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THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF HLUBI MALE INITIATION: A CASE STUDY FROM MATATIELE, EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA.

STUDENT NAME: **JOHN ZULU**

STUDENT No. **0712076N**

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Social Sciences in the Department of Anthropology

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MATATIELE ARCHAEOLOGY ROCK ART

ROCK ART RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Abstract

This is a study of the material culture associated with male circumcision rituals among Hlubi people in the Matatiele region of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. In recent years social scientists and public commentators have paid increasing attention to male circumcision in the context of controversies around 'botched' circumcisions, on the one hand, and the growing evidence, on the other hand, that male circumcision plays a role in restricting the spread of HIV. Much less attention has been paid, however, to a vital issue that underpins all these concerns: what materials give male circumcision its distinctive qualities as a cultural process, and how do various kinds of participants and observers think about those materials in relation to other domains of material culture, e.g. medical circumcision. This study will approach the topic through unstructured interviews conducted with various groups of informants.

Acknowledgement

This has been a long and sometimes lonely journey which I could not have completed without the support of many people that have been around me giving the encouragement to race on and cross the finish line. It would be unrealistic to say I can mention all such individuals in this short space, in any case I am grateful to everyone who played a role in encouraging me to reach this far. However some individuals cannot go un noticed such as my supervisors; Dr Hylton White and Dr Sam Challis - you are the best!!. Thank you for all the help and support throughout the course and during the process of writing this thesis. Words would limit my heart felt gratitude to both of you and for all you have done for me. You might not have known this but many times I got so confident and energised within myself to forge on whenever I deliberately popped into your offices. It really took your patience and confidence in me to reach this far - Thank you for ensuring I was financially secured and the list could go on and on but all I am saying is that I am grateful for all you have done for me. This project was sponsored by the National Research Institute, the Rock Art Research Institute and Matatiele Rock Art Archaeology (MARA) project to whom I am grateful for the financial support. To all my dear friends, course mates thankyou being there for me.

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rage and that made me feel part of the family - for that and many other things I cannot count, I am so thankful. Mama Cyndi thank you for the wonderful meals, warm water to bath. Many thanks also I extend to mama spambo-every time she was overwhelmed she always remarked "*oh nkosi yami!"* (Oh my God). Many thanks to Thulani Spambo and the wife for helping charge my phone and my laptop using the solar charger. To Jojo and the wife for being there to answer sensitive questions and keeping me accompany.

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Glossary

amakwenkwe - Uncircumcised novice

amanzi - Water or water ritual

Amasiko -"culture" or ritual

Basekhutla, - the place where boys and men gathered or assembled

Baseliwa amanzi - (Being poured with water). the eight days ritual performed after the boys were circumcised

Blao - Type of *muthi* used during rituals

Bokwe - A goat

Gogo - Grandparent (grandmother or grandfather)

Goxe - One of the research sites in Madlangala location

hoo hoo hoo - Joyous rhythm expression sung by men during initiation ceremonies

Imbeleko - Ritual performed to present and introduce the baby to the ancestors.

Imbola - Red ochre applied on initiates' body when coming back from the mountains

Impepho - (Helichrysum odoratissimum) a plant used to perform different rituals

Intshitshi - Tree branches used in the construction of the enclosure that surrounded the *Khutla*

iingcibi - Traditional surgeons

Inja - a dog

Inkwenkwe - Singular term for a novice

Inyanga - A herbalist

Inyogo - Gallbladder

Iphempe - Seclusion hut constructed for novices in the mountains

Iqhiyae - Head dress worn by Hlubi women to show respect to both the dead and the living

Isigoqo - A piece of Protea wood

Isiko - Singular term for *amasiko*

Ityali - A type of blanket worn by women around their waists

Ityeba - A type Traditional bandages

Ixhwele - Medical expert

Izichwe - A type of Traditional bandage

Izangoma - Traditional Healer

Kamasi - A specific type of dance novices dance during the first ritual

Khutla. - A temporary constructed shelter for the novices while waiting to go to the mountains

Lobola - Bridal price

Madlangala - One of the location under Matatiele Municipal council (ward 11)

Magamise - Ankle shakers

Makhoti.- Hlubi women dress

Muchabiso - Ritual performed after a man paid bridal price (*lobolla*)

Muthi - Traditional medicine

Ntate - Father, a term also used to show respect to elderly people

Phephela - One of the villages in Madlangala location

Qhang Qhang - Red pigment believed to have been used in the rock art paintings by the San people

Isikhumba senkomo - Dried cow skin

Sphandla - *muthi* made of goat tail mostly worn on the wrist

Ukuyeza - first ritual performed by novices

Ululations - Joyous sounds made mostly by women

Umgubho - Ritual performed by the novices before disappearing to the mountains

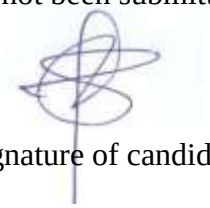
Umqombothi - Traditional brewed beer

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my lovely family; my Beautiful wife Mabel, Temwani-my son, Thandiwe- my daughter and Tumbikani my son. Thank you for enduring the pain of living without a father for a while. Although every thought of you dismayed me they also made me stronger to face each day knowing that I was doing this for you – I Love you

Declaration

I declare that this Dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This work has not been submitted before for any examination or degree in any other University.



(Signature of candidate)

15th Day of March in 2016

“Ever tried, ever failed, No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better”

-Samuel Beckettm -



Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains

Chapter 1

Introduction

New rules

In 2001 the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa enacted the Health Standards in Traditional Male Circumcision Act (No.6 of 2001) also commonly known as the Circumcision Act. The Act stipulated specific conditions such as the age of the initiate, consent from parents or guardians, basic hygienic conditions where circumcision was to be conducted, and medical examinations to certify if the candidates were fit to undergo traditional male circumcision (Deacon and Thompson 2012:17). The Act was a response to escalating numbers of genital infections, amputations and deaths during traditional male circumcision rituals especially in the Eastern Cape. "More than 6,000 initiates were admitted to the Eastern Cape hospitals, more than 3000 deaths were recorded and more than 70 underwent genital amputation while attending traditional circumcision since 1995" (Vincent 2008b:79). According to the Mail and Guardian, government released statistics that "30 of the Eastern Cape's initiation-related deaths were recorded in the year 2013 in the Eastern Cape"[1]. Twala (2009) ascribed these tragedies to some traditional surgeons' (*iingcibi*) use of blunt and unsterilized material objects which resulted in candidates contracting diseases, injuries, and worse off deaths. As traditional surgeon Maraneni told me in 2015, "Yes it is true a number of boys were getting infected and taken to hospitals because some of my fellow traditional surgeons did not want to follow government's instructions, but this should end because this is a very important ritual." In reference to Maraneni statement, it could be asserted that material culture plays a very critical role in this important ritual. Different material objects were used in the ritual among which included blades, knifes, spears to mention a few. Deaths were experienced because these objects were blunt and caused severe mutilation. The objects were not sterilised after multiple usage possessing a danger of transmitting diseases such HIV Aids.

[1] Eastern Cape government revealed that 30 initiates died in the province since the start of the summer initiation season (Mail and Guardian 24th December 2013 2013).

Research aims

In the context of these concerns (tools of circumcision), this study aims to explore the material culture of contemporary initiation ritual in one part of the rural Eastern Cape. Material objects used in rituals such as traditional male circumcision and initiation have played a critical role both in the ritual process and in people's discourses about it, but little effort has been directed in recent scholarship to studying and understanding this aspect of male initiation. Attention has been directed towards the rituals and ceremonies especially their biomedical implications, but not their material objects. To help address this gap, this study is an ethnographic account of the material culture used during traditional male circumcision and initiation among Hlubi people of the Eastern Cape. The study aims at identifying the key material components of Hlubi initiation, and tracing the meanings and values people associate with these items. The Hlubi case study is particularly interesting because while medical circumcision has replaced traditional circumcision, this has been done in such a way as to retain the surrounding ritual process and not transfer it to the context of the clinic. In order for the reader to have a sense of the rituals and the material objects used during the contemporary initiation ceremony, and in an attempt to make sense of people's experiences, this research report presents an ethnography of the entire ritual cycle.

Among the Hlubi of Madlangala, traditional male initiation is a ceremony hosted twice every year, in the months of June and December. The ceremony is strictly adhered to, and it could be stated that it is by undergoing initiation that a novice is acknowledged to be a responsible Hlubi man. While Hlubi people do not have their own "Hlubi language" (for historical reasons discussed in the following chapter), a sense of Hlubi identity emerges for novices and their relatives around the practice of male initiation.

Research site

The study was undertaken in a location known as Madlangala located approximately 25 kilometres from the small town of Matatiele. Madlangala is also commonly known as Ward 11 under the Matatiele Municipal Council. Field research was conducted in three villages: *Mureneng, Phephepla* and *Goxa.* Research sites were identified through the Matatiele Archaeology Rock Art (MARA) research programme of the Rock Art Research Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand. Previous MARA research (Siteleki 2014, Mokoena 2015) had identified traditional male initiation ceremonies as a critical factor in defining Hlubi identity, so this fieldwork was aimed at exploring the ritual cycle and its material culture in greater depth.

Definitions of Material Culture

The study of material culture is an interdisciplinary field employed by anthropologists and archaeologists to highlight relationships between people and the things that comprise their worlds. The term material culture was first used by E.B.Tylor in 1871 (Reynolds and Stott 1987) and was subsequently accepted in the fields of anthropology and archaeology as the ideal term for referring to material aspects of a 'culture'. It was commonly understood to comprise tools, weapons, utensils, buildings, monuments, and religious images (Reynolds and Stott 1987: 155). Material culture studies normally focused on understanding how objects were fabricated, how meanings were attached to them, and their preservation. With time, the study of material culture has also diversified. Prown (2001) defined material culture as being the study through artefacts of the beliefs, values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions of a particular community or society at a given time. He highlighted how the term material culture was frequently used to refer to the artefacts themselves, a body of material available for such study (Prown 2001:1) For Hurcombe

(2007), humanity lives in a material world of artefacts (modified objects, tools, used objects) and structures (houses, buildings, fences, sheds). “Material culture communicates information about us, our value systems and the society we live in. All human societies have material culture” (Hurcombe 2007:3). According to Hodder (2001), material culture is made up of tools that mediate between people and their environments (Hodder 2010:10). With the above it could be understood that material objects represent or uphold collective relations and beliefs.

According to Herman (2007) the study of material culture can be classified into two categories; ‘object-centred’ and ‘object-driven’. ‘Object-centred’ study mainly focuses on the object itself. Particular attention is focused on details such as the physical attributes of the object, while outlining a detailed description of the object such as how and from what material the object was made, its shape, size, weight, texture, and colour. ‘Object-driven’ study of material culture focused on the other hand on understanding how objects related to people who made and used them. Ideas of contextualisation and function become important in this study (Herman 2007:5). In this report, the material culture of Hlubi initiation is approached in an object-driven way, using material culture as lens for examining human practices and beliefs. This requires paying close attention to the relationship between things, acts, relations, and persons. As Hodder (2010) notes, symbols and other objects do not simply ‘reflect’ the social and cultural world. They play an active role in forming and giving meaning to human social behaviour.

In recent years the study of material culture has re-emerged as a field of enquiry both in anthropology and in archaeology, to provide an reinvigorating platform to re-examine “how ‘things’ that people make, make people” (Miller 2005: 38). With time different theorists have diversified the study of materiality. Appadurai (1986) examined new methodological strategies

for ethnography by following the "social life of things." Hoskins (1998) likewise examines the cultural biographies of objects, and how things materialise the ways in which people narrated their lives. On the one side, material culture clearly includes objects or items acted upon and given meaning and value by people in society. On the other hand, the same material objects also clearly give shape and meaning to human existence (Woodward 2007, Miller 2005, Miller 2010, Durkheim 1990). Along these same lines, I argue that there is a complex interaction between people, objects and social processes that needs to be traced in an open-ended way through particular ethnographic cases, such as the traditional male initiation ritual discussed here. Culture was defined by E. B. Tylor (1884) as being a "complex whole" which included knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. This definition has been contested by many scholars and other definitions have been formulated in an attempt to understand what culture is. Here I comprehend culture in a framework broadly informed by Geertz (1973), emphasizing the symbolic mediation of social and cultural processes, but focusing specifically on the role of material culture under this rubric.

Traditional Male Initiation

In the recent past, male initiation ritual has been beset by controversy, especially in the Eastern Cape. Novices have been dying in numbers while attending initiation school. In the midst of all these fatalities and what seemed to be a conflict of interests, people still regarded traditional male circumcision and initiation highly, as a core essence to the moral fibre of the society (Meintjes 1998, Nqeketo *et al*. 2008a). It was observed that young men still returned from urban lives to rural villages to undergo traditional male circumcision and initiation rituals. Twala (2007) noted that anyone who underwent circumcision from a health point or at a hospital was still regarded as a 'boy' and not a 'real' man. Contrary to this view, Hlubis in Madlangala have developed a

rather different interpretation and understanding of what it meant to be man. Analysing the data collected from a wide range of participants through semi-structured interviews, it became apparent that becoming a man was not about just being circumcised, but it was about going to the mountains. "It is our tradition, our culture that every young man must go to the mountains to become a man," interviewee Shishlaha told me. Traditional male circumcision and initiation were conducted in a very exclusive space where cultural knowledge was inculcated in novices, including appropriate sexual behaviours, the perils of promiscuity, marriage, family values, and above all, taking up responsibilities in the family and the community (Nyembezi *et al.* 2013). During research, it became apparent that the cutting of the foreskin of the penis, or circumcision proper, was only a fraction of what it entailed to become a man and to be part of a 'society' of the Hlubi people. As we will see, this allowed Hlubi to incorporate new techniques of medical circumcision without fundamentlly disrupting, in their view, the broader ritual process.

