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SIGNIFYING PRACTICES: AMAXHOSA RITUAL SPEECH

Nokuzola Mndende

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Supervisor

Professor David Chidester

ABSTRACT

As part of the process of South Africa's transition to democracy, the government, the media, and other institutions have recognized the need to understand and recover African Traditional Religion as the indigenous religion of this country. Much remains to be done to entrench this recognition. There is a growing demand for literature that will document and analyse African Traditional Religion not only as an indigenous religious heritage but also as a contemporary living religion in South Africa. This thesis seeks to address the need for recognition, documentation and analysis of African Traditional Religion with specific focus on the role of ritual speech in AmaXhosa religious practice way of religious practice. Written from the perspective of an academic and a practitioner, the thesis attempts to further a clearer understanding of amaXhosa practice of African Traditional Religion as well provide a useful resource for students of African Traditional Religion.

In historical, anthropological, and other academic literature on African Traditional Religion in South Africa, scholars have tended to focus on one aspect of religion, such as sacrifice, the divination techniques of *sangomas*, or the veneration of ancestors in rituals dealing with death. This thesis

argues, however, that a more comprehensive perspective on African Traditional Religion can be gained by focusing on the meaning, power, and performance of ritual speech that runs through all of these religious practices. *Ukuthetha*, or, ritual speaking which produces *ukuvuma*, ritual acceptance, agreement, or consensus, lies at the heart of amaXhosa religion. Distinguished from ordinary speech by its heightened intensity and its performance which occurs within a sacred time and place, *ukuthetha*, or ritual speech, is the medium linking the physical and spiritual world within the amaXhosa worldview.

As this thesis focuses on the analysis of amaXhosa ritual speech, chapters on *ukuthetha* which occur during ritual performances associated with sacrifice, divination, and funerals provide a profile of different types of speech acts within the framework of African Traditional Religion. These speech acts are examined against the background of two theoretical perspectives. One theory, associated with Maurice Bloch, argues that ritual speech is a form of social control, limiting what can be said. The other theory, associated with Stanley Tambiah, maintains that ritual speech is creative performance, expanding the scope of what can be said. The thesis tests these theoretical perspectives against the evidence of amaXhosa ritual speech, finding aspects of both social control and creative performance in African Traditional Religion.

Although the analysis of amaXhosa ritual speech in this thesis focuses primarily on religion in the traditional rural context, a chapter on tradition and change considers new challenges for ritual speech in sacrifice, divination, and funerals within urban environments. Adapting to new contexts, the signifying practices of *ukuthetha* maintain the integrity of amaXhosa religion. By focusing on the meaning and power of ritual speech in different ritual settings and social contexts, this thesis hopes to contribute to our understanding of the continuity and coherence of African Traditional Religion in South Africa.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

After the adoption of the new South African Constitution in 1996 and its Bill of Rights, African Traditional Religion, which has been marginalised for centuries, came out of the cocoon and is now claiming its rightful place to savour the fruits of liberation and democracy. There is a clause within the Bill of Rights which asserts that 'everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion'. As a result, South Africa has now shifted from being a mono-religious country, dominated by Christianity, to a multi-religious, multi-cultural or secular society. This has been an advantage to the indigenous people of South Africa who are still practicing their religion because they can now declare their beliefs and practices openly.

As part of the process of South Africa's transition to democracy, the government, the private sector and other institutions have all seen the need to understand and promote African Traditional Religion as it is the indigenous religion of this country. However, a lot remains to be done to accelerate and entrench this recognition despite the growing demand to develop an extensive literature on African Traditional Religion so that it can be on par with other religions in the country. My thesis seeks to provide an answer to both these critical needs. It is meant to articulate a clearer perception and appreciation of African Traditional Religion as well as provide a valuable resource material on its behalf. This research

has been carried out and conveyed from the perspective of both an academic and a practitioner.

Without getting into why African Traditional Religion was given a lower status or sometimes no status at all, or why there were distortions and misinterpretations in the study of the religion, I will use what is available and try to develop what I feel is relevant to my problem. I will compare and contrast, when possible, what other researchers like Monica Hunter (1961) and McAllister (1980; 1988; 1997) say with regard to the practice of African Traditional Religion. We cannot turn the clock back and because we need to move forward, I believe that this approach will give new meaning to all those who are interested in the study of African Traditional Religion and will broaden the theoretical framework of the religion itself.

The positive aspect of the present literature is that it has, to a certain extent, exposed the reality about the existence of African Traditional Religion in this country. This exposure of some aspects of African Traditional Religion has shown a broader perspective of the religious practices of its people and needs further analysis so as to have more insight about the religion itself. The deeper analysis will, it is hoped, bring tolerance, respect and understanding of the religion itself and its people. It will also enable the religion to fully participate in both national and international religious debates.

The general overview of the present literature reflects more concentration on broader topics surrounding basic beliefs, myths,

symbols and rituals of the African people (Mbiti, 1969; Idowu, 1973; Chidester, 1992). We cannot, therefore, deny the fact that the available literature has been used to justify the fact that Africans have their own unique religion. A lot has been done to understand the relationship between the living and ancestors but some of this literature is confined to the mistaken question as to whether Africans worship ancestors or not (Kopytoff, 1971; Hammond-Tooke, 1978).

Much of the literature assumes that sacrifice, or the mere act of killing an animal, constitutes African Traditional Religion. It is the aim of this dissertation to reflect on the significance of all the activities that make a sacrifice different from an ordinary offering. An observation done in all African religious practices is that addressing the spiritual world, both literally and metaphorically, is the core of African Traditional Religion. Communication between the living and the departed relatives, the ancestors, is always interpreted as real and is believed to need concrete methods as a form of response to the needs of the ancestors. It is where sacrifice is needed. Sacrificing or offerings made to ancestors is the acting out of the religious practices on specific occasions as needed by the ancestors. All sacrifices are characterised by several speeches which are designed for that specific purpose. What this means, is that all the activities that are performed as part of the sacrifice are preceded by what they say. How things happen in any ritual or sacrifice is interpreted as means of communication with the spiritual, whether the religious activity is a success or not, or whether it is accepted or rejected by the ancestors. The heightened

nature of any ritual is separated from ordinary action by the nature of the speeches that are uttered by different people and the nature of objects used, as the objects themselves convey some meaning in relation to the spiritual.

This work will look at the meaning of some of the activities surrounding rituals in both rural and urban settings. The focus will be on the power of words, both verbal and non-verbal in selected rituals. As South Africa is broad in its ethnic and linguistic composition, it is important that I narrow my focus to the amaXhosa people who form part of my lived experience. This distinction has been made on the basis of language and culture. Very little research has been done on the importance of language in African Traditional practice. Hammond-Tooke (1978) mentions the role of invocations in religious rituals and explains that 'objects of religious rituals are set apart and consecrated and, as such, have to be constructed for the purposes of the ritual'. However, what Hammond-Tooke has failed to explain is how these objects are in fact consecrated. I want to argue that it is through a special form of formalised speaking (*ukuthetha*) with the ancestors that these objects are consecrated.

McAllister (1988) has also done some narrative work on the 'oral transmission of ritual knowledge' of the Xhosa, focussing on speeches, songs, dance, and invocation of the ancestors. He argues that 'the speech acts that accompany each stage serve to make symbolic statements about social relationships based on kinship, territory, and gender, as well as to reinforce group boundaries,

social distance, and degrees of inclusion and exclusion' (McAllister 1988: 51). McAllister summarises the speech acts and focuses more on the social aspect of the ritual and does not elaborate on the origin and end of such speech acts in those selected rituals. It is clear, though, that he is aware of the origin of ritual speech because he defines the perceptive nature of the host as 'being attentive to the wishes of the ancestors' (McAllister, 1988: 51). In his concluding analysis, McAllister makes some very important observations on the role of oratory and claims that:

Firstly, it helps to define the relationships between people, and to signal differential incorporation into the ritual proceedings. Second, it serves to legitimate ritual actions by communicating the nature of the proceedings and their 'correctness' to those present. Finally, it defines the relationship between the living and the dead, and enables communication and communion between these two planes to take place. (McAllister, 1988: 61)

It will be from this background that I will develop a comprehensive vocabulary to argue that it is *ukuthetha* (formal speaking) that does what the ritual is intended to do. Looking at the body language of those who utter those special words and also the nature of such speeches, it is fundamental to find out the meaning and purpose of such speech-acts which are called *amasiko* or ritual sacrifices from a specifically African context. *Isiko* (ritual sacrifice) is a religious activity addressed to the ancestors and *Qamata* (Creator) and involves the clan as the central body in a ritual sacrifice which is carried out by specific people with different duties using sacred objects.

As a point of departure, it is important to understand that speaking

to deceased relatives, and maintaining harmony with clan ancestors, is fundamental to the Xhosa religious life. AmaXhosa believe that constant communication with departed relatives brings holistic healing to their lives and their environment. Several strategies are deployed in order to sustain a good relationship between themselves and their ancestors. For example, the performance of ritual and the visiting of sacred places like the cattle kraal, the graves of their deceased relatives, and the mountains, rivers or forests, depending on which clan one belongs to. Sacrificing, visiting sacred places, and speaking in those sacred places shows respect and that one is not neglecting one's ancestors. Such activities also serve to communicate a sense of pride by acknowledging the roots that determine one's identity. Communication with ancestors who, although are in spirit form, is always regarded as real and the messages are always treated with respect and are believed to be obligatory.

Before going any further, it will also be important to explain that, to an ordinary Xhosa person, death may symbolise physical separation between human beings but communication between the living and the departed becomes stronger and more powerful and holy as the departed assume responsibility for the well being of those left behind. It is this communication that is always kept intact between the physical and the spiritual world. This communication is mostly characterised by *ukuthetha* (speaking), verbal and non-verbal - a communication that could be manifested in both metaphorical and symbolical means through objects or animals or any other means that ancestors find suitable as their objects of

communication. Communication from ancestors is always regarded as sacred and all encompassing.

It is this *ukuthetha* with ancestors that sacralises the objects used in sacrifice and it is this type of *ukuthetha* that sacralises the people responsible for special duties within ritual performances. Sometimes circumstances like being away from home as a result of migrant labour, having to work in an urban area or lack of money can make it impossible to perform a ritual by the time it is needed, but negotiations in the form of *ukuthetha* can be done with ancestors. Through a heightened form of *ukuthetha*, by recognising the need for a ritual and by taking responsibility to perform it in the future, permission to postpone a ritual can be given by the ancestors. This form of *ukuthetha* is called *ukungxengxeza* (to appease, to plead, to ask for extension).

This thesis analyses the different types of amaXhosa ritual speeches and their significance in the life of the amaXhosa community. Basically, the term that is going to be used now and again, in different forms, of course, is the meaning and application of *ukuthetha* which, in ordinary language, simply means 'to speak'. In the following chapters, *ukuthetha* will be used in a variety of ways, not only to refer to verbal utterances between human beings, but also to different messages, verbal or non-verbal, literal or symbolic, transmitted to and from the spiritual world. The non-verbal forms of *ukuthetha* may not be reflected through human behaviour only but could be reflected through different symbols like animals and objects. This will be the subject of chapters two

and three.

A comparative approach on the performed functions of ritual speech will be applied. Several scholars have engaged themselves in the field of religious language with specific reference to the use of language in African rituals. Bloch (1989), Tambiah (1968) and Finnegan (1969) have done work on the role of language in some religious traditions but have focused only on the cultural aspects of these societies. Although Bloch (1989), for example, recognises the significance of language in ritual speech, he sees ritual speech by Merina elders as restricted archaic vocabulary, identical to the speeches of elders in political councils. Bloch's approach is from a sociological perspective and considers only the elder who speaks on behalf of the clan and does not indicate the fact that the elder speaks to the ancestor and never on behalf of the ancestors. Ancestors speak for themselves and their manifestations are reflected in many ways which are interpreted, not only by elders, but also by special people such as *amagqirha* (diviners), irrespective of age. Bloch compares speaking in rituals with political speeches. In political speeches, age restriction is not such a serious concern but in amaXhosa ritual speech there is no status given to a boy (i.e. an uncircumcised male). Boys can never admonish in any ritual as admonishing involves having passed certain stages of social and spiritual development.

Bloch elaborates his understanding of the Merina circumcision ceremonial speeches by saying:

The elders are speaking not on their own behalf but on

behalf of the ancestors and elders of the whole descent group whether living or dead. They are repeating the general truth that they have had passed on to them by previous generations. They are speaking in the style and often indeed with the very words which they believe were used by the dead ancestors at similar councils or at similar religious rituals in the past. (Bloch, 1989: 22)

This statement by Bloch clearly shows that there is a need to differentiate between the speeches of social gatherings and those of religious gatherings. In *amaXhosa* practice there is a clear distinction between the meaning of *ukuthetha* in social gatherings and *ukuthetha* in ritual activities or *ukuthetha* of ancestors. The observations made by Bloch on the nature of the Merina ritual are similar to some of the *amaXhosa* ritual speeches in the sense that there is always an explanation of the ritual (*ingxelo*) by the elders or by the first-born male (*inkulu*). *Nqula* (invoking of ancestors), which Bloch calls 'intoning' or what Malinowski (1965: 240) calls 'spells', always follows *ingxelo*. Singing, as observed by Bloch, also forms part of most ritual speeches but Bloch's analysis of the Merina ritual speech as a formalised, controlled form of speech differs with *amaXhosa* ritual speeches in the sense that they are regarded as real communication between the physical and the spiritual world. Knowing the dynamics of language is important in this case as within *nqula*, songs in and other forms of speeches, one is free to question anything that is not clear. Moreover, this contradicts Bloch's belief that ritual speech cannot be challenged and that it serves to merely perpetuate political authority.

On the contrary, Austin (1986), in his concept of speech acts, proposes that 'saying is doing'. In his study of African Traditional

Religion, Ray (1973: 17) applies Austin's notion of 'performative' utterances to Dinka and Dogon rituals to illuminate their meaning by focusing on what is being done through the use of words. As Ray explains:

I intend to show that the 'performative' approach enables us to see not only that language is the central mechanism of these rites but also how the belief in the instrumentality of words (their causal 'power') may be intelligibly understood without consigning it to the sphere of the 'primitive', the 'magical' or the 'symbolic', as so frequently done. (Ray, 1973: 17)

This thesis will therefore look at ritual speech as a performative and heightened form of speech different from an ordinary, everyday use. This will be reflected in the form and meaning of the different kinds of ritual speech, both verbal and non-verbal. The theoretical framework used in this thesis will be based on the arguments on the power of words by scholars like Austin (1986), Bloch (1989), Tambiah (1968), Finnegan (1969), and Ray (1973).

However, the reader must also bear in mind that there will be problems of terminology since the thesis is based on central isiXhosa terms which may have been altered in terms of their meaning in the process of being translated into English. Key terms, such as 'sacrifice', 'ritual', and '*intlombe*' will therefore need to be carefully examined. Firth (1968) understands sacrifice as a voluntary act whereby, through the slaughter of an animal, an offering of food or other substance is made to a spiritual being (Firth, 1968: 13). In the context of *amaXhosa* practices, sacrifice refers to the offering given to ancestors for a specific reason,

something that is obligatory as it results in uniting the living and the deceased as a community. There are compulsory sacrifices such as rites of passage, and *umsindleko* (thanksgiving).

According to an African understanding of *isiko*, which refers to the entire process of clan and community involvement in the procedure of that particular sacrifice in communicating with the ancestors, this ritual has a therapeutic effect on the clan and the wider community. That is why, in some cases, a sacrifice and a ritual may be used simultaneously to mean *isiko*. Ritual is commonly defined as a series of actions used in religious ceremonies. From a Xhosa-African point of view, the use of the word 'ritual' applies only when people are talking about actions which form part of sacrificing for ancestors. For scholarly purposes, it is necessary to explain that 'ritual sacrifice' in this work will be used to refer to an *isiko* and will only be confined to the cases where there is always reference to ancestors and *Qamata* (Creator). Sometimes, as a matter of generalisation, 'ritual' may be used to mean ritual sacrifice or to mean '*isiko*' as it is commonly understood by ordinary amaXhosa.

The problem of translatability is also acknowledged by Bührmann when she finds it difficult to give an exact translation of *ukuxhentsa* and *intlombe*. She gives a much broader explanation by arguing that:

Neither *intlombe* nor *xhentsa* can be satisfactorily translated. *Xhentsa* is called 'dancing' for want of a better word. It is a special kind of stamping rhythmic

movement with the emphasis on the vigorous pounding of the feet on the ground while slowly moving in a circle. It is a ritual dance, accompanied by clapping of the hands, singing of special songs and beating of a drum. This is the basic pattern but there are variations in detail. *Intlombe* is this kind of dancing in a special setting. (Bührmann, 1981: 188)

Bührmann does not go further to elaborate that, during *ukuxhentsa* (as explained above) the participant speaks simultaneously to the ancestors as well, and that *ukuxhentsa* also helps in focussing on communication with the ancestors. It is therefore necessary to explain that, in this thesis, as it focuses on the power of *ukuthetha* (speeches), the closest translations of the different forms of *ukuthetha* will be given according to the context.

Methodology

Since the purpose of this thesis is to explore the linguistic analysis of religious activities it will be of importance that only one African indigenous language is used for discussion purposes. I have chosen to focus on the isiXhosa speaking peoples, or the Cape Nguni, who belong to the broader Nguni group of South Africa (isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiSwati and isiNdebele). AmaXhosa are the southernmost Nguni group who occupy the Eastern Cape, including the former bantustans, what was then known as the Transkei and Ciskei and significant parts of the Western Cape. Absorbed within the amaXhosa group are amaMfengu (Fingoes), the refugees from KwaZulu-Natal, clans such as amaBhele, amaZizi, amaTolo, amaMiya, amaKhuze and others.

Although isiXhosa is the dominant language in the Eastern Cape, there are a few smaller ethnic groups who speak in dialects like amaMpondo and amaBhaca. This research will not include such ethnic groups as their utterances differ slightly from isiXhosa even though they share the same worldview and cosmology. The groups that I have been involved with and have studied are the amaGcaleka, amaBomvana, abaThembu and amaMfengu.

Due to the migrant labour system and increasing urbanisation, amaXhosa are scattered in almost all the provinces of South Africa, especially in Gauteng and the Western Cape. The majority of amaXhosa from these two provinces return to their places of birth, that is, the Eastern Cape, during holiday time over the period of December and Easter. To them, going home also means to perform rituals. Since the Eastern Cape is regarded as the land of their ancestors, it is where they must be buried. Returning home means a reunion with the ancestors which is why, in most cases, *umsindleko* (thanksgiving offering) is done when someone comes back from migrant labour in the city. One must also bear in mind that *umsindleko* is not only done by migrant workers as McAllister (1980) argues, it is done by everybody who has achieved something or someone who has been personally instructed by ancestors to do it.

Due to this movement between the workplace (Gauteng or Western Cape) and home (Eastern Cape), it will be important that this thesis considers the effects of urbanisation on amaXhosa ritual practices. This will be done in Chapter Five. Philip Mayer (1963) pioneered

research on the effects of urbanisation among amaXhosa and the extent to which urbanisation and Christianity have affected the indigenous religious life of amaXhosa.

The chapter on Divination will be more culturally specific as it will deal with the divination methods of 'Xhosa proper'. As Nguni people share the same origin as the Xhosa, there are sometimes amaXhosa who use isiZulu, or isiSwati divination procedures which have some variations when compared with amaXhosa proper. The one that is going to be discussed in the thesis is from those amaXhosa who wear white beads and those who use '*camagu*' and '*chosi*' whenever they refer to the ancestors. Due to the effects of the migrant labour system, as well as some other factors, some amaXhosa are being trained by (*thwasa*) isiZulu, isiSwati or isiNdawa. Some amaXhosa, more especially those with Fingo origins, sometimes trace their call to divination from KwaZulu-Natal. Instead of using '*camagu*', those Xhosa use '*thokoza*' or '*makhosi*'.

Most *iintlombe* (diviner's ritual dances) which I have attended have been either in the former Transkei-Ciskei or in Cape Town. Although I have attended a few divination rituals in Langa and KTC, in Cape Town, I have been in close contact with an *igqirha* (diviner) who is regarded as being very powerful namely, MamNcotshe, a 38 year-old woman with a very substantial history of training novices. In her *iphehlo* (training school) she has twenty-two novices, in different stages; those who have graduated, those who are about to graduate, those who are half way, and those who

have just joined the school. The reader may wonder why those who have graduated in the school are still called 'novices'. It is because in their *iphehlo* (training school) they will remain novices, like 'students' in any institution.

The majority of MamNcotshe's novices have come to Cape Town for work. Otherwise, they perform their own *iintlombe* in the rural areas. Very few of her novices perform their major rituals in the urban areas. During my period of research in MamNcotshe's *iphehlo*, I only saw two novices who had their rituals (*intlwayelelo*) performed in town. In the case of *godusa* rituals (graduation), all of the diviners have done them in their ancestral homes in the Eastern Cape. This explanation serves to explain that although the research will be based on several theories of scholarly work, the activities and the vocabulary tabulated is based on participant observation and interviews with the leaders of different categories of such activities. As part of my research, I conducted interviews with a variety of clan elders and spiritual leaders across the gender lines.

The methodology will therefore be characterised by both a qualitative and a comparative approach. Although some literature review will be done as a point of reference, the thesis will be based on the information gathered during my fieldwork and participant observation. For this reason, information which I have collected from fieldwork will be used as the primary source of information and forms the basis of the vocabulary which I have recorded to show the power of speech in amaXhosa ritual practices. The use of other literature assists as a form of comparative analysis with other

African communities as ritual speech is not only focal to amaXhosa practices but to all African communities who practice African Traditional Religion.

Chapter Two begins with an analysis of the meaning and understanding of an *isiko* (ritual sacrifice). A person who does not perform *amasiko* (ritual sacrifices) is regarded by traditional amaXhosa as an incomplete person, a confused person who does not know his/her true identity. Although these ritual sacrifices differ in essence, there are those fundamental ritual sacrifices such as rites of passage of birth, initiation, *ukudliswa amasi* (acceptance or incorporating a newly wed woman in her husband's home), *ukuthwasa* (rituals performed for a diviner), and death rituals (accompanying and bringing back rituals). All these rituals have meaning; they carry some information to and from the spiritual world, the world of *Qamata* (Creator) and ancestors. The success and the failures of such rituals are reflected in both verbal and non-verbal utterances and speech actions.

Different forms of *ukuthetha*, both verbal and non-verbal, human and non-human, symbolic and literal, will be developed, discussed and analysed, together with an amaXhosa understanding of the relationship between the two worlds, that is, the physical and the spiritual worlds. Among the normal ritual speeches, or speech acts, there are also substitutional ritual speeches that temporally suspend the effects or 'punishment' as a result of an unperformed ritual by the individual or clan. For example, verbal speeches like *ukungxola* (humble submission of guilt for ritual non-performance and a

promise to perform a ritual at a later stage), or *ukungxengxeza* (to appease, to apologise, and to plead the ancestors).

Chapter Three deals with special forms of ritual speeches throughout the period of the diviner's process of initiation. It begins with the various ways in which an *igqirha* (diviner) is called until s/he graduates and begins using various forms of healing and divining. The interpretation of dreams is very important to understanding the process of the initiation of an *igqirha* as no person becomes an *igqirha* without dreaming. Various theories of dream interpretations and dream symbols will be compared, such as Jungian theory and the work of Bührmann (1984), Lienhardt (1961) and Kruger (1981). The different ways in which diviners communicate with the spiritual world will form the central point of discussion. Moreno (1995) sees diviners' music as facilitating their travels to the spiritual world and that it helps to establish the connection between the physical and the spiritual world. Different songs, and their purposes, will be analysed in relation to the performers and the space in which they take place.

Chapter Four focuses on the terminology, metaphors and other figures of speech that are used to refer to issues surrounding death. All of these forms of ritual speech reinforce the belief that the soul is immortal and that death is a path taken by an individual to the world of the ancestors. Various speeches which strengthen and sustain the relationship across the divide, that is, between the living and the one which has started the journey to the spiritual world, are uttered.

Chapter Five deals with the dynamic nature of the amaXhosa experience in urban areas. The introduction of Western cultural forms, Christianity, and industrialisation has resulted in some adaptations and additions of ritual speech to meet new demands. According to Mayer (1963), amaXhosa are ‘Men (sic) of two worlds’. In fact it could be argued that now it is not only a case of ‘men (sic) of two worlds’ but, increasingly the amaXhosa are finding themselves to be ‘men (sic) of three worlds’, with the ‘third world’ emerging in the suburbs. As a result, there has been a change in the meaning and performance of some ritual practices. As some sacred spaces are not found in towns, it is the main focus of this chapter to look at the provisions made to cater for those rituals performed in towns. It will be important to find out if there are omissions or additions within different forms of ritual speeches. It will also be important to analyse all the forms of new expressions of ritual speech as, under these conditions, new terms have been created, some modified, while some have been totally changed. As the nature of space is very crucial to the practice of African Traditional Religion it has been noticed that there is a creation of temporary sacred space in the urban areas through newly formed ritual speeches which recreate the ‘home’ of the rural areas. Three case studies of rituals performed in Cape Town, as an urban area, are compared with those done in rural areas as shown in Chapters Two, Three and Four:

- The first case study will be the drinking of beer in an informal settlement at Site C, Khayelitsha, Cape Town. The process followed and the speeches uttered will be compared with the

sacrifice described in Chapter One.

- The second case study will focus on three different types of *iintlombe zamagqirha* (divination ritual dances) in Cape Town. The nature and differences, if any, of different speeches, speech acts, and the control or alteration of space will be compared with *intwaso* discussed in Chapter Three.
- A third case study, *ukubuyisa* (the bringing back ritual) will be an example of one ritual that was performed in a suburb in Cape Town, namely, Mowbray. This ritual, because of certain circumstances, was performed between Gugulethu (an informal settlement outside the city center) and Mowbray (a predominantly white suburb). Some objects were in transit between the two destinations.

The last chapter, will form the conclusion on how amaXhosa understand the meaning of *ukuthetha* in their rituals and how they analyse language and space in different circumstances. Some analysis will be done to reveal how the relationship between the living and the departed adapt to changing situations and circumstances. The chapter will also expose the rich vocabulary in the Xhosa religious tradition and how this vocabulary defines the cohesive nature of Africans in general. The analysis will also show how morality, identity, and cultural values are reflected in the linguistic communications of Xhosa society and how these are intertwined with the spiritual aspects of the everyday life of the community. The chapter will also show that, through the power of words, the cosmos is unified with the other world, the power of words can transform the ordinary to the extraordinary. However, it

will be revealed that the nature of objects and the state of the speaker must be in accordance with the requirements of the spiritual world. Failure to comply with the ancestors may result in rejection, by the ancestors, which is also manifested in verbal or non-verbal communications. The thesis, therefore, reveals that in all amaXhosa religious practices, it is the power of words that unites the community of the living and the departed.

CHAPTER TWO

ISIKO: RITUAL SACRIFICE

From the time of conception until death, individuals within African Traditional Religion and culture are engaged in actively maintaining close contact with the spiritual world, that is, the world of their ancestors and *Qamata* (Creator). Communication between the world of the living and the ancestors, who reside in the spiritual world, is done in many ways both individually and communally. Ancestors play a crucial role within African society in the form of healing, punishing, rewarding, and protecting living members of the clan. Communication between the living and the ancestral worlds is a reciprocal process and the absence of communication, from either side, is always a concern to members of the clan. Feelings of frustration experienced by the clan, or its individual members, owing to what is regarded as neglect by the ancestors is articulated verbally as '*izinyanya zakowethu zindinikele umqolo*' ('my ancestors have turned their back on me'). In such cases, people look for *unobangela* (reason/cause) as to why the ancestors have neglected the living and, subsequently, perform the ritual of *ukungxengeza* in order to appease the ancestors.¹

¹ *Ukungxengeza* will be discussed in more detail in this chapter when dealing with different forms of ritual speech.

Speech forms part of all the *amasiko* (ritual killings) and although words uttered in this context are addressed to both the subject of the ritual, and all those present, they are actually intended for the ears of the *izinyanya* (ancestors) (Hammond-Tooke, 1978: 146). The ancestors and the living are engaged in a reciprocal relationship based on direct or symbolic communication but, ultimately, communication by means of *ukuthetha* ('to speak') is always in a different form from ordinary speaking. *Ukuthetha*, which in this discussion, will be confined to the speaking of ancestors, is reflected in different ways and may have different interpretations from ordinary forms of speech. For example, the Xhosa word for dog can be used to refer to someone in the negative sense but within the context of dreams, the symbol of the dog communicates a visitation by one's ancestors.

The performance of rituals at specific times to mark stages which are significant in the life of the individual, and for the clan as a whole, occupy a central role in constructing and maintaining the community. Rituals involving rites of passage, for example, are publicly performed as they have spiritual and social implications for the entire clan which will be explained in further detail. All rituals are characterised by some form of sacrifice depending on the nature of the particular ritual. Rituals are performed in order to mark birth, initiation (including the initiation of *amagqirha* or diviners), marriage and death. The aim of this thesis however, is concerned less with the types of rituals and rather with unpacking

the meaning of the different ways in which speech is used within the context of ritual activity. The importance of *ukuthetha* (to speak), as a means of unifying the living with the ancestors, is revealed by the fact that a visitor to the homestead can only participate in the drinking of African beer, or the feasting on a slaughtered animal, once s/he has been informed whether the reason for the ritual has to do with communication with the ancestors. Any ritual of sacrifice which is related to ancestors has an element of *ukuthetha*, or is associated with *ukuthetha*, and it is therefore the duty of the head of the homestead to explain to the visitor if the African beer or the animal slaughtered is for family consumption or *iyathetha*, that is reasons pertaining to an ancestral relationship.

