge). These lexical items (*entabeni, esuthwini, ebakhwetheni, ehlathini, ethontweni, ebhomeni*) all refer to the same place but further research is needed to establish whether there are any subtle differences in meaning.
- There is agreement in both groups of participants that there no traditional songs that are sung in the bereavement rite. Songs that participants often hear or use in the bereavement rite are common songs of Christianity. These songs are normally songs that are sung in the

church that is in charge during the bereavement rite. Which is, in most cases the church that the deceased was a congregant of, or a church chosen by the family. Also, in the different historic records that I have consulted for this study I have not come across any record that make references to traditional bereavement songs at any stage. This would suggest that in the olden days there was no singing during the bereavement rite and maybe a funeral was conducted in a different way to how it is now practised. As other aforementioned scholarly work like those of Solomon (1986) and Soga (1983) have said that during the bereaved period noise such as yelling or shouting was forbidden, death was something which was highly respected. Life was changing instantly for the family of the deceased; people were required to speak with a soft voice. This could explain why I could not find any particular song that could be linked to traditional bereavement of amaXhosa. For circumcision rite, there are traditional songs that both groups of participants have linked to different stages of this rite. Songs that speak about this rite and songs that are encouraging the initiate. These songs are common amongst amaXhosa. This might suggest that this rite is welcomed, endorsed and rejoiced by amaXhosa, as it is generally known that amaXhosa are people who express their happiness through music. Thus, there are traditional songs that participants could link to different stages of circumcision rite.

- Semantic narrowing is underway with a number of the terms. Further research needs to be done in order to establish whether the more detailed meanings of these words are known by any speakers.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I attempt to answer my key research questions which were:

- How do isiXhosa-speakers talk about Xhosa cultural practices?
- Do Western and Eastern Cape isiXhosa-speakers use the same lexicon when talking about cultural practices?
- To what extent is the vocabulary consistent across ages and place of residence and to what extent is there lexical variability when describing cultural events?
- Do isiXhosa dictionaries contain all the words that speakers use to talk about cultural events or are there lexicographical gaps?

### 5.1 How do isiXhosa-speakers talk about their cultural practices?

During weekends and during school holidays and on Heritage Day (24 September) I used to see pictures on Facebook and Instagram of people dressed up in the beautiful, cultural clothing of amaXhosa. In most cases these pictures were of people who had just attended, or were about to attend ritual ceremonies (*imigidi*) celebrating or paying respect at the circumcision or bereavement practices. These pictures prompted me to reflect on the link between culture and language – the people who shared these images appeared to know their culture very well because in the photographs they were wearing appropriate traditional clothing. The fact that they wore the relevant items led me to believe that when they went to buy these items in shops that sell them, they must have had to refer to them using appropriate names. I then wondered whether this knowledge would be carried through to an ability to explain in-depth each and every step of the traditional circumcision and bereavement rites including items (as well as other ritual objects) used in these rituals. Did they know the songs sung, the names to refer to particular stages of these rites and how to refer to people who are vital for the ritual to be performed according to traditional custom?

During the course of this research, after engaging with Eastern Cape and Western Cape residents of different ages (divided into age cohorts from 18 – 35, 36 – 45 and 46 - 65 years old) I noticed that most of the Western Cape participants used a reduced isiXhosa cultural lexicon when describing circumcision and bereavement rituals, occasionally leaving out aspects of the ritual or referring to items using borrowed words (e.g. *iibeads*). On the other hand, participants who had spent most part of their lives in the Eastern Cape knew the language that explains these rites and

were able to access a detailed cultural lexicon to describe specific people, objects, behaviours and places. Important to note is that participants who took part in this study are participants who had been exposed to these two rituals by having attended or performed for them (circumcision). This would suggest that with the first group of participants (18 – 35) whatever they know about these rites was transmitted to them by their elders (36 – 65). What I noticed about the Western Cape participants is that there is a considerable gap in the actual cultural information that all three age groups of participants have. It would appear that information about these rituals has not been transferred successfully (or should I rather say, to avoid judgement, seamlessly) by elders to the youth. For example, *ingongqo* and *ifutha* was only known by one participant (in the 46 – 65 age cohort) whereas these items are still used even now in the Western Cape and because of their currency it was anticipated that this information would have been known even by the 18 – 35 years old Western Cape. With Eastern Cape participants there is not much of a gap in information that is known by participants in all three age groups: the gap is evident in items that are rarely or no longer used. For example, the original word *iimpalane* ‘mourning clothes’ which were made out of a special material, which has now fallen out of use because people now wear mourning clothes made out of a contemporary fabric.