Traditional Male Circumcision and HIV/Aids

A number of scholars have undertaken research to understand the values of traditional male circumcision in relation to HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases. Different facets and angles had been researched with the view of understanding the subject of traditional male circumcision in relation to sexual and reproductive health. Conversely many of these studies have focused on understanding circumcision in relation to protecting oneself from contracting HIV/Aids and other related diseases (Deacon and Thompson 2012). Three recently concluded trials indicated that male circumcision reduced HIV transmission from HIV-positive women to male partners by 60% (Meintjies 1998, Kanta 2003, Meel 2005). It was medically proven that the HIV epidemic was mostly sexually transmitted and by removing the foreskin of the penis, it reduced male infection (Nianga and Boiro 2007). According to Chief Spambo, "We [the Hlubi]

started involving medical doctors in 2004 because of the increase of diseases such as HIV/Aids and secondly, the most experienced elders who really knew how to perform these operations are no longer." Circumcision has been understood as a health measure taken to prevent men from contracting HIV/Aids. According to Kepe (2010: 730), however, it is also the surgical materials used in traditional male circumcision (*umdlanga*) which have been implicated in the spread of HIV/Aids, tetanus and hepatitis, mainly because the materials are not sterilised. Despite being ignored by many scholars, the materials objects used in the process of circumcision played and are still playing a key role in defining the ritual.

Currently there is not much documentation on the material objects used during traditional male circumcision. Despite scholars having written extensively on this rite, there has not been much focus on understanding the material objects used during the ceremony. However, during the research it became apparent that there are a number of symbolic values embedded in the ceremony, including in the different materials used. As Eliade underscores in his general theory of ritual, it is through male initiation rituals that young men are introduced into the 'human community' and into a world of spiritual and cultural values (Eliade 1958: x). This could inform how Hlubi people themselves perceive the initiation process. It was during these rituals that novices learned about the values of the community, the sacred myths and traditions such as the names of ancestors, and the mystical relations between the community and supernatural beings (Eliade 1958: x). Hlubi male initiation comprises four main rituals: *Ukuyheza, Basekhutla, Umgubo* and *Imbola*. These rituals took place at different times of the year and different material objects were used during these rituals. The material objects had different symbolic values and meanings attached to them, as will be discussed.

Finding my participants

After arriving in Madlangala location, my research site, I was introduced to Ntate Nkosinathi Ndaba (my research assistant) who was knowledgeable with regards my research interests. Ntate Ndaba was well known and respected in all the three villages. Through him I quickly became a known figure , to the extent that I was able to walk freely around the villages by myself, something that usually does not happen. Ntate Ndaba has been highly involved with MARA projects in the area and was selected by the Mehloding Community Tourism Trust which is a MARA programme partner. He has worked on several projects with the University of the Witwatersrand including excavating rock shelters, surveying for rock art, and he has assisted university students to conduct their research. He has been generally building his Curriculum Vitae in order to be accredited as an archaeological Field Technician.

With time we developed a close relationship and he looked at me as his young brother. It was through him that research participants were identified in the three villages. In relation to the research, different categories of interviewees were identified, including elderly men, middle aged men, elderly women, middle aged women, boys and girls. Although initiation is seeminlgy a male affair, it was actually much easier to discuss it with women, of all ages. Elderly women and middle aged women proved to be eloquent with secret knowledge concerning rituals such as circumcision. It was understood that this knowledge they acquired it through their partners though it is highly forbidding to share such information. The respective groups were approached differently with different sets of questions, as attached.

Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted in spells of two to three weeks each in the months of October 2015, December 2015, and January 2016. In total I spent approximately eight weeks living in the area. These periods were selected because these are the months when initiation rituals were performed. It has to be stated that due to the sensitivity of the research topic, most participants did not

disclose full information with regards to the subject. The factor of time cannot be over looked because it was difficulty to develop trust with the limited time I had in the field. Anything to do with initiation among the Hlubi people is considered to be sacred knowledge, and information is not shared easily. This extends to other South Africans practising such. The research used a qualitative approach because of the sensitivity of the study. Qualitative meta-analysis was also conducted. Books, photographs, newspaper articles and other journals were used to gain an understanding of what material culture is and also in relation to the material culture used during traditional male circumcision and initiation ceremonies.

To gain access to the research site, permission was sought from the Chief who later introduced me to the elders and the entire community, stressing that my intention was to gain knowledge and understanding of the material culture used in traditional male circumcision. However, I was informed that certain information was not going to be relayed to me because of its sacredness.
I engaged in participant observation to gain a deep understanding of how people lived their day to day lives and the material culture they used. In order to fully understand how people lived, I stayed with a family throughout my field work. Before conducting interviews, I took time to explain the intentions of the study, and after I obtained permission to interview the participants, a voice recorder was used to capture the conversation and later these interviews were transcribed and used to develop this report. Participants were requested to sign a consent form after agreeing to be interviewed. In some instances, potential participants refused to be interviewed because of the sensitivity of the research topic. In all cases an interpreter was used to translate our conversation. Despite understanding Sesotho, which was really helpful, language barrier still posed a great challenge for me in engaging interviewees at certain levels.

The interviews were strategically planned in order to effectively obtain information. Participants were grouped in seven different categories. A total of 17 men aged 50 and above, including the Chief, were interviewed. The oldest man interviewed in this category was Ntate Luke, aged 96 years. A very general overview of the traditional ceremony and material culture used during the male initiation rituals was obtained including the rituals performed with the material objects. However it has to be stated that certain information was not shared with me because of its sensitivity and as an ethnographer, I did not force participants to share such information. During interviews, men mostly gave a general overview of the material culture, describing it in general terms as 'culture' (*isiko*) without giving the meanings attached to the material objects. In other cases they informed me that their forefathers used to but they themselves did not know the meanings attached to the objects. In certain instances they gave their opinion as to what they thought the materials meant. And it was understood that lessons taught in the mountains were not to be shared with an outsider.

A total of 14 women aged between 50 years and above were interviewed. It was interesting that most of the women interviewed in this category discussed the research questions freely. They shared rather interesting information about the material objects they knew, including their meanings. The oldest women interviewed in this category were Gogo Spambo and Gogo Mdaba, aged 76 and 80 years respectively. The two women have been pinpointed because it transpired that they were exceptionally knowledgeable about Hlubi histroy and culture, and the different materials used in initiation rituals. I witnessed instances where men consulted with these women on different issues concerning the Hlubi people, including rituals such as initiation. Twenty-three (23) men aged between 25 and 45 years old were interviewed. Among this number, some were interviewed in groups. This group was especially reticent to share information on anything to do

with ritual and material culture used during intiation rituals. With time and after developing confidence with some of the men, they shared certain information regarding items used during initiation ceremonies, but certain information was not given to me due to its sensitivity in terms of what they thought they could share with me. Women aged 20-35 year old were interviewed. Among this number some were interviewed in groups while others were interviewed as individuals. The aim of interviewing this category was to assess if the group knew of any material culture used during traditional male initiation and their perceptions of male masculinity and sexuality. The research had intended to interview initiates however this proved to be impossible because I was considered an outsider and as a result I was not allowed to get closer to them.

Two traditional surgeons *(iingcibi)* and two traditional healers (*izangoma*) were interviewed in order to gain an understanding of the rituals, material objects and rituals performed on material objects before and after using them during the initiation ceremony. A total of four medical personnel were interviewed who included the District Officers in charge of traditional male circumcision in the District of Matatiele, the nurse in charge, other nurses and support staff at Mureneng clinic.

Research Ethics/Limitations

The subject being researched was highly secretive and information was not easily shared with those who were coming from the 'outside'. However, after obtaining permission to access the research site from the Chief I was accepted, recognised and assisted. During the rituals I strictly depended on Ntate Ndaba, my informant, to guide me on what to do, where to go and where to stand, because strict rules are observed during the ceremony. I strictly adhered to the

instructions; what to ask and what not to ask. In most cases I was forbidden to use a digital camera or a voice recorder when attending certain rituals. As a result I captured very few photos of the ritual process, doing so only where it was explicitly permitted. When conducting interviews, the voice recorder was only used after obtaining permission from the interviewee, including taking of notes. The reader will observe that the report contains some photographs captured during the last initiation ritual. The images were captured with full authorisation from the elders in charge of the ceremony. The reader will observe that only photos of the final ritual were captured and included in this report. This is because during the other rituals, I was not allowed to take any photographs. The images included herein are solely meant for academic purposes and not to disrespect the ritual or the persons captured. The images were captured to enable the reader develop a full understanding of the material objects the novices used during initiation ceremony.

Chapter outline

Each chapter follows a similar structure, moving from ethnographic description to comparative and theoretical analyses. Chapter Two focuses on building a sense of geographical and historical context. The chapter sets off by laying out the broader context of the region and narrows down to the location where the research was conducted. It outlines the main natural and physical features of the location, symbolic values and meanings attached to some of these features. The chapter is concluded by giving a brief historical background to Hlubi people. The historical write up aims at unpacking important hidden historical events which have had a huge impact on Hlubi people and their landscape. Chapter Three outlines rituals performed before novices undergo circumcision. The different material objects used in these rituals are discussed including their significance. Cattle are important here and are also discussed as such. The chapter ends with a

reading of classical Durkheimian conceptions of ritual in relation to the formation of society (1990[1912]). Chapter Four moves on to discussions of the spaces where these rituals were performed and the meanings that have been developed with regard to them over time. Theorists such as Van Gennep (1924), Eliade (1958), Turner (1969), and Durkheim (1990) were engaged in unpacking theories such as that of the profane and the sacred, and death and rebirth processes during initiation rituals. Perceptions of masculinity and sexuality are also discussed. Chapter Five shifts focus to women, the mothers to the novices and the rituals they performed as the novices disappeared to the mountains. The chapter also outlines a number of rituals the Hlubi people performed at different times such as at birth, marriage and death which all have similar material objects used with traditional male circumcision. Chapter Six concludes the report.

Chapter 2

I live in Madlangala

The Town of Matatiele

Matatiele is located in the northern part of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, on the foothills of the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains. On the South West it is neighboured by Greater Kokstad, to the East Umzimvubu, and the Kingdom of Lesotho to the North. In the local dialect, Matatiele means the 'ducks have flown away', a name embedded with historical meanings and significances. According to Vivian Hart (2010:46), ducks migrated away from the area as people established settlements and drained the marshes that had been their local environmental niche. With this occurrence the name has remained, but people now also take it to reflect the ways that peace and good fortune have likewise abandoned the region. Located on the borders of the Maloti-Drakensberg World Heritage Site along its western boundary, Matatiele is part of the Maloti-Drakensberg Trans-frontier Conservation and Development Project (MDTP). Matatiele consists of 26 municipal wards with a population of approximately 203 843 (Matatiele annual report 2012/2013). The eleventh ward, Madlangala, lies 25 km away from Matatiele town.

Madlangala location

Madlangala location lays adjacent to the Great Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains. The mountains meander naturally across the Hlubi landscape, inducing a sense of awe and wonder as one's eyes freely follow their undulations to as far as the eye can see. The mountains reach so high up the sky that on cloudy days, they are topped with clouds; a spectacular sight to view. The mountain

slopes are almost bare except for grass, with no trees. Cattle, sheep, goats and horses wandered freely while grazing on the slopes of the mountains herded by boys. The Drakensberg Mountains form a natural boundary between the countries of South Africa and the Kingdom of Lesotho. The *Kinirha* River flows from the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains and almost encircles the entire Madlangala location. Certain portions of the river are invaded by shrubs of black wattle, invasive alien species, competing for underground water sources. The *Nguga* River also flows from the Mountains and cuts through the location and flow into the *Kinirha*. The *Kinirha* River is the largest perennial river in the region. It is because of these rivers that the location is blessed with fresh waters throughout the year. Every household has a tap of fresh running water. A minimum fee is paid to the Municipal council for water services every month.

Madlangala comprises three main villages namely *Murenene, Phephela* and *Goxe.* These villages are mainly occupied by Hlubi people, while other villages in the location include *Nkupulweni*, mainly occupied by Xhosa-speakers, and *Edressini* village occupied by Basotho. Despite the difference in 'ethnicity', people speak each others' languages fluently and there are no major conflicts among them. Madlangala location registered one of the highest populations of Hlubi-speakers in the Eastern Cape. According to the 2011 census (Matatiele Annual Report 2012/2013), Madlangala recorded a total population of 11 421, with 2 815 households.

Madlangala is the third most populated location in Matatiele. Women constitute 54% of the population while men constituted 46%. The percentage of men compared to women is lower because in most cases men, upon attaining the age of 21 left the village to seek employment in cities such as Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Johannesburg.



Figure1. Map of South Africa indicating the Eastern Cape.



Figure 2. Map of Matatiele District



Figure 3. Matatiele Town

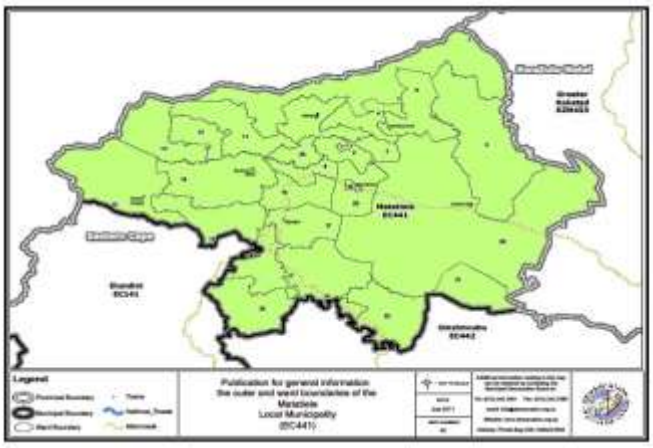


Figure 4. Map of Matatiele indicating different wards

Houses are built on plots which are close to each other. The plots are well organised in blocks as they spread down the sides of the hills. The blocks are separated by wide gravel roads. Families build houses on land allocated to them by the Chief. Residents secure their plots using razor or barbed wire to keep away horses, cattle, sheep and goats. Land is highly valued. Houses in Madlangala are either built using concrete blocks or blocks made of processed soil. The roofs are either grass-thatched or corrugated iron roofing sheets. The walls are painted with bright colours

such as pink, yellow, light green, and blue. The houses in the location are constructed using two main shapes, circular and rectangular. In most cases the circular houses were used as kitchens where a metallic stove was mounted on concrete blocks with a chimney protruding either through the side wall or the roof to discharge smoke into the air. These stoves use fire wood which is mostly collected in abundance before the onset of the winter or the rain seasons. The stoves in the kitchen are not only meant to be used for cooking but also to provide warmth in the winter season as the location is prone to experiencing low temperatures and heavy snow fall. In some cases the kitchens were also used as bedrooms because of the warmth. The rectangular houses are used as sitting rooms and bedrooms. All the houses are built with only one door which faced the eastern direction where the sun rose from. Besides protecting the houses from strong winds which mostly blew from the Western direction, there is also a strong belief that the light of the morning sun comes with the newness of life, new hopes and good luck - and that is why the doors had to face in that direction. Every yard has a 1x1m self-standing concrete toilet with a hard plastic toilet seat, constructed in a corner of the plot. The pit-latrine toilets were constructed under a major nationwide programme which the Government embarked on to improve sanitation at every household in rural area. The construction of pit-latrine toilets in Madlangala location was carried out in 2011.