Ancestors act as an intermediary between the living and the Creator and therefore it is believed that any forms of speech and actions addressed to the ancestors are relayed, via the ancestral realm, to the Creator. Sacrifice within African Traditional Religion can be understood as a ritual in which the holistic relationship between the living and the spiritual worlds is acted out. Hubert and Mauss (in Bloch, 1992: 28) offer a limited definition of sacrifice as ‘a matter of going towards the divine via the death of a victim and then coming back to the profane’ which fails to recognize other forms of sacrifice such as African beer which connect the world of the living and that of the ancestors ². The use of the terms ‘sacred’ and

² Prior to contact with the *amaMfengu* (Fingoes), *amaXhosa* used *amasi* (*maas* or sour milk as another form of sacrifice).

'profane' by Hubert and Mauss does not correspond to the meaning of sacrifice within the context of African Traditional Religion. All spaces are regarded as sacred because they are created by God. It is believed that an individual can talk to the Supreme Being anywhere but places where different activities are carried out are regarded as more special than others. The main hut during ritual performance, for instance, becomes more special as the carcass of the sacrificial animal is placed inside it and the members of the clan all gather in the main hut. At the same time, the cattle kraal, though on a daily basis accommodates the homestead cattle, is always regarded as the dwelling place of ancestors. That is why, in times of crisis, members of the clan go to the kraal and speak to the ancestors.

Many scholars of African Traditional Religion have encountered problems in the analysis and definition of sacrifice as a ritual activity (p'Bitek, 1970; Nangoli, 1986). Within scholarship there is a tendency to describe sacrifice in a manner which does not account for the variety of circumstances under which the ritual would be performed. Several scholars have analysed sacrifice as a response to illness or disease, or as a ritual performed on the advice of a diviner (Bloch, 1992; Hunter, 1961; Broaster, 1984; Hammond-Tooke, 1978). This kind of analysis offers a limited definition of sacrifice because it is understood only in terms of its role as a ritual of appeasement which, in turn, serves to reinforce

the misconception that sacrifice only occurs during times of personal or group crisis, or periodically as advised by diviners. In actual fact, sacrifice within the practice of African Traditional Religion, forms part of rituals such as those relating to rites of passage as well as thanksgiving rituals.

Research and study within the field of African societies have given rise to conceptual problems as well as those relating to terminology. Inevitably, the translating of terms and concepts from one language into another leads to misconceptions and carries the danger of offering limited or distorted definitions of religious beliefs and practices. The concepts used in the literature pertaining to the study of African Traditional Religion are academically dysfunctional because many scholars, faced with linguistic limitations, have the tendency to avoid explicit definitions of concepts and terms, and assume that they can be generalised and that they have no scientific validity. Language is the medium which conveys the culture of its people and therefore by examining a language one could also learn more about people who speak the language.

The chapter will focus on different types of speeches that are used in the ritual of sacrifice. Language in a ritual sacrifice is special as it is only used to address the spiritual realm by using a special mode. Ritual forms of speech are uttered by certain people according to their birthright, for example, if they are the first born male or woman and the use of sacred objects such as the sacred spear in specific ritual activities are believed to result in harmony

within creation.

The focus of observation on what is being said, rather than what is being done, within the context of sacrificial rituals, reveals the distinct nature of speech that is addressed to the spiritual realm. The way in which a ritual is performed depends on the instructions, by the ancestors, as revealed to the living or how the forebears did it. In the case of an ancestor revealing him/herself to an individual, a meeting of the clan members before the sacrifice, referred to as an *ibhunga*, is necessary so that the performer of the ritual can explain the reason for the ritual and how it was revealed to him or her. Adaptations to the ritual can be done depending on the environment but the meaning or the motive behind the performance of sacrifice is always attributed to the ancestors. An example of such adaptations will be dealt with thoroughly in Chapter Six entitled: 'Tradition and Change'.

Words uttered during the ritual of sacrifice, or ritual speech, can be understood as a heightened form of speech different and set apart from ordinary, everyday speech (McAllister, 1988; Tambiah, 1968). Whatever the definition of sacrifice may be, Cook (1930), Hunter (1961), and McAllister (1988), have argued that words play a central role in distinguishing between an ordinary offering and one which is related to sacrifice. Different types of ritual speeches are uttered during the ritual of sacrifice. These words are multi-vocal in the sense that they have different, yet co-existing meanings, each of which represents an important sense or referent of the symbol.

This view is supported by Leach (1966: 408) who emphasizes the special qualities of ritual language by pointing out that, despite being enormously condensed, it is characterised by the way in which a variety of alternative meanings can exist within the same sets of linguistic categories. Ritual can be understood as consisting of different codes which exist simultaneously, some of which are linguistic and some non-linguistic. The nature of words within a ritual separates the sacred from the ordinary. Much of the literature related to the study of African Traditional Religion has argued that there is no distinction between the sacred and the ordinary. This misconception could be attributed to the fact that the semantics used in an ordinary context and those within a religious sense is not fully understood.

The order in which sacrificing is done in African Traditional Religion reveals the extent to which ordinary life is regarded as distinct from spiritual activity. *Ukuthetha* (speaking) refers exclusively to communication with, and participation of, the ancestors. In a religious context, an offering which does not *thetha* signals an ordinary offering or feast that does not involve any ancestral relationship but in an ordinary sense it means one is silent.

Hammond-Tooke (1978) gives a summary of different types of ritual speech by showing several reasons for sacrificing as well as how different speeches are applied in the rites of passage:

A child at bingelela will be told, 'Here is your blanket'.
At a khapha ceremony among the Ndlambe, the officiant

said: 'Today, my people, here at the home of the Mvulanes, we accompany Lungi, son of Manukwana', and at a buyisa: 'Mabamba, the thing I am doing here, I am bringing back Mlamli with this red ox.' There may even be a more specific allusion to the shades, as in this statement at a bingelela birth ceremony: 'Today we are here at the home of Mpokonxa: We are taking out a suckling mother from the house. With this white goat, I say to the Cirhas, our old people of the home, long life to this child of ours' and at a girls' initiation (intonjane): 'today we are taking out these girls of the Zangwes so that they will be healthy'. (Hammond-Tooke, 1978: 146)

In the above extract, Hammond-Tooke has shown, that in all ritual sacrifices, words play a very important role. Words explain the nature of a ritual; they address the audience and allow the main participant, that is, the one who caused the ritual to occur, to feel that s/he is the central actor in the ritual. Words also serve to create feeling of inclusivity and unity amongst all those present at the ritual.

Thetha can also be understood as a form of spiritual negotiations in which the ancestors begin to explain, in one way or another, as to why a ritual is necessary. *Thetha* can be expressed in many ways and leads to the actual performance of a ritual. Ritual performance itself is made up of different types of speech that is set apart from other ordinary language. This set apart and distinctive type of language is either uttered, or communicated through ritual actions, until the climax of the ritual is reached. Every ritual of sacrifice begins and ends with a response from the spiritual world showing approval by the ancestors who are responsible for initiating the ritual. Neglect, on the part of the living, to respond to the spiritual

world results in punishment by the ancestors. The discussion in this chapter is divided into three parts and looks firstly, at the role of speech prior to the actual sacrifice, secondly, at speech that occurs during the ritual until the climax of spiritual healing is reached and, finally, speech relating to the sharing of the sacrifice.

1. Initiating the Sacrifice

1.1 *Ukuhanjelwa Zizinyanya* (Visitation by Ancestors)

The ritual of sacrifice is initiated in many ways, namely, visitation, dreams, visions, and animals. Ancestors sometimes reveal themselves to the living through sickness, sterility, family disharmony, or calamity with a view to reminding them of the necessity to preserve their religious heritage. The departed relative/s may appear in a dream by giving a verbal message or a sign to the living individual. The sign or the vision is always translated into words, which will then reveal the meaning of the message. The state of the ancestor at the time of revelation, or the symbol being used, gives some indication of the seriousness of the message in that particular dream. For example, to dream of an ancestor sitting silently beside a white goat could be interpreted as a sign that is necessary for the living to perform a ritual in which a goat is slaughtered. However, the elders might see it necessary to go to the cattle kraal in order to consult with the ancestors or seek the advice of a diviner before a ritual is performed. An *ithongo*, or a dream in which the departed appear to the living, can be distinguished from an *iphupha*, or an ordinary dream. The word

ithongo has a dual meaning because it refers to the kind of dream involving the appearance of an ancestor but also refers to the ancestor, who has revealed him/herself, and the special relationship which exists between the individual and a particular ancestor. The message contained within an *ithongo* is different to an ordinary dream because it conveys a message from the spiritual world and, ultimately, serves to create a distinction between the ordinary and extra-ordinary. Moreover, it is through *ukuthonga* ('to dream') that the physical and spiritual realms are united. Through the act of dreaming, the individual, not only unites him/herself with the clan, but also unites the living community with the deceased. *Ukulawula*, which refers to the narrating of an *ithongo*, involves the elders of the community who are regarded as being the most experienced in understanding the literal and metaphorical language of the deceased. The language of the deceased can take the form of a persistent illness amongst members of the clan, disharmony or misfortune, and can also manifest itself as strange behaviour by domestic animals such as dogs, goats or cattle, and wild animals such as bees, *uxam* (Nile monitor) or *umcelu* (small bird). The ancestors are known, on some occasions, to reveal themselves through a swarm of bees. An informant from Idutywa once told of his experience involving a swarm of bees occupying his wardrobe. The presence of a swarm of bees inside the hut is interpreted by the Xhosa as, *thetha* (speaking), and is therefore regarded as a message which is being conveyed from the ancestors to the living. For this reason, it is believed that one will be rid of the bees only when a promise to perform a ritual is articulated verbally or when the actual ritual is performed. The informant explained how a male

member of the clan spoke with the bees saying: '*Sivile into enisihambele ngayo, sicela ukuba nisiphe ixesha, siyathembisa ukuba siza kuyenza*' ('We have heard the reason of your coming to visit us, we ask you to give us time and we promise to do what you have come to remind us about'). The words are directed at the bees but the elder, in his speech, would have referred to clan names, as it is the ancestors who are being addressed. The elders of the community believe that, as deceased members of the clan who have passed on to the spiritual realm, the ancestors reveal themselves to the living in different forms as a means of entering into dialogue with the living and therefore, it is only through *thetha* that the situation can be resolved. A similar incident occurred in Willowvale, at Tywaka location in which a swarm of bees left the window and entrance door of a house once the elder spoke the following words: '*Mazizi, booNjokweni, booMtatela, sivile kwaye sithembisa kananjalo ukuba siza kuyenza le nto niyifunayo*' ('*Mazizi, Njokwenis* and *Mtatela's*, we have heard you, we therefore also promise that we are going to do what you want').

An informant from Worcester, belonging to the Majola clan, narrated the following story involving a visitation by his ancestors. According to the beliefs of this clan, their great ancestor, Majola, reveals himself in the form of a snake (Jordan, 1980). The snake can reveal itself in any place (rural or urban) and to any blood relative, either the father's or mother's side. This informant was shocked to see 'this cheeky'³ snake and called upon the help of a

³ 'Cheeky' referring to the snake which did not seem afraid of him at all.

neighbour who told him that this it was a manifestation of Majola and must therefore *thetha* with the snake through *nqula* (invocation of the ancestors) in order to ask the snake to leave but also that he must promise to perform a ritual as well as thank the ancestor for the visitation. The frightened man said the following words to the snake:

Jolinkomo, Qengebe, Thole lomthwakazi, uyabulela lo mzi kaNgwanya ngokusihambela, kwaye sithembisa kananjalo ukuba sakwenza ibhekilana ukukubulela ngamathamsanqa osiphathele wona. Sicela kananjalo ukuba uhambe kuba abantwana bayakoyika, kaloku apha ezidolophini abaqhelanga kuzibona. Camagu Ngwanya kaMajola.

Jolinkoma, Qengebe, Thole loMthwakazi, this house of Ngwanya thanks you for your visitation and we also promise to make African beer to show our appreciation for good fortune you have brought to us. We plead with you to leave because children are scared of you because they are not used to snakes as they are born and bred in the city Camagu Ngwanya of Majola.

Ndungane (1992: 73) explains what he calls, *inkomo ethethayo* ('the beast that speaks'), as a beast that is chosen by the ancestors for sacrifice. This beast will usually display strange behaviour such as leaving the fields, entering the areas in which the huts are located and sometimes defecating inside the hut. The same beast may sometimes position itself in the space between the huts and

kraal, known as the *enkundleni*, and bellow. This type of behaviour by an animal is understood as conveying the message (*iyathetha*) that a ritual of sacrifice needs to be performed. *Thetha* is understood as originating from the spiritual world and it is therefore expected that the living respond accordingly. Various forms of *thetha* are applied in different ways during the ritual performance. The acceptance, by the living, that a sacrificial ritual needs to be performed is communicated through different forms of speech:

1.2 *Ukuvuma* (To Accept, Submit, Promise, Agree, Decide, Confirm, Sing or to be a Success)

Vuma is a complex term used in different ways and in different contexts but, ultimately, communicates a message of acceptance. The translations of *vuma* in an ordinary sense can sometimes be seen to contradict with the different translations of *vuma* used within a ritual context. In this chapter, *vuma* will be used in all its possible and differing contexts. The role of *vuma* in the healing of a Pondo girl, as well as different perceptions of the term, are clearly revealed in the following abstract by Monica Hunter (1961):

The 'old people' of the umzi when they heard of her dream *decided* that they would have to kill. There was speaking in the great hut at midday. Peace was made by the word of mouth with the amathongo. Thanks were given to the amathongo for revealing the cause of illness. It was said, "*we understand: we have heard*"... As soon as they spoke, *promising* the beast, *the child got better*" (Hunter, 1961: 241).

1.2.1 *Abantu Abadala Bagqiba* (The Old People Decided)

After the old people heard the message from the ancestors through the dream of the young girl, they made a decision and came to unanimous agreement to perform a sacrifice to the ancestors. To *vuma*, therefore, means to come to a decision in which there is agreement to accept the request by the ancestors to perform a ritual. Once there was agreement, or acceptance, further negotiations took place with the ancestors and among living members of the clan and, as reported by Hunter in the above paragraph, 'peace was made by word of mouth' (Hunter, 1961).

1.2.2 *Sivile* (We Have Heard)

The negotiations leading to an acceptance, by the living, to perform the sacrifice for the young girl were sealed by the utterance, *sivile*, that is, 'we have heard'. By saying 'we have heard', the living members of the clan mean that they have listened to the ancestors and decided, or agreed, to perform the sacrifice. The acknowledgement, 'we have heard' also constitutes a promise in which the living community commit themselves to fulfilling the expectations of the ancestors. The making of a promise can therefore be understood as another form of *vuma* (acceptance).

1.2.3 *Umntwana Waba Ngcono* (The Child Got Better)

As a result of negotiations between clan members, the display of gratitude and the making of peace with the ancestors by the living,

as well as the promise to the ancestors that the ritual would be performed, the ancestors accepted the plea by the elders and the child was healed. The healing of the child thus shows that the ancestors are in agreement (*ukuvuma*) with the physical world and that the relationship between the spiritual and the physical realm has been successfully re-established and confirmed.

As explained earlier, it is misleading to explain the term *vuma* as a singular concept because it refers to a series of stages as part of a process in which a state of acceptance, involving both the living and the spiritual world, is achieved. This process involves the reciprocal exchange of both words and actions between the living and spiritual realm until, finally, the living realm becomes consumed by that of the ancestors, and dialogue is seen to be occurring exclusively in the spiritual world. The refusal by the living to accept (*vuma*) the request made by the ancestors and the failure to perform a ritual is believed to result in living members of the clan becoming sick as a form of punishment by the ancestors until s/he *vuma* or, the person responsible for the performance, *vuma*. As a process involving the co-operation and participation of the entire clan, *vuma* serves to reinforce communal ties and creates a sense of unity within the community as a whole.

Within the African traditional community, decisions are never made on an individual basis and always involve consultation between clan members. This is clearly revealed by Bigalke (1982: 13) who has shown how his informant Rhumsha first explained the Cirha agnatic cluster of his decision before giving his father a gift. The

decision as to who will be responsible for different stages of the process is taken by an *ibhunga* (clan caucus). This means that, from the first day of *vuma*, the process of negotiation is initiated and will continue until the day of *ukutshiswa kwamathambo* on which the bones of the sacrificial animal are collected and burnt because the animal is regarded as property of the ancestors. It is also for this reason that no meat is allowed to be taken out of the host's homestead.

From the time the ancestor/s reveal themselves to the living, the speeches, objects and animals involved undergo a transformation from the ordinary to the sacred as they are no longer regarded as being of this world but are believed to be under the control of the spiritual world. In his analysis of *inkomo ezithethayo* (beasts that show signs of ancestor intervention), Ndungane (1992: 63) explains the transformation in behaviour by the *inkomo yedini* (sacrificial beast) who has been chosen for sacrifice. Once the beast has been chosen for sacrifice it is regarded as being under the control of ancestors and therefore *iyathetha* (it speaks). The *inkomo ethethayo* (speaking beast), even if it is not going to be slaughtered, performs some of the functions related to what it is intended to perform. The term, *inkomo yobulunga*, refers to a sacred beast who has hair removed from its tail brush for healing purposes and is treated separately from other animals because it believed 'to speak'.

A married woman has her own *inkomo yobulunga* from her home which is under her control (Ndungane, 1992: 64; Hunter, 1961:

236). *Inkomo yobulunga* is never used for sacrifices and is slaughtered in a special way called *ukugugiswa* (slaughtered because of old age) to prevent it from dying of old age. *Ukugugisa* is also a form of speech explaining that the animal is not being slaughtered in order to provide meat for the family, or in fulfillment of the wishes of the ancestors, but rather because the animal is old and lacks energy and vitality. *Ukuguga* means ageing, and it is believed that the ancestors should be informed that the sacred beast is old and needs to be replaced. The act of replacement is sacralised through speech and the replacement heifer is introduced to the ancestors before it can be accepted as the new sacred animal of the clan.

After discussions by the agnatic clan have taken place and it has been decided when then animal should be killed, relatives, as well as neighbours and friends, will be informed to attend the ritual. Before the 'day of the falling of the beast', it is required that all the essential 'speaking' apparatus, like *ubulawu bekhaya* (clan medicine) and *umkhonto wekhaya* (clan sacred assegai) is present at the homestead which is hosting the ritual. The *intlabi* (the clan member who is responsible for killing of the sacrificial animals), who is also usually the first- born male, arrives at the homestead a few days before the day of the sacrifice.

On the first day of the preparations, the hut is cleared of everything used within an ordinary, everyday context and the domestic space is transformed into a sacred, ritual space belonging to the ancestors. As a result of this transformation, the home is seen as

representative of the entire universe in which there is no separation between the world of the living and that of the ancestors. Those who sleep in this space are therefore perceived to be in very close contact with the ancestral realm. Communication between the two worlds is believed to be real and it is necessary for *vuma* to be uttered in public, or in the presence of the relevant audience and in the 'appropriate circumstances' (Austin, 1986: 6).

Vuma is also used in the context of singing and is usually accompanied by dancing. Several songs are sung depending on the nature of the ritual sacrifice. The words of each song always have a particular meaning and significance and work to inspire the audience to be aware of the motivation behind the ritual. *Somagwaza*, for example, is not sung in any ritual except during the initiation of males, in some diviners' seances, and when males are coming back from war. *Nongabe* is only sung during initiation of female members of the clan. *Intlombe* (ritual dance and singing) takes place in the main house at the beginning of, and during, other rituals (McAllister, 1988). *Intlombe* constitutes another form of worship within African Traditional Religion and it is the time that almost all clan members and *izalamane*⁴ participate. Songs relating to the ancestors are sung and it is believed that the main hut is filled with the presence of ancestors.

Vuma serves as a means of restoring and maintaining harmony

⁴ A term which usually refers to those who are related to the clan through marriage of their parents.

within the community by bringing about holistic healing, salvation and balance within the individual and to all the members of the clan which, in turn, is extended to the community at large. There is no distinction between words and actions relating to *vuma* because, in the very act of speaking *vuma*, the action is immediately performed.

2. Offering the Sacrifice

The day of the falling of beast is the most important and it is the day on which the sacrifice is performed (McAllister, 1988). The day is characterised by different types of speeches and actions, which are believed to have a therapeutic effect. The main speech, *ingxelo* (to announce or to inform) is characterised by different forms of *thetha*, like *ukubulela* (to thank), *ukwazisa* (to inform), *ukunqula* (to invoke), and *ukuvuma* (to sing, to accept, to respond). The climax of the ritual is the moment at which the living receive a sign from the ancestors showing that their offering has been accepted by the spiritual world. *Ukukhala* (crying of the beast) is regarded as a sign of the acceptance from the spiritual world. After the animal has been skinned, a certain portion of the meat, or *intsonyama*, is roasted without salt, inside the kraal. It is then put in special herbs (*umnquma* or *umthathi*), cut into small pieces and is eaten by all the members of the clan. This is called *umoshwamo* (first taste) and is regarded by the clan as *iyeza* (medicine). The process of this communion involves the clan and *abatshana* (a collective name for nieces and nephews which simply means children born from the mother's side).

2.1 *Ingxelo* (To Announce, to Inform, to Give Response)

Ingxelo or *ukwazisa* is the public speech or formal oratory, performed by the elder, to inform the community of the purpose of the ritual. *Ingxelo* is the marker, which separates the ensuing ancestral ceremony, from the ongoing social interaction (Kuckertz, 1990: 233). The stages through which the feast is going to proceed are also indicated by a set of specific references made by the ritual elders. The process of giving *ingxelo* is complex and involves many stages in order for it to be rendered meaningful. These stages are going to be discussed at length below. The community within African traditional society is made up of clans and it is therefore vital that each sacrifice begins with an *ingxelo* among the living and departed members within the clan before it is extended to the broader community. *Ingxelo* takes place at three sacred places during the ritual sacrifice. The first *ingxelo* takes place in the main hut before the clan goes out to the kraal. The *ingoma yekhaya* (the sacred song of the clan) is sung, and in the middle of the song, the clan elder will stop the singing by calling '*camagu*'. *Camagu* is an indication that someone wants to talk and is only uttered during ritual sacrifice. The meaning and other uses of *camagu* will be discussed later in this chapter. When the singing has stopped, the clan elder addresses all the participants and tells them what is going to be done. Although the clan members know what type of the animal has been slaughtered, the clan elder will inform the ancestors of the purpose of the ritual, the type and colour of the animal which is to be sacrificed and that African beer has been

prepared for the ritual. The clan elder then leads the clan outside the main hut to the *inkundla*, the space between the main hut and the cattle kraal. Once they are in the *inkundla*, the clan elder will first address the ancestors, and then the entire community, and repeats what he has already said inside the main hut. The members of the community are, at this stage, acting as spectators who witness the ritual sacrifice.

While singing, members of the clan proceed from the *inkundla* to the cattle kraal and the procedure is repeated at *exhantini* (cattle kraal entrance), which is always perceived as being a sacred space, highly charged with the presence of ancestors.

Ingxelo can be defined very broadly as consisting of the following:

2.1.1 *Ukubulela* (To thank, to recognise, to Respect)

There is an old African saying that '*umntu ngumntu ngabantu*' ('I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am'). The success of any ritual depends on the attendance of clan members and its neighbours. After a ritual has been performed, the success of the ritual is expressed with the words: '*belivumile kuba bekugcwele ngabantu*' ('it was a success because it was well attended'). In most cases, people have left their respective duties and responsibilities in order to participate within the ritual and it is therefore very important to show appreciation and respect towards everybody who has formed part of the ritual. In fact, thanking is always the first utterance of every speaker as it is important to recognise that one is

speaking with human beings who have sacrificed their precious time to, assist with, and witness the ritual. It is customary to begin with thanking all those present in every speech. The first to receive thanks are the ancestors of the *amawethu* (kinsmen), then the living clan members, and finally, gratitude is expressed to the community at large. This is reflected in the events which took place at Tywaka, Willowvale, when an elder of the Dlamini clan opened the ritual involving the drinking of beer by saying:

Ndiyabulela Mazizi (I thank you Mazizi).

BooNjokweni, ooMtatela, ooNgxib'inoboya

Ndibulela ukuba le mini niyenze yayimpumelelo

(I thank you for making this day a success).

Ndibulela nani Mazizi alapha

I thank you Mazizi who are here (referring to the clan).

Ndibulela nezihlobo ezizimase lo mcimbi

I also thank friends who have dignified this occasion).

Ndithi kuni ningadinwa nangomso

(I say to you do not be tired, keep on supporting).

Camagu.

The mere presence of the ancestors, kinsmen and the community at large instill a sense of hope that the sacrifice will be a success. Thanking can also be understood as a means of acknowledging the inter-dependence between the living and the deceased and affirming the relationships which exist between the living members of the community.

2.1.2 *Ukwazisa* (To Inform, to Tell, to let it be Known)

Ukwazisa marks the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, in other words, it distinguishes between those occupying a central role

and those who remain on the periphery during the ritual of sacrifice. Members of the agnatic clan inform those present about the reasons and events that have led to the necessity of performing the ritual. McAllister (1988: 47) cites an example of this kind of speech by Rhumsha who was observed as saying the following words:

Oh, let's get it on with it.
 This is what it is Cirha people.
 What I am calling you to the home for.
 Here, for some time I have been thinking about my father.
 However, I had no means (lit. 'feathers').
 I can say that I was not ill, even now I have never been ill.

What is clear to me is that I should do things.
 That I should do something for him, such as a beast.
 I brought him back (i.e. home after death).
 Now I want to give him a gift.
 An ox and a beast.

In the above extract, Rhumsha informs those present that what he is doing is 'speaking', in other words, that the ritual is being performed for his deceased father. By explaining that the reason for the ritual is because he had been thinking about his father, Rhumsha's words challenge the misconception that sacrifice is done only as a cure for illness or misfortune within African traditional society. The act of informing the people plays an important role in identifying the reason for the sacrifice and communicates the expected outcome. It is also through the act of informing that all those present come to know and identify their boundaries in terms of the extent to which they participate within the ritual.

2.1.3 *Ukunqula* (To Invoke the Ancestors, to Recognise their Power, to Refer to Ancestors, to Thank or Praise Ancestors)

All speeches share a common feature, that is, they all make reference to the ancestors. *Ukunqula* is to call on the ancestors by their names and to use their praise names or, *izingulo*, which are the same as their names before they died. *Ukunqula* can thus be seen as a means of establishing an intimate level of contact with the ancestors. *Ukunqula* also reflects the place which is of importance to the deceased members of the lineage. Cook (1930: 109) maintains that a sacrifice is without efficacy unless the officiant calls out *isingulo*, or praise names of the ancestors to whom the sacrifice is made. *Ukunqula* is always followed by an offering to the ancestors and then the request on the part of the living. An example of this submission was cited during an *ingxelo* (explanation of the purpose of the ritual) at Willowvale. The clan elder offered the following explanation:

Camagu Mazizi, booNjokweni, booMtatela
Siyacamagusha kuni sinqula kananjalo
Nali ke Mazizi itakane esininika lona
 (Here is the lamb that we are offering you Mazizi).
Sisithi sicela impilo
 (We are asking for good health).
Sisithi makubekho uxolo kulo mzi kaNjokweni
 (We are saying there should be peace in this Njokweni homestead).

The calling of an *iziduko* or *izibongo* (clan names), coupled with the offering made to the ancestors, fulfils the request of the sacrificer. By uttering these words, it is believed that the request

made to the ancestors, by the living, is fulfilled. *Izibongo* always do things, regardless of how they do (Opland, 1983: 132). A consideration of *izibongo* as a series of performative utterances helps to understand their power within African society. It is believed that the effect produced through ritual speech, during the offering of an animal, is experienced immediately by the participants. Depending on the type of the ritual, it is common, among amaXhosa, to offer a goat or an ox to the ancestors.

The acceptance of the sacrifice by the ancestors is communicated through the crying of the animal or, *ukukhala*, when it is tapped on the navel with a sacred spear (Elliot, 1970: 133). It is a misconception to think that the cry is a result of any pain experienced by the animal because this is done prior to any actual stabbing. Kuckertz (1990: 239) argues that the bellowing of the animal is an essential element because the cry is the medium through which the praises spoken by the elder will be communicated to the agnatic ancestors. Kuckertz is partly correct in identifying the connection between the bellowing of the animal and how it relates to the ancestors. However, the cry is a sign that ancestors have accepted the sacrifice rather than a medium for relaying, to the ancestors, the praises expressed by the elder. If the *intlabi* (the person to kill the animal) is impure, or if the ritual is not done properly, there is the possibility that the animal might not bellow. The cry of the animal is the medium through which acceptance is conveyed to the living. When the animal makes the cry, the following words are said: '*icamagu livumile*' ('*icamagu* has agreed'), meaning that the ancestors have accepted the sacrifice and

that the aim of the sacrifice has been achieved. However, if the animal does not cry, amaXhosa say: ‘*xa ingakhalanga iyayekwa*’ which translates as ‘if it did not cry it is freed’. In the event of this happening, this means that the ancestors have not accepted the sacrifice and the animal has to be freed (Sebe, 1982: 47). Rejection could be due to the sacrifice not being carried out according to the wishes of the ancestors, the failure to follow proper ritual procedures, or if responsibility for the killing of the animal is given to the wrong person. This signals a breakdown in communication between the two worlds and it is believed that there now exists the need for reconciliation between the living and the ancestors. The rejection of the sacrificial ritual is followed by another form of ritual speech, *ngxola*, which means to pardon, to plead, or to inquire.

