

# **Xhosa twins as a theme in conceptually motivated sculptural artworks.**

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of: Magister Technologia: Fine Art in the Department of Visual Arts and Design, Faculty of Human Sciences, Vaal University of Technology.

2015

## DECLARATION

I, Sonwabiso Ngcai, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own independent work, except where otherwise stated. The dissertation has not previously been submitted at any other university. All sources are acknowledged, and explicit references are provided.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sonwabiso Ngcai', written over a dotted line.

Sonwabiso Ngcai

Date: 11 March 2016

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recognition and appreciation go to the following people who have contributed to both my writing and practical components:

To my mother, Tabile Ngcai, my twin brother, Monwabisi, my younger brother, Siyabonga, as well as to my woman Chwayita Thathoba, for their support and encouragement.

To my supervisor, Dr. John Steele, I could not have made it without your patience and guidance, and to my co-supervisor Linda du Preez, for being courageous and supportive from the beginning to the end of the study.

To Lynden Page for proof reading my work - I could not have done this without your kind help and patience.

To Churchill Madikida and Mziwoxolo Makalima for their conceptual and technical advice.

To the National Arts Council for financial support.

To the Vaal University of Technology, Walter Sisulu University and Lovedale College (Alice Campus) for the use of their facilities.

To all the informants from all areas that contributed to this study, especially twins.

To the Ann-Bryant Art Gallery.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Tabile Ngcai.

## **ABSTRACT**

My Masters of Fine Arts degree consists of two components: the dissertation and practical works in the form of sculptures displayed as an exhibition. This body of work explores myth, belief and ritual practices relating to birth, life and death of twins in Xhosa culture. The purpose of the dissertation is to enrich and reflect on both the understanding of Xhosa ritual practices and that of my own work. The study will hopefully add significantly to the body of knowledge about Xhosa Indigenous Knowledge Systems as relating to twins. UNESCO emphasizes that Indigenous Knowledge Systems are part of immaterial cultural heritage such as languages, music and dance, festivities, rituals and traditional craftsmanship, and this cultural heritage is important for the identity of a society (Kaya & Masoga 2008:2). The choice of employing auto-ethnography in this qualitative study is derived from lived experience. Born as a twin in a rural Xhosa community, I experienced some unusual practices during my upbringing and thus a qualitative research method is used, involving auto-ethnography. This methodological approach aims at exploration of personal experience as a focus of investigation. The study also looks briefly at Yoruba twins as a means of finding similarities and commonalties with those of Xhosa culture.

## **KEY WORDS**

Lived experience, twinship, myths, beliefs, ritual practices, birth, life, death, clay, sculpture, installation art, amaXhosa, Xhosa culture, Yoruba culture, auto-ethnography, Post-Structuralism.

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

### **Amawele**

This is a Xhosa word for twins in the plural form. *Wele* is singular meaning for a twin.

### **Twinship**

This is a word to describe the relationship between twins.

### **Xhosa speaking people**

“These are South Africans that are part of the Southern Nguni (Xhosa, Zulu and Swati) group that are mainly based in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. They are divided into several subgroups that are distinct but related. These subgroups are Bhaca, Bomvana, Mfengu, Mpondo, Mpondomise and Xesibe. The majority of the Xhosa live in the Eastern Cape, followed by Western Cape, Gauteng, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, North West, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and Limpopo. The Xhosa speak isiXhosa, which is the second most common language spoken in South Africa after isiZulu” (Yawa 2010:10).

### **Myth**

“A myth is a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it; it is a story believed to have been composed in the past about an event in the past, or, more rarely, in the future, an event that continues to have meaning in the present because it is remembered; it is a story that is part of a larger group of stories” (O’Flaherty 1995:27).

### **Belief**

A feeling of not having doubt that something exists.

### **Culture**

“The customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group” (Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary - OALD 2010:357).

### **Post-Structuralism`**

“A style of critical reasoning that focuses on the moment of slippage in our systems of meaning as a way to identify - right there, in that ambiguous space - the ethical choices that we make, whether in our writings or in everyday life, when we overcome the ambiguity and move from indeterminacy to certainty of belief in an effort to understand, interpret, or shape our social environment” (Harcourt 2007:1).

### **Auto-Ethnography**

“A qualitative research method that combines characteristics of ethnography and autobiography. It provides for writers, artists, performers and others to reflect critically upon their personal and professional creative experiences” (Pace 2012:1).

### **Sculpture**

“Three-dimensional media that occupies space defined through the dimensions of height, width and depth. It includes sculpture, installation and performance art, decorative art, and product design” (Saylor, 2011).

### **Installation art**

“Installation art is a term that loosely refers to the type of art into which the viewer physically enters, and which is often described as theatrical, immersive or experiential” (Bishop 2005:1).

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As an identical twin, I grew up as an object of other people's inquisitiveness. Much of this curiosity seemed to be levelled not only at me and my twin's physical appearance, but at some sort of perceived mysterious notion surrounding twins in our society. I began to pay closer attention to how and why people are interested in twins, and I soon realised that a likeness in physical appearance was just one of many reasons why twins are treated differently.

My interest in twinship as I call it, began in 2007 whilst doing a B-Tech degree. The research topic, 'You and I as One' investigated commonalities and differences between two 'mirror images' [twins] in sculptural artworks. Coincidentally, my twin brother Monwabisi, who specialised in painting, was himself researching identical and fraternal twins. His investigation sought to uncover what most people do not know about twins' lives, and focused on cultural practices relevant to twins.

This study is a result of my experiences as a twin and it sets out to consider, through relevant research, the myths, beliefs and ritual practices that relate to the birth, life and death of twins in Xhosa culture, in order to create a body of artworks. It attempts to provide an overview of the relationship between twin-births and the culture into which they are born in rural South Africa. Leroy, Oruene-Olaleye, Koeppen-Schomerus & Bryan (1995:1) comment on twin-related beliefs and cultural practices, "...superstitions and customs pertaining to twins are universal and often share conveying (sic) features among cultures without mutual geographical or temporal contact. This would point to the twin cult as one of the earliest religious beliefs which has been widely spread and diversified throughout human history".

As a twin born and raised in a rural Xhosa community, I have first-hand experience of unusual practices, and concur with the above. The mythology surrounding twin-births is legendary. Perhaps the most famous Western example are the twin boys, Romulus and Remus, from which Rome got its name, who were fathered by Mars, the god of war, and raised by a she-wolf. Others include Apollo and Artemis, sons of Zeus in Greek mythology, and Jacob and Esau from biblical times.

Gallo Images (2010) show Joseph and George Mothiba, from Limpopo province, who are a house music duo. Another well-known pair of twins in South Africa are Onke and Odwa Ndungane from Eastern Cape. They are acknowledged in the *South African Rugby Magazine* as both having played league and international rugby (*S.A. Rugby Magazine*, 2014). Furthermore, Madyira (2012: 1) reported on William and Wilfred Mugeyi, twins from Zimbabwe, who lived in East London, South Africa, and played soccer for Bush Bucks FC.

In embarking on this research my objective is to present a written dissertation, supported by a body of practical work that examines twin-related practices of the Xhosa people. The understanding of Xhosa ritual practice is discussed and demonstrated, both through my practical and written work. It will hopefully add significantly to the body of knowledge of ritual practices in Xhosa Indigenous Knowledge Systems relating to twins. UNESCO emphasizes that Indigenous Knowledge Systems are “part of an immaterial cultural heritage such as languages, music and dance, festivities, rituals and traditional craftsmanship, and this cultural heritage is important for the identity of a society” (Kaya & Masoga 2008:2). This intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment (Barak, as quoted by Kaya & Masoga 2008:4).

To answer the questions, ‘What role do myths, beliefs and ritual practice play in twin-birth Xhosa culture, and how has this influenced my conceptual sculptured artworks?’ one needs to look no further than to the ritual practices that are evident today. Many of these rituals have influenced and guided my practical aesthetic. These include, for example, the traditional practice of placing a live twin in the grave of its dead counterpart for a short period before the deceased is buried; the lack of mourning for a deceased twin; the prohibition of grave-digging; the remaining indoors during a thunder storm; the carrying of a silver coin when visiting the sea; the exchange of clothing when twins are to be separated; and the circumcision of both twins, male and/or female.

Such practices are integral to the twin theme of my practical output, and inform my artworks. Ceramics, found objects and mixed media are the materials I have used to illustrate and link the written with the practical. Xhosa practices relating to twins have greatly affected my creative output. Moreover, my investigation into twin birth and twin-related practices in Xhosa

culture as mirrored in this study, are thus part of a search for aspects of perpetually fluctuating indications into complexities of twins and visual art practice in society.

The study is limited to the influence of specific twin-related folklore traditions that are practiced in Xhosa culture in general. Unfortunately, written records of twins in Xhosa culture are very limited, even in contemporary times, and it was therefore difficult to access and refer to extensive relevant literature on the subject. Some sources consulted in this study go back to the 1930's. Soga (1937) is usually the most widely quoted source because he wrote more than the others, such as Mqhayi (1970) and Mtuze (2004), about Xhosa culture and twinship.

Given that the population of the study is small, and there is little published data on the subject, it is impossible to generalise the findings as applicable to the larger Xhosa population. There was a need to consult elders and other knowledgeable people in Mthatha and surrounding areas because written records of myths, beliefs and cultural practices in Xhosa society are relatively limited.

Furthermore, the study examines publications on 'twin cult', or *ibeji* culture in the Yoruba peoples of south-western Nigeria, to ascertain whether or not any comparable characteristics exist. The choice of Yoruba culture was determined by the fact that it is arguably one of the main African cultures that has a particular focus on twin-related beliefs and rituals, portrayed profusely in paintings and sculptures. Visual imagery of twins in Yoruba culture are thus presented and discussed.

As a young black artist in multi-cultural South Africa, I explored the many strange and often controversial practices surrounding twins. Through this exploration I would hope to have preserved aspects of Xhosa folklore, and to some extent, enlighten readers as to these cultural practices.

"In South Africa the African Renaissance movement calls for the revival of African traditions, but at the same time the world we live in is becoming increasingly globalised. These challenges face artists as well and it is interesting how black artists in particular are returning to their roots in exploring issues like initiation and opening up investigations into ritual and sacred experiences that were previously not regarded as matters for public discussions" (Bedford 2004:136).

As far as I am aware, a contemporary collection of information on cultural practices relating to twin traditions of the Xhosa people has not yet been documented. This, therefore, has made the study particularly significant. Contemporary cultural practices have been documented from interviews with Xhosa elders, the informed custodians of these traditions. It is the first time that any of these elders have spoken about such practices, knowing that what they said will be ethically recorded for posterity. A qualitative study was undertaken, with primary research conducted by means of interviews with elders, twins, and other knowledgeable people relating to the chosen field of study.

This study is conducted within a Post-Structuralist framework, including extracts from the writings of Jacques Derrida. The Post-Structuralist approach is pertinent to this study because it can be applied to my lived experience in Xhosa culture. It describes and systematically analyses personal experience so that cultural experience is understood better. Denzin and Lincoln (2008:457) state that “the distinct feature of cultural studies is that it combines hermeneutic focus on lived realities, a (post)structuralist analysis of discourses that mediate our experiences and realities, and a contextualised/realist investigation of historical, social and political structures of power”.

Different people experience varied realities. Amongst the Yoruba, for example, Bryan (1984:24) makes an interesting observation concerning the death of twins in African cultures, saying that:

“Surviving twins in Africa may often carry a wooden image representing their dead twin, around their neck or waist. This gives company to the survivor and is a refuge to the spirit of the dead. The image has to be cared for as his twin. The mother must oil the figure and offer it tokens made of wood. When the survivor is old enough, he is expected to care for his twin himself”.

Jurgens & Tyrrell (1983:107) have also written about myths based on twins, stating that:

“All groups ascribe supernatural powers to twins. Zulu twins are said to be song composers, weather prophets and good mediators; Lebedu twins are noted for their powerful ‘shadow’ which makes them dangerous, especially to sick people. Among tribes which abhor them, the very existence of twins threatens society as a whole and cannot be tolerated. The concealment of twins by parents is an offence against the people. Tembu, Xhosa and Mfengu share experiences throughout life, when a boy who has a twin sister is at initiation school and being circumcised, his sister will be

symbolically circumcised with him, similar to the twin sister's *intonjane* initiation rite”.

Soga (1937:37) says that “when twins are born it was a customary practice to plant two small milk trees to commemorate the day. Water from their mother’s bath would be used to irrigate the small trees each day. A strong belief was that both twins would survive, if those small trees survived. But if one tree died that would mean one twin would die also”.

As indicated earlier, another key aspect of my research is the relationship between myself and my twin brother, Monwabisi. As brothers and fellow-artists, we share the cosmology of growing up in a rural Xhosa community. How this has influenced our lives and respective artworks has been discussed and analysed. In order to connect this autobiographical story to a more far-reaching social and cultural understanding, auto-ethnography has been employed as a guide for the study, thus aiding in personal experience being the central focus of the investigation. Auto-ethnography is described as “an auto-biographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the culture” (Ellis and Bochner 2000:739).

Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, and on video-tape, so as to facilitate lip-sync, and to recognise possible audio obscurities. Kundera (2001:26) remarks that “a one-to-one interview conversation between informant and researcher is perhaps the most commonly used strategy for collecting life history data”. The research subject falls within the African oral or narrative tradition, wherein the transmission of cultural material across generations happens without a writing system. This provides a fluid margin as to what is judged to be right or wrong.

There is no guaranteed assurance that those interviewed have told the truth, and all disclosures are thus taken at face value. Cross-referencing ascertains whether or not information is reliable or simply assumed. Bailey (2007:180) shows that “without extensive field notes and other types of records to draw on, even the most experienced researcher will find trustworthiness difficult to establish”.

The procedure of this research method is communicated and debated throughout this dissertation. Gathered information has filtered both objectively and subjectively through to my practical work. Data collection was done in accordance with the Vaal University of

Technology's code of ethics as stated in the Research Policy. My study was initially located in the three Eastern Cape towns of Mthatha, Mqanduli and Ngqeleni. I was born in Ngqeleni. People I interviewed suggested I look further afield, and this prompted me to expand my study into the whole of the Eastern Cape.

My personal experience as a twin, combined with the familiarity of my own Xhosa culture and the people within my community, made it easier for me to gather information. This facilitated my contact with chiefs, elders, twins and parents.

As part of the community and as a twin, I have had exclusive access to sensitive information, in contrast to what Kumar (2005:213) finds when he says "information sought can pose an ethical dilemma in research. Certain types of information can be regarded as sensitive or confidential by some people and thus an invasion of privacy".

In addition to interviews, I have consulted official publications, books, magazines, newspapers and websites. The dissertation is made up of primary research, interpretation, analysis, argument, discussion and conclusions. Concluded results are presented in the form of an exhibition of practical artwork. Thus, the practical application of the theoretical research culminates in a professional exhibition of sculptural works. Theoretical analysis of my three-dimensional work is content-based. One aim was to consider the relationship between theoretical content and the fabric of myths, legends, beliefs and ritual practices. An in-depth discussion of my sculptural work is delivered through Post-Structuralist analysis.

The body of artwork is made up of largely installation-type works in a manner influenced by the British contemporary sculptor, Antony Gormley (b.1950). This relates to the fact that my work has often been in the form of multiple components. The fact that I am a multiple product of my mother, goes hand in hand with my creative style and the idea of multiples and multiplicity. Clay is the primary medium of my work, used in conjunction with found objects and mixed media, to create abstract forms in varying scales of multiples. To this, Bell (2004:31) remarks aptly that "these mythic, monumental figures, incorporating the visual language of diverse civilization and cultures, stand side by side constituting a polyphony of voices, histories and geographies".



This study is further structured in the following sections: In Chapter Two of this dissertation I have reviewed existing literature about myths, beliefs and ritual practices pertaining to birth, life and death of mainly Xhosa and Yoruba twins. In Chapter Three the focus is both on a theoretical framework based on Post-Structuralism aimed at identifying elements of systems, meanings and language to aid understanding, as well as on research methodology based on qualitative research involving ethnographic/auto-ethnographic studies. Then, in Chapter Four the focus turns towards narrative and interview interpretations which include analysis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews (formal interviews and informal discussions) as well as participant observations. These interviews were conducted in the Eastern Cape. In Chapter Five my own experience of twinship is expressed by means of sculptural installations, and thereafter conclusions are drawn, and recommendations for further study are formed.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCHING TWINSHIP

#### **Birth**

“Twin [noun] - one of two children born at the same time to the same mother, *see* also conjoined twin, fraternal twin, identical twin” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2010:1609). Biologically, twins occur in at least two different ways. One pattern involves one egg, fertilized by one sperm, which splits sometimes after fertilization, thus producing mono-zygotic or ‘identical twins’ (Stewart 2000:3). Bryan (1984:24) adds that ‘identical’ twins always, therefore, have the same basic physical features such as eye and hair colour and bone structure”. We now know that identical twins arise when a normal fertilized ovum (egg) divides into two, and each of the halves become a separate individual, each with same genes (Bryan 1984:24). The other pattern involves two eggs, each fertilized by two separated sperms, which eventually produce dizygotic or ‘fraternal twins’. In either case the mother eventually gives birth to two babies more or less at the same time (Stewart 2000:3). Fraternal twins are thus like brothers and sisters, except that they happen to have been conceived at the same time (Bryan 1984:24). Nieuwenhuizen (2012:18) defines fraternal individuals within a twinship as individuals of the same gender, or as a one boy-one girl combination.

Nieuwenhuizen (2012:4) further states that “some studies find that monozygotic twins (identical twins) are more similar than dizygotic twins (fraternal twins) in psychological and behaviour traits”. Hornblend (2010) has another explanation, that “from a scientific perspective, the study of twins helps to increase understanding of the impact of nature and nurture on humans; that is, the effect of shared and unique environmental factors and genetics on us. Examining different perceptions of twins also gives us an insight into the complexity of other cultures and belief systems”.

Notwithstanding whether twins are identical or fraternal, their births, particularly in African societies have had and still have peculiar significance because their existence, “has provoked curiosity and interest across numerous societies and cultures” (Hanson, University of Florida Digital Collections). The following is an in-depth discussion on attitudes to the birth of twins. It will consider ceremonies, ritual practices and attitudes towards the birth of twins.

In an article, by Apfel (2014) in the *Brain Child Magazine*, it was noted that “in Xhosa culture, we attach a magical quality to the existence of twins, which can have little bearing on the hard facts of raising them”. Similarly, Piontelli (2008:1) mentions that “it seems that the birth of twins is special everywhere in the world, but ‘special’ is not always a good thing”. However, amongst all continents it is claimed that “Africa is a continent of twins, both in the number of twin births and in the attention bestowed on them and their birth rights are quite different” (Van Beek, 2002). Although the birth of twins is often a welcome event today, this has not always been the case. Other cultures, such as the Yoruba, have many complex beliefs regarding the biological and spiritual natures of twins, for an example that “twins are believed to detain special preternatural powers” (Hornblend, 2010).

Africa has a long and rich oral tradition that reflects cultural beliefs, traditions, histories, myths, legends, and rules for living that have been passed down orally from generation to generation to this day (Lynch 2004:17). “Rite of birth is the first of the many major rites and involves initiating the infant into the world through a ritual” (Davis, 2011).

With regard specifically to the birth of twins in African cultures, there are certain ceremonies and ritual practices that seek to honour their birth. In Africa, twin births were and are still considered to be events of extraordinary importance. “Traditional beliefs give to twins a special position as sacred monsters and devote to them a variety of ritual celebrations” (Junod n.d.).

Among the amaXhosa, the birth of twins is not regarded as a misfortune, therefore, there are no protective measures taken - no warding off of evil from the family or clan. They nevertheless have prescribed rites that need to be observed during various stages in their lives Soga 1937:30). One prescribed rite is how the umbilical cord (*inkaba*) is dealt with. Littlejohn (2011) states that “*inkaba* is the ritual of burying the cord and the placenta and this has great significance to the clan and seals the attachment of the baby to its ancestral lands. *Inkaba* then comes to mean one’s ancestral home and symbolises the relationship between the individual, his/her clan, the land and the spiritual world”.

Manganyi (2013:18) comments on the performance of these rituals, and notes that:

“There are also ceremonies that are associated with the birth of the child and the naming of that child. Also rituals like the burial of the umbilical cord. This is where the child undergoes ritual washing and cannot be touched by other people for a period after that.

After a month another ritual is performed where the child is introduced to the larger community and relatives”.

Similarly, it is interesting to note that in Yoruba culture “the umbilical cord is bound tightly with thread and then cut. The placenta is buried in the backyard. On the placenta burial spot, the child is bathed with a loofah sponge and rubbed with palm oil” (Grunlan & Mayers 1988:225).