## 5.2 Do Western and Eastern Cape isiXhosa-speakers use the same lexicon when talking about cultural practices?

Western Cape isiXhosa speaker’s lexicon is limited in comparison with the Eastern Cape isiXhosa speakers when talking about the traditional male circumcision rite and the bereavement rite. The Western Cape isiXhosa speakers understand these rites to a certain extent, but there are things that they do not do or perform which are part of the rite traditionally and which are still performed by Eastern Cape isiXhosa speakers. It is hard for these urban dwellers to have access to a lexicon which explains the steps or parts of the rite that they themselves do not perform. For example, in discussing the circumcision rite, all participants of the Western Cape had no idea of the meaning of *ukungcama* (a ritual performed before a boy goes to the initiation lodge), whereas to Eastern Cape participants *ukungcama* is still an important part of the isiXhosa circumcision process. Secondly, Western Cape participants mentioned that most of their boys do not do *umtshotsho/umgubho* because they see such party as something that is done by boys who live in rural areas. As a result Western Cape participants do not know *isabhabha* ‘metal horn’, *ingqanda* ‘spear’ and *ibhunguza* ‘fighting stick’ as these are items that are mainly used during *umgubho* which they do not perform. Western Cape participants did not even have a synonym for *ukungcama*. However, there are things that the Western Cape isiXhosa speakers explain in the same way as Eastern Cape isiXhosa speakers, for

example, understanding of *ithonto*, *ibhuma*, or *isuthu* is the same and the context in which these words are used is the same, referring to the same thing – the initiation lodge. Again, I find the lexicon of the Western Cape isiXhosa speakers limited due to the fact that when they are performing an isiXhosa rite there are parts of the rite that they do not perform. The question as to why they are no longer performing certain aspects of the rite is something that would need to be investigated by another study. For example, in the bereavement ritual, Western Cape isiXhosa speakers' understanding of *izila* or *ukuzila* is limited to 'widow's weeds' or some kind of avoidance behaviour. Eastern Cape isiXhosa speakers' understanding of *izila* extends to the actual ritual referred to as *izila*, which involves slaughtering of a cow in the name of the deceased, a ritual that is done some time after the funeral.

Most of the items or stages related to the circumcision and bereavement rite that the Western Cape isiXhosa speakers did not know or could not better explain **are items or stages that the Western Cape amaXhosa leave out or do not use when performing these rituals**. I emphasise this because it is important to highlight the fact that it is not only the language that has changed, but the ritual itself. Items which Western Cape isiXhosa speakers were familiar with and still used when performing these rites, they named in the same way as Eastern Cape isiXhosa speakers when referring to them. In some cases, however, Western Cape isiXhosa speakers used their own words to refer to these items, for example, what Eastern Cape isiXhosa speakers referred to as *iimfele*, *amasay'bhokhwe*, *iintsiyane* Western Cape isiXhosa speakers called *imithika*, *amatshaka-tshaka*, *amanqasha*. Items which either they were not familiar with or they did not have names for, Western Cape participants did not bother to mention in giving the description of images, for example, *isabhabha*, *amaso* and *ingqanda*. These words were mentioned by Eastern Cape participants when giving description of image #01 and #02 but Western Cape participants did not mention them, or if they did they used English.

In giving descriptions of the rituals, Eastern Cape participants were better than Western Cape participants. Their description were detailed: below is an extract of how Eastern Cape and Western Cape participants gave their response during the interviews to the same question and in the same age group. (I provide only one question from the circumcision related questions and one from the bereavement related questions by way of illustration):

## **Kwenzeka ntoni ngosuku loMPHUMO? (What happens on the uMPHUMO day?)**

Eastern Cape participants (Age cohort: 46 – 65)

*Imini yomphumo yimini enkulu kakhulu. Le mini kulandwa ngayo inkwenkwe esuthwini, idluliswe emlanjeni ihlanjwe itsho iphume ingumntu omtsha ogqibeleleyo. Ukusuka apho iyakhatshwa igoduswe ngabafana namaxhego yombathiswe iragi njengokuba biyombathiswe ingcawe nje ngoku ibisiwa esuthwini. Abafana bayayirhangqa bombele uSomagwaza abanye badlale iintonga, kuyimihlali nje ngale mini. Kuthi xa kusondelwe emizini abantu abangoomama bakulibona eli gquba lamadoda baqale bayiyizele babethe ingqongqo bahabaze kube yiloo nto. Ukufika kwayo ekhayeni layo le nkwenkwe iqaliswa ebuhlanti kuba kaloku kulapho ibiphumele khona. Ifika apho iyalwe ngamaxhego ngobudoda obu ingene kubo. Emva koko isiwa endlini enkulu ifike ihlaliswe emva kwecango ekhukhwini njengomtshakazi kuba kaloku nayo ingumtshakazi ebudodeni. Ihlaliswa nabafana ke apho kufike namantombi ayiqabe imbola ithwaliswe ikhetshemiya njengomtshakazi. Kuyahlalwa ke apho lulutsha kuhanjiswe imini nobusuku bayo ngengakusa kutsho kubekho umgidi wayo. Emva komgidi lowo nalo kengoku ikrwala selinxityisiwe impahla yalo yobukrwala lingaphuma liyobulisa ebantwini.*