2.2 *Camagu* (To Bless, to Appease, to Forgive, to Praise, to Honour or Let it be So)

Camagu is an exclusively Xhosa term frequently used in all situations in which the ancestors are involved. *Camagu* cannot be translated directly and should rather be understood as an utterance, appearing in all ritual speeches, which can be explained only in terms of the context in which it is used. The inherent complexity of *camagu* has resulted in scholars offering a number of different meanings and interpretations of the term. *Camagu* can be used as a noun ‘*icamagu*’ (Pauw, 1975: 125), as a verb *siyacamagusha* or as a form of exclamation ‘*camagu!*’ which means, ‘be appeased’ (McAllister, 1997). *Camagu* is also used in the opening speech by

the clan elder to command the full attention of his audience who recognize it as an utterance demanding respect. Most scholars commonly associate *camagu* with a plea for forgiveness and define the term as meaning 'to appease' or 'to be pardoned' (McAllister, 1988). Sebe (1982: 44) has argued that *camagu* is used during rituals pertaining to birth, bringing back the deceased, accompanying the deceased and when offering a gift to an ancestor. Sebe (1982: 46) has argued that *ukucamagusha* (to praise, to honour) is associated with all sacrifice performed for the ancestors and followed by the brewing of African beer and the killing of a beast. However, in this context *camagu* cannot be interpreted as meaning, 'to appease', as there is no element of sickness involved but can rather be seen as a renewal of the relationship between the living and the deceased.

Within the process of *ukucamagusha*, *camagu* is used more frequently to accompany other forms of ritual speech. The cry of the animal is heard during the ritual of sacrifice once the sacred spear has been passed through the hind legs and over the belly and fore legs of the animal. Bigalke (1982: 22) and Kuckertz (1990: 126) describe this as an act of consecration whereby the animal is made 'clean' for the ancestors. As mentioned earlier, the cry of the animal symbolises acceptance from the spiritual world and, uttered in this context, *camagu* can be understood as an expression of joy (Ndungane, 1992: 55; Sityana, 1978: 63; Sebe, 1982: 47). The cry of the beast is followed by the ululation of the female members of the clan, or the *iintombi*, who joyously call upon all the ancestors. Everybody understands that on such an occasion *icamagu livumile*

that is, 'the sacrifice has been accepted'. The crying of the beast, as well as *camagu* by males in the kraal and the ululating of *iintombi*, all serve to heighten the performative acceptance of the ritual. For example, within the ritual of 'bringing back the deceased', all these aspects would be interpreted as a sign that the deceased have returned and are protecting the living and, in this context, *camagu* can be taken to mean 'let it be so', 'welcome back', 'thank you', 'I agree' or 'we have heard'.

Camagu is also used during rituals of reconciliation between the living and the spiritual world and, in this context, can be understood as meaning 'to appease' 'to propitiate'. Another use of *camagu* can be noted in the responses from the audience who acknowledge that they agree with the speaker addressing both the living and the deceased. *Camagu* is clearly a complex term and, although it has different meanings in different contexts, it is always used on sacred occasions and has a spiritual meaning as it is always used to draw the attention of the ancestors. In his discussion of *camagu*, Laubscher offers the following observations:

In studying the various examples when '*Camagu*' is employed and the mental and emotional atmosphere which accompanies it seems to convey or call up much feelings as reverence, holiness, power that pardons or forgive, the unseen world of goodness is around one. When one looks at *Camagu*, the word carries the binding force in all the ritual practices and it carries the ritual power. (Laubscher, 1975: 18-19)

2.3 *Ukungxengxeza* (To Plead, to Entreat, to Apologise, to Acknowledge a Fault, to Rectify)

It is believed that anger or dissatisfaction by the ancestors is communicated to the living in the form of dreams or visions and can also manifest as unusual behaviour by people and animals. Under these circumstances, the living are required to seek appeasement from the ancestors. Appeasement can only be achieved through the performance of rituals and by addressing the ancestors in a specific way. *Ukungxengxeza* is a form of speech which is associated with the acknowledgment of fault, and delay or ignorance of responsibility on behalf of the living. It is *ukungxengxeza* that most scholars discuss within the context of sacrifice or the ritual slaughtering of an animal.

When circumstances prevent the performance of a ritual, such as financial problems or in a situation when one is too far from the ancestral home, the elders of the clan, *ngxola*. *Ngxola* is a form of appeasement whereby the elder requests that the ancestors grant the living a chance to perform the neglected ritual. It is believed that *ngxola* should always be accompanied by an acknowledgment of fault as well as the promise to perform the ritual. The words spoken include a plea to heal the sufferer and *ukungxola* can therefore also bring about temporary healing of the afflicted.

Ngxola, which does not have a direct English translation, has been interpreted as meaning to scold and points to disrespect and

misconduct or improper behaviour on the part of the living. However, from an African perspective, it can be understood as an act of humble submission and constitutes a request to follow the right course of action. In one particular case, a teacher working in Umtata fell ill and her sickness was interpreted by the elders as conveying the need for a thanksgiving ritual which she was supposed to have performed two years ago. After verbally agreeing to perform the ritual and explaining to the ancestors that conditions were not yet suitable as it was during the school term, the woman was healed. The elders of the clan who were also working in Umtata at the time had to *ngxola* and said the following words:

*Mawethu sivile
Nentombazana ivumile
Iza kuwenza lo mcimbi njengoko nifuna njalo
Camagu*

*Ithi ke mandinicele khe niyimele
Kaloku apha ikwamlungu, ikude nekhaya
Ayinayo nendawo, ke icela niyiphe ithuba
Icela khe niyiphe umthyi kude kube ngoDisemba
Xa izikolo zivaliwe
Camagu*

We have heard, my ancestors.
The girl has also agreed.
She will do the ritual the way you want it to be done.
Camagu.

She says I must ask you to give her some time.
She is under a white man's control, she is far from home.
She does not even have her own place, she is asking for some time.
She is pleading you to give her some relief until December.
When the schools have closed.

Camagu.

3. Sharing the Sacrifice

3.1 *Umoshwamo* (Sacred Communal Meal)

The day on which the animal is actually killed is also referred to as the day of the ‘falling of the beast’ and is regarded as *imini yeyeza* which means ‘healing’ or can be translated literally as ‘day of medicine’. After the animal has been slaughtered and skinned, a piece of meat (*intsonyama*) is removed from the right fore limb. The *intsonyama* is then roasted without salt and placed upon a pile of special herbs beside an *ingqayi* (clay pot) full of African beer. All the members of the clan, including the *abatshana* (nephews and nieces) participate in the communal meal (*umoshwamo*). After being called inside the cattle kraal, everyone is given a piece of meat and a sip of beer. During this part of the ritual, a male elder of the clan speaks to the ancestors and informs them once again about the ritual and about the presence of the clan. A clan member during *umoshwamo* in the bringing back ritual at Idutywa said:

*BooRhade, ooNdlebentle zombini, ooMthimkhulu
Naba abantwana benu
Bazokucela ukuphila
Bazokuthi bajongeni
Ukuze lithi eli yeza bazakulifumana namhlanje
Libaphilise boonke
Athi nobengemi emzini wakhe
Athi ngokugcamla apha eyezeni aphile*

Rhadebes, Ndlebentle zombini, Mthimkhulus.
Here are your children.

They have come to ask for health.
 They have come to ask you to look at them.
 So that the medicine they are going to receive today heals
 them all.
 Even the one who does not conceive in her marriage.
 By participating in this medicine, she is healed.

The communal meal symbolises the unification of the spiritual and the physical worlds, the sharing of spirituality and the process of healing which is called *ukushwama*. Ndungane (1992: 26) explains that the communal meal constitutes the core of a ritual but it is *ukushwama* which distinguishes ordinary slaughtering from sacrifice. *Ukushwama* is the healing part of a ritual and is always associated with *iyeza* (medicine) by its participants.

3.2 *Ukuyala* (To admonish, to Guide, to Advise, to Warn, to Teach, to Exhort)

Morality is a vital source of law and order in the African community. This morality is taught in many ways, both practically and by word of mouth. Morality and responsibility go hand in hand. One is always taught that, as a representative of the clan, one should never disgrace his/her clan including its deceased members. One would say that *nezinyanya zam zingandiqumbela ukuba ndingenza inyala* ('even my ancestors would be cross with me if I can do that bad habit'). The elders are responsible for *bayayala* (admonish, advise, teach, guide, and warn) as a way of reminding individuals that their behaviour is representative of the clan as a whole and communicates the importance of leading a moral and spiritual life for the benefit of the entire community.

At a male initiation ceremony held at the Sebeni location, Willowvale, an area inhabited by the Gcaleka community, Chief Vamsinya Dumalisile (A-a-aNdabazandile) conveyed words of *ukuyala* to the two male *abakhwetha* (initiates) during the admonishes before sharing them with the rest of the community. Chief Ndabazandile said the following words to the two initiates who were listening attentively:

Kulo nyaka mntan'am uyihlo akazukulima

This year my child your father is not going to plough his fields.

Kuba kaloku uFayidukwe umxhelile ukuze ube yindoda

Because he has slaughtered Fayidukhwe so that you must become a man.

Uze usebenze uvuse uFayidukhwe

You must therefore work to raise Fayidukhwe.

Indoda iyasebenza

A man must work.

In the admonitions, the initiate's new status as a man is emphasised as he is told of the responsibilities and expectations required of him now that he has undergone the transformation to adulthood. The initiate is told to look after his parents as they grow older and is reminded of the sacrifice done by his father. (The boy's father had slaughtered a beast that he was using for ploughing, especially for the occasion, and would now have to enlist the help of his neighbours in ploughing his mielie field.) As an adult, the initiate is expected to work closer to his father and assist in the acquiring of beasts.

To conclude, sacrificing is a communal way of enacting communication with the spiritual. The spiritual world

communicates with the physical world of the living through symbols such as meat, beer, plants, animals and objects or, more directly, through individual members of the community. Symbols convey the silent language of the ancestors who are seen to respond to the needs of the community who strive to sustain unity and social harmony. It is through these symbols that the presence of the ancestors is made meaningful within the lives of the living bringing together the spiritual and physical world.

4. The Power of Words

4.1 The Present Tense

During sacrifice, ritual speech always appears in the present tense and the participation of the living and the ancestors is both reciprocal and simultaneous. The nature of the ritual for which the sacrifice is being performed determines the nature of the words which will be uttered during the ritual. The sacrifice is always carried out according to a set of procedures discussed within an *ibhunga* (clan preparatory meeting). The order of speakers depend on the different kinds of ritual speech, for example, during an *ingxelo*, it is the clan elder who gives an *ingxelo*, and is supported by his brothers in further explanation.

It is believed that, by speaking in the present tense, sincerity on the part of the speaker is communicated and shows that s/he is 'talking from the heart'. The dialogue between the speaker and the ancestors is believed to be practical. For example, an elder will say

the following to the ancestors: '*Nali itakane esininika lona*' ('Here is the lamb that we are offering to you'). The statement works to create a 'mental picture' in which one group, representative of the giver, is distinguished from the group who are understood as being the receiver.

The concept of ritual speech does not refer to the past actions of an individual performed within the context of ritual. Ritual speeches are not prescribed. The speaker needs to be knowledgeable of the nature of a ritual speech as s/he is responsible for communicating the purpose of the ritual to the ancestors and to the community. Bloch considers ritual speech to be a controlled and prescribed form of speech which serves as a form of social control. However, this interpretation may be due to his own limitations in the practice of the people he studied. According to Bloch, ritual speech is similar to the speech made at the chief's place but falls short in his explanation as to how *ingxelo* is performed in both contexts. Similarly, Ray (1973) draws similarities between ritual speech and the type of speech used in other contexts:

The same type of speeches which occur in the sacrifices also occur in secular court cases, and both are called by the same word *log*. In both situations, legal and ritual, the speeches do the same thing : they delineate the moral and intentional aspects of past actions. This structural identity between ritual and non-ritual performatives also agree with what Finnegan has observed among the Limba, that ritual utterances perform the same type of semantic operation as performed by illocutionary acts in everyday, non-ritual contexts. (Ray, 1973: 23-4)

The above statement shows that the author does not have a full

understanding of the different types of ritual speeches which occur within sacrifice. *Nqula*, *camagu*, and *shwama*, in amaXhosa ritual speech, for example, is completely absent in other social gatherings. Other existing forms of speech are done in a very limited manner and do not directly address the ancestors. *Ingxelo* is done only to the people attending the ceremony and *yala* is performed on specific occasions like, in court, when the culprit is admonished by responsible members of the community and warned not to repeat the crime.

4.2 Dialogue

Dialogue always requires an immediate response and confirmation from both parties in order for it to be effective. Uncertainties and misunderstandings are resolved during ritual performances. Mutual respect is facilitated by the use of language common to both parties. Scholars experience difficulty in the study of African religion because their analysis is based on a single form of ritual, the ritual of appeasement. These authors also lack an insider's knowledge of the processes taking place in an African ritual and have the tendency to analyse ritual speech from the perspective of 'book religions' that like to recite what was said in the past. Ray (1973: 29), for example, misunderstands the cause of the performative action of words in ritual. According to Ray, power is derived from the living because ritual speech is performed by a person of authority within the community who is seen as commanding the ancestors:

amends and ensure that the sacrifice is accepted.

In short, one could conclude by saying that ritual speech during sacrifice is controlled and formalised in the sense that it defines ritual and has a performative function but the end result is, ultimately, dependent on the approval and response of the ancestors. The variety of speech is determined by the type of sacrifice. This can be observed in the complex meanings of the different speeches which are uttered during different types of sacrifices. Sacrifice, therefore, is an offering which is transferred to its destination through verbal and non-verbal communication. It is the power of words that transforms the ordinary offering into a gift for the ancestors from the living. AmaXhosa ritual speech differs from ordinary speech because it is directed at the ancestors but also because it is seen as originating from the spiritual realm. During sacrificing, words transform the ritual environment into a spiritual world where the participants forget that death has separated them from their deceased relatives.

CHAPTER THREE

INTWASO: DIVINATION

The field of African traditional healing and the role of healers within African indigenous society have been the focus of many scholarly debates. Despite extensive research, as yet, no exact translation of the term *igqirha*, or a person who is called by the ancestors to heal, exists. This shortfall can be attributed to the fact that the approach to the study of African healing systems is dominated by Western methods of study and interpretation. The work of an *igqirha* is holistic because it deals with the biological, psychological, spiritual, social aspects of an individual. For this reason, the study of the nature and functions of an *igqirha* should always be grounded in an understanding of African sets of experiences and its specific terminology. Kruger has argued that the attempts made, so far, to understand the work of an *igqirha* have not been very successful. While some researchers have been more generous than others have, they have all judged him in terms of Western medical and psychological standards (Kruger, 1981: 37).

It is unfortunate that the dominance of Western approaches continues to pervade the work of scholars, even those such as Vera Bührmann, who claim to offer a positive perspective on the study of African religion. Buhrman sees the practices of an *igqirha* as a continuation of pre-literate traditions and those of the West as literate and therefore 'civilised'. She explains her point by arguing

as follows:

From my first contact with the healers and their ceremonies about nine years ago I was strongly influenced by the way in which preliterate people in therapy act out what the Western people talk about..." (Bührmann, 1984: 13)

Burhmann's analysis of African healing methods is also problematic because it is based largely on a comparison between African and Western ideological paradigms:

The two worlds I am concerned with are the Western world which is primarily scientific, rational and ego-oriented, and the world of the Black healer and his people, which is primarily intuitive, non-rational or oriented towards the inner world of symbols and images of the collective unconscious. (Bührmann, 1984: 15)

According to this line of analysis, African communities, such as the amaXhosa, are seen as representative of preliterate societies and can be characterized by terms such as 'non-rational' and 'non-scientific'. However, rather than attempting to offer a definition of the work of a diviner, this chapter focuses on the power of words used within divination as well the importance of the meaning of messages conveyed in the form of symbols, dance, song and *ukunqula* (invoking) the spiritual world. Remaining focused on the power of *ukuthetha*, this chapter discusses the forms of ritual speech which characterize - and manifest themselves - in all aspects of the work of an *igqirha*.

An important distinction often overlooked by scholars, especially in the translation of African terminology, is the difference between

an *igqirha* (diviner) and an *ixhwele* (medicine man/herbalist). Besides designating an *igqirha*, the concept of an indigenous healer could also refer to an *ixhwele* (herbalist) who is someone who may have learned the use of indigenous medicine from a parent or grandparent. In some ways, an *ixhwele* can be compared with a pharmacist who has knowledge of the uses of different medicines but, ultimately, it is a qualified doctor who provides a diagnosis as well the prescription. In other words, the role of an *ixhwele* is limited to his/her knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants without having the ability to determine the cause of illness. Moreover an *ixhwele* can be differentiated from an *igqirha* as s/he does not undergo any ritual processes such as 'accepting the sickness' and graduating to be a fully-fledged *igqirha*. A herbalist may have the gift of knowing a particular medicine revealed by the ancestors but s/he does not undergo any training with regards to the different stages of healing and communication with the spiritual realm. In contrast with an *igqirha*, a herbalist does not have the ability to diagnose the nature of a sickness and can merely provide medicine for relief from an ailment.

In my analysis of *ukuthetha*, I have chosen to focus specifically on the role of an *igqirha* and the process in which someone is called to be a diviner. This chapter will concentrate on the practice of divination based within a Xhosa cosmology, as the call to become a diviner is believed to be a call from one's own ancestors. I have chosen not to include an analysis of ritual speech used by the amaBhaca (Bhacas) and amaMpondo (Mpondos) as they make use of a Xhosa dialect and are influenced by Zulu methods of

divination.

Translations of the term *igqirha* have the tendency to offer a limited understanding of the role of the diviner. For example, when translated as ‘witch-doctor’, the role of the diviner is understood only in terms of his/her ability to ‘smell’ witches. Such definitions do not account for the holistic nature of the healing abilities of an *igqirha*. The diviner takes into account the physical, spiritual, psychological and sociological dimensions of an individual’s experience in order to heal somebody of their ailment. An *igqirha* is able to determine the cause of an illness and can detect if the sickness is due to a biological dysfunction, or if it can be attributed to the work of evil spirits or dissatisfaction on the part of the ancestors. Moreover, the term ‘witch-doctor’ is a loaded term used historically, by both colonialists and missionaries, with the explicit purpose of perpetuating a distorted understanding of the work of an *igqirha*. It is for these reasons that I reject the term ‘witch-doctor’ and will not make use of it in my discussion.

My analysis of the role of the *igqirha* constitutes an attempt to move beyond the argument by Bührmann who confines her discussion of the role of the diviner to its psychological dimensions. This will be achieved by focusing on *intlombe* which is a spiritual gathering of *amagqirha* sometimes referred to as a séance. Different categories of ritual speech which occur in the process of an *intwaso* (divination) will be critically analysed in the discussion that follows.

The focus of this chapter on *intwaso* (divination) will be to analyse three major aspects of divination: *ukuthwasa* (to be called to be a diviner), *imvuma kufa* (acceptance of the sickness), and *ukuphuma kwegqirha* (graduation of the diviner). In my analysis of these aspects, the emphasis will be on the verbal processes at work within divination while focusing mainly on the interaction between the living and departed.

1. Communication with Ancestors

As already explained in the previous chapter, communication between the ancestors and the living can occur in a variety of ways and through a variety of mediums. To a large extent, *amagirha* can be understood in terms of their role as mediators between the spiritual and living realm in that the ancestors are seen to communicate through them. The primary duty of healing is accomplished in many different ways, some of which are going to be dealt with thoroughly in this chapter. *Amagqirha* are regarded as people who have received a special calling from the ancestors and, under the guidance of those ancestors, undergo training in order to become a diviner. One cannot choose to become an *agqirha*. One has to be chosen and has to accept the call by the ancestors before s/he can practice any form of healing. Essentially, the acceptance of the call to become a diviner means the acceptance to live a life directed and controlled by the ancestors. The close relationship between the diviner and the ancestors distinguishes him/her from ordinary members of the community and contact with the physical world is therefore perceived as defiling for the diviner.

The divination process requires that the diviner listen to the voices of the ancestors and involves the performance of certain rituals as well as a strict observance of taboos. In order to affirm, restore and sustain the relationship between the diviner and the ancestors, s/he refers to the ancestral and spiritual world on a daily basis.

The call of the ancestors demands the involvement of the individual as a whole and therefore the physical, psychological, emotional, social and, most importantly, spiritual aspects are all implicated within the process of divination. The African traditional worldview can be characterized by its holistic approach to healing which is based on the belief that all aspects of the individual are inter-related and that a spiritual ailment can therefore manifest itself within the body as a physical ailment. The study of divination according to 'Western, natural scientific' terms can serve to distort an understanding of the holistic nature of African systems of healing (Mills, 1984).

Despite the commonalties that might exist in most divination methods in different African ethnics groups, all aspects of the divination process need to be understood within their cultural and performative contexts in order to move beyond a superficial analysis of the work of a diviner. An understanding of the Xhosa divination system should therefore be located within the broader context of Xhosa cosmology (Schweitzer and Bührmann, 1978: 15).

2. *Ukuthwasa* (Call to Divination)

Ukuthwasa or *ukufa okumhlophe*⁵ or *umsholugu* (Sityana, 1978: 35) manifests itself in various ways. *Intwaso*, which is a noun for *ukuthwasa* meaning a ‘call to divination’, is associated with ‘sickness’ in that the individual undergoes a transformation which, in some cases, manifests itself as profound changes in behaviour. During *intwaso*, dreams are no longer analysed in a conventional sense and become ‘real’ in the sense that they are regarded as messages which must be taken literally. The English translation of the word ‘sick’, used in relation to a diviner, can convey a distorted interpretation of the expression. ‘*Ukufa*’, literally meaning ‘death’ or ‘to die’ is a symbolic expression which, within the context of divination, denotes a spiritual call to heal and conveys the ability of the diviner to predict and reveal what is ‘hidden’ to the living. The person who has now *thwasa* or, ‘changed’, acts as the symbol of mediation between the spiritual (*ukukhanya*) and living worlds. The association of a diviner with light can be understood in terms of his/her ability to reveal and unveil. In Xhosa terminology, the diviner is described as a light illuminating (*uyenza mhlophe*) what is hidden from ordinary members of the community. This metaphorical association is reflected in the white clothing and beads worn by an *igqirha* and the use of white ochre by *amathwasa*

⁵ This term can be translated literally as ‘white sickness’, white representing light, to know the unknown.

or *abakhwetha* (initiates/novices). Within Xhosa cosmology, it is believed that the colour black is associated with darkness, death and misfortune and therefore needs to be avoided by the *amagqirha*. This is clearly revealed in the daily chanting during invocation in which the following words are said: '*Mabuded' ubumnyama kuvele ukukhanya* ('darkness must be removed and be replaced by light').

Divination within African Traditional Religion cannot be understood as a singular, uniform process. It is believed that the ancestors call diviners in different ways in order to perform different kinds of duties. There are different types of *amagqirha*, for example, an *amatola* (rain doctor). However, my analysis is not concerned with different categories of *amagqirha* but rather with different forms of speech uttered during the process of divination. I have therefore chosen to focus on an *intlombe yamagqirha* (a spiritual gathering of diviners) which is a ritual performed by all *amagqirha*, irrespective of the kind of call. In other words, we will not speak of *amagqirha omlambo* (those called by the river) or *amagqirha ehlathi* (those called by the forest).

As discussed earlier, literal translations of Xhosa terminology can sometimes distort the meaning they are trying to convey within the context of African Traditional Religion. It is also important to take into consideration that the issue is made more complex due to the fact that certain words take on different meanings when used in relation to the ancestors or to the spiritual world. For instance,

various scholars have described *ukuthwasa* in many different ways, but none have succeeded in conveying the real meaning of the term. *Ukuthwasa* has been described as the condition in which one becomes 'possessed by a spirit' (Nieuwenhuisen, 1974: 35), or, defined as meaning 'to come out' or 'appear gradually' (Hunter, 1961: 320). Nieuwenhuisen's definition cannot be regarded as adequate because he relies on the vague notion of 'spirit' which can mean many things. However, in the case of divination, it means to be called by one's ancestors to be a traditional healer.

The association of *ukuthwasa* with 'sickness' is also misinterpreted and is deliberately analysed from an outsider's perspective in order to reinforce Western perceptions of Africa as 'preliterate' and 'non-rational'. Schweitzer and Bührmann (1978) argue the following:

It is indicated that if someone is *thwasa*, a precondition exists, i.e. that his relationship to the shades is disturbed and his being is in a state of dis-equilibrium which gives rise to strange experiences and strange behaviour. The relationship during treatment changes into a 'meaning giving' one, accompanied by a sense of 'well-being'. Psychologically, *thwasa* experience is essential and is the first step in the resolution of a particular crisis in living, and in the process of becoming an *igqirha*. (Schweitzer and Bührmann, 1978: 17)

Descriptions such as these are misleading in that they identify 'disturbance' as forming the basis of the experience when one is called to be a diviner. However, it is believed that diviners are called through dreams and visions and it is neglect, ignorance or refusal to accept the call, by the living, which causes imbalance in the life of the individual. The disturbance serves as a reminder that

one is being called by one's ancestors or serves as a form of punishment to those refusing to respond to the call and thus showing disrespect to the spiritual world. Under such circumstances, the ancestors usually convey their dissatisfaction and anger in the form of sickness which is manifested in the individual or his/her children. As stated by the following informant, sometimes the person called is not yet ready to accept the call of the ancestors or, in other cases, does not believe that s/he is really being called to be an *igqirha*:

To become an *igqirha* you first have to accept the calling which, in most cases, people take time to accept. This was the case with myself. I was told at different times by other *amagqirha* that I had to accept the calling but I could not believe yet and so I did not want to become *igqirha*. (cited in Dovey and Mjingwana, 1985: 79)

An *igqirha* cited by Dovey and Mjingwana says:

For most *amagqirha*, even prior to their acceptance of the calling, they have the ability to communicate with the shades- to perceive phenomena that ordinary people cannot perceive. (Dovey and Mjingwana 1985: 75)

The first paragraph reveals that *ukuvuma* is the critical phase which most people delay in responding to and it is the neglect of *imvuma kufa* (acceptance of the call) which results in sickness as punishment for disobedience to the ancestors. The second paragraph explains that ancestors communicate with the person they have chosen and provide instructions which have to be adhered to. On some occasions, the birth of a diviner is marked by signs that the child has a special relationship with the ancestors and that he/she has the ability of foretelling the needs of the ancestors

or to predict future events within the community. In the case of an *umntwana wesingxobo* (a child which is born covered with a membrane), the older women of the community take it upon themselves to protect the future *igqirha* against ill health by keeping the caul so that it can be placed in the child's bathing water.

2.1 *Ukuthonga* (Dreaming)

Most scholars have accurately identified dreaming as one of the major forms of communication between the ancestors and the living but fail to recognize it as the preliminary symptom of *ukuthwasa* (call to divination) (Dovey and Mjingwana, 1985; Schweitzer and Bührmann, 1978; Hunter, 1961; Lienhardt, 1961). Scholars such as Hunter (1961) and Pauw (1975) believe that physical illness is the preliminary symptom to *ukuthwasa* but research has shown that it is the neglect of dreams which convey messages from the ancestors that results in physical sickness.

A dream in which no ancestor related symbols or images appear is considered to be an ordinary dream and referred to as an *iphupha*. In contrast, *amathongo* are dreams that interpreted as carrying messages from ancestors and therefore need to be narrated (*ukulilawula*) or related the following day. The entrance to the world of divination is marked by the use of a new set of vocabulary in order to ensure proper and meaningful communication between the two worlds.

In the context of dreams, it is not only the meaning of words which are transformed, but also the meaning attributed to objects as well as to animals (Jordan, 1980; Lienhardt, 1961, Broaster, 1984). Sityana (1978) explains how a person with *intwaso* dreams, for example, of wild animals and deceased family elders. A revelation of this kind is understood as a dream which conveys a message from the spiritual realm. Each and every clan has a specific animal with which it is associated and therefore the appearance of such a clan animal is always interpreted as a message or is regarded as a visitation by the ancestors. (See, for example, the appearance of the Majola snake which is associated with the Mpondomise clan in A.C. Jordan's (1980) book, *The Wrath of the Ancestors*.)

When one dreams of *isilawu* (clan medicine) this clearly shows that this is a dream through which the ancestors are conveying a message to the living. Such dreams have a fixed interpretation and need not be narrated to anybody except the elders of the clan. A dream associated with ancestors, or an, *ithongo* is always narrated (*lilawulwa*) either to the elderly members of the clan or to the senior *igqirha* who guides the initiate.

To dream of dogs, for instance, symbolises the appearance of ancestors. The reference to somebody as a dog in ordinary, waking life implies that the person is considered useless but, within the context of dreaming, dogs are interpreted as symbolic of messages from the ancestors. For example, dreams in which dogs are barking at the individual are believed to be symbolic of anger as a result of a communication breakdown between the individual and his/her

ancestors. However, if the dogs play enthusiastically with the individual (*xa zikubunguzelela*) this is interpreted as a message that the ancestors are content with their relationship with the living. Messages carried by symbols that appear in dreams have a performative effect in the sense that they carry messages of what actions need to be taken on the part of the living and are therefore taken seriously. *Amathongo* involve certain objects, such as African beer, animal horns and bones, *ubulawu* (sacred home medicine) as well as sacred places like graves, *exhantini* (entrance to the cattle kraal), *emthonyameni* (the sacred place inside the kraal) *emzini omkhulu* (river) or *engetheni* (forest). For instance, the experience of dreaming in which one is called to be a diviner was described, by an informant, in the following way: 'I began to dream of wild animals, brewed beer, of *amagqirha* dancing and that I was eating foam' (Nombuso cited in Broaster, 1984: 95). Dreams of this kind are regarded as 'real' in the sense that they are seen as direct instructions from the spiritual world and are therefore *ubulawu* or *isilawu* (clan medicine).

The presence of foam in Nombuso's dream explicitly refers to the foam which occurs in *ubulawu* (home medicine). It is believed that, through the symbols of beer, foam and *amagqirha*, the ancestors called Nombuso to be an *igqirha*. Such dreams reveal that the individual has been chosen to speak on behalf of the ancestors and it is therefore essential that the dream be narrated to the elders of the clan in order to ensure that the correct ritual procedure will follow.