Another prescribed ritual practiced by amaXhosa people is that euphorbia trees (*umhlontlo*) must be planted in the homestead. Soga (1937:292) has said that “on the birth of twins the father sets out for the forest, and digs up two young euphorbia trees. The father takes them [trees] home and plants them alongside the hut in which the twins were born”. This is confirmed by Laubscher (1937:224) who refers to the *umhlontlo* as being a *naaboom* tree. He says that “the *naaboom* tree has a milky sap which flows freely at the slightest injury to the tree. Two *naaboom* trees are planted alongside of each other. Pairs of trees of this nature are frequently seen in Transkei”.

Thus, according to Xhosa tradition, *umhlontlo* is a special tree with a connection to twins (*amawele*). The tree is planted alongside the house or the kraal, and is fenced off as a means of protection against animals. Mabona (2004:136) says that “even today in Xhosa land, if one sees a euphorbia, or a pair of euphorbias growing in an old kraal site, one can be sure they were planted on the birth of twins”. Soga (1937:43) mentions that planting of *umhlontlo* is thus a means to “commemorate the day”. Furthermore, “water from their mother’s bath would be used to irrigate the small trees each day. A strong belief was that both twins would survive if those small euphorbia trees survived. But if one tree died it would mean one twin would also die. “It is interesting to note that logic behind the ritual of planting *umhlontlo* seems to have no real justification”.

Soga (1937:43) also explains ambiguity between the belief and the use of the tree saying that “whilst it does not always follow, (but) it does so often enough to perpetuate the belief that the one influences the other. In like manner if either or both twins die, so will their respective plants”. Soga (2013:296) adds that “though the euphorbia is universally used for this purpose to the exclusion of the other trees yet there is no explanation given for its special selection”.

Coehoorn (2009:1) commenting about integration of daily living and nature, has said that:

“In South Africa the *amaXhosa* rural communities are living in close relationship with their environment. These communities do not only depend on the natural environment to fulfil daily subsistence needs in respect to energy and selected food and medicinal products, but also to perform and fulfil their cultural needs. Several cultural practices are focused on either specific spaces or involve specific species. They reflect the specific lifestyle of a community and their way of interacting with the natural environment”.

The use of *umhlontlo* is thus a good example of fulfilling “cultural needs using a specific space involving a specific species” of plant (Coehoorn 2009:1). Noting the above, it is said that *umhlontlo* does not only serve a spiritual purpose but also as a medicine for the twins in times of sickness. This is confirmed by Soga (1937:296) who says that “when both twins become sick the roots of euphorbia are pounded and mixed with water. With this the twins are both washed. All ablutions of the twins are performed in immediate proximity to the two plants growing at the side of the hut” (Soga 1937:296).

As mentioned in my introduction, it is useful to compare and contrast Soga’s perceptions about Xhosa twins with those of Yoruba society because the latter seems to have well-integrated attitudes that nowadays express great value attached to twinship in society. Firstly it should be noted that, even though things have become better as centuries passed, with reference to the Yoruba people’s attitudes towards twins, it is stated that “in earlier times, new born twins, or *ibeji*, as they are called, were believed to be evil, monstrous abnormalities and infanticide was a common practice. However, such beliefs and practices were later superseded and reversed, and by the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century twins came to be seen as a blessing” (Leroy *et al.* 1995). Additionally, Adedoyin (2014) provided some perspective as to what informed the killing of twins, stating that:

“Twins were not always revered by the Yoruba people. Often, twins of poor families were put to death to ease the family’s financial burdens. However, when the twins of wealthy families began to die, the Yoruba leaders became concerned and consulted *Ifa*. Through divination, *Ifa* discovered the killing of the twins was offending Shango, the God of Thunder. The oracle informed *Ifa* that the mother of twins must dance to *Ibeji*, the spirit of the twins, every five days. The oracle said to her that you are the ones who open doors on Earth. You are the ones who open

doors in Heaven; when you awaken, you provide money; you provide children; you provide long life; you, who are dual spirits”.

Nowadays, according to The Africa Centre (2005), for example, “the Yoruba believe that special ceremonies must be performed for twins. They also believe that praise songs must be sung, and special foods be served to twins so that they can maintain their favour with the gods and hence that of their family”. It is also said by Hornblend (2010) that “in other Nigerian cultures, twins are received with reverence and admiration”.

Furthermore, Yoruba twins are thought to be “extremely beneficial in bringing about blessings to the family” (Adedoyin, 2014). Additionally, Yoruba tradition teaches that “each person is one soul in a long line of ancestral souls, but twins are unique because they share the same soul” (Hornblend, 2010). Moreover, according to Adewumi (2014), the communities in which they were born, for example, “honoured twins with a monthly feast”. The Yoruba also believed that twins had “supernatural powers that could increase their parents’ wealth”

When thinking about making comparisons between perceptions of Xhosa and Yoruba twins it is also useful to observe that, in contrast, in West Nigeria “Igbo society viewed twins as a bad omen sent by the ‘Gods.’ They considered twins as supernatural beings that could bring devastation upon society” (Adewumi, 2014).

### **Birth and age of Xhosa twins**

Bryan (1984:28) provides useful general information regarding pregnancy and birth of twins, saying that “the first person to suspect that twins are on the way is often a mother herself. This was certainly so before ultrasound scanning came into common use”. He adds that “for many mothers a twin pregnancy does not feel obviously different from a single one and that is why so many twin pregnancies went undetected in the past”. On the whole a twin pregnancy is the same as a single one, but discomforts and complications tend to be increased. Nyathi (2008:23) argues that “it was sometimes possible that a woman expecting twins would know about her condition”. Although the birth of a child is a commonplace event for the two individuals who become parents, “it is nothing short of miraculous. Becoming a parent is regarded as a definitive stage in one’s life” (Fernihough 2011:19).

Once Xhosa twins are born there are specific expectations of what must be done with regards to continuity of the family. “When a woman gives birth to twins she is expected to have another child as soon as possible. The next child born is considered to be older and will be there to look after the twins” (Isibini, 2011). In our family, this also applies. Thus, “regardless of how parents react, the birth of twins into a family induces change in the way the family functions” (Conlon 2009:2). I echo Conlon’s statement because there are certain chores like planting the garden which are given to myself and my twin brother.

Xhosa and other cultures have different ways of identifying the age of twins, irrespective of whether they are identical or fraternal. Throughout the history of our culture there have been occasions when determining a child’s place in the family was of extreme importance. The birth right of the firstborn meant an opportunity to inherit family fortunes, even entire kingdoms, along with the burden of responsibility for the remaining family members. In my experience, many parents have their decisions influenced by beliefs, but others pay no attention to them. People usually follow cultural practices when identifying a twin’s age.

Bryan (1984:17) recounts a myth from the Bible about determining the age of a pair of twins: “A pair of twins described in Genesis are Pharez and Zarah, the children of Tamar and Judah. They...competed to be delivered first. Zarah presented an arm in the birth canal which was labelled with red string. Later when the babies were born the string was attached to the second baby showing that Pharez had replaced Zarah in birth order”.

Similarly, an article by Nyamende (2008) when commenting in Mqhayi’s *Ityala Lamawele* (the lawsuit of the twins) made this reflection:

“On their birth their mother experiences complications, when one baby’s hand comes out first. Immediately one of the midwives cuts off the tip of one of the unborn baby’s fingers, thereby performing the custom of *ingqithi* (the ritual cutting of a finger). Soon the hand withdraws and the baby who is born subsequently is in possession of all his fingers. Hours later the baby with a cut finger is also born”.

Thus, amongst people who practice fingertip removal, disputes about the age of twins and who presented first, can always be resolved by a showing of hands.

In Xhosa culture it is believed that the twin who comes first is treated as the younger one and it is thought that this twin comes first because he or she is making the way for the main twin, who comes out second. In Northern Ivory Coast, people of the Nyarafolo tribe have the same view with regards to birth and age of twins as has been observed in Xhosa culture. It is said that:

“The reasoning behind this is that the older is more important, so the younger one preceded him to prepare the way (this is what happens, after all, at Nyarafolo events—the most important people come later than everyone else). Or, as some say, the older one is higher/deeper in the womb so has been there longer. Either way, the first one born is younger and second born is older” (*Twins: who is the oldest?* 2007).

Nyathi (2008:5) confirms “that seniority of twins was very important, determining inheritance and succession. It was believed that the twin who was born first was the younger twin and the twin born second was older”. In contrast, for Nyarafolo society, it has been argued that the order in which twins are born has less “impact on the issue of inheritance than we might expect, because inheritance in traditional Nyarafolo culture was already so complex. The oldest don’t necessarily inherit the most, and traditionally boys were more likely to inherit from their mother’s brothers than from their father” (*Twins: who is the oldest?* 2007).

In Nyarafolo society many believe that “the reasoning behind this is that the older is more important, so the younger one preceded him to prepare the way” (*Twins: who is the oldest?* 2007). It is difficult to comprehend why this was so. Perhaps the younger twin was faster and thus came out first. The elder twin, possessing less energy, was last to emerge (Nyathi 2008:5). Similarly in Yoruba culture, this perception is taken into consideration in that:

“The first born twin, whether a boy or a girl, is always called Taiwo, meaning ‘having the first taste of the world’, whereas the second is named Kehinde, meaning ‘arriving after the other’. Although being born first Taiwo is considered as the younger twin. His senior Kehinde is supposed to send out his partner to see what the outside world looks like” (Leroy *et al.* 1995).

Interestingly, with regards to the issue of the age of twins, in Xhosa culture, the use of euphorbia (*umhlontlo*) raises another issue. It is argued that *umhlontlo* was not only used at birth of twins, but also to record the ages of twins. *Imihlontlo* (plural of *umhlontlo*) trees have



been planted next to the house where twins were born, and the right hand plant usually represents the first born twin. D'Aragon (2008:123) mentions that:

“On the morning following the birth of twins, the father - or another member of the family if he was not available - went to the forest and chose two young *imihlontlo*, which were then planted alongside the hut where the twins were born. The right-hand plant represented the twin born first - considered the elder and the successor to the father in the case of first-born sons - whereas the plant on the left-hand side represented the second born”.

Nyathi (2008:5) commenting on the age of twins noted that there was a “drama screened by South African Broadcasting Corporation based on the seniority of twins. The series was called *Ityala lamawe* (lawsuit of twins). The twin who emerged first had his small finger cut off, and then that twin returned to the womb. The second twin then came out first. Which one was the senior”? So, it can become difficult to tell who is older, even if a finger is cut.

### **The naming of Xhosa twins**

“Naming is a universal cultural practice. In every society in the world, people are given names. But how the names are bestowed, the practices and rituals involved, and interpretations attached to the names vary from society to society, and from one culture to another” (Mutunda 2011:16).

It is said that “among many African cultures a name tells a lot about the individual that it signifies, the language from which it is drawn, and the society that ascribes it. A name may indicate the linguistic structures and phonological processes found in the language, the position of the name’s bearer in society, and the collective history and life experiences of the people surrounding the individual” (Mphande, 2006). Fitzpatrick (2012:25) emphasizes that “for Africans your name is your soul - your name has celestial powers and embodies spirit” and thus, as Davis (2011) points out, “names are cultural identifiers. The first gift you can give your child is a noble African name”.

“Name giving among the Xhosa of South Africa takes on other dimensions than that in a Euro-Western context. A name is not only a label, identifying and referring to a unique individual but it also conforms to cultural dictates” (Neethling, 2004).

De Klerk (1996:1) has mentioned that “in Xhosa culture, names are typically meaningful, such meanings relating to the circumstances surrounding the birth, social aspects of the family, hopes and wishes for the child, or the expression of gratitude to a deity. Factors of lesser importance are the commemorative function (naming after family or friends), simply liking the name or the desire to be original”. Neethling (2004: 1) has observed that:

“The names of twins are often marked in the sense that they are paired semantically, and sometimes morphologically. Examples include: Bezile Bemanyiwe *ba-* ‘they’ + *izile* ‘have come’ + *be-* ‘they being’ + *manyiwe* ‘united’ They have become united. The phrase consisting of two words then also functions as the names for the twins, that is, *Bezile* and *Bemanyiwe*. Identity is then clearly expressed in terms of a kind of collective identity. The names express some sort of expectation or aspiration from the name givers for the child”.

### **Myths in the lives of twins**

Jaja (2014:1) explains that “myths play a very important role in the African understanding of reality. African philosophy cannot operate in a vacuum; therefore myths provide the necessary analytic and conceptual framework for an authentic African philosophy”. Furthermore, it is said by Schipani (2005:2) that “myths also play an important role in the moral education of the society. Many of the myths of Africa can be traced back to antiquity ... Myths and beliefs are part of every culture”.

Mathews, *et al.* (2012:1) add that “they are part of mythology, legends, folklore”. Amongst the myths regarding Xhosa twins is the one that requires us to exchange clothes when one or other of us is sick. Wearing the clothes from the healthy twin helps in the recovery of the sick twin by transferring good health. In Xhosa culture it is understood that twins are not automatically allowed to go close to the sea, or to swim. The belief is that if they do they should carry a silver coin and ask for permission or blessing before they go into the water. If this practice is not observed one, if not both twins, will drown.

Recently there was an article published in the *Daily Dispatch* (Boya 2013:8) confirming such beliefs. The article was published following an incident of one twin drowning in the Buffalo River, near East London. The twin who drowned was called Qhamani Mabula. That child’s mother, Thandeka Mabula, said “she warned her twins not to go near water because they are twins” and said that “as Xhosa people we believe twins should stay away from water because

they will die. It was Qhamani's time there [at the Buffalo River] because of what I told them. The surviving twin, Nande, said her mother "had warned them about swimming".

### **Circumcision practices and twins**

"Rites of passage play a central role in African socialization, demarcating the different stages in an individual's development (gender and otherwise), as well as that person's relationship and role to the broader community" (Davis, 2011). Furthermore, "various forms of surgical and ritual operations known as circumcision are performed on human sex organs throughout the world" (Davis, 2011). Male circumcision is defined as "partial removal of the foreskin of the penis" (Mavundla *et al.* 2009:1). The ritual is performed at specific periods in life with the main purpose of integrating the male child into the society according to cultural norms (Mogotlane 2004:1).

In Xhosa culture "the purpose of initiation is, above all, educational. Through initiation, young adults further learn about the traditions and expectations of their community and will therefore be able to contribute to the maintenance of social order" (Traditional male circumcision, 2009). The influence of culture and community on one's identity is of paramount importance.

"Cultural identity and the desire to continue ethnic traditions are the strongest determinants for continuing traditional male circumcision. In some societies, male circumcision as a rite of passage is of major importance to the social status of a man, and essential to him becoming a full member of society. In some communities, an uncircumcised man remains a boy forever, whatever his age" (*Traditional male circumcision*, 2009).

The ritual can last for 3 to 4 weeks, during which time the initiate remains in a grass hut in the bush (i.e. away from the settlement) until he is healed (Mavundla *et al* 2009:1).

D'Aragon (2008:125, citing Soga, 1931:249) explains the belief and ritual performance during the initiation of twins:

"The proximity or 'unity' of the twins was present at many levels of their lives, right up to their deaths. Even if twin brothers were not circumcised at the same time, the twin brother not undergoing the operation had nevertheless to be present up to the moment the surgery was performed. If the twin was a girl, though, she was quite a bit more involved in the ceremony than a male twin. Before performing the surgery on the *umkhwetha* (young male initiate) twin, the *ingcibi* (Xhosa surgeon) acted the scene of

the surgery over the girl's body, pretending as though he were circumcising her by seizing her imaginary prepuce between her legs, and then, by making a back and forth movement with the assegai, completing her symbolic circumcision”.

D’Aragon (2008:125, citing Soga, 1931:249) continued the explanation of this event, saying that just before that symbolic circumcision

“the twin girl also had taken part in the *um-ngcamo* (sacrificial feast), just as a twin brother would have done. The *ubu-lunga* (necklace of hairs from the tail-brush of a cow, which serves to ward off evil and secure good health) would be placed around the neck of the twin not going through the circumcision first, before being worn by the *umkhwetha* (young initiate) twin. As was the case for a twin brother not being circumcised at this time, the twin sister's hair was shaved in the presence of her twin brother”.

D’Aragon (2008:125) noted finally, that:

“In the case of a twin girl's *intonjane* (initiation), the male twin was placed behind the screen in front of his sister. He was also required to bathe with his sister. Whatever the reason for the absence, the ceremony could not take place if one of the twins was away. In the same way, if a twin was ill and the other twin was away, no matter how far away, that twin had to be fetched”.

The foregoing observations show that, circumcision of twins, while following a fairly standard procedure, requires particular attention to details such as who gets circumcised first, depending on gender.

### **Ritualisation of bereavement for twins**

Death of one or both twins is a big loss for the family. Rituals need to be conducted in order to ease the pain and commemorate the passing, in various ways. “From an African perspective death is a natural transition from the visible to the invisible spiritual ontology where the spirit, the essence of the person, is not destroyed but moves to live in the spirit ancestors’ realm dead. It signifies an inextricable spiritual connection between the visible and invisible worlds” (Baloyi n.d.). In connection with both death and mourning Setsiba (2012:3) has explained that “each society has prescribed rituals that can help families in resolving their grief. More details

of grief and rituals can also be unique from one family to another even in the same society due to influences of religious beliefs, education, and wealth status among others”.

Grieving is the internal response to a loss. “Mourning however, is the external response to a loss. It is the external things that one does for example the shaving of a head, the lighting of the candle. Mourning is influenced by the bereaved’s cultural expectations, customs and gender” (Yawa 2010:15). “This usually involves the core beliefs and customs, spiritual practices, and certain expected behaviours that will be symbolic of mourning the death of a loved one” (Mbiti 1969 in Setsiba 2012:2). For example, “when a death has occurred, there are prescribed behaviours and rituals performed such as what is worn, how the bereaved are addressed, how feelings should be dealt with and what will be done to symbolize the separation of the deceased from the people who are left behind” (Setsiba 2012:11). According to Soga (1931:20), “death to the Xhosas does not mean extinction. The soul lives on, continuity of the family is preserved, and the spirits of the departed have direct communication with the living: the living minister to the wants of those who have gone before”.

With regards to twins, Soga (1931:331) also mentions that the “connection is almost, if not altogether sacred, between twins”. Through life this relationship is emphasized. Soga (1931: 297) further details this ritual, by saying that “in the case of the death of one twin the grave is dug and the recess at the bottom for the body is completed. The surviving twin, male or female, young or old, first enters the grave, lies down in the place to be occupied by the corpse, and then comes out of the grave. After this, the deceased twin is laid to rest and the grave is filled”.

There is a similarity between Xhosa and Yoruba practice, which is picked up by Adedoyin (2004) who observes that with regard to Yoruba culture “upon the death of a twin, the mother commissions an *ere* figure. This figure is thought to provide a resting place for the deceased twin's soul. If the *ere* figure is not provided, the Yoruba people believe the soul of the deceased will seek vengeance by bringing terrible misfortune to the other twin, or to the entire family”.

Twins are buried in a moving way because the surviving twin has to precede the deceased twin into the grave and then come out of the grave to allow the dead sibling to be buried. Mtuze (2004:68) says that Xhosa twins were sometimes “buried wrapped in grass – *ingca yamawe* (grass of twins)”. It is known that the practice of burying people with grass or seaweed in

southern Africa goes back at least eight thousand years (Mabona 2004:218), but it is unknown whether such burials were for twins or not. Magoma (1990:104) has also commented, saying

“we Xhosa people believe twins have a special bond, stronger than between mere siblings. When one twin ‘cracks open and becomes separated’ (*liqhezukile*), before his or her twin’s coffin is lowered onto the grave, it is first lowered into the grave with the surviving twin in it. It is only after this mock burial that the real burial takes place. That is the custom. Twins are not separated, even by death”.

Similarly, in Zulu tradition, Nyawose (2000:19) has observed that:

“Before the actual burial of the deceased twin the surviving twin is placed inside the coffin and remains there for some time. The family also keeps the funeral date and time secret. Sometimes the burial can take place in the early hours of the morning for a dead twin. At the cemetery there are families whose custom demands that the surviving twin is placed in the open grave while the family elder speaks to appease the ancestors. The twin will then be pulled out and the coffin with the dead twin is lowered into the grave to be buried. No animal is slaughtered until after the death of the second twin. This is because twins are regarded as one person. The belief is that the death will only be regarded as complete after both twins are dead. The spirit of the beast can therefore not accompany the first twin, but it has to wait until the dual journey is completed”.

Likewise, in Xhosa culture, D’Aragon (2008:124) concurs, saying that “when a twin died, the twin who survived - male or female, young or old - had to lie down first in the grave wearing the dead twin’s clothes for a brief moment before returning them and giving up the space to the dead twin (Soga 1937:79, cited by Laubscher 1937:91). By the symbolic death and ritual burial, the surviving twin experienced the illness of the departed, cut the bonds that had united them until that moment, and then was freed from a comparable fate so that he or she could carry on with life” (Laubscher 1937:91-2).