### Translation

The day of the coming out of the boy is a very important day. On this day, the boy is fetched from the initiation school and taken to the river for a bath where he will emerge as a completely new person. From thereon, he is accompanied by old and young men with a special striped blanket wrapped around him as he had a white blanket with a black stripe wrapped around him on his way to the initiation school. The young men surround this new young man and sing Somagwaza and whilst others play stick fight, there is generally a lot of excitement on this day. As the group of men accompanying the new young man are in close proximity to the homes in the area and are spotted by the women, the women start singing, playing drums, dancing and ululating. Upon arrival at the home of the new young man, he is taken straight to the kraal as this is where he was last. In the kraal he is given words of wisdom by old men regarding manhood. From thereon he is taken to the main house where he sits behind the door on a grass mat like a newly wedded bride as he is also a newbie to manhood. He sits with other men, and young women are called in to apply red ochre (imbola) on his body and wrap a black doek around his head like a newly wedded bride. The youth stay in the house with him throughout the day and night until the following day when a ceremony to celebrate his return from the mountain is held. It is only after this ceremony when the new young man has been dressed in his new clothes that he can go outside to greet his friends and family and other people from the community.

Western Cape participants (same age cohort: age 46 – 65)

*Usuku lomphumo yimini enkulu kakhulu kwi-family ebisolusile. Yimini enkulu kuba unyana wabo ubuye ephila ehlathini. Ngoko ke i-family iye isile utywala besiXhosa, ixhele, imeme abantu ukuba baze bazokuvuyisana nabo babuke nekrwala elo ngeziphlo.*

### Translation

This day is a big day to the family of the initiate. This is because their son has returned from the mountain alive. Therefore the family brews traditional beer, slaughters an animal and invites people to come rejoice with them and bring gifts for their son.

### **Kukuthini ukubeka ilitye?**

Eastern Cape participants (Age cohort: 36 – 45)

*Ukubeka ilitye yindlela yokubonisa okanye ukwazisa umntu ongakhange aye esifihlweni sesizalwane sakhe ingcwaba elo. Xa uyobeka ilitye uye uthathwe yindoda ekhoyo yekhaya ikuse apho kungcwatywe khona ekuseni kakhulu afike apho lo mntu ukuzisileyo akwazise kumntu lo uzobeka kuye ilitye. Umzekelo athi nanku ubani kabani obengekho ngelixesha besizokufihla apha ngoku ukhona naye uzile uzokubulisa abeke ilitye njengobungqina wokuba uyawazi umzi wakho wokugqibela.*

#### Translation

Laying a stone is a way of showing the grave of a relative to the person who did not attend the funeral. When you are to lay a stone you are taken by the man of the family to the grave site early in the morning. When you get there, the person who brought you there will introduce you to the deceased. For example, he will say here is whoever (the person's name) of so and so who did not attend your burial, he is here now to lay a stone as a way of ensuring that he knows your last home.

Western Cape participant (same age cohort: 36 – 45)

*Ukubeka ilitye kukugalela isanti elaa xesha kuthwa umhlaba emhlabeni or uthuthu ethuthwini xa kusihla ibhokisi yomngcwabo.*

#### Translation

Laying a stone is to throw in sand, at that time people utter words like, soil to soil or ashes to ashes as the casket is going down.

From the above extracts it is clear that the Eastern Cape participants in this study went into as much detail as possible when giving description of the ritual. This detailed description shows their understanding of the ritual and their choice of words used when giving these descriptions shows that they have the appropriate lexicon for these rituals.

### **5.3 To what extent is the vocabulary consistent across ages and place of residence and to what extent is there lexical variability when describing cultural events?**

In both groups of participants, their responses were influenced by the way that they speak on a daily basis. They tried to give their responses in isiXhosa, even though I asked them to speak freely as they normally do without being cautious about the language they use. What I noticed in both group of participants is, the younger the participant is, the more bilingual (isiXhosa and English) she or he will be in giving responses. Even so, the Eastern Cape participants used less English words as

compared to their urban counterparts, this could be due to the fact that isiXhosa is the dominant language in the Eastern Cape. The Western Cape participants comfortably gave their responses by purposefully juxtaposing isiXhosa and English. This also could be due to the fact that most people in the Western Cape are bilingual. The link between a loss of vocabulary of the mother-tongue by bilingual isiXhosa/English-speakers needs to be investigated as there appears to be a direct link between the two factors. Although their study was with Persian-English bilinguals in New Zealand, Gharibi and Boers' 2017 findings are relevant. The authors gave vocabulary tests to monolinguals and bilinguals and discovered that the bilinguals were outperformed by the monolinguals (Gharibi and Boers, 2017:52). It was also established that parents' attitudes towards the mother-tongue was "the strongest predictor" of the bilinguals' vocabulary knowledge.