Figure 5. Satellite map showing Madlangala location

Today approximately 75% of the population in the study area comprises persons aged between 20 to 90 years old. However, I also encountered some men who were above the age of 90 such as Ntate Luke. Mostly people aged between 20-50 years old are not working due to lack of industries and companies. Mostly people within this class had low or no education qualifications to enable them look for employment. According to the 2011 census, it was observed that although the percentage of people with matric increased to 12.7%, the percentage of people in higher education declined from 4.0% to 3.1% between 2001 and 2011. The main reason for such a decline is attributed to poor financial backgrounds, in that most students after matric did not have the financial means to further their studies. And because of the low numbers of people with higher educational qualifications, many people took up unskilled jobs which were also limited. This has had an adverse effect on the economic status of the people in the location. Generally

this could be considered to be an economically active population of people who are able, willing and who are actively looking for some form of work. The population which is economically active in the entirety of Matatiele is 112 338 people[2]. The unemployment rate is currently estimated at 38.2 %. The census (Matatiele annual report 2012/2013) also revealed that the larger proportion of this population were people between the ages of 16-34 years old. Of this age, only 0.4% attended higher education, 4.9% completed secondary education while 30.4 did not complete secondary school and could be considered drop outs, and 7.6% had fully completed primary school (Census 2011).

Most of the people in the location earned a living by being engaged by the Local Municipal council in temporary jobs such as road maintenance, and the controlling and management of invasive alien species, mainly black wattle. Fire-wise is an organisation engaged by the Matatiele Municipal Council to control invasive alien species in the location. The organisation was the largest employer in the location. People were divided to work in two groups: one worked on the land close to the river banks while the other worked on the mountain. The ground workers mainly controlled the invasive species in areas which are easily accessible by foot; and mostly women worked in such areas. The other group focused on invasive species which had grown along mountain streams. This group mainly used their own horses to access these areas to control the invasive species. However, the poverty levels in the location were still high because of the non-existence of stable jobs. While space in these institutions was taken up by a few, a number of women engaged in brewing local traditional beer commonly known as *umqombothi* which

[2] Matatiele Annual Report 2012/2013 indicated that the population which is economically active in Matatiele Local Municipality is recorded at 112 338 people according to the 2011 conducted cencus. The unemployment rate was estimated at 38.2 %.

they sold to members of the community (see McAllister 2006). As one woman said to me, "After selling this beer, the money helps us buy house necessities for our children because both I and my husband are not working; there are no jobs here." It became apparent that in the absence of jobs men and young women turned to excessive beer drinking.



Figure 6. Fire wise team

Education challenges in Madlangala

Madlangala location has no secondary schools. Parents send their children to towns such as Matatiele, Pietermaritzburg and Durban to attend secondary school and tertiary education. Currently there are only two basic schools which offer education up to Grade Nine. Most children attend basic school, but it is a challenge for even young children to attend primary school not only because of financial constraints but because of family responsibilities. At a tender age boys are taught how to herd cattle, sheep and goats. Every morning they are required to herd the animals up the mountains to feed, and they herd them back again at sunset. As a headmaster complained to me, "Families preferred their children to herd these family properties than attending school." This is one of the reasons 'boys' look forward to attending initiation school in the 'mountains,' because when they become 'men' they were not required to go out to herd cattle, he added. Initiation school in the mountains plays an important role among Hlubi because it is also considered as school. These are considered 'schools' just like the contemporary

or modern schools introduced by missionaries and the colonial state. In the case of nearby Cancele, Ngwane (2004) highlighted how elders argued that traditional male circumcision and initiation was considered to be 'school' which played parallel roles to formal/modern schools.

Brief historical background to the Hlubi people

It is only in recent times that scholars have tried to understand and to write or rewrite the history of the Hlubi people. There is still much to be done as a number of historical factors still remain unanswered. The historical records gathered today concerning the Hlubi people are mainly historical oral narrations which older people of this generation claim to be the 'history' of the Hlubi. Authors such as Wright and Manson (1983) and Herd (1976) also attest to the fact that there are no clear historical records documented on the origins, political, economic and social affairs of the Hlubi people. According to Ntate Spambo, Hlubi origins could be traced as coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hlubi appear to have migrated south and settled in South Africa around the 1300s, first along the *Lubombo* Mountains, extending from north of the Zululand, northwards along the Swaziland-Mozambique borders (Herd 1976, Isizwe samaHlubi 2004). Some Hlubi historians claim historical occupation of the territory which was marked by the Pongola River on the north east border. The land extended east beyond the *Ncome* (Blood) River, south to where *Umzinyathi* and the *Thukela* rivers met. The territory further stretched south to where the Bushman's River met the Drakensberg Mountains, which also marked the Western border. In present expressions the Hlubi Land would included the following areas: Charlestown, Volkrust, Newcastle, Madadeni, Utrecht, Wakkestroom, Alckockspruit, Paulpietersburg, Vryheid, Dundee, Nquthu, and all the way to Estcourt. In this view, AmaHlubi were the first to colonise the land mass later called Natal Colony (Isizwe samahlubi 2004).

After conducting my research it was apparent as to why the Hlubi did not seem to have their history on record and among the many reasons is that which was pointed out in the book "The Bent Pine" by Norman Herd 1976. Herd (1976) notes that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Hlubi were a very dominant and powerful group in the Eastern Coast. There was no group that would dare engage in war with this massive nation including the Zulus. "At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Zulus were a tiny insignificant clan and from their social pinnacle the amaHlubi could look down upon them as despised tobacco sellers" (Herd 1976:2). The tribe extended from Ladysmith to Escort and to date amaHlubi are spread all over parts of the country which included parts of KwaZulu -Natal (KZN), the Eastern Cape, more specifically the old Ciskei, Transkei and small parts of the North West and Mpumalanga. These regions had their own Hlubi Chiefs who reported to the Royal House in Estcourt where the 'headquarters' was established. It was common practice in those days that weak nations would seek refuge in the stronger nations even as the stronger ones would attack the weak ones in pursuit of wealth such as cattle. It was one of the reasons that many nations at the time came under the authority of the Hlubi King; among such nations included the amazizi, amabele, amaZengele to mention a few (Isizwe samahlubi 2004). The Hlubi people were also known for their ability to use magical powers. King Langalibalele himself was most renowned for his ability to make rain, a strength which earned him a reputation as a powerful ruler among many other Kings and Chiefs throughout Southern Africa had consulted him including King Moshoeshoe, Mpande and Cetywayo (Isizwe samahlubi 2004). He was reported to have developed strong ties with Moshoeshoe, Cetywayo and Sobhuza of the amaSwazi: "A clear recognition of his status as King of a once powerful amaHlubi nation" (Herd 1976:5). It is important to note that the Hlubi Nation had always been independent and never paid allegiance to either the Zulu kings or any other authorities at the time (Herd 1976). In the early nineteenth century ruling this vast nation became

a challenge for King Langalibalele as the nation continued to grow as well as external pressure from the colonists, the Boer white farmers who also claimed the right to the land, including the Zulu King Mpande who demanded that the Hlubi people should submit to his authority to which they refused and caused war.

Wright and Manson (1983) observe that from the perspective of the Zulu royal house, Langalibalele was beginning to emerge as a figure whose power in the upper *Mzinyathi* - upper *Pongolo* borderlands rivalled that of the king himself. Herd (1976) emphasises that there were unfounded fears that Langalibalele's general defiance, his independence and possession of firearms were a security threat to the Colony's white community. Rumour had it that Langalibalele was collecting guns for purposes of planning a rebellion. Given his influence and prominence, it was a threat which the British did not take lightly. Learning of the intention of the colonial government to attack his nation and arrest him, he planned his escape with some of his troops to the mountains. This act was to be considered by the colonial administration to be an act of treason and resulted in militant action against King Langalibalele (Isizwe samahlubi 2004). Innocent Hlubi men, women and children were killed, villages were burnt and animals destroyed while pursuing the King as he fled to the mountains from the colonists. This is what led to the infamous battle in 1873 (Herd 1976, Isizwe samahlubi 2004). After rigorously pursuing King Langalibalele, the colonists managed to arrest him in his hiding place across the Drakensberg Mountains in Basotho-land (Lesotho). This was after informants had passed information to the colonists about his hiding. He was arrested by Chief Jonathan of the Basotho people under the authority of the British government (Herd 1976). The King's arrest was the breaking point of the Hlubi nation. "It was a lethal blow aimed at the heart of the location's policy which had largely deprived the white population of the primary source of cheap labour" (Herd 1976: 33). Herd

(1976:34) also notes that the colonists regarded it as singularly fitting that the tribe should suffer the full weight of the government's anger, since their well-publicised affluence was seen as an encouragement to indolence, contempt for authority and a spur to unrest among other Africans in the colony. Despite the courts not finding King Langalibalele guilty during his trial in Pietermaritzburg, he was arrested and imprisoned and deported on Robben Island. He was soon forced to be released and put in isolation in the Cape Colony. Later King Langalibalele was allowed to return to Natal, where he settled in the Zwartkops area under some form of house arrest where he later died in 1889 and received the kind of burial reserved for royalty (Herd 1976:150). However it is worth noting that since the death of King Langalibalele there has not been any King appointed and recognised to reign over the Hlubi nation. The nation was later merged with the Zulu kingdom (Herd 1976) for easy control by the colonial government.

The above occurrences slowly saw the diminishing of the Hlubi people. The once large and powerful nation was torn apart as members joined other nations close to them. The language silently disappeared as people started communicating in other prominent dialects such as *isi*Zulu, *isi*Xhosa and Sesotho. In the South African context, as in many others, language is usually taken as a key marker of ethnic identity. Without a language a 'nation' cannot claim a position of sovereignty. However, despite losing their language, Hlubi still practice traditions which cause them to stand out and be recognised as any other ethnic group in South Africa. Today, traditional male initiation is the main ceremony widely celebrated by Hlubi people.

Hlubi history is also, however, a matter greately contested within the community. On a beautiful Wednesday warm sunny morning in Murenene, I relaxed on my bed as my mind wondered through the corrugated iron sheets into a world of thoughts which I cannot even recall. I was

awakened from my day dreaming by a hard knock on my door and all of a sudden brought me back from the world of wonder. Zengele, one of my informants from *Phephela* village, gave me a wide smile and I responded with a smile, I was happy to see him. After all the formal greetings and catching up on a number of issues I mentioned to him a piece of history I had read regarding the Hlubi nation as briefly described above, especially about Langalibalele. Immediately after I mentioned the name 'Langalibalele', Zengele reacted sharply to the name - "no no do not mention that name!!"My mouth dropped opened wide as I wondered what wrong I had said about the King. I managed softly but fearfully to ask him why I should not mention the King's name. He looked into my eyes and firmly told me not to mention that name again. All of a sudden there was some emotional tension in the room though I was really anxious to know what was behind Zengele's reaction. After a minute of silence Zengele opened his mouth and expressed his thoughts about the King. It was then I came to understand that some Hlubi people had rather mixed feelings against King Langalibalele. "The King was not supposed to run away and leave his subjects to the hand of the enemy; that is why we are like this today." According to Gogo Mdaba, "It was politics, there are different stories about our past, I have heard and the unfortunate thing is that we were all not there and so one can tell what is true or false." It was interesting for a researcher like me to understand how people interpreted historical events and related them to contemporary society. This could display how culture is contested by people: people develop different interpretations of past occurrences which impact the present. It could be argued that historical and cultural interpretations are solely dependent on an individual. Despite having one storyline, different individuals would still interpret it differently and react differently against the historical events.

Chapter 3

I want to be a Hlubi man

Initiation Ceremony of the Hlubi people

The Hlubi initiation ceremony is hosted twice every year; in the months of June and December. The initiation ceremony is divided up into four main rituals namely: *Ukuyeza, Basekhutla, Umgubho* and *Imbola.* Catherine Bell (1992:19) describes a ritual as being a performance of conceptual orientations. Following this description, it could be understood that rituals enact symbolic values of a belief system. She adds that "a ritual was typically viewed as an expression of belief and held social power, which generated change" (Bell 1992:182). Hlubi ritual is a typical example of the way that the symbolic enactment of conceptual orientations changes social statuses. According Edward Shils (in Bell 1992:19), ritual and belief are intertwined and yet separable, and yet rituals depend on beliefs for them to be performed. It is essential for all the Hlubi novices to undergo this process because it is considered as a basis on which one becomes a respectable man. As Bloch puts it, describing initiation in Madagascar, "Passing through the rituals was considered as an essential step to beginning or continuing life as a full moral person" (1992:8).

Eliade Mircea (1958), a scholar of religion, notes that initiation ceremonies can be divided into four different phases. The phases include preparation, separation, the liminal phase, and the reinstatement phase. All these phases deploy different symbols and material objects. Van Gennep (1924) and Turner (1969) likewise discuss the phases of ritual. However, their narratives of

initiation do not include the preparation phase, which Eliade considers the first. I argue that Eliade's model is best for understanding the four-phase process of Hlubi initiation. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the first phases.