The Yoruba have a high mortality rate of twins and have developed special beliefs and customs that cater in particular for the ritualization of the bereavement process when one or both of the twins die. In the next chapter I look at theoretical frameworks and research methodologies that enable ways in which such beliefs and customs can be understood.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the ways of looking at past analytical models is crucial to building a solid theoretical foundation. A useful point of departure is to focus on Post-Structuralism as a means for looking at conceptualizations of Xhosa twinship. “To the average speaker of English, terms such as ‘structure’, ‘structuralist’ and ‘structuralism’ seem to have an abstract, complex ... air about them” (Hawkes 2003:1). Indeed, as Bonilla puts it, Structuralism “offers a new way of looking” (Bonilla, 2003).

Matthews (2001:1) explains that “Structuralism is any theory or method which deals with structures of and interrelations among the elements of a system”. Moreover, Structuralism is described as “a catchall term for a set of explanatory approaches or paradigms in the social sciences that emphasize the causal force of the relations among elements in a system” (Schneider, n.d.).

It can be suggested therefore that Structuralism is a search “for basic foundations that come together” (Taghizadeh 2011:288) to make cultural practices coherent. Thus, for example, in literature, an individual word can only be understood when it is seen within the whole language, when it has ‘come together’. Language, consisting of the use of connected words, is our way of communicating, and this applies whether written or spoken. We use language to relate to the world around us. It lets us compare things, and to see a relativity to one another. Language, including symbols and images, is our window to information.

The theory of Structuralism puts forward that language, spoken, written, or in symbolic form, gives us the important tool, the window, to understand our world and to give meaning and credibility to our existence. Language is alterable, changeable, adaptable and adoptable – it is always out there, never hidden or individually owned. “Understanding cultural life requires isolating symbols, identifying their meanings, and showing how symbols resonate within a specific, dynamic cultural context” (Moore 2009:229).

It is evident therefore that language is integral in communicating the past. “Both written and oral testimony requires words, whilst artefacts portray history in signs and symbols. Linguistic signs refer only to other linguistic signs within the system and it is the play of differences that

infer meanings” (Naude 2008:28). For example, culture involves the “creation of symbolic meanings and these meanings differ even among the individuals involved in a single cultural exchange such as a ritual, a conversation, or a coronation” (Moore 2009:228). “The Structuralist paradigm in anthropology suggests that the structure of human thought processes is the same in all cultures, and that these mental processes exist in the form of binary oppositions” (Winthrop 1991:1).

Preiser (2010) argues that “anthropologists represent their data mostly in written form by means of ethnographic accounts, and artists represent their findings by means of imaginative artistic media such as painting, sculpture, filmmaking and music”. *Anthropological Theories* (n.d.) note that Structuralists argue that binary oppositions are reflected in various cultural institutions and that the approach offered by Structuralism stresses that culture must be understood in terms of its relationships to the whole, complete system.

Post-Structuralism is a direct response to Structuralism. Whisnant (2012) states that “Structuralism and Post-Structuralism have a great deal in common. Post-Structuralism ... retains the structuralist belief that cultural systems can be represented as coded systems of meaning”. The influence of Post-Structuralism overlaps philosophy and embraces other subjects that include art, politics, history and sociology, anthropology and cultural criticism.

“Post-Structuralism emphasizes powers of interpretation, where each sign is interrelated with other signs and the emphasis is on the process of interpretation as opposed to discovering a fixed set of meanings” (Meents 2009:25). As Derrida (1976:158, cited by Naude 2008:26) boldly remarks, “there is nothing outside the text”, meaning that everything is relevant. De Saussure (cited by Naude 2008:27) believes that the different parts, for example, of language are significant, not necessarily because they refer to things outside the system of language, but because they relate to each other “within” the system.

Language has informed the human experience and our interpretation of the world around us, and how we understand and interpret our cultural practices. It is an abstract way of communication in our ‘speech community’, and is one of the ways we remain connected to our past. Derrida notes that language gives direction to us as humans because “texts create a medium through which we understand our reality” (Meents 2009:5). Sapir (1949:162) states that:



“Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of a particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation”.

Interpretations happen according to agreed signs and symbols - semiotics - used by society. Jacobs (2007:22) says that “Structuralists and Post-Structuralists alike, agree that we are always already positioned by semiotic systems - and most clearly by language. Thus, within Post-Structural theory, the subject is regarded not as essentialist but rather as fluid and fragmented”. Roland Barthes in *Elements of Semiology* (Barthes, 1964) suggests a ‘metalanguage’ concept - whereby symbols take the place of words and phrases. Metalanguage is the specialized set of symbols used to describe the structure of a language.

“Post-Structuralism is a style of critical reasoning that focuses on the moment of slippage in our systems of meaning as a way to identify - right there, in that ambiguous space - the ethical choices that we make, whether in our writings or in everyday life, when we overcome the ambiguity and move from indeterminacy to certainty of belief in an effort to understand, interpret, or shape our social environment” (Harcourt 2007:1).

Integral to Post-Structuralist investigations of cultural activity is the study of anything created through a thought process in narrative form, such as texts, writing, stories, song-writing, verse, films or other media.

Anthropologists, on examining myth, legend, kinship and language have uncovered the presence of underlying thought processes. This leads them to the theory that a hidden reality is present in all cultural expressions. The aim of Post-Structuralism is to understand these underlying thought processes and to examine how they are expressed in cultural practices. Meents (2009:19, citing Dooley & Kavanagh 2007), quotes from Derrida, who stated that “I have only one project, my first desire is not to reproduce a philosophical work or a work of art: it is to preserve memory”. Thus customs, cultural beliefs and myths survive because of memory.

Bearing this in mind, and allowing for an array of different accounts of the past, rather than a narrow, singular view, I am able to incorporate Xhosa cultural practice with cultural ideologies of the Yoruba peoples. Furthermore, “there are parallels between these two groups” (Odunayo 2014:21). Both Yoruba and Xhosa cultures exist within cultural contexts and have mutually strong cultural identities. This is an important factor to take into account when making comparisons between the two cultures, and especially in the understanding of each culture’s behaviours and/or traditions relating to twins. Post-Structuralism offers the opportunity to examine the abundant collection of individual stories and artefacts. Early examiners of the narrative collected all these stories under one umbrella, and then used each umbrella to create a larger narrative form.

The collective aspects of a person’s being, namely race, gender, nationality, age, sexuality, location, history and religious persuasion, together form one’s cultural identity. It is referred to as a feeling of belonging to, or part of an ethnic group, and a strong cultural identity adds to one’s general sense of well-being. We identify our cultural identity by noticing the differences between other cultural groups, and ourselves; by defining ourselves in opposition to other cultures; and through confrontation with other cultures.

Referring to the concept of human commonalities, Popke (2003:1) notes that these factors have “roots in the facts of human dependency and connectedness, in the inescapably social nature of human existence. Such an argument would appear to have increased purchase in the contemporary world, in which the globalization of economic activity and the movement of people have increased the interconnectedness between local and distant strangers”.

The first notion of Post-Structuralism is how, through a system of ideas, beliefs, values and traditions, a community sees itself in the world around them. It is through this basic interpretation of language that we communicate.

As a sculptor, working within the frame of cultural identity, the concept of employing symbolic representations is a key factor in my work. Derrida (1970), believes in

“deconstructing information in order that all texts are interrelated with other texts, and all texts exist only in relation to other texts that are constructed through discourse, symbols, linguistics, and grammars. Therefore, to analyse spoken or

written symbols and to ascertain their intended meanings is a deconstructive approach. Analysis should include all significant factors, and this includes images and symbols, if it is to give us a reliable access to information”.

Belsey (2002:01) adds that “if language, in other words, transmits the knowledge and values that constitute a culture, it follows that the existing meanings are not ours to command”. Post-Structuralism leans towards the idea that the contrasts we make are produced by the symbol-laden systems we are open to.

In contemporary society, art has moved into the space once occupied by anthropology (Allen, 2008: 4). It is art that has now become the ‘spokesthing’ for tracking, dissecting and examining different cultural aspects of contemporary life. The visual culture theorist exclaims loudly “visual culture is not just part of your everyday life. It is your everyday life” (Mirzoeff, n.d.). Visual culture is reflected profusely in both Xhosa and Yoruba societies, and points to the likelihood that different people experience and interpret the same environments in different ways. This holds true for those in present times looking at each other, and for those in present times looking back into the past. Different people can thus attribute various meanings to a work of art at the same time, and through time.

“Yoruba artists, as in any other culture, are the major life force of artistic practice in their community. They are the major stakeholders who respond to the prevailing social experience, and creatively interpret them in visual forms, for the appreciation and use of the public” (Kalilu, 2013). What stands out in African art, is the way in which Africans express their perceptions of traditions, nature, daily life and cultural identity. This artistic practice is the all-important symbolic tool, used for the conveyance of cultural identity, to a wider audience, and presents in the form of sculpture, painting, print-making, amongst other disciplines.

The visual arts are “one of the crucial areas of cultural practice in terms of understanding what and how people convey, contest, or otherwise negotiate aspects of contemporary life” (Jones 2006:4). When we respond to, or create art, we are making a connection between ourselves and other people, including the aesthetic experience. “In this sense art itself becomes, not a discrete set of entities, but rather a web of relationships between ideas and images in constant flux to which no single authorship is attributable, and whose meanings depended on those who enter the network” (Jones 2006:569).

“Thus the interplay between the individual and society has become increasingly complex, leaving room for new theories, research and speculation about the future of humankind. Who am I? Who are we? ... [and that] “art is a mirror and at times a forecaster” (Ziegler, 2011). Artists are able to imagine, then create, a response to cultural changes in their environments. “South Africans [artists] consider the past to be an important aspect of their identity in the present” (Mallen 2008:1).

As a young black artist in South Africa I concur with Hobbs and Rankin when they state that “South African ... black artists make representational art with subject matter reflecting ... their own communities” (Democratic Alliance, n.d.). I also agree with the artist Nicholas Hlobo’s (2010:1) view that “through my works I attempt to create conversations that explore certain issues within my culture as a South African. Art can help to build appreciation for different perspectives in our country and deepen understanding for the different experiences of being South African”.

Another emerging black artist, as featured in *Way Magazine* (2013), Asanda Kupa, winner of the Rheinhold Cassirer Award 2013, explores socio-economic inequalities, troubled political landscapes and social ills through his art production, thereby ‘switching the viewer on’ towards a deeper understanding of what it is to be South African. “Identity is always nourished from two sides: the outside world and the inside experience of that world” (Ziegler, 2011). This view is echoed in *NLA Design and Visual Arts* (2013) where it was said that “although South African artists were influenced by International Art Movements there were other forces operating in their own environment that were pertinent to their particular situation”.

South Africa’s colonial, and then apartheid past, greatly influenced, and still does, the way South African artists conceptualise their work. For example, township artists often portrayed the brutal, violent regime they lived in, in traditional and sometimes obscure media. The very nature of South African history has procured a unique platform for identity. “Artists who are embedded in ‘real life’ situations by means of participant observation, can render stronger comment because they are more familiar with the particularities of the situation [that affect them]” (Preiser 2010:67).

Moxey (1994:01) adds that “if art history is to take part in the processes of cultural transformation that characterise our society, its historical narratives must come to terms with the most powerful and influential theories that currently determine the way in which we conceive of ourselves”. Harrington (2004:1) quoted by Preiser (2010:67) suggests that “art must be interrogated in the context of the much wider social domain known as culture”. In addition, my foregrounding of clay artworks as being located in daily life provides the opportunity to explore how they acquire meaning from their cultural context. Contemporary art addresses a wide range of interrelated themes but is often hindered by society’s need for a coherent story.

Preiser (2010:9) notes that “choices rooted in ceramics [sculptural artworks] practice are intimate to lifestyle choices and what is to be achieved and/or communicated”. My sculptures in symbolic form represent the self within the culture that I inhabit. As Fredriksen (2006:126) explains, “the intimacy between lived experience and things [reveal]... a vital source for understanding symbolic meaning”.

Bourriaud (2002:18) draws our attention to the interplay between transformation of culture and the variety of art tools, including skills and technology that can influence art-making. This author says that “indeed, it is striking that the tools most often used by artists today ... provide [means] of connection between individuals”. There is, however, often a lack of artistic training and other resources that results in diminished capacity for articulate expression. Also, issues of “technology, style, identity and culture have wide applicability” (Steele 2010:34).

Such cultural references are widespread. Akpang (2013:25), for example, has observed that “contemporary African art is multifaceted by virtue of proliferating art styles springing up across the continent. The most common feature of these diversified genres of modern African art is the phenomenon of appropriation, which involves hybridization of traditional African and western art cultures within modern practice”. South African “artists are exposed to and familiar with this global context” (Ziegler, 2011).

It is important, for me as an artist, to explore some cultural misunderstandings in our society. The creative process can be highly effective in overcoming ignorance, fear or prejudice. As a sculptor, working in a hands-on field, using various sculpturing materials, such as clay, plaster of Paris and other media, I find it particularly significant to reflect on my culture, its practices

and rituals as a way of situating my own identity. My work titled *Ingqithi* (cutting of the finger) is an example of this significance.

### **Research methodology**

Auto-ethnographic research adopts a qualitative research method involving an ethnographic study. Chang (2008:48) argues that “auto-ethnography should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation”. This type of qualitative research attempts to study human actions or behaviours from the “insider’s perspective with a purpose of focusing on the process rather than just the outcome” (Babbie & Mouton 2001:279).

It is noted that “the dominance of evocative auto-ethnography has obscured recognition of the compatibility of auto-ethnographic research with more traditional ethnographic practices” (Anderson, 2006). In its most common definition ethnography is a qualitative research method used to gather empirical data on societies and/or cultures (Demjanenko 2011:10). This approach enables a researcher to get closer to those being researched so as to better understand such person’s points of view, through their eyes.

I agree with Eriksson (2010:97) that “when doing research in my own cultural backyard, I am already an insider, an accepted and natural part of the social system. I have a viewpoint and my presence does not seem to disturb others in any abnormal way”. This view and relation between the self and others “features the person not as separate from the social context but as more connected and less differentiated from others” (Kitayama & Markus, 1991:1). The advantage of this kind of research is that its purpose is to understand perceptions and cultural attitudes towards Xhosa twins, and about how I, as an insider, get involved as a participant. “This method enables the researcher to examine the different views and perceptions that exist” (Ntombana 2011:42) regarding twins in the amaXhosa cultural world.

Demjanenko (2011:10, citing Denzin & Lincoln 2008) notes that “the difficulties of auto-ethnography begin with ambiguity in definition, stemming partly from the fact that the method continues to evolve. In the beginning, there was ethnography, a method of research rooted in anthropology and used to study, research and re/present in academic circles the culture of a subordinate and distant other”.

Likewise, David and Sutton (2004:103) provide an explanation that “the term ethnography originated in anthropology and traditionally referred to the conducting of fieldwork within cultures other than the anthropologist’s own”. The more specific origin of ethnography is in the “nineteenth century when anthropologists relied on the reports by missionaries, colonial administrators and travellers whose intentions were to inform their fellows about other societies” (Ntombana 2011:43, citing Forster & Kemper 1974:2; Hammersley 1998:2).

From around the turn of the twentieth century it became widely accepted that it was necessary for anthropologists to collect their own data, and to do so in a systematic and rigorous manner (Hammersley 1998:3). That was at the time when anthropology became a “legitimate academic discipline with PhD graduate programmes and field research became accepted as essential for professional preparation and practice” (Forster & Kemper 1974:2).

At the time, the emphasis of ethnographic studies was about anthropologists making efforts to learn other’s culture which “involved living among the people they were studying, learning their language and making first-hand observations” (Hammersley 1998:2; David & Sutton 2004:103). In this way, researchers can move toward a “respect for the participants in research, academic creativity, and the growth possible in fluid and ambiguous research” (Demjanenko 2011:12). “It appears that historically, ethnography was perceived as proving knowledge about cultures yet unknown in Europe (Nkwi 1998:192), who further states that:

“As time went on, ethnography was not only recognised as a study of others but also of the self. This notion gave birth to the encouragement that African anthropologists must take part in studying and defining their cultural life. Anthropology/ethnography can no longer be a reflection of the outsiders’ view of Africa but a means for Africans to study themselves in relation to the world. Black Africans took a stand to better understand themselves and sought to educate others about the African way of life”.

According to Pace (2012:2) “many different research methods have been applied to the study of human creativity since the 1950s”. Furthermore, Pace (2012:2) notes that “one research method that has been widely used for this purpose in recent years is auto-ethnography, a qualitative method that combines characteristics of ethnography and autobiography”. Duncan (2004:29) adds “auto-ethnographies are case studies that follow the tradition of ethnographic research. Ethnography’s extensive history as a research method began with the work of anthropologists during the early 1900s”.

Noting the above, my choice relates to that of Crist (2009:6), namely “auto-ethnography was a decision that meant that I could finally drive myself to question, and derive meaning from the experiences which resonated with ...” myself being a twin in Xhosa culture. I further agree with Crist (2008:6) that “using this method force[s] me back to my notes and memories about experiences, with a more objective and critical eye”. Pace (2004:29) argues that “auto-ethnography is gaining momentum as a research method within the creative and performing arts, partly because of the opportunity it provides for writers, artists, performers and others to reflect critically upon their personal and professional creative experiences”. Like other genres of self-narrative, such as memoir, “autobiography and creative nonfiction, auto-ethnography involves storytelling, but it is marked by the way it ‘transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation’ (Chang 2008: 43).

Ellis’s (2004:30) important work on narrative auto-ethnography suggests that research projects in this field are distinguished by the following characteristics:

“The author usually writes in the first-person style, making him-or-herself the object of research; the focus of any generalisation is usually within a single case over time rather than across multiple cases; the narrative text is evocative, often disclosing hidden details of private life and highlighting emotional experience; relationships are dramatized as connected episodes unfolding over time rather than as snapshots; the researcher’s life is studied along with the lives of other participants in a reflexive connection”.

Other social scientists like Chang (2008:361) agree with Ellis’s (2004:30) analysis, who is said to offer “a useful discussion of the role of the self in a research study - from focusing solely on self, to studying some aspect of self - alongside that same aspect of others to using personal experiences solely to decide on a topic”. A definition of auto-ethnography provided by Balaam (n.d.) is that, “auto-ethnography is a form of ethnography that uses the self as a lens to understand a wider culture and in turn uses the experiences of others to better understand the self”.

Auto-ethnographers look back and forth between “an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by...cultural interpretation” (Crist 2009:9). Thus,



auto-ethnography, “an approach as close to the arts and humanities as it is to the social and human sciences, celebrates and prizes subjectivity rather than viewing it as an irritant, and can be distinguished from biography or memoir by its commitment to rigorous cultural interrogation and analysis” (Nigel *et al.* 2013).

From the definitions of ethnography and auto-ethnography, I drew two elements that were highly significant, namely, those of participant observation and the recognition of cultural context. In acknowledging the above elements, I attempted to remain true to the natural setting of the amaXhosa and the concepts they use to describe themselves and their environment. This is where the values of the people and attachment to their cultural life became critical, especially as such “value attachments related to people’s self-identities, their socio-cultural and religious-ethical constructions” (Ntombana 2011:45).

Data was collected through a literature study and fieldwork. Firstly, a literature review of primary and secondary documents was done. In this regard, newspapers, books, documents and other literature written by different authors were consulted. The literature study was carried out both pre-and post-fieldwork in order to complement the fieldwork data. Secondly, key informant interviews were conducted with individuals who play significant roles in society. Thirdly, direct observations were made when attending ritual events such as at the time of burials of twins and observing twins at the seaside.

#### **Auto-ethnography: sculptural practice as a form of data**

The three words that make up auto-ethnography are defined as, ‘auto’ meaning I or self, ‘ethno’ relating to culture, and ‘graphy’ the process of writing which can include the many forms of expression that bring finality to an idea.

An interesting note is made, that “Auto-ethnography is an intriguing and promising qualitative method that offers a way of giving voice to personal experience for the purpose of extending sociological understanding” (Wall, 2008). Through its very nature auto-ethnography is able to strip away at many emotive feelings, whether this be elation, sorrow, indifference, revelation or titillation. Thought processes and emotions become very clear to the reader through the writer’s personal stories, experience and observations. Therefore, so as to understand the cultural experience, the personal experience must be described, and so auto-ethnography becomes the process and the end product.

Munro (2011:163) argues that “there are strong parallels between the research process and the design process ... that the design process is potentially ‘messy’ and therefore a method needs to be sought to capture evidence from the process as the design process emerges and unfolds. Such a method is auto-ethnography”. I investigate myself through the textual, the use of sketches and the actual making of sculpture. In this way the process unfolds for a better understanding of the self. I believe it is possible to transmit information through art that would be impossible to verbalize and arrange according to verbal cognitive patterns. I echo Suominen’s (2003:4) statement that: “I believe that images and visual understandings themselves are knowledge that does not need to be translated into any other form of knowledge, thus I have examined images as data, as sources of information for investigation; as a medium for analysis for the researcher; and as an alternative form of representation in qualitative inquiry”.