Descriptions of dreams experienced by various *amagqirha* in which they were called by their respective ancestors revealed the way in which dreams began to take on meaning in their lives. A *igqirha* from Gatyana, Willowvale, described one of her dreams in which she was called by her ancestors including her great-grandfather who had died before she was born:

I was visited by a group of old men who came to my room at night. I was asleep and they woke me up. One of them was limping. They told me that they are calling me to *thwasa* and I will *thwasa* by the river, meaning that most of my rituals will be performed in the river because those ancestors who are calling me are in the river.

The belief that ancestors take on a physical form, within the context of a dream, is revealed in the following explanation offered by a Zulu informant:

Dreams are a channel of communication between survivors and the shades. In the dreams the shades become very real, intimate and concrete. They come to us at night very clearly. They reveal themselves. We see them clearly and hear them saying things to us. They are just beside us when they reveal themselves in this way. (cited in Berglund, 1976: 89)

The above description clearly shows the belief that *amathongo* can reveal themselves in a physical form by taking on the same appearance as before they were physically separated, from the living, by death. They give instructions on how one should be initiated and who should act as the senior diviner for the novice.

An informant by the name of Mabase, who is currently working in

Cape Town, explains how, in her dreams, she was shown who her senior diviner would be and where she lived. She claims that she was instructed by her ancestors to take a leave of absence from work to return home to the Eastern Cape and was given directions to where she could find this particular diviner. As per the instructions of her ancestors, Mabase visited the senior diviner the day after her arrival at her home, Tywaka, in the Eastern Cape. Upon her arrival, the woman told Mabase that the *igqirha* had been waiting for her and that the ancestors had revealed, through her dreams, that she would be visited by Mabase and was given instructions as to what she should do.

All of these examples serve to show the extent to which the words of the ancestors are understood as being 'real' by the informants in the sense that they are interpreted as messages from the ancestors through which they are given a set of instructions which need to be followed. The fact that the father of the first *igqirha* from Gatyana, Willowvale lastly admitted and described how his father looked, shows that what the ancestors say, whether in dreams or in visions, is never totally rejected by those who are brought up in African Traditional Religion even though initially, as a Christian, he was reluctant to accept the call. The extent of the power and influence of ancestors is evident in the fact that even those who have been converted to other religions perform rituals which acknowledge the relationship between the living and the deceased. Secondly as *ukuthwasa* is also understood as a gift, to deny someone of her/his gift is also regarded as inhuman. In African Traditional Religion, it is believed that no parent has a right to deny his/her child a gift

given by the ancestors and by doing so the child may suffer a form of sickness until the necessary rituals are performed. On some occasions, the ancestors are known to have resorted to taking the person to the river to initiate him/her themselves. An example of this is in the case of a young girl from Retreat in Cape Town, who disappeared in a swimming pool while at a picnic with her mother and returned after a few days but, at first, could not speak. Later on she explained that she was taken to the river and was initiated to be an *igqirha*. As her mother was 'coloured' and her father was Xhosa, she explained to her mother how she was told, by the ancestors, that rituals needed to be performed at her father's home in the Ciskei. As part of her graduation ritual, a beast was slaughtered and now, at the age of thirteen, she is a fully-fledged diviner. Depending on the procedures which are followed after the person has been 'taken', the person will either return as a fully-fledged *igqirha* or never re-surfaces.

In situations where the individual does not come back, it is necessary for rituals to be performed near to, or at, the river. It is believed that on occasions in which an individual has been taken – and never returned – the ancestors will call many members of her immediate family to be *amagqirha*. During the process of divination, the authority of the elders is relinquished to the ancestors indicating that the soul of the initiate or novice is no longer under the control of the physical world. The body is merely a vessel for the soul which is located in the physical world and therefore a refusal to accept the call may result in the ancestors assuming complete control of the initiate.

The discussion above points out that dreams are very important in the process of divination, that is in becoming a diviner (*ukuthwasa*), and also in the practice of divination (Kruger, 1981, Broaster, 1984, Bührmann, 1977). This is clearly revealed by a senior diviner who said: 'I cannot treat people who do not dream' (Mr T. cited in Bührmann, 1977: 18). Another informant, Nombuso, confirms that dreams are a vital factor because they are the manifestations of ancestral spirits and insists that the narration of such dreams form the most important part of one's training to be an *igqirha* (Broaster, 1984). Furthermore, a person with *ukuthwasa*, or one who has been called by the ancestors, can never recover unless s/he listens to the voices of the ancestors who communicate through dreams.

2.2 *Imvuma Kufa* (Acceptance of the Sickness)

Imvuma kufa (acceptance of the call to heal) constitutes the initial stage of the process of becoming a diviner. For one to be healed of *ukufa okumhlophe* (call to divination), it is necessary for the person to obey the ancestors who convey their wishes through dreams or in visions. Most scholars have identified sickness as the most common symptom occurring in the call to become a diviner (Mills, 1984; Hunter, 1961). However, it could be argued that it is actually dreaming and the experiencing of visions which signify the call of the ancestors. For the most part, physical sickness occurs due to a rejection of the call, sometimes due to a deliberate delay because one is reluctant to accept the call, or in the case of an individual

who is unaware of the significance of his/her dreams. *Ukufa okumhlophe* does not respond to ordinary treatment.

Ukuvuma (submission) is the only way to be cured or to survive the illness inflicted upon the individual by the ancestors. As a process, *ukuvuma* starts from within in the sense that the individual begins by personally accepting the call before informing the rest of the clan who, subsequently, prepare for the public ritual of acceptance. In the case of a child being called to be a diviner, the parents, particularly the father or the paternal aunt, speaks to the ancestors and accepts the call on behalf of the child by agreeing to perform all the necessary rituals in order to show acceptance of the call so that the child can be healed. After it has been proved that s/he *thwasa* or, has been called to be an *igqirha*, the individual makes a commitment to undergo training in order to fulfil the role of conveying messages on behalf of the ancestors. In accepting the role of mediator between the ancestors and the living, the person who has been called is acknowledging the existence of a dialogue between the individual and the ancestors who will be sustained until his/her death.

The role of the diviner cannot be seen in isolation to the rest of the community. The diviner is an intermediary between the living and the ancestors and therefore the involvement of the clan, as the fundamental social structure within African Religion, is essential. Members of the clan witness the new status of the novice and share in the ritual participation and spiritual intervention with the spiritual world. Ancestors are descendents of living members of

the clan and therefore the clan, as a whole, plays a crucial role in the spiritual development and training of the novice. Some members of the clan have special duties within the performance of certain rituals. The success of the *imvuma kufa* and other rituals depend on the clan, particularly, the firstborn male within the family who is also usually the person responsible for killing the sacrificial animal (*intlabi*).

Submission on the part of the individual is always done in consultation with close members of the family such as the person's parents. The process of submission is initiated by members of the immediate family who are usually the first to observe and experience the changes in behaviour of the individual who is called to be a diviner.

The dialogue between the ancestors and the person who is being called is then extended to include the involvement of the entire clan, especially those who occupy significant roles such as the *intlabi*. It is necessary for the head of the homestead, or the firstborn male of the home, to accept the call as he is responsible for providing for the needs of the novice and for leading the ritual performance which is done in consultation with the senior diviner and the novice. The duty of the homestead head extends to listening to the needs of the ancestors and complying with their demands so as to prevent punishment of the living. Punishment by the ancestors is not restricted to the individual who is being called and a refusal to accept the call can result in other members of the family falling ill. This is clearly illustrated in the testimony, which

follows below, by an informant who describes the consequences of his brother's refusal to acknowledge the call of the ancestors:

My intwaso took a long time and I suffered from frustration because my brother who should take care of us is a born again Christian. When I told him my problem he took it as utter nonsense, the work of demons. I had several dreams but he refused. It was not long ago when his most favourite child had the same dreams and she was seriously ill because he first ignored her. He changed his mind when he realised that he is going to lose her intandane (the beloved one). He accepted it but was told to begin with me which he was forced to do.

The communal dimension of rituals associated with divination is reflected in the Xhosa practice of the father, or the *inkulu* (first born male when the father is deceased) providing a sacrificial animal for the novice, even when the novice is self-sufficient. In the event of the *umkhwetha* (novice) dreaming of a ritual performed on the mother's side of the family, the firstborn uncle, following the maternal lineage, must take the responsibility for the performance of the necessary rituals. The term, *imvuma kufa*, can therefore be understood, in a broad sense, as referring to the involvement of all those related biologically to the *umkhwetha*. The refusal to *vuma* (accept) is to disassociate one's self with the norms and values of the community that work to maintain harmony within the self and amongst the clan. As a result, the person usually finds him/herself in a more difficult situation.

Imvuma kufa is a public ritual officially announcing the acceptance of the call by the novice who has undertaken to be the agent of the

ancestors for healing purposes. Essentially, the novice is 'handed over' to the ancestors by the clan and, although it is a ritual performed exclusively for diviners, *imvuma kufa* includes the community as a whole. This is confirmed by Schweitzer and Bührmann (1978: 17) who explain that 'their training begins when they and their families accept the illness as the desire of the shades that they follow the calling to become a healer'. After the ritual of *imvuma kufa*, the novice is referred to as an *umkhwetha* until s/he graduates to qualify as an *igqirha*. The term *umkhwetha* is normally used to refer to somebody who is undergoing a change in social status as, for example, in the case of male circumcision which marks the transformation from boyhood to manhood. An *umkhwetha*, within the context of divination, is a term which signifies the process of transformation in which an ordinary person becomes a spiritual guide for the community. The significance of *umkhwetha* within the community is reflected outwardly by the wearing of beads and the smearing of ochre.

3. Intlombe (Diviner's Ritual Dance)

Intlombe is a collective term referring to a spiritual gathering of *amagqirha* which includes relatives, neighbours, and friends but, essentially, remains a ritual for *amagqirha* to communicate individually and collectively with the spiritual world. An *intlombe* cannot be effective without the presence and participation of relatives and friends. The spiritual world is represented by *amagqirha* who dance in a circle while relatives and friends, representing the physical world, sing and clap in order to facilitate

communication between the living and those residing in the spiritual realm. The ritual of *intlombe* is characterised by singing, dancing and frequent utterance of *camagu* and also *nqula*. Dancing and *nqula* are done exclusively by *amagqirha* but everybody participates in singing once each diviner has initiated his/her own particular song. *Camagu* is a crucial utterance as it is an exchange of responses between an *igqirha* and the audience during *nqula*. An *intlombe* should be understood as more than just a ritual dance as it involves a range of activities including sacrifice, and the use of ritual speech, which serve to create a sacred space governed by certain rules and observances. For reasons of clarity, these activities will be dealt with separately but it should be clear that they are performed simultaneously and that the meanings and functions of these activities sometimes overlap.

As a public demonstration of the communal relationship between the living and the ancestors, the ritual of *intlombe* occurs frequently within African Traditional Religion. *Intlombe* is also the first form of *invuma kufa* in which, the senior diviner, and members of the clan, listen to the message which the novice conveys on behalf of the ancestors. *Ukulawula amathongo* or, the narrating of dreams, is the most important part of the religious practice because all the activities to be carried out during the process of becoming a fully fledged *igqirha* come to the novice through dreams. The novice always narrates dreams to the senior diviner whose duty it is to guide the novice according to what appeared to him or her through dreams.

During *imvuma kufa*, the *umkhwetha* (novice) changes from ordinary clothing into the attire which s/he has been instructed to wear by the ancestors who communicate, through dreams, the type of animal skin or beads which need to be worn by the novice. Instead of using the term '*bhotani*', which is the standard Xhosa way of greeting people, *camagu* is used in order to show that someone is enlightened (*umhlophe*) and, as a messenger of the ancestors, is regarded as being different to the rest of the community because s/he is charged with the spiritual power of the ancestors. During the course of *intlombe*, the novice has to prove that s/he has been called by the ancestors. For example, there is the test of *uNontongwana* in which objects are hidden from the novice who has to display the ability to find them immediately. By passing *uNontongwana*, the novice shows progression in the call to be a diviner and proves his/her future strength as an *igqirha*.

3.1 *Isiko*: Ritual Slaughtering

All the actions performed by the *umkhwetha*, during initiation, can be seen as a result of what appears in the *amathongo* ('dreams from ancestors'). The nature or, the type of animal to be slaughtered, how it should be slaughtered and where it should be slaughtered is always revealed in dreams. The senior diviner assists the *umkhwetha* in the interpretation of symbols and metaphorical language of the ancestors which appear in the context of *amathongo*. Although divination is regarded as a special call from the spiritual world, it does not disassociate itself from the existing structures of the religious hierarchy. The male responsible for

killing the sacrificial animal of the clan (*intlabi*) will therefore continue to carry out his religious duties in the initiation process in accordance with the instructions which have been revealed to the novice in dreams, such as, the nature of the animal and where it should be slaughtered. Ritual speeches take their normal way and form with *ingxelo* and *ukubulela* still being the responsibility of the elder clan members. *Ukunqula* and *ukucamagusha* are now extended to form part of the daily life of the novice. For example, the novice will begin using *camagu* for all greetings as a way of showing that s/he is an *igqirha* and therefore a messenger of the ancestors. Similarly, *ukucamagusha/ukunqula* (invoking ancestors) will also be done on a daily basis.

During ritual slaughtering the animal becomes the medium of communication between the physical and the spiritual world. In order to ensure effective communication, the slaughtering of a sacrificial animal is accompanied by the use of sacred objects like the clan spear which gives spiritual and sacred 'weight' to the message. As part of the slaughtering ritual, special herbs, *amahlahla omthathi* (branches of the sneeze wood), are used during *umoshwamo* (the sacred meal). These small branches from the *umthathi* (sneeze-wood tree) are used to put on the *umoshwamo* (meat which is tasted by clan members only). *Ubulawu bekhaya* (home medicine) is also used before the ritual killing in all rituals and with *umkhwetha* is always available for frequent use.

3.2 *lingoma*: Songs

Makuliwe has defined a traditional song in the following way:

Ingoma sisixhobo sokubonisa uvuyo, udano, unxunguphalo, impixano nongquzulwano. Ukuvunywa kwengoma kunika ithemba nokuphila nokuba imeko besele zisithini. (Makuliwe, 1997: 1)

Ingoma (traditional song) is a tool through which to express joy, disappointment, frustration, and conflict. Singing a song can give hope and serve as a form of healing under any circumstances.

Makuliwe argues that singing is a common and collective way of speaking to the ancestors. Moreover, it is through song that *amagqirha* are able to convey messages, simultaneously, to both the audience and the ancestors. The entire space of the hut is regarded as being spiritually charged and *amagqirha* separate themselves from the audience by forming a circle around the fire. This division within the hut reflects the close relationship of *amagqirha* with the ancestors who are, at this stage, speaking to them directly and very closely. Each *igqirha* sings their particular song even though the focus of the ritual, and the accompanying speech, is on the *umkhwetha*. Preference is given to *umkhwetha* to dance, sing, *nqula* and *vumisa* (divine) when assigned to do so. Participation in dancing is determined by the age and level of experience of the diviner and therefore the *oompondo zihlanjiwe* ('experienced') only dance once the initiates have all invoked their respective ancestors.

As mentioned earlier, every trainee has a particular song that was revealed during the time of 'sickness' when s/he was called to be a

diviner. Some songs describe the nature of the sickness or whether the initiate was called by the river or by the forest, while others convey the message to the audience that the *umkhwetha* was chosen by the ancestors. Manzaba from Gatyana sang the following song in her *mvuma kufa*:

Nam'andizenzanga (I have not caused myself).
Ndenziwe ngabalele (I have been called by ancestors).
He thongo lam, ndithethelele thongo lam (My ancestor, speak for me).

Madlamini from KTC in Nyanga, Cape Town, who is originally from the Eastern Cape, revealed that when she *nqula*, she sings the song, *ndolal'emaweni*, meaning 'I will sleep in the cliffs'. When asked about the meaning of the song she offered the following explanation:

This song (the words and the tune) was revealed to me in dreams. It was when I was told to go and stay alone in the wilderness, in the cliffs for some time. I am telling you that experience I will never forget when I was alone among *amarhamncwa* (wild animals).

The song has a special message for Madlamini who calls upon her ancestors by singing the song that they have assigned to her. She revealed that she does sing other songs as part of her *nqula* but that they do not have the same ancestral attachment like the one which was 'given' to her. Madlamini claims that she sings her particular song even when she goes into the forest to collect medicinal plants as the song *iyamkhanyisela indlela yakhe*, which means that it enlightens her way to dig the right medicine for the cure.

There is a song that acknowledges the ancestors who are believed to reside in the river at a place known as *umzi omkhulu* ('great house') by those who *thwasa* by the river. A song such as *Wadidiyel'unonkala ngasemlanjeni* ('Nonkala is dancing near the river') symbolises dancing in the river. *Unonkala* refers to the crab who is regarded as a messenger and *umlambo* refers to the river. Singing, within the context of African ritual, demands the involvement of the entire body: the sensory system, the movement of the whole body and attend is paid to achieving rhythmic balance between the voice, the feet, clapping and drumming. It is believed that singing makes it possible for the audience to communicate, collectively, in a meaningful way with the spiritual world and helps the audience to focus their attention on the actions of the novice. A novice from Willowvale whose relatives were resistant to her accepting the call to become a diviner liked to sing the following song:

*Zeningandibulali bethuna, andinasono
ndakusebenzel'amathongo*

(Please do not kill me, I have not done anything wrong, I will work for my ancestors).

Andinakusebenzel'intw'engekhoyo
(I can't work for nothing).

Andinasono, Iyhoho ndosebenzel'amathambo
(I have not done anything wrong, I will work for ancestors).

Ho-o- ndosebenzel'amathambo, andinasono
(I will work for ancestors, I have not done anything wrong).

Ndosebenzel'amathambo
(I will work for ancestors).

The audience respond by saying:

'Hayi akanasono uzakusebenzel'izinyanya'

(S/he has not done anything wrong, s/he will work for her/his ancestors).

The collective act of singing signifies the presence of all the ancestors from different clans and is seen to create the spiritual world within the physical world by the exaltation of a portion of the physical world, namely, the hut, to a state of increased sacrality. The hut where *intlombe* is taking place is regarded as encompassing the totality of the whole sphere of ancestral presence and nothing can now be seen as profane as the ancestors are 'talking' through their messengers. The audience feels highly charged with spiritual presence and, by talking to the ancestors, it is believed that the existence of the physical world is temporarily dissolved. Songs unite those participating in the ritual but also serve to merge the world of the living with the ancestral realm by, simultaneously, referring both to the audience and to the ancestors. This is illustrated in the following song:

Nam Andizenzanga (I have not made myself to be sick).
Ndenziwe ngabalele (I have been called by those who are asleep - meaning ancestors).
Ndithelele thongo lam (please my ancestor intervene).
He-e-e thongo lam (x3)
Ndithethelele thongo lam

The first two verses convey the message to the audience that the initiate has been called by the ancestors. The audience respond, or *landela*, which can be translated, literally as 'follows', in a special way that is also taught by the *igqirha*. The *igqirha* seems to be informing the audience about his/her special relationship with the ancestors and telling the audience s/he is now completely under the

control of the ancestors and is therefore acting under their instruction. In the second verse, the novice makes a plea to the ancestors to convince the audience that all that s/he is doing or requesting is from the *ithongo* (ancestor). The song can also mean that the novice is accepting the sickness and is appealing to the ancestors to be healed. When the song is sung, the *igqirha* seems to be in another world and is oblivious to the presence of the audience. The rate of dancing is accelerated and singing is continuously interrupted by *camagu* which is a sign that one is going to *nqula*.

The participation of both the novice and the audience (by their singing and clapping) facilitates communication between the novice and the ancestors but also allows the diviner to, symbolically, move between the world of the audience and that of the ancestors. An informant, Mrs. T, explains how she feels about singing her song:

I feel inspired inside and I feel I must sing it, and having sung it, I feel healed. The song tells me what is wrong with the patient... The song doesn't change, one can't change it... It comes from the multitudes, those who have died. (Bührmann, 1977: 18)

Mrs. T explained that there are other songs which she likes, and are often sung, which she regards as 'inspirational' but does not believe that they 'increase awareness' in the same way as her own song that was revealed to her by her ancestors. This implies that the song revealed is special and that others may carry meanings but real communication is defined by her *amathongo*. The significance

of the song is clearly revealed by MaDlamini, of KTC, who, while doing her *nqula* as part of her graduation, explained that she only sings the song *Ndolal'emaweni* when doing her *nqula*.

Songs have a transformative effect on the intensity of sacredness of the space in which the *intlombe* is performed. The ritual is usually performed in a place which is used on a daily basis, for example, the hut, and is cleared of ordinary objects before the *intlombe* can begin. The space is made sacred not only through actions but also through words. After the *intlombe*, MaRadebe, also of KTC, released the *amagqirha* by singing *sicel'ukugoduka* ('we ask to go home').

3.3 *Ukuxhentsa, Ukubetha Igubu, Nokuhwaba*. (Dancing, Drum Beating and Hand Clapping)

Nombuso, who is cited by Broaster (1984: 38), explains the relationship between singing, clapping and dancing. She asserts that the power to confess dreams is acquired through dancing, which involves the ancestors, and that singing and clapping liberate this power. Music, dancing, clapping of hands and the beating of drums combine in a way which allows the diviner to feel the music. The vigorous performance of these activities are believed to facilitate the divination process as messages are revealed faster. Furthermore, the combination of all these activities, in the context of *intlombe*, shows that African forms of healing are communal in all respects. Rituals within African Traditional Religion allow individuals to temporarily forget about the mundane, physical

world and enter into the spiritual realm. While dancing, an *igqirha* forgets about the presence of the audience and experiences a sensation of being elevated above the earth, surrounded only by ancestors. Accompanied by dancing and *nqula*, the song belonging to diviner becomes a holistic prayer and the division between the spiritual and the physical world is dissolved as the diviner believes that s/he is speaking directly with the ancestors.

The ceremony is brought to a close by the *amagqirha* who ask to be released from the ancestors once communication between them has come to an end. The *intlombe*, which I attended, was closed with everybody singing and clapping to the song which maRhadebe had begun with: '*He-e sihlwele sam khawundikhulule ndigoduke*' ('my ancestor allow me to go home'). This song can also be understood as a closing prayer in which the sacred space of the hut is transformed back into an ordinary, domestic space. The temporary transformation of space forms part of a larger process in which, not only place, but also people, are sacralised. Once the ritual is complete, all the objects associated with ordinary, everyday activities are brought back into the hut as it has now been transformed back into an ordinary, domestic space and *amagqirha* return to their everyday life.

3.4 *Camagu* (To Bless, to Thank, to Honour, to Forgive, to Appease, to Praise, 'Let it Be So')

As we have seen, *camagu* is a complex utterance which can have many meanings but is only used in circumstances and rituals which

involve ancestors. *Camagu* is very important as it is a form of ritual speech which is believed to have originated in the realm of ancestors and therefore uttering it constitutes a call to the spiritual world of the ancestors. *Camagu* is seen to have ritual power and occupies the most important place in Xhosa religious practice:

In all instances of genuine worship and sacrifice, *Camagu* appears. It is indeed a word carrying power to the native mind and is thus never flippantly employed. It has many complex connotations which are bewildering to those not acquainted with inner mysteries of the ritualistic practices. (Alberti, 1968: 67)

The use of *camagu* becomes more complex when it comes to *ukuthwasa*, or the 'call to divination'. The use of language, usually associated with the spiritual realm, by *igqirha* in ordinary, everyday conversation reflects that s/he has been chosen as a spiritual messenger. Broaster has offered the following explanation as to how he understands the word *camagu*:

This is a religious word implying reverence, and is used in addressing the ancestral spirits as well as *amagqirha* and their assistance. It is also used during sacrifices and worship, where it has great spiritual significance and nuances of meaning. It implies the recognition of power, wonder, gratitude, fear, a plea for mercy, and is a greeting as well as a prayer. During a sacrifice it may be a prayer for blessing and protection or in case of wrongdoing, an appeal for help and forgiveness. (Broaster, 1984: 28-9)

As an ancestral mode of communication, *camagu*, can be symbolised by objects like beads. The first type of beads used in *imvuma kufa* ('the acceptance of sickness') is called an *icamagu*

which is worn in order to inform the public that one has accepted the call of the ancestors. *Camagu* is also used to signal that it is time to *nqula*, or, invoke the ancestors. In an *intlombe*, singing is interrupted by each *igqirha* calling '*camagu*' showing that s/he is wanting to *nqula*. At times, the *igqirha* instructs the audience to say '*camagu*' during *nqula* by saying: '*masitsho sonke sithi camagu*' ('let us all say *camagu*'). This is considered to be a holy time in which the spiritual and physical worlds merge and there is no pause during this part of the ritual. The diviner is seen as being in personal contact with the ancestors and sometimes addresses them with the following words: '*ndithetha nani zihlwele zam*' ('I am talking to you my ancestors'). Within the context of ritual, *camagu* is used by all participants inside the hut as it regarded as being the only way to communicate with both the *amagqirha* and the ancestors. *Camagu* is the means through which the living can articulate respect for the ancestors and recognition of their power within both the physical and the spiritual worlds which, ultimately, stems from *Qamata* (Creator).

Most scholars agree that the *camagu* agree is used only is an association with ancestors but differ on the meaning of the term. As a result, translations have tended to vary from 'be appeased' (Pauw, 1975) to 'be blessed' (McAllister, 1997; Laubscher, 1975). On some occasions, *amagqirha* respond to *camagu* with the word *chosi* which is not regarded as being as powerful as *camagu* and translates as merely 'let it be so', 'yes', or 'I agree'. *Chosi* is used as a response by *amagqirha* only as an affirmation and to ask participants to stop singing. Laubscher summarises his

understanding of the use of the term *camagu* in the following way:

In studying the various examples given of the occasions when 'Camagu' is employed and the mental and emotional atmosphere which accompanies it seems to convey or call up such feelings as reverence, holiness, sublimity, blessedness, and I think a power that pardons or forgives. (Laubscher, 1975: 19)

3.5 *Nqula* (To Invoke Ancestors, to Recognise their Power, to Refer to Ancestors, to Thank or Praise Ancestors)

Within the context of divination, *nqula*, is different from that of ordinary sacrifice (see Chapter Two) as its use and meaning is extended and also has a point of reference to all the activities of the ancestors. *Nqula*, within the ritual of *intlombe*, demands involvement of all other speeches, like *camagu*, songs, requests and phrases. As described earlier, a diviner first utters *nqula* which the audience then responds to immediately with *camagu*. To give him/her time to talk to his/her ancestors publicly each diviner does *nqula* in divination. Mam'uMaDlamini of KTC in Nyanga, Cape Town, referred to several things during her performance of *nqula* which was interrupted by songs initiated by her or other diviners. She began by singing the song, 'Ndolal'emaweni' which she claimed was revealed to her by her ancestors. According to Mam'uMaDlamini, the songs elevate her spirituality and facilitate efficient communication with her ancestors. The song is seen as the key to open direct communication with her ancestors thus making it possible for her requests to be fulfilled. As part of her

nqula, Mam'uMaDlamini made reference to the following:

- i) *Kwizihlwele zekhaya* (all ancestors of the homestead)
- ii) *Kwisilawu/ubulawu* (home medicine)
- iii) *Ndinqula eyezeni/ emthini* (medicine to heal other people)
- iv) *Kumathongo alele ukuthula* (ancestors who are sleeping peacefully)

3.5.1 *Kwizihlwele Zekhaya* (All Ancestors of the Homestead)

Within the African community, it is recognised that one is the product of both paternal and maternal ancestors and therefore, when one does his/her *nqula*, one must be able to invoke all of these ancestors. *Nqula* can therefore be understood as an affirmation of the power and importance that lies in a continuation with the past. An underlying assumption in the calling of one's ancestors is that all the clan ancestors are present in their totality and are listening attentively. The performance of *nqula* also serves to acknowledge the protective capabilities of the ancestors. The personal dimension of the conversation that occurs between the physical and the spiritual realm is reflected by the way in which the person performing *nqula* speaks directly to the ancestors. For example, '*Ndithetha nani booNjokweni, booMtatela, booLamyeni*'. ('I am talking to Njokwenis, Mtatelas, and Lamyenis'). Invocation is informative in that a primary function of the diviner is to inform the ancestors as well as recognise their presence. Communication with the ancestors does not take the form of a single, continuous dialogue and is interrupted by songs which are always

accompanied by drum beating, clapping of hands and dancing.

Sometimes a diviner calls all her/his ancestors in their respective habitats. MamNcotshe always calls upon the ancestors in the river, sea, forest and caves. She would say the following:

*Ndithetha nazo zonke izikhawukhawu zakuthi
Ndizibiza zonke ziselagwebeni, emzini omkhulu
Ndizibiza zonke bethuna nezisengetheni, nabafana bakuthi
ababhinqe izibheshu*

I am speaking to all my ancestors.

I call upon those who are in the sea, in the river.

I also call upon those who are in the forest and those who are wearing skins (those in the caves).

3.5.2 *Kwisilawu/Ubulawu* (Clan Medicine)

Ubulawu/Isilawu is an exclusively *iyeza lekhaya* (home medicine associated with ancestors) used mainly for purification, communication with ancestors and healing purposes. Each clan has its own *ubulawu/isilawu*. Knowledge about this medicine is held usually by the clan elderly who know its features. The medicine is used to wash the body whenever there is a need associated with ancestors. The washing of the body with *ubulawu* is understood as a way of cleansing an individual. When one *thwasa*, *ubulawu* is frequently used as it is believed that it helps to clarify what the ancestors need by bringing the novice closer to the ancestors. *Umkhwetha* does *phehla ubulawu* and no one progresses without this process of *ukuphehla*. *Ukuphehla* is specifically a Xhosa term

that can be defined as the rapid twirling of medicine using *ixhayi*, a two-pronged wooden stick that is held downwards in between the palm of both hands. *Ukuphehla* is always accompanied by *nqula* when the twirling takes place. The word *ukuphehla* refers to the whole process and includes singing as well as *nqula* which, in this case, involves requests to the ancestors by the performers of the ritual. *Ubulawu* can also be used to open the mind to dreams and to help clarify their meaning as well as assist in the calling of one's ancestors. In the case of an *intlombe*, only someone who has healing powers and knows how to communicate with the ancestors can perform *ukuphehla* such as a senior *igqirha* or a trainee diviner. MamNcotshe from Willowvale in the Eastern Cape always sings a song addressed to her ancestors, calling amaNcotshe to help her in her process of initiating an *igqirha*. When she *phehla* she always sings the following:

Aph' amaNcosh' azokuman'ukutsho kamnandi
Ziph' izihlwele zizakuman'ukutsho kamnandi
 Where are amaNcotshe so that they can sing nicely.
 Where are the ancestors so that they can sing nicely.