The vocabulary used by the Eastern Cape participants is consistent to a certain extent. Again, age appeared to be an important variable because the older the participant is the most likely he or she would use a traditional lexicon. For example, participants who used words like, *iimpalane*, *iintsiyane* and *oophephela* were old participants of the Eastern Cape. Other words such as *ithonto*, *isuthu* and *ibhuma* were used interchangeably by Eastern Cape participants who used whichever word that comes first to mind. There is no group I would say that preferred to use *isuthu*, for example, over *ibhuma*. The same can be observed with the Western Cape participants in referring to initiation school they used same words as their rural counterparts, except for the word *entabeni*, they used *ebakhwetheni*. Furthermore, the words, *umgubho*, *umguyo* and *umtshotsho* were only used by participants of the Eastern Cape in all age groups. None of the Western Cape participant used these in referring to the pre-initiation party. Eastern Cape participants used the word *usaluka* to refer to the 'initiant to be' and *unosala* to the one who is left behind by his agemates. Meanwhile Western Cape participants just referred to the boy as 'the boy' with no specific name which would differentiate him from those boys who would not be going to the initiation school. Eastern Cape residents in the 18-35 age group used the verb *bheshuza* to refer to the style of dancing done by the women although this kind of dancing or movement but this word does not appear in any dictionary. The word *bhenquza* is used in the *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* and by popular artists but *beshuza* is found in Doke et al.'s *English/Zulu-Zulu/English Dictionary* (1990:34) and is glossed as "toss up the hind quarters (as a buck when running)". This kind of variation speaks to the fact that isiXhosa and isiZulu have porous lexicons that are able to enrich the descriptive repertoires of their speakers.

#### 5.4 Do isiXhosa dictionaries contain all the words that speakers use to talk about cultural events or are there lexicographical gaps?

When there is a new word that you come across it is only normal to check its meaning in the dictionary. In doing so, your vocabulary grows, and you gain confidence in using your new words in contexts where they fit. Although isiXhosa dictionaries have been helpful throughout this study, there are words that they do not have, even though these words are used by isiXhosa speakers when talking about cultural events. I cannot say that maybe these words are new words because growing up I often heard old people and youngsters using these words (still do) in referring to specific items or rituals which are not new innovations but have always been part of the culture of amaXhosa. This would suggest that there are lexicographical gaps in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa (Vol 1-3)*.

Mtuzi (1992:166) notes that “Most people see the dictionary as a standard yardstick by which they should judge their own ability to spell and assign correct meanings to words” but then goes on to quote Pinchuk (1977:223 in Mtuzi, 1992:166) who cautions that a dictionary is an “instrument to be used with caution and discernment”. Pinchuk goes on to say that lexicographers themselves view dictionaries not as infallible but as records that “describe useage, **it does not establish it**” (Ibid. my emphasis) Studies like mine therefore, would be important for lexicographers wanting to enter all possible meanings of a word into the dictionary in order to record all of its uses, in all contexts. We cannot excuse *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* for the gaps on the grounds that the words not found there are from a non-standard dialect, because, as Mtuzi (Ibid.:170) observes “it also includes other dialectical and regional connotations”. I am not suggesting that this dictionary is deficient, only that it needs regular updating which cannot be done in the absence of research (obviously on a much larger scale with much bigger corpora than mine). Listed below are the ten words (single lexical units) not found in the dictionary, or in fact, any of the dictionaries I had access to:

Amanqasha  
 Amatshaka-tshaka  
 Amasay’bhokhwe  
 Ikheshemiya  
 Iintsiyane  
 Intlamba-peki  
 Oophephela  
 Isabhabha  
 Umtsico  
 Usaluka

## 5.5 To what extent is the lexicon as researched in this thesis in line with that of historical and contemporary records?

In *Intlalo kaXhosa*, originally published in 1936, Soga (1983:94) describes circumcision as a traditional rite of passage for boys going into manhood and mentions the fact that the boy normally goes for initiation at the time the chief's son (failing which the son of an important person) goes for initiation. My elderly and young informants also described the circumcision as a rite of passage that amaXhosa boys must go through. However, since the time that Soga wrote his book and the present, there has been a change in terms of how the exact time of circumcision is determined by the family. Boys no longer wait for the chief's son, or the son of an important person before they can go to initiation school. Normally, when they are 18 years old and have the permission of their parents boys can be circumcised. In some cases, boys who are less than 18 years of age do go the initiation school without the knowledge or permission of their parents. This might have changed because laws have changed or because lines of authority have changed: in some areas of the Eastern Cape councillors rule not chiefs. Or it might have changed because people have enough money to send their boys to the initiation schools without being hosted by someone.