For the purpose of this study I have used the qualitative research method of auto-ethnography to illustrate my personal experience of twinship. It has been an adventure to discover the self and others [twins that is] through the process of the narrative and the making of sculptural ceramic installations. Important to note is that one “should consider whether your idea really could be developed into available research topic that needs researching. Usually there is a good personal reason for undertaking the research – especially issues relating to practice – but is there a wider need and can this be confirmed?” (Gray & Malins 2004:12).

Combined with the experiences and observations of interviewees, and my interpretations in material form, I seek to capture a cultural story that not only defines the myths, traditions and beliefs of twins in Xhosa culture, but also to give the reader a deeper insight into my own feelings of being a twin. On a personal level, the research process in itself has revealed idiosyncratic and controversial information, perhaps none more pertinent than my twin brothers’ stance on myths and beliefs in Xhosa culture, as well as my own disappointment at not being part of some customs and traditions. In many ways auto-ethnography assists in the process of self-healing and self-cleansing, and certainly, self-awareness.

Ellis & Bochner (2000:139) argue that “auto-ethnographers gaze reflexively, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exploring a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move

through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations". With this approach, and as an artist within Xhosa culture, I was able through the creative process to use narrative and visual methodology to discover twinship and the culture that surrounds it, and in addition, to discover how twinship in turn affects culture.

Suominen (2003:28) explains critical visual methodology as "an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging". My own visual methodology is influenced by cultural and personal experiences, some being graceful, and others being open to adaptation. Change can be painful, swift and abrupt. Twins in Xhosa culture experience these changes in their lives periodically. In my creative processes, even though I use an intuitive approach, I also need to be able to adapt to outside characteristics, such as weather, temperatures, load shedding, clay making, surface treatment and firings. I echo Kudchadkar's commentary on auto-ethnography through objects when saying that "the process is instinctive, corporeal. I am interested in the way my touch translates into form - how and why. I study the exchange of information between my body and the clay. Personal memories, and experiences - the intangible knowledge of the body determines the outcome" (Kudchadkar, n.d.).

The use of clay as an organic material is able to evoke my personal experiences and memories. Clay being the material that most rural boys use to make cows along the river banks helped me to remember my boyhood as a twin, restricted by fear from getting into the water. Copper oxide when applied on white clay (fig 5), shows up as a green effect which reminds me of the deep waters that I was scared of. Artefacts such as vegetation (fig 8), play a significant role in self-reflective narrative and auto-ethnographic qualitative method due to the fact that such imagery is a means of data collection for myself as an artist. Such imagery becomes pertinent for understating the form and surfaces in the use of clay. "Throughout the [visual] artefact, I wish to demonstrate how I came to critically re-evaluate, through local, personal and visual methods of inquiry, the methods we use to study identity and cultural production" (Suominen 2003:2).

Retrospectively, through description and analysis of the personal experience, both my own and of others, I feel the cultural experience has been captured, assuring that the process and the product have now become the story. I have endeavoured through auto-ethnography to penetrate the many layers of the unique life experience of being a twin in Xhosa culture, and it is a unique

situation, unlike no other. My auto-ethnographic sculptural installations “encourage the viewer to glimpse aspects of the self through the screen of the other/researcher. In this way, this project attempts to reach beyond the personal and subjective narration of my experience and extends to public/shared experience” (Demjanenko 2011:40). Thus, the gallery becomes a space in which the viewer engages in the journey of my personal experiences.

All my experiences of being a twin together with the experiences of the interviewees, have, through auto-ethnography, manifested themselves in my practical work. The myths, traditions and various practices have come to life through the medium of clay. From the collecting of euphorbias, the throwing of silver coins into the sea, through to the burial of the umbilical cord and death itself - all have now moved from the narrative to a structured, sculptural form, emulating the practical and symbolic beliefs of twinship in Xhosa culture. This, to my mind, is the very essence of auto-ethnography. The limited written knowledge on the subject has been the catalyst for obtaining a credible and authentic narrative through the spoken word. I have delved deeply into my own twin experience and that of others to produce a body of work that illustrates this hopefully with credibility and authenticity. I have produced work through the method of sculpture and installation that shows both the joyous and the darker side of the Xhosa twin phenomenon, and would hope that the viewer gets this message and feels the cultural pull that surrounds the meaning of twins in Xhosa culture. All the preparation involved in my body of work, from conception to the making of moulds, sculpturing clay, the building of installations and the final product, bear testimony to the information-gathering process and are the integral heart of my work.

## **Interviews**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (formal interviews and informal discussions) were conducted in the areas identified for the research. The purpose of the interviews was to derive “interpretations, not facts or laws, from the informants” (Rubin 2010:23). Similarly, as was done by Ntombana (2011:47), “the interviews were based on conversation, with the emphasis on the researcher asking questions and listening, and the informants answering”.

The participant interviews took place in a setting where a video camera could be set up and where the noise level was at a minimum. Each participant determined the final decision of site location based on his or her comfort and personal needs. This method for conducting interviews was decided upon for the following reasons: I realised that the majority of Black Africans do

not feel confident about expressing their views in writing; instead they are more open to share them in a less formal manner. Another reason for conducting interviews in this way is that many people prefer to be familiar with the person seeking information and want to get assurances about how the information will be used.

### **Types of interviews**

Interviews can be structured, unstructured or semi-structured. I chose to use semi-structured interviews for this study. This type of interview has much of the free-wheeling quality of conversation of unstructured interviews and requires all the same skills (Bernard 1988:205). A semi-structured interview was also used to obtain information from the research participants. According to Yawa (2010:41) a semi-structured interview

“consists of asking respondents to comment on widely defined issues; those interviewed are free to expand on the topic as they see fit, to focus on particular aspects, to relate to their own experiences - the interviewer will only intervene to ask for clarification or further explanation but not to give directives or confront the interviewees with probing questions”.

The interview schedules used created a positive atmosphere where the informants were “free to share their experiences and views without intimidation” (Ntombana 2011:50).

### **Advantages of semi-structured interviews**

It is on the strength of the following explanation that I decided to use the semi-structured interview as a data gathering technique for the study. Cohen and Crabtree in Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Qualitative research guidelines project, 2006), explain as follows:

“Semi-structured interviewing is best used when you won't get more than one chance to interview someone and when you will be sending several interviewers out into the field to collect data. Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing in order to allow the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions”.

The semi-structured interview still allows for spontaneous interaction whilst maintaining a modicum of structure, and provides the interviewer with different ways of grasping and understanding the topic.

### **Recording of the interview data**

“Data in ethnography traditionally arise from interviews, participant observation field notes, document and artefact analysis, and research diaries” (Wall 2008:44). Wall (2008:44) further states that “thus far, the data sources accessed by auto-ethnographers have followed these traditions for the most part”. I chose to record my data on video so as to be able to facilitate lip-sync for recognition of any possible audio obscurity.

I used one-to-one interview techniques. In this regard Kundera (2001:26) has remarked that “a one-to-one interview conversation between informant and researcher is perhaps the most commonly used strategy for collecting life history data”. I concur with Ntombana (2011:50) about his approach. As he points out “when the intentions of the research and the reasons for recording were clearly communicated to the informants, they felt that their views were taken seriously when recorded on tape”.

### **Advantages of auto-ethnography/auto-anthropology**

Ellis (2004 :9) explains that the term ‘auto-ethnography’ has been used “interchangeably with countless other research writing methods, such as: personal narrative, self-stories, personal experience narratives, lived experience, narrative of the self, personal ethnography, evocative narratives, personal and first person accounts, among others”. The concept of auto-anthropology, or auto-ethnography as it is sometimes called, was defined by Strathern (1987:17, cited by Ntombana 2011:51) as “anthropology carried out in the social context which produced it”.

Auto-ethnography is “writing and research which is connected to the study of ‘meaning-making’ and ‘emotional life experiences’, which literally makes the researcher’s own experience a topic of investigation in its own right” (Ellis 2004:49). Ntombana (2011:51) adds that “auto-ethnography is anthropological research carried out by someone in his or her own cultural setting”. The term was originally defined as “insider ethnography”. According to Rapport and Overing (2000:18), auto-ethnography as a concept covers “the notion of an anthropological study of one’s own, one’s home and one’s self, and explores that murky

ground, at once physical, phenomenological, psychological, social and personal, which ‘an anthropology at home’ gives”. Such cultural research by anthropologists of their own people [is based upon] an intimate *familiarity* with the group” (Hayano 1979: 100).

Rapport and Overing’s (2000:5) assertion could be summarised as auto-ethnography being the “converging of auto or self and ethno or culture, or the researcher coming to reality with his or her own cultural experience”. Auto-ethnographies are “highly personalised, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences in relation to their cultural selves” (Ntombana 2011:52). Ethnographic authors “occupy dual interactive roles of researcher and research participant. Auto-ethnography emphasises what is heard and seen. The focus is on emotional and bodily knowledge, as well as cognitive perception; knowledge comes through direct participation as well as from observation” (Harvey 1998:490). The concept of auto-ethnography and its elements introduced a “paradigm shift in the ethnographic research world and, as a result, it is now popular among anthropologists” (Ellis 2004, as cited by Ntombana 2011:52).

In this research, I have taken a journey through my own cultural practice of myths, beliefs and rituals. I have undertaken this auto-ethnographic research as a Xhosa twin who has practiced some of the rituals to achieve the aims and objectives of this research. I echo Ntombana’s (2011:52) statement when he mentions that “this research work is my own contribution in joining other African researchers who have taken the liberty of exploring their own cultural practices”.

### **Language**

According to Foster & Kemper (1974:6) “the ethnographer lives among the people intended to be studied for some time learning the language and understanding their culture”. In some cases, the ethnographer uses the services of an interpreter, which carries its own disadvantages. (Petrus 2009:26). Petrus (2009, in Ntombana 2011:57) mentions that he was unfamiliar with the Xhosa language and culture. He did his ethnographic research in Xhosa speaking rural areas, but due to his ineffective grasp of the isiXhosa language, he could not follow properly and experienced the following challenges:

“The possibility that some of the data might have been lost between the process of interviews and data analyses. The unavailability of an interpreter at certain times limited the number of informants. Sometimes the interpreter did not pitch up for the appointments with the informants, which made the researcher seem unprofessional. Appointments had to suit the schedule of the interpreter even when he and the informants were ready to do the interviews. At one point the researcher had to suspend interviews while he was searching for another interpreter” (Ntombana 2011:57).

As a Xhosa man I did not need to learn the informants' language, unlike some of the ethnographers who study foreign communities (Ntombana 2011:57, citing Forster & Kemper 1974:6). Thus, I did not need the services of an interpreter, and that eliminated some of the challenges that ethnographers like Petrus (2009) encountered. For example, because I am a twin I saw myself as being privileged when one of the elders who is familiar with herbs took me to the bush to show me *umhlontlwana* (the small euphorbia tree used as medicine for twins). I could easily understand the nuances and significances of what he explained regarding this tree.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Duncan (2004:31) says that:

“Although ethnographic and auto-ethnographic reports are presented in the form of personal narratives, this research tradition does more than just tell stories. It provides reports that are scholarly and justifiable interpretations based on multiple sources of evidence. This means auto-ethnographic accounts do not consist solely of the researcher's opinions but are also supported by other data that can confirm or triangulate those opinions. Methods of collecting data include participant observation, reflective writing, interviewing, and gathering documents and artefacts”.

I have applied these principles when thinking about my own life, conducting interviews and creating my body of artworks, these will be seen in the forthcoming chapters.



## CHAPTER 4

### NARRATIVE AND INTERVIEW INTERPRETATIONS

Scant written information exists concerning attitudes and rituals associated with the birth, life and death of Xhosa twins. Primary sources, therefore, such as chiefs, community leaders, headmen, mothers, fathers and other twins, have played an important role in adding to my knowledge of this subject. My interviews with these people have confirmed and/or contradicted information previously in the public domain, and has, to a certain extent, increased the knowledge pool regarding twins in Xhosa society. Information gathered from these sources, which include my twin brother, Monwabisi, together with my own experiences, has also furthered this research.

#### **Are twins seen as a blessing or curse in Xhosa culture?**

With regard to whether Xhosa twins are seen as a blessing or a curse, my grandfather, Sthembele Ngcai (interview 2010) has said that in Xhosa society the “birth of twins is regarded as a blessing; it is because everything just goes in multiples in the family.” Sonny Pali, an elderly community member, (interview 2010) enlarges on this point, saying that “they have got divineness within themselves” and therefore “special ceremonies and rituals are performed on their arrival on earth”.

Twins are believed to bring fortune to the family and those around them. Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima (interview 2015), who is chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders in the Eastern Cape, has concurred with the above by saying that “indeed whether one comes from any of the Xhosa nations, twins were and are seen as a blessing in our culture because of many things, such as bringing wealth to the family”. He further said that “in most cases this bringing of wealth happens when the crops are planted in the fields. Because of this belief twins would be given the seeds and be asked to do the planting”.

#### **Birth rituals:**

##### **Umhlontlo**

The practice of planting euphorbia trees, called *umhlontlo*, (Soga 1931:292) has been confirmed by Ndoda Sidlayiya (interview 2010), an elderly community member who fathered twins.

Sonny Pali (interview of 2010) concurred, and further added that “if one of the twins were to die then one of the trees would be cut away, and if one of the trees dies it would mean that one of the twins would die soon”. Sthembele Ngcai (interview 2010) has also said that the mother of twins would regularly irrigate the plants with the bath water of herself and her twins. Ndoda Sidlayiya (interview 2010) justified this saying that “*amawele* are white people and the tree has white milky latex in it and that’s the only tree you find here that bleeds milk”. The number of trees planted is said to be equal to the number of twins. As mentioned above, *umhlontlo* is fetched from the forest by the father of twins. In our case, we grew up without a father and this may have had something to do with the fact that the ritual was not observed.

With regards to death of both *umhlontlo* and/or a twin, Nomvuyo Ndikinda (interview 2015) who is a female *imfusi* to male twins, alluded to an incident when a twin died at the age of five. She explained, saying that “at home there were two *imihlontlo* which were planted on the birth of my brothers. One tree began ailing and it eventually fell over and died. It was not long after the death of the tree, the twin also got ill and died”.

Even though the literature says that the ritual planting of *umhlontlo* was a customary practice, during my field work in homes where twins were born, there has not been much evidence of the tree, if at all. It is apparent, therefore, that the practice of planting euphorbia trees is slowly vanishing. However, Thando Khesa, a twin (interview 2015) has mentioned that “at home we grew up seeing a tree like that - ‘a thorny tree’, but it has slowly disappeared due to developments at home and perhaps ageing of the tree as well”. Available data does not mention anything about ageing of trees.

In contrast to what is both written and verbalized about *umhlontlo*, Lizo Cetywa, who is a twin brother to Malizo (interview 2015), and who grew up in the same area as myself, has told an interesting story about how *umhlontlo* is perceived in his home. He explained that “to my knowledge, the tree is a stone’s throw away from our home, but it is a tree that is not wanted, and moreover, we were told not even to make fire with it”. He further explained that “the only thing we were told to do was to plant two pairs of trees, namely two of *udywabasi* (black wattle), and two aloe trees”.

In my research I found that twins growing up in urban areas lacked these traditional practices. Mzimkhulu Zazi, a twin to Mzwandile (interview 2015) who grew up in a township near

Queenstown, mentioned that “unfortunately I know nothing about *umhlontlo* and I am sure it is because we were not living in a rural area”. Similarly Asanda and Siyasanga Malgas, from King William’s Town, are from what they call ‘modern rural’ areas. They mentioned that they knew nothing about this practice, which suggests that the tree was not planted at the time of their birth. One may then argue that the practice is becoming out-dated, especially considering that many homes of twins do not uphold the tradition.

### **Inkaba**

Burial of the umbilical cord and placenta, *inkaba*, has great clan significance and seals the attachment of the babies to their ancestral lands. Most women in the olden days would give birth at home and the *inkaba* could be easily buried, unlike in cases where a birth took place at a hospital. I found that there are variations with regards to where exactly the burial takes place. Asanda and Siyasanga Malgas (interview 2015) mentioned that “our mother told us that ours was buried next to the fire place inside, at the centre of the house”. Similarly, Thando Khesa (interview 2015) said that theirs was buried inside the house, but next to the wall. The house being referred to by Thando is the ‘big’ house, a well-respected place where gatherings and ceremonial activities take place. He further mentioned that “*inkaba* links us with *abantu abakhulu*, the elders (ancestors)”. In contrast, Andile Mqolombeli, a twin to Ayanda (interview 2015), mentioned that their *inkaba* was buried outside, next to the house.

In my case, my mother, (interview 2010) said that ours was “buried outside, next to the door step”. When I asked why, she answered that she did as she was told. She explained that she grew up in a family where there were elders and even though sometimes she could not make sense of instructions, she did as she was told. So she buried the *inkaba* as instructed, because doing this was vital for the connection of the children to their forefathers.

Most Xhosa people have a particular way of asking where the other person is from, namely “*iphi inkaba yakho?*” When literally translated the questioner is asking “where is your umbilical cord”? This is simply another way of asking ‘where are you from?’ Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to know where one’s *inkaba* is because this tells us where one is from.

### **Age of twins**

In my culture, as mentioned above, it is believed that the first twin to emerge from the womb is the younger twin. The age of twins is of huge significance in Xhosa culture as it involves inheritance and sometimes chieftaincy.

With regard to the belief about the second born twin being the older one (higher status twin), my grandfather, Sthembele Ngcai (interview 2010) has said that “I grew up knowing that there was always a ‘big’ and a ‘small’ twin, or an older and a younger twin. Our Xhosa history tells us that when a woman gives birth to twins, the one who came first would be called a younger twin because he opened a space for his brother to come out”. The ‘older twin’ is regarded as having a ‘higher twin status’ in this context [second born that is]. Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima (interview 2015), has agreed with this assessment, saying that “this is what I know, and I grew up with that knowledge”.

Ndoda Sidlayiya (interview 2010), an elderly community member who is also a father of twins, rationalized the reasoning behind this by citing an example of chiefs in Xhosa society. He said, “for example . . . I am living with younger brothers - if there are people coming to see or visit me, they are the ones who attend to them, asking where they are from and what they are here for, not me. Thereafter they come and report to me. So it basically means they are my shield and that is how it works in Xhosa thinking”.

Thando Khesa, a twin (interview 2015), has confirmed this by saying that “in our case, my brother was delivered first but we were told that I am the older one, and it’s even more interesting because I stayed many hours in the womb before I was born”. Asanda and Siyasanga Malgas, female twins (interview 2015), have also confirmed this, saying that “our parents believe that the older twin is the one who came second”. Mzimkhulu Zazi (interview 2015) also grew up knowing that his twin brother, who came out second, is the older twin. However, he mentioned that “when my brother is asked who is older, he says we were born on the same day and that makes us equal”.

This suggests that his brother, like Monwabisi and I, does not like the fact that we are told there is an older or younger twin. In our case our mother did not tell us which one of us was older than the other, because she did not know.

The fact that my brother and I grew up not having a father probably played a key role in us not being identified according to birth sequence. But in many ways we like the fact we do not know who the older twin is because it just simplifies our lives. On the other hand, Sthembele Ngcai, my grandfather, (interview 2015) said that in a case where twins are male and female, “the male twin succeeds by virtue of being a male, whether younger or older”.

Interestingly, our grandfather, Sthembele Ngcai (interview 2010) once mentioned that “*imfusi* (the next child born after twins) is the bigger twin and that makes him the heir”. Thus, among amaXhosa, there is a difference between older or bigger. Given a status of being big means that one possesses higher powers, even if one is younger. However, if it should turn out that the *imfusi* is female, then she would not have this status invested in her because she would not stand to inherit.

This became clear to us after our mother named her spaza shop after our younger brother, Siyabonga Ngcai. She later told us that we needed to find our own *amanxiwa* (plots for the future), because we would not inherit either the shop or the home. We were both happy with that decision.

During my fieldwork in East London I happened to meet up with Zimbabwean twin William Mugeyi. In an interview (2010) he told a similar story about the age of twins in Zimbabwe. He said that his “twin brother Wilfred is the older one according to our culture. In Zimbabwe, the older twin is the one who came second because they believe that the second one pushed the first one out. In other words, the second baby helped his brother to come out; otherwise he would have struggled to make way on his own”. William Mugeyi then said that he disagrees with how that works because “I saw the sun first and I am the older one. Culture messed things around regarding this matter”.

In contrast, the parents of Zoleka and Zoliswa (interview 2010), who live in Elliotdale, as well as those of Zikhona and Snazo (interview 2010), who live in Cala, did not rely on these cultural beliefs. With both these pairs of twins, the first ones were labelled immediately after birth, and they believe that the older is the one who was born first.