The song will be sung until she finishes *phehla* and the froth or foam is formed. The formation of the froth shows that the ancestors have accepted the performance. Dreaming about *ubulawu* is therefore considered to be significant because it is the medicine revealed by the ancestors. Broaster (1984) has recorded an incident in which an informant, Nombuso, dreamt of herself drinking foam and it was identified as *ubulawu* by the elders and therefore interpreted as a sign that she *thwasa*.

As part of her *nqula*, MaDlamini mentions her respect for *ubulawu*. She recognises that *ubulawu* purifies the individual and that it prepares the individual to temporarily enter the spiritual world in order to communicate requests on behalf of the living and to be reconciled with the divine realm. By performing *ukuphehla ubulawu*, and by washing with the medicine, it is believed that the individual has been cleansed, thereby ensuring successful communication with the ancestors.

3.5.3. *Ndinqula Eyezeni/Emthini* (Medicine)

Divination is performed primarily for the purpose of holistic healing. Healing can take various forms: physical, social, psychological or spiritual but, essentially, it is holistic in that all these aspects form part of the process. In African systems of healing, it is believed that any form of sickness will inevitably have an effect on other aspects of the individual, most especially the spiritual aspect. Neglecting to perform a ritual can also affect all these aspects of an individual. Healing may be performed either through the performance of ritual or by the use of certain herbs. The type of herbs used in this context was specified by MaDlamini as being *umthi*, meaning tree or plant. *Iyeza* can be a root, stem or the leaves of a plant. The medicinal plants used to cure the sick are regarded as a revelation from the ancestors and the effectiveness of the healing power of these medicinal plants is attributed to the *amathongo*. For this reason, during the performance of *nqula*, the *amagqirha* acknowledge the power of the ancestors and show their appreciation for their success:

Amagqirha usually ask the shades for assistance in her or his diagnosis and choice of remedy. The answer is given in dreams. (Dovey and Mjingwana, 1985: 79)

In the same way as divination is a call from the spiritual world, the knowledge to heal is itself regarded a gift from the ancestors. It is therefore essential to ask the ancestors to imbue the medicines with the power to heal. On one occasion, I observed a diviner who used the words '*unqula eyezeni*' to acknowledge the power held by the ancestors to heal using herbs that they have chosen. The diviner ended by saying '*bange bangaphila*' which, can be translated as 'wishing that they (the sick) be healed'. The power of *ieza*, depends not only on the biological healing properties of the plant but also on the power of those who have revealed the medicine, namely, the ancestors. For this reason, an individual cannot be healed successfully if the medicine is not used in accordance with the way in which it was revealed. That is why different diviners have different powers and specific diseases they specialise in curing.

By referring to an *ieza*, MaDlamini also appeared to be referring to a broader context of her understanding of medicine. By having attendance of other *amagqirha* to her *intlombe* was also regarded as coming to an *ieza*, that is, to her *intlombe* itself is an *ieza*. As all diviners during their *nqula* always say '*Mabuded'ubumnyama kuvel ukukhanya*' ('Let darkness be removed and light comes in.') To bring healing means to bring medicine. In addition to that, to *nqula* on its own is believed to have some healing effects. So in

her *nqula* she says:

Ndinqulela abantwana abangene endlini phakathi kweyeza, baphume neyeza, angange baphile budede ubumnyama kuvele ukukhanya.

I *nqula* for the children who came to this house within the medicine, so that they will be healed, I wish all the darkness will vanish and be replaced by light.

3.5.4 *Amathambo Alele Ukuthula* (Bones that are not Dead but Sleeping)

In African Traditional Religion, a reference to bones is symbolic of the ancestors. The symbolism of bones can be understood in terms of the belief within the African worldview of an immortal soul, which is said to reside within the bones of the deceased person. Moreover, it is believed that the bones of the deceased are ‘vocal’ and can communicate with the living on behalf of the deceased. Communication between these two worlds is recognised to be possible as, according to African Traditional Religion, bones can speak and those who do not are understood to be just ‘asleep’. The bones of the deceased are imbued with human qualities and are regarded as having the ability to hear, see, speak as well display feelings like anger or mercy. In other words, the bones possess the qualities of the previously alive individual but now also have the power to heal spiritually. On some occasions, an individual is buried far from home and the family may have to ask for the exhumation of bones in order to rebury them in the ancestral graves.

4. Other Processes of Initiation

4.1 *Ukunikwa Igama* (To be Given a New Name)

It is customary, during any initiation ceremony, for the novice to be given a new name as s/he has undergone a transformation and has assumed a new status within the community. During an initiation ceremony in Langa, a young *igqirha* was given the name ‘*Khulel'ethongweni*’ (‘the one who grows in ancestral communication’). She had been called to be a diviner at the age of nine and, when she was fourteen, graduated as a fully-fledged *igqirha*. She was given a name which was regarded as suitable for her age and reflects the sentiment which regarded her as being fortunate to grow with *amathongo* (ancestors). A diviner who was initiated in Gugulethu, Cape Town, was given the name ‘*Nomhlola*’ which is related to the Xhosa word for problem (*umhlola*), as she displayed a good divining ability.

4.2 *Ukunikwa Ulugxa* (To be Given a Spear)

As part of the process of initiation to become a fully-fledged *igqirha*, one has to undergo a series of stages. *Ukunikwa ulugxa* is the final step before one is recognised as being a qualified *igqirha*. This stage is characterised by certain attire which is revealed through the presence of ancestors in an *ithongo* (dream). Manyawuza, a qualified nursing sister at a clinic in Gugulethu, Cape Town, had a dream relating to this second last phase of becoming a diviner in which she was told the nature of the skin that

had to be put on her head. In her dream, she had to wear *umqhele*, half of a *isidlokolo* - the headgear worn by graduated *amagqirha*.

As an *igqirha* in her second last stage, Manyawuza (clan name), or Nonyameko, which is the name given to her by her mentor, MamNcotshe, held an *intlombe* at her home in Gugulethu. Her *intlombe* consisted of the various types of ritual speeches that were described as part of the sacrificial ceremonies in Chapter Two. The procession to the main house was led by the elder of the Nyawuza clan and consisted of Manyawuza, completely covered by a white blanket, followed by other members of the Nyawuza clan as well as her mentor, MaMncotshe and her other novices who had already graduated, in their order of seniority. MaMncotshe and her novices were followed by the senior *amagqirha*, also in their order of seniority. During the procession, a special song known as 'Somagwaza' was sung, which is a song of victory usually sung during male initiation ceremonies and after war. On this occasion, it was also a song of victory as MaNyawuza had passed all the different initiation stages in order to become a fully qualified diviner and was officially given a spear to dig medicines.

4.3 *Ukuxhoma Iqonga* (To Erect a Stand for Medicine)

As I have explained in the preceding paragraph, there is a stage in the process of becoming an *igqirha* in which one is given an *ulugxa* (spear) which permits the diviner to dig for medicines on her own. Every fully trained *igqirha* has a special place, or, *umrhawule*, where medicines are kept. The senior diviner calls his/her novices

together with few clan members and informs them that now the novice has the right to have his/her own dispensary though s/he will still be working for the trainee diviner until s/he graduates. This is also done in an official manner whereby a senior diviner conducts an *intlombe* to officiate the right to place medicines in one's *umrhawule* (dispensary) to heal the sick. There are only a few speeches in this *intlombe* as it is characterised by admonishes on how to behave when one enters *umrhawule*. There are taboos associated with the forms of respect of *umrhawule*. There is singing, *nqula*, *camagu* and a promise from the novice that s/he will adhere to the rules and regulations as to how to keep *umrhawule* sacred.

4.4 Different Types of Ritual Speeches at an *Intlombe*

4.4.1 *Ingxelo* (To Announce, to Inform, to Respond)

The clan elder, as is customary, announced to the ancestors and to the living members of the community, the aim of the *intlombe*. On this occasion, Manyawuza's mentor also addressed the *intlombe* and informed the audience about the aim of the ritual. The involvement of the community is vital as it is the stamp to witness the activity for future reference.

4.4.2 *Ukuphehla*

MaMncotshe, the *igqirha* who had been training Manyawuza, performed her *ingxelo*, ('announcement') and reported on the

progress of the novice towards becoming a qualified diviner. After the *ingxelo*, MaMncotshe began to '*phehla*' *ubulawu* (clan medicine). As explained earlier, *ukuphehla* is a very complex activity. Clapping her hands rhythmically, she began by singing the following song:

Aph'amaNcotsh' azoman'ukutsho kamnandi
Ziph'izihlewele zizokuman'ukutsho kamnandi

The other members inside the house followed the song with the words: '*Ho ziman'ukutsho kamnandi*'. As part of the process of *ukuphehla*, MaMncotshe started to *nqula* ('invoke') and requested that the ancestors heal Manyawuza.

4.4.3 *Ukuvuma* (To Accept, to Submit, to Promise, to Agree, to Decide, to Confirm, to Sing, to be a Success)

Ukuvuma ('acceptance') can be performed in a number of ways including, singing, but in this particular case, acceptance is revealed by the formation of the foam/froth of *isilawu* during *ukuphehla*. The formation of the foam during *ukuphehla* showed that the ceremony had been accepted by the ancestors. If the ritual is not performed correctly, the foam does not form and this is interpreted as a sign that the ritual has not been accepted by the ancestors.

4.4.4 *Ukuyala* (To Admonish, to Guide, to Advise, to Warn, to Teach)

As the part of the ritual in which the Nyawuza elder handed over the spear/assegai, the novice was told that the spear had been given to her to dig for medicines and not for the purpose of killing people. Speeches were made which admonished the novice and instructed her on how to relate to other people and to her trainer. These admonishes vary from the senior *amagqirha* as this is treated as an occasion to call a spade a spade regarding the behaviour of a novice. The novice may have misbehaved during the process of his/her initiation. S/he has to be told in public about her/his weak points and strong points so that the entire clan know all about him/her and so s/he can learn from her/his mistakes.

It is important that an *intlombe* is performed to mark every stage that is reached by the novice in the process of becoming a diviner. The performance of an *intlombe* fulfils the need for the living community to communicate with the deceased but also because it is important to have witnesses to confirm that a particular stage was passed successfully.

5. Ukuphuma Kwegqirha (Graduation of a Diviner)

Ukuphuma kwegqirha or *ukuphiliswa kwegqirha* ('graduation' or, the final healing process of an *igqirha*) is the stage in which the now, fully trained diviner, is incorporated back into the community. The process of training is understood as being under the guidance of the ancestors as well as the senior diviner who is training the *umkhwetha* (novice). When the ancestors are convinced that the *mkhwetha* is ready, they reveal themselves in order to grant him/her

the permission to practice independently. In the same way as *imvuma kufa* and rituals of *intlombe* are performed within the public sphere, the graduation ceremony or, *umphumo wegqirha*, serves to inform the wider community that the novice has completed the training to be a diviner and has been granted permission to practice independently without any guidance from a senior diviner. This is a period of joy for the individual, the clan, other *amagqirha*, and the rest of the community. The graduating *igqirha* is regarded as being different from the day of *imvuma kufa* and wears numerous white beads which reflect the status of the graduate. Singing, dancing and ritual speeches that have already been dealt with in the previous chapter are performed, for example, *ingxelo*, *umbulelo*, *yala* (admonition), *nqula* and *camagu*. These different speeches are uttered by, both clan members during slaughtering, and by *amagqirha* during an *intlombe*.

5.1 *Ukungqina* (To Witness, to Confirm, to Approve)

As part of *ukuphuma kwegqirha* (the graduation of a diviner), or '*ukugodusa*' that is, the 'taking home' ceremony, another form of ritual speech known as *ukungqina* (to witness or to confirm) is used which serves to communicate that one is now a fully accepted *igqirha* by the ancestors. This last stage is reached only when one has satisfied the ancestors by performing all the prescribed duties. Approval is needed not only from ancestors, but also from the senior diviner who was responsible for training the novice, and by the broader community as during the course of the training s/he – under supervision - treated members of the community and

performed *vumisa* (divination) or *uNontongwana* ('finding hidden objects'). *Ukuyala* ('to admonish') forms part of *ukungqina* ('to witness'), as the newly graduated diviner is now seen as a representative of the community of diviners as well as living and deceased members of her clan. At the graduation of MaDlamini at KTC, Novazimtsholo said the following:

Novazimtsholo: *Into endiyithandayo tat'uGxarha, ngunogqibile lo*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Camagu*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Andizoyikiseli xa ndithetha ngoNomayeza*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Kuba ndithetha ngo Gxarha, umntu otheni?*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Othe wanyang'uNomayeza*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Phambili ntombi ka Luzipho*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Nguyel'umfana ka Gabeni*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Ukubekile aph'enkundleni*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Namhlanj'uligqirha*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Ngoku sithetha ngawe*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Kuba nguw'igqirh'eliphumiley'ekhapha*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Thina singamangqina nje*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Singqinela wena*

Audience: *Camagu*

Novazimtsholo: *Uhlambekile ke ntombi*

Audience: *Camagu*

What I like father Gxarha, this is the last stage

This one was trained by us up to where she is now

I don't have any doubts when I talk about Nomayeza
 Because I talk of Gxarha who trained Nomayeza
 Keep it up Luzipho's daughter
 Here is Gabeni's son
 He has placed you in public
 Today you are a diviner
 Today we are talking about you
 Because you are the diviner that is graduating in this homestead
 We are the witnesses
 Witnessing on your behalf
 You are cleansed, colleague

In all the other speeches, the *amagqirha* wish the novice good luck (*thamsanqelisa*) and affirm that she has been accepted as a qualified *igqirha*.

6. Ukuthetha in Divination

6.1 Oral Performance

The process of divination is underpinned by the belief that an *igqirha* is in constant communication with the ancestors and therefore a diviner interprets every vision that s/he experiences as a message from the ancestors. Within African thought, symbols are classified according to the meaning, or message, that they convey. There are some symbols, which, not only convey messages but are also representative of the ancestors or they refer to a place where ancestors call someone to be initiated. It is believed that such symbols should be shown great respect and are not called by their usual names because they represent or are the mouthpiece of ancestors. For example:

Umlambo..... Umzi omkhulu..... River

Ihlathi.....Ingethe..... .Forest

Iinyosi.....Impukane zengethe or abahlekazi.....Bees

Ingwe.....Inalane enkulu.....Tiger

Ulwandle.....Ulwagcweba/umzi onxolayo...Sea

Bloch (1989) is only partially correct in his understanding of ritual speech as something prescribed, limited and therefore a form of social control. It could be argued that the structure of African society is, to some extent, maintained through forms of social control such as ritual speech. However, in divination, social control becomes stronger and unchallengeable because it is not 'man' that is speaking but ancestors and control is from the ancestors and not from society. The use of 'prescribed' by Bloch may be right as an *igqirha* follows the instruction from what has been dreamt or what has been seen in the vision from the ancestors.

A Nyawuza elder in charge of her sister's ceremony of *ukunikwa ulugxa* (ceremony of getting an assegai) at Malunga Park in Cape Town, spoke to the ancestors, calling them one by one as they were leaving the hut to go to the kraal. He invited the ancestors to be present at all the proceedings. MaMncotshe, the senior diviner who was responsible for initiating Manyawuza, said the following to her initiate while capping her with the type of a headgear that had been revealed to her in her dreams :

*Masitheni Camagu. Lufele lwakhe, uluphuphile
aluphutshwanga ndim. Lithongo lakhe, uzakulinxitywa
ngutatakhe. Lwakumjikela, luphutshwe nguye.*

Let us all say *camagu*. This is her 'leather skin', she dreamt of it, I did not dream about it. It is her dream, her father is going to put it on her. If it turns against her, she dreamt about it.

The above statement clearly shows that MaMncotshe behaved in accordance with the wishes of the ancestors as revealed to the novice.

Within the context of divination, every *igqirha* is an authority of his/her own, they all *nqula* their ancestors. *Nqula* involves one's requests to his/her ancestors, participants do not refer to one group of ancestors where we can speak of limitations and prescriptions though the destination is the Supreme Being. Peek (1981) has also noticed the limitations of written text when he writes about the importance of verbal art. He has offered the following comments:

It should be stressed that too often we have allowed our literate analytical heritage, recording methods, and concerns about texts and contexts to obscure the primacy of the oral nature of verbal art. Verbal art forms are not merely oral 'translations' which we then 'reduce' to writing. We must continually remind ourselves of the limits of literacy and the hazards of exclusively literate scholarship. For many cultures that we seek to understand, hearing is believing. (Peek, 1981: 453)

It could be argued that the oral tradition is more effective than the written expression of a religious tradition because it is not only said, but also done. To *phehla*, for instance combines *nqula* and the foam which is formed and had to be drunk at that particular moment. No-one reads from a text telling people how a certain *nqula* was performed as diviners actually do things and speak

simultaneously and that is not written down for future teachings as the call of the future diviner in that clan may be different from the present one. Ritual speech is not restricted, since someone thanking, or asking, or announcing in a ritual is not restricted by anybody. In the performance of *nqula*, for instance, one does not write or practice what is going to be said and ritual speech occurs spontaneously. In Xhosa, a good speaker is referred to as an *iciko* and one who is sometimes shy or boring and does not hold the interest of the audience is known as an *iyilo*.

The order in which the ancestors are orally called, is determined by the diviner as they do not have to be referred to any particular order. While observing the ritual speeches uttered in the context of *intlombe*, I noticed that each diviner, *nqula* his/her ancestors and the order was not important. It is the act of invoking which is significant. Dancing, singing, the rhythmic drumming and clapping as well as the message of each song plays a very significant role to those who are in close proximity to the diviners. The stage is for diviners demonstrating their religious practice in a way that is shown to them, it is therefore difficult even to the spectators to know what is actually happening within the diviner's body when they reach the climax of their interaction with the spiritual world.

6.2 Performance and Power

Nombuso, cited in Broaster (1984: 34) confirms that ritual speech cannot be restricted as the interpretation of dreams, for example,

depends on many circumstances. Nombuso, for instance claims that according to her experience ‘the power to confess these dreams comes through dancing which invokes the spirit, while the singing and clapping, liberate this power’. Others do not narrate dreams by dancing first but may first sing a song. During training, the novices have to narrate their dreams. Narration always happens in a formal way. In many cases the novice before narrating a dream to her/his mentor, s/he sings a song indicating the reason of the song. MamCirha from Engcobo in Transkei explained that while she was undertaking her training she had to explain her dreams to her mentor. She further explained that she used to wake up and go to her mentor’s hut to wake her by singing the song: *Khanivukeni nilawul’amathongo* (‘Wake up and narrate your dreams’).

Looking at the different types of activities during divination, one could notice that divination speech is very complex and should be regarded as extraordinary and can therefore not be interpreted in ordinary terms. The circumstances which surround the uttering of such speech is powerful to its practitioners, and it is believed, that some speeches have the ability to create sacred objects and places. Closing songs and speeches made after the *intlombe* can change the extraordinary to ordinary. Language used in divination such as *nqula* or *camagu*, draws the attention of both the spiritual and the physical realm. Towards the end of the ritual, MaRhadebe began to sing the following: *He sihlwele sam, kha undikhulule ndigoduke* (‘My ancestor, please release me so that I can go home’). After she had sung those words, the *amagqirha* dispersed as the ancestors had given them permission to return to their respective homes.

The diviner's *intlombe* can be seen as the most democratic religious practice as all diviners are free to address their ancestors in whatever way they like. All the *amagqirha* present are given a chance to communicate to the spiritual world and perform their respective invocation (*nqula*). The *intlombe* takes longer than some of the other rituals because every *igqirha* participates irrespective of whether one is an *umkhwetha* (novice) or a senior diviner. All these practices are done in an orderly and respectful manner. Divination speech is therefore a specialised form of performative speech with specific reference to ancestors. It is a speech that can be vocal to special people at certain times. In the case of divination, certain utterances can only be heard by the *amagqirha* who then relates them to the audience.

Tambiah's (1968) description of ritual speech as the 'recital' of sacred words may be confusing once it is applied to the speeches that take place in an *intlombe* as recitation involves memorization which may not be based on the spiritual experience of the person who is doing the reciting. Recitation generally involves a prescribed text located within a particular historical, socio-political context whereas ritual speech can be seen as a prayer meaning that one says what s/he requests at that particular moment. Even *nqula* cannot be regarded as recitation as there is no prescribed order when one is invoking ancestors. *Nqula* is an exchange of dialogue, a conversation, and it would be a misconception to regard it as a form of recitation. The most important aspect of African methods of divination is the effectiveness of the communication between the

living and the deceased. Communication itself is guarded by rules, restrictions and a form of morality as the effect of the speech is measured by the outcome of the ritual or the response from the ancestors. The effectiveness of the words depends not only on the utterances made by the diviner, or the sacrificer, but also on the response from the spiritual world which must *vuma* ('accept', 'recognise', 'acknowledge').

From what has been discussed in this chapter, it is clear that ritual speeches during an *intlombe* are perceived as personal communication between *amagqirha* and their ancestors. This analysis agrees with Austin's theory of the performative functions of words as the purpose of an *intlombe* is always narrated and achieved. All the theories or research work on divination so far lack an in depth analysis of the importance of words uttered and the purpose thereof. Schweitzer and Bührmann, for instance, clearly show this problem of interpretation when they cite the following interpretations of *thwasa* which have been offered by different scholars:

Laubscher (a psychiatrist) as representing schizophrenia or epileptic Psychosis. Lee (a psychologist), however, describes *thwasa* as being a psychoneurotic condition, which has been further supported by Hammond-Tooke (an anthropologist)... Kruger (a psychologist) who has looked at "*thwasa*" as a "crisis in living", and by Bührmann (an analytic psychiatrist) who has posited an interpretation of *thwasa*, as a "creative illness". (Schweitzer and Bührmann, 1978: 15)

Although they seem to acknowledge the limitations and prejudices of 'outsider' researchers and analysts of *ukuthwasa*, they

themselves are unaware that their research is also prejudiced and offer a limited understanding of African religious practices. They refer to ancestors as 'shades' without having convinced practitioners from within the tradition of the reasoning which informs and justifies the use of the term. The use of shades for instance comes from a belief that ancestors are confined in the rural areas, therefore when they come to town, they are the shades of those in the rural areas. Schweitzer and Bührmann's definition of 'shade' as a 'ghost of a person after death' is problematic and shows continuity with colonial interpretations of African Traditional Religion as the deceased in the African worldview are never associated with ghosts:

Thwasa refers to a category of experience, whereby the individual experiences, a 'calling' to join the profession of the amagqirha (diviners). This "calling" is associated with 'sickness' or 'disintegration' and is initiated by the ancestors or the term which (we) prefer, the shades... The word shade, is used in preference to ancestor. Whereas ancestor refers to dead descendents, the Xhosa live in an undivided world, in which the shades / ancestors are a living and the dead is often not significant and often meaningless. (Schweitzer and Bührmann, 1978: 15-16)

In this chapter, *thetha*, is used more frequently than any other activity. For any activity to be genuine and to be blessed by those who have chosen the individual, a communal gathering of both the clan and the community at large to announce the event is obligatory. The use of the present tense in all ritual speech, and the need to interpret dreams, show that the participants believe that they are in direct communication with their ancestors. This dialogue is always believed to be active in divination as an *igqirha*

is regarded as the mouthpiece of the ancestors and is therefore always consulted to explain the needs of ancestors who are seen to *thetha* through an *igqirha*. Ritual speech in divination is therefore believed to be a dialogue between the diviner and his/her ancestors. It is a dialogue that begins when ancestors choose the individual until one dies, which could be the beginning of another dialogue as the deceased diviner is believed to choose another person to inherit this profession of a healer.

CHAPTER FOUR

UMPHANGA: DEATH

Death is defined primarily as a departure, a change. To die is to leave the visible world for the invisible; it is to say no to hunger, misery, disease, and worry. It is to say goodbye to the earth... This departure, however, is not an eternal separation. From time to time the deceased return home to warn, inform, or give instructions to the *kanda* or an individual member regarding an upcoming event looming large. (Bokie, 1993: 83)

In African Traditional Religion, death is regarded as a transitional stage before one can join the departed and enter the world of ancestors. The way in which the community responds to death is determined by the circumstances under which death occurs. Death is dealt with in different ways depending on whether the cause of death is natural, that is, the result of old age, sickness, or if by *ingozi* (accident). In the case of *ingozi*, for example, if someone is struck by a lightning, killed during war, or is drowned, it is necessary to bury the person at the site of the accident even though

other rituals like 'accompanying' and 'bringing back' are performed later. However, if death can be attributed to natural causes, the person is buried at home. This broad classification of the nature of death is elaborated on by Chidester (2001) who has argued:

Death may appear to be an easily identifiable event. One moment there is life, the next death. But because dying is at the same time a biological, psychological, and social process, a human death is a complex event. Because a human death is also a symbolised event, surrounded in the symbolic forms of religious imagination, discourse, and practice, death and dying appear even more complex in human experience. (Chidester, 2001: 5)

Due to the complexities which surround death, this chapter will focus only on the speeches that are uttered in the case of a person who has died of natural causes and will also reflect on the religious aspect of the consequences of death. My analysis will place emphasis on religious symbols relating to death and dying as these 'represent opportunities for rising above or going beyond the biological, psychological, and social aspects of human life' (Chidester, 2001: 5).

1. Symbolism of Bones

Death means the physical separation of the flesh from an immortal soul. In African Traditional Religion, it is believed that although the flesh decays, symbolically the bones are believed to remain alive and possess the ability to see, hear, feel and experience a

range of emotions. Bones of the deceased are treated with great respect and are believed to have the ability to 'speak' (*ayathetha*) and 'hear' (*ayeva*) when someone is speaking to them. Several metaphors are used to communicate the relationship of the deceased with his/her living relatives. For example, the term *ayashukuma* means that bones are shaking in order to express anger or dissatisfaction of the deceased. Sometimes a deceased person may complain that, *uyagodola*, which means that s/he is feeling cold, or that s/he is 'naked' and needs to be 'covered'. This is interpreted as a sign that one of the rituals associated with death was never performed.

As suggested by the above paragraph, it is evident that, to an African, the bones of the deceased, *thetha*, or 'speak'. It is therefore important to know where the bones of the departed relatives are 'sleeping' so that when the need for direct communication arises, especially during times of crisis, the living can visit the graves of the deceased. It is not only during times of crisis that the graves are visited. In some cases, living members of the clan visit the graves of their ancestors to inform them of important occasions such as an individual leaving home for an extended period of time or to tell them of an achievement. When an individual visits the grave, s/he mentions the name of the deceased person and refers to the person as if s/he is still alive. For example, one might say: 'I am going to my mother'.

To show the importance of the association of the deceased with the 'living bones' or, *amathambo aphilayo*, the ancestors are

sometimes referred to as *amathambo*. Aside from terms such as *izinyanya* or, *izihlwele*, (ancestors) the Xhosa also use names related to ancestral bones in order to refer to the deceased:

- i) The reference to the deceased as *amathambo* ('bones') is related to the belief that, after death, it is only the flesh and, not the bones, which decay. The association of the deceased with bones denote that the person in the grave is immortal. The bones create a demarcated space where the deceased has been 'put to rest' and represent the sacred place where, in times of crisis, the living clan members can consult with their ancestors.
- ii) Graves are treated with great respect as it is believed that the bones of the deceased need to be maintained in a state of peace, hence the reference to ancestors as, *amathambo alele ukuthula* ('bones that are silently sleeping'). In order to maintain this peaceful state of existence, the living need to perform all the necessary rituals and fulfil the obligations and responsibilities prescribed for each individual.
- iii) The purity of the ancestors is associated with the whiteness of bones and therefore the term *amathambo amhlophe* ('white bones') is sometimes used to refer to the ancestors. The association of whiteness with the purity of the spiritual realm is communicated by *amagqirha amaXhosa* (Xhosa diviners) who wear white beads, white clothes and decorate their bodies with white ochre.

On some occasions, ancestors demand that certain rituals be done in

the forest or in the river. This shows that, although the bones of the deceased reside in the grave, the spirit of the ancestor is not bound to any one place. It is believed that, unlike the physical remains, the spirit is confined neither to the grave, the cattle kraal nor the house or, for that matter, the realm of dreams. According to African cosmology, ancestors can be found everywhere. The use of bones when referring to ancestors is either used literally or metaphorically. It is literal in the sense that a grave, as explained earlier, is a sacred place that houses the bones of the deceased but the reference to bones can also be used metaphorically in the sense that sometimes people speak of ancestors that are found everywhere such as, in the river (*emzini omkhulu*), or in the forest (*engetheni*).

Death marks not only the transition to the spiritual world but carries with it the obligation to look after the welfare of the living. Death is an opening to another life, a continuation of the present one, but it is a life that is considered to be holy, powerful, and eternal. The communal nature of African society, and the fact that the living are always in consultation with the ancestors, means that it is compulsory for an individual to prepare the way to the afterlife. Moreover, the elderly are obliged to secure the safety of the dependants who will be left behind as well as to instruct the living by passing on the wisdom that s/he has accumulated in this world. The elders of the clan issue verbally binding instructions for the living descendants and it is known that communication will continue even once the elder has left the physical realm. It is believed that an individual who has lived a good life and has strived to maintain harmony within the clan and the wider

community at large (including the relationship with the spiritual realm), will know when the time of death is near. It is therefore important for the dying person to inform the family of any needs that s/he would like to have fulfilled after his/her death. The elder usually passes on any wisdom or knowledge to the person who has been chosen to take over the responsibilities after his/her death. The elder explain how s/he wants to be buried and assigns certain duties to other members of the family. All these instructions are encompassed in what is called, *umyolelo*, and refers to the wishes of the dying person. Unlike a will, *umyolelo*, is concerned with imparting blessings on the living and less with the distribution of material benefits. In African culture, it is considered to be a great blessing to be present when a parent utters his/her last words even if the living individual does not stand to inherit any material wealth. It is for this reason that Africans usually do not hesitate to return home when one is called by a parent who is terminally ill. Neglecting to respond to such a call could bring about great misfortune.