Ndangam (2008:212) asserts that men who fail to endure the pain of traditional circumcision or men who choose to do medical circumcision are often perceived as unworthy of being called real men by other men in the community. This claim was corroborated by my research: none of the Eastern Cape or Western Cape participants (across all age groups), when describing *ulwaluko*, suggested that *ulwaluko* could also be done medically at hospitals. Eastern Cape participants particularly emphasised that *ulwaluko* must be done at a traditional initiation school. As one participant put it:

*Ukwaluka kuthetha ukuba umntwana oyinkwenkwe uwelela kwinqanaba elingentla ebomini. Eli nqanaba linqaba elibonakalisa ubudala apho umntwana aye enzelwe isiko ngokokushiyana kwemizi, wenzelwa isiko ngendlela ekwenziwa ngayo kokwabo. Uthathwa ngabafana bamse ebhomeni ahlale khona abuye eyindoda ehlukenene nemikhwa okanye imikhuba yobukhwenkwe. Xa ebuya ubizwa ngokuba ngubhuti omtsha, nezinto azinikwayo okanye azisebenzisayo zizinto ezintsha nesimilo somntu owolukileyo ke kuye kulindeleke ukuba sibe sitsha.*

### Translation

Initiation means that the boy child is progressing to the next stage of their life. This is the stage whereby he has to act as a grown-up, and a ritual is generally performed for him depending on the household he comes from. A group of young men accompany him to a secluded house where he has to stay during the initiation period. When he is integrated back into society, he will have

become a man and he will no longer act as a boy. When he comes back from the initiation school, he is called “a new young man” and he also receives new daily items for his use. He is expected to behave in a new way now, like a man.

This suggests that irrespective of demographical differences amongst participants, amaXhosa still agree that *ulwaluko* must take place at the initiation school, and because emphasis is put on the locale of the circumcision (a secluded circumcision lodge – *ebhomeni*) it follows that if a boy were to go to hospital for circumcision he would probably not be accepted as a traditional man.

Mfecane (2016:207) argues that apart from undergoing the physical endurance required by traditional circumcision in order to be accepted or recognised as a man by amaXhosa communities, there is also a special language spoken by traditionally circumcised men that they should know. Both groups of participants in all age groups confirmed that there is a special language that is used by initiants at the initiation school. The examples of words in this special language that is sometimes referred to as *isikhwetha* (see Finlayson, 1998) that participants provided were similar for all age groups: the most common words offered were: *amagcaza* which is the *isikhwetha* word for *amanzi*, *ikhanka* for *inja* and the *isikhwetha* word *isigqwathi* for *umfazi*. This suggests that language used at the initiation schools might have not changed much in different generations and different areas and most probably its main distinguishing feature is its lexicon.

Soga (1983:95) describes *umgidi* as “*Imigidi le wena zinto zakutsha nje, zindywala ezisilelwa abakweta nentonjane maxa wambi xa kupunywayo.*”

### Translation

Coming out parties are modern things; it is just alcohol that is brewed in preparation for the coming out ceremony of male and female initiants.

Young and elderly participants understand *umgidi* in the same light as Soga. Even though Soga admits that *umgidi* is something new. People might have started to do *imigidi* after seeing that quite a number of initiants die during circumcision so if an initiants come back alive and well from the initiation school that is reason enough to celebrate the life and well-being of the initiant.

Soga (1983:86) describes *ukuyalwa*<sup>24</sup> as:

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<sup>24</sup> Note the old orthography in the extract originally penned in 1936

*Eli siko lingummiso kumzi o-Ntsundu upela. Uya yalwa umntwana xa engeniswa kwinqanam lobuntu obukulu nje ngenkwenkwe eyalukileyo ekutshwa ebukweteni ingeniswa ebudodeni (ikrwala) nentombi eyendayo nomfana ozekayo uya yalwa.*

#### Translation

This custom is something that is done by all the Black households. The child is given words of wisdom when s/he is entering a major stage of life, like the circumcised who is taken out of being an initiate and brought into being a man (initiant) and a young lady who is marrying or lad who is taking a wife is offered words of wisdom.

Young participants in my research study understand and describe *ukuyalwa* as:

*Ukuyalwa kukufundiswa ngendlela yokuziphatha njengomntu omtsha. Umzekelo xa ungumakoti okanye ikrwala.*

#### Translation

*Ukuyalwa* is when one is being taught the way in which one is to behave as a young person. For example, a newly wedded bride and a young man returning from initiation school.

The young people only fail to mention that instruction happens at liminal stages, but they do give examples of these stages.