## Naming

The naming of twins, like for any Xhosa child, is significant, and associated with a number of relevant things. For instance, they can be named after forefathers, an event, and wishes of the family, sequence of children in the family and for many other connotations. Lizo, a twin to Malizo, has a particular order in relation to birth sequence, in that Malizo means ‘alms/donations’ and Lizo also means ‘alms’, but in the singular. In this context Malizo (interview 2015) justified the meaning behind their names saying that “our parents grew up poor and the names given to us were a way of thanking God for the donation”. However, the poor parents could also “have been asking for donations from the community”. Andile, who grew up in King William’s Town, (interview 2015) said that”

“With us, naming was basically based on the fact that we are five at home and the older person is the lady, followed by Mzwandile (meaning home has become bigger), and then by Mzwamadoda (meaning home of men only). Then the twins were born and my twin brother, who was said be older, was named Ayanda (meaning they are still growing/coming/widening) and my name is Andile (meaning men have widened)”.

So Andile became the last of the men. Similarly, the name Mzimkhulu Zazi (interview 2015) means that the ‘home became bigger’ and Mzwandile means that the home has increased. These twins are from Queenstown. Mzwandile is the older twin, and in terms of their sense of order, it means his arrival on earth added depth in the home, whereas Mzimkhulu means ‘now the home is bigger’.

In our case, my twin brother and I were given very similar names just like the twins mentioned above. Our names carry special meanings as well as some expectations. Sonwabiso means ‘that which makes others happy’, and Monwabisi means to ‘bring joy’.

My brother and I believe that our mother was hoping for something better after having had a tough time during her previous marriage. Our mother did not know which twin was born first, so the naming had no linkage with age. However, our younger brother, Siyabonga (meaning we thank you) resonates with the fact that she was saying ‘this is my last child and we thank you’. Remarkably all the twins interviewed in this study have similar names.

## Connections

Twins, whether identical or fraternal, have many expectations placed on them with regard to sustaining their spiritual and other connections between each other, within the family, and with their ancestors. For example, apart from the fact that most mothers would buy identical clothing for their babies as a way of keeping similarities/commonalities/connections between the two, it is said that twins need to exchange clothing when separating. This is in order to prevent illnesses in cases where one misses the other.

Underwear is noticeably the most popular item in this regard. This is an interesting concept because underwear contains someone's dirt. In this case, dirt could be playing an integral part in connecting the two souls. Exchanging of clothing for some twins does not always happen literally.

Mzimkhulu Zazi (interview 2015) mentioned that "I honestly did not know anything about this myth, but it is very interesting because every time I go home I take an item of clothing of Mzwandile with me, who is in Cape Town". I also find this interesting because in our case, even though we are aware of this myth, Monwabisi and I do not deliberately exchange clothing, but have done so unconsciously on occasions. We share clothing sometimes because we are the same size and we share the same taste. I sometimes buy my twin brother an item of clothing, or he does the same, and to me that simply means we are exchanging. It has happened on occasion that we have each bought something similar for the other on the same day. This interesting type of occurrence also happens with hair cutting. On many occasions we have both come home with bald heads, and even with moustaches. This always fascinates us, as well as the people around us. They often think that we have communicated about these happenings, but we are as mystified as they are because they occur without consultation.

Asanda, a twin to Siyasanga Malgas (interview 2015), mentioned that "our connection has always been very special and we want to keep it that way". She explained that "we wear each other's underwear". Thando Khesa (interview 2015), whose twin brother Thandile lives and works in Cape Town, concurs with the notion of a need to keep closely connected by means of exchanging clothing, and further mentions that "this practice keeps us connected because we hardly see each other". Malizo Cetywa (interview 2015) has mentioned that he and his brother had always maintained the practice of clothing exchange when they were working in different,

faraway places, but have recently stopped the tradition due to the fact that they are now living in the same place.

My brother, Monwabisi (interview 2015), on the other hand, says that “exchanging or not, does not really make a difference to me, but if it happens then that is fine, and sharing does help create memories for me”.

### **Twins as diviners**

Ndoda Sidlayiya (interview 2015), an elder in the Ngqeleni community who fathered twins, said that:

“*amawele ngabantu bolwandle, ooNgelengele, basuka apho kungasuki mntu khona*, like *amagqirha* (diviners), their home is in the waters. Hence they need to perform certain rituals, such as throwing silver coins into the ocean, when, and if, they go into the sea for swimming or rituals. They need to introduce themselves by saying: We are twins and we would like to be welcomed and protected”.

Ndoda Sidlayiya explained that “twins are ocean people; they are called *ooNgelengele* because they are from the sea. So when the sea comes to them it welcomes them with love and shows positive reception because it sees its brothers/sisters”.

Sonny Pali (interview 2010) concurred, explaining that “*amawele*, have got this diviner’s effect about them, and, like a diviner, they do not just enter into the sea”. Sonny Pali thus confirmed that twins need to introduce themselves because the belief is that twins are “seen by the sea as fellow people” and by seeing them the sea “sees one of its own and welcomes them”. During this welcoming it may appear as if it is violent, by showing “rapid movement and big waves”. In this process of welcoming one of the twins may be “taken away” and be drowned if they have not introduced themselves properly. Pali further recalled an event that took place when he was an initiate, saying that:

“We were *abakhwetha* (initiates) in 1957. . .you see, when there is a full moon, it is when we could go and dig up *ingceke* (white clay) by the sea ... now when we got there I was in front and the water was in the distance. It was morning and very quiet. We started digging up *ingceke* using wood and twigs. We formed a line and I was inside the sea. Suddenly the sea got violent and we noticed that one of the twins was drowning, but we managed to rescue him”.



I have found that most twins respect the ocean, and as a result they choose to stay away from it. Asanda and Siyasanga Malgas, Lwando and Lwandiso Ndalen, Mzimkhulu and Mzwandile Zazi have all mentioned in their interviews (2015, 2010 and 2015) that they know about the myth, and that for them the best practice is to stay away from the sea. I, also hardly ever go to the sea, and even though I lived by the sea for many years at East London, I did not swim in it. However, I sometimes enjoy walking on the beach, at the edge of the ocean. At the moment I am working inland, and it is my wish to settle on the coast in due course.

Asanda Malgas (interview 2015), further admits that she does not even know what the sea looks like, unlike her twin sister who has seen the sea, but has not been in it. Andile (interview 2015), like the others, mentioned that he and his twin brother do not even want to risk going to the sea, even though it is said that they would be protected by properly introducing themselves by carrying and throwing silver coins into it. Thando Khesa (interview 2015), a twin and an *ingqirha* (diviner), has mentioned that “being *umntu omhlophe* (a diviner, also known as a white person), I possess high powers and those powers are given to me by those in a quiet place, deep inside the sea, and that is where my luck is. Those people make me see things that other people do not see”.

In our case, when Monwabisi and I first went to the sea in 1997, we were given very old 5 and 10 cent silver coins to make it safe for us to be able to swim. We threw the coins into the sea and introduced ourselves to the ocean. Everyone around us looked very shocked at what we were doing. The practice of using money (silver coins) seems to have replaced use of a white bead. Ndoda Sidlayiya (interview 2010) has explained that “before the introduction of silver coins people used a white bead, which was also used by *abantu abamhlophe*” (*amagqirha* = diviner).

Chief Ngangomhlaba (interview 2015) mentioned a different point, which had not yet surfaced, with regards to the introduction ritual of twins to the sea. He said that “twins should take a piece of their hair and throw it into the sea before swimming as a way of introducing themselves. In that way, they would be welcomed by the people of the sea and be protected”. This for me was a very interesting finding, because if one comes to think about it, then perhaps this way of doing things gives an indication of what was used a long time ago before beads and coins existed.

In essence, what throwing the piece of hair into the sea means, is that twins were and are expected to introduce part of their own DNA into the sea in order to be known and thus ensure safety.

In addition, *amagqirha* use silver coins when conducting their performances at the sea. Singathwa Yose, (interview 2015) who is an *igqirha*, explained that “there is a ceremonial activity called *ukuhlwayelelwa*”. This means that there is a ceremony required when going to talk to the people at the sea or river, or upon being called by those people when going to the sea. Yose continued, saying that “we as *amagqirha*, carry a silver coin. We do not take notes or brown coins because we believe in whiteness bringing good fate. The rationale behind using a silver coin is that by virtue of it being shiny it carries its essence of bringing good fortune and is noticeable and easily seen”. Brown coins are associated with misfortune. Whiteness is dominant and always important for *amagqirha*. For example, white beads are always used, as well as white goats for sacrifice, and white brandy is given to the *iminyanya* (ancestors). Even natural elements like stars are associated with sacredness.

Carrying silver coins by some twins and *amagqirha* hints at a common appreciation of spiritual issues that show respect for ancestral spirits. Thando Khesa (interview 2015), both a twin and a diviner, has concurred with the above, saying that “I carry dual responsibilities of being a twin and a diviner, and when I go to the sea I go as someone whose originality is based at the sea, and I serve and worship my people inside these waters, as *igqirha*. Carrying silver coins, to us, also means being blessed”.

*Amagqirha* are people who possess spiritual powers, as do twins. They can see things that ordinary people cannot see. Their divinity is bestowed upon them by people deep in the waters. They have the ability to heal and protect their close ones. Yose (interview 2010), an *igqirha* based at King William’s Town, has shared an interesting story, saying she prevented her nephew’s death. She explained that “some time ago, there was a Miss and Mr University of Fort Hare competition and I ordered my nephew not to go to the event because he was going to die. The nephew did not believe this, but listened anyway, and decided not to go. The following morning after the event, two of the nephew’s friends died in a car accident. He would have been a passenger in that same car”. Yose said her nephew came to her and said “I will never doubt you again”. She says she sometimes prefers to keep quiet about what is being shown to her by her gods because people tend to jump to conclusions, especially because her

powers could be misinterpreted as being those of an *igqwirha*, who are feared because of being aligned with witchcraft.

With regards to healing, twins are known to have a healing hand. Their touch can heal. Thando Khesa (interview 2015) said “I believe that by touching people when they are physically ill, I can heal them. Even when we were young, we would be called to go and play with the ill and they would be healed”. In 2014, a colleague of mine who had a painful ankle called me, saying that “I need your touch because I know twins are healers”. Subsequently, on the following day I got a call from a teammate who had a similar problem. These are the types of occurrences that stamp my belief in this myth.

On the other hand, my twin brother Monwabisi has different views on this issue. He said (interview 2015) that “when growing up I was told that twins, especially identical twins, have supernatural powers and that they can even heal someone by just touching. However, that never got into my head and I never pursued it or even experimented with it. In essence, I do not believe I possess supernatural spirits or powers”. He explained that his reasoning for this is that “myths, beliefs and rituals are basically the creation of human beings, and I have learnt not to follow everything that is man-made”. I respect his way of thinking, but feel differently about this. I will equally continue with what I believe in, as has been outlined above, in my commentary to Khesa’s beliefs.

Twins are also believed to have great powers in connection with storms. Should a potential *isitshi* (storm) occur, twins are known to be the ones who have powers to prevent huge damage, or chase a storm away completely. Mzimkhulu Zazi (interview 2015) explained that “even though we were based in a township, when a storm was brewing, my brother and I were asked to shout out at it, saying ‘go back, go back’, and make a noise by beating pots”. He confirmed that indeed the storm would disappear. He also mentioned that for them as twins, the whole activity was fun, rather worrying about being able to make any sense of it.

This is also confirmed by Asanda and Siyasanga Malgas (interview 2015) who recall that “we used to chase the storm away and indeed the storm would withdraw”. Asanda recalled that in 2012 she and her sister, while visiting their grandmother, were asked to go outside and chase the storm forces away. These findings came as a bit of a surprise to me. Monwabisi and I have never been called to chase away storms. In fact, when we were young, we were ordered to

remain indoors because twins were very vulnerable and susceptible to lightning. We were told to sit very still and be quiet, but first we had to cover all shiny things, like mirrors and pots, and disconnect all electrical appliances. We were also not allowed to eat, especially not *umvubo* (sour milk mixed with dry pap), because it is believed to attract lightening. Once the storm had passed we uncovered everything, and continued as normal.

### **Circumcision**

Whether twins are identical or fraternal, male or female, they are treated as one. Hence the rituals performed on one must be performed on his or her counterpart. When both twins are of the same gender, there is no special treatment in the process of circumcision, but my grandfather, Sthembele Ngcai, (interview 2015), said that where the twins are fraternal (male and a female) and the male twin is to be circumcised, his female counterpart will be brought to the same place as him, and that there will be a pretence circumcision on her first. The knife that was going to be used on the male is first shown to her as if she is also being circumcised, but no actual cuts are made. Then she will leave the place of circumcision.

Nyameka Cungcu (interview 2015) has confirmed this basic understanding. She said that on the day before her twin brother, Nyameko, was to be circumcised he had gone to a traditional healer to get special protection because he was the one going outside the safety of home to be circumcised. She did not receive any such special treatment. She further explained that:

“As the proceedings for circumcision got underway, my brother and I waited by the kraal wearing red and white blankets and we were smeared with *ingceke* (white clay). A man came and cut our hair, and after that we went to the *ibhoma*, the temporary home on the mountain, and as we approached we were told to wait for the *ingcibi* (traditional surgeon) who told me to look away. He then took my blanket and cut a corner of it and ordered me to say ‘*ndiyindoda*’ ‘I am a man’, and then asked me to go. I believe by asking me to go he wanted to attend to my brother without me seeing anything”.

Once Nyameka had left, then her male counterpart, Nyameko, was circumcised normally. With regard to male twins, they are also treated as one person, but the older twin, usually second born, is first in all proceedings, including for circumcision. This older twin also usually gets preference with food, whereby he will eat first, as well as be the one to start off a song, and

lead others when walking. Furthermore, in the *ibhoma* (initiation hut), his place is the one next to the door, because this position indicates higher status than those further from the door.

Among amaXhosa, the seating arrangement is very important as it denotes and addresses age and gender status. Seating is important whenever there is a gathering of any nature in a room or in the kraal. The oldest man is always seated next to the door and then age sequence descends thereafter. With twins, as also for other initiates, the oldest is seated closest to the door and is called *usobhoma* (main initiate), and the smaller or younger is called *ntondo* (last born), in this context. This seating arrangement is also observed in the kraal when initiates have returned home where the *ukojiswa* or *ukosiswa* ritual that marks the healing stage of the initiate is performed. The older twin is seated next to the kraal exit.

Twins are always treated as one in these rituals. A single goat is slaughtered and everything is shared, such as *intsonyama* or *umshwamo* (a strip of meat cut from the right foreleg). Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima (interview 2015) confirmed the above by saying that “to my knowledge and according to what I have observed, twins do share a goat or cow during the initiation ceremony. I have observed that happening for all twins, no matter their gender”. This was also confirmed by Thando Khesa (interview 2015), when he mentioned that “with us, due to the fact that we are twins, there was one goat slaughtered and we had to share everything”. Similarly, Monwabisi and I shared one goat and *intsonyama*, the strip of meat cut from the right foreleg. On the other hand, twins Mzimkhulu and Mzwandile Zazi, as well as Lizo and Malizo Cetywa (interviews 2015), each had a goat during their *umojiso*, and did not share anything.

It is standard practice that when the initiate is about to return home, he first goes to the river to cleanse his old self. Nyameka Cungcu (interview 2015), explained that on the day when her brother was returning home she was asked to also go to the river where Nyameko was to bathe. After the brother was bathed they were both smeared with *imbola* red clay.

*Intonjane* (girl's initiation to adulthood) is similar to male initiation in the sense that the male twin is expected to undergo the ritual. Nomvuyo Ndikinda (interview 2015) being *imfusi*, and acting as a twin, has explained that her brother on the day of her initiation also underwent the ritual from beginning to end. She mentioned that being *ivele elikhulu* (higher status twin),

everything began with her, including when we performed the ritual “*ukuchazwa* (a clan practice of cutting/making marks on the face using a sharp razor), as well as during his circumcision”.

### **Imfusi**

*Imfusi* is like a second twin, and treated as part of the twinship, even though he or she was born after the twins. Just as twins are considered to be ‘one person’, *imfusi*, whether male or female, becomes a second twin, depending on circumstances. It is also acknowledged that in cases where twins perform certain rituals, he or she partakes in them as well, and when one of the twins has passed on, the *imfusi* takes the place of the deceased twin. Nomvuyo Ndikinda, (interview 2015) shared her experience as an *imfusi*. She had taken on the role of the second twin after one of the twins in her family had passed on at the age of five. All rituals undertaken by the living twin, were undertaken by her, and she told of being present at her brother’s initiation saying that “when he went to the mountain I was with him and I was the first to be circumcised (pretence circumcision) and then released. The reason for the release was probably due to the fact that they [elders and traditional surgeon] did not want me to see what was going to be done to my brother”. She further explained that on her brother’s return from the mountain, she was equally part of the “whole day of *ukosiswa/ukojiswa* ritual which is the healing of the initiate and the slaughtering of a sheep/goat in the bush” (Ntombana 2011:32).

Nomvuyo explained that in the morning when her brother went to the river, she went to the *ibhoma* and was smeared with *ingceke*, then went to the river with the rest of the men. She went on to say that “at the river I was secluded and allowed to wash while my brother bathed on the other side. On completion of the procedure, I joined him and the other men, singing and playing with fighting sticks, until we reached home where we were placed in the kraal and *umojiso* went ahead”. As commented above, twins usually share the goat because they are regarded as being one person, but in this case she was given her own goat.

### **Graves, burials and bereavements**

In amaXhosa society twins require special treatment and rituals, especially with regard to issues of grave digging, the pouring of soil into the grave when a family or relative is buried, and bereavement practice.

Rural life involves a lot of working together and use of joint labour from all community members, and includes gardening, the making of mud bricks, the brewing of traditional beer

and slaughtering. On the death of a community member, the men are expected to dig a grave for the deceased without payment. Twins are part of the society and are therefore expected to participate in community work parties. However, the lines regarding the involvement of twins in grave digging are blurred and inconclusive.

It is customary that once one becomes a man, he is expected to partake in activities such as grave digging. In 1999 my brother and I became men and were of the understanding that we should follow the norms of our society. We thus participated in grave digging, but later heard from some older people that we were not supposed to actually dig graves. We were advised to attend the grave digging without physically doing digging, and in that way to honour the dead. We were not sure, so sometimes we helped dig graves, and on other occasions we attended without digging. The expectation of refraining from grave digging was reinforced when my grandfather and other interviewees reiterated this belief when I was conducting interviews in 2007.

Furthermore, in my interview with Malizo Cetywa (2015), who is a twin coming from the same area as I do. I was surprised to hear that he had “never dug a grave up until now and our headman respects this, but we do hear people complaining even though they are aware of the twin situation”. On the other hand, Xolani Sifanele (interview 2015) who comes from the same place as I do, and is a twin to his late twin brother Mxolisi, has explained that “with me and Mxolisi, our grandfather told us that there is no such thing as twins do not do grave digging, as long as they had undergone proper rituals such as *imbeleko* (introducing a child to ancestors) and *ulwaluko* (circumcision)”. Xolani then continued, saying that “so that the pronunciation by our grandfather was key to us because it gave us a right to continue being part of the digging team without having to worry about consequences”.

Information pertaining to these myths, beliefs and ritual practices usually proves to be more reliable the older the informant is, but this is not always the case. For example, what transpired in my interview with our local chief, who is quite old, was mostly ‘I do not know’. This chief, Bamb’ingonyama Hlomendlini (interview 2015), when asked about twin’s involvement in grave digging and the pouring of earth into the grave after the coffin has been lowered, said that he “didn’t know, and that I would have to do his research and ask other chiefs”. However, Zwelakhe Mkhosana (interview 2015), who is a headman in the same village, has mentioned that he is aware of the belief and “knows deceased twins who were very firm in their belief of

not digging graves because they were forbidden from the practice”. Zwelakhe explained that the twins got old and died without ever having dug a grave. He said that “to me it is about what the twins themselves believe and how the community respects that”.

In basic agreement, Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima (interview 2015), said that “as far as I know, twins were and are seen as being sensitive people and they were/are forbidden from anything to do with such things as grave digging”. In contrast, Mlamli Ndamase (interview 2015), who is a Ward Councillor at Libode, has explained that “twins are treated like any other people with regards to grave digging and pouring soil”.

One of the twins from Queenstown, Mzimkhulu Zazi (interview 2015), explained that nowadays, growing up in a township meant that graves are dug by municipal workers, in contrast to rural villages where it is the responsibility of the men in the community. Thus, “the belief that we are not supposed to dig a grave was not shared with us”. They grew up in the township, and so were never told about this rule. Thus, in most townships, twins are not specially considered when it comes to grave digging, because it is not a community responsibility.

Furthermore, my twin brother Monwabisi (interview 2015) has agreed that our prohibition from grave digging was advised by our grandfather. However, he questioned the validity of this advice because we regularly dug graves and nothing bad has happened to us, and said that, “I believe we, or I, can still do it”.