Ukuyeza Ritual or the Preparation Phase

I sat in the living room to take a rest after walking the entire morning and part of the afternoon conducting interviews around the Mureneng Village. In the midst of enjoying my rest, suddenly there was a knock on my door and Ntate Nkosinathi my informant was calling my name. I recognised his voice though it sounded rather worrisome. I hurriedly ran to open the door for him; he smiled at me and asked me to quickly put on my shoes because the *Ukuyeza* ritual was about to take place. Looking rather blank, I reluctantly managed to ask him what that meant and he enthusiastically explained that *Ukuyeza* the first ritual of initiation was performed by novices (*amakwenkwe*). It is during this ritual that boys who had come of age presented themselves to the appointed traditional surgeon to declare their readiness to undergo circumcision and initiation. The novices wore grey blankets with black stripes symbolising their social status. Every boy who had not been to the mountains was required to wear this as a way of announcing their social status and readiness to become part of society. The grey blanket was made of cheap material but it spoke volumes about the social status of the novices. It signified their willingness to go to the mountains and was also worn to show respect to parents and the community.



Figure 7. Young Hlubi boy (*Inkwenkwe*) wearing a grey blanket, a material object symbolizing that a novice is ready to go to the mountains

As we arrived, we found novices wearing grey blankets standing side by side in a line being issued instructions by an elderly man whom I was told was one of the principals for the forthcoming initiation school. After receiving these instructions, the novices tied black pieces of rubber with hanging pieces of metals, known as *magamise*, on their lower legs, and immediately ran to the mountain forests barefoot. The flattened metal pieces made a unique sound with the movement of the legs. *Magamise* are worn only during such rituals. The sound did not contain a specific meaning except the rhythm it produced with movement. The novices were tasked to fetch from the mountain a piece of a tree locally known as *isigoqo*, also known in English as the Protea caffra tree (scientific name: *Scolymocephalus caffer*). According to Nkosinathi Ndaba, Hlubi regard this tree species highly because of its ability to persevere in harsh weather conditions, just as a man was expected to persevere in any difficulty situation. It is also considered as a sacred tree among the Hlubi people and no one is permitted to cut the tree except during rituals such as male initiation. Upon inquiring what made the tree species sacred, I was denied the information.

The tree is also considered one of the national trees of South Africa. Upon their return from the mountains, the novices stood approximately 5 meters away from the surgeon singing songs of affirming their readiness to become a man.

Gijiman' bafana - Run young man *O*

uyabona Murena -**Chief do you see**

oooh oooh - **oh oh oh**

Ewe - **yes**

Gijiman' gijiman' bafana - **Young men run, run**

oooh….oooh

Lyrics provided by Thulani Spambo (2015)

The above song was sung by novices after coming back from the mountians while performing a dance known as *Kamasi*. One by one they performed this dance while approaching the traditional surgeon to present the *isigoqo*. As my informant Marareni put it, "This ritual symbolizes that a novice was submitting himself to the traditional surgeon to undergo circumcision and to be initiated by him." The wood from the tree was meant to be used for cooking food and brewing *umqombothi* (traditionally brewed beer) for the forthcoming rituals.







Figure 8. Top left: Figure 8. Ntate Nkosinathai Ndaba demonstrating how the protea wood is carried
Figure 9. Top right: Ntate Nkosinathai Ndaba demonstrating how magamise are worn by Amankwenkwe
Figure 10. Bottom left: A boy (Inkwenkwe) performing a dance during Ukuyeza ceremony;

- carrying protea wood (isigoqo)
- wearing a grey blanket
- wearing magamise

People of different ages and gender gathered to watch the novices perform the ritual. Young women and the mothers of the boys watched and ululated joyfully from afar. The traditional surgeon provided *umqombothi* to all who came to witness the ritual. Others beers were provided among which included Black Label and Castle Lagers.

The Basekhutla Ritual or the Separation Phase

December is an exciting month in Madlangala. Besides it being a festive month, it is when two other phases of initiation ritual are performed before the novices disappear to the mountains to undergo the process of circumcision and initiation. The second ritual took place in the first week of the month of December. This ritual is known as *Basekhutla*, and locally it means the place where boys and men gather or assemble. This ritual was held two nights before the novices disappeared to the mountains. On a Thursday evening all the novices gathered at the traditional surgeon's home in readiness to go to the mountains. In the models of Van Gennep (1924), Eliade (1958) and Turner (1969), this would be termed the separation phase. The novices separated themselves from the rest of their families and community in readiness to undergo initiation. The boys gathered in a temporary shelter known as *khutla.* The *khutla* was 3x3 meters constructed of old corrugated iron sheets with a single door which faced the east. Men from different villages of the location gathered to witness the assembling of the novices. It was interesting to note that the *Khutla* or shelter was constructed right in the middle of the cattle kraal at the traditional surgeon's home. Cattle were shifted for this period into a temporarily constructed kraal. As Marareni told me, "Now that the boys are becoming men, they have to know and understand the importance of cattle; that is why they have to sit here and smell cow dung so that it becomes part of them." Ndaba added that cattle are sacred animal for Hlubi and that young men needed to know that the first thing they needed to acquire when they started work was a cow: "That was why they had to sit in a kraal; it was very important for us as Hlubi people. The possession of cattle defines social status, and like many southern African commiunities, Hlubi have numerous terms for their animals. (I explore the ritual significance of cattle in the following section.)

Men drank beer and sung the whole night while novices sat in the *khutla* awaiting for the morning to carry out the task of going into the mountains to cut *intshitshi* (tree branches) to be used in the construction of an enclosure around the *khutla*. Right before the sun laid its hand on the eastern horizon, the young men quietly disappeared into the mountain forest to cut *intshitshi* to be used in the construction of a kraal. Ululations and cheering could be heard from afar announcing the arrival of close to a hundred men who had followed the boys to haul the branches. Close to thirty heads of oxen were used to haul them. Some men I knew and once interviewed came from as far as *Goxe* and *Phephela* to give a hand in constructing the structure. Unity and commitment were virtues which were tangibly displayed among the men from different villages of the location. The construction of the enclosure did not take long because the men worked together. The enclosure surrounded the *khutla* structure, where the boys sat and listened to different songs sung by men on what it meant to be a man.

Song: *Sekguwa sethata* - English is difficult

Sekguwa se thata - **English is difficult**

Se hloka kelello - **You need brains**

Bonna bo-thata - **To be a Man is difficult**

Bo batla mamello - **You must have stamina**

Ke lekile ho bepa manala a sala fatse- **I tried to dig with my nails but they fell off**

Tumelo eaka nkeke ka e lahla - **My faith, my belief, I will never let go of it**

Bonna bothata - **To be a Man is difficult**

Lyrics provided by Thulani Spambo 2015.

Throughout the cool of the day till sunset, men sang and danced in circles while stamping their feet hard on the ground in a harmonious traditional rhythm. Passion could be felt in the waves of their voices as they sung to themselves songs centred on being a man, the hardships that a man faced, and how men had to persevere and overcome.

Value of cattle among the Hlubi people

After cutting *intshitshi*, the novices walked between a herd of cattle, all wearing a cow skin on top of the grey blanket. The cow skin is locally known as *isikhumba senkomo*. The dried cow skin was treated and used in rituals such as this. This object was passed on from one generation to the next. As Jojo told me, "This cow skin was given to me by my uncle when I was going to the mountains. After I used it, my son is now going to use it." Besides wearing the cow skin on top of the blanket, it was used as a mat for sitting and sleeping on in the mountains. It was a requirement that every boy had a cow skin before going to the mountains. It came to my attention that for some of the novices who did not have a cow skin, their families had to rent one from those who were willing to rent it out because it was such an important object to have. Cattle are central in many ways to Hlubi initiation. A herd of cattle led the way where ever the boys went. Some of the young men and elderly men wore cow bells around their waists, from which a loud noise emanated when they walked and more especially when they danced. Wearing cow bells around their waists was to invoke the ancestors during ritual. In Marareni's words, "Everything we do as Hlubi's is about the cow."

This is of course a general theme throughout many parts of southern and eastern Africa. As Kuper (1981) showed in his classic comparison of southern African domestic structures, cattle were central to the organization both of space and of social relationships in preoclonial societies

(see Huffman 2007). As Ferguson (1985), Comaroff and Comaroff (1992) and other ethnographers of modern southern Africa have demonstrated, cattle also remain central to domestic and political life, continuing to play critical roles in bridewealth transactions and and sibling ties, loans, alliances, and chiefship. Cattle are central to the building of human relationships and closely identified with human beings. Phalafala (2013) states that cattle function to bridge, to connect, and to invoke. They exist in a liminal space between humans and the divine, the physical and spiritual, the alive and the ancestors, the worldly and the universal. Phalafala also states that after drying the skin of a cow, it is used in making of a drum which is believed to invoke ancestors to partake of the realm. Furthermore he states that cattle are not just considered as animals but are part of the family, community, part of those who have passed and part of the universe (Phalafala 2013). All of this also applies in the Hlubi case. A cow was highly treasured and it was perceived as a sacred animal. Returning to Marareni, "Everything on the cow is of great value; that is why it was the most expensive animal, and we hardly sell a cow. There is nothing that we discarded from a cow; it meant a lot to us."

There are only two ceremonies where Hlubi slaughter cattle: during initiation and during funerals. During funerals, a cow is slaughtered to show respect to the dead person and to appease the ancestors to receive the dead. On the day of burial, an ox is slaughtered and certain parts of the meat are offered to the family members while the rest of the meat is supposed to be eaten by the gathering. Once the meat was boiled it was supposed to be eaten and finished on that very same day. Marareni added that when a man wants to take a wife he has to gather sufficient cattle to pay brideprice (*lobola*). If a family does not have cattle, the bride's family would fix the amount to be paid in form of cash on the going rate of a cow. Like Tshidi Barolong (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992), Hlubi call these 'legless cattle' there is nothing which more embodies

wealth for Hlubi than cattle. During celebrations or death a cow was slaughtered to show respect to the ancestors. Depending on the ceremony, different cattle were slaughtered. It was interesting to notice that during funerals, the Hlubi people slaughtered an ox while during initiation ceremonies a bull and an ox were slaughtered. The bull was slaughtered for the novices while the ox was slaughtered for the people who had gathered to celebrate the ceremony.

Umgubo ritual - the disappearing of the boys

After the *intshitshi* was constructed, men gathered in different groups. They sat and discussed loudly while others made circles where they demonstrated their singing and dancing skills. At song intervals a man shouted on top of his voice "*hoo hoo hoo!!*" and the rest of the men responded in unison and harmony "*hoo hoo hoo!!*" This was a joyous expression that men used to express their excitement and there is no real meaning attached to it.

Song: *O re tima joala* -You do not want to give us beer

Monga mona u re tima joala - **The owner of this place does not want to give us beer**

'Buti bona oa re bona hore re nyoriloe - **But he sees that we are already drunk**

Ha a re fe joala - **But he does not give us beer**

Banna ba nyoruwe tshela joala-aahhaa - **Men we are thirsty give us some more beer, hee he hee**

Lyrics provided by Thulani Spambo 2015

Mokorotlo - Basotho head

Mokorotlo - **This is night before the boys go away**

Lyrics provided by Thulani Spambo 2015.

The spirit of jubilation overtook the entire village; dust rose from the dry ground as men danced in several groups. They were celebrating the *Umgubo* ritual during which the boys disappeared into the mountains at midnight. Women formed their own groups where they sang and danced joyfully. The Chief broke out reciting a Sesotho praise poem which was filled with emotional gestures; his voice was strong and loud and his hands gestured every word that proceeded out of his mouth with passion. It was interesting to note that all poems were recited in Sesotho, and they addressed different roles of men and women in society. Chief Spambo danced around with a stick in his hand and everyone listened attentively while women ululated at intervals as he recited the poem captured below;

U eme lepholi u eme leoese - **You are staying with the oxen**

U yetsi mankwa a mafubedu - **The clouds are red**

Ho feta kgaba ho feta kganyapa - **The tornado is passing**

Ke sikgurha samukgane qwune - **Everyone is scared**

Banana ba tshaba ho palama - **Ladies are worried about it (are scared of riding it)**

Ba tshaba ho palama pere e kgunwana bolelemela - **Horses are on the run (they are scared of riding this horse, this awesome horse)**

Ke siphunya bohle sakena tsilenga sakena - **Men make a protocol**

Saphunya ntiu kamorawu sa kena - **Women are dancing and singing**

Kesifako sangwanyana nkwebe - **Hailstorm is coming**

Ha urekisangwana le nga wu - T**he women must dance for that**

Poems citied by Chief Spambo, interpreted by Ndaba (2015)

Before the novices disappeared into the mountains, two animals, an ox and a bull, were slaughtered by a medicine man. Parents to the novices contributed money to procure animals to be used during these rituals. An herbalist (*inyanga*) was hired at this special event to perform the slaughtering of the animals and perform rituals for protecting the boys before departing to the mountains. The slaughtering of the animals showed gratitude that the boys were becoming men and also provided meat for the ritual. The herbalist used a spear to perform this task. Before slaughtering the animals, traditional medicine (*muthi*) was applied on the spear head. All the men gathered around the kraal to witness the slaughtering of the animals. They beat the edge of the kraal with their fighting sticks, as they chanted in unison '*hooo hooo hooo'*. After using the spear to kill the animals, it was used to protect the boys from witchcraft and any misfortune while in the mountains. Blood from the pierced animal was allowed to freely drop and be swallowed by the earth as a sacrifice to the ancestors; this was believed to be a petition and a sacrifice that pleased the ancestors. Other men joined the medicine man to skin the animals and removed certain internal organs of the animal which were used for medicinal purposes. Due to the sensitivity of the information, I was not availed of the details of the performed rituals as it was considered to be sacred. I was also not allowed to interview the medicine man. As the Chief's elder relative Ntate Spambo said, "You cannot talk to him because he may lose his powers; you can only talk to him after he comes back from the mountains. For now you cannot talk to him." The medicine man delegated parts of the animal to be eaten by the gathering and ones to be reserved for the boys. Men threw the meat into to the fire for roasting and later served to the elderly men first with internal parts such as the liver while the rest of the people were served meat from different parts of the animal as the sun slowly drifted to its resting place.