Elderly participants on the other hand specifically refer to the stages as did Soga and they describe *ukuyalwa* as:

*Ukuyalwa kukucetyiswa komntu ofikayo okanye ongenayo kwikhabathiso elithile lobomi. Iingcebiso zivela okanye uzinikwa ngabo sele kudala bekhona behamba kweli khabathiso. Bazele ngamava okuphila nawokugcina isidima nesithozela seli khabathiso.*

#### Translation

It is the act of giving advice to someone who is new to a particular stage in life. These advices are given by people who have been in this stage for some time. These people have the wisdom and experience to live and keep the reputation of this particular stage.

All participants understand *ukuyalwa* in much the same way as described by Soga. This suggests that *ukuyalwa* is a custom that has worked for amaXhosa as a result no one has seen the need to deviate or adjust this custom.

Coming to bereavement rituals, Solomon (1986:37-38) asserts that a messenger, carrying a branch from the bread fruit tree called *umphanga*, was sent out to break news to people when there was

death in the family. Solomon also asserts that a branch of the tree would be put outside the deceased person's house so that visitors who passed by the home would know that they could not expect to stay there overnight or to be catered for (Ibid.)

While both young and elderly informants understood *umphanga* as news about death, none of them mentioned anything about the branch from the bread fruit tree. This might be because now, because of technology, news in general can easily reach people and there is no longer a need to send out a messenger: ways of communication have vastly improved. News about death can also be announced to reach as wide audience as possible through a programme called *imiphanga* on uMhlobo weNene fm (South Africa's national broadcaster for isiXhosa speakers). The name of this programme is no doubt derived from the tree name Solomon refers to as *umphanga* but used in the plural as it is a platform for many people to announce the deaths of loved ones. These days people can also tell each other about death in social media or at social gatherings, but the bread fruit tree branch never features any more in any of these announcement - I for one have never come across it but have been interested to learn about the origins and etymology of the word *umphanga*.

Soga, in his *Intlalo yamaXhosa* (1983:130) speaks of amaXhosa as a people who had a rigorous system of burying their loved one. Soga (1983:130) relates the following practice:

*Ukuba ngumnini-mzi kombiwa ecaleni kwexanti lasekunene afakwe nedosha, inxowa yake yokutshaya, nokuko nezenjana, nomkonto kwa nezinye ke intwana-ntwana zakhe. Qonda ke yinkolo yasema-Xoseni yovuko le lwabafileyo neyentlalo kwelizayo ipakade. Apo wofika agawule abiyele inkomo zakhe utango etshaya icuba lake.*

When it is the head of the household that has passed on, his grave will be dug on the left-hand side in front of the kraal where he will be buried with his lighter, his bag of tobacco, a woven grass mat, his axe and spear and a few other personal belongings. Understand that it is the belief of amaXhosa that the dead will resurrect in the next life and live forever. There when he arrives he will cut down trees and fence off his cattle whilst smoking his tobacco. (Own translation.)

None of my Eastern or Western Cape participants mentioned burying a person with his belongings. This suggests that burial rites have changed since Soga's time - people might have found new ways of burying their loved ones because of changes in the county's burial laws or new beliefs about burying a loved one.

Soga (1983:130) also asserts that a stone was laid upon the grave of the deceased and that the bereaved would speak with their loved one saying “*Hamba kakuhle. Uze ube usikhonzele phambili apho. Siyeza siya kulandela. Uz’usikhumbule nalapo uya kona.*”

Young informants in both the Eastern and Western Cape understand *ukubeka ilitye* as a way of visiting the grave of the deceased if you were not able to attend the funeral. The following description exemplifies the responses:

*Ukubeka ilitye, umntu obeka ilitye ngumntu obengekho esingcwabeni. Xa kuye kwangcwatywa lo mntu uthile, ube wena ungekho esingcwabeni. Then ufike emva kwesingcwabo uye emafihlweni uyogalela ke umhlaba, ukubuya kwakho uhlambe izandla. Ukubizwa kwaloo nto ke kuthwa kukubeka ilitye. Umntu obeka ilitye ngumntu obengekho esingcwabeni, ofike umntu sele engcwatywe.*

#### Translation

Laying a stone, a person who lays a stone is the person who did not attend a funeral. If your loved one was buried, and you could not attend the funeral. When you arrive, you go to the grave site where you pour the earth on the tomb and on your return you wash your hands. That is referred to as laying of a stone. A person lays a stone is the person who could not attend the funeral, and arrived after the burial had taken place.

However, elderly informants understand *ukubeka ilitye* both as a way of visiting the grave of the deceased if you were not able to attend the funeral, and as a way of bidding farewell to the deceased, acknowledging that you will never see him or her again.