It is interesting to note that there are also some rules regarding the pouring of soil into the grave at the time of burial. Mzimkhulu Zazi (interview 2015), and his twin brother, are both reverends in their churches and it is a challenge when they conduct funeral services for mourners wishing to pour soil into the grave at the end of proceedings. Mzimkhulu and his twin brother prefer not to conduct such service because twins should not put soil into the grave. This belief relates to the principle that twins should not dig graves. He mentioned that he is fortunate that at his church they know and understand this tradition.

According to Mkhize (2008:22) “in most African societies, when a death is announced, the family is immediately regarded as ‘polluted’, *isinyama*”. My grandfather, Sthembele Ngcai (interview 2010), confirmed that in the olden days children would not go to a burial site, nor



go close to the family of the deceased, because of the belief that they could be contaminated. Children would lay a stone at the graveside at a later date, after the burial, as a means of saying farewell to the deceased. So, *amawele*, being sensitive people, are known to be more delicate than other people, and need protection from the possibilities of pollution. This is confirmed by Malizo Cetywa (interview 2015) who explained that “we respect anything that has to do with a grave site. We grew up knowing that we do not pour earth on the grave and people respect that”. Zwelakhe Mkhosana (interview 2015) has further confirmed the above, saying that “I know twins do not pour soil into the grave”.

Burial ceremonies for twins are different because they are afforded special treatment. Ndoda Sidlayiya (interview 2010) said that it is standard practice to put the living twin in the grave for a short period of time before the deceased twin is actually buried. This practice is believed to be important because it releases the soul of the dead and equally helps the living twin to heal. He also said that during the procedure, both twins must have exchanged their clothing, so that the living twin would be wearing the clothing of the deceased, and *vice versa*. The deceased twin is thus buried in the clothing of the surviving twin. Sonny Pali (interview 2010) has mentioned that “we believe that this is how we prevent sickness and weakness from attacking the surviving twin, because the loss of a twin has the severe potential of emotionally weakening the survivor, be that person male or female”. Andile Mqolombeli (interview 2015), a twin to Ayanda from King Williams’ Town, for example, has mentioned that he saw that his grandfather, who was a twin, practiced the ritual of entering the grave before his counterpart.

Xolani Sifanele (interview 2015), a twin brother to late Mxolisi, living in the same area as I do, has shared his experience during the burial of his late brother, with reference to practices of placing a surviving twin into the grave of the twin to be buried. Xolani said that “with me it did not happen that way. Instead, my grandfather told me to join the men in the grave who would receive the coffin as it was passed down”. They did not have modern equipment or ropes for lowering the coffin, so it was passed down in order to be laid to rest. Xolani continued, saying that “I had to hold my brother’s coffin at the head, at the end at which my brother’s head had been placed”. Xolani said that he did “not know what would have happened if they had modern equipment” and that “my act of lowering the coffin was a way of compensating for the ritual sometimes performed of the surviving twin lying down in the grave before internment of the deceased”.

Bamb'ingonyama Hlomendlini (interview 2015), a chief in my village of Buntingville, who is a regular attendee at most of the local funerals, has confirmed that “indeed, in all funerals of twins I attended, I have witnessed the practice of the surviving twin going into the grave first”. Twins like Mzimkhulu Zazi and Thando Khesa (interview 2015) have expressed the importance of observing this ritual. They said that this is a way of honouring the deceased and healing the self. However, Monwabisi my twin brother, has a different view with regards to this belief, and some general practices pertaining to twins. In an interview (2015), he said,

“I fully understand that myths and beliefs are our living heritage as amaXhosa, especially those concerning twins. This living heritage needs to be transmitted from one generation to another. In order for that to be done, it needs control, protection and development. However, all these are man-made practices and for me it is a matter of doing what makes sense, and not to do things just because the majority does”.

I then asked Monwabisi in this same interview what he would do if I was to die first, in terms of honouring my death, bearing in mind the practice of the surviving twin entering the grave for a short while first. He replied: “In the event that you die before me, I will not practice this tradition. I understand that it has a long history and heritage of amaXhosa, and has been done for the sake of the living twin. There are many ways that I will honour your death and I do not believe that I will be left behind with misfortune by not obeying and following the old practices”.

This was somewhat hard for me to swallow, and was a bit of a shock, even though I understand and respect his way of believing and making his own interpretations. The departure of a person, particularly one's own blood, is never an easy thing to deal with. But, it is his choice to think and act on whatever he prefers, and I will not be there anyway to see what he has done. On the other hand, Malizo Cetywa (interview 2015), has said that “I do think I will honour my twin brother's death in that way”. Likewise, Mzimkhulu Zazi (interview 2015), makes an interesting point saying that “I would rather do what should be done, rather than continue living my life, possibly with regrets and not being able to undo the situation”.

Mzimkhulu's opinion expresses my own feelings, because I am likely to engage with burial practices in the way that relates to honouring twins, particularly as regards death. Death is a transition phase of existence. We are one soul, and for me to accompany him in that way will

be very relieving to me as a person who is part of our township. Different people have different ways of honouring deceased people.

Even though the ritual of placing a surviving twin in the grave before the deceased twin is interred is a prescribed practice, I do believe that doing it will be special and important to me, partly because of helping his soul/being to move on smoothly to whatever comes next. Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima (interview 2015), explained that “for any person/relative who has lost his or her family member, it is important that he or she finds a way to release peacefully. The deceased needs to have a peaceful departure from earth”.

Twinship does not end when one of the pair dies. The deceased twin is still regarded as being present. In some cases the deceased’s twin is consulted when there are certain ceremonies or rituals to be performed. This is confirmed by Nomvuyo Ndikinda who is *imfusi* to a twin whose brother is deceased. She explained that “at home we always consult the other twin. When my brother went for initiation there was a goat slaughtered for the other as well. That also happened when I went for my *intonjane*”.

According Ntombana (2011:2), “mourning rituals include among others, cleansing, funeral ceremony, removal of hair, slaughtering of a cow, wearing of mourning clothes and restriction of the mourners to participate in social activities for a stipulated time”. Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima (interview 2015) noted that “different tribes, clans, sub-tribes or families perform rituals of mourning differently even though there are apparent commonalities”. With regards to twins, he further explained that “twins are treated as one person and thus, any kind of mourning is only done after the second twin has died”. Pali (interview 2010), has concurred, saying “it only makes sense that there is no mourning until both twins are dead because one cannot mourn for a living person”.

Xolani Sifanele (interview 2015), who lost his twin brother early this year, has mentioned that “there was not any kind of mourning in our family when my twin brother passed away”. That there are many different ways of doing things all goes to show, again and again, that the ways in which people act depends very much on what they believe in rather than that there are hard and fast facts and rules that apply to everyone.

In Xolani's case, as part of preserving the soul of his brother, he was given all of his late brother's clothing, so he could wear these items anytime he misses him. It was surprising and interesting when he told me during this very interview that he was wearing his late brother's t-shirt. When I called him on the phone I was not exactly sure which twin I was going to talk to because I had heard that one had passed away, but was not sure which one that was. I was afraid that I would call the surviving twin by the name of the deceased twin.

He immediately put me at ease, by saying that people often confuse the two of them even though they were not identical twins, and even recently have called him by his late brother's name. This put me at ease about possibly calling him by the wrong name, and also brought to mind that there are many possibilities for confusion when dealing with twins. Xolani and Mxolisi Sifanele are non-identical twins, yet people still confuse them.

I have found myself wondering, for example, what will happen if either Monwabisi or I pass away. We are identical twins, so there is even greater potential for confusion. I have laughed out loud when thinking about what people might say about one or other of us during the memorial service, because everyone we know struggles to distinguish between us, and so there is every likelihood that when people think they are talking about the deceased, they might well actually be talking about the surviving twin. This seems quite funny to me. I imagine, for instance, a situation where the photo being displayed could be of the surviving twin rather than the deceased twin. There are members of my family who are completely unable to distinguish between us. Thus there are possibilities for huge confusion, even to the extent that the surviving twin could take on the identity of the deceased twin, and nobody would know.

Monwabisi and I are different and have differing beliefs, yet we are inseparable. In the next chapter I explore our twinship more extensively, as expressed by means of a series of installation artworks.

## CHAPTER 5

### SCULPTURE INTERPRETATIONS

*‘Art should be an agent for destabilization, an agent for change’*

Antony Gormley, Reuters, 2009

In South African contemporary art, the need for art that redresses imbalance is huge, and I find Nicholas Hlobo’s work does justice in exploring such concepts. Hlobo (2010:1) suggests that “through my works I attempt to create conversations that explore certain issues within my culture as a South African.” He draws on his Xhosa culture and heritage, and his life as a black person in post-apartheid South Africa, and is concerned with gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity. Similarly, Nandipha Mtambo (2007:6) whose roots are based in Nguni culture, “investigates notions of personal and cultural memory and how these have influenced my art creation. I draw attention to my experience of existing between two cultural spaces; Western and Nguni and how this has influenced the work”. These characteristics are prevalent in much of South African contemporary art, but they are not prevalent in my own artistic practice. I concur with Odunayo (2014:51) in that “research does not focus on these issues, neither does my work directly engage with concepts of post-colonial influences or their impact on social identity”.

I am of the view that artists should take into consideration the concept that specific cultural backgrounds influence creative experiences. Thus, the creation of my artworks is based on my lived experience, taking into account, but not neglecting, the evolving influences of the past.

Zingisa Nkosinkulu, an artist from the Xhosa culture, investigated Christianity and Xhosa cultural traditions using his personal experience. He “seeks to understand how identity is constructed within a particular geographical and ideological culture and how self-identity can be constituted through the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of cultural histories” (Nkosinkulu 2015:1).

According to Judy Ramgolam (2011:47) “various artists have visually interrogated the notions of identity in response to the multiple variables of personal, emotional and social interaction with cultural practices”.

In exploring personal experiences, I employ a narrative approach which Sharon Weaving (2011:4) describes as something that “exists independently of the media, giving it concrete form, and is therefore easily transportable and flexible in its application to new methods of communication” and, in addition, “emphasizes the important function of narrative in commenting on pertinent concerns within contemporary society” (Weaving 2011:9). Consequently narratives from previous generations remain pertinent to contemporary society (Altman 2008:1). In present day society “artists are willing to use their art and ‘lived experience’ as a means of educating others, telling their stories and reflecting on the behaviour of contemporary society by visually narrating personal experiences”.

My body of work seeks not only to exhibit technical ability but to add value to Xhosa indigenous knowledge, capturing the narrative through the exploration of auto-ethnography and sculpture. In critical discourse on sculpture, it is recognised that it has been a primary source of expression for thousands of years, and “is often used to represent the societal concerns, such as religion, politics, and morality” (Shaikh, n.d.).

In my work I have found inspiration through artists who explore duality and multiplicity such as Gormley (b.1950) whose interest is in the “body because it is the place where emotions are most directly registered” (Gormley, n.d.). As an artist I use the self as a way of interrogating culture. In this way my body does the communication, because “when you feel frightened, when you feel excited, happy, depressed, somehow the body registers it. The body is a language before language. When made still in sculpture it can be a witness to life and it can talk about this time now” (Gormley, n.d.).

Gormley’s installation *Bed* (1980) “seems like the indentations of a couple in a mattress of bread and is in fact based on one body and its mirror image. The volume of the artist’s body is represented by empty space, the contours of which are defined by a surrounding environment composed of bread” (Tate Modern Gallery, n.d.).



Fig 1. Antony Gormley *Bed*, 1980. Bread and paraffin wax on aluminium panels, 280 x 2200 x 1680 mm.

I too, use the representation of space to allude to a womb, or a bed, or the community of the amaXhosa, prescribing the way in which twins should live their lives. In Gormley's work, the question of enclosure, a memory, a void or impression arises, and equally so in my work.

The bed, or box-like form, addresses this question. Here is a place of comfort and enclosure. The pose of the absent and supposedly sleeping figure, arms folded on the chest, replicates the traditional pose of the dead.



Fig 2. Antony Gormley *Field*, 1991. Terracotta, 35,000 figurines each between 8 and 26 cm high.

I have echoed the mysterious figurines in Gormley's work *Field*, to have dual meaning: they are the community into which twins are born, and also the outsiders who question the cultural practices associated with twins. In contrast to Gormley's work, which fills the gallery space, my work sits in limited space. His "figures fill out the space - there is no room for us, the threshold cannot be crossed. The shape of the *Field*, is defined by the gallery spaces".

Gormley explains *Body of Fruit* as 'expansion work'



Fig 3. Antony Gormley *Body and Fruit*, 1990. Cast in iron, 229 x 259 x 219cm /194 x 125 x 120 cm.

"Expansion works began with an obsession with renegotiating the skin: questioning where things and events begin and end" (Gormley n.d.). The space between the bodies seems to expand the more the viewer observes it. The word expansion resonates with my work in various ways. I have attempted to create the feeling of pulling away, or dividing into two, and then merging as one again.

The influence of Denise Pelletier's (2006) *Pug re* is also evident in my work in the employment of the visual aesthetic, media, and the way in which the work is presented, rather than its conceptualized content.



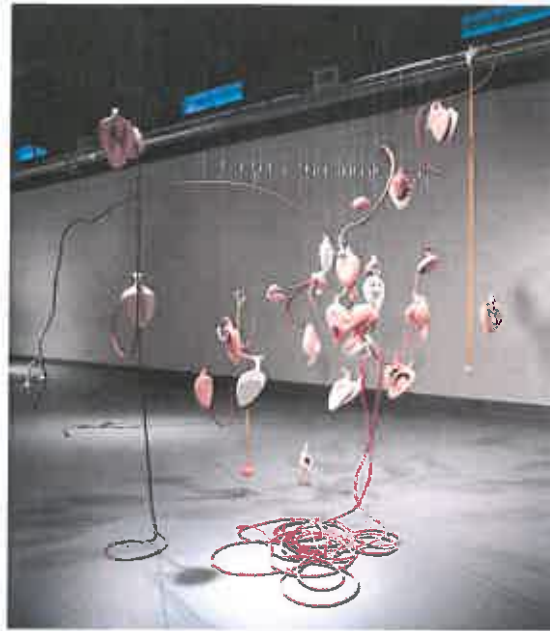


Fig 4. Denise Pelletier, *Pugáre*, 2006. Porcelain, mixed media, dimensions variable.

In *Pugáre*, which means to scour or cleanse, the meaning seems self-evident after one looks at the repeated forms that include bedpans, portable urinals and other materials related to hygiene. “However, an implied sickliness remains” (Pelletier, 2006).

Even though I cast forms individually, the viewer is aware of the repetitiveness and can assume the pieces are cast from one mould. This sort of seeing is apparent when people view identical and semi-identical twins, the repeat pattern of facial features being two individuals, and yet also one. Pelletier’s objects hang, suspended in space, in an almost timeless vacuum. I look at ways in which clay as a medium can be used to create repetitive, hanging, organic forms to achieve notions of multiplicity.

### **Visual analysis / conceptualising my artworks**

The studio is the workroom I call a creative space. It is the place for construction, instruction, deconstruction, and experimental ideas, the place of self-expression and artistic discovery. Within this designated area I am able to embrace the opportunity to be innovative and creative in my formal discipline as a ceramic sculptor. I share studio space and equipment, such as slab rollers, a kiln and general studio tools, with my students, but have my own work area within this space. This arrangement in itself provides challenges on a daily basis. The beneficial outcome, however, of working in a teaching environment, far outweighs any negative aspects. Students, generally of a curious nature, are able to observe first-hand the methods and

techniques I use, many of which are not included in their curriculum. When they watch me working, they are able to see and question the creative process, and frequently request to be part of the production. In my view many artists are secretive about the layering processes that impact on the final product. I see myself as different. I am more than happy to share all my experimentation, successes and failures, with my students. However, I often work after hours in tranquillity and without disturbance.

The fact that I do not have an organized space for storing finished work or work in progress can sometimes be frustrating. On entering the studio I am confronted with a huge amount of pending work in various stages of completion - I can equate this in many ways to being a mother of twins. My mother often tells us that she is now happy we are grown men. The challenges she faced when we were young were many, and she was regularly asked if she was coping with two individuals. People would find it 'cute' to see her feeding twins simultaneously, but the reality was harsh. Dual planning was part of her daily life .... buying for two, buying in pairs. Now we are seen as independent individuals not necessarily knowing what our mother went through. When I am faced with producing a large volume of work, I sometimes ask for assistance from my students.

Likewise, there are many processes that have led to the final product of my artworks. Processes such as preliminary sketchbook drawings, choosing the method of work and the medium to be used, making maquettes, assembling, disassembling, purchasing clay, the practice, the finishing and firing. These are similar challenges to those that confront the mother of twins. The artworks become my multiple birth babies. The nature of my studio space together with the participation of my students, and the challenges that these factors present, has greatly influenced the outcome of this body of work.

### **My exhibition: *Entwined, One***

This exhibition took place at the Ann Bryant Gallery, East London: 29 October – 12 November 2015.

At the Exhibition I make it clear that my interest in the topic of twinship within Xhosa culture is due to my own personal experiences as a twin. The subject covers the many issues of twinning such as connectedness, oneness, and duality. These multiplicities, deeply entwined in myth, beliefs and ritual practices in my culture, are conveyed through sculptural installations.

Reflecting on this theme, the installations portray, question and interrogate the concept of ‘one in many’ - because twins are perceived as one person. The body of work created for this study is a result of my own experiences and that of other twins, as well as information gathered from fieldwork. Setsiba (2012:51) remarks that “qualitative research involves the use of a variety of materials, case studies, personal experience, interviews, observation, and visual text that describe experience and meaning in the lives of an individual”. As a result of these experiences and interviews, I was able to analyse and create artworks that communicate the nature of being a twin in Xhosa culture. The exhibition sets out to consider the myths, beliefs and ritual practice that relate to the birth, life and death of twins within this culture. It also attempts to provide an overview of the relationship between twin-births and the cultural environment into which they are born.

In *Entwined, One* I explore selected issues regarding standards by which we as twins are expected to live within our society. This work highlights the question of culture and cultural perceptions that surround ‘twin’ connectedness, and how myths and traditional practices have affected this oneness. The phenomenon of twins, namely the fertilization of one egg that subsequently splits into two, underlines the whole dilemma of oneness.

Do I perceive my twin brother and I as one, or is it society that dictates this? The interplay between cultural perception and the impact it imparts on the experience of being a twin is integral to the exhibition.

The choice of material for the body of work is predominately clay, and it was a choice I could not veer away from - I am born in clay soil and this work cohesively investigates the concepts of self-location and identity. The works “being made of clay, emphasize the vulnerability [of practices], as clay is delicate and must be handled carefully” (Riner 2013:22). The process of working with clay is never static and this can be compared to culture - ideas transform and transfer constantly, much in the same way culture invents and adapts.

Land, earth and whatever emerges from it, is important in Xhosa culture. It is the life-blood of existence, the giver of sustenance, the body-paint for ceremonial and ritual practice, the provider of materials for dwellings and utensils. More poignantly is its connection to history, politics, reclamation and landlessness. My intention is to portray the connectedness that glues me to my twin, and through the use of clay, to the land as well.

As a child, making clay cows, cars and pots were among our playing activities. Matjaz Duh (2010:32) concurs that the “artistic expression of younger children shows itself in the role of a child's cognitive development and represents an aid that the child uses to come to know, explore and work out the world around him”. Creating clay cows was not solely because of the lack of shop-bought toys, but was also because of the feeling of enjoyment the self-manufacturing process presented. Each cow was made from local raw material and reflected life in its immediate environment. It was a creative process that related to realities around us. Thomas McEvelley (1999:381) says that “art is a way of thinking about reality”. Since a child I have been captivated by the medium; its organic origins and its pliability, its versatility and earth tones. As time passed, and I continued working with clay I soon learnt that my passion lay in becoming a ceramic artist.

Noticeably, clay dominates my work. I fully agree with Benson (2011) when he writes:

“No matter what other media I add later, clay is always at the forefront, the centre, the core. Clay is unique and physical. When constructing with clay, getting it under my fingernails, I really become a part of it. I like the physicality of clay, which requires a tremendous bodily effort on my part to work with it. Unlike other materials, clay comes in its rawest form, unrefined. I am responsible for its refining, and in this process, I come to know and understand the material”.

Moreover, through in-depth investigation of clay and its qualities, and understanding its physical makeup, I came to realize that ceramic sculptures need more strength and less weight. Paper clay became the medium to achieve this strength. Being able to join different sizes of clay, being able to join wet-on-dry surfaces, allowing for no cracks, achieving a light weight material, and so on ... paper clay provides these qualities. Despite the long process involved in the preparation, from boiling water, experimenting with pulp ratios, drilling clay and paper together, and laying it on the plaster of Paris slab, the process itself is both fulfilling and satisfying to the ceramic artist.



Fig 5. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Umhlontlo*, 2015. Clay, wood.

The choice of title is based on two aspects, it is firstly symbolic, in that *umhlontlo* is planted in the morning when twins are born and, secondly, the idea of having *umhlontlo* as the first installation, strategically placed as one enters the gallery, introduces the viewer to the theme of twinship, much the same as twins are introduced to the family or community. *Umhlontlo*, known widely in South Africa as *euphorbia triangularis* of the euphorbiaceous family, a succulent, spiny tree with toxic latex, is ritually planted on the birth of twins to protect them.