2. *Ukuyolela* (To Utter the Last Words/Wishes Before Death, to Give Instructions of What is to be Done After One's Death)

Umyolelo refers to the information imparted, before death, to the living members of the clan. The concern about the disappearance of his/her name after death is reflected in the words of an elder who can be heard admonishing his children by saying: 'I do not want my *umzi* (homestead) to perish and you find people saying *umzi owawulapha wayangaphi na?* ('where is the homestead that was

here?'). Each homestead head wants his name to continue forever, his children should continue performing rituals in his name. The deathbed is regarded as a sacred space which marks the beginning of the transition to the spiritual world. The living are bound to fulfil any obligations expressed by a person on their deathbed as s/he is regarded as being in a state of transition to the spiritual world. *Umyolelo* involves all the activities that an individual would need to have performed after his/her death.

Umyolelo is a complex form of speech which refers, not only to the living, but is also regarded as a message 'in transit' from this world into the next and is therefore considered spiritually 'heavier' than an ordinary instruction. Although *umyolelo* can sometimes be very short, it is a form of speech which serves to convey messages or communicate any final instructions to the living, as well as to explain that the time has come to join the world of ancestors. *Umyolelo* is usually accompanied by, *ukuyala*, a form of speech which allows the dying person to communicate advice or warnings to living members of the clan. Sometimes the patient is terminally ill and cannot speak properly but utters the last words to give instructions on what should happen after his/her death. Such utterances are taken very seriously by the living. Bokie (1993) recorded the following example of a case in which a terminally ill elder addressed his children by saying:

I am pleased to see you all.
 Before my departure to our ancestors.
 I know very well the way you feel in this moment
 But I must beg you not to be so saddened.
 You must continue to love one another.

You must protect well our ancestor's land.
Never sell it.

In his book *The Wrath of the Ancestors*, Jordan informs us how the Mpondomise chief, Zwelinzima, ignored his father's wishes and married a Fingo woman, a commoner, instead of the Bhaca princess with tragic consequences for both him and his son (Jordan, 1980).

Ukuyolela does not necessarily occur very near to the moment of death. One of my informants, Mr. Dladla, of eSebeni location in Willowvale, explained that sometimes a person may perform *ukuyolela* while they are still healthy and strong. In such cases, the person is responding to a situation which s/he, might have observed, and would not like to see happen after his/her death. With this type of *ukuyolela*, Mr. Dladla explained that a person is persistent in communicating his/her wishes so that they are recognised as more than just mere talking: '*kufuneka iqheleke apha ebantwini ukuze bangayilibali*' ('it should always be in the minds of people so that they do not forget it'). Mr. Dladla further gave an example of such an *umyolelo* by explaining how a relative once said to him, '*Xa ndingcwatywayo ndingaze ndingcwatywe umbilini wam ungekho kum*' ('never bury me without my internal organs') meaning that he does not want to be taken to the mortuary when he dies as he believed that it is practice, at the mortuary, to remove the internal organs before the body is buried.⁶ If such an *umyolelo* is

⁶ He believed that the extracted internal organs were used for medicinal purposes.

ignored, it is believed that such actions would bring about irreversible misfortune for the living. He further explained that the failure to fulfil the wishes of the deceased person could give rise to new forms of ritual practices, specific to that clan, as they are developed in order to appease the ancestors. He referred to such rituals as *izisusa*.

Obviously, it is imperative that there are witnesses present when *ukuyolela* is performed so that the wishes of the dying individual are fulfilled and that any obligations, on the part of the living, are met. The responsibility to respond to *ukuyolela* lies, not only with the clan, but also with those present at the moment of death. The closing of the eyes of a deceased person signals the beginning of the process in which the spirit is released from the physical body and undergoes the journey to the eternal realm.

3. *Ukumpola* (To Confess Evil Deeds)

In African Traditional Religion there is no conception of hell or heaven, punishment and salvation occurs in the here and now. It is also believed that an evil person will not be accepted into the world of the ancestors. It is therefore imperative that before a person who is considered to be evil dies, s/he is forced to publicly confess and reconcile with the people s/he has wronged. The concept of *ukumpola* differs from *umyolelo* because it does not carry any form of blessings to the living. It is only by confessing one's evil deeds that the terminally ill person can ensure that s/he will enter the

realm of the ancestors after s/he has died. If one dies, accidentally, and without the opportunity for confession, rituals of *izisusa* – rituals of appeasement - are performed by the living as per the request of the deceased whose spirit lingers while s/he awaits ‘cleansing’ for the evil deeds which prevent entry into the spiritual realm. The nature of the *izisusa* ritual and how it needs to be performed is explained by the deceased through dreams or visions.

Eurocentric approaches to the study of African Traditional Religion attempt to explain *ukumpola* as a psychological disorder and there is a tendency for it to be reduced to a kind of mental disturbance. There are some practical examples cited by some people in rural areas who have been diagnosed as being mentally disturbed yet the elderly analyse them as being *mpola*. *Ukumpola* is always accompanied by a plea of forgiveness after a person has confessed his/her evil deeds that may have been witnessed by many people.

It is not only *ukumpola* which is performed as part of the preparation for the transition to the spiritual world. On some occasions, a person might need to alleviate a sense of guilt - resulting from any wrongdoing - or wants to ensure that no-one bears a grudge against him/her. What follows below is an example of what is said under such circumstances:

There must be someone among you and others
 who did not like me.
 I ask him to forgive me now.
 I have nothing against anyone.
 I loved everybody.
 I am not troubled to join my ancestors.

Again, do not be so saddened, for we will meet again
(cited in Bokie, 1993: 98).

Umyolelo serves to provide a sense of hope that the deceased will ultimately be reconciled with the living in two ways. Firstly, that the deceased will remain spiritually connected to living members of the clan and secondly, that all members of the clan will eventually join those who have already entered the realm of ancestors.

4. *Ukubika* (To Announce, to Inform, to Bring Bad News)

A message bearing the news of the death, or the departure, of an individual from the physical world is referred to as *umphanga* or *umbiko*. To announce *umphanga* is another form of *ingxelo* used exclusively by the elderly. The day on which the community hears of the *umbiko* or *umphanga* marks the beginning of grief in that particular homestead or amongst the relevant clan. *Umphanga* is sent to all members of the clan related by blood (*izihlobo*) and to those who are members as a result of marriage (*izalamane*). Death is often referred to metaphorically, in the following ways:

Uswelekile - has become scarce

Utshonile/utshabile - has disappeared

Akasekho - not present

Usishiyile - has left us

Uhambile - has gone (Mcetywa, 1991:78).

The above metaphors serve to communicate that the individual may have departed from the physical realm but his/her spirit will continue to remain among the living.

5. Silence and the Removal of White Wash as a Symbol of Mourning

As a sign of bereavement, the entire homestead is smeared with *udaka* which is comprised of a mixture of soil, cow dung and water. By covering the whitewash of the structures within the homestead, everybody is made aware that there is *umphanga* (death). *Udaka* remains on the walls even after the funeral has occurred and is removed only once the period of mourning has been completed.

As a form of respect during the period of mourning for the deceased, it is customary for the community to be as silent as possible, speaking softly and only when necessary. Baw'uChizama from Willowvale explained that it is believed that even animals mourn when there is a death in the homestead and claimed that dogs showed respect for *umphanga* (death) by not barking during the period of mourning.

6. *Umfihlo* (Burial)

Umfihlo or *umngcwabo* refers to the ceremony of *ukubeka ongasekhoyo* (lit. putting down the one who has gone, or has deceased) into his or her other dwelling place, *ingcwaba* or *ifihlo*, that is, the grave. A grave is regarded as a home for the person who has undergone the journey from the physical to the spiritual world and is therefore regarded as sacred. A grave is sometimes called an *ifihlo*, a place of concealment. As the person is believed not to be physically with the living but is spiritually communicating with

them, it is believed that his body should be concealed as s/he will speak in the form of dreams and visions. The inside of the main hut is cleared as it is the place where the body will be put before the burial.

Baw'uChizama expressed criticism for today's funerals which, he claimed, were more like wedding feasts because of the attendance and participation of children who are not related to the deceased. In traditional funerals, children are usually not allowed to attend funerals except those of their close relatives.

Within the study of African Traditional Religion, there are some misconceptions surrounding burial rituals, for example, Soga maintains that:

No religious ceremony takes place at the grave, and no words of condolence or sympathy are uttered. A precatory sentence, however, is often addressed to the departed, such as "remember us for good from the place to which you have gone" (*Uze usikhumbulele apho uya khona*). (Soga, 1931: 320)

Soga claims that there is no religious ceremony within Xhosa burial practices which is problematic because it is underpinned by Christian-informed notions of what constitutes religious ceremony. However, in a traditional Xhosa burial, there is a strict adherence to a set of ritual procedures. For example, only male members of the clan carry the body to the grave, the deceased has to be placed in the grave facing the homestead and buried with possessions which were of importance to the person whilst s/he was alive.

Furthermore, Soga reduces the words said by the elder once the deceased person has been placed into the grave to 'a precatory sentence', implying that the speaker had prepared these words before summarising them into a sentence. Defining these words as 'precatory' also serves to dismiss the way in which they unite, remind, extend the relationship, confirm everlasting dialogue and the promise (*vuma*) of carrying out responsibilities assigned before death. Under such circumstances, a reader may be misled to think that what is said near the grave is a prepared, restricted and controlled form of speech, yet the speaker is given some time to say something only to the deceased but not to the people who attended the burial. The words uttered are to the deceased who is left *kwikhaya lakhe lokugqibela* (his/her last home).

As a sign of respect, there is an absence of any form of song, clapping, or dancing during the burial ritual. Before the body is lowered into the grave, certain words are addressed to the deceased. An example of the words which are uttered to the deceased while being buried is given by Baw'uDladla :

Xa ulapha kule ndlu yakho sikubeka kuyo siyakwazi awusilahlanga, nathi asikulahlanga. Uhlale kakuhle kule ndlu yakho, naba abantwana bakho, beva kabuhlungu ngawe. Ungazilibali ihasi ezi uzishiyileyo. Umkakho uze ungamlibali wazi ukuba umshiye nabantwana.

When you are in this house that we are putting you in, we know that you have not abandoned us, we have also not abandoned you.
Keep well in your house.

Here are your children, they are feeling bad about your departure.

Please do not forget the poor children that you have left behind.

Do not forget your wife, remember that you have left her with children.

He went on to explain that the deceased is addressed in a very specific manner to ensure that he would reveal himself in dreams and bring the living good luck. Such words go beyond the explanation of ritual speech by Bloch (1989) regarding prescribed and controlled speech. The speech made near the grave may not differ to admonishes which are done face to face. However, these admonishes near the grave are not ordinary admonishes and go together with pleas and reminders. They may be considered prescribed to a certain extent because they communicate a moral code, but the context and manner in which the words are said are never prescribed. The deceased person is reminded to maintain his/her obligations and responsibilities even though s/he has made the transition to the spirit world. These words of wisdom cannot be documented as they depend on the status and gender of the deceased. For example, a young man or woman who dies without having children cannot be admonished about looking after children. Certain words uttered to the deceased communicate the belief that death is regarded as continuation into another life. Citing some words which are uttered by the Ba-ila people when burying their dead, Edwin W. Smith explains that:

The corpse is lowered gently into the grave, where it is laid upon a skin. A wooden stool is placed under the head. Then various articles are put by the side of the

corpse; some maize and ground -nuts, a calabash of milk or beer; a lump of tobacco and a pipe - the pipe the man used while alive. A member of the family kneels by the graveside and calls, as each article is placed in position: Tata (Father), here is beer which we give you to drink, and so on. (Smith, 1929: 53).

A similar procedure is explained by Sityana in his description of an amaXhosa burial:

Mamela ke xa kuphoswa ezi zinto amazwi akhutshwayo kuloo nto iphoswayo ngale ndlela. Kuqala kuphoswa ingxowa yakhe kuthiwe, 'Nantso ingxowa yakho; hamba ugcine zonke izinto zakho'; kuphoswe idosha kuthiwe, 'Hamba uzakhele umlilo usotha, utshaya ungagodoli'; Kuphoswe ingawa kuthiwe, 'Hamba kakuhle unganqanqatheki endleleni mfondini ukwazi ukutshaya apho uthe waphumla khona'; kuphoswe isikhwili kuthiwe, 'Naso isikhali sakho ukuze ukwazi ukuzilwela endleleni apho uthe wahlangana khona notshaba'. (Sityana, 1978: 31)

These are the words that are said when they put things in the grave. They first put in his sack and he is told to keep all his belongings, then a lighter and is told to make fire so as to keep warm, and also to smoke. Then a pipe is put and is told that he must use it so that he does not crave for smoking, he must smoke when he is taking some rest. Then his weapon will be put and is told to use it to protect himself when he finds himself with an enemy.

Sityana's explanation above shows how amaXhosa speak to the deceased after they have put the corpse into the grave and describes a procedure whereby he is given a sack to keep his things, a lighter, a pipe and a weapon to protect himself.

At times, it might be necessary for the living to explain, and apologise, why they had not done exactly what they had been instructed to do by the deceased. For example, an elder in the Zizi clan at Tywaka location had to apologise to the deceased person who had not been buried beside his mother, as he had requested, due to the fact that there would not have been enough room to bury both him and his wife. Before the body was lowered into the grave, his younger brother said the following:

Mkhuluwa (big brother), I am standing here to apologise for changing what you asked for, to be buried next to your mother. We hope you will not be angry with us because it was done for a good reason. We cannot divorce you with your wife after you left us. When we came here to prepare your house we noticed that Nothembile, your wife will not have enough space for her house next to you. We therefore decided to put you next to your uncle where there is enough space for your wife to sleep next to you. Let us hope Dlamini, that you understand our decision. *Camagu*.

During the funeral of his son at the local cemetery, a man from Khayelitsha, Cape Town asked his deceased son not to complain because they had buried him in the township and not in the homestead. He explained to his son that, in accordance with African tradition, he would have to be buried where the fatal accident had occurred in order to prevent a repetition of the incident within the family. Under ordinary circumstances, a person must be buried, 'at home', next to his/her ancestral graves. However, due to the fact that people die more frequently now as a result of car accidents, it has become common to bury the dead at

'home'. In such cases, the corpse is taken straight to the graveyard and is never brought inside the house. Communities that have been affected by western laws which force them to have graveyards, or those that have lost much of their land due to colonialism, usually have no choice but to bury their dead in the *emangcwabeni* (graveyard).

On the day of the funeral all the vessels that contain curdled milk, namely, *onke amaselwa*, are emptied and *amasi* (curdled milk or sour milk) is spilled out except for one which will be used for when people return from the burial ceremony. After returning from the burial ceremony, it is customary amongst the Xhosa to *chila ukufa*, that is, drink curdled milk, chew the leaves of *umhlolokotshane* tree and then spit them out saying that death must not return.

7. *Ukuhlamba Izandla* (Washing Hands/Cleansing)

After the deceased is buried, those returning from the gravesite wash their hands in the nearest river as running water is regarded as a symbol to wash away bad luck and as a form of cleansing from the contamination of death. Washing hands at home is not encouraged as it might bring bad luck or *ukufa* (death) into the home. Traditionally, Xhosa people believe that death should only occur when an individual is old as death is considered to be a progression from adulthood to ancestorhood. The death of a young person always comes as a shock and many preventative measures against an accidental death are taken. For example, males coming back from the river usually bring green branches and *umhlolokotshane* (a plant from the forest) for *ukuchila* (to cast away death by spitting and talking). *Umhlolokotshane* is chewed and combined with a sip of *amasi* (sour milk) before spitting to the east and then to the west. Asked about the reason for *ukuchila*, Baw'uChizama responded by saying: “*kugxothwa eli shwangusha lisekhapha*” (‘to cast away this misfortune that has happened in this homestead’). After the funeral, people usually sit down and eat *iinkobe* (boiled mealies) and nothing else, but Baw'uDladla complains that today things have changed as some people use *iinkobe* for *ukuchila* rather than *umhlolokotshane* and *amasi*.

8. *Ukuphuzwa Kwamanzi* ('Drinking of Water' i.e. Strengthening the Mourners or Admonishing, Releasing, Unifying, Cleansing)

Ukuphuzwa kwamanzi is characterised by different forms of speech addressed to the bereaved and to the community. Nowadays, the day after the funeral, clan members, together with the community, gather in the main hut where the bereaved remain until they are released. A ritual of cleansing, *ukuphuzwa kwamanzi*, is accompanied by, *ukuyala*, *ukungqina*, *ukubulela*, and *ukwazisa*, that is, to admonish, to guide, to advise, to warn, to teach. These words are spoken in order to console the bereaved and to ensure that the deceased is not angered in any way. Members of the clan only return to their respective homes some days after the funeral, usually from the second day after the burial. The day after the burial, a sheep is slaughtered and eaten. Before the members of the clan disperse, they gather together in the main hut with the rest of the community to admonish the family of the deceased. In an *ukuhlamba izandla* ritual at Tywaka location, the elders of both the community and the clan admonished the family of the deceased in three ways by addressing the wife, the *inkulu* (first born male), and the children in general. Before the advent of Christianity, this ritual was only done for those members of the family who did not attend the funeral and who came late for *ukubeka ilitye*, that is, to 'put stones' in the grave.

9. Ukuyala (To Admonish, to Guide, to Advise, to Warn, to Teach)

During *ukuhlamba izandla* or *ukuphuzwa kwamanzi* the elderly of both the community and the clan admonish those members of the deceased family who will remain in the homestead. This was done in the following way:

To the wife:

Mafobe, indoda yakho igulile kwaye uyongile

Ndiqinisekile awunasikrokro

Ke uze ulugcine usapho lwenu ngoluhlobo benibambisene ngalo noDlamini

Uze wazi into enye, akazikukuyekela umyeni wakho

Uyakusoloko ekujongile ngeliso lomoya ngoku, njengokuba esithele ngeli lenyama

Isidima salo mzi singehli sihlale ngoluya hlobo besilulo

Siyakushiya namhlanje

Maze ukhwaze xa kukho ingxaki

Nathi asizi kuphela kulo mzi womkhuluwa

Camagu

Mafobe, your husband had been sick and you looked after him.

I am sure you are satisfied.

You should then look after the family the same way that you did together with Dlamini.

You must know one thing, you husband will still help you.

He will always look at you through his spiritual eye even though he is not visible by the physical eye.

The dignity of this homestead should not be lowered, it must remain the same as it used to be.

We are leaving you today.

Inform us when there is a problem.

We too, we wont stop coming to our big brother's homestead.

Camagu.

To the first born:

Nyana, indoda yalo mzi isishiyile

Zange saxoxa ke ekhapha, sisoloko sisiza kumnandi, simke kumnandi

Ke maze angathi uDlamini akusithela sihambe ezinkundleni

Uze ugcine unyoko, angasokoli ukhona

Ungamleqi ngamabhunguza kuba ufuna ilifa.

Uhloniphe abantakwenu, ubakhongozele, ungabayaluzelisi, kuba usithi uyinkulu

Namhlanje indoda enkulu yasekhapha nguwe

Kodwa akuyondoda kanyoko, ukuzele, ubonisane naye ekugcineni eli khaya

Singavi zijwili ekhapha akusithela uyihlo

Wazi kakuhle ukujongile, uyakukohlwaya

Camagu

Son, the homestead's head had left us.

We never argued here, we always came and left here being happy.

It should not happen that when Dlamini left us, we should go to court.

Look after your mother, she must not suffer though you are here.

Do not chase her with sticks because you want inheritance.

Respect you brothers and sisters, collect them, do not toss them around, because you say you are the heir.

Today you are the breadwinner in this homestead.

But you are not your mother's husband, she gave birth to you, discuss with her all the issues concerning this homestead.

We must not hear cries in this homestead once your father has disappeared.

You must know it clearly that he is looking at you, he will punish you.

Camagu.

To the other children :

Bantwana bam, nigcinane

Kungabikho otsalela ecaleni

*Ningamqumbisi uyihlo
Nigcine unyoko, nibonisane nomntakwenu
Xa kukho ingxaki niyazi ukuba nithini, sikhona.
Namhlane siyanishiya kodwa asizi kuphela ekhapha
Camagu.*

My children, you must look after each other.
No one must pull on his/her side.
Do not make your father cross.
Look after your mother, discuss things with your brother.
When there is a problem you know what you must do, we are
there for you.
Today we are leaving you but we will always come now and
again.

To the neighbours:

*Nakuni ke bantu bokuhlala
Ubukho benu apha bubonakalisa into ebiyiyo le ndoda
Okokubangaba ibingazi mntu ngekubonakala
Ngeningaphumanga ngolu hlobo niphume ngalo namhlanje*

*Maze ningapheli kulo mzi womfowethu
Maze nazi ukuba akekho nje phambi kwenu
Uyakunikhalela ukba nikhe nawulahla umzi wakhe
Nicebise xa nibona kusonalakala
Lilungelo lenu elo
Kungenzeki into engazange yenzeke umkhuluwa esaphila
Camagu*

And to you neighbours.
Your presence here shows what type of a man he was.
If he saw only himself as a human being that was going to
show
You could not have come the way you have done today.

You must frequently visit my brother's house.
You must know that he is not just physically around you.
He will complain to you if you forsake his house.
Advise when you see that things are not going right.
That is your right.
Avoid bad things that never happened when my big brother
was still alive.

10. *Ukungqina* (To Witness, to Confirm, to Approve)

Ultimately, all the speech uttered in this context serves to encourage the family to be strong and to remind them that they are not alone. The first born male is reminded that his father's inheritance belongs to the entire clan and is warned not to take advantage of his birth right. If the mother is still alive, the first born male is reminded of his duty to now help and support her. As he is now the eldest male member of the clan, the first born son takes over the ritual duties which, previously, were performed by his father such *izila* (mourning), *ukukhapha* (accompanying) and *ukubuyisa* (bringing back) and is reminded that he will be punished if these are neglected. For the purpose of this thesis, only one death ritual will be discussed because of its emphasis on ritual speech, namely, *ukubuyisa*, or the 'bringing back' ritual. This ritual marks the end of the period of mourning as the soul of the deceased is 'brought back' to look after the living members of the clan. It is a time of great happiness as the living feel the deceased speaking to them.

11. *Ukuguqula/Ukubyisa* (Bringing Back the Deceased)

Ukuguqula ('to turn the deceased around so that he must face home') or *ukubuyisa* ('bringing back') is performed in order to reconcile the spirit of the deceased with the living members of the clan. The ritual is normally done a few years after the deceased person has been buried. The first born male is responsible for performing the ritual. The 'bringing back' ritual is characterised by many speeches that describe each and every action that takes place. The cattle kraal, as well as the main hut, play a very significant role in the 'bringing back' ritual. Movement between the hut and the kraal is always done in a systematic way and is accompanied by specific songs and forms of ritual speech which are performed by clan members. The ritual of *inkundla* is performed on the second day and is used, specifically, to address the rest of community and those who, because of certain marital relationships to the clan, are not allowed inside the kraal.

The day on which the 'falling of the beast' is announced, decisions regarding preparations for the ritual take place and involves adherence to certain taboos and restrictions as well as inclusions and exclusions on the basis of gender and marital status. During this time, one is obliged to perform whatever duty one has been assigned whether it be the collection of fire wood, brewing of beer, the cutting of grass which is then scattered in the main hut or *ukuphemba umlilo* (making fire) for cooking. The planning of *ingxelo* ('to inform' or 'announce') takes place at the *ibhunga* (meeting of clan members). Within African Traditional Religion,

announcements form an integral part of ritual activity as it is believed that it is important for everybody to witness and share in the joy of acceptance by the ancestors, as well as the misery, if the sacrifice is rejected.

The first day of preparation of African beer is also the first day of abstinence from sex. All the males and *iintombi*⁷ of the clan sleep in the main house. In the case of such important rituals, even *iintombi* who are married have to return home in order to fulfil specific duties and ensure a successful ritual. For example, one of their duties in the bringing back ritual is to collect wood for the fire on which the meat will be cooked. Married women belonging to the clan are not allowed to touch, or come close to, the wood for this fire. *Abatshana* (nephews and nieces) are the only people to *phemba umlilo* (make fire) on which the sacrificial meat will be cooked.

The beast is killed the day before the beer is ready. It is essential that the beast bellows when it is tapped on the navel by the sacred assegai (Sebe, 1982: 47). If the animal bellows all the clan members shout: '*Camagu! ICamagu livumile*' ('the *camagu* have agreed') to show that the ritual has been done correctly and has been accepted by the *izihlwele* (clan ancestors). *Intombi* (female clan members) *ziyayiyizela* (ullulate) because acceptance by the

⁷ Female clan members, irrespective of age, are called *iintombi* which translates as 'girls'.

ancestors is also understood as an assurance of their good health. If the animal does not bellow (*vumisa*), the elders *bathatha iintonga* (take sticks) which means that they visit a diviner who must tell them the reason why the sacrifice was rejected by the ancestors.

When the beast is brought into the kraal to be slaughtered, the *intlombe* begins inside the main hut. People begin dancing around the fire hearth anti-clockwise, and sing continuously until the favourite song of the deceased is sung. The *inkulu* (first born male) then raises his hand as a sign for a pause in the singing (*uyemisa*) in order to introduce himself and tell people that he is 'bringing back' his father. It is his duty to describe the beast which has been chosen for the sacrifice and is now inside the kraal with *utywala* (African beer) placed at the far end of the kraal opposite the doorway (*entla*). After his speech, *umdudo* is sung and the clan leaves the hut and move to the kraal carrying two clay pots, one filled with African beer and the other with *ubulawu bekhaya* (home medicine) - both of which will not be used until the last day of the ritual. They will be carried to and from the kraal and from the main hut. The movement of these two pots between the kraal and the main hut occurs in the morning and again in the late afternoon and is always accompanied by songs and speeches that inform people of where the process has begun as well as the stage of the ritual. On the way to the kraal, at the *inkundla*, which is the open space between the kraal and the huts, the first born male pauses the singing once again and gives another *ingxelo* (explanation of the ritual) by pointing at the beast and informing the crowd of its name

and colour. He repeats that the beast is accompanied by *umqombothi* (African beer) and tells all the participants that the beer is inside the main hut.

The ancestors are invoked and asked to come and bless the ritual. The *intlabi* kills the beast and the clan members partake in the traditional holy communion (*shwama*) by eating *intsonyama* (meat taken from the sacrificial animal) and drinking *igwele* (fermenting African beer). The *ilali* (members of the community) are given *imibengo* (long strips of meat cut on alternate sides for roasting). The meat is only cooked on the following day.

The following day, before the meat is distributed, the *intlombe* begins again and the first born male will do another *ingxelo* (explanation):

Yesterday I told you that I am bringing back my father, even today we are still busy with that. I am bringing back my father with a beast, there is *utywala* for this beast, it is there inside the kraal, we are now going into the kraal to dish it out.

The above speech is repeated once the clan has moved to inside the kraal by the first born male who stands at *exhantini* (cattle kraal entrance). Baw'uDladla explained that in his *ingxelo*, the first born male must refer to the beer by its proper name and must never, for example, talk about giving *amanzi* (water) instead of *utywala* (African beer) because that would mean that he has fallen short of what he was supposed to do (*awenzanga ingcwele wenze isichenene*). If the homestead head has fallen short of African beer

Baw'uDladla said that the skull of the sacrificial animal will be kept inside the hut until the homestead members makes *utywala bekhakhayi* ('beer of the skull'). The first born male will then give an *ingxelo*, saying that *ulandelisa* (doing a follow-up) that beast of the accompanying ritual by the *utywala* (the amount of beer that was required for such a feast). The skull will then be taken to the kraal entrance (*exhantini*).

It is important that the members of the community, and not only of the clan, are given chance to speak because this affirms that they have witnessed the occasion and their participation confirms that the ritual did happen. A male elder, usually someone who was close to the deceased, speaks on behalf of the community, like a neighbour or a headman. He encourages unity among members of the family and tells them to keep up the good work they have done. He also affirms that the fact that the sacrifice has been accepted which shows that the deceased is happy. His speech also reminds the clan of the support offered by the wider community.

The ritual of *ukubuyisa* is characterised by speeches that are partly prescribed to maintain order between the deceased and the clan members. It is believed that the *ukubuyisa* ritual is very important as it is believed that it causes the deceased to look after the welfare of the living. As I have explained, *ingxelo* characterises the first day of the ritual on which the clan comes together and communally agrees on how relevant information will be communicated to the rest of the community. *Ingxelo* is the main type of ritual speech which occurs throughout the *ukubuyisa* ritual. It begins at the hut,

before moving to the space between the huts and the kraal (*inkundla*), and then to the cattle kraal entrance (*exhantini*). It is informative in that it marks progression of the ritual from beginning till end.