*Ukubeka ilitye yindlela esetyenziswa ngabantu abaphilayo xa bebulisa, besenza undlela-ntle kulowo uhambileyo. Abantu abahlula igazi nomfi bayalibeka ilitye, iyindlela leyo yokwahlukana naye. Iilitye lisisxhobo sokuba ndancama ke ngoku, ndiyanikezela. Iilitye libekwa ngabantu abakhoyo esifihlweni kanti nabo bebengakhange bafike ukuza kuzongcwaba bayalibeka ilitye xa bethe bafika noba kunini.*

#### Translation

Laying a stone is a way that is used by the living when greeting and bidding farewell to the deceased. Family members lay a stone for their relatives who have passed on as a way of saying goodbye to them. Laying a stone is a way of saying, “I give up”. A stone is laid by people who are at the funeral and by those who could not attend the funeral.

The fact that elderly participants mentioned *undlela-ntle* ‘the farewell’ would suggest that their understanding of the *ukubek’ilitye* ritual is not far off Soga’s understanding. Laying a stone is, however, changing for young informants who generally understood *ukubek’ilitye* as a ritual that is performed if you did not attend the funeral. This would suggest that the act of laying a stone will be understood differently in years to come. Contemporary understandings of laying a stone take into account the fact that people these days stay far from each other in different provinces or countries or cannot take off much time from work. It is common for people to lay a stone even months or weeks after the funeral.

Soga (1983:130) describes death as a game changer. When one dies, many things were bound to change for the living. Their day to day lives were changing more especially if it is the head of the house who has passed on:

*Invaba zomninimzi zoqwengelwa izinja kuba ziyinqambi namhla. Ayaliwa ngokutsha amaselwa nemvaba kutungwe ezintsha kufunwa ukuqalwa ngamasi amatsha. Ngokuhlwa zitshiswe nqu izindlu nobuhlanti bucitwe kwakiwe bumbi.*

#### Translation

Traditional milk-sack of the head of the household would be ripped up for dogs as they would no longer be acceptable. The calabashes are freshly washed and new traditional milk-sack are sewn so that sour milk can be made afresh. In the evening the houses are burnt, the kraal are demolished and a new kraal is built.

Soga (1983:132) further says that *inkomo yezila* (a cow for mourning) would be slaughtered to commemorate the deceased “*Ngokwesiko laba-Ntsundu be kuxelwa inkomo ekutiwa yeyezila likabani ofileyo, kukunjuzwa oko kufa kwake*”.

Young and elderly Eastern Cape participants understand *inkomo yezila* in the same view as Soga and mentioned that its meat is to be consumed at once on the same day. However, Western Cape participants do not mention anything about *inkomo yezila*. This could be because most Western Cape people buy ready slaughtered animals when they want meat since they do not keep or own cows in the urban spaces where they live. That would explain why they do not have *inkomo yezila* after the funeral has passed.

## 5.6 Link with theoretical approach

In collecting and analysing linguistic data relating to two key traditions of amaXhosa, I embraced a theoretical approach that assumed that culture is organized via language through specific shared cultural scripts including the naming of cultural objects, animals, food, officiants, music and dance.

My theoretical approach also drew inspiration from Catherine Bell's seminal understanding of culture as being constantly revitalized (Bell, 2009:123).

In terms of cultural scripts on the one hand I found that the older participants, particularly those resident in the Eastern Cape, were able to provide me with scripts that did not substantially deviate from those detailed in historical texts. The information I gathered from younger, urban participants, on the other hand, exposed changed narratives and adapted lexicons. From the research with younger and specifically urban participants I established that the circumcision and bereavement rituals of amaXhosa are indeed being modernized and reinvigorated. Urban speakers use more English words to describe objects (*iibead*, *iidrum*) and are more flexible with regard to the terms they use to describe ritual clothing and activities. Sometimes, however, urban participants did not mention some items such as *ibhunguza* 'fighting stick', *isabhabha* 'metal horn' and *ingcawe* 'white woollen blanket with red edges worn by initiants' either in English or isiXhosa and this would suggest that there is not a modernization of the ritual but that there has been vocabulary loss.

Even though there was flux in terms of narratives offered to describe these key rituals, Bell's (2009:216) reflections that a sense of unity can be achieved through consent to the forms is still relevant. I would argue that the fact that all participants recognized and were able to speak about the rituals is testimony to the fact that certain key symbols and common understandings are still shared and that it is this that feeds the cultural solidarity of amaXhosa.

With regard to language variation in the description of the rituals and rites it is important to appreciate the fact that bilinguals are increasing their linguistic repertoires by borrowing words from English to describe objects (e.g. *iibeads*, *iidrum*) that are key to cultural performances.