After the sun had set, all of a sudden it became scarily dark as rain clouds quickly covered the skies of Mureneng village preventing the moon and stars from giving any light. The winds steadily gained momentum as time passed on. Despite the darkness and likelihood of a heavy downpour, still the men and women danced and sung, enjoying the occasion. Indescribable jubilation filled the night of the village as everyone awaited to see the boys go to the mountains. Many anticipated to see the boys leave for the mountains, but it was not possible. This was not only because of the darkness and the large number of people who had gathered, but also because a customary strategy was applied to ensure no one saw the novices leave. As Ndaba said, "The boys just disappear and you cannot see them. This is done for fear of witchcraft because not everyone is happy that the boys are going to the mountains; so they are snitched away." The clock ticked on and silence was slowly falling on the village because people were exhausted from dancing and most of them were drunk and slept where ever they found space to lay their heads. I kept my eyes open to try and see the boys leave, but it seemed too late, it was clear that the boys had already gone and no one saw them leave, confirming Ndaba's words. Suddenly the heavens opened and people ran to find shelter as large droplets began dropping from the skies. Lightning lit the dark mountain sides as thunder shook the location. I ran to my room for shelter and all of a sudden human voices diminished as everybody seemed to quietly listen to the jingle of the rains as it fell hard on the iron roofing sheets.

The Durkheimian Conception of Society

In Durkheim's classical conception of society (1995), the social world is composed not of masses of individuals but from the circulation of collective representations through a community. People come together in a sharing of consciousness, and these 'ideas' are what is processed into

what society calls beliefs and values. These could be considered to be the threads that made up 'society'. It could therefore be said that society is a group of people having the same ideas, beliefs and sharing the same value system. Durkheim calls this "mechanical solidarity," based on the synchronisation of beliefs and values through the circulation of representations. In the Hlubi case, a novice had to go the mountains in order to become a respected man and a part of society. To belong to a 'society' of men, formed as mechanical solidarity, different phases such as going through a shift from the profane to the sacred have to be experienced by a novice, and indeed, the entire purpose of the Hlubi initiation ceremony is to shift the novice from the profane to the sacred. It was evident during field work that when a novice had not undergone the process of initiation, he could not sit with the elderly people - even his own father - because he was considered to be profane and he was mostly addressed as uncircumcised boy (*inkwenkwe*) or as a dog (*inja)* (see Twala 2007:25). This is a slighting term among the Hlubi. Boys who had not undergone traditional male circumcision and initiation were ridiculed in the strongest sense. It is one of the utmost reasons boys highly consider undergoing the rituals because it was through them that they can become respectable persons of society (Mgqolozana 2009). "Society demands that people make themselves its servant while forgetting their own interests" (Durkheim 1995: 209). "The force of collectively is not wholly external; but that it enters into us and become organised within us, and it becomes an integral part of our being" (Durkheim 1995: 211).

A summary of material objects discussed in this chapter

Reflecting on the material culture used in the different rituals of initiation as discussed in this chapter it is interesting to note how the Hlubi initiation ceremony is systematically structured through different rituals which are performed by the novices with different material objects. The main material objects discussed in this chapter included; the grey blanket which a novice wraps

around his shoulders, ankle shakers (*magamise*) used mostly when performing a dance, cow bells are tied around the waist and they produce a loud sound wth any movement, especially dancing The cow skin (*isikumba senkomo*), is worn and also used as a mat for sleeping and sitting, protea wood (*isigoqo*) is used for cooking and to used to demonstrate the readiness of the novice to go to the mountain and the spear. The spear is used for slaughtering the cattle and is also used to protect the novice and the entire ritual process from any form of withcraft.

Chapter 4

Amanzi

"You cannot call yourself a man if you have not been to the mountains"

(Twala 2007, Mgqolozana 2009, Ndaba 2015).

These are not just Mountains

The Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains that almost surround Madlangala location are not just a natural feature but are suffused with symbolic value. "We the Hlubi people have a high regard for the mountains because we believe the spirits of the dead and our ancestors abode in the mountains," said Ndaba.The Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains were inscribed on the World Heritage list as a Mixed Site in the year 2000 for their "Outstanding Universal Values."[3] The mountains were recognised under various criteria because they provide a scenery with exceptional natural beauty, visually spectacular sculptures and caves filled with unique rock paintings which were painted by the San people who once occupied the area. The mountains also form a physical boundary separating the two countries of South Africa and the Kingdom of Lesotho as mentioned earlier. It could be said that the distance between Madlangala location and the mountains is similar to the distance that exists between two binary poles of the profane and the sacred. In the terms provided by Eliade (1959) in his model of the profane and sacred in relation to space, the Drakensberg Mountains could be considered a threshold, a boundary or a frontier which distinguishes and opposes two worlds - the sacred and the profane, a place where two worlds communicated, a passage which led one from the profane to the sacred world (Eliade

[3] The Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains were inscribed on the World Heritage list as a Mixed Site in the year 2000 for their "Outstanding Universal Values under criterion i, iii and x under the World Heritage Convention. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/985

1959:25). While the mountains are considered a point where the profane is translated to the sacred, I argue that it is also a point where the sacred is translated to become profane in order for the profane to become sacred. The two binary points co-exit and one cannot live without the other. It is through these mountains, a doorway, that the novices enter and are translated from one social status to the other. They are transformed from being boys to men; they shifted from the profane to the sacred. It is for this same rationale that if a man hadn't been to the mountains he was still considered to be profane (as highlighted in the previous chapter). The mountains are strongly believed to be sacred: it is in them that boys encountered a religious life, in the excluded spaces where the *amanzi* ritual took place.

It has to be mentioned at this point that I was not allowed to go the mountains to observe the rituals performed by the novices for my research purposes because of my not being Hlubi. However I was informed that there are a number material objects used to perform different rites in the mountains which are considered sacred and such information was only kept within the community. It is for that reason that this chapter focuses on the time the novices disappeared to the mountains and the time when they came back after a period of one month. Information pertaining to what happened in the mountains was obtained through meta-research and semi-structured interviews conducted with men and older women who were willing to share what they felt they could share with me. However elderly women were of great assistance as they proved to be knowledgeable of the rituals and material objects used in the mountains. As Gogo Mdaba claimed, "Before my husband died he told me everything that takes place in the mountains."

During my field work it became apparent that the Chief was not just perceived as a 'political' leader but also as a leader who also provided guidance on traditional ceremonies such as

initiation and other rituals. For instance, the Chief coordinated logistics for the medical doctor to perform circumcision on the novices and this included the selection of the space where the actual circumcision was performed. The Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains were used by different people from different locations for initiation rituals. It was the duty of Chief Spambo to allocated spaces for different groups to perform initiation rituals in the mountains. It is in the mountains where the seclusion hut was constructed, a hut where novices sat while nursing their wounds and receiving traditional lessons from selected elders. The seclusion hut is one of the most profound material structure constructed at a particular location with specific materiality and purpose. The construction of the hut was done according to particular dimensions and specifications given by the traditional *sangoma*. It is in the hut that the novice encountered what I term the 'supernatural'. It could be stated that the hut was embedded with 'powers' which caused dramatic occurrences to take place within the experiences of novices. This space was strictly a no-go zone for anybody except those who had been appointed to be part of the team to assist the traditional surgeon. Hlubi's are strict as to who visits the hut for fear of mischief, witchcraft being a major source of worry (see Ngwane 2004:180). It is for this reason that the spear used in slaughtering the bull and the ox (as elaborated in the previous chapter) is mounted at the entry to the hut to keep away any form of witchcraft directed against the novices. This material object is believed to keep away evil spirits.

Circumcision - It is no longer the knife

Hlubi traditional surgeons no longer operate on the novices using objects such as spears, knives or blades as the case was before 2004. This was prompted by concerns over several risk factors. First was the fear of initiates contracting diseases such as HIV/Aids as the same blade was used on multiple initiates. Secondly, the blades used were mostly blunt, causing cases where

candidates ended up having severe mutilation and amputation of the penis, and worse off, death. It was for this reason that the state intervened by formulating a law to govern circumcision. Despite this major shift in the material culture of circumcision, this had no major impact on how the Hlubi people perceived the initiation ceremony. The usage of contemporary medical apparatus has not changed the cultural values attached on male initiation. Indeed, 'culture' is not static: it changes with time encompassing other cultural variables. Perceptions of masculinity have also been changing with time. At one point, to become a man was perceived as going through pain and haemorrhage during initiation (Mogotlane *et al* 2004). Matobo *et al* (2009) and Mgqolozana (2009) highlight that there was a strong belief that inflicted pain was a vital component in the process of becoming a man. The experienced pain and haemorrhage inflicted by material objects used on the novices during the process of initiation were thought to be the model to become a man. However perceptions of a man undergoing pain before becoming a man have been challenged not only among Hlubi but in many African countries.

New law

Since the year 2004, Hlubi in Madlangala have been engaging a licenced medical doctor appointed by the Provincial Medical Board to perform circumcision on novices in the location following the enacted law: the Traditional Male Circumcision Act (No.6 of 2001) also commonly known as the Circumcision Act[4]. This move was enacted by the authorities because of the escalating numbers of young men facing genital amputation and even death while attending traditional male circumcision.

[4] The Traditional male Circumcision Act (No.6 of 2001) also commonly known as the Circumcision Act. The Act contains specifications of circumcision candidates such as the age, consent from parents/guardians, requirements the traditional surgeons and basic hygienic requirement/conditions. This was enacted because of the escalating numbers of young men having their genitals amputated while others died while attending the traditional male circumcision rituals in the Eastern Cape Province.

It is said that genital amputations and deaths were mostly caused by inexperienced traditional surgeons and the usage of blunt material objects. Mavundla, Netswera, Bottoman and Toth (2013) give the example of the 2009 scandal in which initiation schools in the Eastern Cape lost many young boys during the ritual. Most of the novices underwent complications which ended up requiring medical attention such as septicaemia, gangrene, severe dehydration and genital mutilation. Besides the above, initiates were exposed to high risks of contracting HIV/Aids because of using one and the same blade on multiple initiates. It could be argued that this Act was not enacted to redefine the value and meanings embedded in the traditional male initiation rituals but to control the escalating numbers of deaths and genital amputations which occurred during initiation ceremonies. Traditional surgeon Maraneni justified the local government's move in that "It is not that we are changing our 'culture' but it is about protecting our children; however everything else remains the same; remember we are the 'culture'." According to Ndaba, "If you notice since 2004, we have not had any boy die during our initiation ceremony, however a number of boys are still dying among the Xhosa because they are still using their own traditional surgeons who are not even qualified and that is why every year boys are dying; just this year 20 boys died, it is not good."

Every year before initiation ceremonies are held, the District Health Department of the Eastern Cape conducts meetings in Matatiele between the Provincial Medical Board and the Chiefs from the 26 different locations, as well as the traditional surgeons. It is at these meetings that the Chiefs submit how many boys registered to attend initiation school including the traditional surgeons who will be responsible for monitoring the recovery process. While interviewing the District Health Officer in charge of traditional circumcision ceremonies, he made it plain that it

was compulsory for the Chiefs and the traditional surgeons to attend these meetings and to submit a list of names of novices attending initiation school, their age, and consent from their parents for each particular season. "During these meetings we plan and host workshops where traditional surgeons are trained in basic hygiene and how to monitor wounds, including how to use the first aid kit. It is at these workshops that we required all surgeons to be certified and these practicing permits are to be renewed every year in accordance to the Traditional Health and Practitioners Act of 2004[5]". However the District Health Officer expressed dismay that certain locations did not adhere to the local government's call, and as a result novices still died in numbers in such locations.

Change and continuity

My informants say that the shift in the material practice of male circumcision, from traditional surgeons to medical doctors, did not change the significance of the initiation process as a whole. In order to capture some of these perceptions, women in different ages were interviewed. According to Spambo, "I cannot go out with a man who has not been to the mountains; because he knows nothing." In the mountains, men are taught how to be responsible and how to fend for their own families. Also, as Mkangara said, "On issues of intimacy, men who have not been to the mountains cannot satisfy a woman sexually because they are 'cold'—they are not powerful enough to satisfy a woman sexually." Spambo again: "The performance of 'boys' who have not been to the mountains is weak, they get tired too quickly; that is why they must go to the mountains." And Mkangara: "It is considered a taboo for a Hlubi girl to have her first sexual intercourse with a man who has not been to the mountains; it is bad luck." However Busiwe had a rather different perception in that, "there is no difference because it is still the same person only

[5] In 2004, the government South Africa enacted a law which required all traditional surgeons to be licenced according to the Traditional Health and Practitioners Act of 2004. While the move was to protect its citizens, the traditional leaders considered these moves as an insult to the long standing traditional legacy.

that he now felt proud that he has been to the mountains, however even a man who has not been to the mountains can still make you pregnant." Still, elderly women strictly kept to their 'tradition' and emphasized that their daughters marry someone who had been to the mountains because the young men were taught how to treat a woman well and they knew how to take care of the family. "It is our tradition and it has to be upheld with all diligence."

With the above interviews, it became apparent that the symbolic values of initiation had not fundamentally changed, including those of circumcision, in spite of the change in circumcision practice. The definition of masculinity was no longer defined by the pain which the novice endured but by undergoing a process of social transformation through the laid out rituals. It could be argued that the perception of masculinity had undergone a process of construction and deconstruction where the mountains were key to the construction of what it meant to be a man. The mountains denote values and respect bestowed on the novice. The mountains could also be considered as a doorway, a threshold, that separated the profane from the sacred; and those who have been to the mountains were regarded as having attained the religious status of being sacred and became part of a society of men. This also exemplifies how the mountains were perceived and embedded with cultural meanings and symbolic values.