Although it is necessary for the clan to begin the procession and the *intlombe* inside the main hut, as well as for the *inkulu* (first born male) to give *ingxelo*, the nature of the beast for sacrifice, the songs sung and the *nqula*, all differ from person to person or from clan to clan. It is impossible for somebody to prepare a 'script' which could be used in all rituals to address all the ancestors, irrespective of their clan, as this would result in the rejection of the sacrifice by the ancestors. Furthermore, no one has the authority to prescribe what is said because this would undermine the sincerity of the sentiments expressed by the person performing *ingxelo*. In African Traditional Religion it is believed that to lie or exaggerate, especially in the context of ritual, would have a detrimental effect on the outcome of the ritual and, ultimately, have negative implications for the wider community

During the *ukubuyisa* ritual, the clan is considered to be in a process of dialogue with the ancestors in the spiritual realm and the wider community serves to witness the success of the ritual. The exclusion of the community in some aspects of the ritual shows that each clan can claim an authentic right to perform the ritual in a way prescribed by their ancestors. Mr. Dladla mentioned the singing of a song loved most by the deceased which is sung on the day of the *ukubuyisa* ritual in order to show the deceased (*umfi*) that he is still

in the minds of those he left behind and to include him as part of the ritual. Sometimes a clan song is sung. In a bringing back ritual at Fort Malan in Willowvale, the following song was sung, intermittently, during the speeches:

Tshoba le nkomo
Balibuza kum ethongweni
Tshoba le nkomo

Tail brush of the beast is being asked from me through dreams.

Tail brush of the beast.

12. Concluding Analysis

Ritual speech, within the context of death, helps the living to cope with the loss of the loved one while simultaneously reminding them of the advantage of having a clan member looking after the living in a more powerful manner than when s/he was physically with them. Rituals surrounding death are important in maintaining contact with the departed and to remind the living of their obligations to adhere to all the necessary requirements so as to ensure successful communication with the spiritual world. Ultimately, these forms of speech convey the importance of communal life and affirm communal responsibilities which are believed to have always existed.

Ritual speech acts as a unifying factor in a community which dramatises the sharing, communal nature of worship and strengthens relationships among blood relatives and those relationships by marriage. For a woman who has married into a

clan, participation in these rituals can be seen to strengthen her claim to the same rights as *iintombi* (women born into a clan).

Speeches uttered as part of rituals associated with death are designed for the needs of the community undergoing the transitional stage. The living community have a strong desire to maintain contact with the departed as the deceased are believed to be more active in the spiritual world than in the earthly, physical realm. Such transitional speeches start on the day on which death occurs and continue until after the funeral. Three obligatory rituals should be performed after one's death: *izila* (mourning), *ukukhapha* (accompanying), and *ukubuyisa* (bringing back). *Umyolelo* is a prescribed, obligatory instruction by a person before s/he dies. This may be the type of ritual speech that is close to Bloch's analysis of ritual speech but *umyolelo* is only to be carried after the the person has died. *Umyolelo* differs from person to person according to the individual's wishes. *Umyolelo*, *ukuzila* (mourning), *ukukhapha* (accompanying) and *ukubuyisa* (bringing back) are all obligatory as neglect of them is believed to anger the ancestors.

This chapter has looked at several speeches that take place when a member of the family dies. The nature of the speeches vary in terms of the various ways in which the bad news (*ukubika*) is announced and in the methods used to alleviate the shock experienced by the living as a result of losing of a loved one. The fact that the news of an individual's death is communicated by the elderly shows the wisdom used. A feeling of hope is instilled by the message which conveys that the person is not dead, or permanently separated from

the living, but has *uhambile*, (gone) *utshonile* (disappeared) or has left us (*usishiyile*) (Mcetywa, 1991). There is a progression of experience from shock to acceptance (*vuma*) of death which is expressed in the form of mourning as a form of respect for the transition. After this form of *vuma*, a ritual of *ukukhapha* (bring back) is performed to help the deceased pass over to the spiritual world as the spirit of the deceased is relinquished to the ancestors.

I have chosen to focus on three rituals:

- (i) The drinking of beer at Site C, Khayelitsha.
- (ii) Divination at Langa and Malunga Park in Gugulethu.
- (iii) The bringing back ritual in Mowbray.

All these rituals are characterised by forms of ritual speech which have undergone adaptation as a response to socio-economic and political conditions:

1. Migrant Labour, Urbanisation and the Loss of an *Ikhaya* (home)

From the previous chapters, we have learnt that home plays a very important part in ritual performance and, to a certain extent, determines the outcome of a ritual. The notion of home within the African tradition should always be understood in its own context and does not only refer to the physical structure of a home but also to ancestors, kinship graves, sacred places, special people, the clan, animals and special objects. As explained in Chapter Two, *umthonyama* is a common name that symbolises the indigenous practice.

Colonisation, and proselytisation have played a major role in the destruction, disorientation, and misinterpretation of African religious practices and the life of some Africans. The introduction of taxation and the monetary system have undermined the respect and dignity of an *ikhaya* (home). As a result of migrant labour,

many families have been forced to move from the rural areas where, previously, they had lived within a community which had been defined for them by the west with its western rules based on foreign culture and colonial propaganda.

Married men were forced into single quarters or compounds for a period of approximately twelve months away from their families. These single quarters were later occupied by married couples. Families were then created out of those circumstances. Some of these families moved to informal settlements while some were fortunate enough to have formal settlements that became their homes. These new homes consist of a house and have neither a cattle kraal nor an *inkundla* (space between the house and the cattle kraal). For the most part, an area of open space is usually located behind the house and can therefore never be regarded as an *inkundla* which must always be in front of the house. Within an urban context, there is no *indlu enkulu* (main house or hut) and usually, for the duration of the ritual, the sitting room is used to represent the main house or is visualised as the main hut at home. The divisions that are supposed to be applicable in the main hut are virtually impossible to apply in an urban house. The sitting room and kitchen lead to bedrooms and can therefore not be set aside for a week so that it can be used exclusively for ritual purposes without interference by married women within the particular clan. It is also impossible to remove all the furniture in the sitting room and scatter grass on the floor as is normally done because it would be an inconvenience to have grass covering the floor of the domestic space for an entire week. Furthermore, the *inkxopho* (grass) used

within rituals is found only in the rural areas. Under such conditions, it is understandable that a compromise of some sort has to be reached when performing rituals within an urban setting.

Essentially, in the transition from country to town, Africans have lost their African understanding of an *ikhaya* (home). At present, urban Africans have houses rather than homes. A house is for the nuclear family whereas a home is for the clan. After the death of the head of the household the children could lose the house in the city but, after the death of a homestead head, under no circumstances do members of the family lose their home. The impact of colonisation and migrant labour have denied some of the indigenous people of this country the right to have a home. Africans now find themselves far from their ancestral graves, their clans, important figures within the community such as the first born male members of the clan as well as sacred places and objects like cattle kraals and sacred assegai used in ritual slaughtering. The experience of living within an urban setting can therefore be characterised as a state of temporary exile for practitioners of African Traditional Religion. In the past, the state dictated what areas Africans were allowed to use for residential purposes and were forced to perform their sacrifices in secret or, otherwise, face the possibility of arrest.

The lack of space under urban conditions has forced Africans to concentrate on the nuclear family which is, essentially, a eurocentric social structure imposed on African culture by the west. The notion of an 'extended' family was a term introduced in

opposition to the 'nuclear' family in which the father and mother and their biological children are understood as being more important than any other relative outside this prescribed form of structure.

The absence of a cattle kraal in an urban setting plays a central role in the adaptations Africans were forced to make to rituals and ritual speech. Mqhayi has analysed the importance of cattle among the Xhosa people as follows:

Ewe, kukho indawo eyingwele kumzi womXhosa ngamnye- inkundla yobuhlanti benkomo; apho onke amatheko angcwele enzelwa khona. (Mqhayi, 1975: 14)

Yes, indeed there is a holy place in every Xhosa homestead, the family court which is the cattle kraal, where all the sacred ceremonies are performed.

1.1 Sacred Animals

Africans who are located within the city have not only lost the meaning of 'home' but also the importance of sacrificial animals used within ritual practices has been undermined. In the city there is no way for the clan to identify *inkomo ethethayo*, that is, the beast that has been chosen for sacrifice by the ancestors. As part of major rituals, the beast which is to be slaughtered should be *inkomo yomthonyama* (the beast that is taken from the homestead cattle) and not bought from outside the clan. Unfortunately, in the city there are no kraals in the yards and the political and economic climate of South Africa which has made it impossible for Africans

to own farms has meant that they have had to rely on sacrificial animals bought from white farmers. If the sacrificer breaks with tradition and buys the beast and slaughters it inside his/her house, the beast does not usually make the cry (*ayikhali*). There are many explanations for this occurrence. Some people believe that even if it has been bought, it is important for the beast to sleep inside the home the night before it is slaughtered so as to introduce it to the ancestors. An *igqirha* (*diviner*) from Worcester, in the Western Cape, claimed that just by beating the beast with an *itshoba* (the tail brush carried by *amagqirha*) it is made sacred so there is no need for it not to make the cry. Such a statement was criticised by some rural elders as being irresponsible and ignorant of ones religion and culture. This statement shows the extent to which compromises have been made to accommodate urban conditions and the way in which a sacrificial ritual takes the form of a feast rather than a symbol of communication between the living and the departed. In an urban context, it is also very difficult to see that *icamagu livumile* or, that the *camagu* has agreed, and that the sacrifice has been accepted by the ancestors because the cry of the animal before it is slaughtered may not be an important issue - only slaughtering or sacrificing is important. Sometimes slaughtering is done at the abattoirs because slaughtering in one's city house is prohibited legally by government structures and organisations such as the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals).

1.2 Sacred Objects

The use of a knife instead of the sacred spear is an adaptation

which results in the displacement of the person whose responsibility it is to keep the sacred spear and kill animals for the clan. Traditionally, the sacred spear is kept by an *inkulu* (first born male) who is officially given an *umkhonto* (spear) as part of a ritual in which sacred words are said to the ancestors and to the *inkulu*. An *inkulu* is admonished on how to use and respect the assegai and is also instructed as to what observances and taboos need to be adhered to on the day before the actual slaughtering of the sacrificial animal. If any member of the clan wants to perform a ritual it is necessary for them to use the same sacred spear which cannot be handled by anybody. At times, an *inkulu* is unavailable in the city so either a knife is used as a substitute or the slaughtering is performed by another member of the clan who may not be an *inkulu*. This can result in the omission of certain practices.

Members of the clan cleanse themselves by abstaining from sex starting from the day preparations for the sacrifice begin to be carried out. In cities, it is sometimes difficult to sleep in the same place at which the ritual is going to take place, as the lack of space can be problematic. The absence of *intlombe* within an urban setting can be attributed to factors such as lack of space or fear of police intervention as a result of neighbours complaining about the noise.

1.3 Imposed Western Laws

Lebele (1996: 2) has argued that the slaughtering of cattle at funerals and other culturally significant functions in the city has

'caused a lot of noise from irate neighbours and spokespersons of animals'. Sacrifices need to be done openly and without fear. There must be no disturbances of any kind and there must be perfect peace and calm (Mayer, 1963: 153). As revealed by a newspaper article which appeared in *The Eastern Cape News Weekend Service*, this is rarely achieved:

The ritual slaughter of two cows in Grahamstown's upmarket leafy green suburb of Somerset Heights has left the mainly-white neighbourhood up-in-arms. (*ECN Weekend Service*, 3 May 1998)

Amongst the complaints were the following:

- i) Incessant beating of drums.
- ii) Constant singing.
- iii) The slaughter was inhumane.
- iv) The large number of people who attended the ritual.

One interesting resolution which was put forward at a council meeting to discuss the issue, was that in future there must be an on-site meeting with the applicant to identify the most suitable place where actual slaughtering can take place. It was also suggested that the slaughtering of animals should be done as humanely as possible. This suggestion is inherently problematic because the decision as to where slaughtering could take place would be taken by people who do not belong to the clan or, even worse, by people who do not even belong to the religion itself. If the council decides on which place should represent the kraal, how will the ancestors be involved?

As already explained, the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and municipal laws place restrictions on the performance of sacrifice in cities. Roman Dutch law, in most cases, stands in opposition to traditional African methods of sacrifice as it is perceived as cruel (*Sunday Times*, 22 September, 1996: 3) compared to other forms of killing approved of for the consumption of other religious communities such as the Muslim and Jewish communities. This attitude is seen by many adherents of African Traditional Religion as racist because killing is killing, whether it be by the Muslim or Jewish community. The reference to the 'cry' of the animal is misunderstood as it is not due to any form of pain or suffering. Barbara Nash, national spokesperson of the SPCA (see *Sunday Times*, 22 September, 1996: 3) has shown a lack of understanding for the process of sacrificing by claiming that the animal is pierced in order for it to make the cry for the ancestors to hear (*Sunday Times* 29 September, 1997). In actual fact, the ancestors first 'hear' and then, through the cry of the animal, convey their message of acceptance to the living. An abattoir is a foreign environment and cannot be regarded as a viable substitute for a kraal. Lebele (1996: 4) has argued that by forcing people to carry out slaughtering within abattoirs, the powerful are exerting a form of control over the powerless:

The general convention to whites, especially urban dwelling, is to purchase meat over the counter at butcheries and supermarkets. The main purpose being consumption. Thus the consumer is not involved in the process of slaughtering. This is the terrain of the abattoirs. At this juncture, it is of importance to note that there is no cultural significance to this process. Black people also consume meat in the same manner.

However, the difference between this practice and traditional slaughter is the cultural significance the latter bears. (Lebele, 1996 :4)

As I have argued earlier, an important aspect of ritual practice is harmony but the attitudes of some white neighbours, who disapprove of African ritual practice, have resulted in some Africans having to compromise and buy meat from butcheries. This has meant that many adaptations have been made and given rise to confusion and, in some cases, has distorted African traditional practices. On some occasions, rituals are disturbed by police who threaten practitioners of African Traditional Religion with arrest for transgressing municipal laws by slaughtering in their yards. Under these conditions, some Africans feel like strangers in the city and move between the urban and rural areas in order to perform certain rituals. Philip Mayer has written of the difficult conditions under which Africans living in an urban setting are forced to perform rituals:

Whether the sacrifice is done in a yard or in the bush, whether it involves a goat or an ox, the man sacrificing in town cannot afford to relax his guard for a moment. You are in the midst of skinning the beast when you see an unfamiliar figure coming down the hill towards you. Immediately you stop skinning, and watch the figure closely to see if you can identify it as a policeman. (Mayer, 1963: 153)

One is born into African Traditional Religion, and because they are proud of their roots, Africans in towns have had to adapt to the situation in which they find themselves. In the rest of this chapter, I will explain how these adaptations are done but it must also be

noted that some people return to the *ezilalini* (rural areas) which is sometimes referred to as *emaXhoseni* (Xhosaland) in order to perform their major rituals.

1.4 Changing African Rituals

There are several variations within the performance of rituals in an urban setting. The experience of living in two worlds, or because Christianity is regarded as superior to African Traditional Religion, some rituals have been renamed with the assumption that they have been elevated. The birth ritual (*imbeleko*), for instance, is sometimes referred to, by Xhosa Christians (urban or rural), as *idinara yomntwana* (the child's dinner). Pauw, 1975: 179) has argued that, in town, the dinner may become a more elaborate and sophisticated affair, and be referred to as a 'party'. Pauw refers to such rituals as ancestor's rituals in disguise. Pauw also argues that in those rituals

There is a strong tendency to modify and adapt, and, in fact, disguise these rituals by avoiding traditional names, omitting some of the traditional ritual details, and introducing customs of which the form derives from Christian or Western tradition. (Pauw, 1975: 172)

1.5 *Ukucela* (To Ask for Permission to Sacralise)

Ukucela (to ask for permission to sacralise) is a new form of *ukuthetha* (ritual speech) that is commonly used in the city to create a sacred space and to sacralise objects or animals used for sacrifice.

Ukungxengxeza, sometimes understood as being similar to *ukungxola*, is a form of ritual speech commonly used in the city. As

a result of the problems experienced within an urban setting, *ngxola* is the most commonly used ritual speech by many people when ritual needs arise and conditions are not suitable for proper ritual performance. *Ngxola* may be described as a way of talking to the ancestors, or more specifically, acknowledging the need of a particular ritual which has been neglected due to uncontrolled circumstances and serves to reassure the ancestors that the ritual will be performed at a later stage. The words also include a plea for healing the sufferer. *Ukungxola* can therefore be regarded as a ritual speech which is used to postpone the performance of a ritual when one is too far from 'home'. *Ngxola* is always done by an elder who humbly pleads with the ancestors on behalf of the living. However, before an elder can *ngxola*, the acceptance of the need for a sacrifice by the sufferer plays an important role. Acceptance is accompanied by a promise, made by the living, who enter into a 'contract' with the ancestors that the ritual will be performed in the future when it is possible. For this reason, many Africans in cities return 'home' in their December vacation as they have made 'promises' to perform rituals. *Ngxola*, in this case, together with a promise to the ancestors, can temporarily replace the need for a sacrificial ritual. In order to avoid punishment by the ancestors, it is important that the promise made after *ngxola* is fulfilled.

1.6 Naming

Ritual practices which are adapted to an urban setting are sometimes renamed. *Utywala* or *umqombothi* or *imbiza* (pot), for example, are all terms used in the rural areas which to refer to

African beer. However, in cities, the use of large plastic containers called *amagogogo*, or *amagqongo*, has meant that these terms have displaced rural terminology for African beer.

In this chapter, it has been explained that some individuals who work in the cities are unable to perform ritual sacrifices in town or in their temporary homes since they believe that these must be done in their ancestral homes. A ritual performed in town is therefore never considered to be complete and *ukungxola* is the only means whereby one can, temporarily, suspend the need for a particular ritual until circumstances are right. Permanent city dwellers are faced with no choice but to perform ritual sacrifices for the ancestors and transgress Eurocentric norms and values which are imposed on the indigenous people of Africa in the form of legislation. Hunter (1961: 488) states that the majority of Africans living in cities believe in the power of the ancestral spirits. In an urban context, the power of ritual speech is clearly evident as, in the absence of a kraal, the living request that the ancestors, temporarily, sacralise an open space. The branches cut from the forest form the lines of the demarcated space representing the kraal and marks the beginning and end of a highly spiritual charged area where any speech made inside it will result in holistic healing.

2. Sacrifice

In African Traditional Religion, it is compulsory for an individual to always keep the community informed of his/her activities, such as, a change of residence. *Ukwazisa* (to inform, to introduce, to

announce) in the form of a sacrifice of either African beer, or a sacrificial animal, is therefore a common practice among African traditionalists. A man who has built a new place of residence or has moved to another place of residence must, immediately after the occupation, introduce it to the ancestors and his clan. The same ritual procedure is followed as described in Chapter Two. Sometimes, individuals living in an urban setting, ignore this ritual as they regard their city homes as merely temporary and will dream of their ancestors complaining that their whereabouts are not known.

Mafobe, a widow, whose *inkaba* (place of birth) is located at the Gwadu location in Willowvale married a man from Ngcobo, also in the Eastern Cape, explained how she had a persistent feeling of guilt which she attributed to her being 'silent' since she arrived at Site C in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. She was previously staying in a shack in Somerset West. She also claimed that, on several occasions, she had dreamt of her husband who claimed to be looking for her. Mafobe had not performed the ritual which introduced her new place of residence to both her *abantu bomzi* (husband's ancestors) and to her own ancestors. For this reason, she experienced a profound sense of alienation from her own people and compared herself to someone who was lost and whose whereabouts are not known. She then decided to make *umqombothi* (African beer) and call those who share the same clan names of her *umzi* (husband's people) as well as members of her own clan. During the drinking of beer, several ritual speeches were observed:

2.1 *Ingxelo* (To Inform, to Announce, to Respond)

An adult male from Mafobe's *umzi* (husband's clan) made an *ingxelo* (announcement) to neighbours and friends present at the ritual. In his *ingxelo*, he first called upon his paternal ancestors and also Mafobe's paternal ancestors as the house is believed to belong to both of these two ancestors. He started his speech as follows:

*E-e-e Mzi wakwa Tshetshe-wula
Nomzi waseMawusheni, kwaMjoli, kwaMadela, kwaFobe
(wife's clan)
Silapha manhlanje ngokubizwa nguMafobe lo
Wenze le bhekilana
Uthi uMafobe, umfazi womkhuluwa lo wam
Uthi ngokwenjenje uyazazisa ukuba ngoku ulapha
Benisoloko nimazi eseSomerset West
Ngoku uthuthile ulapha*

*E-e-e-Kuni zihlobo nabamelwane
Umafobe uyazazisa ukuba nimazi ukuba ulapha
Kwaye ufuna nimazi ukuba naba abantu bakhe
ningacingi ukuba ngumduka
Ke silolusapho lwalo mzi
Sithi mamkeleni*

*Kuwe Mafobe, ucinge into, kaloku amehlo abalele
ukuthula abukhali.
Uthi umntu akulahleka avunjululwe apho akhoyo,
nesazela sithethe sithi ndilapha.
Namhlanje ke uyaziwa zizihlwele ukuba ulapha, nathi
siyakwazi.
Ndithi ke ntombazana phambili, mabudedede ubumnyama
kuvele ukukhanya
Wanga ungasikeleleka kule nto uyenzileyo.*

E-e-e House of *Tshetshe-wula*.

And the house of Bhaca, Wushe, Mjoli, Madela, and Fobe.

We are being called here today by Mafobe who has made this African beer.

Mafobe, who is my elder brother's wife, says that by so doing, she is introducing herself to you; Because she has moved from Somerset West where she used to stay.

Now to you who are here, her neighbours and her friends. Mafobe is introducing herself to you too. She also wants to introduce her people, that is us, to you so that you must not think that she is a wanderer. As her people, we are asking you to accept and welcome her.

To you, Mafobe, you have done the right thing.
Those who are 'asleep' have sharp eyes.
They always remind a person when s/he is lost.
Even the guilt reminds the offender.
Today your ancestors and us know where you are.
Keep it up and be blessed.

The speech made by the elder brother of the deceased husband is divided into three sections, referring to three groups of people. Firstly, the ancestors, secondly, friends and neighbours and, finally, to Mafobe.

2.2. Ancestors

On the occasion of Mafobe's marriage, a ritual combining both her and her husband's ancestors was performed. The ritual of *ukudlisa amasi*, which is the equivalent of attaining a marriage certificate, was also performed. It is therefore believed that Mafobe is not only looked at by her own ancestors, but also by her husband's. As a

member of her husband's clan, she is under the protection and guidance of two sets of ancestors.

Mafobe's brother-in-law was the first to speak to the ancestors and addressed the spiritual world explaining to them that Mafobe is introducing herself within this new environment. This type of speech is more than just an ordinary announcement - it is an act of recognition that Mafobe is still devoted to her ancestors. Mafobe asked her and her husband's ancestors for protection, health and good fortune. The performance of this ritual affirms her bond with the spiritual world which can never be severed by distance or by the experience of living under foreign laws. Where ever Mafobe finds herself, she will always belong to her ancestors.

Ingxelo (to announce) not only revives the relationship between Mafobe and the ancestors but also strengthens the bond or relationship between her and her husband's clan. The web of relationships was extended by the performance of this ritual as new relatives had the chance to meet and share the first taste of African beer.

The third paragraph introduced Mafobe to her neighbours so that they 'officially' know who she is and where she comes from. This is a provision to inform neighbours so that they know where they can contact her relatives in case of an emergency and to incorporate Mafobe as a member of their community

Forms of ritual speech, which are addressed specifically to Mafobe,

serve to strengthen her respect for her in-laws, both dead and alive. The speech also ensures her that her request to *ukuzazisa*, or make her known, has been fulfilled. The performative function of this ritual is reflected in the words of her brother-in-law who said: 'Today you are known by all your ancestors, you are even known by us (the living).' This statement shows that although the African tradition is known for its communal nature that embraces the living and the departed, the functions of the community are different, the deceased are more powerful than the living; that is why he said: 'you are even known by us'. It is evident that the ancestors knew, even before the ritual, hence they revealed themselves. The last part of the fourth paragraph can be understood as an informal prayer in which the living ask that Mafobe is blessed with good fortune by her ancestors.

2.3 *Ukuthetha* (Having a Reason to Speak)

Individuals never participate in the drinking of beer without being told whether this *umqombothi uyathetha na* ('African is speaking') as they must be told if there is a reason for the beer preparations or not. What separates an ordinary *mqombothi* from a speaking *umqombothi* is *isizathu* (reason). In this context, 'reason' means to be associated with ancestors, or the message conveyed by the ancestors as the cause of the sacrifice. If it were an ordinary *mqombothi* people would be told that *abuthethi* (the beer does not speak) which means that it is not related to ancestors.

2.4 Sacred Space

As already explained earlier in this chapter, the *indlu enkulu* (main hut) is absent in an urban context and therefore the living room is temporarily transformed into the main hut. The inside of the living room may be cleared only on the day of the ritual, or in some cases, the furniture may be moved into one corner of the living room. Sometimes it is left as it is. In the rural areas, *inkxopho* (a special grass) is spread on the ground and *umgquba* (cattle manure) is also placed at the rear end of the doorway over which containers of African beer are put. These are absent within an urban context as, usually, it is impossible to acquire them outside of the rural areas. In a traditional homestead, the left side of the hut is *iyahlonitshwa* (generally respected by avoidance) by a woman who is married to the homestead as it is normally for male in-laws. Even if there are preparations for the ritual made by the wife, this side is totally avoided. It is normally understood as belonging to the clan both the living and the ancestors. During preparations for any sacrifice in town, the side is temporarily respected by married women and, sometimes, only respected in the presence of a male clan member. On some occasions this form of respect is even completely ignored. During the speeches which accompany the rituals of sacrifice performed in town, such observances are in most cases ignored and it is assumed that what is said is actually done. In other words, the performance is assumed to have reached recognition and is actually working.

3. *Intwaso* (Divination)

In Chapter Three, it has been explained that dreams play a vital role in the process of the call (*intwaso*) of the ancestors. Permanent residents of the city have no choice but to perform *iintlombe* (diviner's ritual dance ceremonies) within an urban setting. As they still have connections with their ancestors and still belong to African Traditional Religion, they *vuma* (accept) their call in whatever context they are located, be it rural or urban. The reasons for these ritual dance ceremonies can vary. For example, a diviner who works in the city and has performed all the appropriate rituals at his/her rural home will still have to perform those rituals at his/her urban home in order to introduce him/herself - irrespective of his/her stage of training. This type of ceremonial dance is called *ukothula umthwalo* ('putting down the luggage'). Another ritual common to all *amagqirha* (diviners) is the cleansing ritual which is performed when an *igqirha* has attended the funeral of a blood relative. Until the ritual is performed, an *igqirha* cannot wear his/her diviner's regalia as s/he is still regarded as unclean.

3.1 The Home

In an urban setting, the house is used as the 'homestead' while the different rooms are regarded as the 'huts'. The fully- fledged *amagqirha* are regarded as senior to the novices and therefore have to stay in different huts. As space is usually limited in an urban context, the novices use the kitchen as both their place to share and also where they cook for their seniors.

The living room is where dancing as part of the *intlombe* is done. Although there is no fire hearth to separate the two sides of the room, which is always rectangular, *amagqirha* still dance anti-clock wise in a circle. Before the preparations of an *intlombe*, the living room is emptied of the furniture inside and is put either in the garage or somewhere in the neighbourhood. At an *intlombe* performed in Cape Town, the absence of an *inkundla* (space between the hut and the cattle kraal) meant that the dance had to be performed in the street which had been closed off especially for the occasion.

Under normal circumstances, the kraal and the *inkundla* is always located in front of the huts. However, in the city, the nature and size of the plot determines whether the *inkundla* and *ubuhlanti* (cattle kraal) is present or absent. In an *intlombe* at Malunga Park, Gugulethu, the cattle kraal was temporarily erected at the back of the house as this was the only area which had enough space to do so. Temporary enclosures representing cattle kraals are demarcated

in the city and bushes from the forest are cut and placed in the demarcated area. As Baw'uNtshiza from Khayelitsha explained, the elder of the clan has to first ask the ancestors for permission to erect a kraal in that space. The elder invites the presence of ancestors in the same way as it is done in the rural areas. Once the request has been accepted, the elder sends young men to the forest to cut poles and shrubs for the building of the cattle kraal which is necessary for the performance of the ritual.

After they have finished the cattle kraal, the elder will again 'talk' to the ancestors informing them that the kraal has been finished and, again, invite the presence of the ancestors. From now on, this space is considered to be taboo for married women to walk by or enter. As in the case of a kraal in the rural areas, it is believed that this temporary kraal has an *ixhanti* (entrance) and an *umthonyama* (the side furthest from the *ixhanti*).

During initiation, an *igqirha* must use the beast from the kraal which is sometimes referred to as the beast of the manure or *kwinkomo zekhaya* (home beasts) chosen by the ancestors. If the beast is from outside the home, some words are said to explain the reason why it is not from *umgquba*. It is customary for the sacrificial animal to sleep in the kraal a day or two before the sacrifice. In the city there are municipal laws that do not allow animals to be kept in the house unless there is a permission to do so. In most cases, the beast is usually brought on the day it is supposed to be killed. When the beast has arrived, the ancestors are informed that this is the beast to be slaughtered for the sacrifice.

Tat'uMbhele from Makhaya, Khayelitsha explained how animals bought from white-owned farms, *thetha* (speak) to ancestors to ask them to sacralise the animal. In this particular case, it means that there is an additional form of ritual speech in order to ask ancestors to sacralise what is from outside *umthonyama* or African indigenous practice.

It is compulsory for a clan elder to be present to officiate an *intlombe*. MaNyawuza from Malunga Park called her brother who was working in East London from the Eastern Cape to come and officiate her ceremony. Other members of the clan, who are not necessarily from the same rural areas, are invited and may be people who have met in Cape Town. On occasions when one of the clan elders is available, but not the first born male, permission is granted by other clan members in the rural areas for him to officiate the sacrifice. In some cases, a distant clan relative officiates the ceremony. For example, a Dlamini from the Ciskei might be asked to officiate a ceremony of another Dlamini from the Transkei after meeting in Cape Town and knowing each other for a long time because they share the same clan names. Such ceremonies sometimes become problematic as that particular Dlamini may, for various reasons, not be the right person to officiate the ceremony.