The euphorbia in *umhlontlo* are arranged to form a kraal, which is the place of gathering and ancestral spirits, as a symbol to indicate to the entire community that twins are now in the home. The gallery space thus becomes my home for this period, a space where I am introduced as a twin and where the viewer becomes part of the community. It is, for all intents and purposes, the gathering of people to view art and to witness the birth of twins. As a twin who came from a home where this practice was not observed, I feel somewhat embittered. However, I do not blame the situation in the sense that our father was not present at the time when we were born. Forests and herbs in Xhosa culture are linked to the presence of men, and he was not there. This is possibly the reason why we do not have *umhlontlo* at home.

As an artist and auto-ethnographer, I went to the forest and fetched *umhlontlo* before creating this piece. I chose three euphorbias of differing forms and height, rationalizing the fact that we as twins have many things in common and twining does not end in 'two' but more than two, and takes in height and body weight as well.

*Each mhlontlo* was then duplicated by means of a plaster of Paris mould. Multiples of these forms were made to replicate the duplication and/or multiplicity of twins. The choice of a clay colour tone is based on two reasons: The tree itself is white-grey in colour, and when cut it bleeds a latex milk. Even though the tree is known to be very soft, paper clay was the best medium to use in creating *umhlontlo*. The evident split-line in the mould emphasizes twinning as one entity. During the creation of these components, the duality of twins became apparent, in that a single *umhlontlo* is cut and divided into two pieces and then combined to form 'one' once more. In other words, the form begins as a whole, is separated, and becomes whole once more, the same way the fertilized ovum splits into two ova.

I was at times confused as to which of the six components belonged to which (3 sets of euphorbia), but solved this problem by naming each component alphabetically so as to prevent confusion. This resonates well with the fact our mother could not tell the difference between my twin brother and I, and even today, our siblings and those in our community find it hard to distinguish us from each other. As a result some people requested that we have a mark, or cut our hair in an individual way.

[see next artwork overleaf]



Fig 6. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Inkaba*, 2015.

Terracotta clay, fabric, white casting slip.

This installation comprises 68 slip-cast bags and is intentionally placed adjacent to *Umhlontlo*. The rationale behind this concept is the fact that when twins are born and introduced to the family, their umbilical cord is cut, wrapped and buried. The ritual of burying the cord and the placenta has great clan significance and seals the attachment of the babies to their ancestral lands. However, this practice is not only pertinent to the birth of twins but to any Xhosa child. *Inkaba* then comes to mean one's ancestral home and symbolises the relationship between the individual, his/her clan, the land and the spiritual world. The burial place of an *inkaba* is a place where one must go to dream and communicate with ancestors. It is usually a sacred place next to the house. *Inkaba* is buried in a rondavel or big house (house where family and ceremonial gatherings take place) at the edge where the room floor and wall connect. Thus, the gallery becomes the ceremonial place, with the installation placed in the centre of the room, in the same way *inkaba* is buried.

Using a casting slip to produce these individual forms reinforces the idea of multiplicity, as is the case when a ceramic factory uses moulds and casting slip to mass produce their wares. The white and terracotta slip highlights variations on the nature of people who practice this custom. Different fabrics dipped in slip, reiterate individuality among twins, as the women would use whatever fabric material was available to them so as to differentiate the siblings. Fabric



becomes an integral component as it enhances both shape and form, and, in the finished piece, emphasises fragility and vulnerability. After the first (bisque) firing, the appearance and texture are enhanced. The custom of *inkaba* is akin to something that gradually fades, and eventually its presence vanishes. As in Pelletier's *Pugáre*, the forms hang, suspended in the air, and are viewable from any angle, front on, underneath, above.



Fig 7. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Ingqithi*, 2015.

Clay, metal and steel.



*Ingqithi* is strategically placed next to *inkaba* and portrays certain rituals performed during the birth of twins, relevant to the tribes and clans of the amaXhosa nation.

Nyamende (2008:20), citing Mqhayi (1970), notes that: “On their birth their mother experiences complications, when one baby’s hand comes out first, immediately one of the midwives cuts one of the unborn baby’s fingers thereby performing the custom of *ingqithi* (the ritual cutting of a finger). Soon the hand withdraws and the baby who is born subsequently is in possession of all his fingers. Hours later the baby with a cut finger is also born. This sparks off a dispute among the midwives”.

The sculpture suggests the body of a pregnant woman with the vaginal opening showing the emergence of a baby’s hand. It is constructed with two main materials, namely metal and clay. The use of metal in the work suggests durability, although under certain conditions, it can deteriorate as with the practice of cutting a finger. Clay is used in conjunction with metal, stamping the fact that the amaXhosa are seen as a tribe that still adheres to cultural traditions.

My fieldwork people had very different views on the importance of cultural traditions. Some believe that in the olden days cutting a small finger of a twin was a way of determining the age of twins, i.e. who was born first. Most believe that cutting a finger is not a general practice, but rather a clan decision. In our case we do not have *ingqithi* and there was no symbol or mark to determine our age, and hence our mother is still unclear which of us is the older.

[see next artwork overleaf]

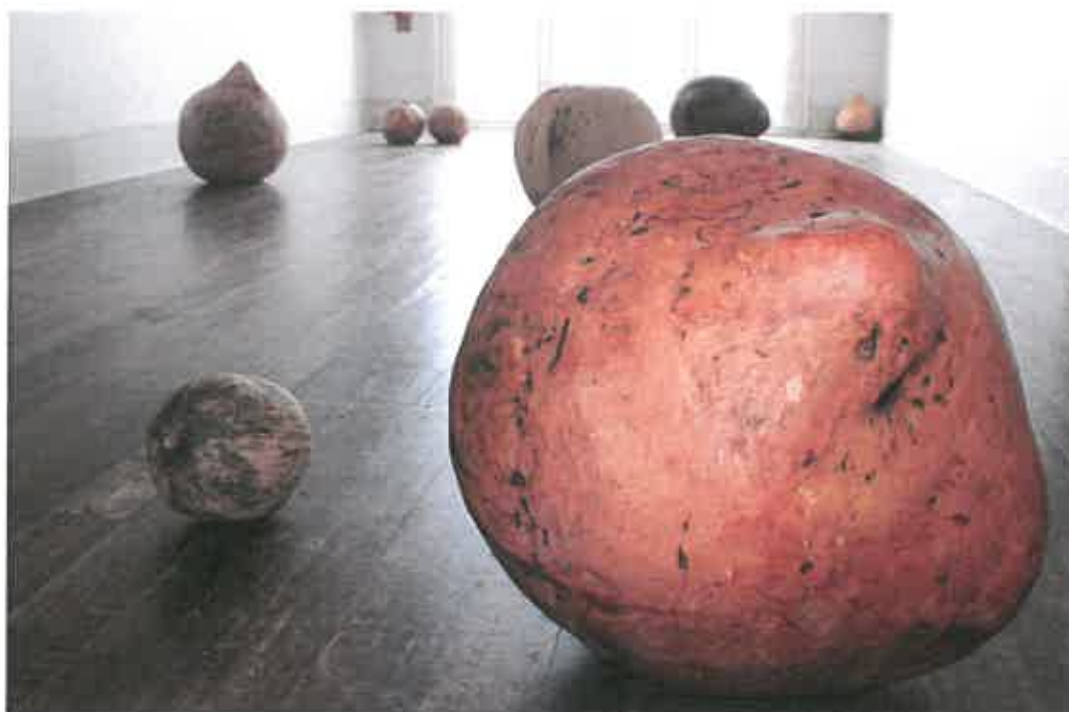


Fig 8. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Igadi*, 2015.

Terracotta clay.

When my twin brother, Monwabisi and I were very young, our neighbours asked us to help them with the planting of their gardens. We were unaware of any special significance, but we were both good hard workers from birth, and imagined that people liked our work ethic, and the fact that we were not lazy. But we were constantly being asked to plant gardens, and soon our curiosity was aroused. Our grandmother then told us that twins possess something special with their hands, and that a garden planted by twins would yield great fertility.

We attended high school in a small town 36km from our home, and would spend our weekends at home doing the planting. There were some specific things we had to do - for instance, cut the edge of the leaves (the end of the pumpkins branches) or just walk around the garden if someone had already planted it. The acts of both cutting and walking are based on myth. When twins make a presence in a garden, it turns the garden into a place of increased productivity. This abundance, as claimed by elders, was not only peculiar to pumpkins, but affected the entire vegetation.

The layout of this installation of abstract organic clay forms depicts the magical garden space wherein we walked, and takes the viewer with them - the gallery space thus becomes a

momentary garden. Purposefully, these forms are made in such a way that they are not replicas of any specific vegetation, but are there to allow the viewer to temporally connect and engage the imagination with the physical site.

The choice of terracotta clay is based on the topography of our home and location, where red clay is predominant, and where surfaces are constantly covered in the fine dust of red soil. Clay also changes the appearance of skin colour when smeared and painted on the body. Both white and red clay are used in traditional rituals such as initiation, while *amagqirha* use soil colour as a means of identification. The use of copper oxide on the surface reinforces both the quality and richness of clay and enhances the mixture of soil and manure. Twins themselves are seen as ‘manure’ in this context due to the fact that they add fertility to the soil and increase productivity. The soil in which these forms are laid are suggestive of the garden, returning here to the theme of earth/clay in twinship and Xhosa culture. *Igadi* explores the concept of multiplicity and continuity of growth in vegetation, and bears similarities with Gormley’s work *Body and Fruit*.

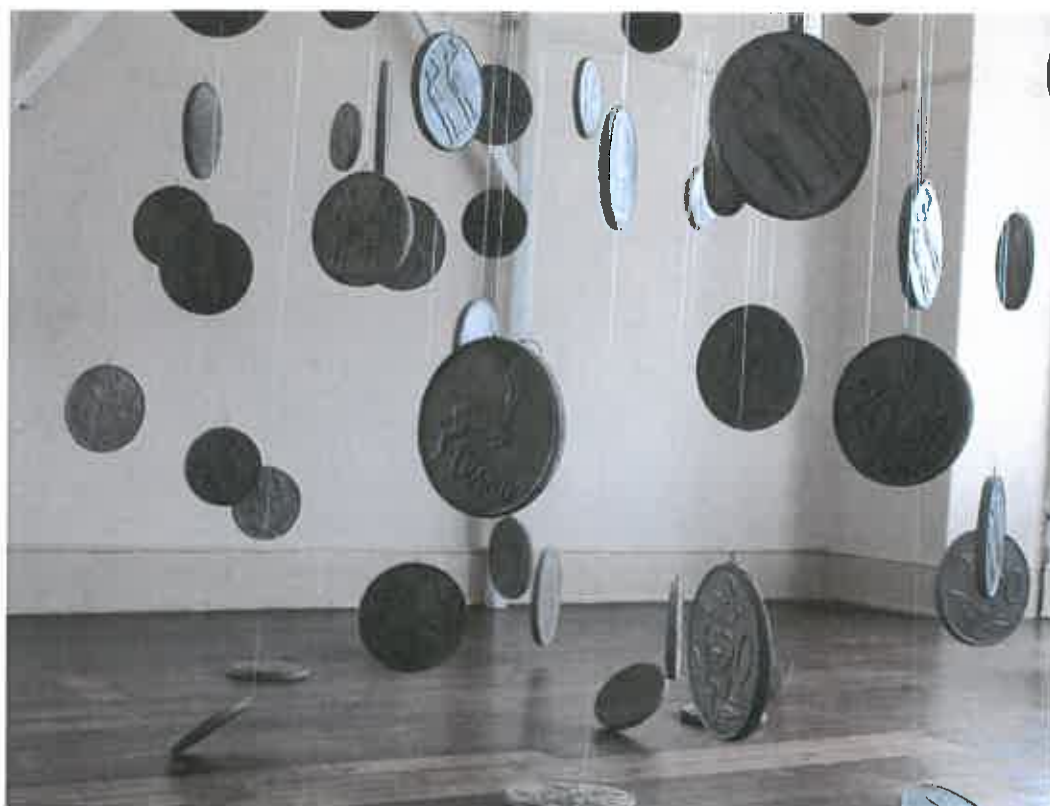


Fig 9. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Emweka I* (White 1), 2015.

Concrete and steel.

The coins in *Emweka I* depict the myth that twins are not allowed to go to the sea without having a silver coin in their possession.

Contrary to the statement that ‘twins are people from the sea’, twins are obliged to pay an entrance fee, or tariff, when entering the ocean. *Emweka* means white in Xhosa. AmaXhosa do not refer to this as silver but rather as ‘white’, and it is called *imali emhlophe*. Imali was a foreign concept among traditional Xhosa peoples before the introduction of money. The Xhosa bartered crops, animals and land, and, as no coins existed, beads were probably used. White beads are mostly associated with diviners or *amagqirha* who wear them as part of their attire because of associated symbolism. *Amagqirha* are known as people of the river or from the river. Similarly, *amaweke ngabantu abamhlophe* - twins are people from the sea.

These suspended, floating pieces show a process of acceptance: The joining of coins with the ancestors. Concrete is the main medium used in this artwork, portraying the durability and sustainability of this long living belief. The coins show age, and wear and tear through dents and chips, much the same as the coins in our pockets. They would be presented to the sea in exchange for the safety and protection of twins.

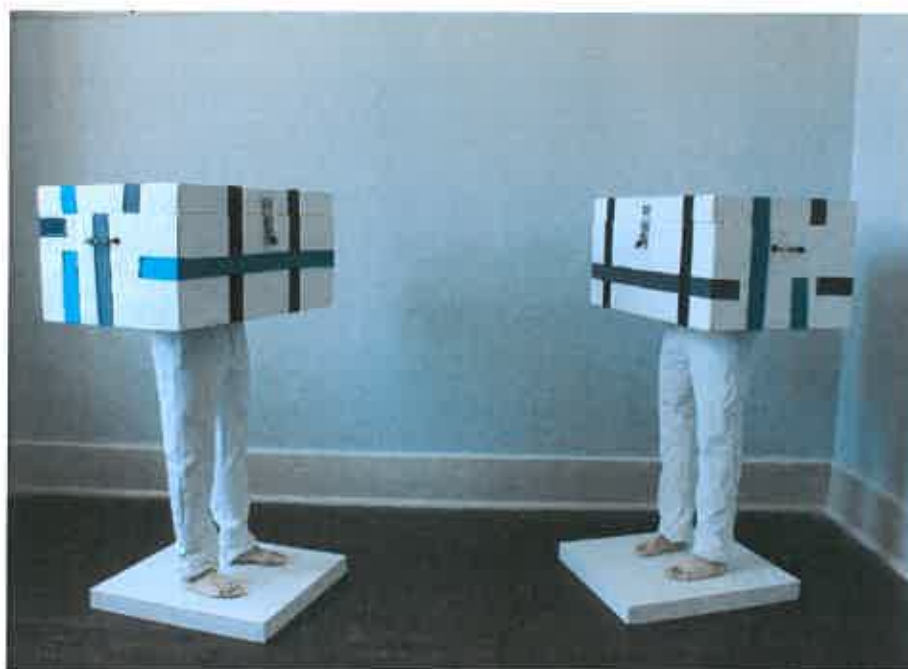


Fig 10. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Dis-Connection*, 2015.

Mixed media.

*Dis-Connection* is a shortened, melded together term for 'distance and connection'. Xhosa myth tells us that twins need to exchange clothing before they separate from each other. Should one leave for a different location for any length of time, they need to prepare themselves for this separation by exchanging their clothing. It is believed that this exchange helps to allay the feeling of missing each other and of coping with distance. This speaks of the deep connection twins have towards one another.

Our connection is beyond what is believed it should be when we separate. As twins we do not literally exchange clothing, nor subscribe to the 'belief', but the act of buying a clothing item for the other, or visa-versa, is an act of exchanging. When we are apart, we do not know what the other is doing, but it often transpires that when we meet again at home we are both wearing similar clothing. The box 'suitcase' is an expression of two meanings: There is the conformity that twins find themselves in, the 'inside', a sort of cultural enclosure, and the physical component that twins need to carry to remember the other. Suitcases, constructed from plywood and covered in white cloth, symbolize nature and the durability of our connectedness.

Distance is suggested by the suitcases being placed apart from each other. In Xhosa, when a person leaves home we say *okumhlophe*, meaning 'bright future journey'. Thus, white cloth is used to depict this meaning, as a symbol of goodwill. The suitcases sit on top of two white clay legs, underpinning the theory of motion and movement.

[see next artwork overleaf]

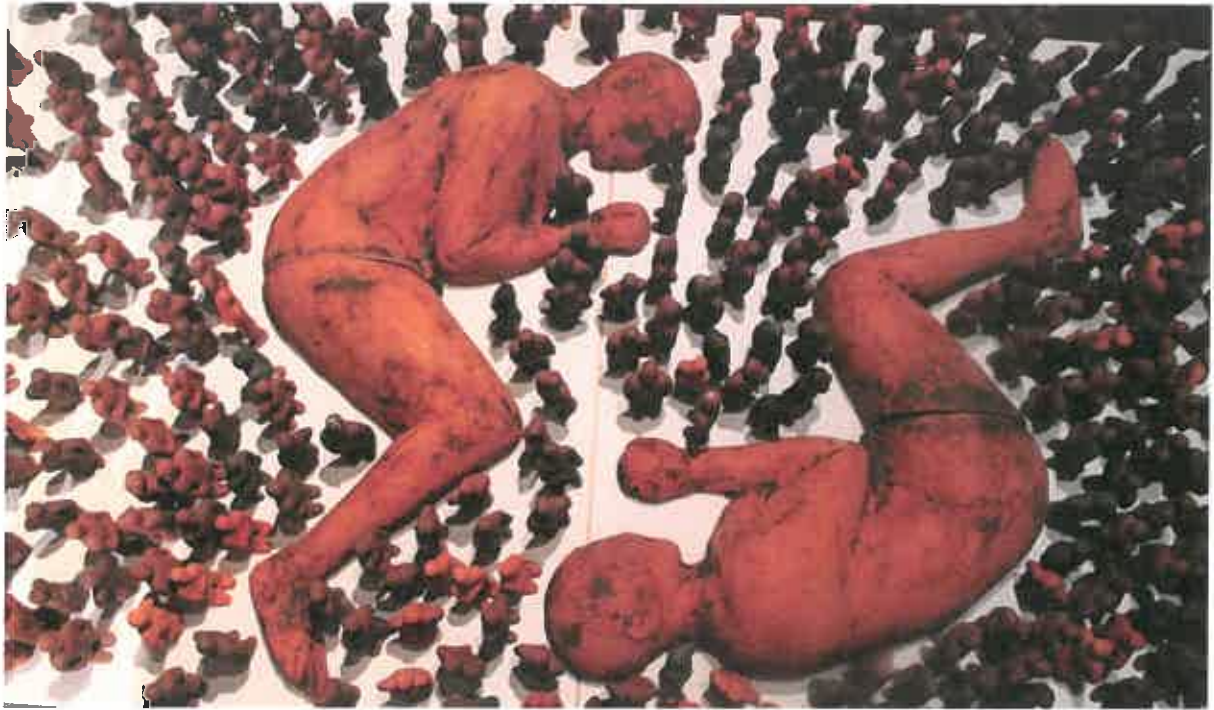


Fig 11. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Wedentity II*, 2015.

Terracotta clay and wood.

This artwork explores the mystery of identity and conformity - the 'sameness muddle' and the societal prescriptions. The work seeks to refer to possible commonalities between 'normal' and 'abnormal', 'real' and 'unreal'.

Two abstract figures, surrounded by mysterious figurines, explore the sense of sameness. The lifelike figures depict twin babies in the womb and examine the level of conformity in which twins in Xhosa culture find themselves. The womb in this context is used as a symbol to depict inhibition, a place of growth where individual identity is primarily formed. The two bodies facing upside-down in the foetal position suggest the unpredictability of the birthing sequence and the implications thereof. The enclosed space (womb) is a symbolic place wherein society exhibits flexibility of culture, and encapsulates those who practice it.

The womb, a place of comfort, safety and inheritance, can also be a place of isolation and restriction. Society has rules, traditions and customs to which one's life is subject, and to which one is expected to adhere. My artwork echoes Gormley's (1980) statement when he says that "*Bed*, the usual location for conception, birth and death, becomes the ground for the



transformative processes of life itself". It is said that "unlike ordinary siblings, twins share a most important environment - the uterus. If a predisposition towards social interaction is present before birth, one may expect twin foetuses to engage in some form of interaction" (Susan B. Anthony List, 2011).