The seclusion hut

After the boys are circumcised they are led to the seclusion hut where they stay while their wounds are being nursed and traditional knowledge is imparted to them. Turner (1969:52) states that the act of having the foreskin cut solidified the phase of separation of the novice from his society. Citing Gluckman, LaFontaine (1984:27) states that circumcision removed the skin which resembled the labia, the purpose being to separate a boy from the mother and create a distinction

between a woman and a man. She states that physical changes that take place during this phase are a severe test of the initiate's capacity to survive debilitating, exhaustion, cold, shock and loss of blood; wounds which may become infected or fail to heal. In this report, the seclusion hut is considered one of the most profound material structures constructed at a particular location. The construction and location were done according to particular dimensions and specifications. These specifications are issued by the traditional surgeon in charge of the proceedings. It is in this space that the novices sat and encountered what may be termed the 'supernatural'. It could be argued that the hut was embedded with 'powers' which caused dramatic occurrences to take place within the novices.

Witchcraft is real

Although it is not my intention to go deeper in discussing Hlubi perceptions or understandings of witchcraft, it is worth mentioning that in Madlangala as in most of South Africa there are elaborate discourses concerning witchcraft and magic. The subject is not discussed openly as it remains very contentious. However it is something that everyone believes exists, and people ensure they protect themselves and their families by visiting traditional healers to give them medicine for protection against ill-wishers. Anthropologists and archaeologists as well as historians have contended that witchcraft accusations indicate different sorts of tension in different social contexts (Niehaus 1997:251). Different meanings and interpretations as to what witchcraft is have been developed over time. However in this report, witchcraft is perceived as the secret use of *muthi,* spells and evil spirits by any person with an intention of cause harm, damage or sickness to another person or their property. Witchcraft is performed against the other for different reasons among which include jealousy, anger, envy and revenge. Witchcraft could also be perceived as doing harm to someone without any justifiable reason. During initiation

ritual, Hlubi ensure they protect the proceedings and the novices from any form of witchcraft by performing different rituals. They use diverse material objects to this end, such as the spear as described above, to protect the novices against any form of witchcraft. They mix water with *muthi* which they sprinkle on the pathway where the novices walk as a way of cleansing the pathway from any enchantments and planted mischiefs. They also use red ochre (*imbola*) to prevent evil spirits from coming near the initiates as will be discussed in the following sections.

Process of becoming a man - the liminal phase

The liminal phase, according to Van Gennep (1929), Turner (1969) and Eliade (1958) is described as the threshold where one is neither here nor there, making the state of the ritual subject ambiguous. The novice is no longer in the old state and has not yet reached the new state of being. It could also be referred to as a transitional phase of waiting to be transformed into another state. It could be argued that this is not only triggered by the processes of circumcision and sitting in the hut; but by a number of symbolic values which are attached to the ritual including its material objects. I was not informed of the material objects used during this phase as they were considered to be sacred. However it is in this phase that the above authors claimed that new birth took place in the novice. It is a phase where religious values and beliefs of a 'society' are impacted on the novices by the elders till they attained the phase of reintegration. It could also be argued that it was during this phase that a novice went through the process of 'death' and 'rebirth' into a new society according to the above authors. According to Durkheim (1995), it is a phase where the profane was translated to become sacred. This process of death and rebirth is a cardinal process in living a religious life. According to Bloch (1984), Merina initiates are symbolically dead and considered to have become spirits, as they undergo various

ordeals and lessons pertaining to the secrets of the community (Bloch 1984:9). Rebirth was inculcated in the novices through various sacred myths and traditional lessons.

Red ochre (Imbola) ritual

Two days after Christmas celebrations, I received a phone call from Ntate Ndaba that the boys were coming back from the mountains a day after New Year's Day. I hurriedly packed my backpack and travelled to my research site. After arriving in Mureneng village, information had reached the village that the boys were coming back from the mountains late that afternoon, however not as boys but as men. The atmosphere in the location was charged with a spirit of jubilation because of the coming back of the men. Fathers, mothers, uncles, aunties, brothers and sisters assembled at the traditional surgeon's home to prepare for the coming of the men. Different foods were prepared and traditional beer was brewed for people to enjoy during the massive celebration. Everyone was busy doing something. A fleet of different brands of cars with different provincial registration plates had filled the location as people travelled from different towns to witness the colourful event. At about mid-day, a number of men mostly aged 20 to 45 years old headed to the mountains to give moral support to the men. A few selected village elders assisted to prepare the boys for their comeback by bathing them and applying red ochre (*imbola*) on them. A lot of resources and money were invested by parents and the traditional surgeon in ensuring their sons underwent this important process. As Jojo told me, "Me and my wife had to save money for a long time just for this time; it is costly because there are a number of things that we were required to meet; but it's a joy."

I positioned myself at an isolated place and ensured I captured every moment of the coming back of the boys. Suddenly a thick dark cloud of smoke ascended in the clear skies in the mountains.

This was a sign that the seclusion hut was burnt including everything that was used during the initiation period. According to Ndaba, "The boys were forbidden to look behind as it was considered a taboo; bad things would follow one if they looked back." The 'now men' headed to the *Kinirha* River to birth and applied red ochre (*Imbola*) all over their bodies. The only clothing they wore were loin clothing made of sheep skin.

The horse men rode their horses to and fro announcing the coming of the 'now men' as those on foot danced in several single lines while singing and chanting in a harmonious traditional rhythm. All the men were carrying blankets in their hands and sticks. Occasionally mock stick fights broke out among the men as part of the ritual to display their strength and fighting skills. Dust ascended up the skies as the horses raced speedily to and fro. The chanting became louder and louder as men in unison lifted their voices and recited "*hooo hooo hooo*" and others responded accordingly "*hooo hooo hooo".* This chant was repeatedly sung to express the delight of the moment. It was clear it was about enjoying the moment. Women, girls and boys rose to the occasion and ran to watch the beautiful scenario.

The noise grew louder and louder as they came closer to the village and the initiates walked together in tight rows of three. The initiates appeared red and shiny because of the red ochre (*imbola*) they had applied on their bodies, including their hair. *Imbola* is a mixture of red ochre powder boiled together with Rama spread. According to Gogo Mdaba, "In the past our ancestors used to make this red ochre from a certain stone but there is no one with the knowledge of how to make the red ochre. That is why people today have to buy the red powder from town, it never used to be like that but it is something that is close." Studies of the history and archaeology of the Maloti-Drakensberg had it that the red pigment was in Sesotho called *Qhang Qhang.* Marion

How (1970) states that *Qhang Qhang* was regarded as powerful medicine which was used, among other things to ward off hail and lightning. It was also applied on babies' heads if the frontal bones did not join together readily (How 1970:34).

The boys were only wearing loin clothes made of sheep skin which also appeared to have been smeared with the red ochre. Maraneni told me, "We use sheep skin to make the loin clothes because they were softer and tender after being processed." In their hands the boys were holding a knobkerrie, a symbol of being a man. Only those who have been to the mountains can own this material object. Some of the knobkerries were decorated with different coloured beads positioned in different patterns. On the other hand the boys were holding shiny silver cans containing extra *imbola* to be used for the days to come, I was informed. Leading the entourage was a man probably in his early 20s carrying a container of water who sprinkled *muthi* on the grounds using a twig of a tree. The principal of the initiation school slowly rode his white and black horse right behind the man sprinkling *muthi* while holding up a spear in his left hand. The boys followed a herd of cattle which were positioned behind the principal. The herd of cattle belonged to the traditional surgeon. The cattle were led to the temporary kraal where the ox to be slaughtered was separated. Behind the boys there was yet another young man carrying another spear with *muthi* on it. I was informed by my informant that the spear which the principal carried was the same one used to slaughter the bull and the ox before the boys went up to the mountains. The spear is an important material object that is believed to contain very strong powers to protect the boys and the entire procession from any attacks of ill-wishers. As they came closer to the *iphempe* (enclosure), a place where they had departed from, the boys sprinted into the *khutla* (a shelter constructed in a kraal) before being recognised by friends and relatives.

A few minutes later the boys came out of the *khutla* wearing new thick colourful blankets, contrasting decisively with the grey blankets they had worn when they left. They proceeded into the kraal where they surrounded the ox. The novices stood in silence receiving instructions from the principal and after a few minutes they quickly returned into the *khutla*. When I enquired the content of instructions issued to the novices while surrounding the ox, my informant denied me the information and told me that it was only meant for those men and not for a researcher like me. The new blankets symbolised that the novices were no longer boys but men.

A wide range of free beers were offered to both the men and women who drank and celebrated as the sun went down. These celebrations continued all night. Some men burst into songs with lyrics such as these captured below:

Ndiyamezela (Bearing hardships as a man)

Umfazo udla ngokuphawa tphathwa kakubi - Men are always rough

Ngungeni kukdwa anynymezele - She's been good to him all the time

Amezela kuba efuna ukukhulisa ambatwane bakhe - she sacrificed to bring up her children

Kuthe xa kufika ithuba lokuthi kwanele - Now enough is enough

Ba ingenan wakhe aye entabeni wauwya kuba esazi - When the son will be back from the mountain she will have someone to protect her

kuba uza kuba nendoda - Now that her son has become a man

Eza kumele ke - He will defend her

Ndiyamezela - I will bear these hardships as a man

Lyrics and interpretation provided by (Gogo) Mrs M.E Mdaba 2015

Nlthethelenlani - (Still a young man)

Xa umutwana esemnema - When the children are still young

Utya kakhuu kuba unina - they eat too much when they are young

Ulibhongo abe yindoda - she wants him to become a man

Naye kodwa kufuneka - But in the long run he must change

Etshintshile aqase adle - because he's preparing to have a wife

Kunetho yoku lungiselela um fazi uza - and things will not be the same because the wife is not like the mother

iCulo ke lithelha nto lithi - That is what the song means

Nlthetheleleni ngebhekile eneana - Give him a small amounts of food in a container to prepare him

Lyrics and interpretation provided by (Gogo) Mrs V. N Mdaba (2015)

They sung such songs the whole night till most of them they were too drunk to do anything but sleep wherever they found space.

As the sun slowly awoke from its slumber with its light hitting the clear skies, young women, men and children made headway to a space where a ritual of spitting at the sun was to be performed. The novices walked in a single line from the *khutla* and lined up facing the horizon where the sun was rising. It seemed they had applied fresh *imbola* on their bodies and they were only wearing the loin clothes made of sheep skin. Just before the sun blinked above the horizon the principal instructed the boys to run and spit at the sun. This cursed the previous days of their lives when they were not men; this is a symbol of new beginnings Ndaba told me. They returned

in the *khutla* wore their new blankets and sung songs and recited poems which they had learnt whilst in the mountains about what it meant to be a man.







Figure 11. Left: A novice reciting a poem while hold a decorated knobkerrie, wearing a new blanket and *imbola* applied on his bodies
Figure 12. Right: Novices singing songs with themes centred on what it means to be a man
Figure 13. Below: Attentively listening to their colleague reciting a poem

According to Evans-Pritchard (1940) it was at such times that the Nuer men received from their fathers or uncle a spear, a material object which symbolised authority and manhood. It meant that a boy had become a warrior. He was also given an ox from which he took an ox name and became a herdsman (Evans-Pritchard 1940:254). As for Xhosa, Mgqolozana (2009) states that it was at this point that a father gave a stick to the son as a symbol of him becoming a man. In Madlangala, the parents bought a new blanket for the novices and a knobkerrie. Other items bought for the novices included handkerchiefs and differently decorated necklaces. The

decorated blanket was a symbol of being a man. This is the reinstatement phase of the novice into society. The novices recited different poems that they reflecting their personal thoughts of how they desired to live their lives as men. Ngwane (2004) affirms that it in this final phase where a novice is endowed with a renewed confidence, and which restores legitimacy to social hierarchies. It is through the highlighted rituals that novices learnt not only the behavioural patterns of society he lived in, the technique and the institution of adulthood but he also learnt about the sacred myths and traditions of the community, the names of ancestors, and their history.

Summary of material objects discussed in this chapter

This chapter has highlighted a number of material objects that were used in ritual processes when the boys were in the mountains and when returning to the community. It is important to note that before using the material objects, *muthi* was applied and different rituals were performed on them to protect them from ill-wishers, but this was mostly not disclosed to me. This could also be extended to the novices themselves. They attend these 'initiation schools' in order to be shifted from being 'profane' to become 'sacred'. It could be argued that this was attained through the process of death and rebirth in which material objects played a critical role. Before going to the mountains boys were considered to be profane, evidently they could not sit with elders including their own fathers and eat together on the same table because they are considered to be profane. However, after going to the mountains they were considered to be sacred, and it is then that they could participate in family affairs and have a meal with their fathers. The major material objects highlighted in this chapter included the spear, knobkerrie, red ochre (*imbola*), Rama spread, loin cloths made of sheep skin, colourful blankets, silver cans used to carry extra *imbola*, and the seclusion hut itself.

Chapter 5

Our Ancestors speak

It is time to cut the umbilical cord - ma

It rained heavily the night when the novices disappeared to the mountains. The village was quiet as thunderstorms periodically seemed to shake the entire village. Elderly people including Gogo Mdaba attached meaning to the rains that fell that night: "It was a message from the ancestors that they were pleased with the rituals and that they had accepted the boys" - because the rain symbolised blessings. Despite being a joyous night, it was also a night of pain, anguish and agony especially for the mothers to the initiates. Immediately the sun took its rest, mothers to the boys were separated from the rest of the people and assembled in one isolated room where they had to sit till a message was received from the mountains that the boys had been circumcised. A female *sangoma* appointed by the Chief issued instructions to the mothers on how they had to conduct themselves during this period. The performed rituals detached them from their sons. In order to do this, the mothers were required to sit on the floor, in one position, with their legs stretched out together, this position had to be maintained and not changed unless instructed by the female *sangoma*. Sleeping, standing up, walking around to stretch, or talking during this ritual, were all strictly forbidden. No matter how long the circumcising of the boys in the mountain took, the women were required to sit in this one room in the same position till news was received from the mountains that the boys had been circumcised. Changing sitting position, standing up or even sleeping was believed to have a negative effect on the entire process of circumcising the boys. Looking again to the classical models of Van Gennep (1924), Eliade

(1958) and Turner (1969), this enacted the separation of mother from son, and was therefore crucial to the process of initaion itself, allowing boys to pass into adult masculinity.