3.2 Cross-Racial Divination Methods

As explained earlier, *intwaso* is usually always understood as a call from an individual's biological ancestors. However, there is now a

growing trend in which participation within this practice has broadened across the racial spectrum. On the other hand, it is still the central belief among amaXhosa that an individual's home and clan play the central role in ritual performance throughout the stages leading to the completion of *intwaso*. It will therefore be necessary for this section to also look at the various interpretations of this new form of practice.

In South Africa, there is now a growing trend in which white people are being trained to be *amagqirha esiNtu* (African diviners). Although this 'call to African divination' is being noticed nationally among isiZulu, isiSwati and isiXhosa, the focus in this section will be on isiXhosa. This new trend has opened a ground of contestation as it has resulted in different interpretations with some amaXhosa believing that *abelungu* (white people) are outsiders who are interfering in their tradition for their selfish needs. On the other hand, *abelungu* (white people) are claiming that divination is an international practice and that everybody has ancestors so it is not only *amaXhosa* or Africans who communicate with their ancestors. White people have accused the Xhosa speaking individuals who are against them being trained of being conservative and racist. On the other hand, amaXhosa accuse the white people who claim to be called to be *amagqirha* as being manipulative and interested only in commercialising what they believe is their sacred arena.

In a seminar organised by the Icamagu Institute on 7th May 2002 at the University of Cape Town entitled: '*Amagqirha Abelungu*

(White Diviners) Initiated into Xhosa Divination : Fact or Fallacy? opposing views from both white and Xhosa diviners emerged. Some crucial issues raised by Xhosa diviners were the following:

- i) One becomes an *igqirha* because of one's *call* by one's ancestors; *amagqirha amaXhosa* (Xhosa diviners) wanted to know which ancestors called *abelungu* (whites). They wanted to know if they were called by their biological white ancestors or African ancestors.
- ii) They also wanted to know if *ukuthwasa* is something that happens within the white community. If yes, why do they opt for a Xhosa approach and not of their clan related methods?
- iii) If they are called to be *amagqirha* by the Xhosa tradition, how do they *nqula* as *nqula* is the key to speaking to the ancestors?
- iv) If these white *amagqirha* are called by their ancestors, who prescribed the nature of the beads they wear?
- v) If they are being called by their ancestors, why do they perform their rituals in their homesteads instead of those belonging to the Xhosa *igqirha*.
- vi) As *ukuphehla* of clan *ubulawu* is also central to the process of *intwaso* (divination), Xhosa diviners wanted to know what is *ubulawu bomlungu* (clan medicine of a white person) and how do they *phehla*?
- vii) As *umoshwamo* is regarded as *iyeza* (medicine) it was also of interest to those Xhosa *amagqirha* present as to how white diviners *shwama*.

After the conference, it was clear that there were problems of

misunderstandings with regard to the training of white *amagqirha* by *amaXhosa*. For example, the exclusion of clans and the fact that sacrificing was never done in the white initiate's 'home' was seen as problematic. All the other problems, if one could analyse them, related to ritual speech:

- i) The call to divination
- ii) *Nqula*
- iii) Symbolism of animals
- iv) *Ukushwama*
- v) Initiation names

3.2.1 Call to Divination

The white diviners confirmed that they were not directly 'told' by their ancestors that they want them to be diviners. They were told by the Xhosa diviners that they *thwasa*. They explained how they met Xhosa diviners on different occasions and were told that they *thwasa*. In Cape Town, only one Xhosa diviner has claimed to see that these people are called by their ancestors to be diviners - it is the person who claims to have the power to unite them with their ancestors. It is the person who 'trains' or perhaps teaches them to be Xhosa diviners. According to the Xhosa tradition, after *ukuvuma intwaso* (to accept the call), one is led by her/his ancestors and is instructed as to how and where a sacrifice should be performed. However, in the case of white diviners, they follow the instructions of their senior diviners. Under these circumstances, ritual speeches such as *ibhunga* (the clan caucus), *phehla* and *ngxengxeza* (appease) are missing. On some occasions, ritual speeches are

misdirected. For example, *camagu* was uttered by observers in Khayelitsha during a chicken sacrifice on the shoulders of Mrs. Sealey of Rondebosch (*The Tattler*, March 2001: 15). It was not clear whether this uttering of *camagu* was used spiritually or not as the initiate could not *nqula*.

3.2.2 *Ukunqula* (To Invoke Ancestors)

As part of the ritual of *ukunqula*, the ancestors - both on the paternal and maternal side - need to be acknowledged as *intwaso* cannot be complete if rituals are not done from both the father's and mother's side. Chris Reid, a white diviner who was initiated in Port St Johns, told the seminar that he was adopted by his mentor and was given the clan name of his mentor, Dlamini. As Chris Reid began to speak in the seminar, he did not *nqula* any clan and he struggled to speak Xhosa. He requested to speak English as 'his Xhosa is difficult', perhaps he wanted to say that Xhosa is difficult. He said: '*Ndicela ukuthetha isingesi, isiXhosa sam inzima makhosi*'. He then switched to English and said: 'My name is Ntombemhlophe from a Dlamini clan'. His name was strange to the Xhosa because it is a female name. *Ntombemhlophe* means 'white girl' (*ntombi*-girl; *mhlophe*-white). As an *igqirha* he was expected to begin his speech with *nqula*. Even if he was speaking English he was expected to talk to his ancestors first but he did not. Peter von Maltitz also did not *nqula*.

3.2.3. Animal Symbolism

There was also confusion regarding the interpretation of some symbols. Peter von Maltitz, another white *igqirha* who could not even try to speak Xhosa, claimed that the animal revealed to him by his ancestors was a horse. The problem was, that in the tradition that he is trained in, that is a Xhosa tradition, a horse represents evil. Asked about his own song, he began with the Sanskrit term, 'Aum' - something that proved to the audience that Peter was just a researcher and there was no call involved. Peter von Maltitz, who revealed to a local paper that he is also a member of the Christian Community Church in Atlantis, said that the only way to learn from traditional healers was to interact with them (*Sunday Argus*, August 15/16 1998). Some research analysts assert that Mr von Maltitz is a researcher who uses participant observation in order to get information because the divination training in amaXhosa is full of secrecy.

This suspicion by researchers such as Ms Nunzia Faxi of the University of Cape Town's music department is supported by Mr von Maltitz' comment when he said the following about traditional African healers:

The healers have spiritual knowledge which I am interested in. I also studied other kinds of spiritual knowledge. I learnt the Hindu religion, yoga, Buddhism and anthroposophy, the wisdom of men (*Sunday Argus*, 15/16 1998:6).

3.2.4 Animal Sacrifice and *Ukushwama*

Another issue that raises considerable interest is this new trend of initiation as in the case of Mrs. Sealy of Rondebosch who was initiated as an *igqirha* by Mr. Philip Kubukeli at his home in Khayelitsha. Again, there was no mention of her clan's involvement in this ritual as part of her other ritual speeches. Except for the presence of her twenty eight year old daughter, Emma, Mrs Sealey's relatives were absent. This absence clearly showed that there was no *ingxelo* (to inform the clan and the community), *yala* (admonitions), *mbulelo* (thanking of ancestors), and no *camagusha* (invoking ancestors) from her family. A local newspaper, *The Tattler*, reported that:

Three chickens were brought in front of Mrs. Sealey and two were put on her shoulders. When they cried everybody screamed 'Camagu', to accept the cry. Later on the chickens were slaughtered for her. (*The Tattler*, Thursday, 15 March 2001)

The above explanation has the characteristics of a theatrical performance as, according to the Xhosa tradition, chickens are never sacrificed for ancestors. At no stage is it stated that a goat was slaughtered for the novice. Again, as already stated in Chapter Two, *intsonyama* (a certain piece of meat) for *umoshwamo* is taken from the right foreleg of the goat or a cow. A chicken is regarded as *intaka* (a bird) and does not have *intsonyama* for *umoshwamo*. All clans use *intsonyama* for their holy meal of *umoshwamo*.

Another area of concern is the calling of *camagu* when the

chickens cried. Chickens always cry without the intervention of ancestors. At the same time, even the sacrificial animal such as a goat or an ox cries after it has been sacralised. That is, there are circumstances that lead to its 'cry'.

3.2.5. The Training of an *Igqirha* as a Process

The road to the graduation of an *igqirha* is a process of the communication between an individual and his/her ancestors who give constant guidance on how to offer sacrifices and where they should be done. This process is lacking to most of these *amagqirha*. For instance, it took one day in order for Mrs Sealey to become a fully fledged *sangoma* without undergoing *nontongwana* (divining process). Her one day training is also reflected in *The Tattler* which claims that:

Mrs. Sealey was successfully accepted as a *sangoma* at a symbolic traditional ceremony held at Monwabisi beach. 'I was a bit frightened but the excitement of knowing that I will come out a fully fledged *sangoma* gave me strength', said Mrs. Sealey. (*The Tattler*, Thursday, 15 March, 2001)

At no stage is it stated that Mrs. Sealey *nqula* her ancestors. It is only her *igqirha* that did *ukunqula*. Also, at no stage it is stated that she initiated her song that was revealed to her by her ancestors. We are only told that when she arrived at Mr Kubukeli's house in Makhaza township from the beach, people sang songs of welcome and said she was a hero because she was the first white woman to go through the process. Even her initiation to be an *igqirha* is a

result of unspecified dreams she had six months previous to her initiation.

3.2.6 Initiation Names

When an individual undergoes an initiation process, s/he is given a new name which, like every name according to African tradition, has a meaning or a reason for why an individual has taken on a certain name. Mr. Kubukeli's 'white converts' as it is put in *The Tattler*, have Xhosa names. One cannot convert to African Traditional Religion, a person is born into it and this notion of 'conversion' is a new trend within amaXhosa ritual practice. Despite the fact that all his 'converts' cannot speak Xhosa, Mr Kubukeli gave them Xhosa names such as:

- (i) Peter von Maltitz, a Tulbagh farmer was named *Zanemvula*, which means 'to bring rain'.
- (ii) Stephan Tippach, who was born in Germany, was given the name *Zanempilo* which means, 'to bring health'.
- (iii) Johan Crafford, born in Ladysmith, was named *Thobelithongo* which can be translated as, 'obey your dreams'.
- (iv) Martin Malikaa, from Mitchell's Plain was given the name *Jongiyeza*, or 'look at the medicine'. (*Cape Argus*, Thursday, March 25, 1999)

3.2.7 Concluding remarks

A new form of speech could be analysed with regard to divination

your ancestral home as it is the place at which your umbilical cord is buried. In this case, the ancestral home of the deceased was in Idutywa, in the Transkei, Eastern Cape. The wife of the deceased claimed to have dreamt of her late husband complaining that he was feeling cold and neglected. The wife soon realised that her husband was complaining because she had not performed the *ukubuyisa* ritual for him. She then called her closest relatives living in Cape Town to discuss the process of the ritual performance. What follows below is a description of this ritual:

4.1 Sacred Space

The house is located within a suburb, with a garage and a swimming pool and a very small lawn in front which cannot even accommodate ten people. Under such circumstances, there was no possibility for the presence of a kraal or even a temporal enclosure. The living room could not be cleared of its contents as there were no empty rooms to move the furniture into. Such conditions made it difficult to have an *indlu enkulu* (main hut) for the clan within which to have their exclusive ritual speeches (i.e. *ibhunga* and proper *ingxelo*). Furthermore, all the usual observances and taboos which occur the day before the ritual were absent in this case. As a result of the limited space, the garage and the driveway had to be utilised to accommodate all the participants.

4.2 *Umqombothi* (African Beer)

In preparation for a major ritual like *ukubuyisa* (bringing back), *umqombothi* is usually prepared by *iintombi*, which usually refers to girls, but, in this case, refers to all women belonging to the clan by birth, irrespective of age or marital status. *Umqombothi* has to be prepared in the house where the ritual is to take place so that *iintsipho* (sediment) is carried out into another homestead. When *umqombothi* is ready, the clan elder scoops some into an *ibhekile* (billy can) which is then used during the first taste of *ukushwama*. No one is allowed to taste *umqombothi* before the ritual procedure of *umoshwamo*. In all the preparations of *umqombothi*, the elders take precautions to ensure that everything goes well. That is why *iintombi* prepare it. In this particular *ukubuyisa*, there was no proof that the beer had not been tasted by outsiders before the ritual since it was prepared at Gugulethu and then transported to Mowbray. This particular *mqombothi* could have lost the importance of *thetha* and remain undifferentiated from ordinary beer for a number of reasons. Firstly, the beer was not made in the house where the carcass was kept and, secondly, the drink was tasted by people who did not belong to the clan. In this case, according to some practitioners of African Traditional Religion, the ritual of bringing back the deceased has not yet been performed because the clan was excluded from the ritual procedures. Besides the exclusion of living clan members, even ancestors were not included because they were never informed through *ingxelo* about the purpose of the gathering.

4.3 *Ingxelo* (To Announce)

The wife of the deceased was Anglican and therefore *ingxelo* was preceded by a Christian prayer delivered by an Anglican priest who was not related to either. After the sermon by the priest and the singing of Christian songs, one of the wife's relatives performed *ingxelo*. In this ritual, *ingxelo* did not occur in the beginning of the ritual and was performed as an extension of the Christian prayer usually made before the serving of food. This type of *ingxelo* is very limited because in most cases it lacks *nqula*. Moreover, the *ingxelo* should have been done by the male elder of the deceased husband.

At this particular bringing back ritual, the omission of some important ritual speeches, and the displacement of others by Christian speeches resulting in the displacement of special people to perform their duties, was observed. The absence of sacred spaces and objects, like sacred spears and the use of plates instead of sneezewood or simply *izithebe* (traditional communal plates) was also observed.

4.4 Contested Interpretations

That bringing back ritual was interpreted in two ways by different groups; the first group being the one from the husband's family who know *isiko* (African religious practitioners); and the second group made up of the wife's friends and relatives. I will focus on the objections raised by the husband's relatives. The wife and her

relatives did not see anything wrong with the way in which the ritual took place as they are of the belief that a sacred space can be created anywhere. The husband's relatives felt that they had not performed a ritual and what took place was merely a social gathering. One observer said that it was a '*fanakalo*' (the language spoken in mines which is neither Xhosa nor Zulu nor English but a combination of both) ritual. They claim that it is important that there should be the spilling of blood in any bringing back ritual, and that the animal must 'cry' so that everybody can witness that *icamagu livumile* (the sacrifice has been accepted). The blood spilt in the kraal symbolises harmony between the physical and the spiritual realm and therefore the absence of blood communicates the lack of unity between these two worlds.

The absence of a proper *ingxelo* meant that clan ancestors were completely excluded from the ritual. Furthermore, ancestors were not invoked and *nqula* and *camagu* were totally absent. The presence of *ukungqina* (to witness) was regarded by the clan as mere tokenism for a performed ritual. *Ukungqina* (to witness) is usually performed with *ukuvuma* (to accept, to recognise) as *ukungqina* (witness) means to ensure what one has recognised and approved. According to clan members, the absence of a clan *intlabi* (the eldest male who kills the sacrificial animal) and *iintombi* (clan women) signaled the failure of the ritual. There was no *intlombe* (singing and dancing) which would have been proof of communication between the living and the departed. No one explained how the deceased is brought back, as in the case of speeches made from the hut to the *inkundla* and the kraal, which

was described in the previous chapter. The clan, therefore, did not approve, or accept, or recognise and witness the bringing back ritual of the deceased. The speeches and practices done in the context of that ritual were not accepted because they were interpreted as foreign to the African Traditional Religious way of life. The displacement of *ingxelo* and other ritual speeches with Christian prayers were regarded as unacceptable to the clan.

To conclude, because of the change in times, some other factors have been introduced, directly or indirectly to Xhosa ritual performances. Because of Westernisation, migrant labour, and the introduction of Christianity into the Xhosa tradition, there has been a lot of adaptations, renaming, omissions, and additions of ritual speeches to suit the required need of that particular ritual. Ritual speeches of compromise are also being created so as to maintain the relationship between the ancestors and an individual wherever s/he might find him/herself. The most common speeches done in the city are those associated with rituals of appeasement (*ukungxengxeza*) as to why certain rituals are not being performed. Some new terms (*ukothula umthwalo*) so as to inform ancestors where an *igqirha* in town has to perform an *intlombe* to inform other *amagqirha* of what s/he did at home, that is what was done for in the rural areas. There could be several causes of *ukothula umthwalo*, like when a *godusa intlombe* was done at an *igqirha*'s ancestral home for an *igqirha* that is working in town. When s/he comes back s/he must be known by *amagqirha* and other people that everything done at home went well.

The changes and adaptations made to the practice of African Traditional Religion within an urban context are characterised by contested notions of space, methods, animals and objects used. The renaming of some ritual speeches or the adaptations and introduction of new names are used so as to suit the new styles of the new environment and, simultaneously, maintain a close relationship with the spiritual world.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

It has been argued that amaXhosa ritual speech, as a form of religious language, has been integrated to form part of a broader analysis of ritual speech used in many religious traditions. This thesis has helped to develop an understanding of African religious practices by analysing the vocabulary of an indigenous African language within the framework of an academic discourse which has shown the centrality of language as a form of action (Malinowski, 1965; Lienhardt, 1961; Austin, 1986; Du Bois, 1992). Participants in any religious activity consider religious language to be different from everyday, ordinary speech (Tambiah, 1968; Cook, 1930; McAllister, 1988) and serves to instil a sense belief in the supernatural (Harding, 1987). Most of the literature with regards to African Traditional Religion assumes that sacrifice or the mere killing of an animal constitutes the religion of African people (Hunter, 1961; Firth, 1968; Bloch, 1992; Broaster, 1984). This thesis has proved that the power of any form of sacrifice lies in the words that are uttered by the ancestors and the responses from living members of the community. In amaXhosa religious practices, it is *ukuthetha* (speaking) that allows both the participants, and the observers, to believe in the unification of the spiritual and physical worlds.

The study of religious language has tended to focus on the

relationship between meaning and form. Studies that focus on the meaning of language conveyed through metaphor (Fernandez, 1982, Witherspoon, 1977), and other figures of speech such as personification (for example, talking to bees as representing the deceased in AmaXhosa ritual practices, the crying of a sacrificial animal being perceived as ancestors speaking through the animal), tend to stress the richness and polyvalent qualities of religious language. The use of *camagu* also reflects this richness and polyvalent qualities of ritual speech. Linguistic form in ritual speech is multi-functional, as in the case of *vuma* (accept or sing) and *thetha* (speaking). Speaking, singing, and invoking can be as much a condition of possibility for the experience of the divine as a response to it (Ferguson, 1985).

The linguistic forms in AmaXhosa ritual speech, as shown in the thesis, are always in the present tense and give a central place to the intentionality of the individual speakers (Duranti, 1993; Rosaldo, 1982) in relation to the spiritual world or the cause of the ritual performed. Rather than being construed as accounts of actions that were carried out in the past, the words are taken as reports on, and directives for, the action they themselves carry out in the moment of speaking. Much of the content of ritual speech refers to the very actions it is undertaking (Silverstein, 1976; Jacobson, 1971). Some ritual speech events combine several roles in one physical individual (Hill and Irvine, 1992; Silverstein and Urban, 1996). This combination is evident in a diviner's *nqula* (invoking) where the diviner *nqula* to the ancestors and, on the other hand, simultaneously addresses the audience of his/her

special relationship with ancestors.

Participant's Role

In Du Bois's view, divinatory procedures work, in part, by distributing responsibility for different components of ritual speech among several participants in a communicating event. Participants are also interested in the social relationships along which speech is transmitted from the realm of the living to that of the ancestors. Shamans, for instance, are commonly said to develop individual relationships with spirits who then provide them with songs or chants (Atkinson, 1989; Briggs, 1993; Hanks, 1996). In the context of African Traditional Religion, ancestors provide songs to *amagqirha* (diviners) primarily through *ukuthonga* (dreaming) which forms the central method of communication between diviners and their ancestors. That is why singing one's given song of the ancestors is believed to be inspiring to the individual diviner. For listeners who are aware of this relationship, the performance itself will be sufficient to affirm the existence of the relationship which, in turn, provides the warrant for the performance. It is therefore distorting to describe a shaman as acting alone simply because his spirit others are nowhere visible to the untrained observer (Hanks, 1996: 167).

During sacrifice, the nature of tense shifts from the reason of sacrifice during *ibhunga*, to the actual sacrificing, until finally the outcome is implicitly taken to be something which has already been accomplished. Gill (1981) gives some examples of the sequence of

verbs in Navajo prayers which, he claims, moves from plea for the expected future actions to the description of actions taking place and, ultimately, to a description of the result of accomplished actions. The accomplishment of the end result of ritual speech is regarded as an oral text as members of the community confirm through *ukungqina* (to confirm, to witness, to agree) the successful performance of a ritual.

Having argued extensively on the role played by an *isiko* (ritual sacrifice) among amaXhosa, it has been revealed that what makes an *isiko* is not an offering on its own but rather the performance of *ukuthetha* (speaking) which accompanies it. An offering on its own cannot change anything in the spiritual and moral life of human beings, it is only when it is preceded by a specialised form of *ukuthetha* that it becomes a ritualistic sacrifice and gains its efficacy. *Ukuthetha*, in the African Traditional Religious context, is not limited to verbal utterances but adopts non-verbal forms as well. Similarly, *ukuthetha* is not confined to the verbal or non-verbal acts of human beings as non-human forms of mediation are utilised in the communication between the ancestors and the living. The appearance of a swarm of bees in a strategic position at a homestead, to reiterate, signifies a form of communication. This form of *ukuthetha* is a specialised way of speaking which reflects communication between the living and the spiritual world.

As a rule, within this form of *ukuthetha*, ancestors are the initiators of communication and human beings are the recipients and respondents; and have to react in accordance with the needs of the

ancestors. As ancestors are physically separated from the living, by death, their ways of speaking with the living is complex in nature as it is revealed in different forms such as symbols, dreams, visions and in certain non-human (animal) and human behaviours. As part of the response to ancestors, human beings also have to use sacred symbols and specialised forms of speeches. That is why *ukuthetha* forms the anchor of this thesis and the reader should also understand that the forms of *ukuthetha* analysed here are very complex as they are defined by the context in which such terms are used. No single form of *ukuthetha* can be used in every context. In a nutshell, the bulk of this thesis explains that, in amaXhosa ritual practices, power lies in the words used. *Ukuthetha* actually does what is intended in any ritual activity. *Ukuthetha* serves to define all the tools used within a ritual as well as the offering and the different categories of people participating in the ritual. Furthermore, all these work together towards the fulfilment of the intended purpose of the ritual.

The amaXhosa have been used as the central focus of the study to show how unity between the physical and the spiritual worlds is central to the moral, social, and spiritual development and cohesiveness of this particular community. However, it can be argued that this understanding of *ukuthetha* applies to other African ethnic groups as well. Our study of the amaXhosa religious system thus has special resonance with other ethnic systems. This study has shown significant areas of commonality within the African ethnic religious groups and thus serves to highlight critical components of African Traditional Religion beyond the amaXhosa

community. Ultimately, this thesis can be seen as an eye opener for a broader analysis of African Traditional Religion and culture as it has raised some critical issues than need further research.

An internal journey within the religious practices of amaXhosa, which are the sacrifices performed by clans and the other members of the community, has been undertaken so as to show why there are boundaries between the different categories of people in terms of kinship and territorial criteria. The field-work that I have undertaken and the primary information which I have gathered has formed the basis of this dissertation. As a point of reference and comparison, I have drawn on the work of scholars such as Bloch (1989), Tambiah (1968), Austin (1986) and McAllister (1988).

Bloch's analysis of ritual speech as a formalised and controlled form of speech limits the purpose of ritual speech and excludes the needs of the speaker. By speaking of a recited, formalised form of ritual speech, Bloch implies that the speaker is limited by what is expected of him or her, yet the dialogue between the speaker, the ancestors and the community is determined by the circumstances around the purpose of the ritual. A thorough explanation of such speeches is shown in Chapter Two on *Isiko* (Sacrifice). In addition to ignoring the speaker's needs, Bloch's analysis also undermines the power of the ancestors because, contrary to what Bloch has argued, their communication cannot be judged and formalised by any elder. Ancestors communicate their needs and outline the procedures they want the living to follow in fulfilling their requests. Bloch provides some insight in his understanding of the

adherence to formal procedures such as the movements between the main hut and cattle kraal, the meeting of clan members (*ibhunga*), as well as the singing which takes place inside the hut and on route to the cattle kraal. However, what is said and sung, or the way in which a dance is performed, cannot be formalised. The notion of formalisation and control applies to the different types of stages which are followed as part of the ritual procedure. This does not only involve speech, but also objects which are to be used as part of the ritual, for example, not any spear can be used, it has to be a sacred clan spear.

The creative nature of ritual speech and its performative functions (Tambiah, 1968) are always in accordance with the needs of the members of the community. AmaXhosa always say: '*xa ingakhalanga iyayekwa*' ('if it does not cry let it go'), which means that if the sacrificial animal does not make the cry it must not be slaughtered as this is a sign of rejection from the spiritual world. Austin (1986) provides a more accurate understanding of amaXhosa ritual speech in his claim that words used within a ritual actually do what they say. AmaXhosa believe that communication between themselves and their departed relatives is real and concrete and therefore, by speaking to them, they believe that it is actually happening. Monica Hunter gives an example of a young girl who was healed because of the power of words in a ritual by providing the following account:

There was speaking in the great hut at midday. Peace was made by word of mouth with amathongo. As soon as they spoke, promising the beast, the child got better. (Hunter, 1961: 241)

If the young girl had not been healed, this would have meant that the ancestors had not accepted their plea and would have communicated this to the living. During this ritual process, which McAllister (1988) believes is characterised by 'inclusion and exclusion', the use of other symbols such as meat, beer, the special spear and clan medicine play a very important role in defining the nature of the ritual sacrifice.

This thesis has looked at different approaches on how to understand and interpret various actions and forms of communication within amaXhosa rituals. An in-depth analysis has been done to explain that all forms of communication amongst the amaXhosa is characterised by some form of verbal and non-verbal action which can be interpreted literally, or symbolically, but always reflects the needs and responses of the ancestors. According to the amaXhosa, ancestors speak through a variety of symbols and appear in dreams or manifest as sicknesses within the lives of the community. It is within these symbolic forms that a dialogue is created between themselves and the departed. Living AmaXhosa respond to the ancestors by communicating with the departed using different forms of speech and believe that the divide which separates the living from the deceased is, effectively, dissolved. Although the presence of ancestors cannot be seen by the physical eye, what is important to the living is that ancestors can be felt and their presence seen in, for example, the 'cry' of the animal and the healing of the sick.

I have also shown that, ultimately, *thetha* should always result in *ukuvuma*, or acceptance of the entire ritual procedure. This kind of *vuma* is different from the ordinary human *vuma* because it originates in the world of the ancestors. It is therefore important to note that human *vuma* is regarded as a subordinate *vuma* which one is obliged to do honestly as it cannot challenge the one initiated by ancestors. It is important for this subordinate *vuma* to be honest as it will influence the nature of other accessory activities within the ritual performance such as, the nature of *ibhunga* (clan meeting), ritual preparations, reflection of *ukuvuma* from ancestors as portrayed by the crying of the beast and the nature of *phehla*. The nature of *vuma* within ritual practice is therefore different from other activities in the homestead because, through it, ancestors, *zithethile* (have spoken). If anything is done because *izinyanya zithethile* (the ancestors have spoken), that particular activity is understood to *thetha* (speak) on its own as it is now the mouthpiece of the ancestors. The significant difference between ordinary slaughtering and a ritual sacrifice is because of *thetha* and a certain code of conduct has to be followed, a conduct that is communal among the members of the clan and also witnessed by the members of the community.

The thesis would never be complete if it had not shown how ancestors and the Creator have transcended the limitations of time and space. The chapter entitled 'Tradition and Change' (Chapter Six) has shown that the shift from a rural to an urban environment does not prevent communication between the living and the spiritual world. Case studies in the Western Cape have shown how

the change of environment has resulted in the creation of new forms of ritual speeches and shows how *ukuthetha* becomes a valuable resource through which to transform a hostile environment that is known as the 'white mans' space. As my thesis has shown, this transformation is sometimes contested.

Lastly, the thesis has shown that amaXhosa ritual speech is a formalised group of activities that is intended to unify the spiritual and the physical worlds and bring about holistic healing. It is *ukuthetha* that allows all these activities to function together. *Ukuthetha* within ritual speeches is initiated in the spiritual world and the destination of the end result is also approved of in the spiritual words. This statement means that ancestors are the main authors of ritual speech. Such speeches could be spoken either verbally by human beings, or non-verbally, through the behaviour of certain animals.

This thesis has provided the reader with an extensive vocabulary and a deeper understanding of the nature and significance of African Traditional Religion. After reading this dissertation, the reader will have a deeper insight of the complex nature of the African community, its languages and its religion. The study has proved that African Traditional Religion is not only reactive but also proactive in its outlook. It is not only characterised by ritual activities as a response to crises (i.e. rituals of appeasement) but is also a joyous participation in the initiative of the ancestors (i.e. rituals of divination and rites of passage). It is a celebration of communal worship among members of the community which

instils morality through wisdom and experience of the elderly during *ukuyala* (admonishing). It has also been shown that *ukuthetha* must always result in *vuma* in order to achieve unity and harmony between the physical and the spiritual world.

In a nutshell one could conclude that amaXhosa ritual speech is special form of communication whose authorship either originates from, or is endorsed, in the spiritual world. Ancestors either 'speak' metaphorically themselves or communicate via a medium, which may be a human being, an animal or any object they choose. Through the authority of ancestors, ritual speech can create sacred places or objects that could be used in situations where conditions are not conducive to sacrificial rituals, for example, within an urban context where a sacrificing space such as the kraal and the main hut/house is absent. AmaXhosa ritual speech is a method of communicating with ancestors and breaking this communication results in disharmony between the spiritual and the physical which, in a ritual sense, are regarded as one.

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