The position of the figures does not suggest any literal interaction, other than its own language formed in the uterus before birth. The figures are sliced into two equal halves reiterating the fact that twins are seen as one soul, although remaining two individuals. The forms are made of red clay. This decision springs from the nature of clay being from the earth, and earth is the place of germination and growth. In Xhosa culture, some pregnant women are known to fulfil a craving by eating clay. The uniqueness of oneness in terms of form refers to the seamless identity of one individual from the other. I have mass-produced the figurines in clay to reinforce the notion of multiplicity in birth and to add fuel to the mystery surrounding twins, a mystery that evokes and provokes questions of identity and mental perceptions.

The figurines, as bystanders, are deep in dialogue regarding the identity of the twins: Who is who? A broader context exists that alludes to the social behaviour among societies that attach metaphysical properties to the notion of twins.

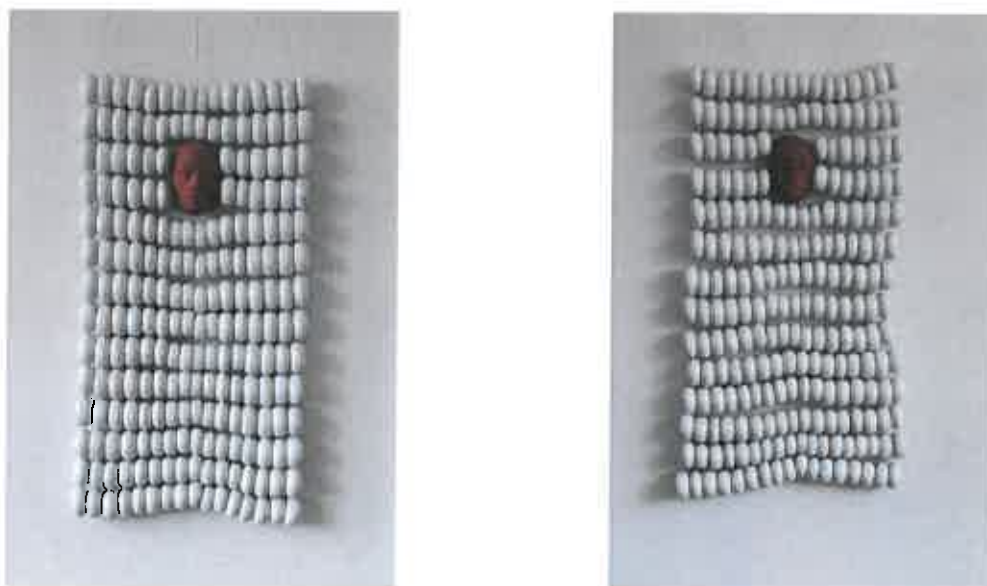


Fig 12. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Emweka I*, 2015.

White slip, white glaze and canvas.

Addressing issues of obeisance where twins are seen as *amagqirha* - *abantu abamhlophe* (diviners), the installation looks at this deferential respect while questioning the uniqueness of the belief system surrounding twins in Xhosa culture. The two, 2 x 2m pieces, occupy opposite sides of the gallery.

Their being on opposite sides of the gallery reflects individuality, while the identical gestures of the two lifelike figures, exhibited in a pose of submission, reflect perspicacity. This keenness of understanding is brought to the fore through the mirroring of the artwork. Mirroring plays a major role in all things connected with twins. The figures seek to explore the prescribed life of twins in Xhosa culture. Reflecting on each other, they draw the viewer into their world, a world that to non-twins is both unique and mysterious. By turning the head from one segment on one wall to the other, I am creating the normal reaction people have when they see my brother and I together. The gaze falls on one face, then the other, and back again in amazement, with curiosity, generally of a congenial nature.

White is the dominant colour preferred by *Amagqirha*. It is used in their traditional attire and is associated with holiness and luck. The beads in '*Emweka II*' are the size of my fist, and are constructed from individual moulds which are cast in white slip and finished off with white glaze. The chemical reaction of Cobalt Oxide provides the blue dot, another dominant colour in the attire of diviners. The beads are then sewn into a strong white canvas-like fabric, once again resembling the use of white by the *amagqirha*.

[see next artwork overleaf]





Fig 13. Sonwabiso Ngcai *Release*, 2015.

Mixed media.

This installation explores the traditional belief of placing a surviving twin in an open grave before the deceased is buried.

In this artwork the coffin is placed a few meters from the grave, wherein lies the surviving twin. Inside the coffin is an identical clay body, suggesting the two figures are twins. The body lies on a rectangular shape mimicking a grave. Once again, clay is used, adding to the idea of organic material returning to the earth, as described in the burial ceremony, 'dust to dust', when the body is covered with soil. Clay is another form of soil, part of the living and the dead. Although twins are prohibited from digging the graves of others, the myth surrounding the surviving twin entering the grave of a deceased twin has powerful meaning. The gallery, which at the entrance became a place of birth as signified by the artwork *umhlontlo*, now becomes a grave site, where the viewers take on the role of mourners at a burial ceremony.

This exhibition goes some way towards investigating some darker aspects of twinship, thus destabilising some commonly held ideas that everything to do with twinship is bright and beautiful. Some of these darker aspects include the cutting of the finger, the grave ritual, the silver coins for protection from the sea, the pain of separation, the constant reaction we live

with when together, the predictable format when meeting people, the anguish of a mother coping with duality. I would hope that the viewer feels a certain sense of emotional discomfort, or at least has become more aware of different cultural ways of viewing twinship. I felt a strong sense of discomfort when creating some of these artworks, and imagine there might be others who feel the same way. I also hope that the viewer goes away with a better understanding of the traditional significance of Xhosa twins, and feels the richness and symbolic importance of myths, beliefs and practices that surround the meaning of twinship in my culture.

## CONCLUSION

The desire to investigate myths, beliefs and ritual practices pertaining to birth, life and death of Xhosa twins has been a key element guiding my research, insofar as these have impacted on my life experiences as a twin. The study explores, attempts to understand, and connects personal experience with current practices and available literature. My search for greater knowledge about these factors arose because I had been wondering why it was necessary to perform certain rituals in the first place. I wondered if there were hidden dangers that needed to be counteracted, or were the rituals more about nurturing potentially special powers, in certain circumstances.

Information retrieved from the limited sources and written records of twins in Xhosa culture have, nonetheless, managed to answer some personal questions related to this study. For example, the question as to whether Xhosa twins are a blessing or a curse has been favourably answered. From the very beginning of when twin-related cultural practices have been written about, this literature acknowledges the arrival and existence of Xhosa twins as being special, and as being a blessing to both family and community.

In an attempt to further answer the question about whether twins are regarded as a blessing or a curse, a comparison between Yoruba and Xhosa cultures as a means of finding differences and commonalities indicated that although twins in Yoruba culture are nowadays seen as a blessing, in the distant past they were seen as evil and to be avoided. In both Xhosa and Yoruba cultures, whether the twins are identical or fraternal, male or female, research shows that their arrival on earth is greeted with joy and they are regarded as adding value. Yoruba and Xhosa people have special ceremonies set up for the birth of twins. Other commonalities include that twins are seen as having the potential to be diviners, and that the death of either twin requires special ritual performances by the surviving twin and parents.

Understanding the ways of looking at past analytical models was crucial to building a solid theoretical foundation. I discounted structuralist metanarrative methods of generalizing information in order to focus on Post-Structuralism as a means of looking at conceptualizations of Xhosa and Yoruba twinship. Writing about twinship using a Post-Structuralist theory involved searching for small details and individual stories, and understanding the commonalities and differences of ways that Xhosa twins are perceived and expected to behave.

Furthermore, a Post-Structuralist methodology was useful when reflecting on the process of creating sculptures. I chose to be specific and use my own body in relation to others, and express my own sense of presence within society. Likewise, I found that the decision to use a Post-Structuralist approach to acquiring more insight about lives of other twins, some of whom may feel that their lives are discriminated against by preconceived ideas, has helped me find imbalances in our lives. “When we tell our own stories, we begin to see how their content is derived from our culture. As we learn about ourselves and our own culture-bound constraints, we learn more about ... the participants in our research. We become sensitized to their struggles as we reflect on those struggles in our own lives” (Allen & Piercy 2005:156).

People I interviewed suggested I expand my area of investigation, and this prompted me to extend my study into the whole of the Eastern Cape. This wider area has given further weight and value to the study because I have now been in contact with twins, mothers and fathers of twins, chiefs, headmen, as well as elderly people from all over the Province, who have shown that the arrival of twins in Xhosa society is regarded as a blessing, and their existence, depending on the clan and family’s beliefs, is usually ritually marked.

The way twins live their lives is partly prescribed and pre-determined by traditions. Such Xhosa traditions are largely according to clan and family beliefs, depending on whether they are nations of Tembu, Bomvane, Xesibe, Mpondomise, Mfengu, or of other origin. For instance, twins in some areas are not forbidden from engaging in grave digging, or from the pouring of soil into the grave after the burial of a family member. Such traditions are also affected by factors such as whether the twins are living in a rural or an urban area. Some twins, and some parents who live in the townships, have indicated that they are unfamiliar with most of the myths, beliefs and ritual practices associated with twinship in rural areas. As a result, they expressed shock and surprise upon hearing about such beliefs and rituals during interviews. It was also interesting to note that some traditional authorities, based in rural settings, were unsure of some ritual practices associated with twins.

Furthermore, it has been a highlight of my study to have interviewed authorities in positions of traditional leadership. I spoke to people like Chief Ngangomhlaba Matanzima who is a chairperson at The House of Traditional Leaders in the Eastern Cape; Phathekile Holomisa

who is President of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa; and Prince Burns-Ncamashe who is spokesperson for the Rharhabe Royal House at Mngqesha Great Place.

The interview with Burns-Ncamashe was particularly significant as he touched on issues of colonialism and how certain misguided influences have even affected Xhosa writers. He denounced such influences as misleading, and noted that many writers make up stories and beliefs that in fact do not exist among the amaXhosa at all. He stressed, for example, that there are no such things as sub-tribes for Xhosa speaking people. In other words, in his opinion, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Bomvana, Xesibe, and Thembu are all standalone nations. This information added to my realization of the seriousness of my research and how it could add value for Xhosa speaking people because of a need to re-establish indigenous knowledge.

The word for twins, *amawele*, literally refers to the idea that twins are those who have crossed from being people of the sea to now being among people on land. I can relate to this idea of traversing, and sometimes feel as if I am in liminal spaces between worlds. Furthermore, I have come to realise that in order to know myself better, I also need to know more about others. Through interrogation of Xhosa cultural beliefs and indigenous knowledge systems, and because of the importance of its survival, I have been made to respond to the appointment of twinship, which I realized I have always had.

While conducting this research I have encountered some daunting situations, and made many discoveries. One of these discoveries concerned the beliefs of my own twin brother. His views on myths, beliefs and ritual practices in Xhosa culture are different and challenging. His understanding is that the traditional practices pertaining to twins are man-made and therefore, for him, anything like that does not require conformity from him. So for him, in fact, beliefs about silver coins needed at the seaside, grave digging and twin burial prohibitions, and rituals such as exchanging clothing, are irrelevant and fear-mongering. So, even though we are very alike, and live in similar circumstances, we have very different beliefs.

One of the aims of this study was to ask the following question: What roles do myths, beliefs and ritual practices concerning birth, life and death of twins in Xhosa culture play in my conceptually motivated sculptural artworks? My own twinship has been the key factor in exploring the above question, as I was able to delve into my consciousness of being a twin, and be my own source of reference. As an artist and auto-ethnographer, I have been able to engage

physically in the traditions of using sacred trees, herbs, and other artefacts associated with twins. In my artworks I have applied the visual appearance of some of these objects to clay by means of replicating surfaces. In response to my research question, I have come to the conclusion “that value and meaning in an event does not simply lie in the representation or recounting of authoritative facts, but more importantly in the re-telling and the continual engagement of the past by contemporary society” (Meents 2009:109).

As a young artist in Xhosa society, auto-ethnography has enabled me to further traverse ideas, and to gain and gather knowledge and experiences. Together with my lived experience, auto-ethnography has impacted hugely on the creative aspect of this paper because I have established new ways of knowing about twinship through creating my artworks. I believe my artistic capacity has developed immeasurably whilst involved in this research, both conceptually and technically. My own experience with paper clay “required a certain amount of practical knowledge and ... experience of ceramic materials and studio processes” (Frisinger 2012:56). My artwork installations, utilizing paper clay and other media, have successfully explored issues of discrimination, emotion and embracement of culture, as well as of oneness, duality and multiplicity.

In future, I would like to find new ways of refining my methods of converting conceptual understanding into art-making. I plan to continue creating installation type sculptures by means of further exploration of traditional practices in Xhosa culture, also taking heed that “artists must control the space in which they are showing objects” (Riner 2013:41). My appreciation for the willingness and tangibility of clay means that I will continue to use it as a favoured medium, and intend to engage in some land-art experiments in the not too distant future.

I have always been vaguely aware of some of the myths and beliefs surrounding twinship, and this research has enabled me to embark on a journey of discovery, which in turn, has led to the re-telling and in some cases, resurfacing of these traditions and myths. My own eyes have been opened to the experiences and beliefs of other twins, both in my community and further afield.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

#### **TO MY BROTHER MONWABISI (2015 in Mthatha)**

##### **Do you believe in myths, beliefs and ritual practices pertaining to twins?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand the holistic view of my twin brother's belief system with regards to the myths, beliefs and ritual practices pertaining to twins.

##### **Do you believe that we [twins] have a connection that is supernatural, and possess supernatural spirits (as *igqirha* perhaps)?**

Rationale: the question seeks to discover if my twin brother believes that he and I do connect spiritually/supernaturally and have diviners' powers.

##### **Do you believe that your involvement in the garden [as we were normally asked to plant] yields a larger crop?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand if my twin brother believes in the belief of having a special touch with regards to planting in the garden.

##### **We need to exchange clothing when separating?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand whether or not my twin brother believes in the myth of clothing exchange as means of both preserving memories and avoiding longing in events of missing one another.

##### **Do you believe in the myth of carrying of a silver coin when going to swim at the sea?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand whether or not my twin brother believes in the importance of carrying a silver coin as means of protection when going to swim in the sea.

##### **Do you believe that we [twins] need not to dig a grave, nor pour soil in the grave?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand my twin brother's feeling regarding twin's prohibition from grave digging and pouring of soil into the grave.

##### **Do you believe in the ritual of placing a surviving twin in a grave before the actual deceased is born?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand whether or not my twin brother would perform the ritual in the event I die before he does.

**TO TWINS (MALE AND A MALE, FEMALE AND FEMALE AS WELL AS MALE AND FEMALE)**

**Have you heard from your parents whether or not there were any ritual practices when you were born? Is there any kind of existing evidence?**

Rationale: The question seeks to understand if there were any forms of traditional practices or ritualization during twins' birth.

**Do you subscribe to the traditional belief that says an older twin [the one who possesses higher status] is the one born second, and that, the one born first is the younger twin?**

Rationale: to understand if whether or not twins do succumb and subscribe to the belief, and if their ages are reflective of that belief.

**Does your name say anything about your birth sequence, or do they carry any special meaning with regard to twinship, or do they carry meanings linked to family traditions?**

Rationale: to understand rationalisation behind their given names, and in what circumstances they were given and perhaps for certain family expectations.

**Do you believe that you [twins] have a connection that is supernatural, and possess supernatural spirits (as *igqirha* perhaps), and have the ability to heal?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand twin's beliefs in the notions of spiritual/supernatural connections and as well as in diviners powers.

**Do you believe in the myth that says twin's involvement in the garden yields a larger crop?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand if twins believe in the belief of having a special touch with regards to planting in the garden that can bring about wealth in the family.

**Do you believe in the myth that says twins need to exchange clothing when separating?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand whether twins believe in the myth of clothing exchange as means of both preserving memories and avoiding longing in the event of missing one another.

**Do you believe in the myth of carrying a silver coin when going to swim at the sea?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand whether twins believe in the importance of carrying a silver coin as means of protection when going to swim in the sea.

**Do you believe in the belief that says twins need not to dig a grave, nor pour soil in the grave?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand twins' feelings regarding the prohibition from grave digging and pouring of soil into the grave, as well to understand society's attitude towards them [twins].



**Do you believe in the ritual of placing a surviving twin in a grave before the actual deceased is born?**

Rationale: the question seeks to understand whether or not twins do believe in the ritual and how they would honour the death of their counterpart.

**During initiation, did you share anything such as a goat or cow, as it is believed that twins are one person?**

Rationale: to understand if the notion of oneness among twins is also practiced and acknowledged in such a manner.

**Initiation of a girl (*intonjane*) and that of a male (*ulwaluko*) among twins is said to be a combined traditional practice for twins. How did it happen in your case?**

Rationale: to understand whether or not male and female twins are treated as one with regards to circumcision, and, what and how it actual happens.

#### **TO A TWIN WHO LOST HIS/HER COUNTERPART.**

**When your brother/sister passed away, what kind of bereavement or mourning did you and your family undertake?**

Rationale: to understand forms of bereavement or mourning practices with regards to twins.

**Was there any form of ritual you performed during the burial of your twin brother/sister?**

Rational: to understand forms of rituals during burial of a twin.

**How did you feel after that performance?**

Rationale: to understand the significance and the impact of the ritual for the twin.

**What happened to your brother's/sister's clothing items? Were they given to you and if yes, how important is that in your life?**

Rationale: to understand to what extent clothing has or makes some form of healing and preservation of connections for the surviving twin.

**How is the society treating you as a single twin? For example: do people not keep reminding you about what your brother/sister used to do or do they mistake your names?**

Rationale: to understand reaction of the society towards the surviving twin and how the surviving twin feels and reacts to that.

## **TO MOTHERS, FATHERS OF TWINS, COMMUNITY ELDERS, HEADMEN, AND CHIEFS**

**Are twins seen as a blessing or a curse in Xhosa culture?**

Rationale: to understand whether twins are seen as a blessing or as a curse in Xhosa culture.

**Are there special ceremonies or rituals when twins are born and are there any kind of ritualistic practices for the mother of twins?**

Rationale: to get a deeper understanding with regards to Xhosa cultural practices pertaining to the birth of twins and for their mother.

**What do you know about traditional belief that states that an older twin [higher status twin] is the one born second and a younger twin is one born first?**

Rationale: to understand the root rationale behind oddness in understandings of twins' ages

**There is a myth which stipulates that twins should not go to the sea, or if they do, they should carry and throw a silver coin into the sea before swimming.**

Rationale: to understand reasons why twins have to introduce themselves when going to swim at the sea. Twin's relationship with the sea.

**Are twins in Xhosa culture regarded as one soul and therefore should they share a goat or a cow in their initiation ceremony?**

Rationale: to understand whether or not twins are seen as possessing one soul.

**What do you know about twins being forbidden to dig graves?**

Rationale: to understand the sacredness and sensitivity of twins in connection to grave-related activities.

**There is a belief that says during the burial of a twin, the surviving twin gets to be laid into the grave first before the coffin of the deceased is lowered. What is your understanding of this?**

Rationale: to understand the significance of the ritual and how it is performed.

**What do you know about bereavement and or mourning of a deceased twin?**

Rationale: to understand ways in which death of a twin is being treated by the surviving twin, family and community.

**What happens when it comes to inheritance in twinship? How does the *imfusi* get involved?**

Rationale: to understand the difference in which ways of inheritance are being handled in Xhosa culture and how *imfusi* is involved, as this is said to be different to that of single born children.

**Is *imfusi* of a higher status than twins?**

Rationale: to understand traditional perceptions that seem to regard *imfusi* as being of a higher status than either twin, and thus as an automatic heir.

**Is *imfusi* a second twin in the event that the other twin dies?**

Rationale: to understand how an *imfusi* is viewed or treated, and ways in which he/she acts as a twin.

**What is your view on these myths, beliefs and ritual practices relating to birth, life and death of Xhosa twins?**

Rationale: to get deeper understanding of how both old and young view the myths, beliefs and ritual practices pertaining to twins in Xhosa culture.

**Do you think there is importance in these, and therefore should they be protected and preserved?**

Rationale: to understand how people feel about the significance of indigenous knowledge and whether this makes an impact on twins' lives and those around them.

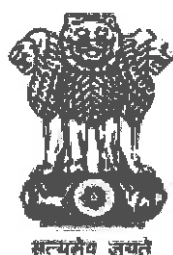
**APPENDIX B**  
**PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING**

ASOKA ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITING CC

2011/065055/23

CELL NO.: 0836507817

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**DECLARATION**

This is to certify that I have English Language edited:

***Xhosa twins as a theme in conceptually motivated sculptural artworks.***

Candidate: Ngcai S.

**SATI member number: 1001872**

**DISCLAIMER**

Whilst the English language editor has used electronic track changes to facilitate corrections and has inserted comments and queries in a right-hand column, the responsibility for effecting changes in the final, submitted document, remains the responsibility of the candidate in consultation with the supervisor/promoter.

Director: Prof. Dennis Schaffer, M.A. Leeds, PhD, KwaZulu Natal, TEFL, TITC Business English, Emeritus Professor UKZN, Cambridge University Accreditation for IGCSE (Drama).

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