It was slightly after midday the following day when a horseman raced to the village to deliver the news that the boys were circumcised. It was then that the female *sangoma* instructed the mothers to stand from their sitting positions. I was not privy to information on what sorts of material objects the female *sangoma* used to perform ritual acts before releasing the women to stand. But I was told that this rite is also evocative of a mother giving birth and weaning off the child because he had now become a man. After receiving the news, the mothers danced and celebrated, and they sang songs focusing on what it meant to be a mother. All of a sudden they seemed to have forgotten the pain and anguish of sitting in one position for the entire night. They wore *magamise* on their feet and danced waving blankets in the air. The celebrations were filled with energy like that of receiving news that a new baby was born to a family.

Eight days

The first eight days of being in the mountains were critical to the recovery of the boys; and the traditional surgeon was paramount in ensuring all the boys recovered well. Among his tasks included continuously checking on the boys and taking necessary action in case one had an infection. Most importantly, the recovery process of the initiates was said to be determined by parents taking heed to instructions issued to them by the traditional surgeon. Not taking heed to the instructions posed a serious danger to the boys. Parents were instructed to abstain from engaging in sexual intercourse during the first eight days. As Ngwane states in his account of initiation elsewhere in the Eastern Cape, "the men themselves posed a danger to the initiates; should they engage in sexual intercourse within a day the men got into the hut, the impurity

would inflame initiates' penises" (Ngwane 2004:180). Like, as Jojo told me in Madlangala, "We were instructed to refrain from having sex during the first eight days, because if we did, it would affect the boys from recovering well." Women were further instructed to refrain from handling sharp material objects such as blades and knives, and they were not allowed to cross rivers or streams. Furthermore, activities such as grinding millet, painting houses or even cutting finger nails was strongly believed to have a negative impact on the recovery process of the boys. Mothers were strictly forbidden from undertaking such activities and if they did not adhere to the instructions, misfortune would befall the boys. Any misfortune that occurred in the mountains was believed to have been caused by people who infuriated the ancestors because they failed to adhere to instructions issued to them by their messenger, the *sangoma.* It was interesting to note how mothers were in someways critical to the entire ritual of male circumcision.

In the course of my time in Madlangala I also became aware of ritual processes that were not linked to male initiation, and in the remainder of this chapter I give brief accounts of a few of these, with an emphasis on their material-cultural dimensions and the forms of cultural discourse that surround them. I place these accounts in this chapter because, like the separation of sons from mothers which I have just described, they are focused mainly on women as ritual agents.

Our ancestors live on

Nosiphelo Muraren is a divorced woman in her early 30s with two young children, a boy of ten and a girl of eight. She was in the process of remarrying at the time I met her, and she worked for Fire-wise. Besides her children, she stayed with her aging grandmother, who mostly sat in her circular house. Nkosinathi and I sat on a bench in the circular kitchen, which had two beds placed opposite each other and a metallic stove which stood on the far corner leaning against the

unpainted mud wall. Next to the stove was a wooden table with assorted kitchen utensils. Under the wooden table was a scratched orange paraffin cylinder stove which was currently not being used. I was told that paraffin stoves were commonly used in the location because they proved to be cheaper than gas stoves. The grass roof had almost turned dark grey in colour because of the smoke discharged from the paraffin stove, I assumed. The floor appeared to have been redone recently. After inquiring how and with what material they used in constructing their houses and floors I was informed that they used cow dung for the flooring.

As our conversation proceeded, Muraren began to address the place of the dead in Hlubi life: "Ancestors were our family members; fathers, grand fathers, mothers, uncles and so on who once lived and are now dead but still live on though we cannot see them." One of the roles of the ancestors was to protect and guide their family members: "The ancestors protect us and they give us instructions on what we are required to do in order to life a good life." "Instructions are mostly issued to us in dreams and sometime through visions," said Muraren. As Ntombekeya told me, "My dead grandmother visited me in my dreams and told me I had been chosen by the ancestors to become a *sangoma*. I tried to ignore the dream and the instruction but I had no peace within me. Things in my life started turning upside down. For no reasons I was fired from work, my marriage started shaking for no apparent reasons until we had to divorce with my husband, and it was then that I realized that I had to follow what the ancestors where instructing me, that is how I became a *sangoma*." She was instructed by her ancestors to use a number of material objects, Ntombekeya further explained, including white beads, cloths used for different purposes, a horse tail whisk, and other things she could not show me. She explained that once she wore the material objects they gave her powers to get into a certain 'space' where she was able to diagnose a patients' problem and gave them solutions to their problems. When she wore these

materials and performed corresponding rituals, "it is not me who speaks but someone overshadows me and speaks through me; those are my ancestors." In other words, these items enabled Ntombekeya to access the ancetsral realm that empowered her to treat people.

Amasiko -'our culture'

Amasiko is a general term that refers to different rituals performed for ancestors for different reasons, Muraren explained. *Amasiko* is an Nguni term also used to refer to 'cultural beliefs'. The singular term for a ritual or 'custom' is *isiko*. In this study *amasiko* is taken to mean ritual performances. Different rituals are performed at different times of the year by either individuals or a family who feel obliged to appease or make petition to the ancestors. According to Hylton White (2004:146), Zulu people make such sacrifices when people go through trouble, strife and bad luck in their lives, and the same of course applies throughout southern Africa, including in the Hlubi case. Rituals are performed to either appreciate or make petition to the ancestors when things were not going well. Petitions for employment, good health among family members, finances, having children, productive farming season, and good business opportunities and many others are brought before the ancestors through rituals. During these rituals animals such as chickens, sheep, goat and cattle are slaughtered. In the case of all these animals, the internal organ, especially the gallbladder (*inyogo*) was used to make *muthi* by mixing it with herbs and water. This mixture was sprinkled either on people, houses and other properties as an appeal to the ancestors for protection. As Ndaba told me, "The reason why the gallbladder is used is because of its functionalities in an animal; it is able to cleanse and get rid of any poisonous substance in the blood which may endanger an animal." It is for that reason that the Hlubi people believe that the same functionalities could be translated and used to protect them including everything that concerned them especially after rituals are performed over it.

Impepho

In all Hlubi ritual, a plant locally known as *impepho* was used because of the powers believed to be embedded in it. Scientifically the plant is known as *Helichrysum odoratissimum*. *Impepho* grows in most parts of the location of Madlangala. When fully grown the plant has white frost green leaves with a brown stem and when flowering, eye catching yellow flowers illuminate the plant. When dried, the plant is burnt and the smoke is believed to have powers to cleanse, purify and to protect the physical and spiritual bodies. Ancestors are evoked by the smell of the burning plant, and as a result it is mostly used in homes to invite the presence of the ancestors, especially in difficult and trying times including during rituals. As Dold and Cock (2012:73) put it, "The pungent spicy odour of the smoke is used to facilitate communion with ancestors during rituals." For self-cleansing and purification, the plant is burnt and smoke is allowed to fall freely on one's body, to keep away misfortune. Before embarking on a long journey, Hlubi burn *impepho* and allow the smoke to fall freely on them, including the mode of transport; this is believed to keep away bad spirits. The plant is believed to have the powers that burnished away all negative energies and allows the ancestors to protect people from evil spirits. When making petitions to the ancestors for various issues that a family was going through, traditionally brewed beer *Umqombothi, inyogo* mixed with *muthi* and water are placed alongside *Impepho* at a specific space and if ancestors used to smoke tobacco or even dagga, these would be burnt at that particular space in order for them to be pleased with us. *Impepo* is also used in the mountains to keep evil away from the novices in the seclusion hut.

Imbeleko ritual

There are four main Hlubi life-cycle rites: at birth, at traditional male initiation, at marriage and at death. When a baby is born in a family, *imbeleko* ritual is performed to introduce the baby to the ancestors. This ritual is performed after the remnant of the umbilical cord drops from the baby's body. In performing this ritual, a goat (*ibokwe*) is first presented to the baby and the father explains to the baby about the ritual. Hlubi believe that babies understand when spoken to. The animal is slaughtered at sun rise and blood is allowed to freely drop into the earth as a sacrifice to the ancestors. The knife used in the process of slaughtering the animal is ritually cleansed and purified before the slaughter. The internal organs are removed and offered to the ancestors alongside traditional brewed beer which is placed in a calabash. This ritual is performed at a selected 'space' known to be a doorway to the ancestors. It is at these spaces that an animal is sacrificed and the baby introduced to the ancestors and petitions for protection, good health and success in all life endeavours are made on behalf of the baby. The skin of the goat is processed to be used as a mat for the baby to sleep on and the meat is boiled and eaten by the family members present after the ritual is completed. This is done in many parts of southern Africa, but with differences in procedure. As Morebane told me, "The Xhosa people process part of the tail skin with *muthi* known as *blao* and made a necklace for the baby to wear while the Zulu people process a string (*sphandla*) from the goats tail and tied it on the wrist of the baby." Milk from a white female goat is placed in a bowl and placed on the door way of the main house. Every family member has to pass through the door way except for those who had just given birth. When asked what this act symbolised, Mashinini told me, "its *amasiko*, that is how it has always been done, but I think it is something to do with being pure and upright." When cleaning the inside of the goat, the dung is smeared on the door way of the house where the mother and baby stay. This declares that the house is opened up to the ancestors to freely visit the house at

any given time. When eating the goat, or the sheep, women are given the large intestines while men are given the small intestines. This is because women carry the womb while men do not, according to Muranen. This recapitulates a much more general symbolic isomorphism between people and animals. For a baby, a goat is slaughtered, and offered to ancestors while its skin is processed into a mat to be used by the baby to sleep. But men used a cow skin as a sleeping mat.

Muchabiso ritual

Another life-cycle rite is *muchabiso.* This is mostly performed after a man has paid brideprice (*lobola*) to his in-laws. The father to the bride slaughters an ox to express gratitude to the groom for respecting the family by paying *lobola*. As highlighted in chapter 3, cattle play a vital role when a man wants to marry. The brideprice was mostly converted to a number of cows a man had to present to the bride's family. In instances where a man did not have enough animals the brideprice was still converted from animals into monetary form. Only after making full payments and buying other material items such as blankets for the bride's family and a hat for the father in-law, was the man acknowledged as the husband to the woman and the *muchabiso* ritual was performed for the man by slaughtering an ox. Certain parts of the animal were given to the man, such as the head of the animal. After taking his wife home, other rituals were performed where a sheep was slaughtered and the gallbladder was mixed with *muthi* for the woman to drink as a way of introducing her to the new family and to the family ancestors. According to Gogo Mdaba, if this ritual was not performed, the couple were likely not to enjoy their marriage as it would be filled with misunderstandings, fighting and worse off they may end up not have any children because they did not invoke the ancestors into their marriage. In other instances when a woman is married and brought to her new home, *muthi* is mixed in a basin with herbs as well as the blood of the slaughtered animal, and the couple were expected to bath in this mixture. This was

done in order to inform the ancestors that the two were now husband and wife. After performing these rituals the woman is given a new name by the family to the husband. At the name giving ceremony, a goat is slaughtered for the woman, old clothes are taken away from her, and she is dressed with new long clothes which include a long dress, head scarf and a blanket to cover her waist. The replacment of her clothes begins a new phase of life which is believed to be recognised by the ancestors, and from then on she is called by her marital name. A similar rite is performed when either a man or woman lose their marriage partners through death. However in this regard, the ritual is performed to the ancestors as a petition to cleanse the surviving partner from the spirit of death or any other evil spirits that would be hovering around them. A sheep is slaughtered and its gallbladder mixed with *muthi* for the surviving partner to bathe in for eight consecutive days, for the spirit of the dead partner to release them from any oppressions and bad luck. The rest of the slaughtered animal was boiled and had to be eaten on that same day. If this was not done, Gogo Mdaba told me, the surviving partner may also fall sick and consequently die including their children if at all they had because the spirit of death would be haunting and killing them one by day till they all finish.

I am a Hlubi woman

Married Hlubi women in Madlangala follow a specific dress code, which distinguishes them from women in other communities. Every married Hlubi woman is expected to wear a long dress or a long skirt, and her head has to be covered at all times with a blanket wrapped around her waist. This is not only to show respect to her husband but to the ancestors. The head dress known as *iqhiyae* is worn to show respect to both the living and the dead, most especially the parents to the husband. Only the husband is allowed to see the hair of the wife, and no one else. Wherever the women went their head had to be covered.



Figure 14: Marital dress

Similarly to the head, the waist has to be covered at all times with a blanket known as *ityali*. Head and hips must not be seen by the in laws, or anyone else expect for the husband. As one woman told me, "When the women are still young they wear *ityali* on their shoulders but when they are older they wear it around their waist. This is because when they are still young men need to see and appreciate the beauty of the young woman but when they get married it is not allowed, only the husband should see such. The Hlubi dresses worn by women were known as *makhoti*, after the term for wife. The dresses are long covering most of the legs. They had different colours, patterns and decorations.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

You made us but we make you - Material Culture

After undertaking this research, it became apparent that initiation could be described as an all-inclusive terminology which included several different ritual processes performed so that novices could transition to being members of a society of men. Traditional male circumcision is one of the rituals performed during the initiation ceremony, but all phases of the ritual cycle involve the reconstruction of the human body, dress and so on through a variety of material acts that pivot on the use of material-cultural items. The use of material culture is intrisnic to the process of personal transformation and social reproduction. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, objects such as the spear used in slaughtering sacrificial animals protected both the novices and the broader ritual process from ill-wishers and from witchcraft. This also included the red ochre (*imbola*) applied on the novices symbolising new birth and protection from ill-wishers. The novices held knobkerries in their hands as a manner of being men. In diverse ways, humans are remade through technologies and things.