## 5.7 Concluding remarks

One of the most important aspects of the rituals discussed in this thesis, particularly language that is used to articulate them, is their ability to give authority and control to those who officiate. In addition, they promote social cohesion and serve to encourage people to follow accepted norms as well as to give them relief (from real or emotional pain). My research has underscored for me the essential role the circumcision and bereavement rituals play in promoting solidarity amongst amaXhosa young and old, irrespective of the town or province in which they live. These rituals

involve sacrificing and shared experiences amongst amaXhosa and often require social gatherings which presuppose a shared understanding of the language to be used to perform these rites and ceremonies: there is no script that is handed out to those involved, they know what they should say and when and how they should speak. Even when aspects of a ritual change, this does not happen in isolation. So as discussed in this thesis, if a particular stage of a custom is no longer performed because it is no longer relevant, people will adapt their language to describe the new or altered behaviours. When there is a ritual that is performed by a particular family, family friends, people from different areas, town, provinces and members of the community attend this ritual, they bring to it not only their knowledge of the ritual, but of the **language used to articulate that ritual**. Everyone becomes hands-on, all members of the group help the family in making sure that the ritual is a success. The gender roles become significant during the performance of these rituals and again, the words that are used are often symbolic and have been passed down from one generation to the next. But there will also be practical language that will ensure the smooth running of the ritual process: young men help with things like slaughtering, gathering wood and starting fire, newlyweds help with cooking, preparing food to serve people who are attending. Old men and women help with offering words of wisdom, that will aid the person given to in making appropriate decisions as situation warrants. Also, elders help to oversee that things are done according to their understanding of culture and ensure that youngsters learn these things. It is in these social gatherings that people get to socialise and most of family members come together as they live far from each other because of work or school. Through rituals amaXhosa make significant transitions (from boy to man) and mark important events in life (*umgidi* and *umngcwabo*). It is in these rituals where amaXhosa get to express their joy by giving presents (*ukusoka*) and sorrow (*ukuzila*) and most importantly, to strengthen their sense of identity and belonging which is created through them. People who identify as amaXhosa easily find common ground to socialize when they meet up in such rituals even if they do not know each other, and even if the language of the ritual has changed, or is different between groups, it is important to remember, as Scheffler (1997:132) puts it “rituals change more slowly than creeds, often surviving even drastic alterations of doctrine and entering into new interpretive contexts without serious loss of vigor”.

This “vigor” is clearly evident in the language of the Eastern Cape participants, and even to a lesser extent, of their urban counterparts in the Western Cape. In this study, I obtained a thorough description of Images #01 to Image #10 by both groups of participants using a lexicon that they are familiar with. Eastern Cape participants, recognized key symbols of circumcision rite in the relevant images. They identified most of items that signify this rite, starting with the first stage of the rite,

referred to it as *umtshotsho* or *umguyo*. This word feature in *The Greater Dictionary of isiXhosa* and the way participants used it is in the same view as explained in the dictionary. For all these images participants gave detailed descriptions, particularly Image #01, #02, #04 and Image #06. Middle age participants (36 – 45) and elderly participants (46 – 65) gave a detailed description of Image #06 identifying everything that signifies the circumcision rite. Western Cape participants did not recognize all the key symbols of the circumcision rite. In giving descriptions of the circumcision images these participants used words from the ones used by Eastern Cape participants: for example, instead of *amasay'bhokhwe* they used *amatshaka-tshaka*, instead of *iimfele* they used *imithika*. In some cases they did not have names for the key items or used generic names, for example, instead of *ibhungunza* they used *intonga*, instead of *ingqanda* they used *umkhonto* and they did not have the name for *isabhabha*. Participants in both groups recognised the widows weeds in the bereavement rite images and described the widow as *umhlolokazi*. In speaking about the steps involved in the process of bereavement all participants recognized important customs like *ukubeka ilitye* and *izila*. However, their understanding was different depending on the age and the area they live in.

Throughout this study I engaged with amaXhosa who have spent most part of their lives in different provinces (Eastern Cape and Western Cape) and have been exposed to these rituals. I am able to conclude that people can only speak about the ritual **to the extent which they have been exposed to it**. Eastern Cape participants are able to give a detailed explanation of these rituals because they have been exposed to them in great detail and items that are key to these rituals such as cows and animal skins are at their disposal. They are also familiar with the isiXhosa cultural scripts that describe such rituals and ritual items. Hence they can speak of *ukungcama* and about different forms of *izila*. Western Cape participants were not able to say much about these rituals: they could only describe them to the extent which they practice them. Some Western Cape participants were aware that there are things that they do not follow as per the requirements of culture like taking the initiant to the kraal. In this study I also learnt that people might not know or have the core lexicon that defines the ritual due to the lack of the items to which the lexicon refers but the ritual itself does not die out or change irreparably. People still perform these rituals and use whatever they have in their linguistic repertoires to partake in them and to describe them.

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