Male initiation could be described as one of the most organised and structured ceremonies celebrated by Hlubi in the Eastern Cape. It was also considered as the most important ritual which brought a novice to develop a sense of identity and become part of a society. As highlighted, during initiation, Hlubi host four rituals which the novices were required to undergo in order to be considered as fully grown men. If a novice did not undergo these rituals, he was

not regarded a man despite his age. Through the research it was learnt that since the year 2004, the Hlubi people have been engaging a medical doctor, assigned by the Provincial Medical Office to perform the actual operation of circumcision using modern hospital apparatus. However this did not fundamentally challenge or change the way in which the ritual cycle is understood. By literally taking medical circumcision onto the mountain, rather than shifting the act of circumcision to the space of clinic, the space of the mountains is preseved as a threshold for the transformation of boys into men. It is in the mountains that a novice is taught, and shifted from being profane into being sacred.

Besides the core value of making a novice to become a man and part of a society of men, other forms of cultural value have been attached to the ritual. Over the past years male circumcision has been understood to provide protection for men from contracting diseases, such as HIV/Aids as well other sexually transmitted diseases. Due to some of these claims, the numbers of males attending traditional circumcision schools has escalated over the years and because of such 'facts' the ideology of commodifying the circumcision ritual can not be overlooked. However during the entire initiation process the core values of the rituals were stressed to the candidates and this was done through the different ritual processes they underwent and performed. Among the core values emphasized during initiation process is respecting the elderly and respecting every person despite of their background, building families where the men are fully responsible for their families, and last but not the least, honouring the ancestors.

Material objects used in different rituals

Different material objects are used during traditional male initiation ceremony. Hlubi initiation ceremony is well defined including the material objects embedded with symbolic values used in

all the rituals. The different ritual processes are strictly adhered to and it is not as simple as one walking into the hospital and be circumcised As highlighted in chapter 3, *Ukuyeza* is the first rite in the cycle. It affirms the novices' readiness to undergo the process of initiation and become respectable men. Material objects used during the ritual included grey blankets which the novice wore to proclaim their readiness to undergo initiation. The novice wore *amagamise* on their feet and they also fetched protea wood (*isigoqo*) from the mountains, which they presented to the traditional surgeon.

The second ritual is *Basekhutla.* The ritual constitutes a 'place where boys and men assembled' before they disappear to the mountains. During *Basekhutla* the novices wear a dried processed cow skin (*isikhumba senkomo)*, which suggested invoking the ancestors. For Hlubi as for many southern Africans, cattle are part of the domesticated order of society because they bridge the gap between the dead and the living, the physical and the divine, humans and ancestors. Cattle would only be slaughtered on three occasions; after a man paid bridal price in full (*lobola*), during traditional male initiation, and after death. There is nothing that is thrown away from a slaughtered animal. Cow skins are used as mats in the mountains by the novices. During the rituals people dance with cow bells tied around their waist as they believed that the sound of the bells pleases the ancestors. Men performed mock fighting using sticks during this phase of the ritual cycle. It is only those who had been to the mountains who were permitted to carry and own these sticks (see Mgqolozana 2009). The sticks are carved from various tree species; there is no specific tree species used for making the sticks. The metallic spearhead is the other material object used in ritual. The spear is used to slaughter the cows (a bull and an ox) after applying *muthi* on it. The object is also believed to protect the novices from any form of witchcraft and

misfortune. Wherever the novices went, two men held spears up high; one in front and the other followed behind.

In the third ritual, *Umgubo* ritual, the novices disappeared to the mountains at midnight. Once they had separated themselves from the community, the boys underwent circumcision before getting to the seclusion hut where they sat while recovering. It is during this period of recovering that novices were taught traditional stories and ideas about what it means to be a Hlubi man. During this period different songs were taught to the boys mainly focusing on what it meant to be a man. After a period of one month, the novices come back from the mountains not as boys but as men. On the day of their return, red ochre (*imbola)* and rama spread are mixed, boiled together ,and after the mixture has cooled down, selected elders apply it to the bodies of the boys. The only thing the boys wear are loincloths made of sheep skin. In their hands they carry a knobkierie and silver cans filled with extra *imbola.* Later the boys wear new luxurious and colourful blankets as a symbol of being a new person. The material culture used during this ritual mainly signified the rebirth of the novices into a society.

Supposition

Considering the different rituals the novices perform during the initiation ceremony, it could be argued that the entire ceremony enabled the novices to pass through different initiation phases for specific purpose. I suggest that this follows the model proposed by Eliade (1958) although it clearly also resonates with other models of ritual process such as Van Gennep (1906) and Turner (1962). In all of these phases, objects and technologies are fundamental to the reconstruction of the person. It could be argued that material culture used in the rituals listed above and described in the detail in the different chapters are not just fabricated objects, but they defined and give

meaning to the rituals and the people; as they facilitated the process of one becoming a respected man in society. It is the symbolic values embedded in these material objects that facilitated and validated the transition or the shift from the profane to sacred. Latour (2007) highlights how non-human actants are routinely neglected by social and cultural analysts in their quest to understand social processes. "Social explanations ran the risk of hiding that which they should reveal since they remain too often 'without objects'" (Latour 2005:82). Reading Durkheim contrarily through Latour, it could be argued that it is through the non-human or through material culture that the collective consciousness of society is fashioned. It is the non-human or material objects that give form and meaning to human life. Hlubi initiation ritual strongly bears out this claim.

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ANNEXURE 1

School of Social Sciences - Anthropology

School of Social Sciences • Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050, South Africa • Tel: +27 11 717-4404 • Fax: +27 11 717-4419

E-mail: social.anthropology@wits.ac.za • Website: http://ssocial.wits.ac.za/anthropology.htm

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Summary of the study: Understanding and documenting material culture used in traditional male circumcision among the Hlubi speaking people of Matatiele

The research is aimed at understanding the roles which material culture play in the traditional ritual. This is perused in order to understand why the ethnic groups like the Hlubi emphasize on undergoing traditional male circumcision and not medical circumcision.

1. Reasonably the expected benefit of the project will include:
   a. The research will broaden my understanding of material culture in the context of traditional circumcision
   b. The research will also benefit the ethnic group being studied as they will have broader knowledge of their material culture and how they can properly handle their material culture which could eventually lead to reduced fatalities
   c. The research will contribute to the study on material culture
2. The procedure will mainly include interviews where identified participants will be required to describe the objects used in the ritual including their meanings
3. Being a sensitive research topic, this may cause some sought of discomfort to discuss about the ritual because it is considered to be sacred.
4. The alternative means of conducting this research could have been through written articles, books, videos however the Hlubi ethnic group has not been research on extensively.
5. The expected duration for your participation in this interview is one (1) hour or less only
6. Your participation in this interview is absolutely voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can stop at any time. If you refuse to participate now, or withdraw from the study later, it will not have any effect on yourself. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.
7. Any information shared in this interview will be treated confidentially. Information that identifies you as an individual will not be published without your written consent
8. If you have questions about this study, or your rights you may call or write to University of the Witwatersrand

APPENDIX 2

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

My names are John Zulu. I am a Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand and I am currently doing my research as part of my studies. My research aims at documenting the material culture used in traditional male circumcision among the Hlubi speaking people of Matatiele. I am interested in understanding how these material objects are made, how they are used and rituals performed on them including their meaning.

I am asking you to participate in this study because you are aware of the traditional ceremony including its values. If you agree to participate in this project, I will request for information about these material objects, their meanings and values attached to them

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to take part in formal interviews and informal conversations. The conversations will take place at scheduled times by prior agreement. The meetings will take place at locations which are suitable to you. Please be aware that they will be no payment of any kind involved, and that participation in the research is voluntary, not a requirement. You should be aware that if at any time during your participation in the research you are asked questions that make you uncomfortable, you may refuse to answer them. Please also be aware that you can withdraw from participation in the study at any time. If you wish your identity to be kept confidential in the report which is generated from this research, please tell me and I will use pseudonym.

The final research report will be available online through the university library website. If you have questions regarding the research you can contact me by email or phone. At your request I will also send you a copy of the final report if you are interested in reading it.

Thank you very much for considering your participation in this research.

My contact details:

Mobile No. 0796536432 Email: johnzulu1@yahoo.com

My Supervisor's Email: Hylton.White@wits.ac.za OR Sam.Challis@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX 3

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E-mail: social.anthropology@wits.ac.za • Website: http://ssocial.wits.ac.za/anthropology.htm

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Understanding and documenting material culture used in traditional male circumcision among the Hlubi speaking people of Matatiele of the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

Researcher: John Zulu (0712076N

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study the material objects used in traditional male circumcision, how they are made, rituals performed on the objects and how they are stored
2. **Procedures to be followed:** A series of questions based on the purpose of study
3. **Duration:** 1 hour or less
4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is strictly confidential. The data will be stored and secured at *46 Hampstead Apartments, Biccard Street, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa* in a *laptop that is password protected*. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.
5. **Voluntary Participation:** Sharing information with regards to this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time you feel like not going on. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your record.

Participant Name & Signature **Date**

JOHN ZULU (0712076N)

Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX 4

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CONSENT FOR AUDIO TAPING AND TAKING OF PHOTOGRAPHS :

I hereby consent to recording the interviews and taking photographs where I am allowed to. I understand the confidentiality l am required to maintain at all times. The recorded interviews will be destroyed after two year after any publication arising from the study or six years after completion of my study if there are no publications.

Name:_____

Date:_____

Signature:_____

APPENDIX 5 - QUESTIONNAIRES

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE CHIEF AND ELDERS

Male

Female

Age: 18-25 25-35 35-44 44- 60 60-70, 70 and above (**Please tick**)

YES NO Record the interview **(Please tick)**

1. What is the name of the area in which you are recognised as the chief/sub-headman
2. How long have you been the chief/headman of this area?
3. Is traditional male circumcision and initiation important to the people of this area?
4. If so why?
5. What is the difference between traditional male circumcision and medical circumcision?
6. Where do these rituals take place and who selects these spaces?
7. Why are these spaces significant?
8. Why should a young man attend traditional male circumcision and initiation and not medical circumcision?
9. What material objects are used in traditional male circumcision?
10. What meanings do these objects have?
11. How are these meanings attached to these objects?
12. Who fabricates or produces these objects?
13. Who is custodian of these objects and how are they stored after the ceremony?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR ELDERLY WOMEN

Male

Female

Age: 18-25 25-35 35-44 44- 60 60-70, 70 and above (**Please tick**)

YES NO Record the interview **(Please tick)**

1. What is the role of traditional male circumcision in relation to women?
2. What are the values and meanings attached to the ritual?
3. Why should young men young men undergo traditional male circumcision and not medical circumcision?
4. Where do these rituals take place and who selects these spaces?
5. Why are these spaces significant?
6. Do you know of any objects used in traditional male circumcision?
7. If yes what are they?
8. What are their values and meanings?
9. What are your views on medical circumcision?
10. What is your comment on Government's move to develop laws to govern circumcision?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR MEDICAL OFFICERS

Male

Female

Age: 18-25 25-35 35-44 44- 60 60-70, 70 and above (**Please tick**)

YES NO Record the interview **(Please tick)**

1. What is your understanding of traditional male circumcision and initiation?
2. What is the main difference between traditional male circumcision and medical circumcision?
3. What has been the response of young men to medical facilities in this area?
4. What are the instruments used in performing medical circumcision?
5. Are there any meanings attached to the instruments?
6. What are the steps involved in medical circumcision?
7. Would you know what objects are used in traditional male circumcision?
8. How many young men have been admitted and treated for infections resulting from traditional male circumcision?
9. What are the causes of these infections?
10. Does the community comply with Government regulations with regards to traditional male circumcision?
11. What is your comment on Government's move to develop laws to govern circumcision? Where do these rituals take place and who selects these spaces
12. Why are these spaces significant?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR TRADITIONAL SURGEONS

Male

Female

Age: 18-25 25-35 35-44 44- 60 60-70, 70 and above (**Please tick**)

YES NO Record the interview **(Please tick)**

1. When did you start practising as a traditional surgeon?
2. How did you become a traditional surgeon?
3. In your view why is traditional male circumcision important to this community?
4. What objects do you use in performing traditional male circumcision?
5. What are the meanings and significances of these objects?
6. Who makes these objects and how were they made?
7. What is the significance of the raw material used in fabricating these objects?
8. Do you perform any rituals on the objects before, during and after performing circumcision?
9. If yes what are these rituals and what are their meanings?
10. Who is the custodian of the objects after the ceremony?
11. How are these objects stored when not in use?
12. In your view what is the difference between medical circumcision and traditional male circumcision?
13. What is your comment on Government's move to develop laws to govern circumcision?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE INITIATES AND THOSE WHO HAVE UNDERGONE THE RITUAL

Male

Female

Age: 18-25 25-35 35-44 44- 60 60-70, 70 and above (**Please tick**)

YES NO Record the interview **(Please tick)**

1. Why did you decide to be traditionally circumcised?
2. Why didn't you want to be circumcised medically
3. In your view, what are the benefits of being traditionally circumcised?
4. What are the objects used in traditional male circumcision
5. What are the values and significances of these objects?
6. What does traditional male circumcision mean to you?
7. Outline the stages you passed through during the process of circumcision.
8. What are the meanings of these stages?
9. Do you possess any object from the ceremony?
10. If yes, what is it?
11. And what is its significance?
12. What is your comment on Government's move to develop laws to govern circumcision?
13. Where do these rituals take place and who selects these spaces?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR WOMEN AGED 20-35 YEARS OLD

Male

Female

Age: 18-25 25-35 35-44 44- 60 60-70, 70 and above (**Please tick**)

YES NO Record the interview **(Please tick)**

1. What are your perceptions of a real man?
2. What do you know about traditional male circumcision?
3. Why do you think traditional male circumcision is important?
4. Why should young men undergo traditional male circumcision and not medical circumcision?
5. Do you know of any objects used in traditional male circumcision?
6. If yes, name them?
7. What are their meanings and significance?
8. What is your comment on Government's move to develop laws to govern circumcision?
9. Where do these rituals take place and who selects these spaces?
10. Why are these spaces significant?

